

IUCN - MESOAMERICA

15 Years

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The Great Environmental Seed

By Achim Steiner
Director General of the IUCN

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) could be compared to a prolific tree whose seeds were planted in 1948. In that year, the newly created United Nations, through UNESCO, and a renowned team of scientists supported the creation of IUCN, convinced that the correct use of natural resources is and should be part of the culture of the world's peoples.

Since then, the conservation movement has been nurtured within the heart of the IUCN. That is where the protected area categories now used throughout the world were defined, making it possible to protect thousands of ecosystems and millions of species. IUCN would also unfurl the invaluable concept of "sustainable development," the fruit of years of reflection in which a purely conservationist vision evolved into a holistic approach encompassing environmental, economic and social elements as the different faces appearing on the canvas of day-to-day life.

The dual focus necessary for sustainable development—environmental protection with scientific rigorousness and management of political, social and economic factors—are entwined in the daily work of more than 1000 organizations and States belonging to the Union all around the world and thousands of scientists and professionals comprising the IUCN commissions. They are also reflected in the actions of hundreds of environmental organizations throughout the planet that, while not members, follow precepts and environmental thinking emanating from the IUCN, along with the strategies and concepts it constantly continues to produce.

All of the major multilateral agreements on environment have been drafted with the technical and conceptual support of IUCN, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Wetlands with International Importance and the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), to mention some of them. Likewise, the entire world can feel the heartbeat of Earth's flora and fauna through the IUCN "Red List," a measurement of the degree of threat to species, the struggle to save them and the tragedy of extinction.

The concrete expression of this work of global scope in the different continents and regions is largely thanks to the nine regional offices of the IUCN in Africa, Asia, Europe and the American continent.

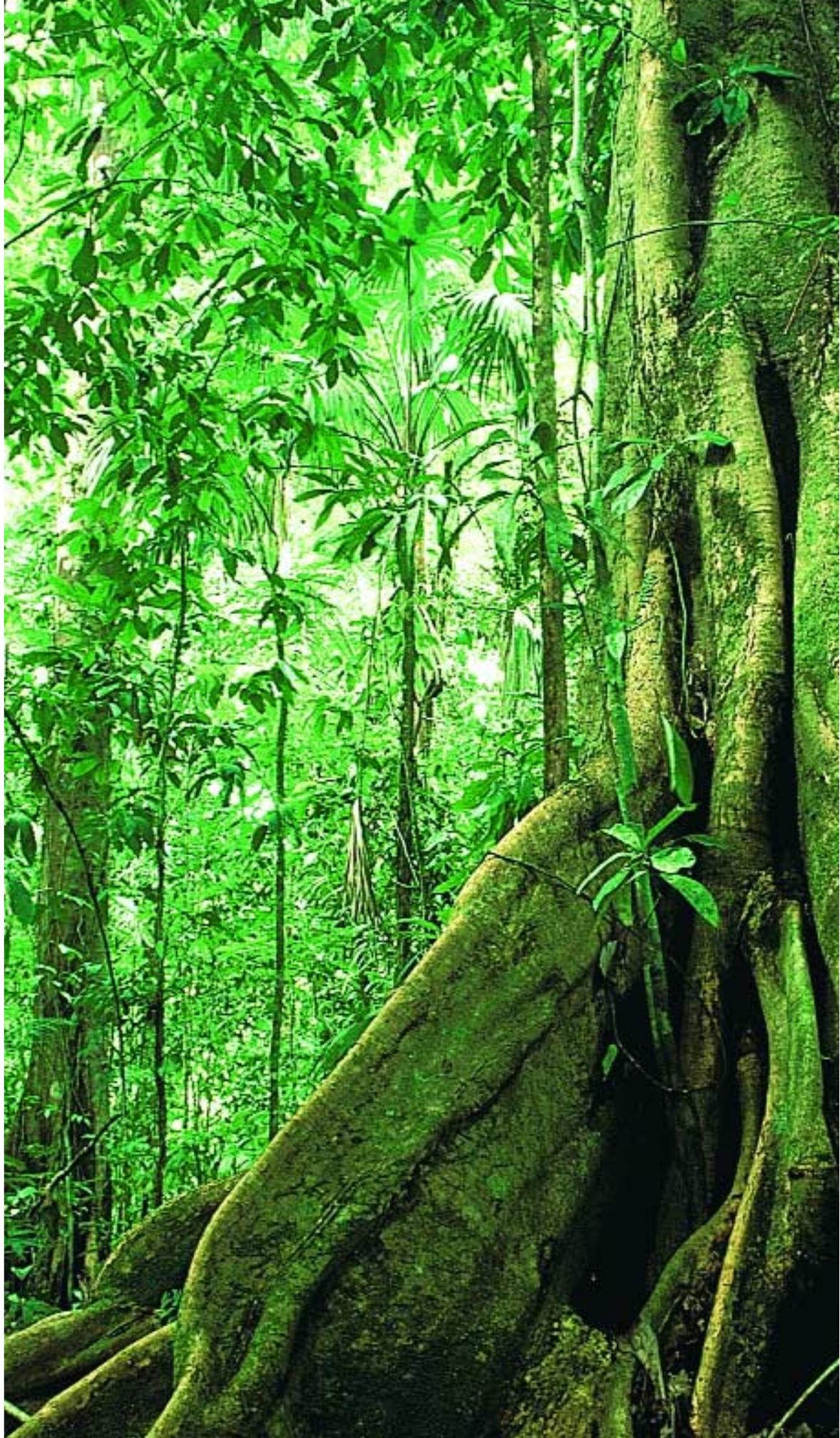
One of these is the Mesoamerican regional office, opened in 1988 as a site for Central America and then Mexico and, more recently, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. This branch of the IUCN tree has spread even further through model, pioneering and revolutionary work. Currently more than 70 Mesoamerican organizations and States belong to the IUCN, forming a network without peer that propels ideas and actions.

The IUCN has instigated an environmental awakening in Mesoamerica, promoting equity as the basic foundation for sustainable development and directly or indirectly generating the creation of protected areas, environmental institutions, regional conventions and agreements, policies and legislation, strategies and projects.

This is the story of the IUCN's first 15 years in Mesoamerica, a brief period in terms of historical evolution, but long in terms of productivity. The Union Members, Secretariat and Commissions in this part of the world have contributed equally in their efforts to make this region a pioneer in the field of sustainable development, a bastion for the environmental future of the planet and an inspiration to new generations of environmentalists.

Mesoamerica's achievements are the world's achievements, and that is why this story is important. Thanks to those who have made it a reality, and thanks to those willing to continue sowing this environmental seed today, tomorrow or many years from now. By working together, this tree will continue to thicken and grow, and we can make this world a sustainable and lovely place to live in.

Photo: Adrian Hepworth





15 Years of Environmental Tracks and Traces

By Yolanda Kakabadse
President of the IUCN

At the end of the eighties, as war continued to bleed Central America and the crisis of the “lost decade” had ravaged the life, environment and hope of the people, a bright light appeared at the end of the tunnel. The signing of the peace accords in 1987 paved the way for the blossoming of a series of initiatives that had been gestating as part of the world’s concern for this region and the desperate search of Central American men and women for ways out of the crisis.

In the environmental arena, as in many others, the Nordic countries were cooperating strongly with Central America. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) two of the IUCN’s main partners throughout the world, decided to support the proposal to open an office in the Central American area.

What is today the IUCN-Mesoamerica was born at that precise moment, at the height of the armed conflicts, stamping its character and its course. Arising newborn in the midst of adversity made it stronger, flexible, visionary, with the capacity to adapt and capable of bravery in action.

The first projects on the ground were very often accompanied by the din of battle. But we were making history, changing the course of destiny, and this was enormously motivating for our staff, the communities and the donors.

Environment became a point of consensus in the midst of disagreements and disputes during the peace conversations. When the progenitors of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD), in company with an IUCN team,

projected slides of Central America’s natural beauty, it was like an oasis for the negotiators, providing a break from the tension and a catharsis that reminded everyone how much they had in common to fight for and come to agreement about.

Thus the creation of the CCAD was approved, one of the many important achievements that the IUCN has accompanied in Central America. Immediately afterwards came the preparatory process for the Earth Summit (Rio ‘92), and approval of the first regional conventions on biodiversity, protected areas, climate change and forests.

Immediately after the Rio Summit, the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES) was established, incorporating several principles contained in the “Caring for the Earth” strategy, published in 1991 by IUCN, UNEP and WWF.

As the 1990s progressed, the approach of sustainable development was being applied in the environmental thinking, legislation, policies and strategies evolving in each of the Mesoamerican countries. The concept became so common in all circles that few people now recall it arose in IUCN.

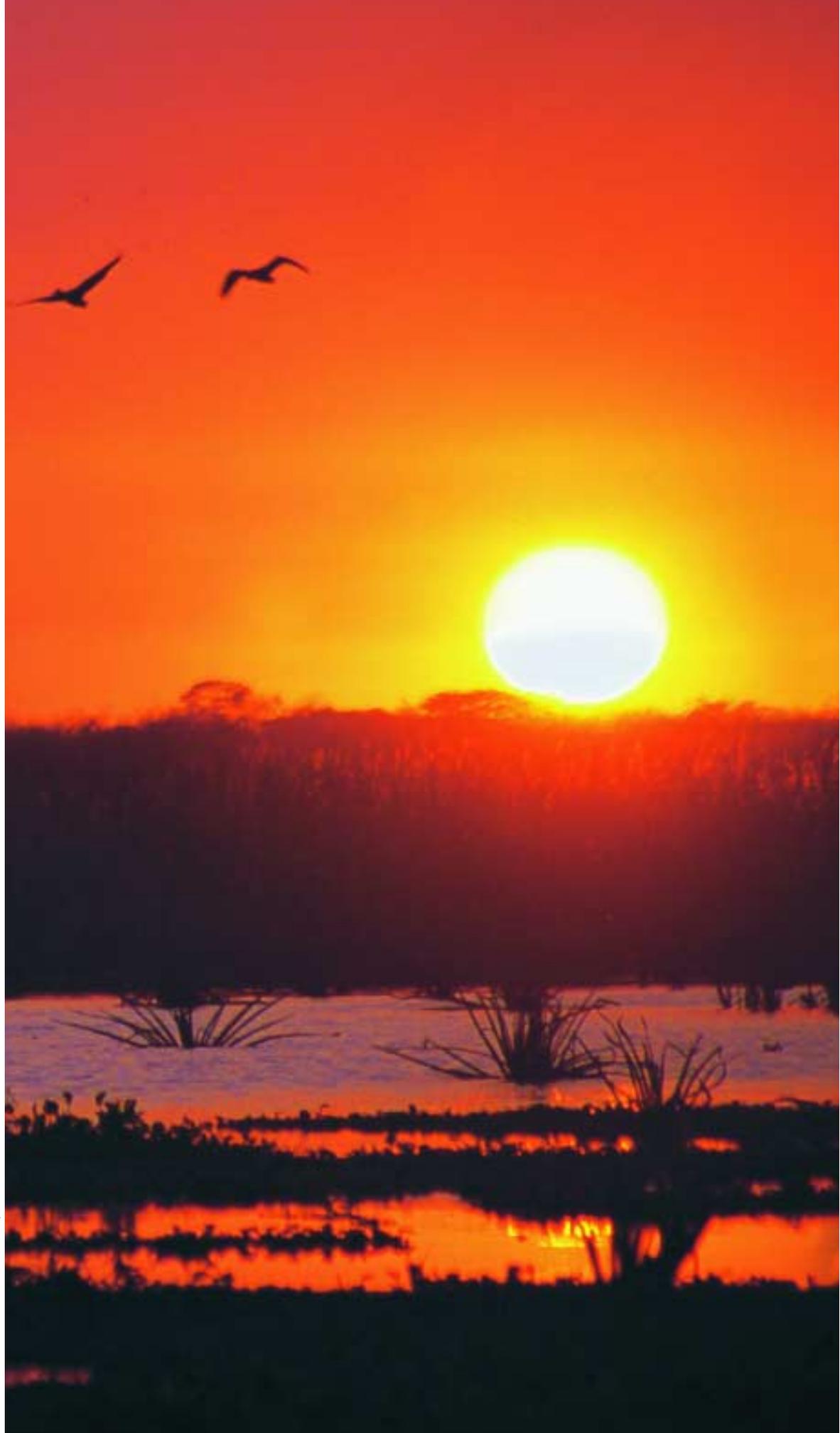
Something similar has occurred with “wetlands,” a word that was hardly known when the IUCN opened its first Regional Wetlands Program in Mesoamerica in 1988, and is now common usage. A decade later, in 1999, the Seventh Conference of Parties of the Ramsar Convention would be held in Central America. The global encounter reinforced Mesoamericans’ commitment to the environment and provided the impetus needed for subsequent approval of the Regional

Wetlands Policy of Central America, the first in the world to have a regional character.

Other concepts that IUCN-Mesoamerica has promoted vigorously in the last decade include social participation in natural resource management and gender perspective. More recently, the Union has become involved with such issues as biosafety, climate change, environmental impact assessment, economic valuation of forest, vulnerability and the relation between environment and poverty alleviation, among others. At the same time, it continues supporting initiatives in traditional conservation themes such as biodiversity, forests and protected areas. The Central American Forest Strategy (EFCA) is a recent example of planning for environmental management supported by the IUCN.

The list continues, as the pages of this book testify. It follows the environmental tracks and traces IUCN has left on Mesoamerica during the last 15 years. This is a story that fills us with pride and with a sense of responsibility. Because we realize it is our duty to invest up to the last ounce of energy defending the natural heritage of the planet and steering the world along a path of sustainability. Mesoamerica also knows this, and is assuming the challenge.

Photo: Adrian Hepworth





A Laborious Awakening

By Enrique Lahmann Zeledón
Director of IUCN-Mesoamerica

At five o'clock in the morning, when the first glints of light begin to sketch out the Caribbean coast of Mesoamerica and move deeper into the continent, revealing the blues and greens of valleys and mountains on the horizon, the miracle of life awakens yet again in the girdle of America. Millions of eyes open, and hands prepare to construct the everyday world...to row boats, start up machinery, till the field, turn on computers, search for firewood, sell products, sweep floors, assemble manufactured goods, breed iguanas, look after the forest, paint handicrafts, attend tourists, sow crops, plant trees...

Some 150 million Mesoamerican men and women go about weaving the reality of the countryside and cities in the eight countries making up this part of the planet—Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama—as well as the Caribbean islands of Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Seventy percent of the inhabitants are poor, and their existence is more difficult. Their awakening is not easy.

Millions of different creatures also become active with the rays of the sun, while many others have already taken advantage of the dark to carry out their function in the ecological chain. In seas and lakes, rivers and estuaries, on dry land, in the treetops, in caves and crags and every possible inch of the Mesoamerican territory, biodiversity rises up to display its tropical nature, defying threats of extinction, depredation and pollution. But it does not always come away from the challenge unscathed.

The advance of the agricultural frontier, poor practices of agrochemical use, indiscriminate logging, poaching, pollution from wastewater, overexploitation, the population explosion, draining of wetlands, forest fires,

unplanned and unordered urban growth and the displacement of native species by alien invasive species... these and other problems are deep-rooted and have very complex cultural, economic and social origins. Combined, they stress the environment and make protection and correct use of natural resources extremely difficult.

In our developing countries, we cannot, nor should we, separate the environmental from the social. They are two sides of the same coin, reflecting how much quality of life has been attained, thus permitting the population to turn its gaze toward the protection of its environment. The alleviation of poverty is one of the most basic conditions for sustainable development and one of the fundamental premises underlying the work of the IUCN Members, Commissions and Secretariat in Mesoamerica.

Sustainable development is easily understood in an economically poor region, where there is a clear and palpable relation between the social, the economic and the environmental in the daily struggle for survival. Thousands of families make a living from marine and coastal resources, the environmental services of forests, ecotourism and even trade in species, for example.

This is why IUCN-Mesoamerica has insistently promoted the concepts of sustainable development, gender equity, community participation and social responsibility as applied to environment—because the situation requires it. Member and State organizations in Mesoamerica have been born with that social consciousness; they practice it in their policies and in their actions in the field. The IUCN work programs in Mesoamerica, prepared jointly by the members, commissions and secretariat, reflect this vision. Mesoamerica's environmental awakening is framed within

a broader social awakening: an awakening to democracy, to education, to environmental awareness and to opportunities that are becoming accessible, little by little. With the end of armed conflict and the reactivation of Central American integration, the environmental awakening brought about by the IUCN has encountered fertile ground at all levels: local, national and regional.

Each idea, each initiative, each project promoted by the IUCN in Mesoamerica has involved collective reflection and analysis with stakeholders, communities or governments. IUCN-Mesoamerica's work has been a part of the socio-environmental dynamics of an entire region, whose awakening is laborious, pragmatic and difficult. We do not expect it to be easy. Probably it never will be. But here we are, promoting policies and environmental action that assure a greater awakening for our sons and daughters.

In addition to the NGOs and governments, we will seek other allies in this struggle—private business, academic centers, and youth groups—because the task is arduous. We need for more seeds to germinate and for the environmental forest to extend. At the end of the road, the beneficiaries are the environment and the population of Mesoamerica. It is worth the effort.

Painting: Deidre Hyde



Photo: Adrian Hepworth

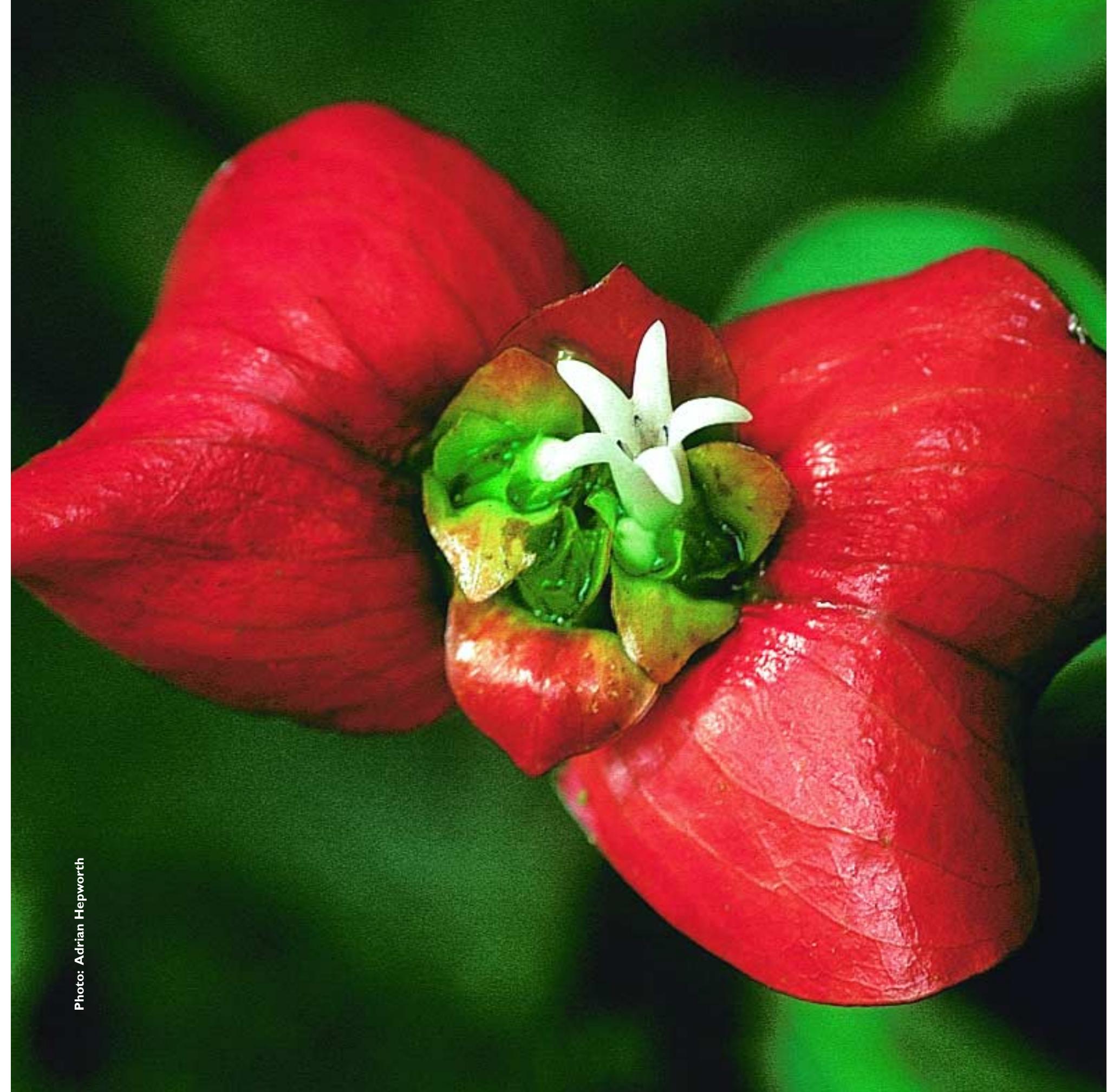


Photo: IUCN



PART I

The Seed Is Planted

IUCN's First Years in Central America

Tilling the Soil

The story of what is today the Regional Office for Mesoamerica of the World Conservation Union (IUCN-Mesoamerica) was conceived in early 1987 in a verdant valley on Central America's Caribbean slope. There, the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), in Turrialba, Costa Rica, was the cradle of a process that has now completed its fifteenth year.

Johan Äshuvud arrived from Sweden as the first Regional Representative of the IUCN for Central America, thanks to funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). A marine biologist with a specialization in development environmental economics, he was a dynamic young man with vision and a joyful nature, allowing him to face great challenges and inspire his different collaborators. He was on a pioneering mission for IUCN: attempt to demonstrate the practical feasibility of a brand new concept—sustainable development.

This revolutionary concept arose from reflection on almost forty years of work in conservation and began to spread in the mid-1980s through the World Conservation Strategy, a joint effort of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and IUCN. Until then, the preservation of nature was viewed as a romantic idea of wealthy countries that had been able to satisfy the basic needs of their inhabitants through economic, agricultural and industrial growth.

The IUCN is an alliance now comprised of almost 1000 organizations, including sovereign States, nongovernmental organizations, research institutions and conservation agencies in every region of the world. Created in 1948, in its first years the IUCN employed the traditional approach to conservation typical of the period, aimed at restoring ecosystems damaged by World War II and protecting the planet's living resources. Over time, the contributions of people and organizations associated with IUCN and thousands of scientists in the specialists commissions led

to an innovative vision uniting development and conservation as the two parts of an equation. Discussion centered on a process involving economic and social transformations, aimed at satisfying the basic development needs of all social sectors in a harmonious and fair way, without compromising the integrity of the ecosystems and the natural resource base on which future generations would depend.

Mark Halle, a philosopher and historian whose passion for nature began early in life, had participated in the committee drafting the World Conservation Strategy, published in 1980. Excited by the vision that had been constructed, he joined up with Mike Cokerell to create the Conservation Data Center (CDC), which eventually became part of the IUCN as its projects division. The CDC was created to reinforce IUCN's capacity to help developing countries implement the recommendations of the World Conservation Strategy. Central America would be one of the first regions where this initiative would be executed and in time, would gradually become a model laboratory for innovation and sustainable development practices.

"I have many memories of Central America," says Halle. "I remember that in the early years there was an incredible spirit of adventure. At that time we were doing something that was totally new and we were certain that it was very important to do it. We got by convincing donors that what we wanted to do was worth it, and we felt like we were riding at the cutting-edge of the wave. We were doing things that everybody else would learn years later. We were willing to take risks."

The Central America Johan Äshuvud knew was submerged in fratricidal wars and devastating economic crises. However, he and his wife, Tensie Whelan, found an enthusiastic reception from Central Americans and an unsuspected interest in conserving natural resources.

"When we arrived, despite the war and the crises all these countries were suffering, there was a sensation of

**IUCN began activities
in Mesoamerica in
1988 to demonstrate
the feasibility of a
concept that the world
was only just
beginning to work
with: sustainable
development.**

hope," explains Whelan. "In Europe, where we had come from, very good things were being done, but the politics and bureaucracy made it very difficult to advance new ideas about sustainable development. In contrast, everything seemed possible in Central America. National parks and protected areas were being created, and ministries of environment and natural resources were appearing. We were working with new people, creating new things that hadn't been contaminated by bureaucracy yet. It was thrilling!"

For all the enthusiasm, the work to be initiated would not be easy. Deforestation was reaching alarming levels in some countries. El Salvador was almost entirely devoid of forest and Costa Rica had razed almost 70% of its forest cover in a matter of 40 years. Cattle ranching, banana plantations and other monocrops were extending to the farthest corners of Mesoamerica, in the process wiping out forests and wetlands and polluting almost every source of water with agrochemicals. In certain cotton growing areas of Nicaragua, the DDT levels in mothers' milk were terrifying.

Under the prevailing vision of development in Central America, land was considered an inexhaustible source of agricultural products for export, and forests were obstacles to that development. More and more land was cleared for cultivation, even though soil was inadequate and even though the disappearance of the forests caused erosion and flooding. When the forests went, so did the plants and animals traditionally used by rural populations.

The Central American population had already begun reacting to threats against their biological riches. Certain pioneering individuals were pushing governments to create national parks, biological reserves and other categories of protected areas to prevent the extraction of natural resources and activities that could degrade selected ecosystems. By the end of the eighties, Costa Rica had already declared more than 20% of its territory



Photos: IUCN

The Pioneers

Johan Åshuvud (left), first director of the IUCN Regional Office in Central America, and part of the regional technical team (below) that began to put Johan's vision and aspirations into practice. They were the first to set the course for IUCN's work in the region, at the end of the 1980s.



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under some form of protection, and several other countries were beginning to create national parks and protected areas.

IUCN had played a catalyzing role in this process. In 1974, Gerardo Budowski, then Director General of IUCN, had organized the first Central American Meeting on Natural and Cultural Resources, held in Costa Rica. At the event, people from the region began to speak of an integrated system of protected areas belonging to the different management categories defined by the Union. Their initiatives galvanized the creation of model parks and protected border zones in all of the countries. In 1987, a second meeting was held in Guatemala, where many of the proposals sketched out at the first encounter took shape. On that occasion, participants emphasized the need to manage the natural and cultural heritage of the Central American countries in an integrated way. One of the main achievements was to identify priority sites that should be conserved because of their representativeness and fragility.

Unfortunately, many of the protected areas declared at that time turned out to be “paper parks,” since there were no resources for managing and administering them. The application of regulations caused conflicts with neighbors and with persons utilizing resources in those areas. The conservation models employed generally failed to take the needs of nearby populations into consideration, and national parks seemed like ivory towers created for the enjoyment of privileged foreigners.

Little by little, the people of Central America began to relate their development problems to an incorrect use of the natural resource base. They were reaching the conclusion that conservation should have a broader purpose than simply preserving a resource—that it should ensure the integrity of the environment on which development depended.

Given these conditions, the nascent idea of “conservation for development” would find fertile

ground in Central America. IUCN introduced the notion that, instead of being some foreign idea designed to limit development, conservation was important to national priorities. The Union’s ideas about conservation were closely connected to the countries’ need for development, and that made them more attractive than the traditional vision.

After making reconnaissance trips and establishing contacts in the region, the relation between IUCN and Mesoamerica began to grow. At first, attempts were made to support isolated projects, such as determining the environmental impact of constructing a highway or the conditions required for an irrigation project to be sustainable.

Sometimes this type of action had an unexpected effect. In the Talamanca zone of Costa Rica, for example, an IUCN consulting team recommended and succeeded in diverting the route of a highway that would have destroyed the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge. In Honduras, a study of La Tigra National Park, near Tegucigalpa, demonstrated the importance of this forest as a source of water for a thirsty city. La Tigra came to be known as the “the reservoir without a dam.” Other studies in which IUCN consultants participated, such as an analysis of the sustainability of an irrigation project in the vicinity of the Tempisque River, in Costa Rica, led to the creation of extremely valuable protected areas.

To a great extent, these projects were carried out in collaboration with regional organizations, generally Union members. The most representative of these at that time was CATIE, whose regional mandate and wild areas program made it a natural associate of IUCN. Working in the program, created by Gerardo Budowski and Kenton Miller at the beginning of the 1980s, were some of the people who would later become IUCN’s first officials in the region, such as Oscar Lücke and Alejandro Imbach.

“Educating these conservation leaders is my greatest contribution to the region,” says Budowski. “Today many of



Seeds of Inspiration

Gerardo Budowski, first Director General of the IUCN at the world level, came to Central America in the late seventies and began sowing a concern for the creation of national parks in every corner of the region.

my former students hold important positions. I continue believing in the importance of education. To me, influencing the leaders of tomorrow and involving them in the work of conserving biodiversity is what is most important.”

Indeed, IUCN's initial work in Central America would be to identify conservationist leaders of both genders who could take charge of the programs and ensure that the activities they carried out responded to the needs and interests of the countries in the region. In just a few months, an appraisal had been conducted and a program was proposed for joint activities with CATIE and other IUCN members in Central America. It was also recommended that an independent office be set up in San Jose to give the Union a broader range of action. The office would provide support for existing initiatives, while also providing technical assistance and seeking funds to launch promising projects.

One joint CATIE-IUCN project would be managed from Turrialba—the Regional Program of Conservation for Sustainable Development, which came to be known as the

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OLAFO Project—while in San Jose another series of actions for the region would be initiated. These would have a multiplier effect by showing political leaders and local populations the importance of using resources wisely. This is exemplified by the conservation strategies for development, such as ECODES in Costa Rica and the provincial strategies of Bocas del Toro, in Panama; and the strategies for Tortuguero, in Costa Rica, and Petén, in Guatemala, all of which generated a fundamental change in the way development was approached in Central America.

The purpose of the program outlined was to establish sustainable models of development based on alternative sources of revenue for communities near protected areas, such as organic farming, ecotourism and management of wildlife species.

In Search of Peace

In the mid-eighties, bloodshed was rampant in Central America and 25 million people were suffering the impact of regional conflict. The civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala had plunged these countries into serious economic and military crises. For neighboring countries, war also caused economic and social instability, along with a constant flow of refugees. The situation threatened to become even worse with the prospect of war between Honduras and Nicaragua. Central America was a focal point of violence where global political interests were being played out and the United States was threatening a military intervention to remove the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

The Central American presidents decided to forge a common front and seek a peaceful solution, creating an internal negotiation mechanism for a regional ventilation of the factors underlying these conflicts. Encouraged by the Presidents of Costa Rica and Guatemala, Oscar Arias and Vinicio Cerezo, the governments initiated a process that culminated in the 1987 signing of the Esquipulas Peace Agreement. This joint declaration represents a commitment to cooperation and understanding and was the beginning of a process of pacification and Central American integration.

From the very onset of the negotiations, there was explicit agreement that if peace were to be achieved in the region, it was necessary to re-establish a participatory democratic process and respect for human rights and social justice in all of the countries. The countries pledged to hold open elections and to renounce the use of violence as a means of resolving their internal disagreements.

The proposal to create the Central American Parliament also put a desire for political and economic integration into motion throughout the region. This would have positive consequences in the environmental sphere, and eventually lead to the creation of the Central American Commission on Development and Environment and the reactivation of the Central American Integration System.

With the opening afforded by the Peace Accords, many initiatives gained force, new proposals were made and a process of democratization was launched in Central America in which environmental thinking would have a place. It is in this regional context that the IUCN began its activities in Mesoamerica.

Putting Central America on the Environmental Map

The environmental history of Central America was stamped by a global event in February 1988, when the IUCN held its 17th General Assembly in Costa Rica. More than 1000 people from some 150 nations attended the meeting and for a few days, the eyes of the conservationist world fixed upon Central America. The presence of celebrities and delegations from the world's foremost conservation organizations attracted the media and burgeoned attendance. For its organizers, the General Assembly was a resounding success.

During the meeting, resolutions and recommendations were approved that would provide direct support for the region and promote collaboration among the Central American nations. Initiatives arose for the creation of Latin American networks of environmental organizations and participants learned of some of the most significant experiences being carried out by individuals and conservation organizations in the region.

Johan Åshuvud had been directing IUCN in the region for just a short time. The General Assembly made it possible for him to attract the interest of cooperation agencies and friendly governments, greatly facilitating the conservation efforts of the region in following years.

According to many of those who attended, one of the chief attractions during the meeting was "Central America Day." With IUCN support, a group of Central American scientists prepared a fascinating presentation for the visitors, with examples of conservation and sustainable development work already underway in the region. Under the direction of Panamanian sociologist, Stanley Heckadon, Central America Day gave delegations a glimpse of the immense wealth of life forms, cultural diversity and variety of conservation activities concen-



Exuberant Setting

CATIE's facilities, in Turrialba, Costa Rica, were IUCN's first home in Central America. This country was also the site of the 17th General Assembly of the Union, which drew participants from some 150 countries.



Photo: CATIE



Photo: Enrique Lahmann

trated in the narrow strip of land, while also demonstrating many of the special needs of this and other tropical zones of the world.

Heckadon spoke of the region's biological diversity as "a sort of treasure chest full of things we have not yet learned to value."

Some years later, IUCN published the experiences presented during the Assembly in the book, "Toward a Green Central America" (*Hacia una Centroamérica Verde*), disseminated in and outside the region with collaboration from the Panos Institute. Co-edited by the Kumarian Press, in English, and Departamento Ecuaménico de Investigaciones (DEI), in Spanish, the work is still used today as a textbook in postgraduate courses on natural resource conservation and management, ecotourism and agroforestry. IUCN-Mesoamerica would subsequently produce dozens of publications serving as reference material for people dedicated to science and conservation in Central America and the rest of the world, as we will see farther on.

During the 1988 General Assembly, Guillermo Archibold, of the Kuna PEMASKY organization, related how his people had obtained authorization from the Panamanian government to administer the Caribbean district of Kuna Yala (San Blas) in accordance with ancestral laws on nature. For the Kuna populations, this exuberant archipelago, with more than 300 islands and rocky breakwaters bathed by crystal clear waters, is their pharmacy and their source of food and construction materials. The aim of the project was to conserve biological diversity, promote research and scientific training for local populations, preserve traditional knowledge of botany and natural medicine and protect the tradition and culture of the Kuna people. Hoping to maintain the integrity of their rich lands and waters, the Kuna General Council agreed to incorporate modern practices of soil management and wildlife conservation, and the district began to be managed as a biosphere reserve.

Representing Honduras, Rigoberto Romero, of the Asociación Hondureña de Ecología, described the critical

water supply situation in the capital of Tegucigalpa. The only way that many of the city's inhabitants could obtain water was from cistern trucks. They purchased this precious liquid of dubious origin at prices up to 50 times higher than official rates and then transported it in rusty barrels or recipients that had been used to store pesticides and other toxic substances. Meanwhile, La Tigra National Park, a cloud forest located just a few kilometers from the city, contained 25 catchment points with excellent quality water. The protection of this valuable water source had become a priority and both government agencies and conservation organizations were collaborating in its administration. This project demonstrated that conserving a watershed offered an economic alternative to constructing new dams and extensive piping.

Tamara Budowski, from the Horizontes tourist agency, told the delegations how Costa Rica had begun to develop a style of tourism that was revolutionary at that time. Costa Rican businesspeople were experimenting with promoting their products under the image of a country dedicated to conservation of its immense biological diversity. The movement had grown and the tourism sector was becoming aware of the value of biological diversity and the importance of conserving the natural resources on which this innovative industry was based. It was not an easy option; traditional conservation sectors were opposed to allowing tourists into protected areas, while government bureaucratic structures were resistant to the new vision. Overcoming this resistance on both sides was the hardest task that the companies and individuals pioneering ecotourism in Costa Rica had to confront. Nevertheless, the country's extensive network of national parks and private protected areas was the magnet attracting an increasing number of visitors, and ecotourism was thus becoming the best argument and a primary tool for sustainable development in Costa Rica.

In northwestern Nicaragua, the fertile plains of the Pacific had been ravaged by the excessive monocultivation of cotton and other poorly planned activities, resulting in deforestation, contamination from pesticides, destruction of mangroves and erosion, hunger and poisoning of the population. Lorenzo Cardenal, then Director of National



The 1988 General Assembly of the IUCN in Costa Rica was a global event that stamped the history of environment in Central America.

Parks in Nicaragua, explained how the project “Heroes y Mártires de Veracruz” had begun to work with campesino cooperatives to recover degraded lands in an extensive area of the Los Maribios Mountain Range, creating forestry nurseries and working to re-establish forests that had practically disappeared. The people who did this work became aware of the need for better land use planning and restoration of degraded soils. This was a densely populated zone, and those in charge insisted that local people directly benefiting from the proposed projects participate in their implementation.

Laguna Jocotal, in El Salvador, was the scene of another enterprising project, described by Manuel Benítez, National Parks Director. Situated in a large volcanic trench on the southern coast, the lovely lake harbored thousands of arboreal ducks: the West Indian Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna arborea*). El Jocotal is the main habitat for waterfowl in the country, but the forests surrounding the lake had almost completely disappeared and with them, the population of ducks had declined dangerously. Neighboring populations suffered from problems of malnutrition, complicated by continual confrontations with armed groups. There was talk of draining the lake when the National Parks Service proposed and initiated a management program for the ducks and built artificial nests so that the birds could reproduce and generate a source of protein for human populations. The lake became a site for fishing and recreation, as well as a wildlife refuge.

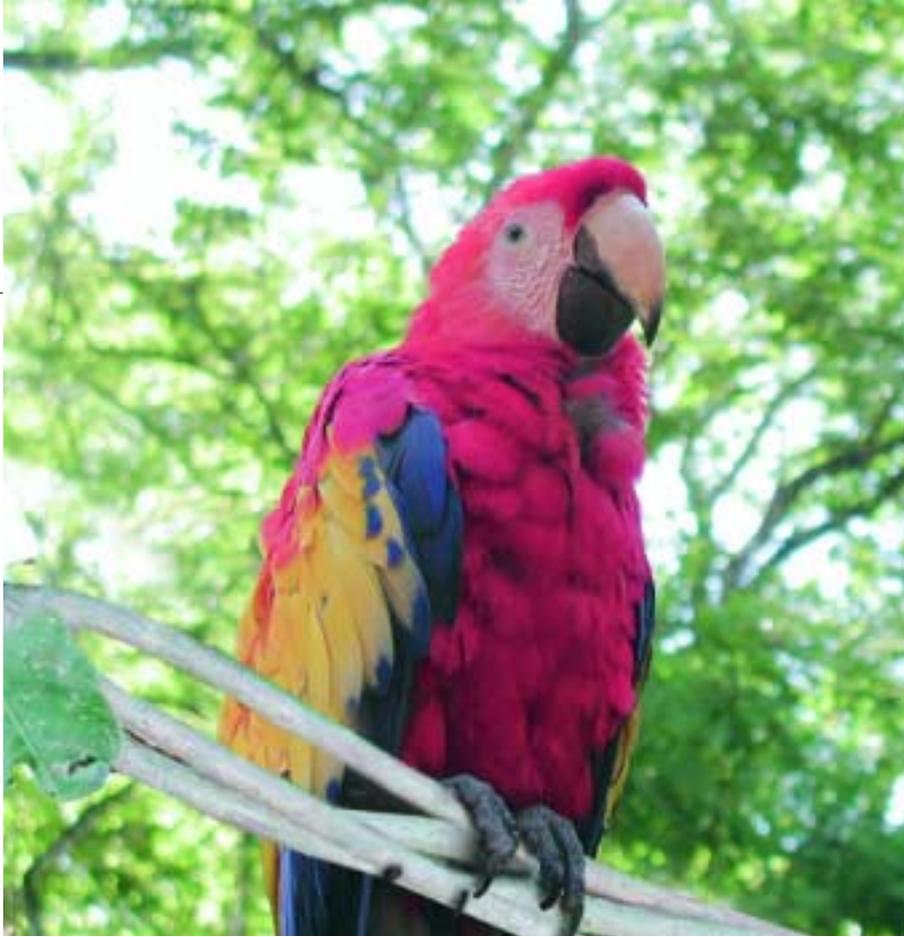
Juan Carlos Godoy, then director of the Center for Conservation Studies at the University of San Carlos, described the creation of the Monterrico Nature Reserve, in the Central Pacific area of Guatemala, and the multiple uses of this very beautiful area. Formed of mangroves, beaches and coastal lagoons, Monterrico harbored caimans, turtles, iguanas and numerous colonies of birds, and was a reproduction area for mollusks, shrimp and commercially valuable fish. Monterrico also sustained a range of economic activities, such as fishing, salt works, carbon production and firewood. From its creation, this nature reserve was managed under a dynamic vision: to promote the participation of neighboring populations, recognizing their need to use reserve resources in a controlled manner.

The innovative cases presented by the Central Americans during the 17th General Assembly were a sample of concrete actions aimed at sustainable development. IUCN was participating in the majority of these projects, on occasion providing economic support and generally providing technical assistance. Over the years, the Union’s contribution was fundamental for the implementation of projects

Photo: Néstor Windevoxhel



El Jocotal Lagoon



Over time, Central America was becoming a laboratory of innovation and a model for sustainable development practices.

such as Heroes y Martires and Pikin Guerero, in Nicaragua; Laguna El Jocotal, in El Salvador; and Pacific Mangroves, in Guatemala.

These were the forerunners of many of the actions that would be carried out in the coming years, and represented the isthmus' formal presentation to the world community.

During the General Assembly, the Government of Costa Rica announced that it was about to conclude its Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development (ECODES), the product of an extensive consultation with the participation of 150 specialists from all sectors of society. The process, employing a complex and innovative methodology, had begun at the end of 1986 and was based on the principles set out in the World Conservation Strategy. Professionals and individuals representing different sectors coordinated work groups that conducted appraisals and designed strategies for their sector. These were later integrated in a single strategy to assure that conservation and sustainable management would have a leading role in national development plans.

The process of designing ECODES culminated in a presentation at Costa Rica's National Theater. Participating along with representatives from all of the sectors considered in the strategy were presidential candidates from the different political parties. This consultation generated serious debate in which politicians committed to changing the development model and began to speak of one "based on social peace and peace with nature."

The CCAD Is Born

This creature came into the world at three o'clock in the morning at the headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, in Costa Rica, when the Central American presidents formally agreed that the creation of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development would be part of the Esquipulas II Peace Plan agreements. These accords would be ratified in that same year of 1989, at the Summit of Costa de El Sol, El Salvador.

The creation of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) was the culmination of a process spearheaded



by the Guatemalan architect and fervent environmentalist, Jorge Cabrera Hidalgo, who was the first Coordinator of the National Commission for the Environment of Guatemala (CONAMA) and became the first Executive Secretary of CCAD. The proposal for a regional organism to promote environmental policy received decisive support from the IUCN, from the special delegates of regional governments and from Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo. Jorge Cabrera recalls the moment when it was approved:

“I think it’s very similar to having a baby, during those moments just before the delivery. In this case, the doctors that had to bring the child into the world were the highest-ranking politicians in the region: the Presidents. I remember being with Alberto Salas, Jorge Rodríguez, Enrique Lahmann and another number of friends, and dreaming about actually achieving these goals. The Presidents were meeting behind closed doors and we were outside, waiting to see if they had approved what we had dared to submit for their consideration. And when we heard the results it was as if a child had been born whose maternity and paternity were shared by a great quantity of people, and we had all gone through great labor to make this happen. Let’s not forget that this wasn’t the only topic of discussion for the Presidents. The main issue was the pacification of the region. They had to have begun discussing the proposal to create the CCAD at 2:30 in the morning, and at 3:00 they notified us that it had been approved. So the CCAD was born amidst the gunfire of the internal conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.”

One thing is certain: in the middle of the sometimes acrimonious negotiations, the theme of environment was like a breath of fresh air, a matter of consensus and a soothing balm that brought to mind what the region shared in common, especially during the preparatory meetings of the foreign ministers. “These meetings were tremendously tense, to the point where one or two foreign ministers actually left the meeting to leave for the airport and were telling another foreign ministers commission to come and pick them up,” recalls Jorge Cabrera. “After dealing with such arid themes as pacification and the termination of conflict,

when we arrived and presented them with a green and lovely Central America, it was refreshing for the foreign ministers. We could actually feel the tension leave the atmosphere. In fact, a minister told me: Hey, you don’t know how therapeutic it was for that topic of yours to be on our negotiations agenda—it was like having oxygen pumped into the meetings,” Cabrera recounts.

The interest in creating a regional environmental entity arose in 1982 with the report of the Brundland Commission document, “Our Common Future,” of the World Commission on Environment and Development and later on, with the entire preparatory process for the Earth Summit (Rio ’92.) It was also inspired by the World Conservation Strategy, launched in the mid-eighties by IUCN, UNEP and WWF.

The CCAD began operating in 1990, became a regional mechanism for communication and coordination, and dedicated its efforts to promoting the incorporation of environmental issues at the highest levels of political decision-making. The priorities of the Commission included defining regional policies on marine resource management, debt-for-nature swaps, education and environmental training, protection of watersheds and shared ecosystems, and ratification of regional conventions on biodiversity, climate change and management of toxic waste.

Ever since the creation of CCAD, the IUCN Regional Office has taken a great interest in the role this institution could play in Central America, participating actively in the Commission’s different stages of development and providing technical support for many of the activities it has carried out in the region. IUCN’s influence has been particularly notable in the areas of environmental legislation; conservation of biodiversity, wetlands and coastal and marine zones; incorporation of the concept of gender equity in environmental policies and consolidation of the Central American System of Protected Areas (SICAP).

“IUCN’s willingness to provide technical assistance was a tremendously positive thing when I was directing the executive part of CCAD,” states Jorge Cabrera Hidalgo, Executive Secretary of the CCAD during its first eight years of operation.



The Central American Commission on
Environment and Development (CCAD)
was born in 1989 as part of the
Esquipulas II Peace Agreements.

Central America's First Forest Plan

One of the first and most significant efforts promoted by the CCAD was the development of the Central America Tropical Forest Action Plan (PAFT-CA), under the direction of Costa Rican forestry engineer Jorge Rodríguez. Along with indisputable beauty, Central American forests have great economic value for the region. The PAFT-CA was based on the principle that with good planning and suitable management, the forestry sector could become an immense support for social and economic development and help improve quality of life for rural populations.

"The rate of deforestation in Central America was close to 450,000 hectares a year at that time. Something had to be done to prevent all the countries from continuing the same destructive curve in forest resources," explains Jorge Rodríguez. "We worked very hard to transfer knowledge. We made joint field trips with forest directors to have them look at forestry plantations and promote reforestation plans in their countries. We reviewed forest legislation and developed national forest plans in each of the seven countries," added Rodríguez.

IUCN's PAGEBOCA project was one of the main advisors of the PAFT-CA, as a way of helping the Central American System of Protected Areas (SICAP) through the Central American Council on Forestry and Protected

Areas, the main promoters of the plan. PAGEBOCA even financed the activities of the plan's executive secretariat for a period.

To make use of forest potential, PAFT-CA proposed that the institutions responsible for the forestry sector be strengthened and that the sector be incorporated in national development policy. In Central America, forestry activity has always been unordered and extractive. The plan aimed to provide individuals and institutions in charge of forest resources with tools to establish regional cooperation mechanisms for the wise use and recuperation of this valuable resource. It proposed balanced land ordering and sustainable development programs in relation to the use of firewood as an energy source, a tropical forest conservation program and a series of actions to order the industrial development of forestry activity.

An effort was also made to update the policy and planning framework, and to seek funding for demonstration projects in forest management. Each country defined its priorities in national-level action plans, and this served as the foundation for regional work. It also proposed broadening forest sector participation to include people who had traditionally exerted no influence, particularly indigenous populations and organized women's groups.

One of the first initiatives of CCAD was the Central American Forest Action Plan, funded by AID with the full involvement of IUCN.

The Demonstration Projects

With a series of field projects distributed throughout the region, in 1988 the IUCN Regional Office launched its mission to demonstrate that the living conditions of the Mesoamerican peoples could be improved by conserving nature. Sustainable development strategies were formulated for Bocas del Toro, in Panama, and Petén, in Guatemala. The Johan Äshuvud Experimental Farm, known as “Finca Johan,” was also set up in Talamanca, Costa Rica, where the Asociación San Migueleña de Conservación y Desarrollo (ASACODE) now works today.

Beaches, mangroves, corals and swamp forests surround the crystal clear waters of the Chiriquí lagoon in Panama. There, in Bocas del Toro, is where the IUCN began its fieldwork in Central America at the request of the Panamanian Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy. The goal was to design a strategy for the sustainable development of the province, using and conserving its valuable marine and terrestrial resources.

The province of Bocas del Toro consists of a narrow coastal strip bordering the rugged Talamanca Mountain Range, some scattered farmlands growing mostly banana and an extraordinary system of islands, islets and caves circled by the tranquil waters of Almirante Bay and the Chiriquí Lagoon. Scientific studies were conducted with technical assistance from IUCN and in collaboration with Panamanian institutions, such as the Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (INRENARE)—now the National Environmental Authority (ANAM)—resulting in the creation of Bastimentos Island National Park and the San-San River Wildlife Refuge. Bastimentos Island Marine Park harbors unique ecosystems with banks of coral, sea grass, beaches with nesting turtles, coastal mangroves and mangrove islands. For its part, the San-San River protects a stable population of manatees (*Trichechus manatus*), an extremely endangered species. Because of its scenic beauty and biological diversity, the ecotourism potential of

this province was a primary theme in the strategy. It also proposed to assess sustainable use opportunities afforded by the orey (*Camptosperma panamensis*) forests and regulated, small-scale fishing.

Participation in designing the Bocas del Toro strategy was Alejandro Imbach’s first experience working with IUCN. An Argentinean agronomy engineer, Imbach was completing his Masters degree in integrated watershed management at CATIE when he found out that the IUCN was looking for a technician to assist the Panamanian government. An initial appraisal showed that provincial lands were unsuitable for farming or ranching. However, with its wealth of flora and fauna, both maritime and terrestrial, and the lovely coral formations submerged in extraordinarily transparent waters framed by the primary forests of the Talamanca Mountains, it had great ecotourism potential. The possibility of wise management of Bocas del Toro marine resources was also considered, and priorities for field research were defined, including an assessment of fishery resources and oceanographic studies.

The Panamanian government soon took over the project, while the Regional Office maintained a presence through the joint activities of the IUCN-CATIE project and the Regional Wetlands Program and provided technical assistance for research projects. The Regional Conservation and Sustainable Use Strategy of Bocas del Toro (1990) has served as a guide for a large number of projects being carried out today in this Panamanian province.

IUCN continued working on regional conservation strategies, and one of these was the provincial strategy for the Department of Petén, in Guatemala.

“Fifteen years ago Central America still had areas that were inaccessible, like the Wild West,” recalls Alejandro

In 1988, IUCN began a series of projects in the field to demonstrate that the living conditions of the Mesoamerican people could be improved by conserving nature.



Aerial view of Bocas del Toro

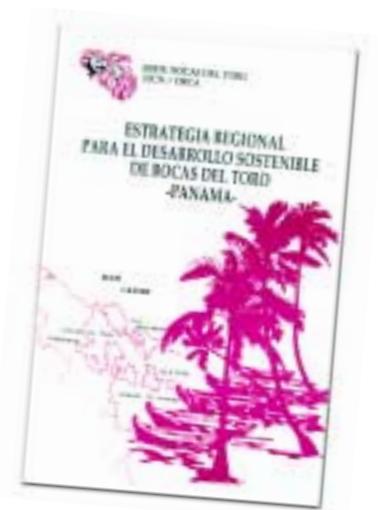
Imbach, who also participated in this project. “When I was in Petén working on the strategy, I wanted to call home once in awhile to let them know I was still alive. But it turned out there was only one telephone line in Flores, the capital, and you had to wait for hours to make a call. There were a lot of places like that. Bocas del Toro could not communicate with the rest of Panama. There were completely unknown zones, such as the Mosquitia, in the Nicaraguan Caribbean. Even in Costa Rica, there were areas that were totally inaccessible.”

For people working in remote areas at that time, Central America was an adventure where their life was often on the line. Oscar Lücke, then regional technical advisor, tells the story of how, after walking several hours through El Salvador’s San Diego Forest, he shared his impression with people in the town about how well protected the area

was. That’s when he found out that the reason there was forest in that area was because it had been occupied by guerrillas and was still full of landmines.

“We had to get around in those conditions, traveling over country roads where there were guerillas or army forces,” explains Lücke. “One time in Guatemala, as we were leaving the Quetzal Biotope we were taken hostage by a group of guerillas who stopped us to charge a ‘war tax.’ They made us lie down on the street, with a machine gun to our heads, threatening to set our vehicle on fire if we didn’t pay. What actually worried us most at that moment was that the army might show up, because they would have killed us all.”

Despite the danger, the team of professionals from the Regional Office maintained their dedication and became



Many of those who began their professional life in IUCN projects are now in the position to make important decisions for their countries and at the front line of environmental policy in the region.

familiar with the living conditions of the Mesoamerican populations, thus enabling them to generate actions responding to the real needs of the people with whom they worked.

Located in the Department of Petén, in northern Guatemala, is the largest protected area in the region. It contains more than a million hectares of protected forests with incredible pyramids and Mayan monuments. Jaguars (*Panthera onca*) ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*), spider monkeys (*Ateles geoffroyi*), deer (*Odocoileus virginianus mayensis*) and pacas (*Agouti paca*) are some of the species living in Petén's steamy jungles. The sustainable development strategy for the province aimed at stabilizing the agricultural frontier and planning a comprehensive system of protected areas. For the human populations, the strategy proposed ecotourism and sustainable forest management activities. Land titling and forest management planning made it possible for Petén communities to assume ownership of the process and take responsibility for the management of their resources. Currently, most of the protected lands in the Maya Reserve are managed by community groups who plan to produce certified wood.

The IUCN's most important contribution at that time was to put new proposals into actual practice in an attempt to demonstrate that ideas about wise management of natural resources, sustainable development and conservation of nature could work in real situations. Furthermore, it provided a pool of people who now hold important posts. Many of those who began their professional life in IUCN projects are now in the position to make important decisions for their countries and at the front line of regional environmental policy.

At that moment, Asociación ANAI, an IUCN member working in Talamanca, Costa Rica, invited Johan Äshuvud to see some of the projects they were supporting. Accompanied by the songs of guans and fleeting glimpses of agoutis (*Dasyprocta punctata*), red cardinals and singing frogs, his visit to the community of San Miguel was revealing. It was a zone of great biological diversity, but with social development indices indicative of poverty and neglect. There, members of the community development association requested support from the Regional Office to create an experimental farm with sustainable development projects. Impressed by the community's work and the lush natural setting, Äshuvud initiated fund raising for land acquisition and support to launch some experimental activities. IUCN-Mesoamerica also assisted in the process of land titling to strengthen community work. The San Miguel population began to develop the Johan Äshuvud Experimental Farm, where today an ecotourism lodge is being built and pieces of wood are extracted from the community-managed forest by water buffalos in order to minimize impacts. The community participates in agroforestry projects and organic farming and belongs to the Asociación del Corredor Biológico Talamanca Caribe (CBTC), an unusual coalition and IUCN member that has been creating, developing and administering a biological corridor that runs from the rain forests and highland paramos of the Talamanca Mountains to the coral reefs, wetlands and beaches of the Caribbean coast.

In April 1988, Johan Äshuvud lost his life in a tragic automobile accident. He was just 27 years old. As his legacy to Central America, he left a grand idea and a solid program of activities to put it into practice. With his open

and cooperative personality, he worked with IUCN members and partners during the 16 months he lived in Central America to define new projects and consolidate actions underway. He made efforts to expand the network of specialists and members, helped define IUCN's philosophy and approach in the region, and above all, was able to create trust and respect toward IUCN in Central America.

After Äshuvud's death, Alejandro Imbach took over his functions temporarily, initiating the implementation of the program proposed and defining new actions in response to the concerns of IUCN partners. In 1989, he would be replaced by César Barrientos, a Guatemalan engineer specializing in environmental sanitation who had created the Guatemala Municipality Environmental Program, involving protected green areas for conservation, sustainable use and recreation in the outskirts of the Guatemalan capital. Barrientos was at the Institute of Anthropology and History under the Guatemalan Ministry of Culture, working in planning for integrated management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Department of Petén, when he began his relation with the IUCN. Alejandro Imbach became the technical coordinator for the joint program being carried out by the IUCN Regional Office and CATIE.

*Jungle and ruins of Tikal,
Petén, Guatemala*

The OLAFO Project

OLAFO was an progressive project that developed methods to assess the economic contribution of the goods and services of a given ecosystem. Pilot projects in different countries were proposed to demonstrate the feasibility of combining conservation and development practices.

At the time IUCN was setting up its office in San Jose, a decision was made to maintain a technical team at CATIE, in Turrialba, to give shape to the joint program of Conservation for Sustainable Development of Central America. Funded by the cooperation agencies of Sweden and Norway, this program is still known today as the OLAFO Project. The implementation of the first phase of the project was a joint effort between CATIE and IUCN.

To promote sustainable development, the project proposed to set up pilot projects in the different countries that would demonstrate the feasibility of combining conservation and development practices. It is no accident that this work converged in the demonstration projects already being carried out by the IUCN.

The Department of Petén, Guatemala, was the starting point for the creation of an integrated system of protected areas with representative samples of the most important ecosystems in the region and areas of cultural and archeological heritage. This system needed to include areas of high biological diversity, and important degraded zones would be restored. Carried out with local institutions such as the National Council on Protected Areas (CONAP) and the Center for Conservation Studies of the University of San Carlos (CECON), among others, OLAFO also involved planning for integrated management of the natural and cultural heritage of the San Miguel La Palotada area.

In Nicaragua, participating organizations worked on planning and management of mangroves on the Pacific coast of the country. The densely populated zone was heavily dependent on mangrove resources such as firewood, bark for tannins, mollusks, crustaceans and fish. Working together with the Institute of Natural Resources

(IRENA), now the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA), and the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in León (UNAN-León), the project's goal was to formulate a management plan to maintain these ecosystems and ensure wise and sustainable use of the mangrove.

In Talamanca, one of Costa Rica's most poverty-stricken zones but harboring the greatest portion of primary forest, OLAFO sought to demonstrate that moist forest could be used sustainably in ways other than timber extraction. This launched an investigation of medicinal products, ornamental plants, organic insecticides, tinctures, foods and other non-timber products from the forest. The project worked with Asociación ANAI, an IUCN member, and the Asociación de Pequeños Productores de Talamanca (APPTA).

Bocas del Toro is one of the provinces of Panama having the least amount of land suitable for agricultural purposes. Its wealth lies instead in the long coastal strip with an abundance of beaches, mangroves, swamp forests, freshwater swamps, coral and rocky coasts. In association with MIPPE and INRENARE, investigations were made in this zone to assess natural capital, identify zones with greater economic potential and determine which ones required protection due to the fragility of their ecology. Also proposed was a sustainable management plan that would be based on the scientific assessment.

Building on the foundation of the conservation and sustainable development strategy prepared by IUCN, the OLAFO Project provided technical training, organized workshops, courses and exchanges, awarded grants and generated databases in order to produce and distribute technical information. IUCN supported the work of organizations collaborating with the demonstration projects in the field.

Under the technical direction of the IUCN Wetlands Program, OLAFO developed methodology for appraising the economic value of goods and services provided by tropical wetlands. This was an extremely pioneering project, since even today there are few sites where methods have been carried out to assess the goods and services of a given ecosystem. These investigations were based in the flood plains of La Pasión River, in Guatemala, and the Pacific mangroves of Nicaragua. The team of consultants performing this work visited both regions to gather the information necessary to analyze and evaluate the functions of the wetlands. They examined both direct services, such as fishing, hunting, firewood and timber; and indirect functions, including protection against flooding and storms, sediment retention, water purification and recycling of nutrients. Tourism potential was also considered. These values were then compared to other alternatives, such as draining the wetlands for urbanization or agricultural uses. The value of a given wetland could thus be demonstrated by employing a relatively simple methodology, facilitating efforts for its conservation.



Photos: Enrique Lahmann

Into the Field
The Talamanca Mountains of Costa Rica (above) and the mangroves of Nicaragua's Pacific coast were the scenarios of IUCN's first field projects in Central America.





Photos: IUCN

Shared Hopes

Reforestation and improved techniques in the cultivation and processing of products such as coffee were part of the activities carried out in Nicaragua during the Pikin Guerrero Project. This project offered a good framework for sharing the dreams and hopes of a population in need.

Pikín Guerrero: An Example of Community Participation

In northern Nicaragua, at the foot of the San Cristóbal and Casita volcanoes, Department of Chinandega, IUCN worked together with local and national authorities to carry out one of its most significant projects in terms of campesino participation in natural resource management.

The Pikín Guerrero Sustainable Development Project, implemented with IRENA and funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD), included the participation of several campesino farm cooperatives working to develop a productive system based on the comprehensive use of natural resources.

Once containing the most fertile lands in Nicaragua, the Pacific plains where activities began in 1988 had been degraded from over 30 years of unsuitable agricultural practices, and have the greatest population density in the country. The large cotton plantations had pushed small farmers back into the piedmont areas, where traditional farming practices, such as clearing land with slash-and-burn techniques, were unsuitable. An advanced process of erosion from wind and water and the inadequate farming practices had deteriorated the fertile soils and regional infrastructure, and extensive use of pesticides on the large landholdings had generated pests more resistant than in any other region. During the cotton production years, many of the trees had been eliminated to facilitate the work of dust croppers, intensifying the critical effects of deforestation and erosion from water and wind.

In this difficult context, the IUCN proposed a demonstrative land rehabilitation project that would bring together a sample of productive and efficient agricultural activities with

extensive campesino participation. The work was carried out in a relatively high-elevation zone, the origin of a process of degradation already threatening the entire region. The object was to implement activities that would not affect the natural resource base so as to maintain long-term development options, and covered a population of almost 15,000 rural inhabitants with few economic resources.

To start, training was provided on the selection and dissemination of appropriate technologies for the area, with an emphasis on the need to diversify crops and carry out soil conservation and reforestation actions. Through workshops and field visits to demonstration parcels, project technicians proposed production technologies that the campesinos could incorporate easily in their own plots.

Along with their customary plantings, people in the zone began introducing yucca, sesame, different varieties of beans, pineapple, coffee, annatto, citrus, mango, avocado, plantains and other fruits and vegetables. The emphasis was on perennial crops that did not cause erosion, and people were encouraged to establish systems of agroforestry production. Soil conservation practices were promoted to improve yield, such as terracing, dikes, corridor crops and contour planting in association with annual crops.

This diversification process included credit for seeds or plants, and participants received training in the reproduction, sowing and harvest of the new species. A swap system was used to avoid a dependency on external funding. Thanks to the creation of community and family nurseries, a large number of people could be trained to reproduce forest species, emphasizing the need to reforest degraded lands. Species

**The Pikín Guerrero
Sustainable
Development Project,
in Nicaragua, was one
of the most significant
in terms of campesino
participation in natural
resource management.**

produced in the nurseries, such as Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Gliricidia sepium, Guanacaste (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*) and Cenizaro (*Pithecellobium saman*), among others, were used as living fences or windbreakers. Fruit and firewood plantations were also established.

One of the most successful and innovative crops was organic coffee. This product has a higher export price, thus generating more income at a lower cost. Movimiento Ambientalista Nicaragüense (MAN) provided technical assistance for producer cooperatives associated with the project to teach them organic farming techniques, and developed demonstration parcels on plantation management and all of the production stages using this system. Organic coffee was rapidly incorporated into the production plans of some of the participating cooperatives, generating very significant additional revenues.

Associated with the theme of organic agriculture was the concept of integrated pest management. Prior to 1988, local campesinos used pesticides indiscriminately. As an example, a harvest of beans could involve up to 10 applications of insecticide, lowering economic benefits and damaging human health and environment. Each year at least one farmer was poisoned by agrochemicals, and analyses indicated a dangerous accumulation of insecticides in the organisms of local women and children. To combat these practices, IUCN worked with the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in León (UNAN-León) in a training program on techniques of integrated pest management aimed at reducing the number of pesticide applications, thus reducing production costs and impacting positively on the

environment and human beings. Pest counts were employed to determine whether an application was truly necessary. Experiments were also made in applying a combination of traditional chemicals and natural products, such as fungi, viruses, predators and toxic plant concentrates. As a result, agrochemical use for production was significantly reduced, with a hearty boost in revenues per harvest.

In addition, numerous workshops were held to encourage producer cooperatives to invest surplus earned from improved production systems in conservation practices, such as fire prevention, soil and water conservation, reforestation and other techniques that were gradually incorporated in the production systems of the zone.

An element contributing to the success of the project was the participation of campesino women in establishing gardens, nurseries and fruit tree plantations and producing medicinal flowers and plants using organic fertilizers. Campesino women were trained in the practical aspects of production, such as soil conservation, composting and the creation of gardens and nurseries. The project also involved improved stoves to reduce firewood consumption, and water receipt and collection systems.

Community organization was of particular importance in the project, so the IUCN proposed that participants define their problems, goals and the form of organization that most suited them. They were assisted in this process through training workshops on how to strengthen and consolidate the structure and organization of the cooperatives. Socioeconomic indicators were assessed periodically to evaluate project advances in the field.

For Love of Wetlands

Shady canals with the outlines of twisted mangrove roots; turquoise ponds reflecting the profile of a pyramid at afternoon's end; fast-flowing rivers of white water where boats and canoes glide by—Mesoamerica's greatest riches may lie in its wetlands. They can consist of either fresh or salt water, and include coasts, lakes and ponds, rivers, mangroves, flood forests and swamps, coral reefs, seagrass beds, estuaries and marshes.

In October 1988, IUCN opened the Wetlands Program for Central America, its first thematic program at the regional level. This effort went beyond demonstration projects in that it sought to create a framework of reference for wetlands conservation and management in the region. Later on work would begin in Mexico, thus turning it into a Mesoamerican program. Enrique Lahmann, now Regional Director of IUCN-Mesoamerica, would be the first coordinator of this successful program.

At the central headquarters of IUCN, Patrick Dugan, marine biologist, was then directing the global wetlands program. He explains that Mesoamerica was chosen for the first regional wetlands program in the world because this zone had a great variety of resources used intensively in local economies.

"We felt that there was potential for a sustainable use of these resources," explains Dugan, "just as long as we were able to develop suitable management practices. Central America seemed like a fascinating site to me, where many things could be learned."

Enrique Lahmann was finishing up his doctorate in marine biology at the University of Miami when Dugan proposed his candidacy. He was a great enthusiast of research and had discovered that his main interest was in applied science. Lahmann was familiar with publications by the



In 1988, IUCN launched its Wetlands Program for Central America, later extended to Mexico. It was the Union's first regional thematic program in the world.

IUCN Ecology Commission on mangrove management and was attracted by the challenge of conserving the region's wetlands.

"It was very interesting, because we had to begin from zero, starting with the fact that even the word "wetlands" was unknown," recalls Lahmann. "We had to determine what state the region's wetlands were in and start defining priority work areas."

And so it was. First, appraisals had to be made in order to establish priorities, and activities were proposed in different fields. In its early stages, the program was carried out in close relation with CATIE and the OLAFO Project. The effort was justified by the importance of the Central American wetlands and the interest of several local institutions.

Thousands of wetlands can be found from Mexico to Panama, with more than a hundred of them having international importance. They provide their inhabitants and users with water and livelihoods, help control flooding and serve as a source of food and construction materials. Mesoamerica harbors 8% of the extension of world mangroves and the second largest barrier coral reef on the planet. Wetlands purify water sources, keep beaches stabilized and often protect coastal populations from storms.

Mesoamerican wetlands are gravely threatened by the advance of the agricultural frontier, industry, urbanization, pollution and other dangers. The draining of continental wetlands, logging of mangrove forests and over-fishing still affect many sites of importance today, and water quality threatens to become irreversibly degraded in the region.

Few people were aware of the importance of wetlands at the end of the eighties. IUCN's policy was to create this awareness, while developing and applying methodologies so that wetlands could continue providing benefits for people.

Wetlands are now included in regional policy and environmental agendas, due in good measure to the

sustained work of the IUCN-Mesoamerica Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Program.

"I'm not saying that the problems have been solved," says Lahmann. "But there is greater awareness and participation in decision making by the man in the street and by NGOs."

From its beginnings, the program advocated strengthening the institutions responsible for managing wetlands through training activities such as courses, workshops and seminars. IUCN provided technical assistance and small research grants, promoted the creation of work groups in each country and set itself the task of disseminating scientific information, creating a documentation center that administers and distributes several thousands of articles, books, magazines and publications on the theme.

International courses on wetlands management and technical assistance or information dissemination on the impact of development activities were some of the types of institutional strengthening employed. In Honduras, a preliminary appraisal was made on the impact of constructing shrimp tanks in the mangroves of the Gulf of Fonseca. The same type of assessment was conducted in Nicaragua. In Belize, at the request of the Belize Audubon Society, an IUCN member, information was provided on the possible destruction unleashed on fisheries by a tourism development project that would have eliminated mangrove areas. IUCN also participated in postgraduate courses and seminars on ecology and protected areas management, and supported the completion of several masters' thesis and research projects on the theme.

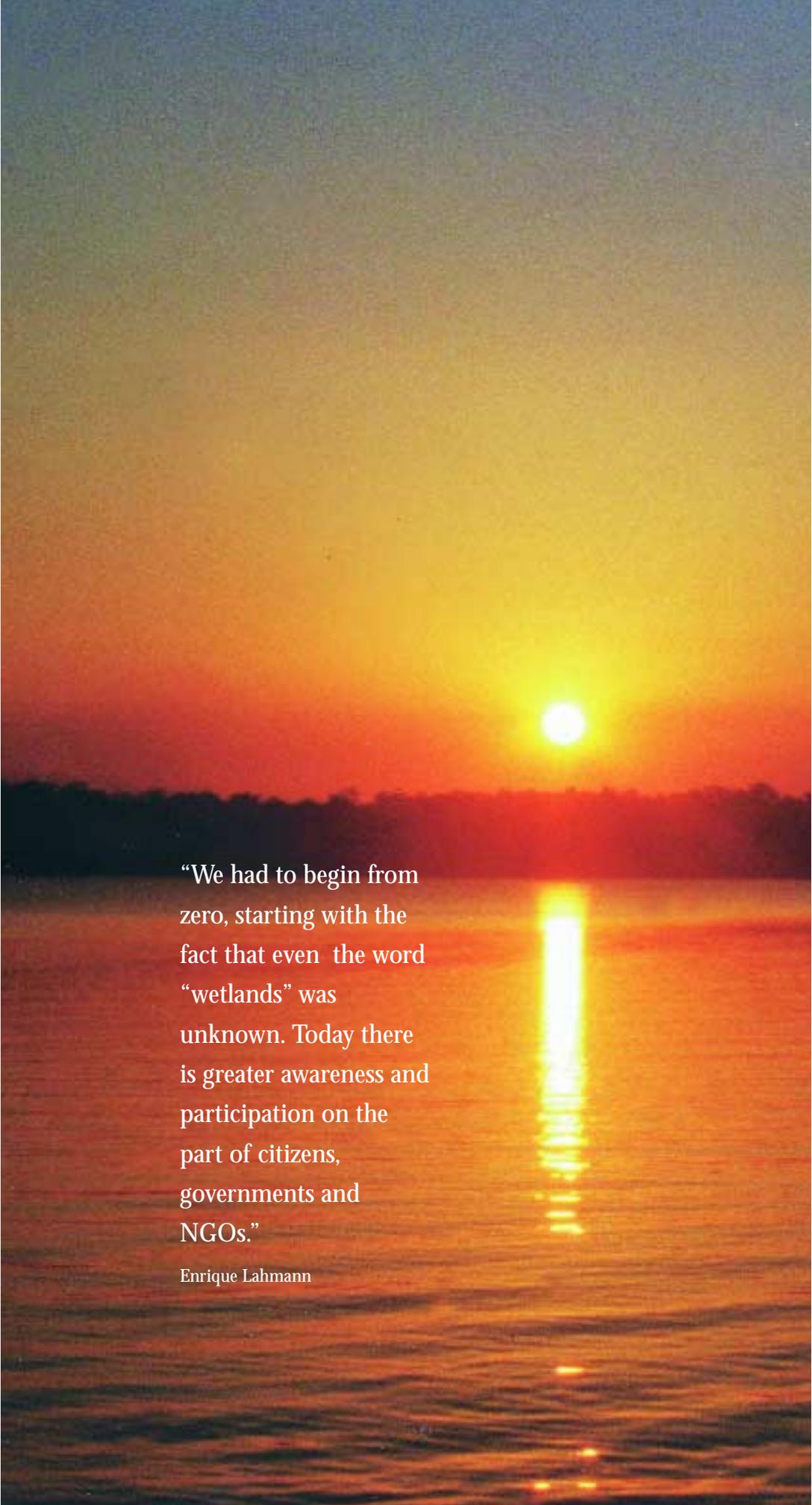
Field demonstration projects such as those initiated in the Térraba-Sierpe mangroves of Costa Rica and Estero Real in Nicaragua, among others, served to improve both management practices in these forests and quality of life for the populations. The first field study made by the Regional Wetlands Program was framed within the rural development project called "Héroes y Mártires de Veracruz," in the north Pacific zone of Nicaragua. Interpreting aerial photographs and verifying mangrove uses in the field, project investigators prepared maps to

identify areas of forestry production, fishing, species reproduction and zones requiring protection. Socioeconomic studies were used to determine the significance of mangrove products for communities in the zone, thus obtaining data showing the importance of managing this ecosystem adequately.

Activities were also implemented in the Gulf of Fonseca, shared by Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador; in Monterrico, Guatemala; in Barra de Santiago, in El Salvador; in the delta of Cuero y Salado, in Honduras and in Los Guatusos, located in Nicaragua. Priority sites for the development of wetland strategies included binational areas, such as SI-A-PAZ (System of Protected Areas for Peace) in the basin of the San Juan River between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. These efforts made it possible to assess the situation of wetlands and their use in the priority areas and to propose, within the framework of suitable management plans, pilot projects on resource use without degradation of the ecosystem or of a particular resource.

One of the great tasks initiated was to promote adherence to the Ramsar Convention for wetlands protection. Arising in the city of Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar Convention") is an international cooperation instrument promoting the protection and wise management of wetlands. Although they recognized the existence of wetlands of international importance in the region, none of the countries had signed the agreement when the program was created. Now all of the Mesoamerican countries have adhered to the Convention, and there are more than 85 sites on the Ramsar list, including national parks, biological and forest reserves, wildlife refuges and a nature sanctuary. They contain flood forests, flood plains, rivers, lakes and ponds, coral reefs, estuaries, mangroves and islands.

All through the nineties, work related to Mesoamerica's wetlands would be intensive and fruitful, generating national strategies and inventories, an immense awareness of the theme, and even the world's first Regional Wetlands Policy, as we will see further on.



“We had to begin from zero, starting with the fact that even the word “wetlands” was unknown. Today there is greater awareness and participation on the part of citizens, governments and NGOs.”

Enrique Lahmann



Photo: IUCN



PART II

The Tree Grows

IUCN in the Nineties

Mesoamerica and Rio '92

The Central American Presidents presented a joint environmental and development agenda at Rio '92, largely inspired by Caring for the Earth.

In October 1991, IUCN, the United Nations Environmental Program and the World Wildlife Fund launched a new version of the World Conservation Strategy. This updated version, entitled "Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living," laid the foundation for many of the sustainable development policies created in Mesoamerica and other parts of the world in the 1990s.

The pursuit of human well being is the underlying reason for economic development and the use of natural riches. This comes up against the inescapable reality that the resources available to human beings are finite and interdependent. With this awareness and given the need to live within the confines of the planet's carrying capacity, the strategy proposed adopting lifestyles and development paths that respect the limits of nature, and set forth an ethic for sustainable living.

The principles proposed in order to attain a sustainable society consisted of the following:

- Respect and care for the community of life
- Improve the quality of human life
- Conserve the Earth's vitality and diversity
- Minimize the depletion of non-renewable resources
- Keep within the Earth's carrying capacity
- Change personal attitudes and practices
- Enable communities to care for their own environments
- Provide a national framework for integrating development and conservation
- Create a global alliance

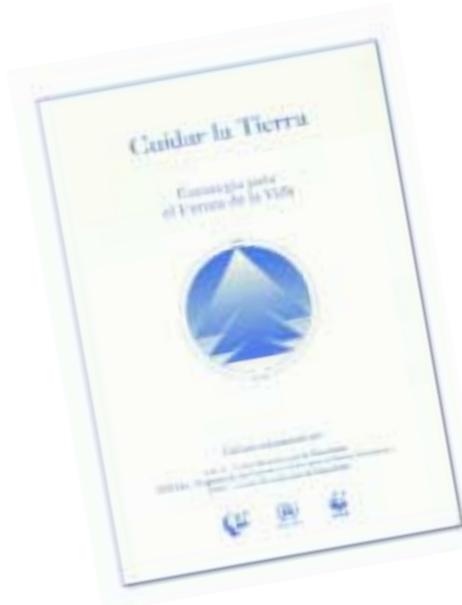
"Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living" was received with great optimism by Central American conservation organizations and governments as an option for conquering poverty while also protecting the environment. The Strategy set forth an action plan for living sustainably, and was analyzed extensively at the preparatory meetings for the World Summit on Environment and Development that would be held in Rio

de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Integrating many of its principles and the recommendations of "Our Own Agenda", which presented the Latin American position before the Rio Summit, the Central American delegations decided to forge a common front and prepared the Central American Agenda on Environment and Development. The Central American position at this summit demonstrated how an economically poor region could be enriched by unity in facing environmental problems that recognize no borders.

The Presidents presented the joint agenda on environment and development together at Rio '92. This was an unprecedented event in the environmental history of Central America, and from that moment on, a series of environmental milestones were reached in the region.

Back from Rio, the heads of state signed the Convention for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Protection of Priority Wild Areas in Central America, along with the Regional Agreement on Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste. One year later, the Convention for the Management and Conservation of Natural Forest Ecosystems and the Development of Forest Plantations was signed, as well as the Central American Convention on Climate Change. But without a doubt, one of the most significant achievements would be the 1994 adoption of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development (ALIDES).

In the two years after Rio '92, Central America had already established a regional alliance for sustainable development, four Central American conventions on key environmental themes and two regional conferences on ecology and health. It was also advocating stronger environmental regulatory institutions in all the countries and the development of fundamental environmental legislation. In many of these tasks, IUCN support for CCAD and the region's governments was essential.



ALIDES Is Born

The emergence of the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES) has marked a “before” and “after” in Central American environmental history. Adopted in 1994 under the impetus of the CCAD, the Alliance has aimed toward the construction of a sustainable development model based on a comprehensive approach that includes political, economic, social and environmental aspects.

The principles of ALIDES are direct descendents of the Caring for the Earth strategy published three years previously by IUCN, UNEP and WWF. The philosophy of Caring for the Earth was of such importance for Central America that even Jorge Cabrera, the CCAD's first Executive Secretary, feels that this has been IUCN's main conceptual support in the region. “I think this document was pivotal in terms of conception and orientation. We even used it in the principles of ALIDES; if you check it against the Caring for the Earth principles you will see enormous parallels. That strategy was extremely useful,” emphasizes Cabrera.

But Central America was not the only region in the world already permeated by the principles of Caring for the Earth and the concept of sustainable development. In the United States, Vice-President Al Gore had just published the book, “Earth in the Balance,” whose entire thrust was sustainable development.

This encouraged CCAD and the Central American Presidents to ask the United States Government for support to develop a program aimed at making the Central American region a pilot model of sustainable development.

The proposal was made in Washington, D.C. at the beginning of 1993, during a meeting with the Central American Presidents, President Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore, who was very enthusiastic about the idea. This



Photo: Marco Calvo

A New Path

With the signing of the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES), Central America was fully embarked on a new path integrating economic and social aspects and environment.



Photo: IUCN

was ultimately the only concrete result of the meeting, whose other topic, a “fast track” agreement on trade negotiations between the Central America and the United States, was unsuccessful.

ALIDES has also served as the conceptual political framework for the development path the region has attempted to follow during the last decade, a development that maintains harmony among economic, social and environmental aspects. In addition, inspired by ALIDES, Central America has created and strengthened national environment and development institutions, and has generated a process of social participation in planning related to development and environment in the region.

In illustration, it is sufficient to recall the very process of formulating the strategy, as recounted by Jorge Cabrera. “I think that ALIDES has been the regional instrument for the most extensive consultation in the history of the region, at least in my memory. It mobilized people in the social, economic and environmental areas, with a level of participation I have never seen before.”

IUCN would be one of CCAD's closest partners, providing strong support for a good portion of the environmental initiatives that arose after ALIDES was approved. It would also reflect the principles of the Alliance, as a continuation of Caring for the Earth, in its work programs during the following years.

The principles of the Caring for the Earth strategy also provided the foundation for the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES), marking a “before” and “after” in the environmental history of the region.

A Change in Course for IUCN -Mesoamerica

Under the dynamics of the 1990s and after five years of formal operations in Mesoamerica, the IUCN Regional Office experienced profound changes in its structure, priorities and levels of effort as part of a necessary evolution. The principles of promoting sustainable development, however, continued intact and became even stronger.

Important modifications had taken place since 1991, when the Regional Director at that time, César Barrientos, left the post to coordinate Union activities in Guatemala. Virgilio Cozzi, an Argentine psychologist, became the Director of the Regional Office. When IUCN member organizations in Mexico requested that the range of action expand to include that country, the upshot was the IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica (ORMA).

"The incorporation of Mexico and the extensive knowledge of many Mexican scientists helped IUCN move into new themes of work, such as the relation between poverty and environment. This was a topic that the Regional Office, and I dare say the IUCN, in general, had not addressed until then," assures Virgilio Cozzi. "Also, Mexico supported us strongly during the First National Congress of Environmental Law in Costa Rica, another innovative theme for IUCN in Mesoamerica at that moment," he states.

The Regional Office grew rapidly between 1991 and 1992, opening offices in almost all the countries of the region and supporting the development of several regional programs. Everything seemed to indicate that IUCN-ORMA (today called IUCN-Mesoamerica) would be a center of action for an integrated force of broad dimensions, but the situation of the region and the internal conditions of the Office made it necessary to shift course.

Once the peace process had initiated in Central America, donor agencies began to concentrate on other areas of the planet, such as the Eastern European countries, reducing the flow of economic aid to our region. Demand for technical

assistance was rising, but the administrative and economic capacity of the Regional Office was declining.

When the situation became critical in 1992, IUCN Headquarters and the Mesoamerican office decided to take action. To start, Enrique Lahmann, who had been directing the Regional Wetlands Program for Mesoamerica until then, was put in charge of carrying forward a new process. More than instigating a simple change of style, Lahmann would be responsible for comprehensive restructuring and a redefinition of priorities and structure, as well as the approach and form of work. The magnitude of the IUCN's administrative and financial crisis in Mesoamerica was so great that few people were interested in assuming its leadership. "It was a difficult and very personal decision to accept the challenge of directing the IUCN. A lot of people thought I was out of my mind," recalls Enrique Lahmann, who served first as interim director at the request of Martin Holdgate, and then became Director General. His position was confirmed a year later.

The vast task of restructuring and rethinking the IUCN in Mesoamerica began in 1993 and continued until 1996, and one of the decisions was to close all of the national offices. The mission, objectives, modality of interaction with Union members in Mesoamerica and work program were all reviewed. This process generated a rich debate, greater convergence and unprecedented participation among IUCN members in the region. Forms and mechanisms of action with a distinctly Mesoamerican style were discovered; national members committees were created, along with a regional committee comprised of the chairpersons of those committees.

National evaluation workshops were held in which each country analyzed its environmental problems and the role expected of the members and secretariat. This dialogue generated key inputs for delineating the future work of IUCN-Mesoamerica, manifested as the 1995-2000 Strategic Plan and formulated in participatory form.

The Members Awake

This review process coincided with an awakening of the membership in the region, galvanized by a historic first encounter in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, in 1992.

“We all started to get to know one another there. It was the first time that all of the members, from Mexico to Panama, had met, and the most interesting part about it was the desire to organize in committees,” tells veteran environmentalist Julio Obiols (affectionately known as, “Don Julito”), at that moment president of FUNDARY, an IUCN member in Guatemala, and in turn Chairman of the Members Committee in Guatemala, the first in the region.

“The El Salvador and Costa Rica committees formed at the Quetzaltenango meeting. That’s also when the idea came up to create a Regional Mesoamerican Committee, and it was agreed to hold a second members meeting in Panama, where the Regional Committee was officially born,” explains “Don Julito.”

Indeed, in 1993 a second historic encounter took place in Chagres, Panama. There it was decided that the Regional IUCN Members Committee of Mesoamerica should be organized, and that the national committees in each country should be consolidated and reinforced.

“Everybody wanted and believed there should be a forum of debate and union within the IUCN in the region. We had a modest but sincere meeting where we could establish that we wanted to meet, form groups and present a common front of both official agencies and NGOs working in environment,” recalls Panamanian economist, Juan Manelia, first Chairman of the Regional Members Committee of IUCN. Manelia, a planning and environmental management specialist, was at that time the Coordinator of the National Environmental

Commission (CONAMA) of Panama, and belonged to the Asociación para la Investigación de Especies Panameñas (AIPEP), the first organization to become an IUCN member in that country.

“Panama had the first presidential debates on environment, and local politicians got the picture that this was a very important issue on the political agendas of presidents,” states Juan Manelia, who encouraged other Mesoamerican countries to be aggressive and try to influence high-level political spheres.

Manelia had assigned responsibility for organizing the strategic Chagres meeting to another Panamanian, economist Jesús Cisneros, who, based on this experience, remained “totally captivated by the IUCN, because it was so complex, so rich, with so much diversity and with such a great capacity of calling upon different scientific disciplines.” Cisneros had just recently joined the staff of AIPEP and one of his first tasks was to coordinate the Mesoamerican Members Meeting in 1993. Later on, he would become Coordinator of the Membership Liaison Unit, a new organ of the Regional Office of IUCN-Mesoamerica formed to attend members and their link with the different components of the Union and the work program.

The need for profound change and a larger role for membership also became evident during the 19th General Assembly of the IUCN, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in early 1994. The Mesoamerican delegations participating in the General Assembly reaffirmed their interest in playing a more active role in IUCN’s work in the region. This interest was manifested in the planning workshops held in each country with representatives of member organizations, and led to the creation of the

A profound transformation occurred in IUCN as of 1993, when members began to take a greater leadership role in the region.

IUCN-Mesoamerica Strategic Plan for the 1995-2000 quinquennium. The plan was approved in July 1994, during the 3rd Regional Encounter of IUCN Members in Mesoamerica, held at CATIE, in Costa Rica.

The approval of this plan marked the end of an era and the birth of a new mission for IUCN in the region: Contribute to the consolidation of a Regional Alliance for Caring for the Earth in Mesoamerica.

Also approved was a transitional program for 1994 to 1996, and work began on participatory formulation of the 1997-2000 Program, which would be presented and approved at the First Global IUCN Congress, in Montreal, Canada, as the first program in which the IUCN shifted its role from main actor to facilitator for a process of change.

As Regional Director of IUCN-Mesoamerica, Enrique Lahmann explained that this change is part of a logical process of evolution: "In response to the actions that took place, capacities were developed in governments and



Photos: IUCN



Walking Together

Periodically, IUCN Members in Mesoamerica hold a regional congress to discuss and approve the steps that have been taken to advance conservation and development.

*Top: Photo of the encounter in 1994
Bottom: Mesoamerican Forum held in 1999*



Social participation in environmental management is one of the maxims of work IUCN promoted in the region throughout the nineties.

associations allied with the IUCN," he says. "We began to coordinate with the NGOs taking front and center stage in environmental action, and to concentrate on facilitating their activity from behind. This marks a new course in which we avoid being competitors and try to become the colleagues of our member institutions."

In its first period of activities, the IUCN had focused on carrying out fieldwork, projects that demonstrated the validity of the new concepts it was promoting. The activities implemented at that time had made it possible to build a technical and administrative capacity in the region that did not exist five years earlier. Networks had been formed and technical assistance had been provided on managing concepts and resources. IUCN had accompanied the environmental movement in a process of growth, incorporating such concepts as sustainable development in the Mesoamerican consciousness. International conventions had been signed and support was being given to put them into action throughout the region.

Now, with its new structures, the Union in Mesoamerica is ready to provide continuity for this work and above all, to promote the generation of pioneering environmental policy in the region, with the support of civil society and convened by members and the specialists in the IUCN commissions in this part of the world. The jointly formulated work programs will be the road map, and the Secretariat with its thematic areas will be the support for generating new results.

Environment with People

The vision IUCN-Mesoamerica was working on in the 1990s was to give people, communities and NGOs a greater role in the different strategies of environmental management and to generate policies facilitating that participation. It began to promote the participation of populations and groups that had not been represented previously in the management of natural wealth in the region, such as women, children, indigenous groups and development and conservation associations.

In the mid-nineties, the population was over 30 million in Central America alone, not counting the inhabitants of the states of southern Mexico that are part of the Mesoamerican region. The cultural diversity, ethnic richness and traditional knowledge of this immense group of people give the region a unique hue in the world. More than half of these people live in rural zones; one-fifth of the population is indigenous and the rest are mestizo, creole, Black and the descendents of diverse nationalities. Without a doubt, it is a human mosaic of great value that, for the IUCN, must take a leading role in the conservation and sustainable use of Mesoamerica's natural resources.

The conservation and sustainable development strategy initiated in the Tortuguero Plains, in Costa Rica; the community wildlife management programs in Panama, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Costa Rica; the sustainable development projects in Laguna Lachuá and in the Pacific Mangroves, in Guatemala; the Gulf of Fonseca projects; and the national networks for gender equity are all examples of IUCN emphasizing that had stressed the participation of people as an essential condition of the work to be carried out.



Photo: Guiselle Rodriguez

Community management of forests and the concept of co-management of protected areas have also been promoted, sometimes encountering opposition in sectors that still view environment as something separate from people.

“In developing countries, principally, we cannot separate the scientific from the social, and as far as I’m concerned, every scientist needs to be clear about his or her social responsibility. We can’t lock ourselves away in an ivory tower and carry out science or conservation without

considering society’s part. To the degree that social factors impacting on the use of natural resource can be understood, we will begin to have an influence for better administration of natural resources together with people,” insists Enrique Lahmann, explaining that social participation has been one of the IUCN’s fundamental maxims of work in Mesoamerica.

Below we take a tour through some of the main initiatives where the IUCN has made this view of the social component in environmental action patently clear.



The Tortuguero Strategy: A Visionary Experiment

“Traveling these waters, it seems as if a gigantic, powerful hand took hold of the deluge and pulled it into a line. From the air, it is a smooth wet serpent running alongside the sea and the infinite green.”

This is how Henry Rojas, environmental educator, describes the Tortuguero Canals, where the IUCN supported Costa Rica’s Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mines, now the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE), in the design of the Conservation Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Tortuguero Plains.

Endangered by the expansion of banana plantations, Tortuguero National Park is a wetland of international importance, as defined under the 1971 Wetlands Convention (Ramsar, Iran) and a special nesting site of the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). The project to formulate a development strategy began in 1992, but under a different vision that included the innovative concept of sustainable development and something practically prohibited in the protected areas: the participation of people.

“At times, sustainable development was like a bad word. At that time, Costa Rica had a strong image in terms of protected areas; people at MIRENEM talked more about protection, and it was a little unnerving for them to mix that with the word ‘development,’” recounts Rocío Córdoba, who worked as Project Coordinator for the National Parks Foundation from 1990 to 1992, and went on to work as field coordinator for the Tortuguero Strategy.

“With the work in Tortuguero, the North American-style vision of national parks for the sake of preservation was modified,” says Oscar Lücke, then regional technical advisor for IUCN-Mesoamerica. “There we started to work with the communities of fishermen, farmers and forest administrators. We had to combine development with conservation and face danger, including death threats, for trying to halt the expansion of the banana industry. Banana plantations were putting pressure on both the Tortuguero National Park and the Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge and the IUCN office played an important role in connecting those areas. Although no one talked directly about the biological corridor, this effort, also designed to unite the areas with the Indio Maíz Reserve in Nicaragua and with the Los Guatusos area, was a first attempt to create a biological corridor at the regional scale. It was about breaking away from the myth of protected areas as islands, and from the naive idea that by issuing a decree, species within the limits of the park were automatically protected.”

