

SPIDER MONKEY CONSERVATION PROJECT

CAPARO FOREST RESERVE

VENEZUELA



INFORME FINAL 2020

FINAL REPORT

CAPARO RANGERS PROJECT 2020

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Participants:

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Project Summary:

Brown spider monkey *Ateles hybridus* is of particular interest for conservation, it is extremely endangered due to habitat destruction, it is distributed in both Colombia and Venezuela. It's included in the list of the 25 most endangered primate species in the world. The International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies *Ateles hybridus* as Critically Endangered. In the Venezuelan Red Book, *A. hybridus* has been declared Endangered.

Their area of distribution more critical in Venezuela is in the Caparo Forest Reserve, located in the western plains of Venezuela close to the Colombian border. The Caparo reserve was established in 1961 and had an area of 184,100 ha. However, in less than 30 years, around 90% of the reserve has become under pressure by small peasants, large farmers and timber companies. As a consequence, the rate of deforestation has increased very rapidly. Currently it survives less than 7,000 ha of continuous forest plus several small isolated forest fragments up to 150 ha.

This situation in Caparo together with the little scientific knowledge we have about *A. hybridus* in Venezuela make necessary the creation of a long-term conservation project of the spider monkey in this forest reserve (<http://spidermonkeyproject.org/>), which includes different objectives.

The aim of the project

The aim of this project is the long-term conservation of the spider monkey (*Ateles hybridus*) and its habitat in the Caparo Forest Reserve

Project specific objectives

Conducting scientific research that allow to know diverse aspects of the ecology of the species, its threats, habitat status and effects of fragmentation in the local population.

Training young researchers and local youth in the community, on issues of ecology, environmental education and conservation.

Implementing actions to conserve the spider monkey populations and its habitat in the Caparo Forest Reserve.

Implement an environmental education program to raise awareness among local community about the importance of preserving this species and its habitat in the Caparo Forest Reserve.

Incorporate the local community in projects involving sustainable practices for the maintenance of forests and biodiversity.

Study area:

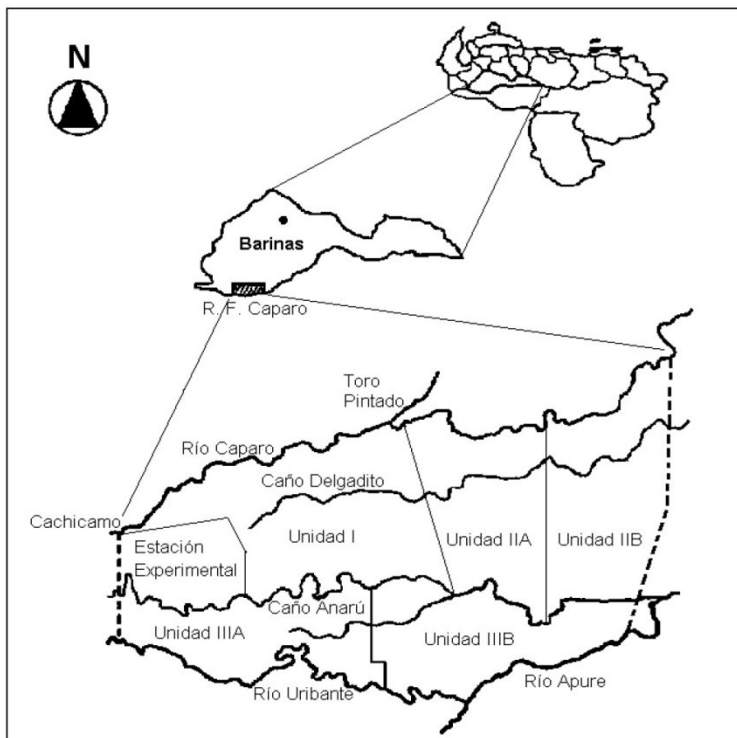
Caparo Forestry Reserve is located in the Municipality of Ezequiel Zamora, south-western state of Barinas, in Venezuela's western plains. The reserve is on the south bank of the Caparo River, the Interior Plain of Western Venezuela and Eastern Colombia, a flat lowland at the foot of the Andes.

