

The Condor corridor

Corridors are an important part of the conservation strategy in the Condor Mountain Range

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Conservation in the Condor

Mountain Range, Ecuador-Peru



Cloud cover: cloud forest between the Comainas and Kusu Nutmpatkaim rivers, Condor Mountain Range. Photo: © Conservation International

THE Condor Mountain Range has been the scene of a long series of armed conflicts between two neighbouring countries—Peru and Ecuador. Today, however, thanks to the goodwill of the governments of both countries and the support of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), this range is in the process of becoming a protected transboundary conservation area (TBCA) that will not only protect the region's rich biodiversity but also contribute to securing lasting peace between the two nations.

The Condor Mountain Range is part of the Andes. Its catchment flows into the Amazon Basin and is a key element in the Basin's hydrological cycle; for example, it is the birthplace of many of the rivers that bathe the Peruvian-Ecuadorian Amazon rainforests. Low, moist clouds cover the range's plateaus and peaks almost on a daily basis. Waterflows turn into innumerable cascades, which, as they descend, filter through the vegetation, crossing cloud and montane forests. The region is one of the most biodiverse in the world; it contains, for example, the most diverse floral communities known to science.

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The local indigenous communities—of the Jivaro ethnolinguistic group—believe in the sacred nature of the waters in this region. They believe that these high areas are the source that gives life to all other elements that surround them. Hydrologists have formed a similar view.

Preserving peace and the environment

The Condor Mountain Range became prominent in the 1990s after several biological studies identified it as both a habitat of high biodiversity and a region under great pressures and threats. The studies identified several endemic species, including the marsupial rat (*Caenolestes condorensis*), the American butterfly (*Euselasia persiana*), and *Dendrobates captivus*, a frog. The names assigned to these animals by local indigenous tribes are still unknown to the outside world.

Even though the conservation community made several attempts in the past to find ways of preserving the exceptional biodiversity found in this area, these initiatives only became a reality after the signing of the Brasilia Presidential Treaty in October 1998. This treaty, which is in fact a comprehensive peace agreement between Ecuador and Peru, created a favourable environment for conservation, facilitating bilateral cooperation and peace. The agreement underscored the need to establish ecological protection areas on both sides of the international border. Further, both countries undertook a commitment to promote development and social and economic cooperation in the transboundary area.

After the treaty was signed and ratified, the Government of Ecuador established the El Condor Park in 1999 with an area of 2540 hectares. On its side of the border, Peru established an ecological protection area of 5440 hectares

Statement of the workshop on increasing the effectiveness of transboundary conservation areas in tropical forests

held 17–21 February 2003, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand

This meeting recognizes the value of transboundary conservation areas as an essential mechanism for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, especially in tropical forests and other vulnerable ecosystems.

TBCAs are more likely to be successful in the long term if they meet social and economic as well as biodiversity objectives. Social benefits can include securing communities' land tenure, strengthening local cultures, building mechanisms for participatory decision-making and helping to promote reconciliation and cultural links in post-conflict situations.

TBCAs can embrace a range of conservation initiatives involving protected areas and intervening lands that establish appropriate ecological linkages and development opportunities in the local and national context.

The meeting commends ITTO for its role in supporting transboundary conservation in over 10 million hectares of tropical moist forest and recommends that ITTO and other organizations raise the level of commitment to transboundary conservation to ensure biodiversity

conservation and the equitable sharing of benefits with local and national communities in border regions.

Working across boundaries demands unique tools and strategies to ensure that the benefits of co-operation outweigh the costs. The meeting recommends that IUCN furthers its support for the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) TBCA Task Force work program, and that the protected area community develops a learning network of regional TBCAs, to develop experience, capacity and methodologies relevant to effective TBCA management. Lessons should be disseminated to a broad audience including professional protected-area managers, land-use planners and policy-makers as well as communities that play a role, or could play a role, in tbcA management.

Further development of TBCAs requires strong public support, continued discussion at regional levels and, perhaps, an international enabling framework.

and followed this in 2000 by creating the Santiago-Comaina Reserve, which covers about 1.65 million hectares. Through these actions, Peru ratified its commitment in support of peace and conservation.

ITTO's role

It was in this context that both governments requested technical and financial support from ITTO to implement a base study through an ITTO pre-project to assess the viability of several conservation strategies for the Condor Mountain Range. As a result of this first study, two project proposals were submitted to and approved and funded by ITTO. The objectives of the projects ('Bi-national Peace and Conservation in the Condor Mountain Range Ecuador-Peru'—ITTO PROJECT PD 2/00 (F) in Ecuador and ITTO PROJECT PD3/00 (F) in Peru) was to contribute to the land-use management of the area, to consolidate a network of transboundary protected areas in the region and to establish a subsystem of natural protected areas within the context of a conservation corridor. The total area of influence of the two projects, including protected areas and buffer zones, is about 2.42 million hectares.

The conservation corridor

Conservation corridors interconnect protected areas and other relevant territories surrounding them. Human activities are promoted in these areas on a sustainable development basis; that is, activities are undertaken that do not endanger the rich natural resources contained therein and which benefit both nations in general and the local communities in particular. Conservation corridors are thus a flexible planning tool that interconnects protected areas through a combination of land-use strategies.

This approach is particularly significant because it includes the areas surrounding natural protected areas. Because of their unique characteristics, these areas are highly

vulnerable, as is the case of the Condor Mountain Range, where indigenous communities are occupying the lands neighbouring the mountain range.

The implementation of the conservation corridor proposal will not only help to link protected areas in both countries but also to create adequate spaces where transboundary interaction can become a reality. In this context, it is important to stress the significance of combining two conservation strategies: the conservation corridors and the transboundary conservation areas.

The conservation efforts in the Condor Mountain Range are not only contributing to the conservation of the extraordinary biological wealth shared by the two countries, but also to creating an environment of trust, an essential element for building a sound, imperturbable and lasting peace in the region. However, the end-product will be much more than the sum of these two objectives. The resulting conservation and peace will also create the ideal social environment for rekindling ancient relations between the indigenous peoples that have existed in the region since time immemorial.

Translated from the Spanish by Claudia Adan.