In close collaboration with park authorities and with financial support from the European Economic Community, the people participating in the Tortuguero Project sought to generate an example of community participation in conservation planning. In meetings and workshops, the strategy involved working with civil society representatives to define critical areas and priority actions. With a well defined social vision, participation was promoted at all stages with the groups and social associations present in the region, to seek general consensus in decision making, build technical and

The Tortuguero Strategy changed the vision of national parks by incorporating the concepts of sustainable development and working with the communities.



institutional capacity, promote self-help and generate economic activities for improving quality of life for communities surrounding the park. There was an insistence on the need for nongovernmental organizations to participate in carrying out the activities proposed in the strategy.

The project supported the government in the design of a sustainable development strategy for the park and its buffer zone, contributed to administrative strengthening through training, built infrastructure and fostered community participation.

Research, ecotourism and environmental education were promoted in the core conservation area, while in adjacent areas the project involved working with communities and

fomenting improved quality of life and an adequate use of natural resources through forestry and agroforestry activities and the communities' active participation in ecotourism.

The objective of the project was to build an internal capacity for putting the strategy into practice at the legal, organizational and technical level. Another aim was to assess the feasibility of the solutions proposed by people participating in the numerous planning meetings. The hope was that participatory agreements and shared responsibility would ensure the continuity of the proposals made, while also demonstrating that the best insurance for the conservation of protected areas is local participation during all stages of the process.

Serpentine Waterway

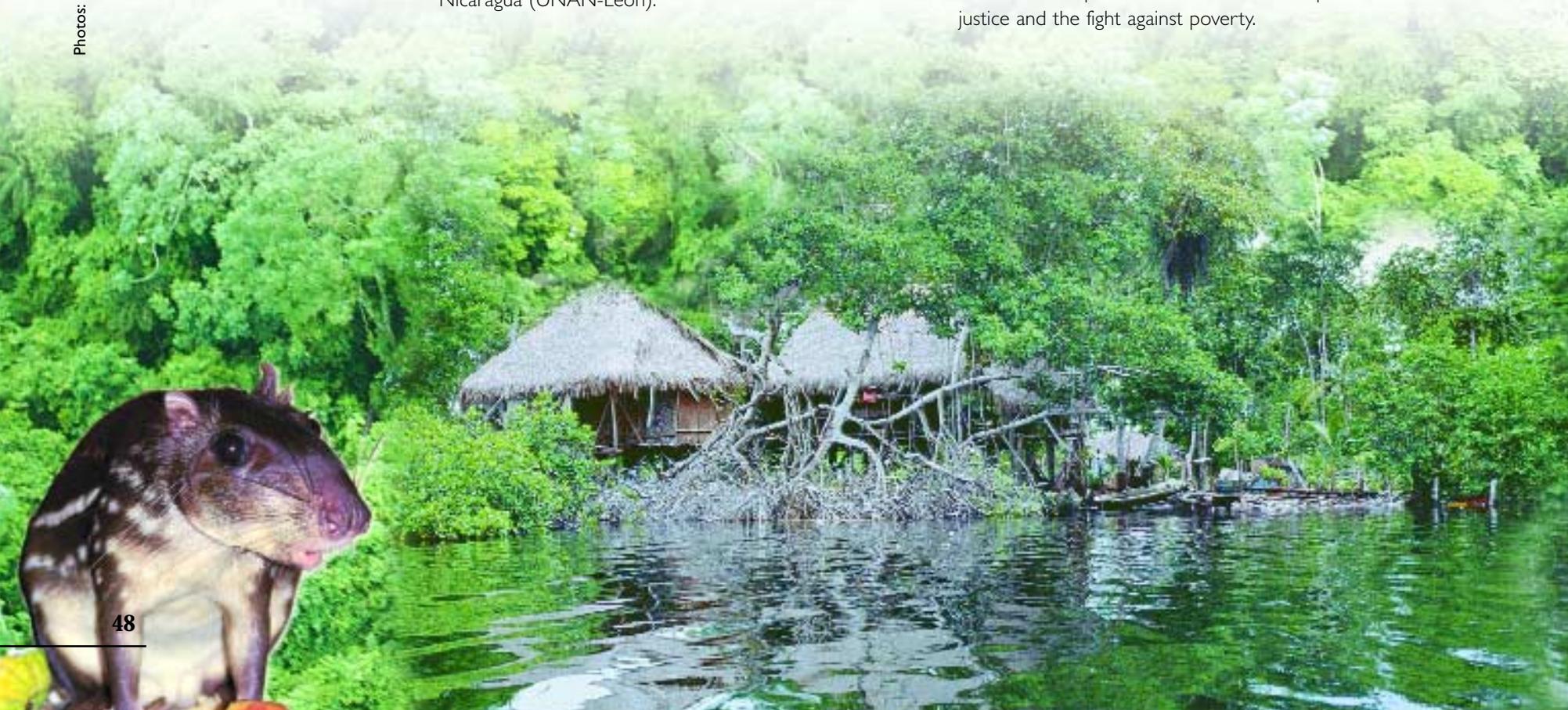
Aerial view of the Tortuguero Canals, scene of an early IUCN field project in Costa Rica

Lessons in Community Use of Wildlife

In 1991, in the Cosigüina peninsula, northwestern Nicaragua, members of the Omar Bacca cooperative began producing green and black iguanas (*Iguana iguana* and *Ctenosaura similis*) in semi-captivity for the pet trade. The meat and eggs of these reptiles had long been a traditional source of protein for rural communities in the region, and the hide of the black iguana is often used in making handicrafts. These species had clearly been overexploited. Illegal trade of their products and the degradation of forests constituting their habitat were leading to the disappearance of iguanas. Some 40 families with scarce resources in the zone had pinned their hopes for improved income on this project, promoted by the IUCN Regional Wildlife Management Program and coordinated by the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN-León).

Through projects such as this one, the Regional Wildlife Management Program of IUCN-Mesoamerica, created in 1989 and directed by Vivienne Solís, was seeking a practical application of the theory that the controlled use of certain wildlife species offered an alternative to strict protection, improving quality of life for communities collaborating with the program without endangering the survival of the species. With this objective, the IUCN worked with organized communities in different countries of the region, generating experiences in practical management that could be reproduced at other sites.

The emphasis on community development and campesino participation in decision-making was one of the most innovative elements IUCN was proposing. Environmental problems were linked to aspects of social justice and the fight against poverty.



“As long as there is one child going hungry, there can be no sustainable development,” says Vivienne Solís. She tells how, after visiting the iguana management program in Cosigüina, a group of people who had participated in the program picked up a boy on the road to give him a ride. In his backpack he carried small iguanas and parakeet chicks to sell illegally in the market. The child told them that every day he had to go higher and higher up the mountain in order to find the animals that allowed him to survive.

In Nicaragua, families participating in the project built enclosures where they planted fruit, beans, squash and other foods for the reptiles in early stages of

development. They began to take counts and keep records on the populations of both species, made artificial nests and incubation zones, and learned techniques for controlling and improving production. IUCN published the wealth of information generated in the process, so that the experience could be reproduced and the knowledge shared with other populations in the region and in the rest of the world.

The project in Cosigüina involved more than the reproduction of iguanas. By taking into account needs identified by the community, the project was framed within a strategy for integrated rural development. The activity promoted community organization and the



**For 10 years, IUCN
championed the survival
of iguanas, ducks, pacas
and turtles by
collaborating with small
communities near
protected areas to
generate appropriate
management
technologies and model
social dynamics.**

creation of forest nurseries and vegetable gardens to diversify diet and sources of income. It was also possible to make inventories of other species and monitor illegal trafficking of species. Furthermore, a series of training actions were initiated on such topics as the Law on Hunting, species threatened with extinction, marketing aspects, production of organic fertilizers and insecticides, forest nurseries and other themes of interest to the community.

Community participation in this project was an essential factor in both technical processes of management and the definition of legal aspects. From the beginning, women in the community took on a good part of the activities of the project and their initiative made them essential for maintaining the process. This phenomenon in turn produced a change in the community power structures, giving women greater participation in decision-making processes and leadership.

For 10 years (from 1991 to 2001), as now, IUCN collaborated with small communities near protected areas through these projects, which were able to generate appropriate management technologies and model social dynamics. Community organization was an essential requisite of IUCN-supported activities to develop new productive options in depressed zones.

In the watershed of the Panama Canal and with support from the IUCN, the Asociación Nacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza (ANCON) carried out another demonstration project involving pacas (*Agouti paca*). Because its meat has been highly prized ever since pre-Colombian times, this species is on the verge of extinction. The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute had

initiated research on the domestication of this species and possibilities for raising it in captivity. The animals obtained in the process were donated to ANCON and placed on an experimental farm, where technology transfer was carried out to train neighboring communities, set up exchanges among individual breeders, develop demonstration parcels and compile the information generated.

IUCN has worked in close collaboration with its Panamanian member, the National Environmental Authority (ANAM), from the moment it was first created, to promote local activities for wildlife management. IUCN-Mesoamerica saw this as an opportunity to help strengthen an institution responsible for this theme in the region, and a way to encourage community participation in wildlife management. Such a project was initiated on the island of Caños, located in the Province of Los Santos on Panama's Pacific coast, in community management of sea turtles, whose eggs have traditionally been considered a delicacy. Because the beaches of Caños are one of the most important nesting sites in the country, a project for sustainable harvesting of the eggs was carried out, thus contributing to the conservation of this highly endangered species. A vital factor in this process was the development of ongoing communication between the State and the communities to define roles and responsibilities satisfactory to each. Since this could not happen unless the community had organized groups, this project also resulted in the formation of the "United Islanders Cooperative of Multiple Services," responsible for various economic, tourism and conservation activities.

In El Salvador, IUCN supported work the National Park Service had been carrying out with populations living near

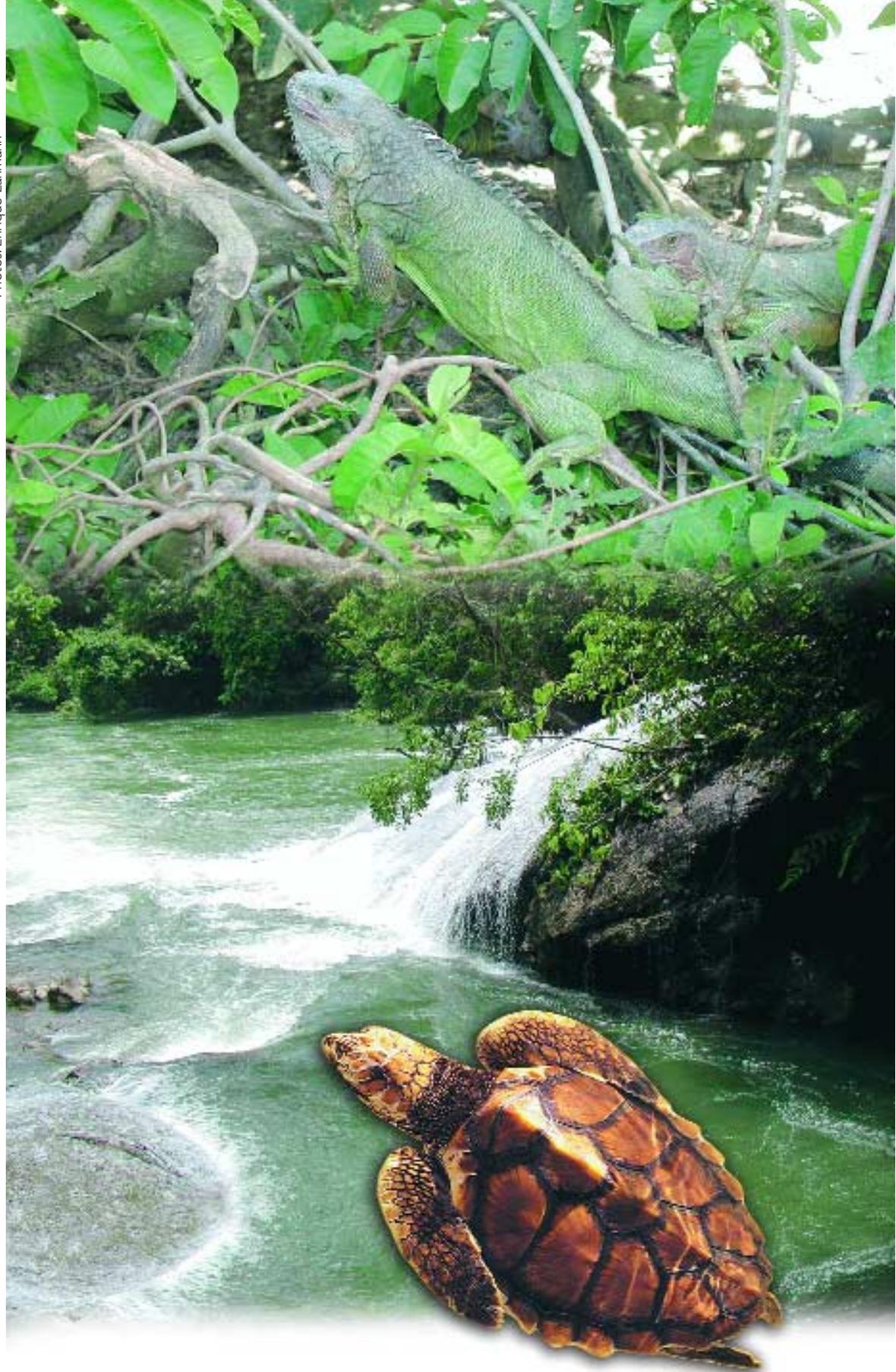
Laguna El Jocotal, involving the reproduction and use of the eggs of an arboreal fowl, the black-bellied whistling duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*). In addition to providing a source of protein for communities along the lakeshore, the project studied options for trade of this resource, thus contributing to the local economy and consequently, to the valuation and conservation of the lake ecosystem, as well.

These demonstration projects were just a part of the effort to promote management of wildlife resources in the region. One of the greatest contributions of this process was the formation of networks and work groups focused on the different species of interest, which also made it possible to initiate an exchange of experiences among the participants.

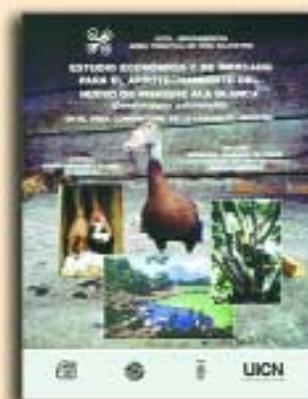
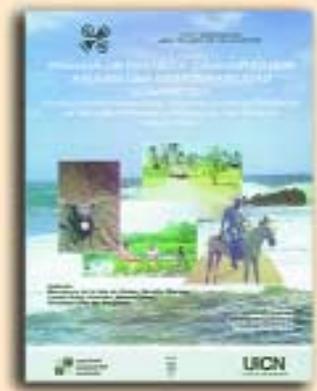
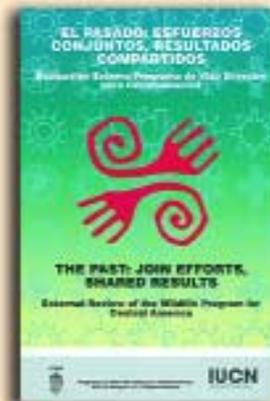
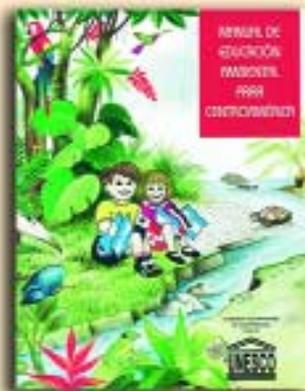
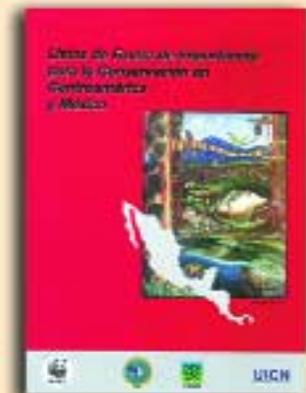
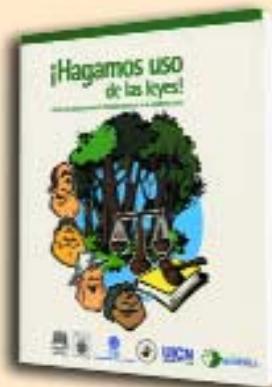
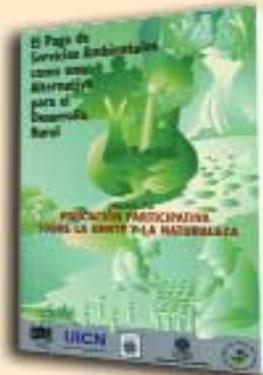
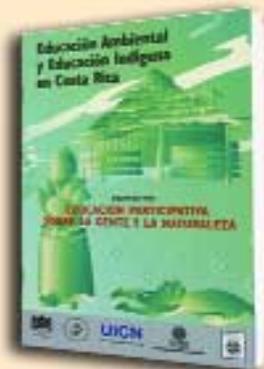
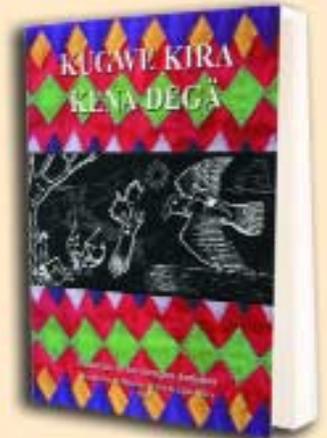
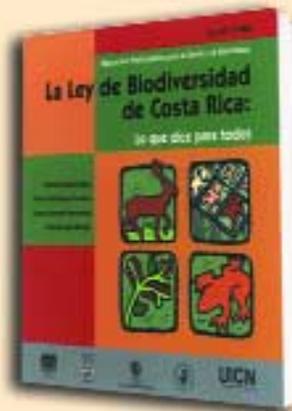
"I believe the IUCN has shaped us and left all of us who work with the organization marked by a philosophy of thought and action that we carry in our veins, like a pact sealed in blood," says Solís. "In this sense we are unflagging, because what transpires from all of the IUCN literature is a philosophy of life, and we see no other option than to maintain it in our lives."

With a comprehensive vision of the need for conservation and suitable management of biodiversity, IUCN-Mesoamerica incorporated social, economic, legal, cultural and administrative aspects in a base of technical and biological research. There was a clear concern about disseminating the information gathered and carrying out education and training activities.

To facilitate information exchange and take advantage of lessons learned in the field, IUCN published a series of



Publications by the Wildlife Area



books summarizing experiences in this area. These publications tell of the management projects in Panama with sea turtles and pacas; sustainable use of the eggs of the black-bellied whistling duck in El Jocotal, El Salvador; and iguana breeding in northern Nicaragua. A more general publication, "Experiences in Wildlife Management in Central America" (*Experiencias de manejo de vida silvestre en Centroamérica*) summarizes the major lessons generated by the small projects described and of others, such as the management of caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*) in Caño Negro, Costa Rica, and joint protection of cultural and natural heritage in Uaxactún, Guatemala. Essays were also published on how to generate national policies based on clues, indications and signs observed in the field and how to generate more efficient regulations for conserving biodiversity.

National, regional and international agreements on biodiversity conservation and management reflect efforts that continually emphasized policies of collaboration and exchange of experiences, the creation of regional specialists networks, the design of appropriate legislation and the signature of regional and international conventions for wildlife protection.

IUCN supported the practical application of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Elsewhere, one of the most important actions of the Regional Program of Wildlife Management was its support for several countries in the revision and development of laws on biodiversity management.

A Cascade of Environmental Education

These schoolchildren are receiving environmental education in the Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica, as part of a community project implemented by the IUCN with other organizations and local partners.



Photo: IUCN

Betting on Gender Equity

IUCN-Mesoamerica introduced the theme of gender equity in environmental management and fostered the formulation of a regional policy on gender equity, approved in 1998.



Inhabiting the Caribbean coast of Honduras is the Garifuna ethnic group, a community of fishermen and women who, after many hours in the hot sun, return to land to sell their product. Garifuna women have fished ever since ancestral times, and María is one of them. But María did not receive any of the boats and motors that were distributed as part of a project in the community, because it did not include women.

On the other side of the isthmus, in the countryside of El Salvador, Luisa comes home tired, lugging a load of firewood to prepare lunch, and in Guatemala, Zulema walks two kilometers balancing an earthenware jar full of water on her head. Her bare feet pound on the hot dust while the sun parches her skin and beat down on her advancing years.

In Costa Rica, other women make their way to the fields, bent over as they plant saplings in a reforestation project in the Northern Zone, but often perceived as an odd species because they perform "men's" work.

Thousands of Mesoamerican women live in conditions of inequality, the product of a culture that invisibilizes their contributions to development. This patriarchal culture prevents women and men from developing fully and reduces possibilities for democracy and social justice. It is impossible to speak of sustainable development in the midst of such social imbalance. Unless environmental action involves the participation of each and every woman and man, there can be no real equality or social justice.

IUCN-Mesoamerica is so convinced of this that it has wagered heavily on the pursuit of gender equity in environmental projects, through a model initiative called "Toward Equity: Technical Assistance and Support for Rural Development Initiatives in the Mesoamerican Region," initiated jointly by IUCN and the Arias

Foundation for Peace and Human Development, with funding from the Government of The Netherlands.

"Toward Equity" both empowered and resulted from work IUCN began in 1989 through its Women and Environment Program, which evolved into what would be the IUCN-Mesoamerica Social Program in 1991, headed by Brazilian sociologist, Miriam Abramovay. She was subsequently joined by Costa Ricans Guiselle Rodríguez, also a sociologist, and Lorena Aguilar, an anthropologist specializing in environmental ecology, who would become Coordinator of the Social Program in 1994.

"We gave the first course on gender and sustainable development at the end of '92, and the process unleashed during the years that followed has left a rich harvest, culminating in the signature of a regional policy on gender equity by the environmental ministries of Mesoamerica," explains Guiselle Rodríguez.

The Gender Equity Policy is indisputably one of the region's foremost environmental milestones whose achievement was made possible through the direct contributions of IUCN during the past decade. In 1998, Central America and Mexico became the first region in the world where the environmental ministries or secretariats have a formal policy on gender equity. In August of that year, the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) agreed to promote this policy.

But there was much more to come. As Lorena Aguilar explains: "Policy is just the beginning of a process, never the end. Now it needs to be reflected in budgets and in the annual planning of the environmental regulatory agencies."

Arriving at a gender equity policy in Mesoamerica was no easy feat. The many workshops, meetings, publications,

training events and projects at the local and national level motivated governments and nongovernmental organizations to begin incorporating gender in their environmental plans and projects.

It was also the product of a particular societal context. "Our countries have rural-based economies that have been eroded. In many cases, men migrate to other zones or countries in search of employment. Women are at the head of productive units and require assistance to

develop sustainable productive alternatives," states Guiselle Rodríguez.

But despite these social trends, linking the theme of gender to environmental management is no simple matter, and this is the first difficulty that the men and women working as environmental technicians run into: How can gender equality concepts be implemented as part of on-the-ground activities? What methodologies can be used? IUCN-Mesoamerica proposed to answer these questions



Photo: Marco Calvo

and to develop practical methodology for incorporating the theme of gender equity in environmental projects.

At the request of the Embassy of The Netherlands, the IUCN-Mesoamerica Social Program conducted an exhaustive investigation during 1996, examining 56 rural development projects funded by the Dutch Government in five countries of Mesoamerica (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and El Salvador), attempting to identify factors blocking the gender equity approach in these projects.

The results were revealing: gender was being addressed in a fragmented manner, as opposed to a process; it was dismissed as just a passing fad; people were terrified about working with this theme because it meant peeling away and deconstructing a distorted and unjust situation; incorporating gender equity was something women did with women, while technical aspects were designed by men for men; and there was a lot of theory but few practical methods for working with such a complex theme.

The proposal was to provide those methodologies, and many were formulated together with the people themselves. Thus was born the series, "Toward Equity", a set of nine training modules on writing proposals with a gender approach, conducting participatory appraisals, planning projects from the perspective of equity, applying gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems, carrying out participatory processes, constructing equity indicators, negotiating and managing development projects equitably, systematizing experiences and basic conceptual elements for understanding gender theory.



Logo of the Toward Equity Project

With these tools in hand, IUCN and the Arias Foundation have trained thousands of NGOs and academicians, and they, in turn, have used this knowledge in a multiplier effect.

"We're now going on 12,000 sets in Spanish of the nine modules making up the series, three thousand sets in English and 1000 in French, and most times when these documents are handed out they're accompanied by training. In 2002 alone, we trained 6000 people, and many of them are connected with communities or projects in which hundreds of people are participating," says Lorena Aguilar, Coordinator of the IUCN-Mesoamerican Social Program and Global Gender Advisor for the Union.

Networking has been one of the keys to the success of the Toward Equity project. Since 1997, national networks ("REDNAs") have been set up in the five nations where this initiative is being implemented. A national facilitation entity is in charge of coordinating the network, which now includes more than 30 organizations per country, with an equal or greater number of rural development projects where gender perspective is being incorporated.

The organizations that have coordinated this effort in each country for more than five years now are FUNDAGUATEMALA, in Guatemala; Asociación Salvadoreña Pro Salud Rural (ASAPROSAR), in El Salvador; Centro de Estudios y Acción para el Desarrollo (CESADE) and Mujeres para el Desarrollo (MUPADE), in Nicaragua; El Productor R.L., in Costa Rica; and Asociación ANDAR, in Honduras.

The Toward Equity Series

"The gender networks are recognized as being the only forum countries have at this moment for discussion of gender equity in the environmental sphere," declares Lorena Aguilar.

At the same time, this project has also contributed to strengthening the Gender Units in the environmental regulatory agencies in Mesoamerica.

IUCN has been a global pioneer in terms of its gender equity work in Mesoamerica. At the 1996 World Conservation Congress, in Montreal, the Mesoamerican countries proposed that the Union have a global policy on gender equity. This proposal was ratified four years later at the World Congress in Amman, Jordan, in 2000. As a consequence, not only did the IUCN adopt a gender policy, but a Mesoamerican was appointed global advisor for this theme: Lorena Aguilar.

"It has been a struggle for over 10 years, but IUCN has now carved out a space at the world level and is recognized in international fora as an authority in the theme of gender equity in environmental action," states Lorena Aguilar. "Our gender proposal talks about equality and equity between men and women: it doesn't focus only on women, and that has been a very useful approach," she adds.

Mesoamerica's contribution to this global movement is indisputable. It is no accident that this region was chosen as the site of the First Global Workshop on Gender and Environment of the IUCN, held in Costa Rica, in January 1998. With the support of Denmark, initially, and then Holland, IUCN-Mesoamerica has established an important benchmark in the theme of gender equity that now transcends Mesoamerican borders.



Through the "Toward Equity" series, thousands of people in Mesoamerica and other parts of the world have been trained in methodology to incorporate gender equity concepts in development projects.

Toward Equity publications have traveled around the world, and these proposals are being used in Africa, Asia and South America, and even in institutions of higher learning in the United States. Additional useful publications have been made for Mesoamerica and other regions, including a series with guidelines on how to incorporate aspects of gender equity in the management of protected areas, biodiversity, wetlands and coastal zones, and arid and semi-arid zones.

Important work has also been carried out through the Central American megasite on population and

environment (<http://www.poam.org>), a joint initiative of the IUCN Social Program, Asociación Demográfica Costarricense (ADC) and Fundación ACCESO, an IUCN member. This site promotes public discussion on the connection between population and environment.

Through the website at <http://www.genderandenvironment.org> (or in Spanish at <http://www.generoyambiente.org>), IUCN has disseminated a great quantity of practical information on how to incorporate gender perspective in different environmental projects and initiatives. This is the Union's first global website dedicated exclusively to gender equity and its relation to environment.

In this fashion, IUCN-Mesoamerica's social analysis of gender equity and population has been vast and groundbreaking in both the region and the world. "It has been an effort with a long-range vision, and although external cooperation was eventually withdrawn, the project's legacy will remain in the different countries, like the campaigns for the promotion of human rights, the fight against racism and many other global processes," says Guiselle Rodríguez.



Making History

The first World Workshop on Gender and Environment, held in 1998, in San Jose, Costa Rica, illustrated the consolidation of this theme in IUCN's activities at the global level.

Together with Central American organisms, IUCN has been the architect of the region's main agreements and initiatives for forests and protected areas over the last decade.

Photo: Marco Calvo



The Forest Thickens and the People Participate

Ever since he was 17 years old, Alberto Salas has traveled and worked in the forests of Mesoamerica, first as a volunteer in national parks, then as park ranger, and later on in the administration of these parks and in the coordination of all types of projects related to protected areas and forest resources. Today he coordinates the IUCN-Mesoamerica Forests and Protected Areas Program.

In all this time, Salas has witnessed key meetings marking evolution in the theme of forests and protected areas in this region over the past 30 years, and he is clear that IUCN, along with regional organisms, has been the architect of Central America's most important projects, initiatives and conventions in this field. He recalls the First Central American Meeting on Cultural and Natural Resources, in 1974, organized by Gerardo Budowski, IUCN Director General at that time. From this meeting arose the proposal of selecting pilot areas in each Central American country to show people what a nature park was.

In 1987, a second version of that meeting took place in Guatemala, where it was seen that countries had made significant advances in terms of protected areas during the period elapsed. However, rates of deforestation in the isthmus were alarming, as were threats to biodiversity, and the most profound transformations were thus yet to come.

The 1989 creation of CCAD, the Central American Agenda for Environment and Development and the Rio '92 preparatory process provided an appropriate political framework for promoting actions in forests and protected areas. Good technical orientation was also being provided

by the Forest Action Plan for Central America and demonstration projects such as that of Tortuguero in Costa Rica or Pikin Guerrero in Nicaragua, to mention just two examples.

Nonetheless, the two pivotal events that unleashed extensive work in Central American forests and protected areas in the 1990s occurred in 1992 and 1993. The first of these was the signature of the Convention for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Protection of Priority Wild Areas in Central America, which mandated the creation of the Central American Council on Protected Areas (CCAP) and the Central American System of Protected Areas (SICAP). IUCN-Mesoamerica participated directly in the formulation of this convention, and indeed, articles 20 and 21 charge IUCN with supporting implementation of the convention at the regional level, through the World Commission on Protected Areas.

The second key event was the 1993 signing of the Convention for the Management and Conservation of Natural Forest Ecosystems and the Development of Forest Plantations, better known as the "Central American Forests Convention." This instrument gave rise to the formation of the Central American Forests Council (CCAB).

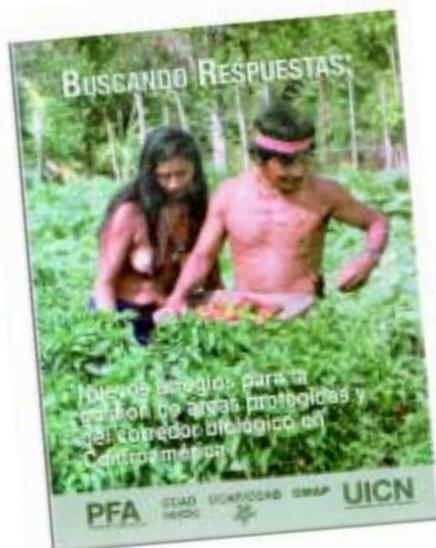
The IUCN not only participated in these processes but also offered ongoing technical assistance to the Forests and Protected Areas Councils from the moment they were formed. A good part of this backing was provided through the "Project to Support Community Management of Forests in Central America" (PAGEBOCA), which IUCN carried out as of 1994 with funding from German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

With assistance from IUCN, Central America has shifted its approach to work in protected areas, recognizing the importance of citizen participation in natural resource management.

PAGEBOCA was adapted to address Central Americans' needs for technical assistance, but continued as the central core for which IUCN would fight tooth and nail in the region: participation of the people in management of environment and natural resources.

“There was a very biased focus on protected areas with a preservationist vision. The theme of forest management or co-management of protected areas had not yet developed. Environmental management was not an option, and things were either black or white,” says Alberto Salas.

But IUCN continued to insist that communities be incorporated in protected area management, and Mesoamerican countries began paying attention to this approach, so much so that in 1997 a milestone was reached with respect to protected areas in Central America. Preparing for the First Latin American Congress on National Parks and other Protected Areas, to be held that year in Santa Marta, Colombia, the Central American countries prepared a joint position in which they recognized the importance of citizen participation in the management of protected areas.



The base document was called “Looking for Answers” (*Buscando Respuestas*), and Alberto Salas, Juan Carlos Godoy and Ronald McCarthy, all at IUCN-Mesoamerica, were in charge of writing it. The proposal was discussed and revised at the preparatory meeting for the Latin American Congress.

“For me, this meeting was a very important milestone, decisively influencing the directors of Central America’s protected areas. For all practical purposes, the idea of citizen participation as a factor in the

management of protected areas came to be recognized at the meeting,” says Alberto Salas. “That was when the protected areas services of the region opened up, and there was an acceptance that the areas could not continue to be managed in the same way anymore. The concept of co-management, also promoted by IUCN, began to take shape,” adds Salas.

Central American men and women attending the 1997 Santa Marta Congress presented a unified proposal and appeared before a high-level audience in what was entitled, “Central American Night.” A new approach to work in protected areas in Central America—with the participation of the people—became evident that evening, while also reinforcing before the world its position of working together as a unified Central America in environment. This approach endures today.

Another fundamental breakthrough during the second half of the nineties was IUCN’s 1996 wide-reaching assessment of the state of all the protected areas in the region (around 700 at that moment.) The study provided a regional snapshot of needs in the realm of information, administrative funding, legal mechanisms and plans and programs.

Immediately, the region determined to develop a database for the Central American System of Protected Areas (SICAP) and prepare work plans for the 1997-2000 period for the protected area systems in each country except Costa Rica, which had such a plan in place. The objective of these plans would be to improve the panorama or “snapshot”—in other words, all areas would be declared by law and have adequate institutional presence.

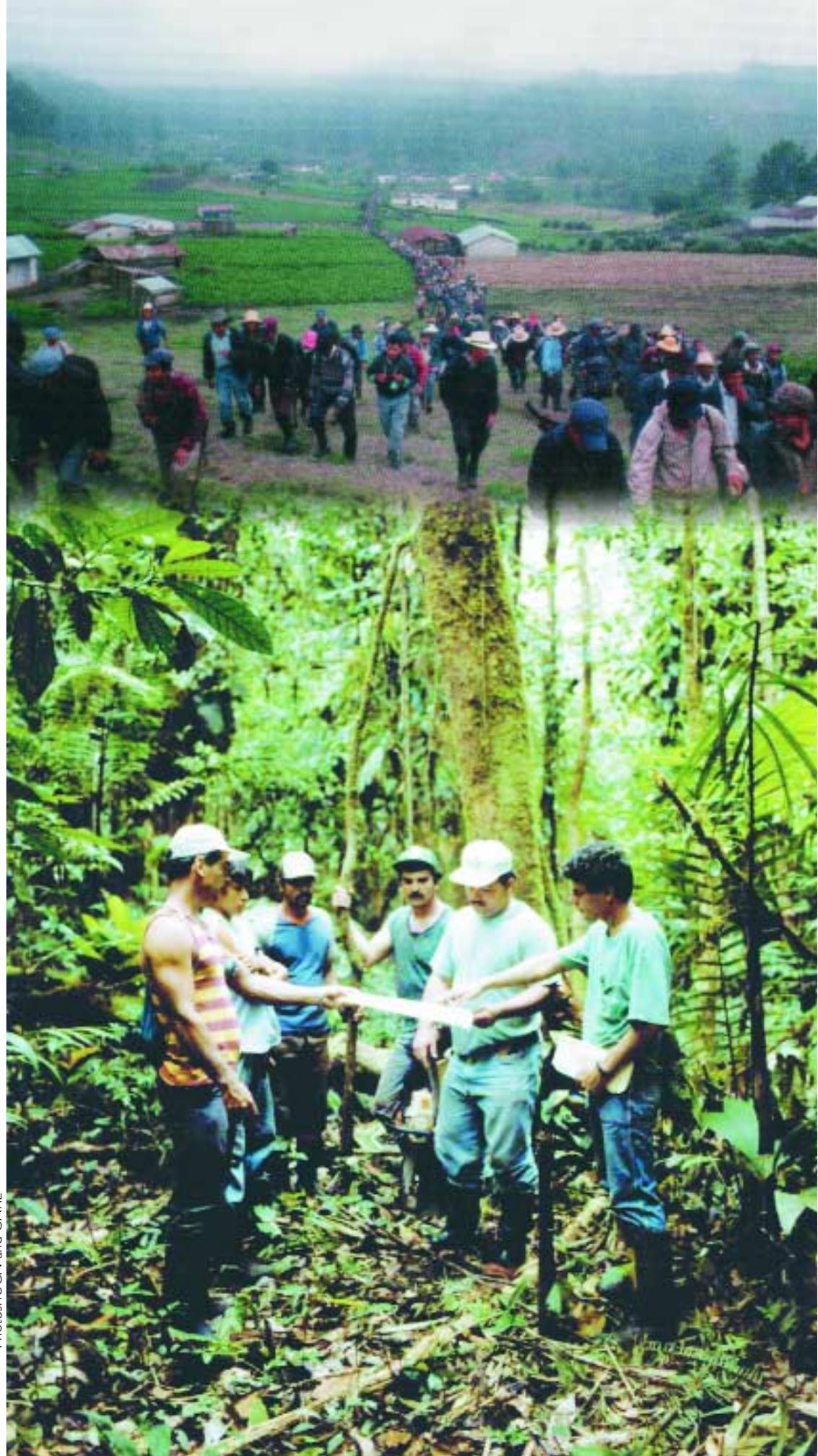
Both the appraisal and the formulation of work plans involved an arduous process that took around two years, and was spearheaded by the Central American Council on Forests and Protected Areas (CCAB-AP), with technical support from IUCN.

At the same time, between 1996 and 1997, IUCN updated the Forestry Appraisal of Central America, also in support of the CCAB-AP. The region's forests were determined to be "virtually bankrupt" in the sense that most of the goods and services derived from their resources are not included in national accounting. With the updating of the forest appraisal, eight new documents came into being (one for each country and one regional.) These have been instruments for information, awareness and change with respect to forests.

By working together with the Central American Forestry and Protected Areas Councils, IUCN was able to disseminate its concepts about co-management of protected areas, community administration of forests, economic valuation of the forest and citizen participation, in general. By then, the IUCN-Mesoamerica forest and protected areas programs had been joined into one thematic area, called "Conservation of Forests and Protected Areas." This fusion took place in 1996, with the explanation that "practically 60% of the remaining forests in Central America are protected areas and much of the remaining 40% will eventually be under some category of management," states Salas.

But, as we have said, IUCN does not conceive of forest as separate from people, so from their very beginnings, it decisively supported two new organizations created in the mid-nineties: Coordinadora Indígena Campesina de Agroforestería Comunitaria Centroamericana (CICAFOC) and Coordinadora Centroamericana del Campo (CCC).

Photos: IUCN and CATIE



Fostering Community Management of Forests

The Kuna and Emberá indigenous groups and campesinos in the surroundings of Lake Bayano, in Panama, were the first in Mesoamerica to put modern concepts of sustainable forest development and watershed management into practice, hand in hand with IUCN. The starting point was the project, "Management and Conservation of Forests in Eastern Panama," carried out from 1993 to 1995 throughout the Majé Mountain range extending from Darien to the province of Panama.

"We wanted to promote the conservation of this mountain massif, but with a participatory strategy. It was a very innovative thing at that time, and the first time we had tried to do such a thing in Panama," recalls the Panamanian agronomist Dionisio Batista, who was designated project coordinator by recommendation of the IUCN members in Panama.

The participation of the people was central, so IUCN with support from BMZ made a great effort to train the zone's inhabitants in new growing techniques to contain erosion and the advance of the agricultural frontier, in reforestation techniques using native species, and other themes.

"The greatest achievement was the quantity of people that were trained (around 2000 individuals) and the quantity of land reforested (between 200 and 300 hectares), and which is now forest. At a time when forest management was still not understood, we achieved a change in the attitude of the campesinos, whose knowledge was limited to slash-and-burn of trees. The fact that they changed their cultivation systems is proof," assures Batista.

Photos: IUCN



In effect, crops such as coffee, tubers, plantain and basic grains were improved with modern techniques, such as sowing distances, zero use of agrochemicals, minimal use of equipment and no burning.

Also participating in the Eastern Forests Project were INRENARE (now the National Environmental Authority-ANAM), the Institute of Water Resources and Electrification (IRHE) and the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA). The ministries of education and health also contributed to some degree.

In addition to conservation, the project stressed capacity building in organization and negotiation for the indigenous so they could manage their territory and defend the Bayano watershed. This zone was under fierce pressure from squatters who were attempting to seize land and deforesting and polluting the watershed. IUCN also

helped the local indigenous people to administer a project supported by the Dutch IUCN Committee, in which the Madughandí district carried out training and negotiating activities enabling them to manage their own territories.

This and other seeds were planted by the Eastern Forests Project in Panama, but this was just one of the community forest management initiatives promoted by IUCN throughout Mesoamerica.

Later on in the 1990s, IUCN joined forces with Coordinadora Indígena Campesina de Agroforestería Comunitaria Centroamericana (CICAFOC), certain that this campesino organization would become a great window of opportunity for community participation in forest management in the region. To start, IUCN helped CICAFOC conduct the first survey of its members, using resources from the PAGEBOCA Project.



**IUCN has promoted
community
management of forest
through intensive
support for
Coordinadora
Indígena Campesina
de Agroforestería
Comunitaria
Centroamericana
(CICAFOC).**

"It was an incredible task," Alberto Salas remembers, "but for the first time CICAFOC knew how much land its members had, the composition of its organizations, how many members there were, the main activities of each organization and where the main demands for work lay. I think this had a big influence on the direction of CICAFOC."

The survey made it possible to sketch a regional profile of CICAFOC, made up of more than 50 community, campesino, Black and Indigenous community organizations working for access, use and management of natural resources in the Central American region. During the subsequent years, IUCN accompanied CICAFOC in the field, provided training in participatory mapping of natural resources and community mapping, disseminated information about members' experiences in community management, opened up opportunities for work with groups on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and others, fomented contacts with Mexican community forestry organizations and prepared project proposals to raise funds internationally.

One of the most important tasks has been to increase awareness of the successful community management experiences CICAFOC members have been carrying out. To do this, IUCN and CICAFOC went deep into the mountains of Talamanca, Costa Rica, to support documentation of the Caribbean Talamanca Biological Corridor.

Likewise, in the jungles of Petén, in Guatemala, IUCN and CICAFOC continue supporting the work of more than 30 communities and 17 organizations in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, grouped together in the Asociación de Comunidades Forestales del Petén (ACOFOC). ACOFOC administers more than 400,000 hectares under the figure of community forestry concessions involving community use of timber and non-timber forest resources in a socially profitable and ecologically friendly manner.

ACOFOC was one of the organizations that accompanied IUCN and CICAFOC at a historic encounter with Mexico's Unión Nacional de Organizaciones en Forestería Comunal (UNOFOC) in early 2000. It was the first meeting of the most important community agroforestry organizations in Central America and Mexico, and culminated in the signing of an agreement for cooperation and exchange. This IUCN-promoted event took place in Michoacán, Mexico, where Central Americans could observe the booming forestry industry of the indigenous community in Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro. There, "comuneros" manage around 18,000 hectares of forest in a sustainable manner, with a forestry industry at the cutting edge in terms of development for the people.

This encounter between Mexicans and Central Americans also led to the book, "Communities and Forest Management in Mesoamerica" (*Comunidades y Gestión de Bosques en Mesoamerica*), published by IUCN. It compiles the most significant information and experiences about forest resources and community management in Central America and Mexico.

The promotion of community forest management has been accompanied by similar encouragement for co-management of protected areas. Convinced that States need support from other sectors for protected area management, IUCN has generated theoretical and practical documentation of co-management to facilitate the incorporation of this concept in the policies of Central American governments on protected areas.

IUCN has identified more than 1000 co-management experiences in Central America, and is proud of its part in the continued growth of this trend. "From a methodological point of view, I would say that all or most of the 123 experiences in co-management in this region were inspired by IUCN publications, workshops we've given, negotiations with the directors of protected areas or talks for CICAFOC groups," states Alberto Salas.

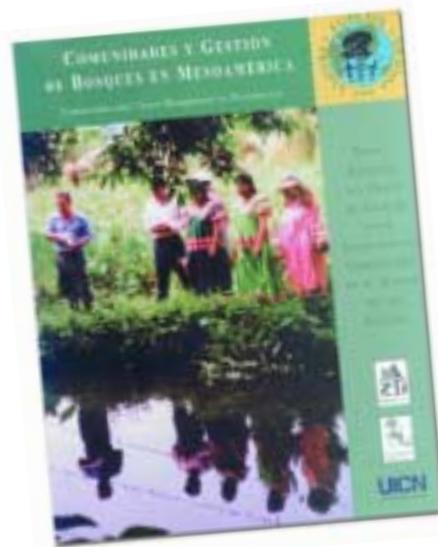
There is no doubt that IUCN ideas about community participation in natural resources have triggered a response, not only in organized groups, but in the Central American Forests and Protected Areas Commission and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD).

This IUCN vision coincides with the thinking of the new CCAD Executive Secretary, Costa Rican engineer Mauricio Castro, who assumed the post in 1998 with the firm intention of providing a forum for civil society in all areas of environmental management. This facilitated joint CCAD-IUCN work in the sphere of forests and protected areas, resulting in such initiatives as the Central American Action Plan for Fire Management, in 1999, focused on combating forest fires; the Forest Ecosystems Restoration and Regeneration Project, also designed in 1999; and the Central American Forest Strategy (EFCA), approved in 2002, described in greater detail further on.

“One of the IUCN’s most important contributions has been in the area of forests, under the community participation approach,” states Mauricio Castro, CCAD Executive Secretary from 1998 to 2003. “In general, IUCN has brought ideas it uses at the global level and incorporated them in Central American currents of thought. It has also taken Central American experiences and disseminated them at the international level,” adds Castro.

“One of IUCN’s fundamental contribution to the region has been the strengthening of the CCAD technical committees, particularly Biodiversity, Forests and Protected Areas, Wetlands and Environmental Impact Assessment,” underscores the CCAD Executive Secretary.

IUCN support for forests and protected areas also extends to the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Initiative, one of the region’s most important proposals in recent years.



Community Leadership for Forests

Representatives of *Coordinadora Indígena Campesina de Agroforestería Comunitaria Centroamericana (CICAFOC)* and Mexico’s *Union Nacional de Organizaciones en Forestería Comunal (UNOFOC)* With IUCN’s support, in 2000 the two organizations launched a cooperation agreement.

Mesoamerican Biological Corridor... with People

The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor is one of the initiatives IUCN and CCAD have promoted jointly. Year after year, shoulder to shoulder, they have worked together in its conceptualization, launching and execution.

“The first time we talked about biological corridors in Mesoamerica was at the boundary between the Kekoldo Reserve and the Bribri Ridge, in Talamanca, Costa Rica. It was at the beginning of the nineties and Oscar Lücke of IUCN, Mario Boza-then Vice-Minister of Natural Resources- and I, as an official of Asociación ANAI, were walking down the road talking about how to try and instigate a corridor that would be different from the first two biological corridors that existed in Central America,” relates Alberto Salas about early discussions about what should be understood as a biological corridor in Mesoamerica.

The region's two biological corridors at that point had been created in Costa Rica. The first one connected Barva Volcano National Park and La Selva Biological Station, in the province of Heredia, and involved purchasing land to extend the protected area. The second corridor was on the Caribbean, between Tortuguero National Park and Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge, and had also required land acquisition. A third corridor was being proposed for Talamanca, and this is what the three environmentalists were discussing.

“We were against a simple land purchase, like the other cases, and a process was initiated for future corridors to be developed with the people, under a sustainable development approach. That was the concept adopted for the corridor,” states Alberto Salas.

Later on, with Salas now working at IUCN, he and the Union technical teams in Mesoamerica would continue to defend this concept of the biological corridor. In 1995, IUCN-Mesoamerica and the Union's World Commission on Protected Areas organized a meeting in Panama for

the exclusive purpose of holding an extensive technical discussion of the concept of the biological corridor. This and other conceptual contributions from the IUCN would be applied to the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC), a project officially launched in 1997 and fostered by the Central American Commission on Environment and Development.

The MBC was conceived as a platform for sustainable development, integrating natural resource conservation, economic competitiveness and efforts to alleviate poverty. The proposal crosses the borders of eight nations, running from southern Mexico to Panama, but not as a single strip; it also interconnects national or binational ecological areas. The point of departure for the corridor are the more than 700 protected areas comprising the Central American System of Protected Areas.

The Presidents of Central America endorsed the MBC project in 1997, defined as follows: “an organized and consolidated land ordering system composed of natural areas under special administrative systems (core, buffer, multiple use and interconnection areas) that offer Mesoamerican society and the world an array of environmental goods and services; providing spaces for social convergence in order to promote investment in conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, for the purpose of improving quality of life for inhabitants of the region.”

This same declaration approving the MBC and signed by the Presidents stresses the need to create “an innovative framework for achieving the principles for the sustainability of society and environment defined by the



Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES).” Just as the principles of ALIDES maintained a close connection with the “Caring for the Earth” strategy promoted by IUCN, UNEP and WWF in the early 1990s, IUCN’s influence can also be observed in the conceptual proposal of the corridor.

This was no accident. IUCN was working side by side with CCAD for almost two years, sketching out the broad outlines of the project and preparing the “launching pad” of the MBC: assessing the state of protected areas, conceptualizing the Corridor, defining strategy, drawing a ecological, economic and social profile of priority areas in the Corridor, examining maps, generating proposals, seeking political support, pursuing stakeholder convergence and participation, and other essential

technical details. Juan Carlos Godoy, Alberto Salas and Ronald McCarthy headed the IUCN advisory group for this process.

IUCN has given extensive support for the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Initiative through the different CCAD projects related directly to it: the Regional Environmental Program for Central America (PROARCA), the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS), and others, as well as the actual project to consolidate the MBC, begun in 1999.

Year after year, IUCN has provided concrete products contributing to the annual work plan of the Corridor Project, and in 2000 a Framework Cooperation Agreement was signed with CCAD and MBC for an initial

five-year period. Some of the products of the agreement have been reports, such as "State of the Art" on co-management in Central America, the Potential of the MBC in Central America in the Clean Development Mechanism and, more recently, the regional declaration and report of the Central American countries for the 5th World Congress on Protected Areas in Durban, South Africa, in September 2003. These last documents were approved during the First Mesoamerican Congress on Protected Areas, held in March 2003, in Managua, Nicaragua. IUCN provided technical support for the MBC

Project and for the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Nicaragua (MARENA), an IUCN member, which were the organizers.

A report was also drafted in 2002 on each country's level of compliance with regional conventions on forests and biodiversity. As complement, support has been provided for the implementation of the national biodiversity strategies, which has signified training for the National Biodiversity Commissions (CONABIOS) in holding national consultations and in the preparation of a regional report.

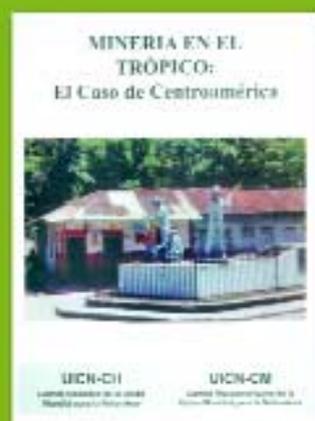
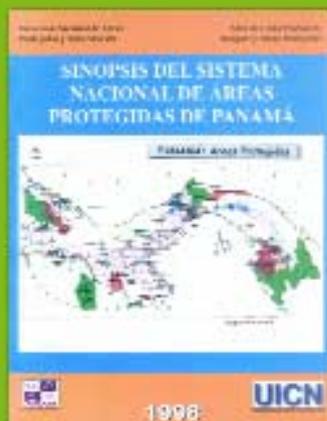
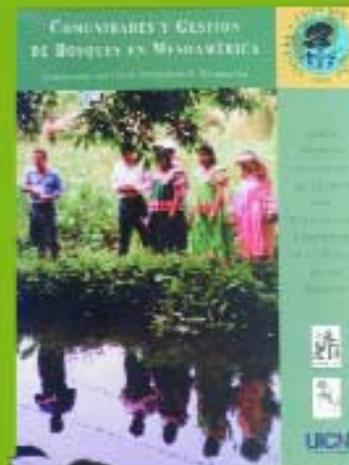
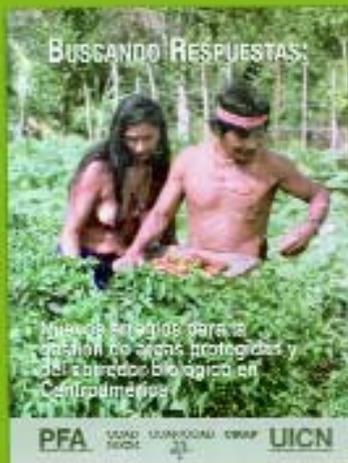
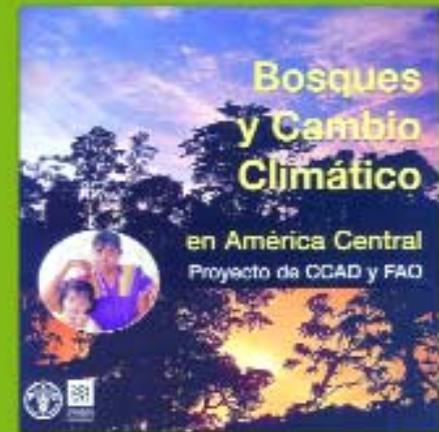
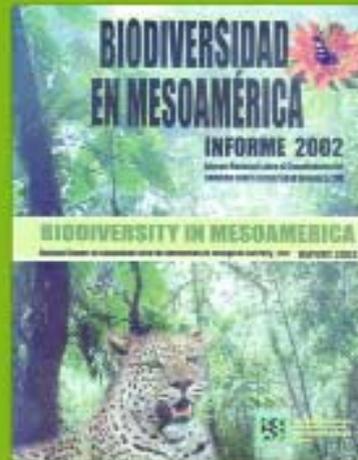
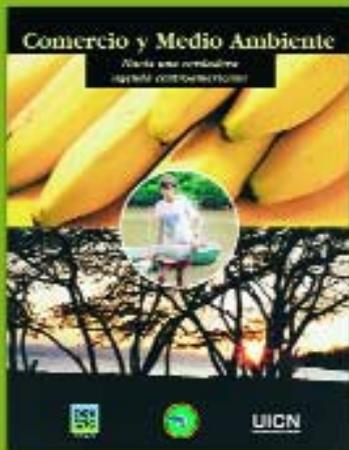
Over all, IUCN technical assistance for the Corridor has been extensive and congruent with its principles of sustainable development and community participation. The Forests and Protected Areas Program of IUCN-Mesoamerica has backed CICAFOC and Coordinadora Centroamericana del Campo (CCC) so that they have been able to maintain a high profile of participation in the MBC.

"IUCN had been promoting the theme of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor way before then, and this project wouldn't exist if organizations such as the IUCN had not put their support behind the great initiative of the MBC," says Nicaraguan Lorenzo Cardenal, Program Coordinator for the Consolidation of the MBC. "The IUCN's capacity to influence has been important in maintaining countries' interest and commitment to continue supporting the initiative," adds Cardenal.



Photo: IUCN

Publications by IUCN-Mesoamerica's Forest Conservation and Protected Areas Program



The Waters Converge

“To save the earth, we need to save the sea,” says Carlos de Paco, director of the marine program at Fundación AVINA. De Paco started the Coastal and Marine Program at IUCN-Mesoamerica in 1992, conducting an assessment of the region's needs and priorities in relation to coastal and marine issues.

In February 1992, de Paco attended the 4th World Parks Congress organized by IUCN in Caracas, Venezuela. Called “Parks for Life,” the event analyzed ways of optimizing support for protected areas as part of the process of creating a sustainable society. Discussion centered on interest in a program for coastal and marine action in the Mesoamerican region. The proposal interested this Costa Rican marine biologist, who agreed to initiate the process by helping to determine priorities and needs in this area.

“At that time there were many groups interested in the marine theme, but no regional vision to bring them

together,” says de Paco. “The program proposed by the IUCN allowed some NGOs to develop marine issues and gave development agencies an opportunity to get involved in this area.”

The IUCN made an effort to determine the needs of the coastal population of the different countries in this field and to identify the government offices and NGOs working in coastal and marine zones. It also identified marine and coastal conservation areas existing in the region and began to introduce this theme into the agenda of the CCAD.

“This is a key theme for this region, not just in conservation but also in the field of economic development, when you consider that it is a very narrow strip of land bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea,” explains de Paco. “Many communities are connected with the coast and generate economic resources related to fishing, maritime transportation and tourism, just to give a few examples.”

During the assessment phase of the program, financed by Canada's International Centre for Ocean Development (ICOD), representatives of institutions related to the coastal and marine theme in the Central American Caribbean met in a series of national workshops. The people participating in those workshops and in the regional workshop, held in Roatan, Bay Islands, Honduras, proposed a serious analysis and recommendations for addressing the problems of coastal development.

The workshops, held within the framework of the Coastal and Marine Program, studied environmental legislation related to the sea, and proposed the development of suitable legal instruments, ratification of international agreements on maritime law and the strengthening of institutions responsible for putting them into effect. With respect to tourism, recommendations were to increase CCAD participation in planning for tourism development in the region, and identify and prioritize resources with



Photo: Enrique Lahmann



tourism potential in the zone, while maintaining respect for the traditions and culture of the communities involved and ensuring their participation in the development of the proposed activities.

Participants also advocated extending marine protected areas and promoting knowledge and conservation of marine biodiversity. It was in this context that a proposal arose to create a system of marine protected areas in the Central American Caribbean, a project that has been taking shape under the concept of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS). Along with the promotion of training for authorities in charge of coastal and marine management, studies were proposed to determine the characteristics and needs of the human populations living in the zone, and to encourage their organization and participation in planning for coastal and marine development.

IUCN's efforts triggered an awareness in other international organizations and donors regarding the importance of the coastal-marine theme in Mesoamerica. People began to talk about creating marine parks and including them in the lists of national parks in the region, and that was when the idea came up for the

Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, an initiative that is now being implemented.

Partly because of this initiative, PROARCA-COSTAS was created with funding from US-AID. This program works in several of the binational and regional areas of Central America that had been identified in the assessment workshops, and implements projects for marine conservation areas. It also works in coastal zones management, strengthening for local communities and waste management.

But coastal and marine ecosystems cannot be viewed in isolation; we also need to find out what is happening upstream. This is why the marine theme was incorporated in the Wetlands Program of IUCN-Mesoamerica under a vision that integrates management of watersheds, from their source in the upper part of the basins all the way to where they empty into the sea.

Under this new vision, the experiences of projects being carried out by the Wetlands Program in the Gulf of Fonseca; in Térraba-Sierpe, Costa Rica; in Estero Real, Nicaragua, and other areas gathered force and were integrated.

In 1993, the Wetlands Program and the Coastal and Marine Program of IUCN-Mesoamerica were fused into the Wetlands and Coastal Zones Area, working under a comprehensive vision of watershed management, from the source to the sea.

The appraisals of the IUCN Coastal and Marine Program gave rise to proposals that were later transformed into the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, the PROARCA-COSTAS program and others.

In 1993, Venezuelan biologist Néstor Windevoxhel assumed coordination of the IUCN-Mesoamerica's Wetlands and Coastal Zones Program. Windevoxhel had come to Central America at the end of the 1980s, when he was earning his Master's degree at CATIE.

"In Central America I found a different approach to conservation, one that I shared a great deal, which was the sustainable use approach promoted by the IUCN," states Néstor Windevoxhel. "At that moment the Wetlands Program was probably one of the IUCN's strongest at the global level, and I, of course, had no intention of changing that," adds Néstor.

Indeed, over the next four years the IUCN-Mesoamerica Wetlands and Coastal Zones program continued to grow under Windevoxhel's direction, promoting new projects in the field such as those for Laguna Lachuá, in Guatemala; Pacific Mangroves, also in Guatemala, and the IUCN's nascent Freshwater Initiative, kicked off with activities involving small-scale fishermen in Lake Nicaragua, to mention a few.

The work already underway in the Gulf of Fonseca and Estero Real was reinforced through new alliances and through the sustainable development strategies for these zones, drafted with community participation.

"These projects made it possible to consolidate knowledge and produce a large number of publications on the theme of conservation. I think we exercised a great deal of leadership during that period," states Windevoxhel. One of the most important information mechanisms would be the Wetlands and Coastal Zones Documentation Center for Mesoamerica, placing more than 14,000 documents on this theme at the public's disposal. This dissemination work was complemented by the Wetlands Program web page (<http://www.uicnhumedales.org>) and by the informational bulletins published every six months.

In general, the Wetlands and Coastal Zones Area promoted the development of standards and policies for wetlands conservation, from specific regulations on mangrove management, for example, to national mangrove conservation policy in Nicaragua and Guatemala. In Costa Rica, support was provided for the government to formulate the country's National Wetlands Strategy, and from 1996 on, to execute a series of activities delineated in the strategy.

"The inventory of wetlands in Costa Rica and the conservation strategy that preceded it were the first ever made in the Neotropics, just like the Costa Rica and Guatemala wetlands policies. Specific regulations were also developed for the management of wetlands, along with national policies on wetlands conservation in Nicaragua and Guatemala," recalls Néstor Windevoxhel.



Productive Wetlands

Rocío Córdoba, a Costa Rican biologist who now directs the IUCN-Mesoamerica Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Area, explains that its work has evolved from the era when talking about sustainable development with conservation authorities was “practically prohibited,” to an emphasis on active participation, such as that achieved in the Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Tortuguero Plains.

“I think that in these years Mesoamerica has acquired technical and political skills in proposing strategies and action plans at the regional level,” says Córdoba. “In our region, when you talk about wetlands management, people think of the IUCN. This is the only program of regional character in Mesoamerica that works with wetlands in a comprehensive way, although there are important efforts, such as WWF’s training projects and the work of TNC and AID in coastal zones through PROARCA-COSTAS.”

Work in Mesoamerica has benefited wetlands conservation in other parts of the world, as Patrick Dugan explains.

“In the mid-1980s, we had difficulties communicating the importance of wetlands resources and the role they played in development agendas and in people’s lives. From early on, the work in Central America provided us with numerous examples of how people depended on aquatic resources and how important the wetlands were as a source of income in a zone with economic difficulties. With the OLAFO projects, we were also able to establish sustainable ways of managing resources so that benefits to communities could be maintained in the long term.”

Field activities in the early days also made it possible to develop technologies to enhance the value of the resources communities had at their disposal. By creating more efficient work methods, the economic situation improved while at the same time resource degradation was contained.

This was the case in Terraba-Sierpe, on the southern coast of Costa Rica, where a dense wall of mangrove borders the delta formed by the Grande de Terraba and Sierpe Rivers. Favorable climate conditions allow mangrove to reproduce rapidly, and mollusks and crustaceans abound. Several species of fish with commercial value spend their

The sustainable development strategies for the Gulf of Fonseca, Laguna Lachuá and the Guatemala Pacific Mangroves set a new benchmark for work in wetlands, with a social vision.

first stages of development there. The economy of the Coronado de Sierpe community, in the heart of this zone, had been severely affected by the departure of the banana company, and the population became almost entirely dependent on mangrove resources. A cooperative of mangrove workers (Coopemangle) obtained a management concession of 200 hectares of mangrove from the General Forestry Directorate, and requested technical assistance from the IUCN Wetlands Program to prepare a management plan. They also wanted to improve techniques in the extraction and management of firewood for charcoal, bark for tannins and other products. More efficient production methods and more diversified activities, such as ecotourism, allowed the community to improve its situation without increasing the impact on resources.

Another model project has been Laguna Lachuá, in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, supported by the Dutch Government. This extensive body of water surrounded by moist tropical forest was declared a national park in 1996, and harbors more than 100 species of mammals, including tapirs and jaguars, and almost 300 species of birds, such as parrots and toucans. Forests contain mahogany, cedar and other precious woods, and an abundance of lianas, bushes, palms and bromeliads. Around 11,000 people of Ketchi origin live within this lovely landscape. IUCN's support for this project has evolved, as Rocío Córdoba explains:

"When it started out, the project promoted conservation actions, but there are indigenous communities with social needs and very difficult living conditions, so now it's trying to give the population options for making use of natural resources. First, through joint action with Guatemalan government agencies, Foro de Tierras, Desarrollo y Conservación de la Eco-Region Lachuá and the Guatemala National Forest Institute (INAB), we tried to

help people from the zone living alongside the park (the buffer zone) to legalize their land tenure situation and at the same time gain security that they will have food to eat. Once these objectives are obtained, we can raise awareness of the importance of the national park and how conservation of biodiversity and other natural resources can improve the living conditions of the neighboring populations."

"I think the Lachuá project is becoming a very interesting benchmark, because it is a conservation project that offers development for the population, mainly indigenous," emphasizes Córdoba.

With actions such as this one, the Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Program has become one of IUCN's most successful because it was able to play a catalyzing role, achieve consensus in the region and serve as a forum for discussing policy in an efficient way early on. It is an example of how field work has multiplied IUCN's impact, not just through projects but by uniting the work of its members and promoting wetlands conservation in a way that has never been accomplished before.

To a good degree, the project, "Conservation of the Coastal Ecosystems of the Gulf of Fonseca," in which the Governments of Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, 17 mayoralties in the three countries and dozens of international governments all participate today, is the result of these early IUCN initiatives.

"Sustainable Use of Resources Associated with the Mangroves of the Pacific Coast of Guatemala," better known as the Pacific Mangroves Project, has also made history. This initiative was fomented by the National Forests Institute of Guatemala (INAB) and IUCN, with funding from the European Union.

"The mangroves project modified the entire structure of legislation on mangrove management in Guatemala, caused Guatemalan authorities to incorporate the theme of mangrove management and established a benchmark for forest conservation and management possibilities in Guatemala's mangroves, which has not been customary. From that point of view, I think [the project] was exemplary," assures Néstor Windevoxhel .

In addition to actions in coastal wetlands, IUCN began to emphasize caring for freshwater wetlands under an integrated vision of conserving watersheds and other sources of water. In response to the World Water and Nature Initiative, workshops were held throughout 1999 to define each country's priority needs and actions for addressing them. A tangible result of this process was the document, "Vision of Water and Nature" (Visión del Agua y la Naturaleza), presented in March 2000 at the World Water Forum, in The Hague, as Mesoamerica's contribution to the "Water for the 21st Century" initiative promoted by the World Water Council.

Also, in 1999, IUCN and CCAD's PROARCA-COSTAS program organized a workshop on wetlands and coastal zones in Central America in order to establish work methodologies and regional priorities into the new century. Each country identified priority sites where they wished to carry out integrated coastal and marine resource management. Ten priority areas were also established at the regional level, with eight of those shared by two or more countries and two shared with Mexico. Work at these sites centers on certain principles and key areas: integrated watershed management and integrated coastal zones management, management of freshwater ecosystems, maintenance of ecological processes and protected sites that generate benefits or impact on the region.

Photo: Néstor Windevoxhel



Ramsar Conference in Central America

In 1999, the Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention was held in Mesoamerica for the first time. Central American participation was prominent, and its people prepared a Declaration they presented before the world.

It was noon on May 12, 1999. Overcoming her nervousness, Eva stood before an auditorium with 1500 people from all over the world, holding some leaves in her hands. A Honduran campesina woman, she had come to read the "Declaration of the Central American Peoples and Wetlands" on behalf of the civil society of the isthmus at the Seventh Conference of Parties of the Ramsar Convention in San José, Costa Rica.

She began her speech: "We, representatives of the people of Central America, from Belize to Panama, consider that our wetlands are of vital importance because they are a source of natural life for present and future generations, because they provide us with an abundance of life, thanks to their wealth of flora and fauna used as food and as natural medicine..." For a space of 15 minutes, Eva Angelina Velásquez described the contributions wetlands make to the economy, the environment and the culture of Central America. She pointed out the threats that loom over them and concluded with the recommendations of civil society to protect and use wetlands sustainably.

Central American civil participation lived up to the title of the Seventh Conference of Parties to the Wetlands Convention, entitled, "People and Wetlands: The vital link," the result of an intensive preparatory process carried out by governments and nations with support from the IUCN-Mesoamerica, Wetlands, Water, and Coastal Zones Program.

"Months beforehand, we brought people from all of the Central American countries together on the Solentiname Archipelago, in Lake Nicaragua, to prepare the Declaration," tells Rocío Córdoba. "These were humble people from little towns, living in contact with wetlands, and it was wonderful to gather their thoughts in a Declaration that would be read before the world community," she continues.

Isaac, a coastal campesino from Barra de Santiago, in El Salvador, was one of those people. For the first time in his life, he not only took out a passport but even his first identify card so that he could get on a plane and travel to neighboring Nicaragua. "I was so moved when he got up and said it had been one of the most beautiful opportunities he had ever had to share with people he had never imagined before, but ordinary people who live alongside wetlands and make use of them. Every time I see him he tells me again how he will never forget that experience. Eva, the woman from Honduras who read the Declaration, says the same thing," says Rocío Córdoba with feeling.

The presence of Central American civil society at the Seventh Conference of the Ramsar Convention could also be felt through a group of campesino artists from Nicaragua, who painted a mural over the course of the ten days of the meeting. In it they expressed the vision Central American peoples hold of the wetlands that form part of their daily life. The artists painted two murals: one has been mounted at the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, in Gland, Switzerland, and the other can be found in the IUCN Regional Office, in San Jose, Costa Rica.

But this extraordinary participation by communities was just a sample of Central America's interest in the theme of wetlands. The very fact that the Seventh Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention was held in this region represented the world's recognition of the effort Central American countries had been making in this sphere.

"The Wetlands Strategy of Costa Rica, the first in the region and the first inventory of wetlands in this country, begun in 1996, were products we contributed to technically, and which helped show the world and position Central America as a good candidate for the site for the

Central American materials at the Ramsar Conference

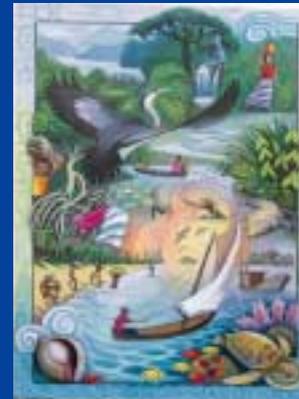
Seventh Conference of the Ramsar Convention,” states Néstor Windevoxhel, Coordinator of the IUCN-Meso-america Wetlands Area until September 1998.

“I had just left the IUCN when the Ramsar Conference was held, and it was exciting to see the fruit of our years of work, together with the governments and peoples of the region,” says Néstor Windevoxhel, current Vice-Chair of the IUCN Ecosystems Management Commission for Mesoamerica.

“The work of having a Declaration of the Peoples who lived in wetlands was a central theme at the conference. It was very nice for me because it meant finding myself reunited with people we had worked with in Solentiname, in the Gulf of Fonseca area, in Térraba-Sierpe, and in the different communities where we had been promoting conservation actions and drafting programs. To have them there together, to see that they were placing their culture, their intimate, cultural relation with the wetlands before the world, and having been a part of that process, was very inspiring and nice for me,” Néstor adds, visibly moved.

At the Seventh Conference of the Ramsar Convention, the IUCN also presented other initiatives promoted by Néstor Windevoxhel and carried on by Rocío Córdoba, who took over coordination of the Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Program in March 1999. One of those initiatives was the traveling exhibit on wetlands, with posters and interactive devices, which subsequently continued its journey throughout the Central American area. Also presented during the Conference of the Parties was a deluxe publication, entitled “Wetlands in Mesoamerica,” summarizing the importance of the wetlands and describing the 25 Ramsar sites in Mesoamerica at that moment.

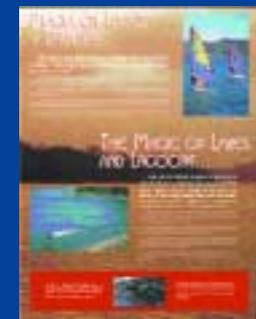
In general, Central America’s participation was resounding during the Seventh Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention. The region generated a proposal to review policies and legislation on wetlands in each country, promote economic valuation of these ecosystems and foment economic incentives for their wise use.



Special poster



Book prepared for the conference



Other posters



Primitivist paintings by artists from Solentiname, Nicaragua



Painting: Deidre Hyde

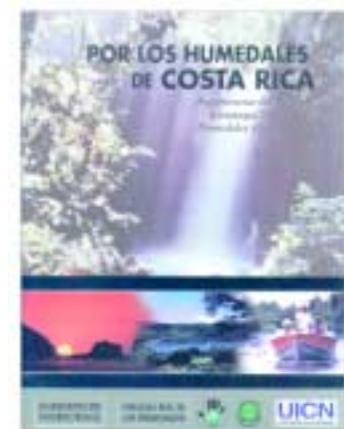
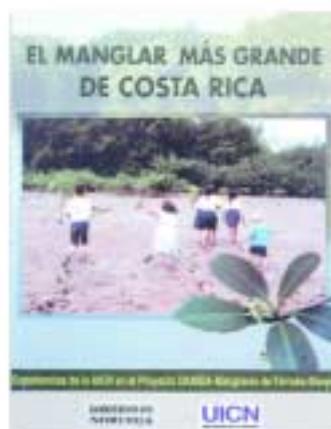
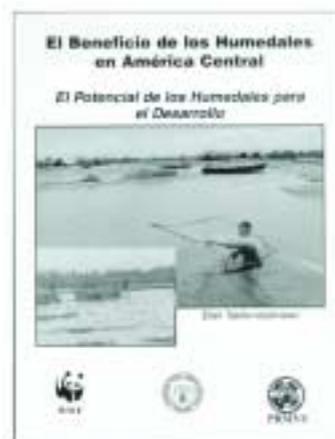
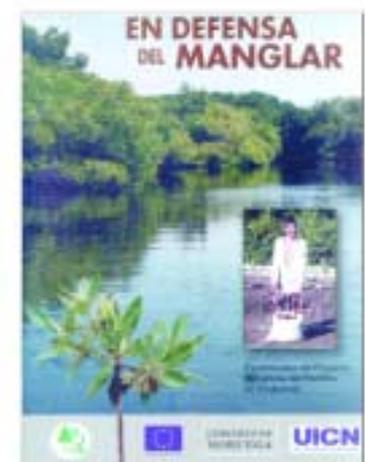
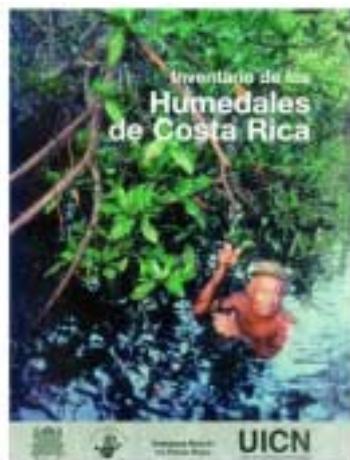
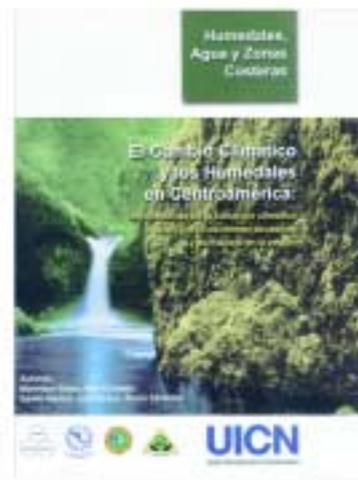
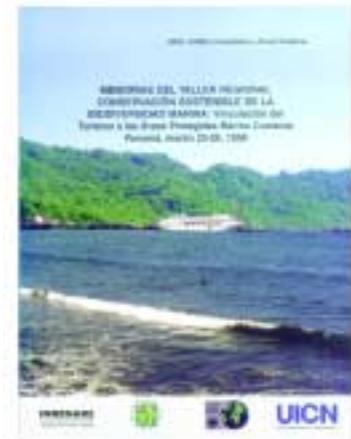
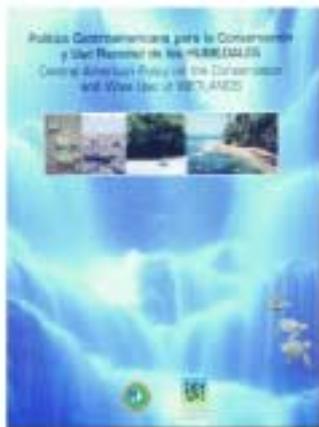
The Conference demonstrated that one of the vast tasks IUCN had taken on in Mesoamerica in the late eighties had been worthwhile: promoting adhesion of the region's nations to the Wetlands Convention (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), or the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance." Although they recognized the existence of wetlands of international importance in the region, none of the countries had signed the convention when the IUCN-Mesoamerica Wetlands Program was created. Today all of the countries have adhered to the convention and there are more than 85 sites included in the Ramsar list, including national parks, biological reserves and forests, wildlife refuges and a nature sanctuary.

The Seventh Conference of the Ramsar Convention concluded the awakening of Mesoamerica's enthusiasm for the theme of wetlands and gave greater momentum to what would be the design of the first regional wetlands policy in the world: the Central American Policy for the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands, formalized in 2002 and described further on.

With this global engagement of the Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention, Mesoamerica gave the final touch to a decade of intensive work in the theme of wetlands, and a magnificent close to the end of the century. The environmental ministries have been good partners for IUCN, as have the NGOs, universities and Union members, who gave a great deal with no remuneration. Other partners are connected more with the Central American Integration System (SICA), such as the Regional Committee for Water Resources (CRRH), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the OAS Water Resources Network and the Centro para Desastres Naturales (CEPREDENAC), among others.

Poster prepared by IUCN-Mesoamerica's Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Thematic Area for the 1999 Ramsar Conference, held in Central America

A Sampling of Publications by the IUCN-Mesoamerica Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Area



New Paradigms in Environmental Law

Other fundamental contributions of the IUCN in Mesoamerica has been the promotion of adequate legislation in the different environmental areas and of the countries' signature to and compliance with the major international agreements in environment.

The decade of the nineties was prolific in terms of environmental laws related to water, biodiversity and framework environmental laws for Mesoamerica. In a good part of these, IUCN collaborated with the national teams that drafted them and later prepared their accompanying regulations.

IUCN began its work in environmental law in 1992 under the direction of Patricia Madrigal, a Costa Rican lawyer specializing in environmental law.

"I came into IUCN because of a judicial ruling that annulled the forestry law in Costa Rica," recalls Madrigal. "The news was reported in the papers and the ecological movement panicked. That same day they called me to a meeting at IUCN and we concluded that a program of environmental legislation had to be promoted."

With financial support from the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, located in Bonn, Germany, an assessment was made to identify people in the region with an interest in this topic. An analysis was initiated of existing environmental legislation through a series of workshops, and the process awoke an interest in the topic that continues growing today.

"We had the opportunity to be there at the right time and in the right institution to get the ball rolling for environmental law," says Madrigal. "Before then, nobody in the region was working in that field. It was after those

first meetings that organizations and professionals were formed and became active in the area. That's also when the CCAD program in environmental policy and legislation arose. The process initiated under that effort has continued on its own in the region."

In part, this snowball was set in motion with the First National Congress on Environmental Law, held in Costa Rica in August 1992, and subsequently followed by others. Another environmental lawyer, Eugenia Wo Ching, participated in those first congresses and began to get involved with the IUCN. She collaborates in the development of environmental law in Mesoamerica at the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Center (CEDARENA), an IUCN member.

"It was very positive when IUCN held the two congresses on environmental law, because they updated the environmental law community about what was going on. An effort was made to bring together specialists from all of the areas, environmental criminal law, environmental administrative law, land ordering, wildlife, forests, air..." remembers Eugenia Wo Ching.

In addition to promoting legal order in the environmental arena, throughout the 1990s IUCN supported the design and approval of specific laws, such as the Law on Biodiversity of Costa Rica.

Costa Rica's Law on Biodiversity was the first in the world conceived as such, and was more than two years in the making. The process was originally spearheaded by the Environmental Commission of the Costa Rican Congress, with technical support from IUCN and very extensive citizen participation.



The main international conventions on environment, new laws on biodiversity and an active Environmental Law Commission in Mesoamerica exemplify the fruits of IUCN's efforts in the sphere of environmental law.



Photo: Marco Calvo



Three thousand copies of the first draft of this law were distributed at the national level to elicit observations. To generate opinion, workshops were organized, along with trips to three sample communities to broaden consultation, and debates were organized in major national universities. When the law was finally presented in the legislature, in June 1996, around 250 people attended, almost half from rural zones. A special drafting committee was formed at that moment to improve and further enrich the law project. The Advisory Commission on Biodiversity (CONABIO) played an important role in this group, along with other actors who joined the process. The Law on Biodiversity of Costa Rica was ultimately passed in 1998.

The environmental lawyers of Mesoamerica, organized in the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, are analyzing innovative issues such as the law of the sea, legislation on water, access to genetic resources and climate change.



A similar process took place in Panama with the drafting of the Law on Wildlife Conservation, approved in late 1995. The formulation of regulations subsequent to the law was also highly participatory, giving rise to the creation of the National Wildlife Commission in 1996.

In Nicaragua, IUCN also collaborated in conducting an institutional legal assessment of biodiversity that would later serve as the foundation for drafting the country's future Law on Biodiversity. That was also when Mesoamerica obtained its first vice-chairmanship of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, with Grethel Aguilar, a Costa Rican lawyer, chosen for the post.

With the entry of Grethel Aguilar, in 1996, the Commission on Environmental Law was decisively reactivated in Mesoamerica. One of its first activities was to support the drafting of Nicaragua's Law on Biodiversity.

"Many members of the Commission on Environmental Law participated as a multidisciplinary team to support the Government of Nicaragua in drawing up this draft of the law. It was a very valuable process in which Commission specialists from Mexico, Peru, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Guatemala contributed," recalls Aguilar.

The work of the Commission on Environmental Law flourished in Mesoamerica during the following years. The number of Commission members rose from 19, in 1996, to 62, in 2002, forming a network of highly experienced volunteers. An environmental law program for Mesoamerica was formulated, along with a proposal to collaborate actively with regional academic formation in the field of environmental law.

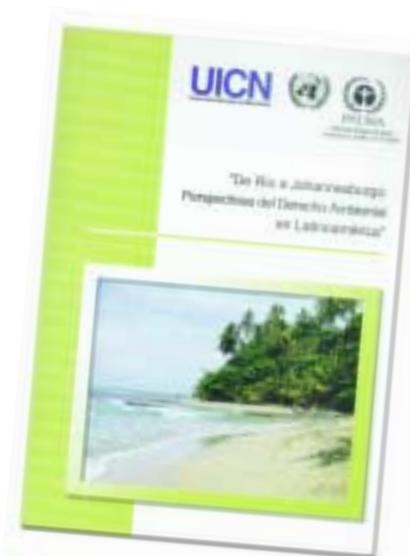
Another product of this intellectual effervescence was a publication on advances in environmental law from Rio

'92 to Johannesburg 2002, in which several Commission members participated with highly innovative articles on such themes as access to genetic resources, the law of the sea, and the legal implications of the Puebla-Panama Plan.

The IUCN program of environmental law, as a crosscutting theme in all of the different activities and aspects of sustainable development, has been a main actor in providing technical support for governments and civil society. Efforts have included participation in the Regional Wetlands Policy, the agreement for strengthening of environmental impact assessment in Central America, sustainable development of fishery resources, and tourism and protected transboundary marine areas in the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System.

But without a doubt, IUCN's greatest contribution in the field of environmental law lie in its promotion of international environmental agreements, as Grethel Aguilar succinctly states: "IUCN has had one of the most important roles in the history of environmental law, because the drafts of the main international agreements on environment have come from within the Union, from its Environmental Law Program and from the Commission on Environmental Law. This has included the draft of the Convention on Biological Diversity, support for the drafting of the Ramsar Convention and working together to draft the Convention on Climate Change, as some of the main ones."

Currently, all of IUCN-Mesoamerica in association with the CCAD, UNEP and other entities, support the countries in complying with these agreements, as does the Commission on Environmental Law. Simultaneously, new themes in environmental law are being profiled: legislation related to water, access to genetic resources, seas and climate change, to mention a few in which the IUCN is providing support in Mesoamerica.



More Environmental Policy

Generating and influencing environmental policy has been another vital line of work for the IUCN in Mesoamerica.

The Regional Wetlands Policy and the Gender Equity Policy, already mentioned, are the main exponents of the policy work IUCN has helped develop in the region to facilitate environmental decision making.

But activities have also included analysis of major themes of concern to the region, with support from the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP).

Security and the environment, trade and the environment, and the general course of environmental policy in the Mesoamerican region have been topics of debate in workshops and meetings with the participation of the CEESP, the Secretariat and IUCN Members in Mesoamerica.

Convoked by the IUCN, environmental specialists from all over the region met in July 1999, in San José, Costa Rica, and formed the Regional Policies Network with the support of the CEESP, the IUCN Global Policies Initiative and the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee. This network decided to focus on three central themes: international agreements, trade and environment and security and environment.

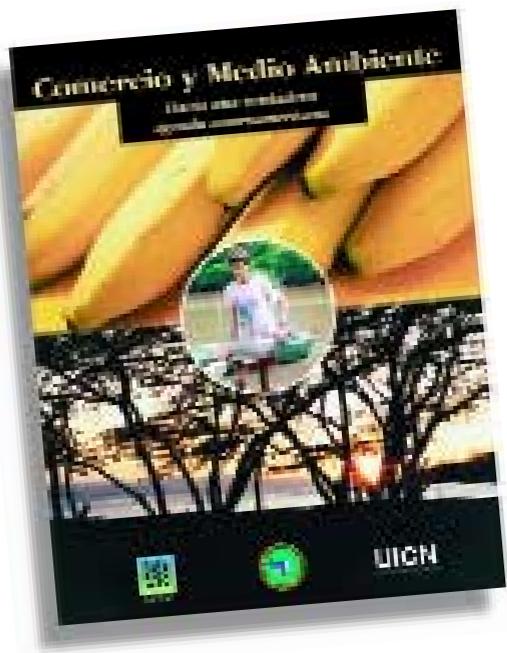
That same month, a second extremely important meeting for the region took place, this time in San Salvador: the Regional Forum on Trade and the Environment, organized by the CCAD, IUCN-Mesoamerica, the IUCN Policies Commission and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

This forum generated recommendations by a high-level group on how Central America could work in the theme of trade and environment. These recommendations and an analysis of the Central American situation within the dynamics of international trade were compiled in the book, "Trade and Environment: Toward a True Central American Agenda" (*Comercio y Medio Ambiente: hacia una verdadera agenda centroamericana*), published by IUCN in 1999.

"These meetings marked the launching of IUCN's new sphere of influencing in non-traditional themes supremely important for the state of the environment and for environmental policies in the region," says Pascal Girot, Vice-Chair for Mesoamerica of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) from 1998 to 2001.

"Much of the pressure on the environment derives from trade policy. It is necessary to develop the theme of environment in the free trade treaties Central America is negotiating and within the context of the trade opening process," adds Girot.

Security and environment is another theme in which the IUCN has worked to generate policies, and for which the IUCN-Mesoamerica prepared certain positions for the World Conservation Congress held in Amman, Jordan, in 2000. "Many conflicts in Latin America revolve around shared natural resources, transboundary watersheds, moving and trafficking of threatened species, illegal fishing and sea rights," explains Girot. "For this and other issues, building the capacity of IUCN-Mesoamerica members to influence policy is essential," urges Pascal Girot.



Policies for the Environment
An analysis of the Central American situation in the dynamics of international trade was compiled in *Comercio y Medio Ambiente*, an IUCN book published in 1999 to help guide decision-making and environmental policy formation in Mesoamerica.

Photos: IUCN and Jorge Jenkins



Photo: Adrian Hepworth



Photo: Iván Estribi



PART III

The Branches Extend

IUCN Members in Mesoamerica

The Branches of the Tree

They manage protected areas, generate environmental policies, conduct research, provide environmental education, conserve wildlife, produce appropriate technology, develop ecological tourism, foment environmental law and, one in all, defend basic principles: conservation and sustainable development. These are the IUCN members in Mesoamerica, a total of 80 organizations as of March 2004, representing a wide range of fields related to environmental action.

IUCN membership in Mesoamerica is a painter's palette with a vast spectrum of different social, political and economic sectors, from environmental NGOs to international agencies, academic institutions, research centers, government agencies.

"We have some of the best organizations in each country in terms of their capacity of convocation or their scientific or technical quality," assures Jesús Cisneros, Coordinator of the Membership Liaison Unit in Mesoamerica.

Taken separately, every one of the organizations generates intensive activity in environment and is highly recognized and respected at the national and regional level. Each IUCN member is a story of toil, diligence and achievement. But as a group, this array of environmental partners also shares a common history that has unfolded hand in hand with the growth and evolution of IUCN in Mesoamerica. They are trees in IUCN's Mesoamerican forest whose branches have been extending and joining together to bear an abundance of fruit in the form of projects, initiatives, organisms, resolutions and policies of enormous importance for the region.

This joint history goes back to 1992, when the first meeting of IUCN members in Central America was held in Guatemala. At the second such meeting, taking place in Panama, in 1993, it was decided to create the Regional Members Committee. Since then, members have been highly successful in initiating a comprehensive process of regional and national organization. This has made it possible for them to meet, make decisions and push for unified actions at regional and world fora, and thus influence IUCN policies and orientations at the global level. They created the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee, comprised of representatives from all the countries and from all of the IUCN commissions, to replace the former Regional Members Committee. They also established national members committees in each country and generated resolutions at the last two world conservation congresses, held in Montreal, Canada, in 1996, and in Amman, Jordan, in 2000.

Together with the Secretariat and IUCN commissions in the region, IUCN members in Mesoamerica also prepared two important road maps setting the course for this environmental community: the Mesoamerican Programs of the IUCN, consisting of a pair of exhaustive regional work plans, the first for the 1997-2000 quadrennium and the second for the 2001-2004 period.

All these products have been the result of painstaking work and reflection about what it means to be a member of the IUCN and what role these members should play.

As of March 2004, IUCN has
80 member organizations in
Mesoamerica, representing a
vast spectrum of
environmental activity.

Members Assume Their Role

The main function IUCN members assume as a group is to speak for the environmental interests of Mesoamerica before the international community, and it is under this vision that the Mesoamerican Committee of IUCN is structured.

“Since each of us has our national niche, probably not related to international action, we are inspired by IUCN’s worldwide prestige in conservation and sustainable use of the environment and by being a part of a global effort,” explains Grethel Aguilar, former Chair of the Members Committee in Costa Rica. “For all of the organizations, it is very important to have the opportunity to express ourselves in a common form within the Union, as a national committee and as a regional group of members,” adds Aguilar.

In a totally voluntary way, without remuneration, and in keeping with their dedication as environmentalists, IUCN members initiated a unique process in the world, which was to influence, as members, the establishment of organizational structures and the formulation of bylaws that would orient and given weight to their joint activities.

“We worked hard on the bylaws of the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee. Those bylaws state the rights and obligations of members in the region and their relation with each national committee and with the regional office. They tell us what the limits are, and opportunities within IUCN. This work took over a year of sessions,” recalls Grethel Aguilar, who asserts that the prior experience of designing the bylaws of the National Members Committee of Costa Rica was very helpful in orienting regional work.

Nowadays, Mesoamerica is one of the most advanced regions within the IUCN structure in terms of membership organization. The member organizations in this part of the world are not only concerned about creating structures for action, but also in preparing strategies and programs of work with concrete goals and objectives.



Photo: Enrique Lahmann



Photo: Marco Calvo

Organization and Commitment

The leadership and interest of IUCN members in Mesoamerica has facilitated consolidation of the Union’s joint work in this part of the world, and made it possible to draft consensual work programs pertinent to the particular problems of this region.

