



FIELD NOTES 2023

WORDS FROM OUR CEO MARTIN SCHAEFER



Dear Friends,

Imagine yourself with a small group of people walking through a forest. You are exploring a mountain slope in Ecuador that few people have ever visited. This stretch of forest is dense, shrouded in mist. There are no trails leading the way. You are searching for something.

You stop and listen. Other than the beating of your heart, it's silent. Then you hear it, faintly at first, then louder, closer. It's a song, the song you were searching for.

Maybe it's the trill of a frog high up in the canopy, a frog that was thought to be extinct. Maybe it's the whistle of a Mountain Tapir, whose numbers have dwindled so low that few people have ever seen one. Or maybe it's a bird on the forest floor, a bird unknown to the outside world.

That small stretch of woodland, once surrounded by a vast and ancient forest, is now only a small remnant, teeming with life. That life is threatened. Many of the species are rare and highly localized. You and that group of people act quickly to save that forest before it too disappears. That's the story of Jocotoco. That's how it began, 25 years ago, and how we continue to save species today.

You and the rest of the Jocotoco community have protected so much since then. Together, we established and expanded reserves in the Andes, in the Amazon foothills, and in the wet Chocó and in the dry Tumbes. We then set sail for the horizon and landed on the iconic Galapagos Islands. You helped discover new species, rediscover species thought to be lost forever, and bring species back from the brink.

Next year is the 25th birthday of Jocotoco. Twenty-five years is a long time. It is only half the lifespan of an Andean Condor, however, and a sixth of the lifespan of a Galapagos Tortoise. We started to think bigger, and longer, in order to prevent these species and countless others from going extinct.

Will you donate today to lead the way for the next twenty-five years?

By donating, you can save some of the most amazing and unique places, plants, and animals that have ever existed on this planet.



Critically Endangered Black-headed Spider Monkey. Photo credit: Javier Aznar



RESTORING LIFE ON THE GALAPAGOS

Floreana is the sixth largest of the Galapagos Islands. It is the scene of the story of evolution, with plants and animals arriving, adapting, and changing over time. Unfortunately, when people first arrived on Floreana, much of that unique wildlife began to disappear. Right now, however, you can bring it back.

Centuries ago, dawn on Floreana arrived with beautiful songs - finches, warblers, and flycatchers would add their unique voices to the chorus. The Floreana Tortoise, a giant tortoise only found on Floreana, would meander through the brush, dispersing seeds and opening up the vegetation. A mockingbird would swoop down toward the tortoise, repeatedly whacking its head if it got too close to its nest. Hawks, gulls, and owls would fly overhead in search of food.

This would all change. Early whalers hunted the tortoises until none were left. With people also came invasive predators, including rats and mice. These predators ate the eggs and young of Floreana's wildlife, and many species disappeared. While 98% of Floreana was later protected as a national park, it seemed as if much of its unique wildlife was gone forever.

A recent discovery changed that outlook. Genetic tests showed that ancestors of Floreana Tortoises were brought to a nearby island, Isabela, where they bred with the Wolf Volcano Tortoises. They maintained most of the genes of the Floreana Tortoises. An ambitious plan with many partners was launched to reintroduce those tortoises to Floreana.

For several years our team, led by Victor Carrión, has been preparing to remove the introduced predators on Floreana to make the reintroduction possible. Now, it's working. Starting in 2024, after a captive breeding program, we will help reintroduce the descendants of the Floreana Tortoises back to the island. We won't stop with the tortoises. In total, we hope to return 12 species of animals to Floreana, including several species of Darwin's finches, the bright red colored Brujo Flycatchers, Floreana Mockingbirds, Lava Gulls, Barn Owls, Galápagos Hawks, and the Floreana Racer, a small snake.

