The incredible Condor

ITTO projects are assisting the establishment of a transboundary 'peace park' in the Condor Range

THE CONDOR mountain range, more than 160 kilometres in length, rises above the sources of the Upper Marañon River, where the Amazon River begins, and runs parallel to the impressive Andes massif. Shared by Peru and Ecuador, this has long been an area of conflict between the two countries, one often referred to as 'the open wound'. It was an area in which disputed borders led to military confrontations during the 20th century.

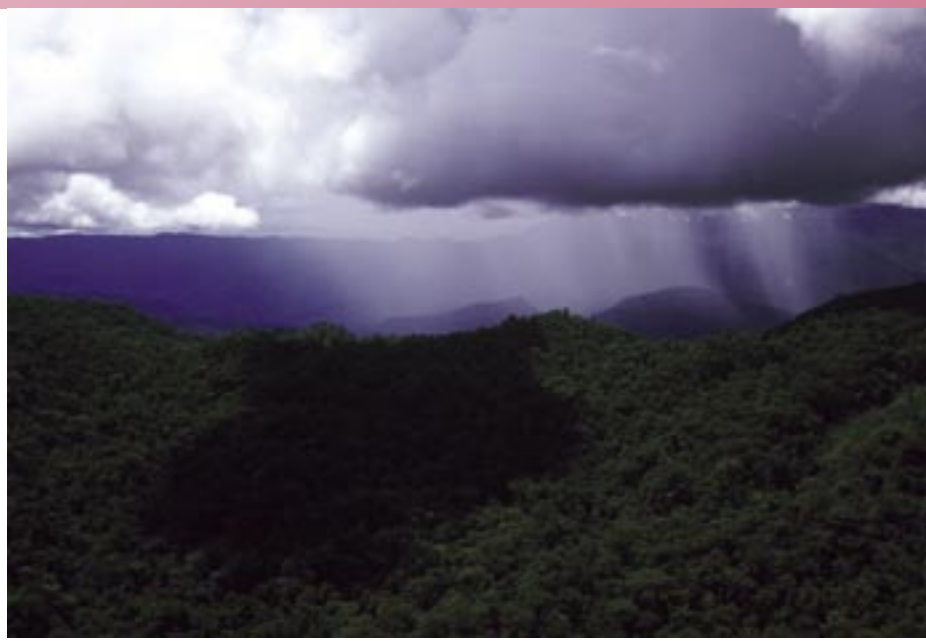

Photo: C. Vega, Conservation International

But beyond its political significance, the region is home to an extraordinary biological diversity *(see box page 11)*. It is a refuge and transit area for species that can live in different altitudinal zones and contains species of both Amazonian and Andean origin. The slopes of the Condor Range on both the Peruvian and Ecuadorian sides are also the ancestral territory of the Awajun, Wampis (mostly Peruvian side) and Shuar (Ecuadorian side) ethnic groups.

In 1998 the two countries fixed the borders of this region and signed a peace agreement, one of the clauses of which stipulated that the region should be designated for conservation purposes. At the same time, however, it was agreed that the region was to be available for development in the form of mining and other economic activities and for the construction of the Amazon road network linking Ecuador and Peru with Brazil.

In 1999 two small 'peace parks' of about 6000 hectares on the Peru side and 2400 hectares in Ecuador were created. These are located between the source of the Kuankus River, which flows towards Ecuador, and the Cenepa River (also known as the Sinip River), which flows towards Peru. The Government of Peru added to the total area by establishing the Santiago Comaina Reserved Zone, now covering an area of 1.64 million hectares.

The establishment of these protected areas was the driving force behind the development of the twin ITTO projects PD 2/00 (F) and PD 3/00: 'Binational peace and conservation in the Condor Range region, Ecuador-Peru'. Implemented under the auspices of the Ministry for the Environment of Ecuador by the Natura Foundation (Fundación Natura) on the Ecuadorian side and the National Institute for Natural Resources of Peru (INRENA) and Conservation International on the Peruvian side, the projects aimed to strengthen mutual cooperation and consolidate a lasting peace between the two countries. Some of the most important outputs of the project have included:

