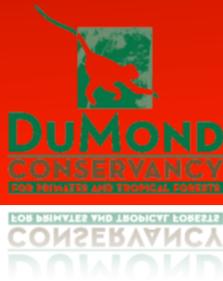




The Aotus Project

Using the owl monkey as flagship species to eradicate the illegal trade of wildlife in the Colombian – Peruvian Amazon



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Species and Habitat Conservation

Aim: Determine the impact of the illegal trade of owl monkeys on their wild populations and ecosystem at the Colombian-Peruvian border, and **assess the species' conservation status.**

Results: Census at 8 localities in Peru and Colombia have reported contrasting population density estimates for Aotus. The owl monkeys in Colombia are rarely hunted as indigenous people do not especially like the taste of their meat. There, population density of the species is on average of 44 individuals per square kilometre, while in Peru, where these monkeys are hunted for the biomedical research market, the population density is as low as 3.6 individuals per square kilometre. Furthermore, forest degradation related to the trapping methods has resulted in the **deforestation of 15.000 adult trees for the capture of approximately 4000 monkeys.**



Local Livelihoods

Aim: Conduct a **feasibility study of different sustainable economic alternatives** to gradually replace the income obtained by local people from the trapping of owl monkeys. The training of vulnerable groups (i.e. women and young indigenous people) establishes a broader understanding of current environmental issues, enhances their participation at community level and provides them with economic income.

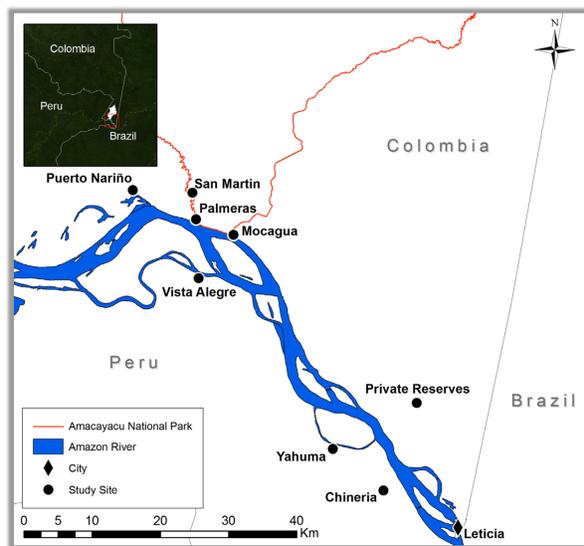
Results: We are currently looking for commercialization channels to distribute our first product, the yellow chilli pepper, cultivated by local communities in the Colombian Amazon.



Illegal trade of wildlife in the Amazon

In forest habitat countries, environmental legislation is precise, and sanctions for environmental crimes are explicit. However, **corruption within environmental authorities** makes law enforcement lax or non-existent to influential infractors. In 2008, a pilot project has documented the existence of an **illegal trade of Aotus at the Amazonian border between Colombia and Peru.** Trapped owl monkeys are sold to a biomedical laboratory in Leticia, Colombia, to be used as guinea-pigs for **research in malaria.** This trade has been going for more than **30 years, decimating wild populations** and drastically affecting their ecosystems.

The animals are **live-trapped by indigenous people in their own territories,** and then sold to the biomedical laboratory, that has a legal **permit to collect 800 animals annually in Colombian territory.** These permits were granted by the environmental authority without conducting population studies prior to issuing these permits. Even though these permits are only valid in Colombia, **the animals are mainly trapped in Peru.** It is important to note two things: 1) there are **no permits from Peru** authorising export of these primates to Colombia, and 2) the **Aotus species of Peru and Colombia are substantially different** (*Aotus nancymae* and *Aotus vociferan*, respectively) and are territorial animals. After experimentation, surviving monkeys from both species are released back in Colombian indigenous land.



What's Next?

- Stop the illegal trade in owl monkeys at the Colombian-Peruvian Amazonia frontier.
- Continue searching for alternatives to improve local livelihoods from sustainable use of biodiversity, respecting indigenous people's way of living.
- Help local people in the search of potable water systems to improve their living standards and improve their livelihoods, like community tourism.
- We expect to win the popular interest suit. If this happens we will triumph against environmental corruption and we expect that central governments from Colombia and Peru will invest in this isolated and utterly forgotten area of the Amazon basin.

Conservation Awareness

Aim: Inform at **local (indigenous people), regional, national and international level** about the magnitude of the illegal trade in owl monkeys in order to raise awareness on this issue. We also inform environmental authorities and provide evidence about this environmental problem.

Results: Our campaign brought the **attention of the media** and the **support of governmental institutions.** Most importantly, it led to the implementation of **hunting bans on night monkeys** in the 3 Peruvian communities where extraction rates were the highest.



Environmental Law Enforcement

Aim: Submit **updated information** on the illegal trade to the CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and environmental authorities in order to **enforce international wildlife trade regulations** in Colombia and Peru.

Results: In April 2011, we started a **popular interest law case** against the biomedical laboratory (FIDIC) and the environmental authorities who have been neglecting the trade. A **complete portfolio of legal documents** was submitted to CITES Peru. Furthermore, the Colombian environmental authority of the Amazonas department (CORPOAMAZONIA) has had to initiate two investigations, one into the laboratory and one for the trade, owing to the pressure of the law case. As a result, the laboratory is currently **not allowed to receive (buy) monkeys nor release them back into the wild.**



Conservation in action
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