

Training and Development of Conservation Biology Capacity for Awá and Shuar Young Leaders in Ecuador

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The Awá and the Shuar are inhabitants and stewards of two of the most important areas for biodiversity conservation in South America. The Awá live in the wet forests of the Chocó biogeographic region in northwestern Ecuador, while the Shuar live on the eastern Andean slopes and the adjacent Amazon lowlands in southeastern Ecuador. In 2002, both indigenous groups made a commitment to establish a conservation and land-use planning technical unit within their organizations, staffed by their own people. A joint effort of the Wildlife Conservation Society and Missouri Botanical Garden helped them to carry out that goal. A two-year capacity building program was designed to train a group of eight indigenous interns (four Awá and four Shuar). The collaborative capacity building program aimed to promote community-based natural resource management by the Awá and Shuar in order to help them develop the technical capacity to plan and carry out natural resource management and conservation actions. The program included training in wildlife management, biodiversity monitoring, ethnobiology, forest management, and land-use planning. The training program was successfully completed in 2004. The interns, in addition to their newly acquired technical skills and knowledge, have earned the support of their communities and Federations and are proud to represent their people on a national level in conservation-related initiatives. Effective management by local residents, with technical support from trained local conservation biologists, provides one of the most promising opportunities for long-term conservation of biodiversity in the biodiversity-rich tropical forest areas of Ecuador and throughout Latin America.

Key Words: Awá, Shuar, Amazon, Chocó, Ecuador, Capacity Building, Community-based natural resource management.

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