



University of Sussex

THE CHOCÓ PROJECT, situated in one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots in the NW Ecuadorian Chocóan rainforests, will protect 1500 hectares and save one of the last healthy populations of over 150 critically endangered brown-headed spider monkeys (*Ateles fusciceps fusciceps*) from an estimated global population of 250. The presence of this top-25 endangered primate (that plays a key role in maintaining forests through seed dispersal) makes this site a global priority in the fight against extinction – a 'hotspot within a hotspot.'

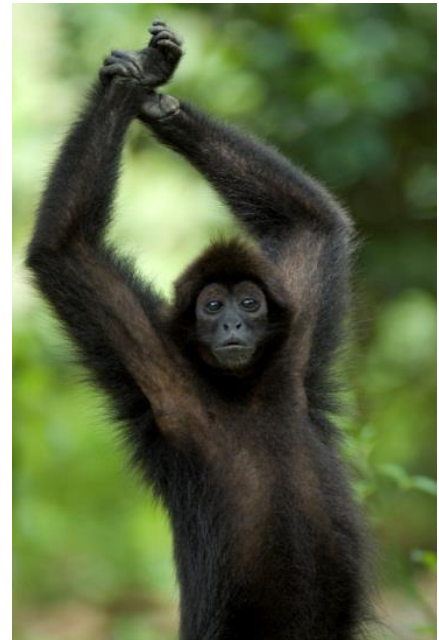
AIM: Protect 1500 hectares of Chocóan rainforest that maintains the largest remaining population of the critically endangered brown-headed spider monkey (*Ateles fusciceps fusciceps*) whilst generating sustainable community livelihoods.

PROJECT ACTION PLAN: Raise £492,000 to (i) expand the Itapoa Reserve to 405 hectares to protect the spider monkey, (ii) establish a conservation chocolate project allowing cacao producers to protect their forests and gain fair trade prices from quality chocolate markets and (iii) expand an environmental education project to address hunting and forest conservation.

UMBRELLA BENEFITS: Protection of last populations of western Ecuadorian jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Bairds Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*) and habitat supporting 44% of mammal species recorded in Ecuador.

IMPACT: Bring the brown-headed spider monkey back from the brink of extinction by conserving some of the most biodiverse forests in the world whilst working together to fight for a sustainable future for both animals and humans.

PROJECT ORGANISERS: The University of Sussex, The Washu Project, The Cambugán Foundation and the local community of Tesoro Escondido NW Ecuador.



Brown-headed spider monkey at Tesoro Escondido.

At 'Tesoro Escondido', in the NW Ecuadorian Chocóan rainforest, primatologists from the University of Sussex have recently identified one of the last healthy populations of the brown-headed spider monkey. Urgent action to protect the area is now needed and the Chocó Project will respond by;

- Establishing a community protected forest reserve,
- Launching a community based chocolate project that generates sustainable incomes whilst protecting forest and,
- Expanding a conservation education project

The 405 hectare Itapoa protected reserve and chocolate project will protect a population of some 150 brown-headed spider monkeys. Through training the chocolate project will ensure that the world class chocolate produced by farmers in the Tesoro Escondido community is professionally processed to

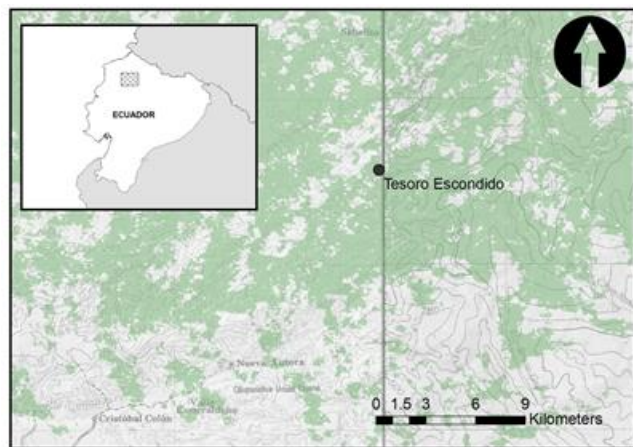
ensure top prices from quality chocolate producers. This will reduce pressures on forests – by linking higher prices directly to conservation and forest restoration the goals of sustainable development can be achieved.

The Chocó Project will be an innovative conservation model linking communities, Ecuadorian non-governmental organisations and national and international researchers, to realise the true value of standing forests and provide livelihoods that compete with clear-cutting.

This will be a replicable conservation model for future regional action and is the first step in ensuring protection for one of the last populations of brown-headed spider monkey. With support, we can conserve these native forests, raise the standard of living of families within the forest communities and bring the critically endangered brown-headed spider monkey back from the brink of extinction.

A major challenge

With the highest rates of deforestation in South America, Ecuador is facing a major challenge. The deterioration and loss of natural habitats and the consequent threat of extinction to species is a pressing problem. Action is particularly urgent in areas with remnants of primary forests, such as those found in the province of Esmeraldas in NW Ecuador. These forests represent one of 25 global biodiversity hotspots identified for urgent conservation action by scientists due to the high number of species they contain and the level of threat they face (Myers, Mittermeier et al. 2000). No more than 50 years ago these forests were considered to be in the best condition of all the Ecuadorian coastal forest habitats. The forest at 'Tesoro Escondido' is a remnant of these primary forests (see map).



Tesoro Escondido, focus of the project location in Esmeraldas Province, NW Ecuador. Light green shaded areas show remaining forest habitat that require urgent conservation action (Data and map from remote sensing and GIS analysis in Peck et al, 2011).

Recent research by the University of Sussex has found the highest population densities of the brown-headed spider monkey, a species endemic to Ecuador and one of the 25 most endangered primates in the world, at Tesoro Escondido (Peck et al. 2011). The spider monkey plays a critical role in maintaining forest diversity as a key species in seed dispersal for numerous tree species. At present, the forest remains at risk due to rapid land development and increased demand for timber, agricultural products and oil palm. Urgent action is needed to protect this wildlife refuge and to search for economic alternatives for the local people that combine wildlife conservation and sustainable incomes.

The Chocó Project now aims to protect these areas under national legislation by raising funds to purchase priority strategic forest from landowners keen to sell. These protected forests will play a key role as they will be the site for a long-term scientific research and education. This will generate the information needed to underpin the long-term conservation of habitat and the brown-headed spider monkey, whilst also offering employment opportunities and a sustainable income for local communities.