



KAPOK

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Newsletter of the
Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

Making Connections



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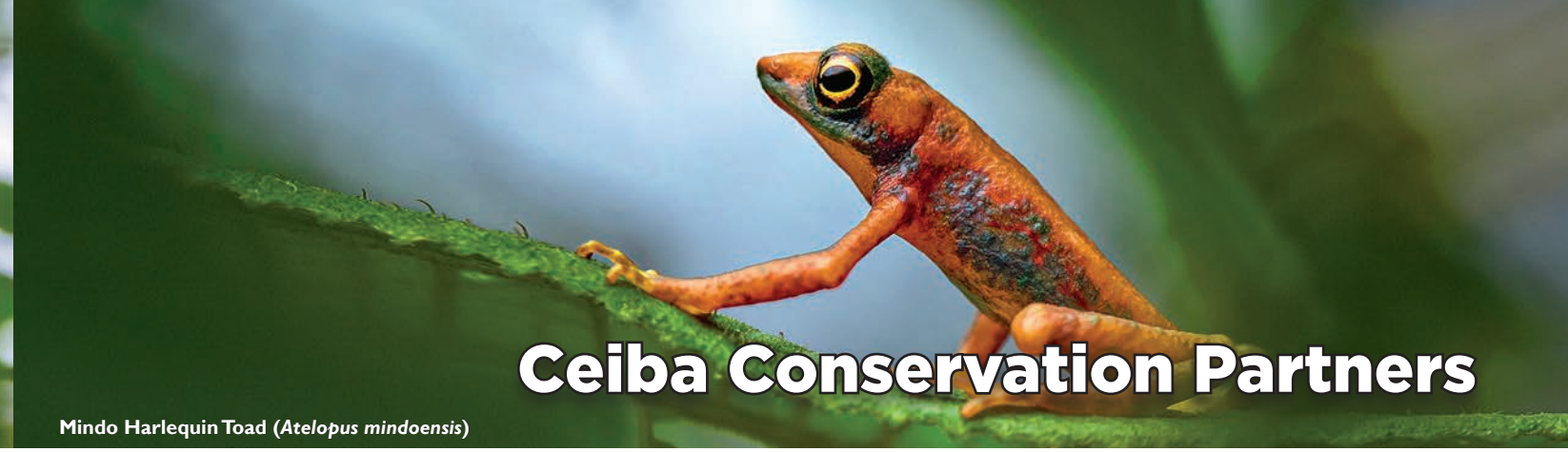
- Letter from Ceiba's President
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Woolly Monkeys (*Lagothrix lagothricha*) cruise the canopy of Ecuador's Amazon rainforest, the most biodiverse place on Earth, where Ceiba has supported the Tiputini Biodiversity Station since 2020



Protecting and Connecting Forests

Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan (*Andigena laminirostris*)



Ceiba Conservation Partners

Mindo Harlequin Toad (*Atelopus mindoensis*)

Letter From Ceiba President Catherine Woodward

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I invite you to enjoy our 2024 newsletter. This year we spotlight Ceiba's mission to **connect people and nature**, as our 10-year effort to establish a conservation corridor in coastal Ecuador reached a critical milestone. Eleven counties have now joined forces to **declare Conservation and Sustainable Use Areas** ("ACUS" for the Spanish acronym), a legal framework for protecting forests and managing land sustainably (see article below, and map).

Each ACUS puts land stewardship in the hands of landowners, communities, and local governments, advancing **social justice**, a core value of Ceiba. We believe that bolstering grassroots initiatives led by local conservation leaders is an equitable way to reduce species extinctions and lessen the impacts of climate change, while fostering long-term motivation to protect nature.

In 2024 we launched the **Seeds of Sustainability Fund** also to promote social equity, awarding \$35,000 to five local initiatives in Ecuador and El Salvador that deliver conservation benefits in their communities (page 3). Our model is to connect these Conservation Partners – who lack resources to fundraise, promote, and network – into a community of practice, buoyed by Ceiba's donors, alumni, and friends who help to raise funds and widely share successes. Thank you for being a part of Ceiba.

The Sustainability of Conservation

Conservation and sustainable development are deeply connected. In Ecuador, Ceiba spearheaded the 2019 establishment of three **ACUS** (see above), land use ordinances that can be declared by local governments, ancestral communities, or private landowners. The goal is to protect native forests, rare species, and scarce water, but also promote sustainable land uses – like shade coffee and cacao – that foster linkages between habitat and connect communities with conservation.