Top: Members of IUCN’s Regional Committee for Mesoamerica at the Copan ruins, Honduras. Bottom: Meeting between IUCN Director General, Achim Steiner, and the Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Environment in Central America during the 6th Mesoamerican Forum of the IUCN in 2003.

IUCN's Mesoamerican members have developed an organizational process that is unique in the world, creating structures such as the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee, and generating a unified four-year program of work for the three pillars of the Union.

The first great joint effort was the design of the 1995-2000 Strategic Plan, approved in 1994. This plan oriented the creation of an institutional program with four key thematic areas: wetlands and coastal and marine areas, forests, wildlife and protected areas. These thematic areas were contemplated with others of an operational nature: social, administrative, environmental legislation, environmental education and environmental impact assessment.

In this fashion, IUCN in Mesoamerica determined in what direction it would focus its efforts as a group, closing ranks among members, the secretariat and the commissions, considered the three pillars of the Union.

For its projection toward the region, four organisms were recognized: the regional directorate, the liaison unit, the thematic areas and the national members committees. The last of these later acquired regional expression in the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee, born in 1996.

Mesoamerican Program: the Regional Trunk

The 1995-2000 Strategic Plan was the basis for what could be considered the "Mesoamerican trunk" of IUCN today: the regional work programs, inspired by the Caring for the Earth strategy. These programs broke with traditional practice in the Union, where the triennial programs were prepared exclusively by the Secretariat. This time things were done differently: Mesoamerica opened up a process of totally open participation for members and specialists commissions in the region.

Together, the members, secretariat and IUCN commissions have defined two programs orienting their activities: the 1997-2000 Mesoamerican Program and the 2001-2004 Mesoamerican Program. At this writing, work had already begun as well on the 2005-2008 Mesoamerican Program.

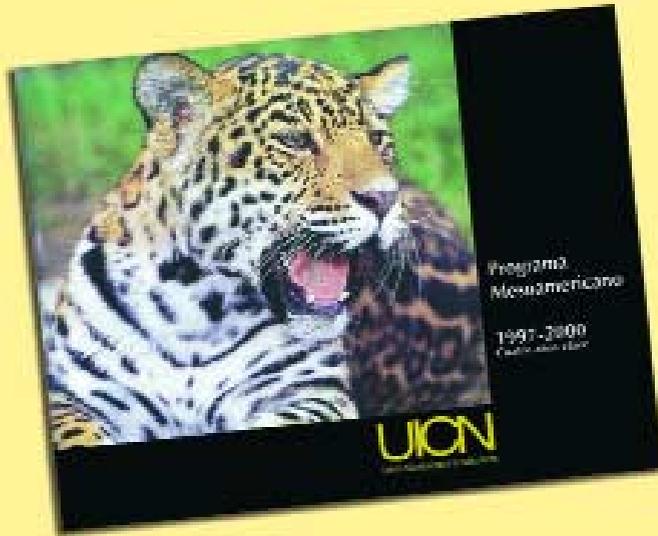
"I think the main achievement of the membership is having these operational plans, facilitated by the IUCN Regional Directorate. In these programs, the three pillars of the Union interact efficiently and with a great deal of synergy, resulting in a greater possibility for conservation in Mesoamerica," states Nicaraguan engineer Justo Pastor Núñez, Chairman of the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee from 1996 until July 2003.

The first IUCN Mesoamerican Program for 1997-2000 was more political in nature, and set three goals:

1. Influence policies related to conservation at the local, national and regional level;
2. Build the capacity of the Union Members, Commissions and Secretariat in the region, as well as those of associated organizations and the local communities where specific actions are underway; and
3. Promote and facilitate communication among the different sectors mentioned and with other institutions in order to strengthen the Mesoamerican Agenda.

The second Mesoamerican program for 2001-2004 goes beyond the political and proposes converging efforts around technical processes that the region needs to foment. It defines critical priority areas for action, with the aim of turning these into scenarios of sustainable development. There is an emphasis on ensuring that the work plan maintains congruence with efforts to eradicate poverty and to advance economic growth in the region, under a renewed vision of equity and sustainability. There is also an insistence that the Mesoamerican program coincide with global IUCN policies and on strategic linkage with its Global Program.

The First Two Mesoamerican Programs



"This was a very well thought out program that arose in response to the deepest concerns about the environment in Mesoamerica," states Enrique Lahmann, Regional Director of IUCN-Mesoamerica.

The three main objectives of the 2001-2004 Program are to:

1. Build the technical and administrative capacity of IUCN in the region (members, commissions and secretariat) in order to carry out its mission: "Strengthen regional alliances to conserve the integrity and diversity of Nature in Mesoamerica, and ensure that all use of natural resources is socially equitable and ecologically sustainable."
2. Begin to see evidence of significant improvements in the management of key ecosystems in Mesoamerica (freshwater, coastal-marine and forest ecosystems)
3. Make advances in achieving coherence among international agreements, policies and regional agreements, policies and national legislation and their application in the corresponding spheres

With these shared objectives and rules of the game, IUCN members in Mesoamerica feel more identified as a group and are moving in a single direction, convinced it is the right one. "Today the members have different spheres of action and ways of working and the strengths of each need to be taken advantage of. Now both the members and the Regional Office of the IUCN base their planning on the same Mesoamerican program and do so more simultaneously, leading to a greater possibility of joint actions," states Eugenia Wo Ching, who chaired the Costa Rica Members Committee from 1996 to 2000.

This joint planning and action has lent force to the IUCN membership in Mesoamerica as a network. "We have been working together now for almost 15 years, and this in itself is an achievement. The key is members' willingness to interact as a network," affirms Justo Pastor Núñez, former Chairman of the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee.

Joint action has been projected into the international sphere, where IUCN members in Mesoamerica have presented themselves as an active and visionary group with capacity for convocation.

Montreal and Amman: Mesoamerica before the world

The IUCN members in Mesoamerica walked onto Canadian soil in October 1996 with a grand objective in mind: to reform Union bylaws during what would be both the First World Conservation Congress and the IUCN General Assembly, at the same time. Organizations making up IUCN all over the world attended this global engagement in Montreal, Canada, where membership history was about to change.

The reform to bylaws would allow members of the different regions in which the IUCN is organized to form intermediate structures recognized officially by the Union: National and Regional Members Committees and Regional Fora of Members (periodic encounters of the membership.)

The proposal was approved at the World Congress, reaffirming a process toward greater internal leadership by Union membership that had been growing in the past decade.

Mesoamerican members showed the world a group leadership that had been consolidating since 1993, and which was confirmed at the historic forum of Tepozotlán, Mexico, during the Fourth Encounter of IUCN-Mesoamerican Members in 1996, prior to the First World Conservation Congress.

"It was in Mexico that the lines were permanently drawn. That was when the intermediate membership structures were approved at the Mesoamerican level, along with an agreement to endorse a change in the global IUCN bylaws during the Montreal congress. It was members taking on the role that corresponded to them. It was saying that members have an important role in this organization and that they wanted their own spaces," explains Jesús Cisneros, Coordinator of the Membership Liaison Unit in Mesoamerica.

In Montreal, the Mesoamericans also proposed that IUCN establish an official global policy on gender equity, an innovative theme for the Union. Likewise, they attained official approval for the first 1997-2000 Mesoamerican Program of the IUCN.

Back from Canada and with the resolutions approved, the first step was to establish the IUCN Mesoamerican Committee and, one by one, proceed to formalize the national members committee in each country. The 1997-2000 Mesoamerican Program was launched simultaneously, along with an ongoing monitoring program to evaluate follow through.

Regional IUCN membership was becoming more and more cohesive under this type of structure, and in 1998 the members (54 in all at that time) were preparing a proposal on action for the new millennium on the occasion of the Union's 50th anniversary. The region was well represented in terms of the members that traveled to Fontainebleau, France, where the IUCN's 50th year would be officially celebrated in November 1998. The proposal they took with them was entitled, "The Mesoamerican Challenge" and expressed a commitment to five general areas of work: to carry out a crusade for biodiversity, turn Mesoamerica into a scenario of sustainable development, promote the concept of ecological citizenry, foment a political style incorporating environmental vision and continue to endorse the development of a science and creativity with ethics.

In 1999, the regional IUCN members, commissions and secretariat again met in plenary, this time at the 5th Mesoamerican Forum of the IUCN, held in Guatemala City on October 3-7. At this forum, participants took stock of the work executed over the course of the quadrennium and prepared the resolutions that would be presented at the 2nd World Conservation Congress

**IUCN member organizations
in Mesoamerica share a
common and voluntary
dream, willing to take on the
challenges of the new
millennium with cutting-
edge proposals.**

planned for the year 2000 in Amman, Jordan. Drafting of the 2001-2004 Mesoamerican Program also began at this juncture.

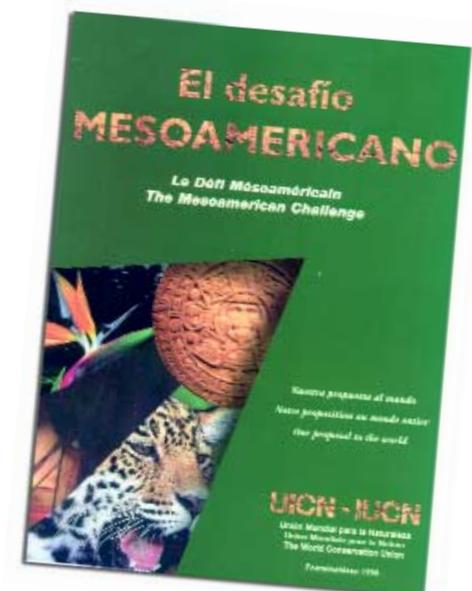
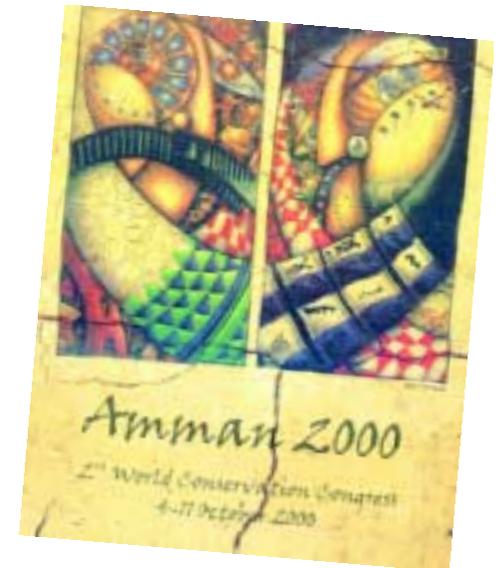
The sizeable delegation from Mesoamerica arrived in Jordanian soil in October 2000 with 20 resolutions and recommendations under their arm, which they would defend as a group, demonstrating to the world the level of organization and experience gained by the region during the last quadrennium of the 20th century. The resolutions presented by Mesoamerica aimed at strengthening the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor; controlling mining and oil drilling in the protected areas of the Mesoamerican countries, reinforcing environmental education within the Mesoamerican program and addressing environmental management problems in zones such as the Darien Biosphere in Panama, the Solentiname Archipelago in Nicaragua and the El Jocotal complex in El Salvador; among other actions.

“Our best work as membership up to the year 2000 was our participation in the Amman Congress, because we prepared many resolutions, we defended them as a region and we were there to make declarations at the right moment,” says Eugenia Wo Ching, who attended and participated actively at the Amman Congress in representation of CEDARENA (IUCN member) and the IUCN Members Committee in Costa Rica.

At the Congress in Jordan, Mesoamerica also obtained ratification of the IUCN Global Gender Equity Policy, with Mesoamerican Lorena Aguilar named global advisor in this theme. Approval was likewise secured for the 2001-2004 Mesoamerican Program.

The world encounter of IUCN members in Amman also served as the stage for Mesoamerica’s presentation before the international community of one of its most important initiatives in the last fifteen years: the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project. A special event had been organized for this purpose and was presided by the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) with the support of IUCN-Mesoamerica. The environmental ministers of Central America attended the presentation, accompanied by the president of IUCN, Yolanda Kakabadse, and the international community received the MBC proposal with great interest.

As one millennium concluded and another began, IUCN members in Mesoamerica signed off one of the first pages of their history with a spectacular flourish and returned to their countries, satisfied and convinced that their new proposals to the world were both useful and feasible. With their spirits renewed, Mesoamerican members continued their labor with a greater sense of responsibility, aware that they were breaking new ground in many fields.



Membership at the Cutting Edge

“I am convinced that the membership in Mesoamerica is at the cutting edge in terms of IUCN and in the world. We are the only ones with this type of structure, and we have a unified program that arose from the three pillars of the Union. IUCN is trying to adopt our form of working with members at the global level and establish it in other countries of the world. Member committees such as that of Spain are interacting with us and supporting our process, as are IUCN members in Africa,” states Justo Pastor Núñez, first Chairman of the Mesoamerican Committee of the IUCN.

Overall, there is a recognition that membership work in Mesoamerica has made an important contribution to the so-called “regionalization” of the IUCN, which consists of giving regional actors greater leadership and opportunity to define Union policies and action in terms of both their respective region and at the global level.

“The Mesoamerican region has played a primordial, if not the main role within the context of IUCN regionalization, because the exercise carried out here—with all of its good things and bad things—has not taken place in any other region of the world. But the effort has been made and it will be continued. If there is a region that has put IUCN systems to the test as a Union and has proposed to unite its membership, strengthen it and make the most of it, that is Mesoamerica,” asserts Grethel Aguilar, former Chairwoman of the Costa Rica Members Committee.

“The Regional Directorate has a genuine interest in strengthening the membership and more channels have been opened up for working together; we need to continue along this line and be convinced that it is worth it, that members are a goldmine of action and knowledge,” stresses Justo Pastor Núñez.

“Our work programs have been better and better over the years, and our evaluations show that the members committees are working a great deal better,” expressed Julio Obiols, of the IUCN Members Committee in Guatemala.

IUCN membership in Mesoamerica currently (as March of 2004) comprises 80 organizations that share a common dream, a dream derived not only from the mainstream environmental movement but also from social movements operating in other arenas, such as community development, agricultural development and other themes.

In July 2003, these members met at El Zamorano, Honduras, in the 6th Mesoamerican Forum. There, accompanied by IUCN Director General, Achim Steiner, they defined their objectives and proposals for the next World Conservation Congress scheduled for October 2004, in Bangkok, Thailand.

On this occasion two additional countries joined the Mesoamerican Forum, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and were officially ratified as new member countries of the Regional IUCN Office in Mesoamerica. This paves the way for what will be the first IUCN program in the Caribbean. Work began in mid-2003 and signifies a diversification of the activities, objectives and goals of IUCN in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean—a diversification and growth that appears to be moving full steam ahead.

“The IUCN has inspired many organizations with another type of agenda to integrate the environmental variable in a responsible and creative way. It is truly extraordinary that at the onset of the 21st century, organizations are

IUCN member organizations in Mesoamerica share a common and voluntary dream, willing to take on the challenges of the new millennium with cutting-edge proposals.



Photo: Marco Calvo

answering a call to share the noble mission of IUCN in a totally voluntary way, because they like it, it appeals to them...it is interesting that in such a globalized and materialized world, there are still organizations that hear the call and join in," says Jesús Cisneros.

With this array of cutting-edge organizations genuinely concerned about sustainable development and with extensive knowledge in different fields, IUCN is assuming the challenges posed by the new millennium, ready to respond with high-level science and social awareness.

Looking Ahead

IUCN members in Mesoamerica held their 6th Mesoamerican Forum in August 2003, in Honduras. IUCN Director General, Achim Steiner, accompanied them on this occasion.

The Entire IUCN Network in Mesoamerica
80 Members in 10 Countries as of 2004



IUCN
The World Conservation Union

The Entire IUCN Network in Mesoamerica

80 Members in 10 Countries (as of March 2004)

BELIZE (3)

Belize Alliance of Conservation NGOs,
BACONGO (bacongo@btl.net)
Belize Audubon Society, BAS
(www.belizeaudubon.org)
Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Centre
(belizezoo@btl.net)

COSTA RICA (14)

Asociación ANAI (www.anaicr.org)
Asociación de Organizaciones del Corredor
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Asociación Ecológica de Paquera, Lepanto y
Cóbano, ASEPALECO (www.asepaleco.org)
Asociación Mesa Nacional Campesina, MNC
(www.mesanacionalcampesina.org)
Asociación Preservacionista de Flora y Fauna
Silvestre, APREFLOFAS
(www.preserveplanet.org)
Asociación de Voluntariado, Investigación y
Desarrollo Ambiental (VIDA) (vida@vida.org)
Centro de Capacitación del Noratlántico
ACECAN
Earth Council (www.ecouncil.ac.cr)
Environmental and Natural Resources Law
Center, CEDARENA (cedarena@racsa.co.cr)
Fundación Acceso (www.acceso.or.cr)
Fundación Café Forestal, COCAFE
(www.coccafe.com/cafeforestal)
Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in
Agriculture, IICA (www.iica.ac.cr)
Ministry of Environment and Energy, MINAE
(www.minae.go.cr)
Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher
Education Center, CATIE (www.catie.ac.cr)

CUBA (2)

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Environment, CITMA-National Center for
Protected Areas (gisel@ama.cu)
(rey@ama.cu)
Sociedad Cubana para la Protección del Medio
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Asociación Montecristo
(aso_montecristo@yahoo.es)
Asociación Salvadoreña Pro-Salud Rural,
ASAPROSAR
(www.thegreenresource.com/asaprosar)
Centro de Protección para Desastres,
CEPRODE (direccion@ceprode.org.sv)
Fundación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo y
Humanismo Maquillishuatl, FUMA
(Fuma.org@telemovil.net)
Fundación para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo
Comunal de El Salvador, CORDES
(cordes.central@salnet)
SalvaNatura (www.salvanatura.org)
Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña, UNES
(www.unes.org.sv)

GUATEMALA (13)

Asociación Amigos del Bosque
(www.rds.org.gt/amigosdelbosque)
Asociación Guatemalteca para la Conservación
Natural, Cãnankax (www.rds.org/canankax)
Asociación para la Recuperación de Manejo y
Saneamiento Ambiental, ARMSA
(armsa@intelnet.net.gt)
Asociación Rescate y Conservación de Vida
Silvestre, ARCAS (www.arcasguatemala.com)
Centro Mesoamericano de Estudios sobre
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Defensores de la Naturaleza
(www.defensores.org.gt)
Fundación del Bosque Tropical, FBT
(www.tropicalinforest.org)
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Fundación para la Conservación del Medio
Ambiente y los Recursos Naturales Mario Dary
Rivera, FUNDARY (www.fundary.manabique)
Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la
Conservación, FUNDAECO
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(www.fundacion-educa.org)
Fundación para la Protección de Lancetilla,
Punta Sal y Texiguat, PROLANSTATE
(www.prolansate.org)
Fundación Vida (fundvida@sdnhon.org.hn)
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Fundación para la Conservación de los
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Fundación PROMAR (www.promar.m20.com)
National Environmental Authority, ANAM
(www.anam.gob.pa)
Panama Audubon Society, SAP
(www.panamaudubon.com)
Smithsonian Foundation of Panama
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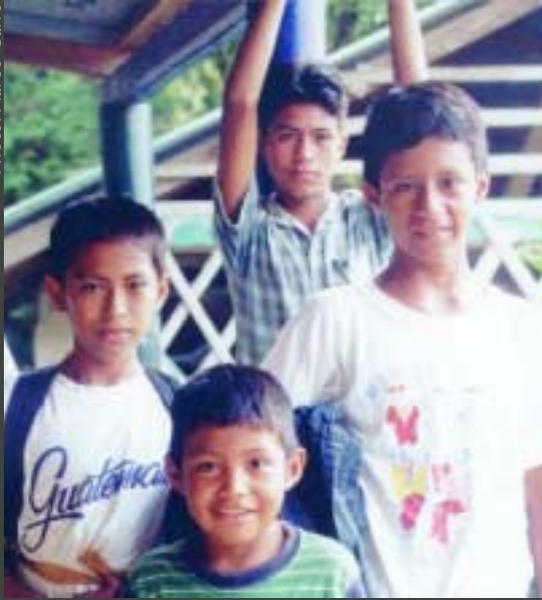
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Photo: Adrian Hepworth

Photo: Marco Calvo



PART IV

Fertilizing the New forest

IUCN-Mesoamerica Faces the Future

The New Environmental Agendas

A marked process of urbanization is taking place all over the region. Fewer people live in the country and the type of pressure on resources is changing. The great polemical issues of the eighties, such as banana cultivation and unshaded coffee, have fallen by the wayside. People are migrating to the cities, leaving the land abandoned. Meanwhile, globalization and new economic activities stress the environment, since clean technologies are the exception rather than the rule in many productive sectors. Problems that never existed before, such as pollution and climate change, have been worsened by urbanization and industrialization.

Responding to this new situation, in recent years the IUCN has initiated a series of projects and initiatives in strategic or relatively new areas, such as environmental impact assessment, climate change and access to genetic resources. It has also helped design the policies and strategies needed to guide the next decades of work in the areas of water, wetlands and forestry development, such as the Global Water and Nature Initiative (Mesoamerican chapter), the Regional Wetlands Policy and the Central American Forestry Strategy.

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in South Africa, served as a showcase where the Mesoamerican countries, supported by IUCN, presented their environmental vision for the new millennium and concrete commitments regarding the work to come. This vision and the commitments reflect an evolution of environmental thinking in the region, the intellectual maturity with which it is addressing the theme of sustainable development, on-the-ground capacity to implement actions and strategies, and its level of awareness about new environmental problems.

IUCN helped the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) to prepare Central America's report for the summit, balancing achievements against matters still pending since Rio '92. Once again, IUCN accompanied the region to conclude one period and plan the next, based on fresh and renewed environmental thinking.

Mesoamerica in Johannesburg 2002

On October 26, 2002, the Central American countries got off to a great start in their participation at the World Summit on Sustainable Development through a formal presentation of its attractive report on progress and events in the region over the ten years since the first Earth Summit (Rio '92).

The IUCN Environmental Centre in Johannesburg was the stage for this important occasion, headed by CCAD Acting Chairman and Costa Rica's Minister of Environment at that time, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.

"We can state with satisfaction that sustainable development forms part of the political agenda of our region. We have signed major international agreements on environment, we have an Alliance for Sustainable Development since 1994, we are carrying out the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Initiative and we are

New environmental themes concern Mesoamerica, and IUCN is already working on them. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development provided a framework for Central America to set forth its future commitments in the sphere of environment.

promoting environmental management in all sectors, along with other commitments," stated Rodríguez during his presentation.

In addition to tracing the road Central America had traveled from Río 92 to Johannesburg 2002, this publication closed with a section on environmental commitments and priority themes for the region in the next decades. These commitments revolved around six key areas: water and health, biodiversity, energy, health, agriculture and policies for sustainable development.

The Central American report to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development was prepared by CCAD with technical support from IUCN-Mesoamerica and published thanks to funding from several cooperation agencies. Mauricio Castro, Executive Secretary of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, describes the teamwork between CCAD and IUCN in the following way:

"The work prepared for Johannesburg was a reflection of how a regional organization utilizes the qualities and benefits of an international organism such as the IUCN. We made the presentation in IUCN facilities and demonstrated that Central America (governments and civil society) work with IUCN day after day, shoulder to shoulder. There we presented what the government and the civil society of Central America has accomplished with the technical support of IUCN, and everyone was equal. We were a team."

IUCN is also ready to form a team with CCAD, the governments of the region, the NGOs and other civil society bodies so that Central America can follow through on commitments acquired at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and thus contribute to achieving the stated goals.

Photo: Gandhi Montoya



Central America Before the World

The Central American countries presented a joint report before the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in South Africa. IUCN supported the environmental ministers and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) in drafting and presenting this report to the international community.

Top: Rigobertha Menchú, 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, shows the report presented by Central America

Bottom: Achim Steiner, Director General de IUCN; Yolanda Kakabadse, President of IUCN; Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, Minister of Environment of Costa Rica, and Víctor Lichtinger, former Secretary of Natural Resources of Mexico (first row) during the presentation of the report.



Photo: Enrique Lahmann

Environmental Impact Assessment

CCAD and IUCN have also worked as a team in the theme of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). From 2001 to 2003, they executed the first phase of a new, groundbreaking project in the field of environmental impact in the region: the Central American EIA Project of the CCAD-IUCN-Government of the Netherlands.

This project led to the reactivation of the Technical Committee for Environmental Impact Assessment in Central America, (CTEIA), comprised of the EIA directors in each of the Central American countries. In a brief time and with much enthusiasm, the Committee laid the foundations and accelerated the harmonization and strengthening of EIA systems in the region's countries. With support from the Project, the CTEIA held six regional meetings between 2002 and 2003 to coordinate important activities for advancing EIA in Central America, thus promoting decision-making that encourages environmentally responsible development.

To start, the EIA directors reviewed what would be the "Central American EIA Action Plan," approved by the environmental ministers in July 2002, and set forth nine steps for strengthening and modernizing EIAs in Central America.

"Other important products the project generated together with the countries include Guatemala's new Regulations on Environmental Impact Assessment, approved in January 2003; the EIA action plans designed in Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Guatemala, of which some components are already underway; and extensive training in Strategic Environmental Assessment, economic

valuation and public participation within the EIA process," says Grethel Aguilar, Coordinator of the EIA-Central America Project.

In effect, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is one of the most innovative themes in the region, attracting a corps of specialists from the Dutch EIA Commission and a Central American team that traveled through Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica in January 2003 to give workshops on SEA.

This successful round led to the production of a training manual entitled, "Strategic Environmental Assessment: Training for Central America," which reproduced the tips and advice provided by the Dutch specialists and made it possible to share this knowledge with countries where the course had not been given.

Another activity of great importance for the EIA process in Mesoamerica was the evaluation of the Initiative for a System of Electrical Interconnection in the Countries of Central America (SIEPAC), one of the most advanced projects of the Puebla-Panama Plan. To evaluate the SIEPAC, the EIA-Central America Project organized a mission of specialists from Holland, contacted by the International EIA Commission, (ICIA) and the Dutch EIA Commission, which visited the region in January 2003.

Keeping pace with the times, the EIA-Central America project has supported EIA authorities to analyze crucial processes taking place in the region, such as the Puebla-Panama Plan and the Free Trade Treaty with the United States. With support from Sweden, work was also carried

The EIA-Central America project of CCAD, IUCN and the Government of The Netherlands has broken new ground in the field of environmental impact in the region.

Publications by the EIA Project

out on transboundary and regional agreements so that the cumulative effects of the projects proposed can be evaluated adequately.

The numerous publications the EIA-Central America Project has produced have been of great support for all of the technical work taking place. A five-volume series entitled, "Environmental Impact Assessment for Central America," (*Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental para Centroamérica*) presents major themes concerning EIA in the region, from the state of the art of country systems, to the basic elements of strategic environmental assessment and a compilation of interesting cases in the countries. Another two very useful publications are the "Central American EIA Action Plan" (*Plan de Acción Centroamericano de EIA*) and a technical manual on EIA with general guidelines (*Manual Técnico de EIA*). There is also a series of three reports on the results of the regional meetings the EIA Technical Committee held between 2002 and 2003. All in all, 16 highly valuable technical publications were produced by the EIA-Central America Project in its first phase of implementation.

There can be no doubt that a dynamic course of work has now been marked out in the field of environmental impact assessment in Central America. The countries have sound plans and tools for continued efforts in the coming years, with IUCN support.



Reports of the EIA Technical Committee



Central American Series on EIA



Other publications

Water and Nature, With Communities

The Water and Nature Initiative, which the IUCN has already initiated in Mesoamerica as part of a global effort, is another work strategy the Union has outlined for the future.

The main aspects of the Water and Nature Initiative in Mesoamerica consist of the management and conservation of watersheds, management of the ecosystems surrounding them and civil society participation in this management and in the mitigation of environmental impacts throughout the watersheds.

As part of the 28 project profiles to be promoted globally, three of the five projects the Initiative will finance in the region during the next five years were launched in 2003. In addition, Mesoamerica drafted five more profiles, and all ten together will signify a total investment of around US\$12,750,000.

The first three projects undertaken in the region involve the ecological complex of El Imposible-Barra de Santiago, in El Salvador; the basin of the Tacaná River between Guatemala and Mexico, and a third in the basin of the Térraba-Sierpe Rivers, in Costa Rica. In all of these projects, one common denominator has been paramount: active community participation.

The comprehensive work planned in the Water and Nature Initiative stems from the Water Vision 2025, resulting from the Second World Water Forum held at The Hague in 2000. "Since then, IUCN approaches watershed management in a more comprehensive way, using an ecosystem approach and stressing freshwater resources but without excluding the coastal zone, which is just as important as the upper and middle sections. We call it the river continuum, something that should not be worked in segments if you want good watershed management," emphasizes Rocío Córdoba, Coordinator of the Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Area of IUCN-Mesoamerica.

In seeking this comprehensive approach, the IUCN Water and Nature Initiative is collaborating with other activities being carried out in the region, such as the Central America Water Plan, the wetlands policies and activities of the Global Water Partnership and others. "Our aim is to integrate the different efforts and permeate current initiatives with the ecosystem perspective," explained Córdoba.

In Central America, the renowned El Imposible-Barra de Santiago ecological complex in Ahuachapán, El Salvador, was selected as a first demonstration site in carrying out the Initiative. The project was officially launched in July 2003 under the title, "Integrated Management of Watersheds Associated with the El Imposible-Barra de Santiago Hydrological Unit."



Photo: Marco Calvo

Important Launching
Juan Marco Alvarez of IUCN member organization, SALVANATURA, stresses the importance of the Water and Nature Initiative for Mesoamerica during the launching of this initiative in 2003, in El Salvador.

There, water resources and biodiversity will be safeguarded and sustainably managed with help from the communities and in coordination with several IUCN partners in El Salvador, including the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), SalvaNATURA and Unión Ecológica Salvadoreña (UNES).

MAG will participate in the project with activities to improve farming, forestry, fishery and aquaculture practices aimed at maintaining soil quality in the project zone, thus benefiting the watershed.

The participation of neighboring communities is a fundamental component. A panel for dialogue has been functioning since early 2002, comprised of representatives from different sectors with an interest in managing El Imposible-Barra de Santiago watershed.

Community participation is also pivotal in the case of the Tacaná River watershed, shared by Mexico and Guatemala. IUCN partners in this project are the National Water Commission of Mexico (CNA), the Tapachula Committee on Drinking Water and Drainage (COAPATAP), the Watershed Council of Costa Sur de Chiapas, the Comprehensive Development Association of the Townships of the Altiplano Marquense (ADIMAM), the Governments of Guatemala and Mexico and IUCN members Sociedad de Historia Natural del Soconusco, FAUNAM-PG7 and ARMSA.