Caparo reserve covered originally an area of 184,100 ha. After years of deforestation, currently survive less than 7,000 ha of continuous forest. This 7,000 ha constitute the Caparo Experimental Station that is owned by the University of the Andes (ULA) since 1970, and it is protected under the figure of Commodatum contract between ULA and the Ministry of the Environment. From the

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biogeographic point of view Caparo Experimental Station is located in the Colombo-Venezuelan Llanos region. Caparo Forest Reserve is classified as a tropical dry forest, a designation based on the Holdridge Life Zone System of vegetation classification (Holdridge, 1967). According to Janzen (1988), it is a tropical dry forest, which is the most endangered major tropical ecosystem in the world.



Location of the Caparo Forest Reserve in Venezuela

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CAPARO RANGERS PROJECT

Objective

Carry out tours of the forest to prevent entry of people, invasions, hunting, prevention of forest fires and early detection of any damage to the forest.

Summary

During 2020 the 4 workers of the Caparo Ranger Project of the Spider Monkey Conservation Project in Caparo, Barinas (José Paipa, Ramiro Cuellar, Emilio Gomez and Rafael Virigay) have been working despite the quarantine declared by the Government of Venezuela before the arrival of Covid-19 to this country, the quarantine being currently maintained, which has prevented the coordinator of the Biology project Diana Duque from traveling to the Caparo Experimental Station to the usual field trips for organizing work and looking for reports handwritten workbooks carried by the workers, however the workers have been documenting all the work done in videos that are posted on the Spider Monkey Project facebook page www.facebook.com/spidermonkeyconservationproject/

On the other hand, the national government, since 2019, has sent to the Cachicamo camp of the Caparo Experimental Station of the ULA, groups of military personnel from the National Guard and Army, which remain in the camp and leave when the Forest Rangers report an environmental crime that requires their support.

The most outstanding events that occurred during 2020 in Caparo were the attempts to illegally occupy the forest and a forest fire caused by the illegal occupants, which fortunately went out quickly when the rains began.



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The main activities carried out during the trips in 2020 were:

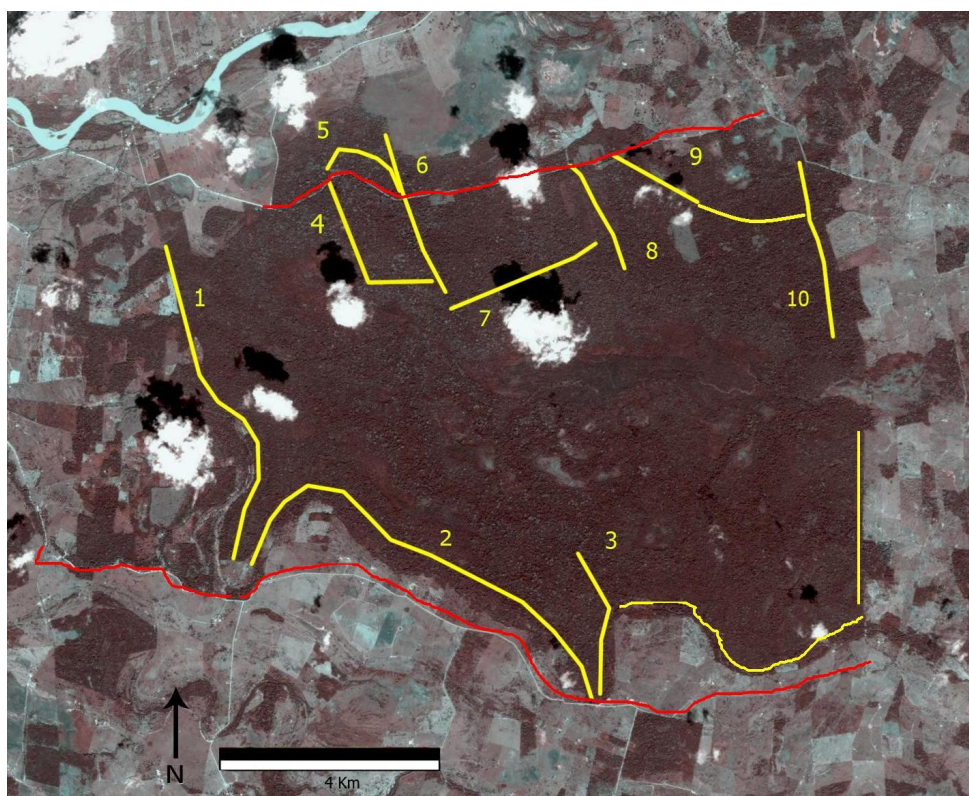
- Trips were carried out through the main surveillance routes previously established on foot within the forest and by motorcycle in the surroundings
- Trips were made with the Army and National Guard when rumors of entry of people were heard
- Surveys and surveillance of the different natural wells of the forest were carried out to prevent hunting
- Several hunter lookouts were detected and destroyed
- A notice was placed at the entrance of the forest that was later stolen, and several notices indicating work areas of the university
- An illegal fence was destroyed at the eastern edge of the forest
- 2 dead tapirs (*Tapirus terrestris*) were found, one of them in one of the dry wells in the forest, and the other near the roadside with a stab wound
- Participation of the rangers in community meetings
- Prevention and control of 7 attempts of illegal occupation of people mainly on the eastern edge of the forest
- During an illegal occupation attempt in April, violent people were evicted with the help of the Army, who had built a new ranch and caused a fire in area 5 of the forest
- A new ranch was destroyed and a deep hole in the ground made by the invaders was covered
- Different tree seeds were collected and dispersed to reforest the area burned by the invaders
- Illegal occupation in the month of August, a group of people entered area 5 of the forest, thanks to the action of the Rangers and military authorities that support us, the eviction was achieved after 3 days
- Illegal occupation in the month of September, the same group of people of August entered area 5 of the forest again, where they stayed for several days, thanks to the action of the Forest Rangers and military authorities that support us, eviction was achieved of these people
- Monitoring the groups of spider monkeys in the forest

