

Date: March 2013

Venue: La Habana, Cuba

Organised & Reported by: Orestes C. Bello González

Introduction

The Cuban archipelago is part of one of the hot points of the world biodiversity, is outlined for the high values of endemism in several biological groups and for presenting a great diversity of ecosystems and landscapes in a relatively small geographic area. In spite of the fact that environmental aspects are an important topic for the Cuban government, the economic conditions of the country, specially in the current conjuncture they make the project financing very difficult specially those with an approach centred on the conservation.

In this context there was specially welcome this conference realized with RSG's financing, and that had as principal aim:

To contribute to the exchange of experiences, discuss designs, problems, perspectives and to create relationships.

Participants

In the conference were present 16 researchers including 13 project leaders and other 3 participants in projects. Only stayed away 4 project leaders who transmitted opportunely there situations. The project leaders came from several provinces of the country including Guantánamo, Granma and Santiago de Cuba (east Cuba) and Havana and Pinar del Río (west Cuba). We had the presence of Mr. Josh Cole, the director of Rufford Small Grants who shared with us during all the time of presentations and debate.

Project leaders/ Projects titles:

Rayner Núñez/*Butterflies of Turquino National Park, Cuba. Research and Individual Capacity Building Toward its Conservation and Butterflies and moths of Monte Iberia, Cuba. Filling gaps and capacity building toward its conservation.*

Norvis Hernández Hernández/*Updating Geographic Distribution and Habitat Conservation Status of the Land Snail Endemic Species Polymita picta and Polymita brocheri, Guantanamo, Cuba.*

Ansel Fong/*Status, Distribution and Conservation of Threatened Amphibians of Cuban Rainforests.*

Pedro López Del Castillo/*Watershed Conservation in Cuba: Bio-monitoring, Training and Environmental Education (I and II).*

Nils Navarro Pacheco/*A Communitarian Campaign to Avoid the Illegal Trafficking of Wild Birds in a Cuban Local Community.*

Lucia Hechavarria Schwesinger/*The Vascular Epiphytes of Guamuhaya Mountains Massif, Central Cuba – Management Strategies for its Conservation in Natural and Agro-Ecosystems.*

Aylin Alegre Barroso/*Research and Environmental Education for Caves' Conservation of the Protected Area Majayara and Cave and Karst Fauna Conservation in the Protected Area Yara-Majayara, Baracoa, Cuba. Strengthening of Research and Environmental Education.*

Carlos Alberto Mancina/*Effects of Hurricanes on Bat Populations in the "Sierra del Rosario" Biosphere Reserve, Cuba: A Long-Term Monitoring Study and Integrating Research and Education for the Conservation of Cuban Bats and their Habitats*

José Luis Ponce de León/*Ecology and Conservation of Endemic Freshwater Fishes in Western Cuba.*

Rigel Fernández Valle/*Functional Diversity and Conservation of Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi from