

RAPID BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT OF THE RAMAL DE CALDERAS, VENEZUELAN ANDES

Expedition Dates

March 26 – April 5, 2008

Area Description

Ramal de Calderas, with an area of 547 Km², is located in the northeastern region of the Merida mountain range, in the llanos covered slopes of the Venezuela Andes. To the northwest it is delimited by the Burate and Aracay rivers; to the northeast by the Boconó river; to the southeast by the Santo Domingo river, and to the south –at approximately 1,600 m.a.s.l. - it is bordered by the Boconó fault, whose fractures align with the valleys between the Aracay, Burate and Boconó rivers that define this geographic unit.

The study area was divided into three focal areas:

Focal Area 1 (FA1): Cerro Gobernador – Valle Encantado (San Ramón Sector) featuring cattle ranches, shade-grown coffee plantations and natural forests with different degrees of degradation on rolling hills, located between the La Bellaca stream (1,100 m.a.s.l.) and the base of Cerro Gobernador (1,500 m), within the semi-deciduous forest zone; addition sampling was done in a natural forest and low brushwood on slopes between 1,500 and 2,000 m.a.s.l. on Cerro Gobernador.

Focal Area 2 (FA2): Aguas Blancas – Los Alcaravanes (Aguas Blancas Sector), cattle ranches and natural areas in different degrees of disturbance, along an altitudinal gradient between 1,700 m.a.s.l. (cloud forest) and 3,200 m.a.s.l. (paramo).

Focal Area 3 (FA3): Bosque de Café (coffee forest) – Pozo Azul (Pozo Azul – La Volcanera Sector), shade grown coffee plantations that replaced natural forests within the semi-deciduous forest zone, between 800 and 1,200 m altitude, along La Volcanera stream.

Reasons and Objectives for the Expedition

Due to its geographical position, Ramal de Calderas has fundamental strategic value for conservation because of its potential as a natural biological corridor, integrating protected natural areas such as Sierra Nevada, La Culata and General Cruz Carrillo (Guaramacal) National Parks. Ramal de Calderas is part of the Teta de Niquitao-Güirigay Natural Monument and the Protective Zone of the hydrological basins of the Guanare, Boconó, Tucupido, La Yuca and Masparro rivers.

The main objective of this RAP survey was to collect information to contribute to the protection of the threatened Andean mountains. The RAP survey aimed at collecting data to understand the biodiversity of the area and to highlight its global importance, all in the context of the imminent threats from the surrounding population and the resulting demands on the natural resources. The results from this RAP survey will be used to establish a scientific baseline to guide informed decision making for the sustainable development and preservation of this natural treasure, the Ramal del Calderas.