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MAIN SURVEILLANCE ROUTES

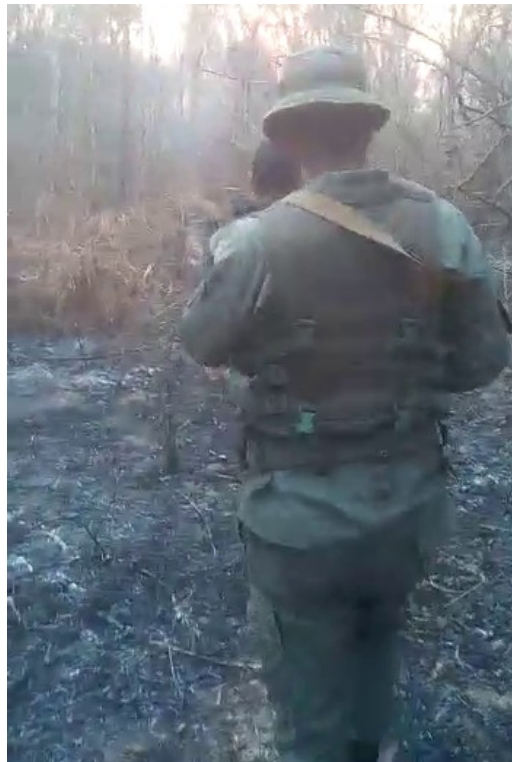
The rangers are taking different routes on foot and on two project motorcycles, through different areas of the forest to detect any irregularities. The main difficulty during this crisis with the virus is the shortage of gasoline in Venezuela, which caused that on several occasions it was not possible to make daily trips, and we had to buy it at international prices. The following image shows the main routes of routes, in yellow internal pikes already established traveled on foot, in red routes of north and south motorcycle routes. Pike 6 is the main pike through which people enter the most central areas of the forest, and most people enter to hunt, so in this place more surveillance is carried out at night, this pike is popularly known as pike 8 where the emblematic saqui saqui tree is found, known as "El Abuelo".



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FOREST FIRE

This year the fire caused by the invaders occurred in area 5 of the forest in one of the April invasions and fortunately it went out quickly because it rained (see map below). Approximately 300 ha of forest burned



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DESTRUCTION OF HUNTER LOOKOUTS

Several hunter lookouts were found and were destroyed by the Rangers. Hunter lookout are sites made with wood where hunters wait for fauna to kill them, mainly limpets and pictures in the dry season.



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INVASIONS

Since March and April there have been several attempts at illegal occupation, in 3 of these attempts people were unable to enter the forest thanks to the rapid action of the Rangers and the military who dispersed the people and carried out several checkpoints along the roads main access points. Two illegal occupations occurred in April and another two in August and September, where people managed to stay in the forest for several days, causing damage to the forest, all in the same area, area 5 of the forest (see map below)

The following images correspond to the illegal occupation of the first week of April where some people built a ranch and deforested an area, this ranch was destroyed with the help of the military and equipment used to deforest such as machetes, chainsaws, and gasoline was confiscated.



