



# KAPOK

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Newsletter of the  
Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

## Eyes on the Future



**What's Inside:** Letter from Ceiba • Conservation Incentives • Seeds of Sustainability  
Capuchins make a Comeback • El Pahuma • Education Abroad and at Home • Alumni Spotlights





## Ceiba Conservation Partners

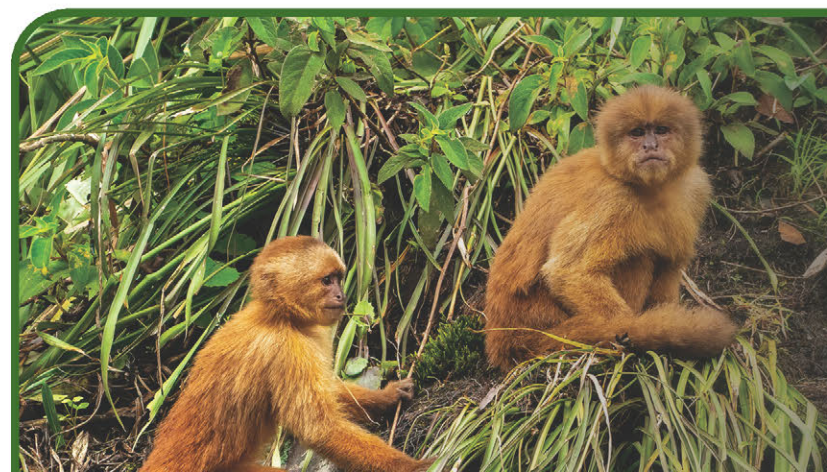
photo: Alejandro Arteaga

### A Message From Our Vice-President

Ceiba has always looked towards the future. Our conservation projects protect plants, animals, and landscapes for the benefit of future generations. Our study abroad courses train the next generation of environmental scientists and stewards. Our outreach programs engage local communities in building a better future for themselves and their families. And our Seeds of Sustainability grants help jump-start grassroots efforts around the world that will lead conservation into the future. Ceiba has blazed new ground in the way we work: we signed South America's first conservation easement; when others are buying land, we support local communities; we listen to our stakeholders, and we support local leadership in implementing their own designs for the future. As ever, the task ahead is towering. How do we save species and protect ecosystems, while economic needs grow ever greater and dozens of critical problems vie for our attention? But thanks to the support of people like you, we are up to the task! Our team in Ecuador is more dynamic, more diverse, and more agile than ever. Ceiba's global partners are directing creative and inspiring projects. Our investment in environmental education has produced committed and caring local leaders. There are many signs of hope. A once-extinct toad was rediscovered in Ecuador by a Ceiba partner (*see right*). Endangered capuchin monkeys are returning to our coastal reserve (*see bottom*). And communities across the planet continue to mobilize, make themselves heard, and create a positive future. We invite you to join Ceiba as we stride confidently into that future, and we thank you for making the world better, one step at a time. - Joe Meisel

### Quest for Conservation Incentives

The long-term conservation of coastal forests in Ecuador is challenging, as mounting economic needs increase the pressure on these shrinking ecosystems. For over 20 years, Ceiba has promoted numerous incentives for the protection of these critically endangered forests, which harbor unique species such as the Ecuadorian capuchin monkey (*see right*). Among those incentives is the exoneration of property taxes for landowners who protect forests on their land. In 2025, we supported four landowners in accessing this incentive in the Jama cantón, promoting conservation of over 370 hectares and doubling the number of beneficiaries from 2024! Ceiba is helping municipal governments implement the incentive and continues to connect land stewards with financial relief. - Domenica Gutierrez