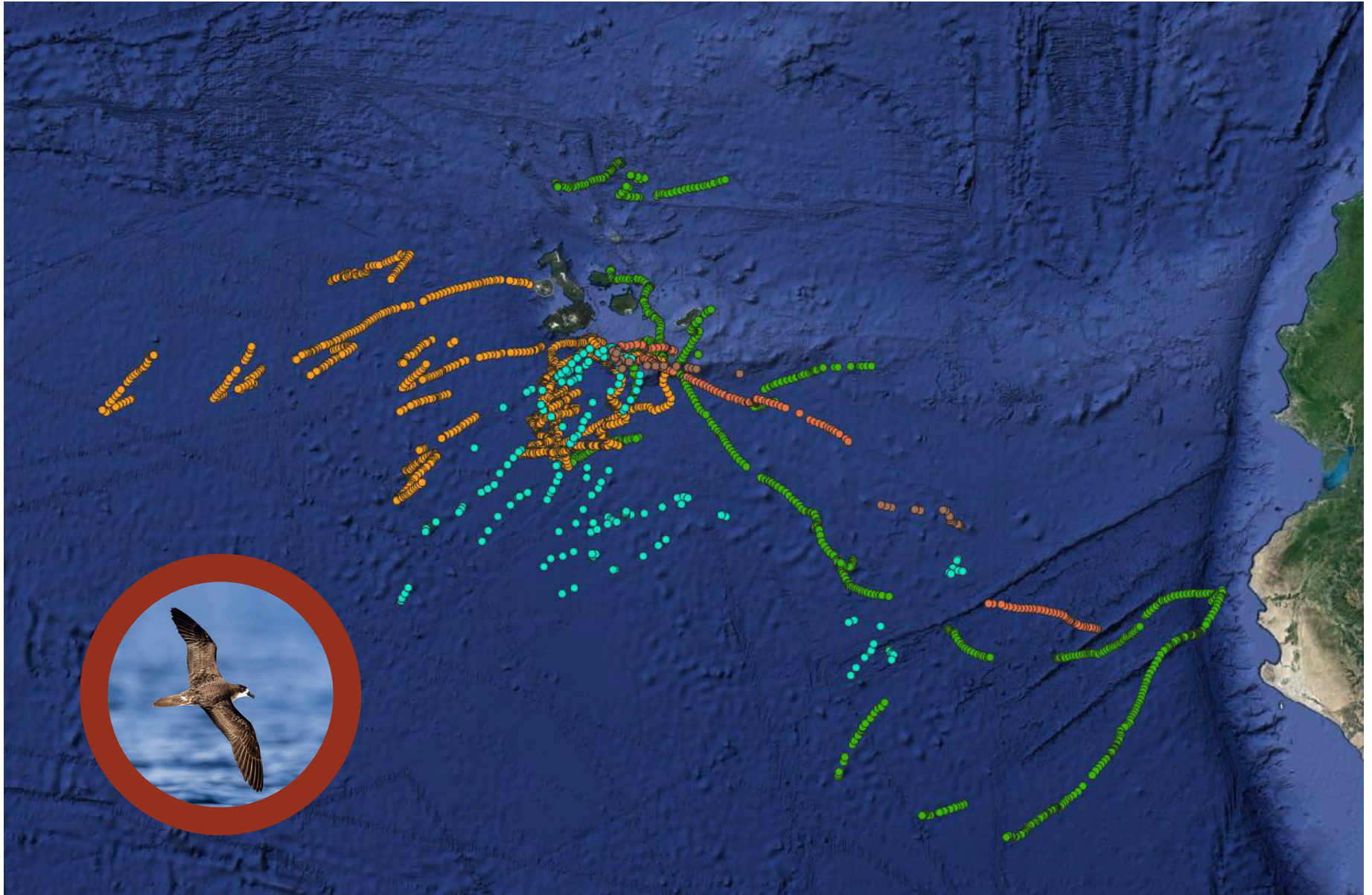
This is only possible because the 150 people who live on Floreana today wanted this to happen. They knew this would bring benefits to them and their families, and it already has. With rats and mice no longer eating their corn and papaya, their crop yields almost doubled. Farmers agreed to put their chickens in coops and to keep their pigs and cows fenced in, allowing vegetation to regenerate but also making their animals easier to manage. Soon, after the wildlife that once lived on Floreana is reintroduced, it will be one the best places for visitors to experience the magic of the Galapagos, bringing new sources of income to the community.

This is the way forward, people and wildlife coexisting, and local communities leading their own conservation movement. You are making this possible.



I am so grateful for the incredible partners helping with this work. This includes many generous funders. As a project of the Ecuadorian government being led by Jocotoco, our partners also include federal and local authorities, other organizations, Jocotoco staff, and of course, the people of Floreana.