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Illegal occupation in mid-April. A larger group of people entered the same area 5 of the forest, built a ranch, made a big hole in the ground and started the forest fire. These people were evicted by the military



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Another attempted occupation of the forest in April that was prevented by the military, before people could enter the forest



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Illegal occupation in the month of August, a group of people entered area 5 of the forest, causing deforestation in the area, contamination of Caño Anarú and elimination of part of the tree plants planted months before by the Rangers in an attempt to reforest the area. Thanks to the action of the Rangers and military authorities that support us, eviction was achieved after 3 days.



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The strategy used by the military was to guard the site day and night with them and not let anyone out until the invaders ran out of supplies.



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Illegal occupation in September, the same group of people from August entered area 5 of the forest again, where they remained for several days, thanks to the action of the Forest Rangers and military authorities that support us, the eviction of these people was achieved, likewise the support of the community that surrounds the forest was vital



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REFORESTATION OF THE INVADED AND BURNED AREA

In June the Rangers group was collecting seeds and saplings of various species of trees, and they planted them with the "broadcast" method in the area 5 deforested and burned by the April invaders. Unfortunately during the invasion of August and September several of these plants that were already growing were destroyed by the invaders. This year 2021, if it passes normally, another attempt will be made to reforest with this method in that area.



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Saman Tree (*Samanea saman*)



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Apamate Tree (*Tabebuia rosea*)



Saman Tree (*Samanea saman*)



Transplanting Saman saplings



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Apamate Tree (*Tabebuia rosea*)



Mijao Tree (*Anacardium*)



Saman Tree (*Samanea saman*)



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EVALUATION OF NATURAL PONDS

The natural ponds of the forest are frequently visited, since they are the favorite sites of hunters, there are about 15 natural ponds in the Caparo forest that we want to recover with another project, since in the dry season they run out of water affecting many animals



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2 dead tapirs (*Tapirus terrestris*) were found, one of them in one of the dry forest wells, and the other near the roadside with a stab wound



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ILLEGAL FENCE REMOVAL

A person neighboring the forest was warned several times by the Ministry of Ecosocialism (Environment), to remove a fence that it placed within the limits of the forest. Since this person did not follow the order given, the Rangers proceeded to remove it



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Preparation of notices identifying work areas of the university



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The fence that was put up last year at the entrance to the forest was knocked over and damaged by unknown people. Then the Rangers placed it again in January and days later it disappeared, it was stolen, we think that by the group of people that this year invaded the forest



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FIREWALL CLEANING

It was not possible to clean the firebreak this year since the University tractor (ULA) remains damaged, with the budget of last year 2019 \$ 400 was contributed for this tractor, but the university could not collaborate with the purchase of the rest of What was missing to fix it and added to the fact that one night outsiders stole other spare parts, so it is still damaged, we decided to look in other ways for resources that exceed \$ 1000 to finish fixing the tractor. The other vehicles of the university, the truck 30 and the Toyota are in operation and have been used only for invasion emergencies transferring the military.



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TRIPS WERE CARRIED OUT WITH THE MILITARY AND CONTROL POINTS WERE CARRIED OUT ON THE MAIN ROADS SURROUNDING THE FOREST



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The Rangers participated in several meetings with the community to listen to their needs and discuss the protection of the forest.



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Spokespersons from various communities surrounding the forest were in support of forest protection

During the last invasion, the Forest Rangers sought the support of different communities and thanks to several of them who were present at the site of the invasion and talked with these people, these people were peacefully evicted from the forest.



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SPIDER MONKEY GROUP OBSERVATIONS

The rangers keep a record of the groups of spider monkeys that they find during their walks, they were taught to use GPS to register the locality, although they were a little limited this year due to the problem of gasoline and the walks were mainly made to area 5, where invaders were.