- a regional conservation strategy, with a proposal for the development of a conservation corridor that would integrate the Condor Range into an extensive transboundary scheme (see page 11);
- an information system for the entire range, incorporating the biological knowledge acquired to date by both countries, as well as a common geographic information system;
- the development of dialogues and meetings between indigenous peoples living in the region—the Awajun, Shuar and Wampis. These cultures have a wealth of traditional knowledge about the natural resources of the region and have developed sustainable methods of fishing, hunting, agriculture and timber harvesting. The project strategy on the Peruvian side sought to integrate the cultural values and knowledge of the Awajun and Wampis indigenous peoples into resource and land-use management. To this end, 16 'indigenous conservation promoters' from the local communities were trained so they could help harmonise the conservation ideas of native communities and the concepts contained in Peruvian legislation on natural protected areas, thus guaranteeing a truly participatory process. Work with indigenous communities on the Ecuadorian side is described on the next page; and
- coordination between the two governments for the implementation of concerted conservation actions and the development of bi-national policies in the Condor Range and in the communities neighbouring the protected areas.

The following two articles show some of the activities of the two projects, which were completed recently. Follow-up phases are planned.

An indigenous solution

The Shuar people are committing themselves to conservation and sound forest use

by the Natura Foundation

Quito, Ecuador

THE CONDOR range is home to a culture more than 1500 years old, erroneously called 'Jivaros' by the first Europeans. These people were made infamous in the 20th century by tales told out of context about a tribe of headhunters. Occupying areas of the great regional Chimu culture, which ranged from the Pacific coast to the Morona River and the Upper Marañon River basin in both Ecuador and Peru, they once controlled several ecological areas (from the Andean to the Amazon regions) and thus generated a wide diversity of knowledge and technologies.

In Ecuador, part of this ethnic group is called Shuar, which is settled in the Condor Range and the Transkutuku Amazon region in the lowlands of the Zamora and Upano river basins. About 1200 Shuar families collectively own a territory of about 220 000 hectares.

Towards the southern end of the Condor Range in Ecuador, the borders of the usable land become much narrower and there are fewer hunting grounds. This is where small-scale miners, mostly Andean farmers forced from their lands by droughts, land depletion and poverty, started occupying poor-quality lands across an area of almost 160 000 hectares.

Children of the Condor. *Photo: C. Vega, Conservation International*

Conservation as an asset for the Shuar people

ITTO's financial support helped the Government of Ecuador through its Ministry for the Environment under the coordination of the Natura Foundation to start a process of engagement with the Shuar. These are people with their own dynamics, their own way of understanding the world, their own way of using the land and forest resources (by family groups), and their very specific cultural relationship with and dependency on the forest. As ancestral owners recognised by the Ecuadorian state, the decision to ensure the conservation of this region must involve respecting their identity as an indigenous people.

In view of this, the Natura Foundation implemented the project using the concept of indigenous territory as

the starting point. The Shuar culture does not fragment or divide the components of daily life—such as the economy, spirituality, sacred rituals for planting, chiefs or policies related to skills or knowledge, and the collection and distribution of wealth between families. The territory is everything: it represents the space of the culture, government, economy and spirituality, and provides the basis for the survival of families and of the whole community as a differentiated group of people.

The Constitution of Ecuador describes the country as multicultural and multi-ethnic; it recognises the right of specific cultural groups to organise their own social, economic and cultural life and to be consulted on activities that will impact on their territories. In view of this, the Natura Foundation held an intensive dialogue with the 1200 families of the Shuar community and supported the integration of all the families under a single territorial management structure. As a result, the Shuar appointed their own authorities and jointly considered the fate of their own space and forest.

Self-management

Slowly but surely, the community has begun to perceive its territory as an integrated unit, in which any change in land-use practices within a group of families could impact on all the families and on the forest. People further understand that there are differences between the families that live in areas of low population density and undisturbed forests and those who live with less forest space and are becoming poorer.

Each family has begun to make decisions on the way they will use their plots or farms. Of all the proposals put forward by the 1200 families, one recurred consistently: more than 70% of the forest should be preserved, including ritual areas, high plateaus and forests for hunting and gathering during festive seasons. The rest of the forest should be designated for sustainable use, including for vegetable gardens of less than one hectare per family, 1-hectare areas for cash crops such as corn and green oranges, and 5–10 hectares for pasture lands. Timber harvesting will also be allowed: the low productivity and competitiveness of agricultural production and the livestock production crisis have made this an increasingly attractive option.

