



# KAPOK

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Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

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## Connecting Nature & People



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Cover: Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, El Pahuma Orchid Reserve



# Conservation

## Now More Than Ever: We Need Nature, and Nature Needs Us

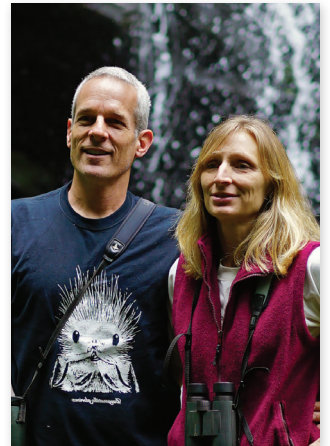
Hot on the heels of celebrating a new conservation easement to protect the Lalo Loor Dry Forest Reserve for years to come, the pandemic upended tourism in Ecuador. Owners of private reserves, like the Loor family, and the Lima family of the El Pahuma Orchid Reserve, saw their principal source of income vanish. Thanks to our donors' support, Ceiba extended immediate relief funds, keeping rangers employed to thwart illegal hunting and logging. Wildlife thrived as peace and quiet reclaimed the forests, revealing just how resilient nature can be when it is properly protected.

With field courses and projects suspended, Ceiba's board and staff took time to reevaluate our conservation strategy and refocus our mission: **Connecting Nature and People**. We connect habitat remnants with corridors of reforestation to conserve biodiversity; we connect human livelihoods to environmental protection by supporting sustainable land use; and we connect learners of all ages to the wondrous ecosystems around them through outdoor education.

Reconnecting with nature has been a bright spot in these trying times. Unable to safely attend indoor gatherings, people are escaping to natural areas in unprecedented numbers, seeking rejuvena-

tion of the body, and the mind. As travel restrictions have lifted in Ecuador, there has been an uptick in visitors to the El Pahuma and Lalo Loor reserves. Ceiba worked hand-in-hand with reserve staff to implement recommended safety protocols, rerouting trails into one-way loops and substituting live guides with improved signage. Even so, it remains hard to earn a living by protecting a forest. If it were easier, the world might not be facing the deforestation, climate, and biodiversity crises of today.

The pandemic has been a wake-up call to the risks posed by destruction of the environment. Now more than ever we need nature, but nature also needs us. It is up to all of us to support the wilderness areas that not only safeguard Earth's biodiversity, but also nurture our own health and spirit. We invite you to connect with Ceiba, and join Joe and Catherine in making a life-long commitment to nature.



## Coastal Conservation Corridor Links Northern and Southern Hemispheres

Ceiba's dream of a Coastal Conservation Corridor came to fruition in 2020 with ratification of our bold Conservation and Sustainable Use Area (ACUS, in Spanish) in western Ecuador. The ACUS straddles the equator, encompasses over 800 square miles (twice the size of Rocky Mountain National Park) and protects 330 square miles of tropical deciduous forests, including coastal vegetation and mangroves. The declaration establishes a legal framework for community-based conservation of threatened ecosystems and species, like the Mantled Howler Monkey (*above*), and promotes reforestation and sustainable land management that will reconnect forests and protect water sources. We know the hardest work is still to come: expanding community participation, raising resources to finance incen-



Simón Falls, a vital source of local water

tives, and holding municipal governments accountable. Foremost on our agenda is ensuring the application of existing laws that exonerate protected forests from property taxes, so conservation-minded landowners can avoid cutting timber to pay the tax. We will push for enforcement of federal laws against illegal logging and poaching throughout the ACUS, and we plan to protect more forest through conservation easements, a legal mechanism we pioneered in Ecuador. Ceiba also will continue to identify and partner with local conservation leaders, like Barón Cevallos and Miguel Dueñas, participants in our 2019 reforestation program who have emerged as vocal champions of the benefits a forested coastline can extend to everyone in the region.



# Sustainability

## Reactivating Coastal Tourism and a New Green Economy

Long term conservation is only possible when the aspirations of local communities align with the goals of habitat conservation and species protection. For years, Ceiba has promoted sustainable entrepreneurship within the Coastal Conservation Corridor, and now we have new backing for these programs. We were recently awarded a grant from the German Agency of International Cooperation to stimulate safe reactivation of tourism in four coastal communities nestled in tropical deciduous forests near Machalilla National Park and El Pelado Marine Reserve.

People in these southern Manabí villages depend heavily on tourism, fishing, and the production of artisanal goods, including finely crafted carvings, jewelry, and ornaments made from local plants like the Tagua palm, whose hard seeds are known as ‘vegetable ivory.’ The global pandemic severely impacted these hardworking communities, as prohibitions on movement within

Ecuador devastated regional tourism, a critical source of income. Now that restrictions are lifting, these remote communities need assistance to strengthen their economic resilience by adapting and improving the services they provide.