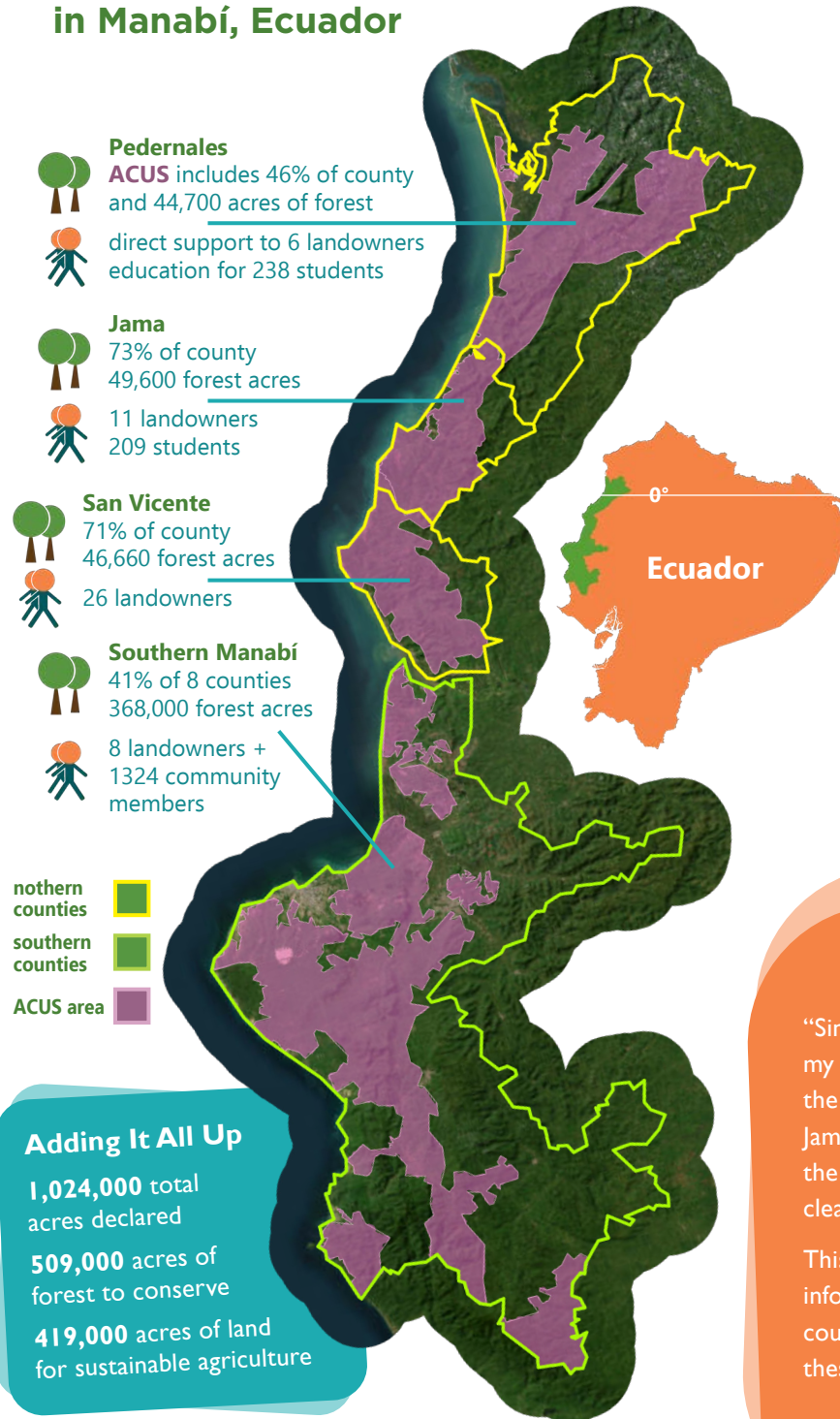
The first three ACUS were pioneered in the northern counties of Pedernales, Jama, and San Vicente in northern Manabí province, comprising 446,600 acres. This included **over 140,000 acres** of one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world, the **seasonally dry tropical forest**. Within these ACUS, we have reinvigorated 8 native tree nurseries, reforested riverbanks and mangroves, led education programs for hundreds of school kids, and helped dozens of landowners draft sustainable farm plans and obtain property tax exoneration for protecting their forests (see map, and page 3 article).



Marcos Cevallos (left) shares seeds with community garden in Salango

This year, thanks to the Andes Amazon Fund, we paved the way for five new ACUS to be declared by the Manabí provincial government. These encompass **368,000 acres of habitat** in 8 southern counties, that link to the northern forests. Ceiba's field expert Marcos Cevallos (left) led planning meetings up and down the coast, and promoted restoration and sustainable production initiatives with early adopters. Long-term success now depends on supporting the growth of local land protection and stewardship initiatives. – *Doménica Gutierrez*

Conservation & Sustainable Use Areas in Manabí, Ecuador



Planting Seeds of Sustainability

Five conservation partners have launched projects funded by our new Seeds of Sustainability grants, and we are thrilled to share some of their updates.

