



SACRED MOUNTAIN  
REFORESTATION  
IN ECUADOR

## INTRODUCTION

On the majestic slopes of the Sacred Mountain in southern Ecuador, a remarkable project is taking place. In a close partnership between *Árbol co(n)razón* and the *Asociación Finca Sagrada*, an initiative is unfolding that is dedicated to the restoration and long-term protection of a tropical mountain forest.

What began as a pilot project in 2021 has evolved into an inspiring journey to revitalize a lost habitat. Tens of thousands of trees have already been planted on more than five hectares of land to restore a long-destroyed habitat. However, our efforts go beyond simply planting trees. Our story is about extraordinary connections between people and nature, the long-term protection of biodiversity and the improvement of living conditions for the local community.

This is more than a story about trees: it is a story about people. People who have recognized the value of tropical forests for the well-being of all the earth's inhabitants and have taken on the challenge of reviving a tropical mountain forest on a mountain more than two square kilometers in size. The common dream: to protect and pro-



moté wildlife, their habitats and biodiversity as a whole and to preserve and strengthen the relationship between community and land while contributing to climate protection.

This is the story of the Sacred Mountain reforestation: a journey shaped by the conviction that protecting our environment concerns us all. A story about the hope for a sustainable future and the confidence to preserve the colorful life of the rainforests for future generations. Join us on this journey of discovery in the heart of southern Ecuador as we explore the who, what, when, where and why of this inspiring initiative.



## THE SACRED MOUNTAIN

The Sacred Mountain is located in the small village of Tumianuma near the town of Vilcabamba in southern Ecuador. Its area covers more than 2 km<sup>2</sup> and 780 m of altitude - from 1550 to 2330 m.a.s.l. The mean annual temperature is between 16 and 18°C and the mean annual precipitation ranges between 750 and 900 mm. Therefore, it is considered a subtropical highland climate.

The mountain is owned by Walter Moora, the president of the Asociación Finca Sagrada. Walter is committed to the preservation of indigenous cultures and is in close contact with the Kogi, an indigenous people known for their spiritual connection to nature and their unique role as guardians of the balance between humanity and nature. During a visit, the Kogi declared the land of Finca Sagrada to be sacred - hence the name of the finca and Sacred Mountain.



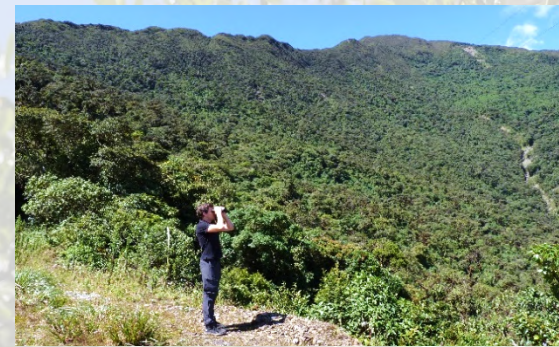
## OUR VISION

Together we want to restore the natural forest and establish a nature reserve. The forest will create a highly valuable habitat for the region's extraordinarily diverse flora and fauna and help wildlife populations and biodiversity to thrive again.

Depending on the altitude, we are aiming for a Matorral Seco (a dry scrubland), a deciduous dry forest or a dry monsoon forest as target habitats. In addition, we have defined tar-

get species from three different species groups: mammals, birds and reptiles (see p. 7).

However, our project is about much more: it is about people and about strengthening a local community. It aims to promote sustainable development in the small community of Tumianuma and beyond. We are committed to creating long-term income opportunities for the locals and work closely with them to ensure that our interventions meet their needs and respect their culture.



Our project shall be like a seed, the beginning of something new: the start of a movement that links the revitalization of nature and the sustainable development of the people of southern Ecuador. A movement that plants forests, produces food sustainably in agroforestry systems, conserves nature and its resources in the best possible way, while treating each other with respect and supporting each other.

---

*«The local community is the key to restoring and protecting our mountain forests. Without them we can achieve nothing, with them we can achieve everything»*

*- Cristian Ojeda*

---



## ECOLOGY

In the immediate vicinity of the Sacred Mountain are the two national parks "Yacurí" in the south and "Podocarpus" - one of the most biodiverse regions on earth - in the east. In addition, the influences of the Tumbes region, with its high proportion of endemic species (species that only occur there), extend into our project region. The mountain is also located within the Andean Depression - a low-lying Andean region with unique flora and fauna.

The region around Tumi-  
anuma has been cleared during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the natural forests and their colorful life were destroyed to make way for pastureland

for livestock farming. Today it is hardly known exactly which animal and plant species were originally native to this valley. It is very likely that most of them were the warmth- and drought-loving species of the Tumbes region, which found a habitat in the tropical dry forests of the central Andes. At this point, these could also have mixed with such species from the humid mountain forests of the national parks, which are less strongly tied to the humid habitat.

Initial surveys of biodiversity show that life on Sacred Mountain is now severely depleted compared to intact habitats in the wider area. There are al-

most exclusively generalist species and hardly any Red List species.

---

In the area studied, the greatest biodiversity are found in areas that are still stocked - an important indication that our reforestation undoubtedly promotes biodiversity!

---

Thanks to its proximity to valuable intact forests, recolonization of Sacred Mountain by specialists and Red List species is extremely likely. In this way, the nature reserve that has been created can unfold its effect in preserving this unique biodiversity.



## OUR PROCEDURE

With the help of methods that are also used in permaculture, we can efficiently and relatively quickly transform the Sacred Mountain back into a valuable habitat. This requires more than just planting trees. In order to withstand the difficult conditions on the mountain and thrive there, the small trees need a jump start.

Our first steps are aimed at increasing soil fertility and creating forest-like conditions: Rainwater harvesting structures increase the infiltration of rainwater, keep nutrients on the hill and prevent erosion. Erosion protection is also provided by cuttings, which help the young trees to grow by mobilizing nutri-

ents from the soil, suppressing competitive grasses, fixing nitrogen and providing shade deep into the dry season. In this environment, we plant native pioneer trees that are suitable for the site and will later form our forest



## THE PROJECT TEAM

### THE CORE TEAM:



Kai Reinacher  
Co-Project Manager



Cristian Ojeda  
Co-Project Manager



Walter Moora  
Owner

### THE FIELD TEAM:



Cornelio Ochoa  
Land Worker



Jonathan Pinta  
Land Worker



Gina Viñan  
Land Worker



Ricardo Retete  
Land Worker



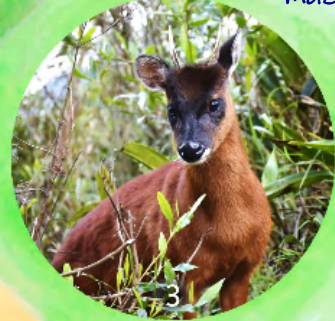
Gabriela Palacio  
Ecologist

## THE TARGET SPECIES

Garlepp's Pampas Cat  
*Leopardus garleppi*



Little Red Brocket  
*Mazama rufina*



Ecuadorian Viscacha  
*Lagidium ahuacaense*



Red-masked Parakeet  
*Psittacara erythrogenys*



Parker's Pholidobolus  
*Macropholidus annectens*



Rufous-necked  
Foliage Gleaner  
*Syndactyla ruficollis*



Rufous-headed Chachalaca  
*Ortalis erythroptera*



Girard's Whorltail Iguana  
*Stenocercus ornatus*



Parker's Ground Snake  
*Atractus carrioni*



Fotos:  
1 Abdhel Bustamante Navarrete  
2+7 Daniel Hualpa | Green Jewel  
3 Jorge Brito  
4 Chris Evers  
5 Andres León-Reyes  
6 Thiebaud Aronson  
8 Ángel Hualpa-Erao | Green Jewel  
9 Kai Reinacher

## THE PILOT PROJECT 2021-2023

Our two-year pilot project was intended to show whether the cooperation between the two partners across the Atlantic works, whether our method is successful and whether trees grow on Sacred Mountain at all. We were able to complete the pilot phase with great success and to our complete satisfaction and are more than motivated to carry the project into the future.



### OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

In addition to our vision, we defined specific goals that were appropriate for the pilot project stage. The main aims included gaining experience: testing our international cooperation and our approach, determining the survival rate of the trees and gaining knowledge. Additionally, building relationships, increasing our reach and planting 20,000 trees.

Despite a smaller budget, we were able to achieve basically all of our goals very satisfactorily thanks to economical budgeting and our cost-efficient project implementation, proving that together we can transform Sacred Mountain into a natural paradise.



### ACHIEVEMENTS:

- 18'700 Trees planted on 5 ha
- 80% Survival Rate of planed Trees
- 840 m Swales for Rainwater Harvesting
- Fair Incomes for 6 young People



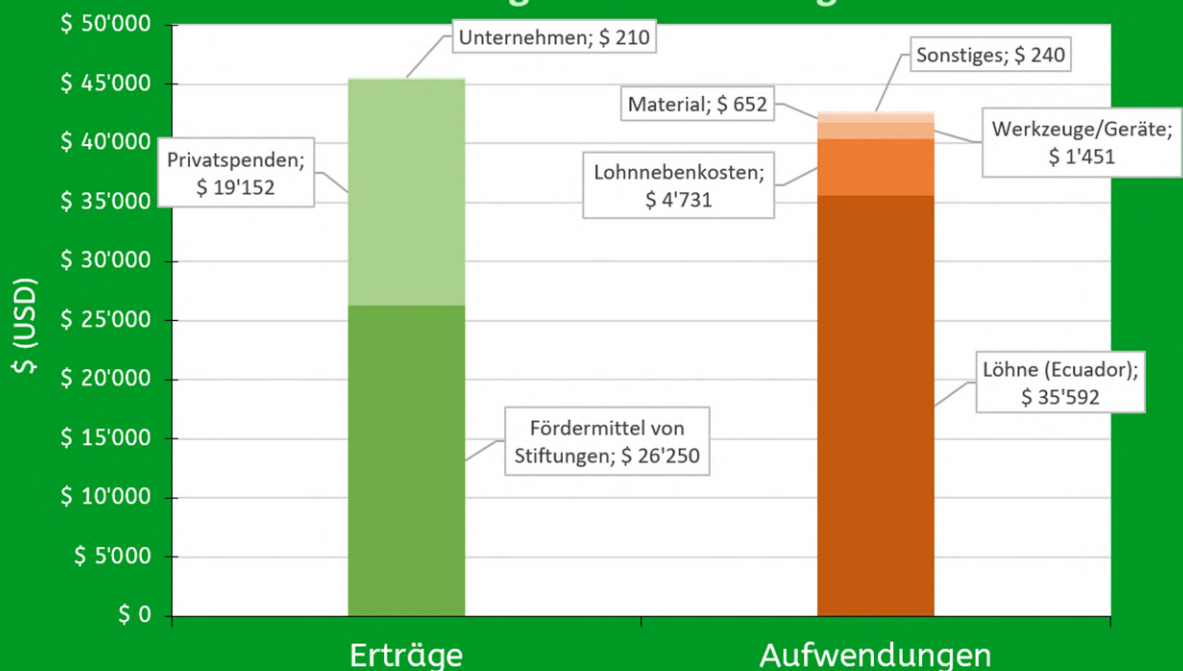


## KEY FINDINGS:

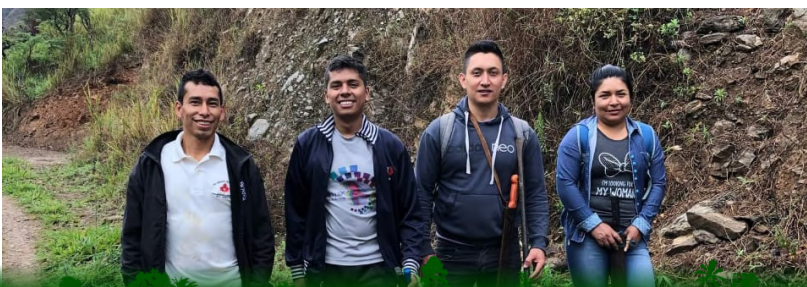
- ✔ **Árbol co(n)razón and the Asociación Finca Sagrada have succeeded in establishing a close partnership of equals.**
- ✔ **A survival rate of 80% of the trees planted proves the success of our reforestation method.**
- ✔ **Cristian is indispensable: without his passionate commitment, the success of the pilot project would hardly have been possible.**
- ✔ **The planting density can be reduced: During the pilot project, trees were planted too densely. The density can be reduced by around 50% - so we can make even more efficient progress!**
- ✔ **Long-term solutions are needed to prevent wildfires.**