At the same time, this internal 'family-based' government decided to establish rules and regulations for its 'life plan' and for forest utilisation in particular. It drafted internal laws to resolve land ownership conflicts and to organise hunting, fishing and gathering activities, and developed annual management plans for family groups.

The same was done for all logging activities. Families agreed that timber was a common heritage that should be used and protected for future generations; they applied stricter standards than those required by Ecuadorian legislation and sought to improve their income levels and reduce pressure on the forests by applying an appropriate felling, transport and marketing system.

The protected Shuar territory

Finally, the Shuar communities made a long analysis of the benefits of having their territory declared a protected area for conservation purposes and for the sound use of resources, as well as for the protection of their national indigenous identity within the Ecuadorian state.

The Ecuadorian Forest Law only provides for state-owned natural conservation areas administered by the Ministry for the Environment. Since a major part of the protected areas have been created in ancestral indigenous territories, the Ministry for the Environment has tended to relax its requirements by signing utilisation agreements and even partial administration agreements with indigenous communities; lands were not expropriated and land titles were recognised.

However, the Shuar community wanted more security for its land. They requested that until the law is revised by the national government to provide for the establishment of protected areas on private lands, local government areas and indigenous territories, the Shuar territory should be declared a protected area, a status that in any case has already been self-declared by this indigenous group.

Precautionary action: protected areas in the south

In the southern part of the region outside the Shuar territory, the Ecuadorian Condor Range becomes narrower and falls sharply towards the Cenepa River in Peru. The existence of three cultural groups, small-scale miners and owners of farms that were potentially geared for timber harvesting, and the granting of a concession over the territory to two large-scale mining companies (a copper-mining company and a gold-mining company), led the Ministry for the Environment to create a new group of viable conservation areas as a precautionary measure.

A biological reserve is proposed in a large Tepuy-type plateau of 9000 hectares, which has a vegetation formation that is unique in Ecuador. In addition, a wildlife refuge of almost 4000 hectares is proposed for montane forest in an area under concession to the mining companies. This refuge will become a sort of central headquarters from where the biological connectivity and sound use of the entire territory could be organised. Finally, there is a proposal to establish a protection forest in the highland areas of the region, close to the national border, until the mining companies have localised their extraction sites.

The conservation of this area of more than 30 000 hectares under the administration of the Ministry for the Environment and other local partners, in a zone not suitable for agriculture and where mining and forest activities are the real sources of income, has become the focus of regional integration. This focus will hopefully ensure the sustainable management of resources, the mitigation of mining impacts, the sound management of the territory, and the connectivity of both plants and animals.

Building the Condor-Kutuku conservation corridor

The Condor transboundary conservation area is the cornerstone of a more ambitious planned regional conservation corridor

by Martin Alcalde and Luis Espinel

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THE CONDOR Range is a biogeographical, cultural and socioeconomic unit; it constitutes the central axis of a substantial group of conservation areas on both sides of the Ecuador/Peru border. The development of the transboundary conservation reserve will facilitate the establishment of a major conservation network between both countries and thus become the central link for the development of the Condor-Kutuku Corridor *(Figure 1)*.

The links established between protected areas and surrounding lands provide a valuable opportunity for the coordination of biodiversity conservation actions aimed at sustainable development. The Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor is a planning tool that will contribute to the integrated management of natural areas within a socioeconomic, political and cultural framework, creating a new window of opportunity for the integration of conservation management between Peru and Ecuador.