A Floreana family with their piglets. Karina Kastdalen from Jocotoco in the middle. Photo credit: Joshua Vela



Galapagos Petrel, a Critically Endangered seabird that only nests on the Galapagos, has its largest colonies on Floreana. They nest in burrows, and have been ravaged by invasive predators. This map shows the flight paths of Galapagos Petrels that we radio-tracked for assessing their vulnerability at sea. The birds fly hundreds of miles in the open ocean to find food – squid, flying fish, and shrimps.



THANK YOU MONICA AND WELCOME PAOLA!

Mónica Calvopiña was just named the director of the Galapagos Life Fund, a trust that provides funding to support long-term conservation in the Galapagos. Monica had been working with Jocotoco helping establish and then create a management plan for a new marine protected area, called La Hermandad, which connects the Galapagos to Cocos Island in Costa Rica. We congratulate Monica on her new position. Paola Sangolquí joined Jocotoco earlier this year and will pick up where Monica left off. Welcome to the team Paola!



Mónica Calvopiña



Paola Sangolquí



Whale Shark. Photo credit: Jonathan Green



SAVING THE CHOCÓ - CREATING A RING OF DEFENSE

The Chocó region in northwest Ecuador lies between the Andes and the Pacific. It is one of the top ten most biodiverse places in the entire world, but it is also highly threatened. The rapid destruction of its forests over the last century has been unrelenting. With you and many partners, we can create a 'Ring of Defense' around lands that are already protected, ensuring the long-term survival of these ecosystems.

Despite the remarkable pace of destruction in the Chocó, there is hope. **The Ring of Defense will save what's left.** Thanks to all of you, we already quintupled the size of our Canandé Reserve to more than 14,000 hectares (approximately 35,000 acres) since 2017. Scientists discovered dozens of new species in Canandé Reserve – a variety of plants, birds, and frogs, among other wildlife. Similarly, the only viable populations of Jaguars and Great Anteaters in Western Ecuador roam Canandé. This expansion enabled us to connect to the Cotacachi-Cayapas National Park, the largest intact wilderness in the Chocó. This created the first part of the Ring of Defense.

We are now building an alliance with our neighbors, from the indigenous Chachi community in the north to other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and partners in the southern part of the Chocó. This alliance will create a much larger Ring of Defense and a network of protected areas, stretching from the lowland rainforests of Canandé to the windswept Andean peaks.

This is the only area in the tropical Andes along the Pacific where the entire range of ecosystems can be protected from less than 200 feet above sea level to more than 16,000 feet (50-4,900 m) in elevation. This is the only place where two wilderness regions can be reconnected in the upper Chocó.

Creating a Ring of Defense in the Chocó will protect more than 500,000 hectares of land. That's more than one million acres, *larger than the State of Rhode Island*. It will save endangered and unique ecosystems. It will ensure abundant and clean drinking water. And it will capture carbon, slowing climate change. We will lead this new vision of conservation, and you can make this happen.

“I CANNOT IMAGINE A MORE URGENT CONSERVATION INITIATIVE. THE CHOCÓ PLANTS AND VERTEBRATES ARE AWE-INSPIRING IN RICHNESS AND HEARTBREAKING IN THEIR ENDANGERMENT.”