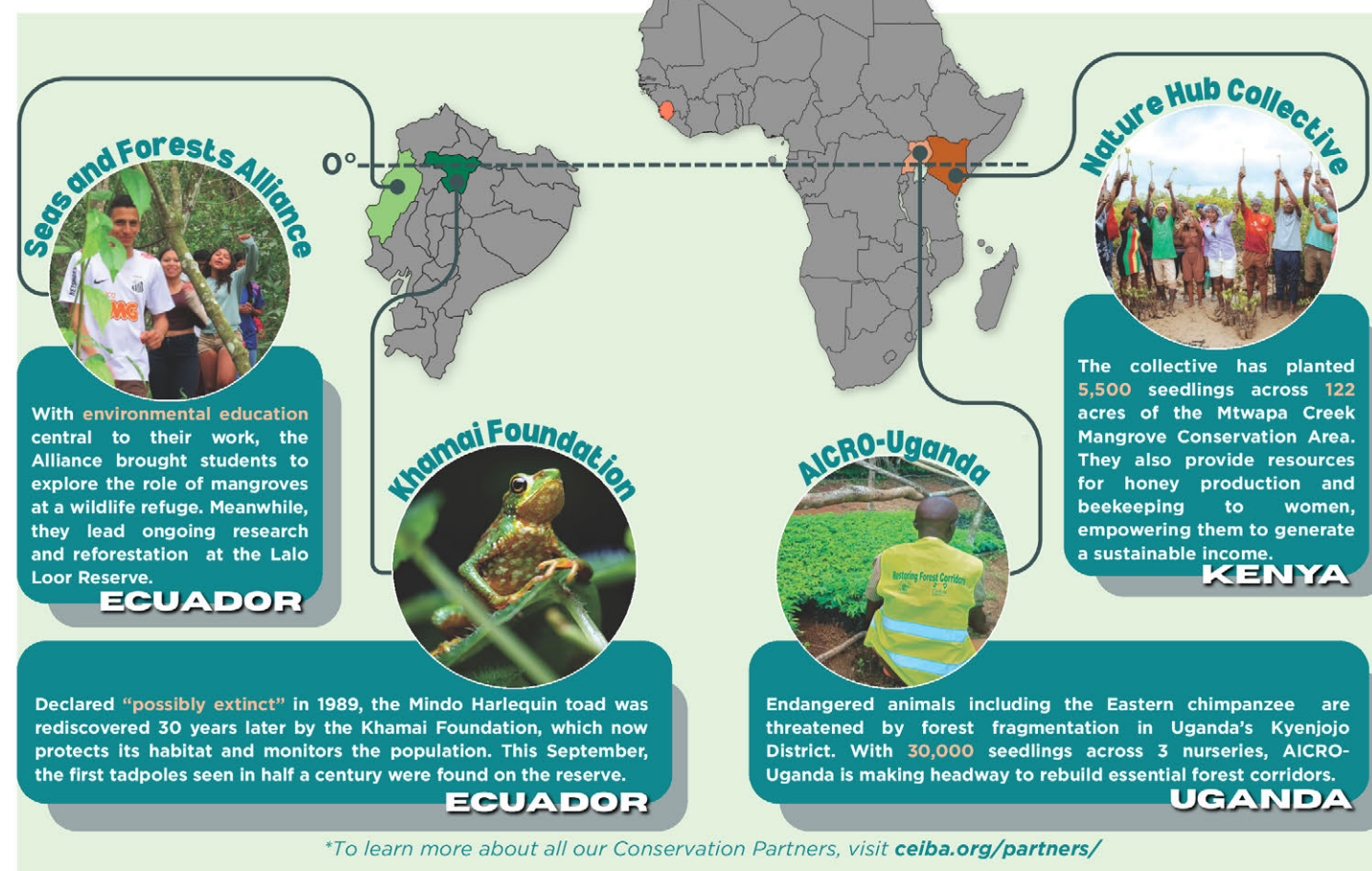


## Conservation Soars

photo: Joe Meisel

### Seeds of Sustainability Grants Around the Globe

Ceiba's Conservation Partners, funded by our new Seeds of Sustainability grant program, are driving local change across the world. Explore their growing impact from Ecuador to Kenya, Uganda, and Sierra Leone!



### Looking Back and Ahead at El Pahuma

A quarter-century ago, Ceiba established the El Pahuma Orchid Reserve, protecting over 700 acres of cloud forest on the slopes of the Andes. Rich in orchids, hummingbirds, frogs, and spectacled bears, we forged a new path and signed South America's first true conservation easement with Efrain Lima and his family, laying the groundwork for an enduring collaboration. Since that inauguration, three generations of Limas have continued to manage the reserve, receiving thousands of visitors who come to bathe in the plunging waterfalls and enjoy the mossy tranquility of this spellbinding forest.