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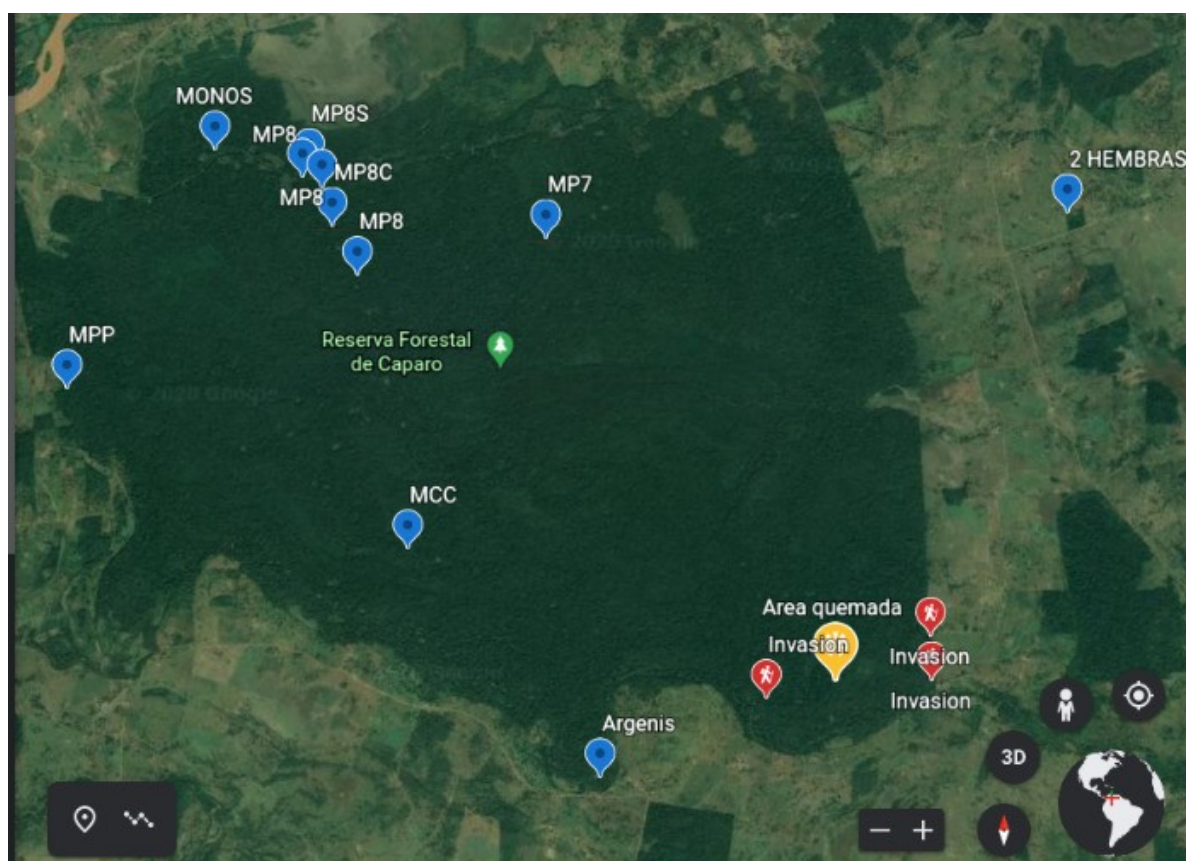
Two females were found in a very small forest fragment, a rescue procedure was to be carried out but when we returned to the site the next day they were gone, the nearby area has been evaluated and we think that they may have moved to near forest fragments



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N.º OBSERV	LOCALIDAD	COORDENADAS	N.º DE INDIVIDUOS
1	Pica 8- vía sabana	7°28'00.5"N- 71° 00'56.4"O	22
2	Pica 8- vía sabana	7°27'58.4"N- 71°00'55.2"O	4 (3 hembras, 1 macho)
3	Pica 8	7°27'54.7"N- 71°00'57.6"O	6 (2 machos, 4 hembras)
4	Área 8	7°28'05.5"N- 71°01'32.4"O	5
5	Costa Caño Anarú	7°25'29.0"N- 71°00'16.0"O	
6	Costa Palma Pintada	7°26'38.2"N- 71°02'30"O	
7	Pica 8	7°27'16.2"N- 71°00'36.3"O	5 (3 hembras, 2 macho)
8	Pica 7	7°27'30.7"N- 70°59'22.9"O	10 (3 hembras, 7 macho)
9	Pica 8- vía sabana	7°27'58.5"N- 71° 00'55.1"O	10
10	Fragmento bosque	7°27'42.2"N- 70° 56'14.5"O	2 hembras
11	Pica 8	7°27'35.7"N - 71° 00'46.1"O	4 hembras
12	Pica 8	7°27'50.9"N - 71° 00'50.7"O	5 machos

Table of some observations of groups of spider monkeys in the Caparo forest during ranger walks 2020



Locations of some observations of spider monkeys (*Ateles hybridus*) during ranger walks in blue, location of the invaded area and forest fire in red and yellow, 2020

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CAPARO BIODIVERSITY

Some wildlife records made by rangers

jaguar footprint



Corallus ruschenbergerii



Cebus skull



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Leptodactylus insularum.



