

Biodiversity Conservation in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve



News Bulletin.

Ford Quarter 2006

Kicking off the VI National Conservation Week, the Sierra Gorda Earth Center celebrated the official inauguration of the installations which offer training facilities and Sierra Gorda project offices, on November 18th. During the event over 150 people attended, among them our local and regional partners such as re-foresters, community-based housewives and ecological leaders, beneficiaries of environmental service payment mechanisms, municipal presidents and community authorities that have played a central role with their interest and solidarity in accomplishing our long-term goals. Additionally important personalities and public figures joined us, particularly Dr. Ernesto Enkerlin, President of the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP in Spanish), Dr. Tiahoga Ruge, Director of the Sustainable Development Training Center (CECADESU in Spanish) (both are branches of the Environmental Ministry) and Mr. Arnaud Peral, Deputy Resident of the United Nations Development Program in Mexico, all of whom contributed warmly with a few words to the proceedings. We would also like to thank the attendance of special guests that include but are not limited to: representatives of the Counties of Landa de Matamoros and Jalpan de Serra, the Environmental Commission of the State Legislature, the World Conservation Union office for Mesoamerica and especially Hewlett Packard Mexico who donated new computers to the Earth Center interactive classroom. The event was indeed a success and re-instilled our commitment to continue working in solidarity for this sector of the Eastern Sierra Madre.

The 7th session of the Diploma course occurring at the Earth Center, "Techniques for Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future" took place on November 17 in Jalpan with the distinguished presence of Dr. Tiahoga Ruge. The students who upon graduation will receive points on their career scale with certification from the Public Education Ministry, received a motivational talk about women and sustainable development, one of the many themes encompassed by the course based on UNESCO curricula for which Sierra Gorda is the exclusive practitioner in Latin America.

Following up on the First Regional Workshop for Jaguar Conservation in Northeastern Mexico organized in Valles City, San Luis Potosi State in October, the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve staff was joined by researchers from the Autonomous University of Queretaro to the second seminar in Victoria City, Tamaulipas State. Thanks to the leadership of the State Secretary of Agriculture and Hydrological Resources of San Luis Potosi State, Dr. David Manuel Sánchez Hermosillo, this initiative seeks to consolidate strategies to protect this endangered feline by uniting inter-institutional efforts and capacities where jaguar populations still exist from Nuevo Leon State to Queretaro, principally along the Eastern Sierra Madre biological corridor. Attendees were varied, from cattle ranchers to governmental officials and researchers from a number of institutions.

Aside from the obvious need to study jaguar populations to determine their conservation status in this wide area of the project mentioned above, currently the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve and the Huasteca region in San Luis Potosi have decided upon other immediate actions to make concrete progress towards the protection of the ample biological corridor that is the Eastern Sierra Madre. For the coming year it is hoped to obtain a reliable estimate of the number of jaguars that still subsist in San Luis Potosi and Queretaro States, the exchange of individual jaguars between the respective populations, their home territories, the prey they depend on as well as the priority conservation areas. Additionally there are joint projects underway for environmental education, inspection and enforcement, standardized protocol and criteria for scientific investigation and financing. A future workshop will take place in Monterrey City with the goal of involving local stakeholders in this pioneer conservation project involving several states of the northeast of Mexico.

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The 2006 Skoll Foundation prizewinner, Albina Ruiz, Executive Director of Healthy City (Ciudad Saludable) of Lima, Peru, was invited by the Biosphere Reserve management to replicate her project in the counties in the Sierra Gorda region. Pati Ruiz Corzo and Albina Ruiz are founding members along with 13 other social entrepreneurs of the Ashoka and Schwab Foundation networks of an independent entity, the International Association of Social Entrepreneurs. The group of distinguished social entrepreneurs are exploring ways to replicate their projects within the Sierra Gorda to different degrees and Albina is the second initiative underway, following the International Network of Ecoclubs where 18 youth groups have successfully been incorporated based on Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda's environmental education program.

Albina Ruiz provided her valuable and expert technical advice over the course of two intense weeks in order to improve and repair trash dumps in the Sierra with the coordination of the Biosphere Management. She was received with interest by the authorities and staff of the five counties that constitute the Biosphere Reserve (Peñamiller, Pinal de Amoles, Arroyo Seco, Jalpan de Serra and Landa de Matamoros) to remediate the current state of the dumps in the Sierra Gorda. Each county benefited from a site visit to evaluate the situation followed by an assigned work day with machinery and hired hands as well as county staff to carry out the immediate sanitation of the dumps and for the first time convert them into sanitary landfills with proper management. The process was accompanied by representatives of the the State Secretariat for Sustainable Development of Queretaro.

The World Tourism Forum, celebrated in Porto Alegre this past November, is an annual meeting of the principal branches of the tourism industry on a global level, including large hotel chains and airlines to small community ecotourism such as the Sierra Gorda Ecotourism Network and Sierra Gorda Ecotours. The Sierra Gorda was invited to share its experience and was represented by Oriol Sallent, an ecotourism consultant from Cataluña, who has provided along with his wife Emma Casademunt their priceless services to the region for the second year in a row to help develop and consolidate the ecotourism initiatives in Sierra Gorda. At the World Tourism Forum Sierra Gorda had the opportunity to exhibit materials, make a presentation in a seminar and meet a wide variety of contacts which will no doubt benefit our conservation and sustainable development objectives within the Sierra Gorda project.

We are proud to announce the valuable time and knowledge being provided by Jim Conrad, an expert naturalist, who recently arrived to the Sierra Gorda. Jim is a professional botanist and with experience in more than 40 countries studying nature and illustrating scientific magazines. Jim will also be sharing his ample experience in managing and developing web pages; please visit his personal site at www.backyardnature.net, where a weekly newsletter describes his experiences and encounters with species of fauna, flora and nature in general as well as geology in the areas he visits.

Finally we would like to take this space to publically thank the good will and interest in supporting our cause and project on behalf of the Café Amadeus in Queretaro City. On the occasion of their 20th Anniversary they organized the event "A night with Amadeus" in the City Museum which consisted in the participation of various artists in music and dance as well as the exposition of "Tracks of Mozart in Vienna." A large audience attended, principally Europeans residing in Queretaro City. The funds raised that night were donated to Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda IAP which will be utilized to acquire cameras with motion sensors for the jaguar population monitoring project in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, as this equipment is urgently needed for the labors being carried out with the biologists of the Autonomous University of Queretaro. Thanks again for this selfless initiative and valuable support.