When Efrain passed away in 2023, the Lima family asked Ceiba for help securing the reserve's future. Legal fees, mapping, and sorting a lifetime of entanglements takes time, money, and expertise. But we are committed to protecting this priceless ecosystem, which lies at the heart of the Choco-Andino Biosphere Reserve. Ceiba is working with local and international partners, and relying on the support of our donors, to ensure this green jewel will continue to protect rare and unique species, critical freshwater resources, and an inviting destination for nature lovers into the next century. - Catherine Woodward



Dracula orchid

### Capuchin Monkeys make a Comeback

Once, the coast of Ecuador was nothing but unbroken forest, bordered by sand and surf. Pumas (*see cover*), jaguars, and ocelots roamed the hills. Howler and capuchin monkeys swung through the trees. But as agriculture grew and the economy squeezed, families began clearing trees. Flash forward one hundred years, and now there are few forests large enough for jaguars and pumas, who have all but disappeared from the landscape. But, much of the original biodiversity survives in forest patches dotting our region. Ocelots still hunt the understory, and howler monkeys keep enjoying a leafy diet. And the Ecuadorian capuchin monkey, recently declared a new and critically endangered species (*Cebus aequatorialis*), is making a comeback. Rampant hunting had decimated populations in the 70s and 80s, but as conservation has taken hold in the region — thanks to Ceiba and our partners — the capuchins are returning! Though absent from the Lalo Loor Reserve for many years, a troop of at least 6 individuals was spotted in September by an intern conducting weekly primate surveys. This incredible finding reminds us that even small reserves play a huge role in protecting endangered species. - Joe Meisel





# Education Abroad and at Home

photo: Catherine Woodward

## Let's Go See the Sea

Discovering Ecosystems is Ceiba's core environmental education program for coastal communities, through which we connect with one of the most sensitive and transformative stages of life: adolescence. It's a journey full of learning experiences and challenges that often surpasses the imaginable. Thanks to UNICEF and local partners, we brought youth groups to Puerto López, a protected area known as the "mini Galapagos," for snorkeling and diving amid abundant marine biodiversity. The transformative power of the experience prompted Rodolfo, 17, to reflect, "we live near the sea, but we didn't know what was inside it." These opportunities are fostering growing awareness of the need for ocean protection. In the past, sea turtles were caught in nets and killed; this year, local teenagers have rescued 3 sea turtles from



Plastic collection at Don Juan Beach

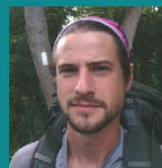
this fate, returning them to the sea unharmed. Another enriching experience was our visit to the National Center for Aquaculture and Marine Research in Santa Elena, where school kids from our region and 20 teenagers from other provinces of Ecuador learned about the connection between science, research, and conservation. They enjoyed a rare opportunity to swim among sea lions, humpback whales, and coral reefs. These encounters foster friendship and collaboration between emerging environmental leaders, reaffirming their shared commitment to education, nature, and life. They remind us that true conservation is born from experience and blossoms in the awareness of a present that is already changing. ~ Erika Lucas

## Twenty Years of Accomplished Alumni

Back in 2007 an enthusiastic group of just six students embarked on the first ever Tropical Conservation Semester (TCS) in Ecuador. With Ceiba co-founders Joe Meisel and Catherine Woodward, they set off to explore the Andes, Amazon, and Galapagos, and their lives were forever changed. This January, the TCS program will celebrate its twentieth year! Alumni from the program have gone on to incredible and impactful careers. Some are professors of biology, like Katherine Lininger (2008) at the University of Colorado and Lauren Hennelly (2012) at Rice University. Others have made a mark on conservation, like Stephanie Wester (2010) with WWF and Mark Ladd (2009), a lead coral scientist at NOAA. A few alums even work for Ceiba! Anna Choles (2024) is Ceiba's communications coordinator, while Teal Guetschow (2012) co-instructs our Coral Reef Ecology course in Belize and leads the marine biology component of TCS in the Galapagos Islands! We are so proud of the achievements of our alumni, who represent the future of conservation and education. Want to know more about Ceiba graduates have accomplished? Connect with our alumni on LinkedIn (*see right*)! ~ Joe Meisel

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

Ceiba is delighted to welcome two new board members, both alumni of our education programs!



**Nicholas Pomplun** is a carbon and biodiversity consultant with expertise in forest ecology and nature-based climate solutions. He brings global project experience and a passion sparked in Ecuador to advance Ceiba's mission.



**Dr. Xavier Haro-Carrión** is a geography professor at Macalester College who specializes in deforestation and land-use change in coastal Ecuador. He strengthens Ceiba's work with coastal municipalities and community-led conservation.



**Connect with our LinkedIn alumni Network:**  
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4002806/>