Giant toad



Chironius spixi



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Dirphia avia



Chelonoidis carbonaria



Hamadryas amphinome



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Anhima cornuta



Saturniidae, Sphingidae



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jaguar footprint



Chelonoidis carbonaria



Opisthocomus hoazin



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Eunectes murinus



Chelonoidis carbonaria



Erythrolamprus melanotus juvenil





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PRESS ARTICLES

The invaders also organized themselves online where they published false articles in various media that were denied by the authorities of the Universidad de los Andes.

<https://talcualdigital.com/ecocidio-en-las-selvas-de-caparo-por-elides-a-sulbaran-zambrano/>

Another page published an article in March 2020, about the Spider Monkey Project

<https://www.cinco8.com/periodismo/la-lucha-de-diana-duque-por-salvar-al-mono-arana/>

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EXPENSES REPORT

Salario 4 trabajadores	8160 USD
Comida	1440
Gasolina	1500
Repuestos y mantenimiento motos	500
1 teléfono inteligente para fotos y videos	100
*1 cámara digital	400
Emergencias	500
TOTAL	12600 USD

The price of gasoline in Venezuela, in the Caparo area, which is the border with Colombia, has a value between 1 to 3 dollars per liter. More gasoline had to be used during the invasions to move the military, with area 5 being the invasion point furthest from the camp. In Venezuela in various zones, its no longer posible to get gasoline from the state that was almost free, so we have to pay for it at those prices to be able to work

We also had to support with food for the military and the people of the community on the days they helped us. Since they are sent with few supplies and without vehicles

We had to buy another phone with which the videos are recorded since the previous one was damaged as a result of a fall by the Ranger from the motorcycle

We weren't able to give the rangers the salary proposed last year due to the extra expenses of the invasions and gasoline

* We want to buy a digital camera so Rangers can take better quality photos and videos

We want to leave a fund for emergencies since this year a ranger had a work accident and another a health problem and we did not have resources at that time for their care

We are looking for someone that could collaborate with us with the uniforms, since they have only one since 2019, if we cannot find it, we will use the budget to buy another one and we will buy shirts with the identification of the Project for them

Some boots for field work were donated by a company from Venezuela

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CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The main difficulty during this crisis with the virus is the shortage of gasoline in Venezuela, which causes that on several occasions it was not possible to make daily trips, we had to buy it at international prices, gasoline is extremely necessary to be able to maintain vigilance enough throughout the forest and to be able to mobilize the rangers and the military in case of another invasion attempt.

This project is vital to continue conserving the forest and thanks to the actions carried out this year, the new illegal occupation attempts have been stopped in time, so we must continue to count on the support of our collaborators.

Next year we need to continue this Ranger project and we want to carry out more projects. We received help from the Auckland Zoo for a forest restoration project, an educational project with school children and a research project with a group of monkeys.

We have not yet obtained resources for the project to recover the natural lagoons of the forest, and we also want to buy camera traps to evaluate the fauna that uses these lagoons when they recover. Due to the disturbances in the forest and the general deforestation of the reserve, each year the droughts are longer and more intense and this year we observe the death of several animals due to the drought in the natural lagoons that the forest has.

People have tried to invade the forest because the ULA (Universidad de Los Andes) has not carried out projects or activities in the camp or within the forest, so the station is abandoned and some people have mistakenly thought that they can take over the forest. That is also why we want to be constantly carrying out activities, so that people in the nearby communities see that we are working, and thus, we will not only discourage them from trying to invade the forest, but we will also motivate them to help us, defend it in case of any new invasion attempt, as has happened in previous cases. Having the support of the community is essential and that is why we consider it important to carry out other projects that allow more people to work in the forest, such as educational projects, research projects or community projects. Due to the university crisis, other vehicles at the station are damaged and abandoned, so we are also looking for resources to repair them,

The forest rangers' work has been effective and successful for forest conservation and early threat detection.

The community that surrounds the forest is beginning to value and respect the work of the Rangers, so many have joined the protection of the forest

Threats and attempts at illegal occupation continue so we need support to continue this work.

Thank you all for supporting this project, this help has been vital for the protection of the Caparo forest