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Dear Patron,

We are right back from a research expedition in coastal Ecuador. In this project, we used Biological inventory and monitoring techniques to describe the communities of reptiles and amphibians of imperiled forests during a biological crisis there. Over 90% of the western Ecuadorian forests have been cut down. We are finding out what animals are there while we still have the chance.

Based on the valuable scientific data we collected in January, we have already identified land-management recommendations. One of our study sites, "Bosque Protector La Perla" is a remnant of the rainforest that once stretched on for miles, which as all but disappeared in recent years. We found that even though this small patch of forest is ancient and pristine, it is surrounded by species of reptile and amphibian that specialize in areas where forests have been destroyed. These "weed" species of lizards, snakes, and frogs have invaded and displaced the great diversity once found in this island of forest. Many of the unique species once found in this virgin forest may have died in a recent drought—potentially influenced by global warming.

Based on the conclusions drawn from our valuable data, we have identified La Perla as a prime candidate for setting up what are known as wildlife corridors. These narrow stretches of forest connect patches of remnant forests. Like highways for animals, these stretches of habitat between forest remnants allow migrant animals to travel from one patch of habitat to another. Thus, even if the animals in one forest have died, they can reestablish themselves from another forest where they still exist. We have recommended that wildlife corridors be set up at La Perla as soon as possible.

Situations such as at La Perla are numerous and dire. We must act now to understand what is happening to biodiversity, and how we can reverse losses to that diversity as quickly as possible.

Another amazing result of our January expedition is the discovery of a possibly new species of snake! We found this snail-sucking snake in the imperiled coastal dry forest of Ecuador that does not match published accounts of any snake species in Ecuador. While it will take some time to verify that this is a new species, and to scientifically describe it with a name, we are very excited about this discovery. We need to continue making such discoveries, since these forests are disappearing. If we find unique and endangered species in a remaining patch of forest, this tells us that action must be immediately taken to save that land. We need to find out what is there while we still have the chance. And the clock is ticking.

Another function of our organization is educational outreach. I, as Executive Director, gave presentations on reptiles, amphibians, and Conservation Biology 14 times in 2006. My audience varied from kindergarteners to university students to community groups. This is one way we spread the word about the conservation crisis, what can be done about it, while teaching about the fascinating habits of some amazing rainforest animals.

You can help us! With your support, we can understand patterns of biodiversity and the role humans have on that diversity, while educating the public about this important work. We have numerous fundraising goals for 2007. We are seeking funds from everything from room and board in the field, to specialized and crucial technological needs such as computers and global positioning systems (GPS). Thus far in our organization, our entire staff and field crew has volunteered their services, and we look forward to being able to pay our excellent team of scientists and workers. We have added a page on our web site, ReptileResearch.org, which details some of our current fund-raising needs. As you will see, every bit helps.

We are also looking forward to a full-length documentary of our work being produced by Academy-Award nominated filmmaker David McGowan. Video is an excellent medium for getting our word out, and we are very enthusiastic about this prospect.

With contributions from conscientious individuals like yourself, we hope to make these goals realities, to help us in our ultimate goal of understanding tropical biodiversity while educating the public about our discoveries. Our next expedition is in May, and we look forward to getting back to the field to make even more new discoveries. With your help, we can make this happen. Please use the enclosed envelope for making a payment by check or credit card. We can also accept donations on our website, ReptileResearch.org, or by phone. Please take action today. We, and the tropical forest animals, need your help as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Paul Hamilton, PhD
Executive Director, Reptile Research