## ÜBERBLICK FINANZEN PILOT-PROJEKT Erträge und Aufwendungen

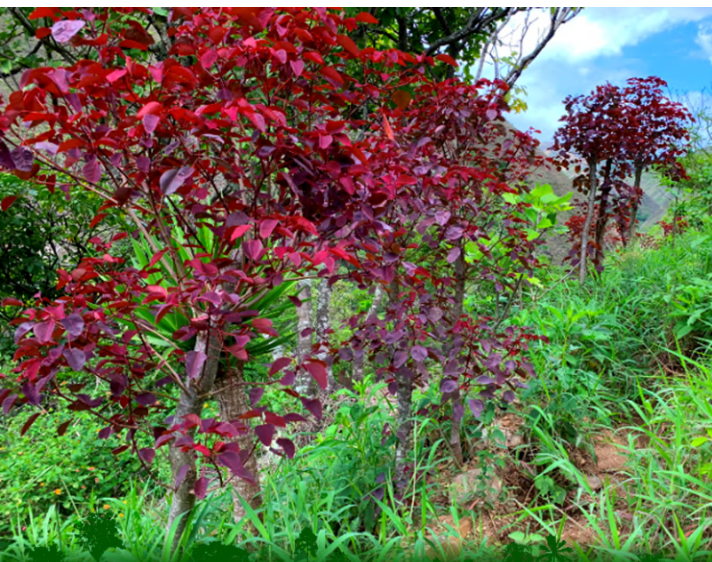


Als Budget wurden \$66'700.- (USD) veranschlagt. Davon kamen letztlich ca. \$45'600.- aus Spenden (42,5%) und Fördermitteln durch Stiftungen (57,5%) zusammen. Dank sorgfältigem wirtschaften konnten wir das Budget einhalten und unsere Ziele trotzdem sehr zufriedenstellend erreichen. Der ehrenamtliche Aufwand durch **Árbol co(n)razón** war mit min. 1000 Std in zwei Jahren etwa doppelt so hoch wie erwartet. Der überwiegende Teil des Budgets wurde für Löhne (83,4%) und Lohnnebenkosten (11,1%) für unsere Landarbeiterinnen und Landarbeiter sowie den Projektkoordinator aufgewendet. Die restlichen 5,5% entfielen auf die Posten Werkzeuge & Geräte, Material und Sonstiges.





**WE THANK THE MANY PEOPLE  
WHO MAKE OUR PROJECT POSSIBLE,  
FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS**





## PERSONAL REVIEW AND OUTLOOK

The two-year pilot project is now over - how quickly time flies when you are experiencing exciting new things. For our association and especially for me as project manager, this time was very special and will remain so forever: our (my) first own project of international cooperation - a project that would not exist without our commitment. The past two years have been very labor-intensive, exhausting, sometimes nerve-wracking and at the same time exciting, beautiful and extremely fulfilling!

The pilot project was a complete success. Many things went according to plan and some things turned out differently. Overall, however, the pilot project achieved almost all

its goals and our method of reforestation has proved its worth. We are now ready for the next phase. With the Green Jewel Foundation from Loja, a local nature conservation organization, and the EcosLab of the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL), we have found strong partners with whom we can set up our project more broadly for the future and distribute responsibilities across more shoulders. Together we want to set up an environmental education program, establish a biodiversity monitoring system, carry out ecological research projects and further develop

methods for restoring the region's natural ecosystems. And at the heart of all these developments is, of course, the reforestation of Sacred Mountain - so that it will soon become a valuable nature reserve.

Kind Regards,

*Kai Reinacher*



## PARTICIPATE AND SUPPORT

### PARTICIPATE

Together for nature and people! Work in our reforestation project in southern Ecuador and make an active contribution to protecting tropical forests and improving the living conditions of local communities. Become part of our team and join us in our commitment to biodiversity and the global climate!

We look forward to hear from you: [kai@arbol-conrazon.ch](mailto:kai@arbol-conrazon.ch)

### DONATIONS

Our collective adventure to restore Sacred Mountain has already achieved impressive results, but there is still so much more to do. We have planted trees, created habitats and strengthened communities. Now is the time to make our vision of a thriving nature reserve a reality.

Your support is crucial to making this dream a reality. Every contribution, big or small, makes a difference. We at **Árbol co(n)razón** work on a voluntary basis, which means that **100% of your donation goes directly to the project**. In doing so, you not only help to plant trees, but also to develop educational programs, promote biodiversity and support long-term sustainability projects.

Donate today and become part of this fascinating journey. Your generosity counts, and it will propel our mission forward. Here are the different ways you can donate to our project:



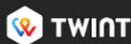
### DONATION ACCOUNT:

Árbol Co(n)razón  
IBAN: CH67 0839 2000 1544 1230 9  
Freie Gemeinschaftsbank Basel  
BIC: FRGGCHB1XXX

### MORE INFORMATION:

[www.arbol-conrazon.ch](http://www.arbol-conrazon.ch)  
(also to find Online Donation Tools)

MAKE IT SIMPLE,  
DONATE WITH



This QR deposit slip can also be scanned using TWINT.

### Receipt

Account / Payable to  
CH67 0839 2000 1544 1230 9  
Árbol co(n)razón  
4000 Basel

Payable by (name/address)

Currency  
CHF

Amount

Acceptance point

### Payment part



Currency  
CHF

Amount

Account / Payable to  
CH67 0839 2000 1544 1230 9  
Árbol co(n)razón  
4000 Basel

Additional information  
Donation for the Sacred Mountain Reforestation

Payable by (name/address)