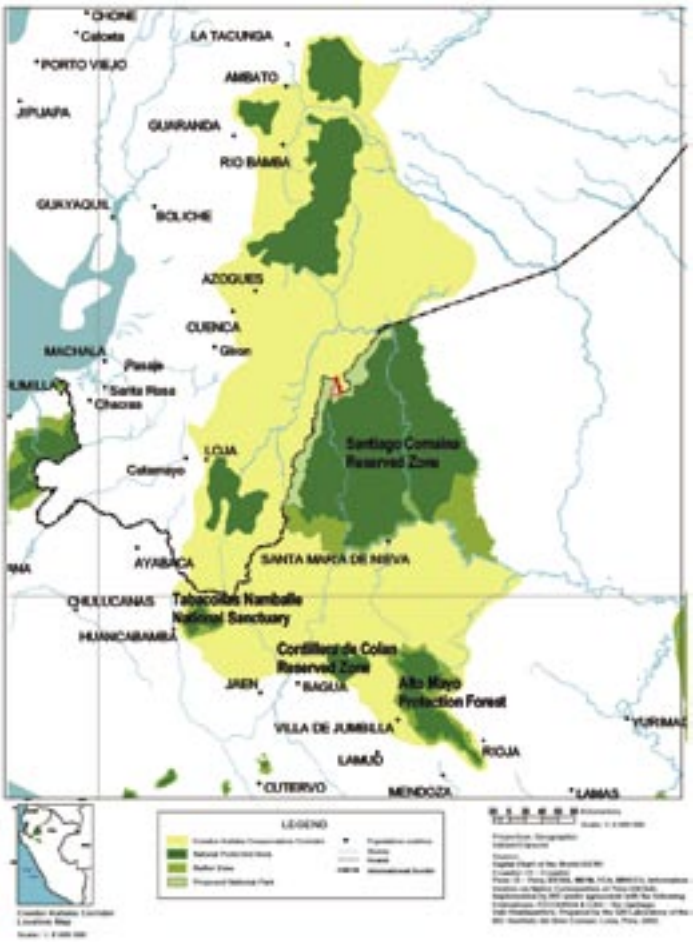
As part of the process of building this corridor, one of the outputs of ITTO PROJECT PD 3/00, which was implemented on the Peru side, was a final proposal for the establishment of the Ichigkat Muja Condor Range National Park *(Figure 1)* within Peru's national system for state-protected natural areas, along with a 5-year master plan. The proposal was developed with the active participation of the local communities in the identification and management of natural protected areas.

Potential park

Figure 2: boundaries of the proposed Ichigkat Muja Condor Range National Park

Condor corridor

Figure 1: the Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor straddles the border between Peru and Ecuador



A longer-term goal is to design and develop a participatory process for the consolidation of the Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor. This would involve:

- designing the Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor based on a participatory approach;
- emphasising biological connectivity and the management of transboundary conservation areas on both sides of the border as a single unit, thus providing an opportunity to highlight the importance of a 'link' connecting the network of protected areas between Peru and Ecuador so as to consolidate the regional vision of conservation corridors;
- provide biological, social, physical and other arguments supporting the viability of the management of the conservation corridor; and
- promote the zoning of the conservation corridor so as to identify programs and sub-programs suitable for the land-uses therein.

Wildlife refuge and endemism

The decision of the two countries to create a transboundary conservation area is particularly inspired because of the high conservation value of the region. Indeed, the region's vulnerability is so marked, its conservation status so high and the importance of its biodiversity so great that the national interests of both countries should be well served through its conservation.

The Condor Range is rich in biodiversity, with more than 4000 plant species, many still to be identified. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the area is the existence of unusual vegetation formations that grow on vertically cut sandstone geo-morphological structures with extensive plateaus near the peaks; these structures have been referred to as 'Tepuy-like' because of their similarity to the Guiana Shield region in Venezuela. They harbour a plant formation that is unique in the world made up of orchids, bromelias and dwarf palms; 27 of the 40 species of orchids collected during surveys conducted under the ITTO projects were reported to be new to science. Other important findings included the Andean bear *Tremarctos ornatus*, classified as an endangered species; the carnivorous plant *Drosera*, a rare species of limited habitat; the marsupial *Caenolestes condorensis*; butterflies *Pseudocharis sp.* and *Macrosoma sp.*; and the fish species *Creagrutus kunturus*. These last four are believed to be new to science.

A total of 142 species of mammals (Mena 2003) have been documented in the Condor Range, along with some 613 bird species (Agreda 2004), of which 44 inhabit the flat plateaus of the Condor Range and are not found in the montane forests below 2000 m in altitude. Six of these species are endemic to the Condor Range and the southeastern region of the Andes.

The photo shows one of the techniques used to survey insects in the region.

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Bug-catcher: an insect survey in progress in the Condor Range.
Photo: C. Vega, Conservation International