-- THE LATE E.O. WILSON



Oophaga sylvatica. Photo credit: James Muchmore



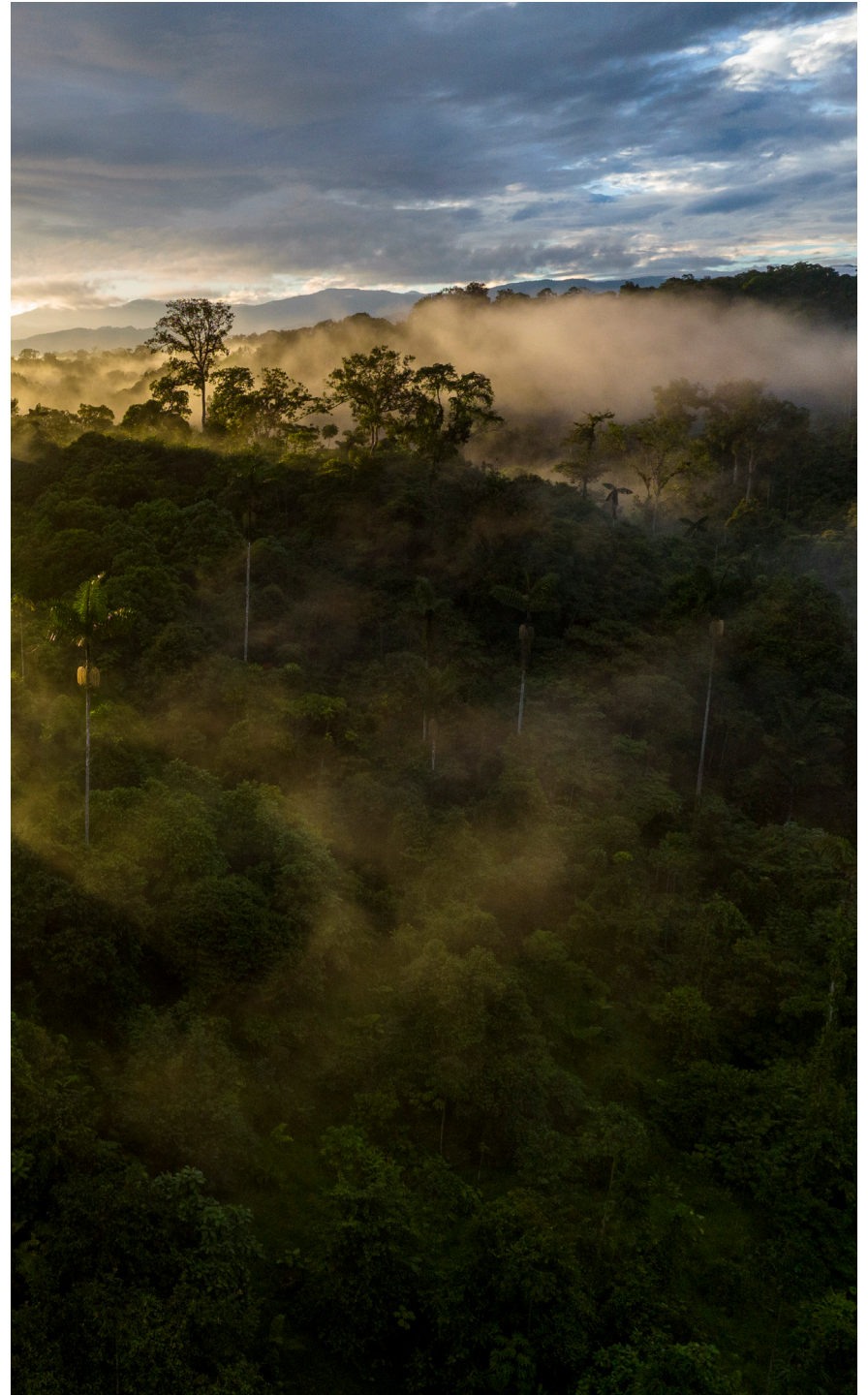
EXPANDING CANANDÉ

Efraín Cepeda joined Jocotoco way back in 2007. He started off assisting with reforestation efforts then began directing Jocotoco's northern reserves. Today he is our Director of Reserve Expansion. He has added many puzzle pieces to the Canandé Reserve in the Chocó. Canandé is now our largest reserve consisting of more than 200 separate plots of land.

Just this year, portions of Canandé were added to the Sistema Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (SNAP), the national system of protected areas. While still owned and managed privately by Jocotoco, being part of the system gives those portions of the Canandé Reserve the highest level of permanent protection possible in Ecuador. Next year we plan to include more of Canandé in SNAP, as well as several other reserves, making Jocotoco the largest private reserve owner in the national system of protected areas.



Efraín Cepeda



Canandé Reserve. Photo credit: James Muchmore



CONSERVATION HEROES

On the beaches near our Ayampe Reserve, our administrator Byron Delgado gives me hope for the future. Byron is a member of Las Tunas ancestral community, the traditional inhabitants of the area. Originally protected because its tropical dry forests are home to the Esmeraldas Woodstar, a very rare hummingbird, Ayampe also includes a long stretch of one of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in Ecuador.