The **Seas & Forests Conservation Alliance** is working towards integrated conservation in the Jama county ACUS (see map). "Thanks to Ceiba's funding," they relate, "we can develop projects aligned with ecosystem restoration, research, environmental education and sustainable livelihoods for communities and in favor of conservation." Their research team recently collected the first insect samples to assess ecosystem resilience and plant-pollinator interactions in reforestation sites.



Daniel Reyes installs insect sampling traps

In the Cloud Forest of Mindo, the **Khamai Foundation** seeks to protect the endangered Mindo Harlequin Toad (see photo above). After being declared "possibly extinct" in 1989, a survey funded by this year's grant discovered a live individual for the first time in 5 years, dubbed Tryone the Solitary.

Sociedad Salvaje Salvadoreña is cultivating a unique conservation presence in the newly established Oriente Salvaje World Surfing Reserve in El Salvador. They are involving communities in operating a sea turtle nursery, raising and releasing four endangered turtle species into the Pacific Ocean.

As an organization of indigenous women, the **Kichwa Midwives** work to preserve knowledge and practices of the Napu Runa culture. They collect seeds from endangered trees for "chakra" (mixed agroforestry) nurseries. Chakras foster biodiversity and are fundamental spaces to engage community members with ancestral knowledge and sustainable practices. – *Lilly Pearson*

Forests Begin Paying for Themselves

"Since my childhood I had a vision of conserving the forest that I had the opportunity to inherit from my father. Over the years I realize that it is not easy, but it makes me happy," says Julián Carrión, one of the landowners Ceiba helped to secure a crucial Property Tax Exemption for Conservation in 2024. The Jama county government (see map) in Manabí province made this exemption possible, in exchange for the environmental services that standing forests provide for everyone, such as filtering water. Access to clean water is vital to communities that suffer from water scarcity during the region's long dry season.

This new legal benefit is offered by county governments, which receive federal funding but make locally-informed decisions that can motivate landowners to conserve. We are now working with Pedernales county, north of Jama, to offer this incentive to more people in the region. Our broader goal is to unlock these forest conservation benefits across the entire province of Manabí. – *Erika Lucas*



Below and Above the Waves

Study Abroad Students Broaden Their Horizons

An interconnected and ever-changing world needs scientists and policy makers with modern skills, and Ceiba is leading the way in training that next generation. Our study abroad programs explore the planet's most biodiverse ecosystems, provide hands-on instruction, and broaden cultural horizons with real-world experiences. In the Amazon of Ecuador, students apply current research techniques to study tropical rainforests; in the Galapagos islands, they write grant proposals for future conservation projects; and underwater in Belize, they assess the health of coral reefs and gain a deeper understanding of the solutions that can protect this rich ecosystem. Throughout, students are immersed in local cultures, exposed to local voices, and guided by local program leaders. For

Maddie DeMarco (Ecuador 2022), the experience “did more than expand my knowledge of tropical ecology and conservation, it helped me become a more-informed global citizen and strengthened my relationship with both nature and so many new friends.”



Students prep for rainforest monkey surveys

Ceiba aims to inspire and empower students, equipping them with tools to become stewards and leaders of our dynamic world. Tropical Conservation Semester alum Catherine Nguyen said of her five months

abroad: “this program taught me so much about wildlife and environmental conservation, but also flexibility, interpersonal communications, fieldwork preparation, and cultural awareness in places I never would have been able to witness otherwise.” ~ Joe Meisel

Underwater Education in Ecuador

Holger Chica has been a fisherman all his life. “It was the trade I learned when I was little. Today I am very grateful for the opportunity Ceiba gave my son to be able to dive, he is happy and I am happy for him.” His son, also named Holger, is a member of our Discovering Ecosystems program that teaches him skills – through observation, research, and practice – for conserving the ocean that sustains fishermen like his father. Holger was one of the twelve teenagers who received an Open Water Diver certification, thanks to Ceiba’s alliance with Evelyn Arias and Spondylus Divers, and the Pontificia University of Ecuador in Manta. To date we have over 40 stories like this to tell, one for each teenager who explores the sea and forest with us. ~ Erika Lucas

Alumni Spotlight: Ollie Parmekar



I’m a Ceiba alum from the 2021 Coral Reef Ecology course in Belize, where my research examined effects of invasive lionfish on the reef fish community. Some of my favorite memories are suspending myself underwater to observe, and feeling like I was in a completely different world. This experience was pivotal for me, as it was my first chance to conduct

my own research project, solidifying my desire to pursue a career in coral reef ecology. I’m now an intern for Reef Doctor in Madagascar, doing mangrove planting and GPS mapping, artificial reef construction, and coral transplantation. To address Madagascar’s challenges with undernourishment, we also collaborate with local communities to enhance food security and replenish over-harvested fish stocks.



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