



# **The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation**

## **Resolution Urging Legal Protection of Forests at Cerro Chucantí, Panama**

WHEREAS, Cerro Chucantí is an isolated massif in eastern Panama that rises from sea level to 1439 meters in elevation, and sustains a diverse cloud-forest as well as other tropical forest ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, the geographic isolation of the Cerro Chucantí mountaintop has allowed its fauna and flora to differentiate considerably, such that it contains a number of locally endemic rainforest species and subspecies found nowhere else on Earth; and

WHEREAS, preliminary field surveys of Cerro Chucantí by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, the University of Panama, and the Gorgas Laboratory continue to reveal the presence of unique fauna and flora, some of which are new records for the country of Panama, and several of which are undescribed species new to science; and

WHEREAS, the rainforests of Cerro Chucantí maintain populations of endangered wildlife such as the Great Green Macaw (*Ara ambiguous*) and Baird's Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*) as well as vulnerable species such as the Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*), Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*), Great Curassow (*Crax rubra*), Puma (*Puma concolor*), and Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), whose populations are extremely vulnerable to habitat loss, fragmentation, and overhunting; and

WHEREAS, Cerro Chucantí has been designated an Important Bird Area by the Panama Audubon Society and is rated as a High-Priority Endemic Bird Area of the World (EBA 024: Darien Highlands) by Birdlife International; and

WHEREAS, Cerro Chucantí lies in a key biological transition zone between two global Biodiversity Hotspots, the Mesoamerican Hotspot and the Tumbes-Choco-Magdalena Hotspot, as defined by Conservation International; and

WHEREAS, the natural vegetation at Cerro Chucantí provides a continuous elevational gradient, ranging from mangrove forests on the Pacific coast, to lowland tropical rainforest, to mid-elevation and montane forest, and finally to cloud forest on the mountain's summit; and

WHEREAS, each of these elevational zones contains specific assemblages of animal and plant species that are adapted to narrow thermal ranges and microhabitats; and

WHEREAS, many native bird, bat, and insect species in the tropics require continuous elevational gradients in order to undertake seasonal movements while foraging for fruit, nectar, and other resources; and

WHEREAS, continuous elevational gradients such as that at Cerro Chucantí will be crucial in the future to permit species migrations in response to global warming and climatic change; and

WHEREAS, parts of Cerro Chucantí are claimed as traditional collective land ('Tierras Colectivas') by members of the Wounann people, an important component of Panama's indigenous community and cultural patrimony, who practice sustainable, small-scale swidden farming and hunting in the area; and

WHEREAS, the Cerro Chucantí forests and Wounaan territory are under severe threat from non-traditional deforestation for cattle pastures, poaching, and logging; and

WHEREAS, forest loss and degradation at Cerro Chucantí threaten not only the endemic wildlife species and indigenous people in the region but also the forested watershed, which supplies a year-round supply of clean drinking water to nearby villages; and

WHEREAS, the Cerro Chucantí area provides an important base for many ecotourism activities and for scientific research by leading organizations such as the University of Panama, Gorgas Laboratory, and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, the world's largest scientific organization devoted to the study, protection, and careful use of tropical ecosystems:

- URGES the National Government of the Republic of Panama to declare an immediate moratorium on non-traditional deforestation and forest degradation in the greater Cerro Chucantí area; and
- IMPLORES the Panamanian Government to provide protected-area status to the Cerro Chucantí forests, ensuring that all remaining forested areas, especially including those comprising a continuous elevational gradient from the coast to the cloud forest, are formally protected under force of law; and
- RECOMMENDS that the Panamanian Government as well as international-aid organizations and relevant nongovernmental groups collectively provide adequate financial and logistical resources to ensure that remaining forests within the proposed Chucantí Protected Area are monitored and protected in perpetuity.