

## PERU: CENTRAL SELVA PROTECTION AREA

*Woodworking Jobs, Wildlife Corridors and More Trees Are Keys to Forest Protection*



Scientists have documented 520 tree species and 450 bird species in the Central Selva Protection Area. © TNC

**W**HEN IT COMES TO RAINFALL, Central Selva Protection Area is easily the Seattle of Peru. Each year up to 275 inches of rain soak Upper Amazonian forests ranging in elevation from 2,953 to 12,139 feet

Central Selva is on the eastern slope of the Andes, part of the greater Amazon River Basin. It encompasses a network of Andean highlands, high rain forests, low rain forests, cloud forests and the basins of four major rivers. In 2004 Nature Conservancy partner Pro Naturaleza filed an application with UNESCO to protect about 2.5 million acres as a biosphere reserve and World Heritage Site. It includes three protected areas—the Yanachaga-Chemillén National Park, the San Matías-San Carlos Protection Area and the Yanesha Communal Reserve.

Remarkably, at least 520 tree species have been documented in the region. Plant life is so incredibly varied that an Australian scientist set a world record recently when he discovered 200 different species of epiphytes—orchids and other plants—growing from a single ficus tree. Jaguars, spectacled bears, giant river otters, capybaras, tapirs and about 75 other mammal species live in Central Selva. It is also home to more than 450 bird species such as the harpy eagle and the Andean cock-of-the-rock, Peru's national bird. Peregrine falcons, scarlet tanagers, cerulean warblers, yellow-billed cuckoos and Mississippi kites are some of about 30 birds that migrate to and from the United States.

The Yanesha are one of more than half a dozen indigenous peoples who have lived in the area for centuries.

Austrian and Germans settled in Oxapampa and the nearby communities of Pozuzo, Chontabamba and Huancabamba beginning in the late 1850s. Since the 1950s, Peruvians from the highlands have migrated to Central Selva. Passage was made easier in 1986 when a paved road to La Merced was completed.

An abundance of rain, fragile soils and rugged topography means the area is already vulnerable. Those stresses are compounded when roads and dams, and loggers, slash and burn farmers, coca growers and cattle ranchers are added to the mix. Erosion, flooding and habitat loss are the most ominous threats. Each year, about 617,750 acres of forests in the Peruvian Amazon are hacked away. It's estimated that at least 12 percent of the forest cover has been destroyed.

The Conservancy is collaborating with in-country partners to restore habitat by coordinating a massive reforestation project, creating municipal reserves to expand wildlife corridors and steering local farmers toward more ecologically friendly practices.

### **Wildlife Corridors**

Pro Naturaleza, a Peruvian-based Conservancy partner set a precedent in 2004 by creating the first two municipal protected areas on public lands within the 2.5 million-acre Central Selva Conservation Unit. Both models—known as El Pajonal and Yanachaga-Mirador—share borders with Yanachaga Chemillén National Park. Two nearby communities draw their drinking water from El Pajonal, a 2,400-acre mosaic of humid grasslands, and cloud and dwarf forests. The mountainous 14,800-acre Yanachaga-Mirador is an extension of the Yanachaga Range. Extraction of mosses and orchids for commercial sale and the clearing of native vegetation to make room for crops and pastures are key threats. Local townspeople will map the future of the two new reserves. On the agenda are ecotourism, guided visits and sustainable orchid harvests.

### **Keeping Trees Standing**

Loggers and farmers continue to chip away at Central Selva forests. Satellite images documenting actual deterioration guide Conservancy scientists as they define prime locations for large- and small-scale reforestation projects. Strategies include natural regeneration and the planting of native trees. By storing carbon, forests offset the atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide, one of the gases contributing to climate change.

For example, Pro Naturaleza works with local farmers to restore degraded pastureland by rotating crops and planting native trees. The goal is to keep the soil fertile

enough so that farmers don't just abandon the land in a few years in search of more native forests to slash and burn.

Also, at a sample municipal nursery near Pozuzo 10 species of native trees, including nogal, mahogany and cedar, thrive. Local workers earn money for growing the trees, which are distributed to campesinos in the highlands. The idea is to provide trees of high economic value to the campesinos so they will manage their forests sustainably instead of clearing them to grow illegal coca.

### **Jobs in the Rain Forest**

Eduardo Peña Torres formed a sustainable forestry cooperative with his family in 1997, because he figured it would eventually pay off. It has, now that he has the backing of the Conservancy, Pro Naturaleza and Partnerships and Technology for Sustainability (PaTS).

The family co-op—Peña Agroforestry Enterprise—now provides jobs for 80 neighbors who craft stools, cups, bowls, utensils, candelabras and other handmade items for a lucrative market in the United States. Right now, they are using the wood of two native but lesser-known tree species—tornillo and almendro. At least 30 more local people are now learning wood-carving skills.

(PaTS) is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that promotes forest conservation. The company's goal is to find export markets for furniture and other products made in Peru in a socially and environmentally sound manner. Amy Smith, PaTS project director, is working with Peña Agroforestry Enterprise and two other woodworking co-operatives in the Yanesha Communal Reserve to market their products. In addition, Smith is working with seven Yanesha handicraft organizations. Women use traditional Yanesha designs to dye and paint fabrics for pillows, wall hangings, tablecloths and place mats.

As another way to keep Central Selva ecologically sound, the Conservancy is using money from U.S. Agency for International Development's Parks in Peril program to train 11 rangers to patrol the region to discourage poaching of plants and animals. They are equipped with guard stations, patrol vehicles and two-way radios.

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