When I first visited the beach ten years ago, only a few dozen Green and Olive turtles were nesting there. Byron changed Jocotoco's perspective to focus on protecting the sea turtles and their nests. With his dedication and passion, he inspired the Las Tunas community to join the work. Now, more than five hundred sea turtles nest in good years, including the Hawksbill and massive Leatherbacks. People from around the country, and around the world, now come to see the turtles.

Byron's ten year-old-daughter, Naiara, monitors the sea turtle nests with her dad. She is also an ambassador for the turtles with school groups and her friends. She lets everyone know that they too can protect the turtles. **The story of Byron and Naiara illustrate how impactful each one of us can be. You are helping Naiara, and many children across Ecuador, become the next generation of Jocotoco conservation heroes.**



Naiara monitoring sea turtle nests at Ayampe. Photo credit: Byron Delgado



INTRODUCING JAJEAN ROSE-BURNEY

I want to conclude my message by introducing you to Jajeán Rose-Burney, our newest staff member. Jajeán wrote a note that he wanted me to share with you, below.



Just a couple of weeks ago, I started my new job with the Jocotoco Conservation Foundation as a Donor Steward. From as far back as I can remember, I've wanted to help protect our world's unique wildlife, especially in the megadiverse tropics. I am grateful to be doing just that as part of the Jocotoco team.

I grew up in Buffalo, New York, not far from Niagara Falls. My father and mother volunteered at a nature reserve outside of the city. We spent every weekend there together, along with my little brother. We splashed through creeks, sat beneath tall oaks, and paddled across a long beaver pond. Generations of people before us had protected this remarkable place so that we could experience it.

I also saw places like this disappear. I watched as forests were cut to make way for subdivisions and parking lots. The wonders of nature bring so much joy – losing these places can bring so much pain. I wanted to save the places that meant so much to me and my family.

Over the last decade I worked with the Western New York Land Conservancy protecting wildlife habitat around the Great Lakes. Before that, I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in central Mexico helping protect bird habitat and large wetlands. And before that, as both a student and a teacher, I worked in Costa Rica, helping communities around cloud forest reserves plan their future.

I recently moved to the Washington, D.C. area after my wife started a new job there. As I was looking for international conservation work, I came across the job ad for Jocotoco. It sounded perfect. I applied, and I had a series of interviews with Jocotoco staff and board members in early November. When I received the job offer, I knew right away what my decision would be. Still, this was going to be a big change for me and I wanted to talk to my wife. She told me that the answer was obvious. She told me that I couldn't stop smiling when I described working in the Galapagos, Andes, and Amazon. She told me that my eyes lit up when I talked about working with sea turtles, condors, and jaguars. She told me what I already knew - working with Jocotoco was just right. I said yes.

I know that together we can ensure that families will always be able to connect to nature and experience its awe-inspiring wonders, just like you and I have.

Thank you for welcoming me to your community.



Jajeán leading a birdwatching tour for kids. Photo credit: Ana Hernandez Balzac



Endangered Black-and-Chestnut Eagle at Yanacocha Reserve. Photo credit: Meinolf Pues



The December 2023 edition of the Smithsonian Magazine featured Jocotoco, and told the story of the rediscovery of the Horned Marsupial Frog that incubates its eggs on a pouch on its back. The frog was thought to have disappeared. This rediscovery was in the Chocó, and gives me hope for the future, the same hope that Jajeán has. As I said in the Smithsonian article, *hope is something we all can create with our actions.*

WILL YOU DONATE TO THE JOCOTOCO CONSERVATION FOUNDATION TODAY TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE?

With best wishes,

Martin Schaefer, CEO



Endangered Horned Marsupial Frog. Photo credit: James Muchmore



There are many ways that you can give to Jocotoco.

Go to our website and click donate: jocotococonservation.org

You can also mail a check payable to:
Jocotoco Conservation Foundation
P.O. Box 38274
Baltimore, MD 21231

We accept gifts of stock, donor advised funds, qualified charitable distributions from your IRA, and gains from crypto currency. You can also add Jocotoco to your estate plans by including us in your will.

Please contact Jajeen Rose-Burney, our Donor Steward, at 1 (716) 247-1255 or jajeen.rose@jocotoco.org if you have any questions about how to donate.



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CODE TO DONATE**

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Narupa Reserve. Photo credit: Rhett A. Butler for Mongabay