The "Conservation and Sustainable Management of the Tacaná River Watershed" project proposes actions for better management of this zone, bathed by the Coatán, Suchiate and Naranjo Rivers and one of the most important for water production in both Guatemala and Mexico. The Tacaná watershed is threatened by increasingly frequent environmental impacts, deforestation of the upper parts of the watershed, unsuitable land use,

unsustainable coffee growing practices and over-grazing, making conservation and better management urgent.

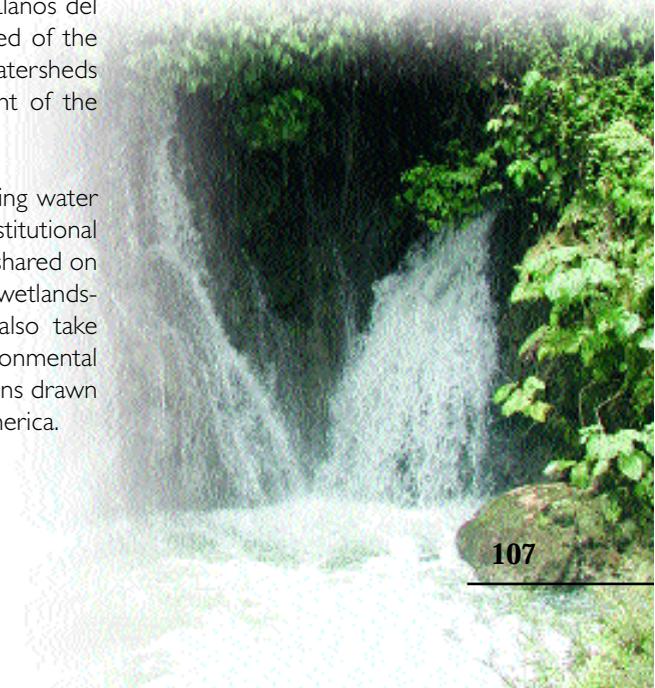
The watersheds of the Térraba-Sierpe Rivers in Costa Rica are the site of the project, "Incorporation of Economic Values of the Wetlands in the Management of River Basins." This is one of the four demonstration sites in the world where the Water and Nature Initiative has chosen to work in the theme of economic valuation of wetlands. Specifically, efforts have focused on applying economic instruments that can be used to calculate the value of the goods and services wetlands produce, identify the economic causes for loss of wetlands and determine the potential of the economic instruments to sustain conservation of wetlands and sustainable development of river basins.

The ultimate goal is to achieve a more equitable, efficient and sustainable management of wetlands and river basins by applying economic techniques and measures applied to environment as part of conservation and development policies, plans and projects.

In the future, the Water and Nature Initiative plans to work in the watersheds of Lake Güija and the Llanos del Espino Pond in El Salvador; and in the watershed of the Panama Canal, both in management of these watersheds and their ecosystems, and in the empowerment of the communities living around them.

At the regional level, work will focus on improving water resource administration, including legal and institutional aspects. Experiences will also be generated and shared on how to define priorities for the conservation of wetlands-associated biodiversity. Similar exchanges will also take place on the theme of water, food and environmental security, while also promoting a network of lessons drawn from the Water and Nature Initiative in Mesoamerica.

The Water and Nature Initiative has already been launched in Mesoamerica with three projects to improve management of watersheds and valuation of wetlands. Community participation is a key element of the initiative.



The Regional Wetlands Policy

Indisputably, the Regional Wetlands Policy is the compass orienting work in this area in Central America over the next decades. Its fundamental goal is for wetlands to be conserved and used wisely and in a coordinated and consensual way among the countries of the isthmus, with economic, social and environmental benefits for its population.

“The Regional Wetlands Policy is the greatest contribution Central America has made to the world in this theme. Many regions want to follow this example,” states Rocío Córdoba, Coordinator of the IUCN-Mesoamerica Wetlands, Water and Coastal Zones Area.

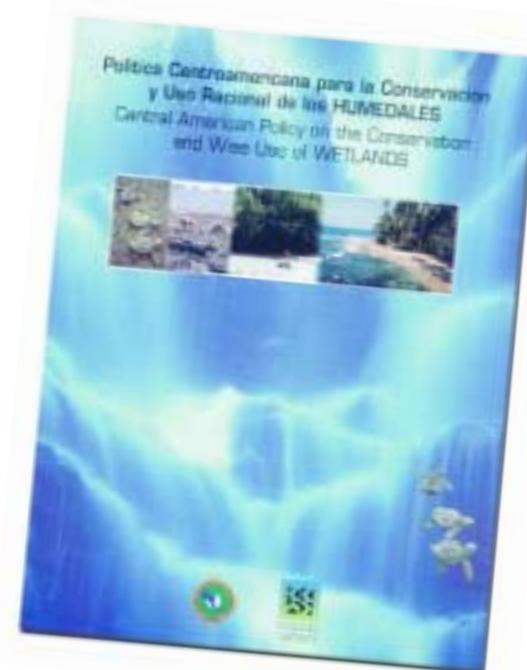
The Central American countries presented their regional policy during the 8th Conference of Parties to the International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention), held in Valencia, Spain, in November 2002.

“One of the nicest things we’ve done with the IUCN recently is being able to organize such an inspiring take-off of the Regional Wetlands Policy at the Ramsar COP in Valencia, and to see every member government of CCAD and IUCN assuming ownership of the event,” tells Mauricio Castro, Executive Secretary of CCAD. “The heads of each Central American delegation took charge of inviting the Heads of Delegations from other countries and we had a meeting with 40 people, of which 25 were Heads of Delegations. In other words, there were 25 countries present in addition to the Central American nations.”

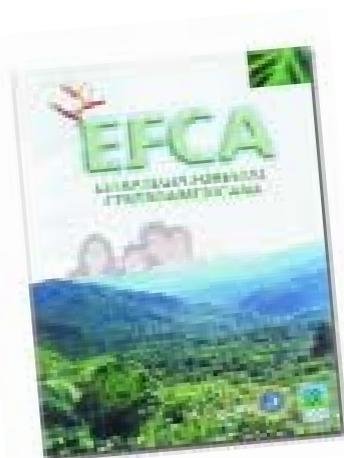
“Since we formulated this policy with IUCN support, the Director of the IUCN Global Environmental Law Programme also attended the presentation. This showed that our relation with IUCN has been global as well as regional,” points out Mauricio Castro.

This same global and horizontal relation will be maintained to put the Regional Wetlands Policy of Central America into practice in the years to come.

The Regional Wetlands Policy and the Central American Forest Policy are the compass orienting work in these areas in Central America during the next decades.



Forest Strategy for the Future



The Central American Forest Strategy (EFCA) will mark policy for forest development in the isthmus over the next 25 years. This strategy, approved in 2003, was designed by the Central American Council on Forests and Protected Areas, the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, the Regional Forest

Program of the UNDP, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with technical support from IUCN-Mesoamerica.

"EFCA represents one of the last opportunities Central America has to halt the ongoing destruction of forest resources. It is an initiative to rescue and elevate the forest policy agenda in the countries of the region," stated Jorge Rodríguez, former coordinator of the Regional Forestry Program of the United Nations Development Program (PROFOR-UNDP) and one of the main proponents of the Strategy.

The aim of EFCA is that by 2005, all the Central American countries will have revised or updated their forestry policies and National Forestry Development Programs, will have laid the foundations for the economic and social functioning of the region's forests by 2010, and by 2025 forest cover in the isthmus will amount to 45- 60%.

One of the primary goals is to increase the extension of protected areas in Central America, consolidating and augmenting the Central American System of Protected Areas (SICAP). Currently 22% of the region is under

some category of protection, and this percent is expected to rise to 25 and 30% of the territory by the year 2025.

Another concrete result will be the sustainable management of natural forest outside of protected areas, equaling 10 to 15% of the territory of the region. Deforested lands will be restored, for an additional 10 to 15%. All together, these advances will accomplish the goal of increasing forest cover to 45 to 60% of the territory by 2025.

But the strategy's primary goal is to help reduce poverty significantly in the rural areas of Central America, where many communities depend on the resources forests generate.

"Restoring the forests under an ecosystems approach and protecting cloud forests are the two themes that most interest IUCN-Mesoamerica as part of its support for the Central American Forest Strategy," explains Alberto Salas, Coordinator of Forests and Protected Areas at IUCN-Mesoamerica.

"Restoration is essential in order to recover the forest layer and give the forest back its original structure and functions, which includes water flows, stabilizing terrains, reducing vulnerability and providing environmental goods and services, in general, as well as conserving its high level of biodiversity," says Salas. He adds that commercial forest plantations alone cannot be expected to substitute natural restoration.

In the realm of forests, IUCN-Mesoamerica considers that the most important issues for the future are restoration of forest ecosystems, their contribution to reducing vulnerability, forest adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and the equitable distribution of benefits from protected areas.



Confronting Climate Change

Central America is already facing serious problems from extreme phenomena related to water, both flooding and drought, and these problems will become worse in the next decades due to the effects of climate change on the region. Scientists predict less rain in the medium and long term, causing a decline in the quantity and quality of water available for human consumption and economic activities in Mesoamerica. The opposite side of the coin is that flooding will be more and more frequent as extreme events such as tropical storms and hurricanes increase due to climate change, combined with the effects of deforestation on the upper slopes of watersheds and the draining of wetlands in coastal zones, as mentioned earlier. Natural resources and populations will suffer alike.

For this reason, climate change is another theme that has demanded action from the IUCN-Mesoamerica in recent years. In 1999, regional IUCN together with the Global IUCN Climate Change Initiative brought together a group of specialists to assess the situation in Mesoamerica and sketch out strategic actions that could be taken. The report of the analysis with the specialists' recommendations was presented at the Summit of Central American Presidents in October 2000.

The experts gave three lines of advice: launch a good communication and information strategy on the problem of climate change and how it can be addressed, develop regional policies and draw up national and regional action plans.

In 2001, the Central American countries began the Project on Forests and Climate Change for Central America (PBCC), directed by the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) with support from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Since then, IUCN has been collaborating with the PBCC to carry out studies on mitigation potential in the Central American countries, particularly within the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. This information is vital if Mesoamerica is to negotiate successfully in the world carbon market activated by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), functioning under the auspices of the Kyoto Protocol and the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Also in 2001, IUCN-Mesoamerica then signed a memorandum of understanding with FAO to work in climate change and forests, concentrating on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. This agreement includes a study on potential in the forested areas of Corridor zones; with this base information, the countries can prepare projects for climate change mitigation and adaptation and negotiate them with developed countries within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol.

With other partners, IUCN also promoted the "Regional Water and Climate Dialogue," bringing together almost 15 specialists from Central America and other parts of the world for a meeting in Costa Rica in November 2002, and generating the Central American position on the

Climate change is another theme that has demanded action by IUCN-Mesoamerica in recent years, and where intensive activity is projected for the future.

theme of water and climate for the March 2003 World Water Forum, held in Japan. The dialogue was sponsored by IUCN, the Regional Committee for Water Resources (CRRH), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the Global Water Partnership.

“Climate change will mean adverse effects on the different sectors that depend on and manage water resources, including agriculture, industry, water supply, energy, and those that depend on aquatic ecosystems or ecosystems in general,” warns Rocío Córdoba, of IUCN–Mesoamerica. “This is why our region must take measures to adapt to the effect of climate change on water, and one of the things that needs to happen right away is wise use of the resource,” she adds.

“The problem is more urgent for dry zones. There is a clearly identified drought corridor in Central America, and if no investment is made in hydraulic works, possibilities for agricultural growth in these zones is going to be very limited,” explained Marcos Campos, of the Regional Committee for Water Resources.

Thus, IUCN will continue supporting the Latin American countries so that they can take advantage of their mitigation potential within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol, and inform all sectors of society about how climate change may affect them and what they can do about it, from children and young people to businesspeople, NGOs and politicians.



Compliance with Laws and Conventions

During the last 15 years, environmental law came alive in Mesoamerica with the institution of constitutional reforms and framework laws in environment. There has been enormous productivity in legislation on protected areas, wildlife and forests, recent legislative milestones concerning water; access to genetic resources, climate change and the sea, and international, regional and national agreements on the environment and natural resources. IUCN has provided constant support for this upsurge of political and social will toward sustainable development.

For the future, it will be time to comply with these laws, implement them, and make them a reality. "We need to move from creation to action. Of course, there are laws, like those involving biodiversity, that still need to be worked on. The majority of the countries in the region have no legislation on biodiversity and we have water laws that go back 10, 20 and even 40 years and need to be modified, but the main challenge is still how to implement the legislation we already have," says Grethel Aguilar, Vice-Chairwoman for Mesoamerica of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law.

Indeed, with respect to environmental legislation, IUCN-Mesoamerica plans to continue assisting the region to apply existing laws and regulations, improve them where appropriate and comply with the commitments they have assumed through signature to international and regional conventions.

IUCN can provide Central America with technical support in observing the main environmental agreements signed by the countries, listed in the following table.

According to Grethel Aguilar, since the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002), the challenge now faced by the world, including Mesoamerica, is to apply environmental law. The success of efforts to attain sustainable development with environmental and social responsibility will be based upon this.

IUCN is committed to fostering the application of environmental law in the context of the actual situations and needs of the region, where policies and laws aim at improved quality of life for Mesoamerican citizens and the welfare of the world.

MAIN ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS SIGNED BY CENTRAL AMERICA

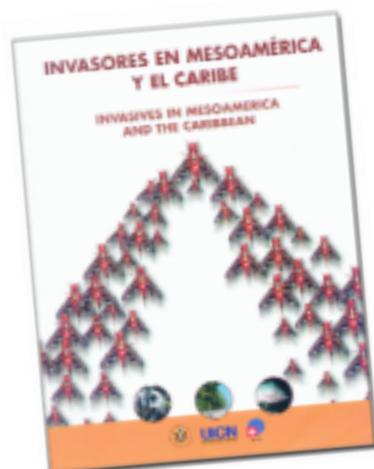
TEN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

- Convention on Biological Diversity, Rio de Janeiro, June 5, 1992
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Iran 1971
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, New York, May 9, 1992
- Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto, December 11, 1997
- Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, Basel, March 22, 1989
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, Washington, March 3, 1973. Amended in Bonn, June 22, 1979
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa; Paris, October 17, 1994
- Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer; Vienna, March 22, 1985. Approved by 7 countries.
- Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, January 9, 2000
- Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Paris, November 23, 1972

EIGHT REGIONAL AGREEMENTS

- Agreement to Constitute the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, San Jose, December 12, 1989
- Protocol to the Agreement to Constitute the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, San Salvador, July 17, 1991
- Convention for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Protection of Priority Wild Areas in Central America, Managua, June 5, 1992
- Regional Convention on Climate Change, Guatemala, October 29, 1993
- Regional Agreement on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes, Panama, December 11, 1992
- Convention for the Management and Conservation of Natural Forest Ecosystems and the Development of Forest Plantations, Guatemala, October 29, 1993
- Convention for Cooperation on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Coastal and Marine Zones of the Pacific Northeast and Its Action Plan, Guatemala, February 18, 2002
- Regional Protocol on Access to Genetic and Biochemical Resources and to Associated Traditional Knowledge, 2002

Alien Invasive Species



A large number of alien species are invading the planet: animals, such as the Africanized bee, Mediterranean fruit fly (*Ceratitis capitata*), Nile Trout (*Oreochromis niloticus*) and wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), or flora such as the Australian Pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia* L.), sickle bush (*Dichrostachys cinerea*) and wild sugar cane, to mention a few. These species are introduced either deliberately or by accident.

Settling into habitats not originally their own, they arrive, they stay and they do an enormous amount of damage to the ecosystem, displacing native plants and animals and drastically reducing biodiversity. After ecosystem loss and fragmentation, biological invasion is the second greatest threat to biodiversity, with devastating consequences for nature and agriculture.

In some cases, invasive species can become plagues that wipe out entire crops. The economic costs associated with the loss and eradication of these “invaders” all over the world is calculated at around US \$400 billion. For this reason, and because of the ecological damage they cause, IUCN-Mesoamerica is promoting activities in the theme of invasive species in this region. In June 2001, IUCN held a workshop in Costa Rica entitled, “International Workshop on Invasive Species for Mesoamerica and the Caribbean,” with the support of the Government of the United States of America, the Swiss Agency for

Development and Cooperation (COSUDE) and the Global Invasive Species Program (GISP).

Experts from all over the world came to the region to assess the invasives situation in this zone and identified basic elements for drawing up the “Regional Action Plan on Alien Invasive Species.” The results of the encounter were of such importance that the bilingual publication, “Invasives in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean,” was produced, explaining the global scope of this problem and presenting eight case studies on invasive species of greatest concern in the region.

It was also decided that IUCN teams and the countries affected will continue working to control or eradicate these invasive species in the coming years.



Photo: J.D. Rawlinson/FAICO

Alien invasive species and access to genetic resources are two last-generation themes in which IUCN-Mesoamerica has begun to work.

Access to Genetic Resources

Another last-generation issue in which IUCN-Mesoamerica has been working is access to genetic resources. The relation between trade, intellectual property, traditional knowledge and biological resources has been the object of analysis among specialized groups trying to shed some light on how to work with these supremely complex themes in the Mesoamerican countries.

A high-level team met in September of 2001, in Tikal, Guatemala, for the “Dialogue on Trade, Intellectual Property Rights and Biological Resources in Mesoamerica.” The imposing backdrop of the Mayan capital and its mysterious beckoning into ancestral meditation served to

inspire the 35 specialists gathered for a candid conversation on a burning issue in both the region and the world: how to protect our biological and genetic resources from international trade interests, using rules of intellectual property rights suited to us.

The encounter was organized by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), headquartered in Switzerland, and IUCN-Mesoamerica, with the collaboration of the Quaker United Nations Office, the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) and the Asociación Cănan K’aax (IUCN member in Guatemala.)

The Tikal Dialogue also made it possible to form a network of specialists located in Mesoamerica and Switzerland, for greater regional debate and preparedness at the hour of negotiating, trading and defending its rights over biological resources, both at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and with businesses and organizations.

A publication called “The Tikal Dialogue” (*El Diálogo de Tikal*) contains the recommendations made at the encounter, as well as presentations on where Mesoamerica is right now with respect to the theme of trade and intellectual property rights in relation to biological resources. IUCN-Mesoamerica will continue to promote debate and intensive work in this sphere.

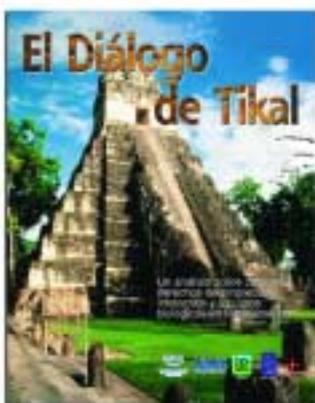


Photo: Gabriela Hernández



Alliances for the People and for Environment

The relation between environment and poverty is a philosophical theme that cuts across all of IUCN-Mesoamerica's activities. IUCN believes it is possible for the Mesoamerican countries to implement a new model of social and environmental development based on the principles of sustainable development, equity and economic progress, and wishes to contribute to this goal.

Combating poverty through wise use of natural resources is an ever-present objective in all of the projects and initiatives IUCN has carried out in the last decade. In addition, however, with support from the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD), the Union prepared a framework proposal to create pilot models for social and environmental development in several sites of Central America.

The idea is to establish local consortia promoting sustainable development, formed of IUCN member organizations and other local partners in three important transboundary sites. The first of these is the Paz River geographic area of concentration, which spans the Pacific coast from Monterrico, in Guatemala, to Barra de Santiago, in El Salvador, encompassing more than 165,000 hectares.

The second is the geographic area of concentration of the San Juan River; between

Costa Rica and Nicaragua, covering a larger area of somewhat more than 600,000 hectares, from southeast of Lake Nicaragua to the cantons of Upala, Guatuso and Los Chiles, in Costa Rica. The third is the geographic area of concentration of Talamanca-Bocas del Toro, extending almost 400,000 hectares along the Caribbean coast shared by Costa Rica and Panama, from Cahuita in the Costa Rican Talamanca to Chiriquí Grande in Bocas del Toro.

"We hope to achieve local-level sustainable management of these key ecosystems by a consortium of organizations active at the different sites. The major concern in each one is how to improve quality of life for the populations without over-exploiting resources or deteriorating the environment," explained IUCN-Mesoamerica Director Enrique Lahmann.

The alliances in these boundary sites were proposed after an IUCN study in 2001 funded by NORAD. Dozens of organizations in the countries involved helped identify common sustainable development strategies that could be executed.

IUCN-Mesoamerica will continue promoting these and other initiatives to define practical guidelines for attaining sustainable development and alleviating poverty.

Photos: Enrique Lahmann



Combating poverty while promoting conservation and sustainable development is an ironclad commitment for IUCN-Mesoamerica in the new millennium.



Torrents of Information

In its 15 years of existence, IUCN-Mesoamerica has published thousands and thousands of pages on the most important issues in environment. Thousands of users have visited the home page of the IUCN Regional Office, as well as its other pages on wetlands, environmental impact assessment and gender and environment. Hundreds of professionals and specialists have exchanged knowledge and information through electronic networking in the areas of environmental legislation, wetlands, development strategies, EIA, environmental policies and other current themes analyzed by the IUCN.

The Wetlands Documentation Center, traveling exhibits and hundreds of training and information activities held to disseminate the latest knowledge in many environmental themes are also part of the communications and information effort IUCN has made in recent years and plans to improve in the future.

IUCN publications, with their great technical and scientific value and visual beauty, have been one of the main sources of information in the region. The "Toward Equity" series on gender and environment, the "Environmental Impact Assessment for Central America" series, the publications on wetlands, the policies and reports published jointly with CCAD, the Red List of Threatened Species in Mesoamerica, a series of publications on community wildlife management, the IUCN Mesoamerican programs, the work reports and the proceedings of innumerable workshops held in every corner of the region are part of the vast editorial production that IUCN has bestowed to Mesoamerica. When drafting projects and policies, studying in university halls and preparing scientific investigations, thousands of people have taken a book edited by IUCN-Mesoamerica in their hands, books that all, in one way or another, contain the message of sustainable development and the fight against poverty.

This information effort, which must still be improved, has been a fundamental part of IUCN technical cooperation for the region, and should always be accessible to those who need knowledge about the environment. For this reason, the major publications produced by IUCN-Mesoamerica have been compiled in PDF format on a special CD.

Extensive Editorial Production

List of the Main Publications of IUCN-Mesoamerica In the Last 15 Years (alphabetical order)



More information at
<http://iucn.org/places/orma/>

1. Adelantando el Siglo de la Acción: Informe UICN 1998-1999
2. Agreement for Conservation of Diversity and Protection of Priority Protected Areas in Central America.
3. Aspectos Biológicos del Manejo de la Iguana en el Proyecto Comunitario de la Cooperativa Omar Baca en la Península de Cosigüina.
4. Biodiversidad en Mesoamérica, informe 2002.
5. Buscando respuestas (tema áreas protegidas).
6. Candil de la calle... luz en la casa?: Hacia una gestión y gerencia con equidad (género y ambiente).
7. Centroamérica: el reto del desarrollo sostenible con equidad.
8. Centroamérica en la Cumbre Mundial de Desarrollo Sostenible.
9. Comercio y Medio Ambiente.
10. Cómo lo hicimos (tema género y ambiente).
11. Compartiendo secretos: sistematizando desde la equidad (género y ambiente).
12. Comunidades y gestión de bosques en Mesoamérica.
13. I Congreso Nacional de Derecho Ambiental.
14. II Congreso de Derecho Ambiental.
15. Convenio para la Conservación de la Biodiversidad y Protección de Áreas Silvestres Prioritarias en América Central.
16. Convenio Regional para el Manejo y Conservación de los Ecosistemas Naturales Forestales y El Desarrollo de Plantaciones Forestales en Centroamérica.
17. Convenios Internacionales relacionados con los humedales y el medio marino de Centroamérica.
18. Delineando el nuevo milenio (memoria de labores 96-97).
19. De Río a Johannesburgo: perspectivas del derecho ambiental en Latinoamérica.
20. Develando el género: elementos conceptuales básicos para entender la equidad.
21. Diagnóstico del impacto socioambiental de la expansión bananera en Sarapiquí, Tortuguero y Talamanca, Costa Rica.
22. Diagnóstico de los Estados de los Recursos Naturales, Socioeconómicos e Institucionales de la Zona Costera del Golfo de Fonseca.
23. Diagnóstico Jurídico Institucional de la Biodiversidad en Nicaragua.
24. Diagnóstico sobre el ordenamiento jurídico e institucional de la biodiversidad en Panamá.
25. Diálogo sobre Agua, Alimentos y Sostenibilidad Ambiental.
26. Dos unidades forman una unidad.
27. Educación Participativa y Educación Indígena en Costa Rica.
28. EIA avanza en Centroamérica.
29. El cambio climático y los humedales en Centroamérica.
30. El Desafío Mesoamericano (propuesta de acción de la UICN)
31. El despertar ambiental (memoria de los 15 años).
32. El diálogo de Tikal (tema de recursos genéticos).
33. El manglar más grande de Costa Rica.
34. El pago de servicios ambientales como una alternativa para el desarrollo rural.
35. El plan de acción centroamericano de EIA.
36. El valor del ambiente en los Kunas desde una perspectiva de género.
37. En búsqueda del género perdido: equidad en áreas protegidas.
38. En defensa del manglar.
39. Equidad en la gestión ambiental de género en Centroamérica.
40. Estado del Sistema Centroamericano de Áreas Protegidas.
41. Estrategias de la Evaluación Ambiental.
42. Estrategia Forestal Centroamericana.
43. Estrategias de Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina.
44. Estudio económico y de mercado para el aprovechamiento del Huevo de Pishiche Ala Blanca.
45. Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica.
46. Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental para Centroamérica, Tomo 1
47. Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental para Centroamérica, Tomo 2
48. Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental para Centroamérica, Tomo 3
49. Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental para Centroamérica, Tomo 4
50. Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental para Centroamérica, Tomo 5
51. Foro Mesoamericano. Octubre 1999.
52. Género y figura no son hasta la sepultura.
53. Género y manejo de recursos naturales.
54. Guía de Capacitación. Proyecto Educación Participativa sobre la Gente y la Naturaleza.
55. Guía de procedimientos para el manejo de Humedales en Costa Rica.
56. Hacia una Centroamérica Verde.
57. Hol Chan Marine Reserve Management Plan.
58. Humedales de Mesoamérica. Sitios Ramsar de Centroamérica y México.
59. Invasores en Mesoamérica y El Caribe.
60. Inventario de los Humedales de Costa Rica.
61. Inventario Nacional de Humedales de Guatemala.
62. La Cría y Domesticación del Conejo Pintado (Agoutipaca). Un proyecto en la cuenca hidrográfica del Canal de Panamá.
63. La gente y la naturaleza.
64. La historia de San Juan de Sierpe y sus habitantes.
65. La Ley de Biodiversidad de Costa Rica: lo que dice para todos
66. La Ineludible Corriente. Políticas de género para el sector ambiental en Mesoamérica.
67. La unión hace el poder: procesos de participación y empoderamiento (género y ambiente).
68. Las campesinas y campesinos del Río San Juan.
69. Listas de Fauna de Importancia para la Conservación en Centroamérica y México.
70. Lo que comienza bien termina mejor: Elaboración de propuestas con enfoque de género.
71. Los Recursos Silvestres y la Gente: Lecciones aprendidas de un proceso de aprovechamiento sostenible. Laguna El Jocotal, El Salvador.
72. Manejo productivo de manglares en América Central.
73. Manual de legislación sobre humedales de Costa Rica.
74. Manual Técnico de EIA.
75. Marco Regional de Adaptación al Cambio Climático para Recursos Hídricos en Centroamérica.
76. Medición de la efectividad del manejo de áreas protegidas.
77. Memorias del Taller sobre Conservación Sostenible de la Biodiversidad Marina.
78. Memorias del Taller Conservación y Manejo de Humedales.
79. Minería en el trópico: el caso de Centroamérica.
80. Nudos y Desnudos (tema género y ambiente).
81. Ojos que ven... corazones que sienten: indicadores de equidad.
82. Panamá: Un Estado y Comunidad que asumen una responsabilidad compartida. Fortalecimiento institucional: Proyecto de manejo sostenible de tortugas marinas en el Refugio de Vida Silvestre Isla de Cañas.
83. Planes de Manejo, conceptos y propuestas.
84. Política Centroamericana para la Conservación y Uso Racional de los Humedales.
85. Por los Humedales de Costa Rica.
86. Programa de Conservación Humedales y Zonas Costeras de UICN para la región.
87. Programa Mesoamericano de la UICN 1997-2000.
88. Programa Mesoamericano de la UICN 2001-2004.
89. Propuesta de Principios, Criterios e Indicadores para la Ordenación Forestal Sostenible en Centroamérica.
90. Protected Areas in Belize and Hol Chan Marine Reserve: Module 1.
91. Protected Areas in Belize and Hol Chan Marine Reserve: Module 2.
92. Protected Areas in Belize and Hol Chan Marine Reserve: Module 3.
93. Protected Areas in Belize and Hol Chan Marine Reserve: Module 4.
94. Proyecto Corredor Biológico Talamanca-Caribe.
95. ¿Qué es un plan de manejo?
96. ¿Qué son humedales y qué hacer para usarlos correctamente?
97. Quien busca... encuentra. Elaborando diagnósticos participativos con enfoque de género.
98. Raíz y Vuelo (tema biodiversidad).
99. Recomendaciones y necesidades para el establecimiento de un Programa Marino Costero en el Caribe de Centroamérica.
100. Resumen Centroamericano (resumen del estado de vida silvestre por país).
101. Seguimiento de las directrices de la Convención Ramsar en la planificación de los Humedales de importancia Internacional en Centroamérica.
102. Señalando el camino (tema EIA y género).
103. Si lo organizamos lo logramos: planificación de los proyectos desde la equidad.
104. Sinopsis del Sistema Nacional de Áreas Protegidas de Panamá.
105. Situación del Manejo Integrado de Zonas Costeras en Centroamérica: Experiencias del Primer Congreso Latinoamericano de Parques Nacionales y otras Áreas Protegidas.
106. Sobre marinos, marinas, mares y mareas: perspectiva de género en zonas marino-costeras.
107. Sobre el conocimiento tradicional de la vida silvestre y el derecho consuetudinario: normas más efectivas de conservación.
108. Sustainable Forest Management in Central America, Proposal of Criteria and Indicators at The Forest Management Unit.
109. Taller de Evaluación de Impacto Ambiental en Nicaragua.
110. Tomándole el pulso al género: sistemas de monitoreo y evaluación sensibles a género.
111. Trabajando en conjunto (tema EIA).
112. Tras la huella y el trillo, el tepexcuintle.
113. UICN: Programa Regional para América Central.
114. Uso sostenible de la Biodiversidad en Mesoamérica.
115. Uso sostenible de Manglares en América Central
116. Va de viaje pues (tema género y ambiente).



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*Fifteen Years of Dedication
and Productivity*

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