Pacific Parrotlets, smaller than sparrows, call this wild coast home

Ceiba’s multi-pronged initiative will help communities implement comprehensive bio-safety measures to minimize risks for returning visitors. The grant will finance construction of essential infrastructure so artisans can sell their products directly to visitors, ensuring a fair price for their work. We also will lead training sessions for local women to elevate the quality of their artisanal crafts and improve sustainability in all phases of production, like

seed collection and packaging. Our goal is for coastal communities to become more prosperous and resilient by building a greener economy that sustains rural people and alleviates pressure on wild lands and the region’s unique plants and animals.

## Relief When It Was Needed Most

In 2016, a devastating earthquake literally shook the lives of everyone around the Lalo Llor Reserve, Ceiba’s flagship conservation project for the past decade. Our staff, volunteers, and donors instantly stepped up to give critical assistance to the most affected households. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic struck with equal ferocity, shuttering businesses, suspending classes, canceling visits to the reserve, and suffocating the local economy. People were in trouble, and looking for help. Thanks once again to an international outpouring of support, Ceiba was able to leap into action to



Weighing beets for relief kits at the Pedernales vegetable market

assist those most in need. Our network of contacts, and history of collaboration in this remote coastal region, helped us mount a targeted response within weeks of the pandemic striking Ecuador. We mobilized our staff and joined forces with local shops and markets to assemble and distribute relief kits to over 200 of the neediest families. The kits included pounds of fresh vegetables, dry beans, and rice, as well as much-needed soap and surgical masks. All of us at Ceiba send a heartfelt “*Muchas Gracias!*” to our generous supporters who made timely contributions to this life-sustaining response.



# Education



## Hugging Trees, Training Teachers, and Inspiring Children

Spotting howler monkeys, taking photos to compare different seasons in the forest, and measuring (and hugging!) trees are all fun outdoor activities at the heart of our local environmental education programs. Through several key partnerships, Ceiba continues to stimulate environmental consciousness in future generations on the Manabí coast.

Together with the University of Wisconsin-based Latino Earth Partnership (LEP), and numerous teachers from regional schools, Ceiba engages children in culturally relevant environmental education programs at sites ranging from nearby nature reserves to streams just behind the schools. In January 2020, 16 teachers participated in a week long Teacher Training Workshop that was hosted for the fourth time in the Lalo



Loor Dry Forest Reserve. Educators pretended to be a drop in the water cycle, and acted as insects in a game of charades, as they practiced the LEP training materials in an outdoor classroom. All of them immediately implemented the material in their own classes, encouraging over 170 students to explore the interconnectedness between humans and their natural environment.

Throughout 2020, Ceiba has offered our own outdoor education experiences (sometimes virtually), for children from numerous regional schools. Together with the local *A Mano Manaba* Foundation and several area libraries, nature conservation theory and practice are combined during fun field visits. In the process, teachers and school kids are showing a stronger commitment to understanding and safeguarding their forests.

## Alumni Spotlight: Michelle Hu, 2011

In the nearly 10 years that have passed since I attended Ceiba's Tropical Conservation Semester (TCS) program in Ecuador, I've built trails, traveled across the western US and Central America, picked up rock climbing and snowboarding, and finished an M.S. in Water Resources. Now I'm working towards a Ph.D. at the University of Washington, using satellite remote sensing and modern data science approaches to study seasonal mountain snow.



How did the TCS program influence my life? I see reverberations of that semester in the activities I pursue, the jobs I've taken, even the relationships I invest in. My closest friendships are with people I met on that trip. An easy answer is that it helped me develop an appreciation and curiosity for the natural world. A more accurate answer is that it challenged me to question how I saw the world while encouraging me to find and take my place in it.

## Until Everybody Is Free

Ceiba stands with those who support peace, justice, equality, and freedom. For over twenty years, we have been striving to make the world safer, more diverse, and more equitable, and we remain committed to creating a more just world where everyone can enjoy equal access to nature. A 2017 National Science Foundation study revealed that only 6% of students studying abroad identified as Black, despite making up 13.4% of the population, and just 6% of all life science doctorates were awarded to Black students. In response, Ceiba is working to establish scholarships to make our study abroad programs, and the science training and international experience they provide, more accessible to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. As Maya Angelou said, "the truth is, no one of us can be free until everybody is free."

### Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

301 South Bedford Street, Suite 7A  
Madison, Wisconsin 53703  
608.230.5550 mail@ceiba.org

[www.ceiba.org](http://www.ceiba.org)



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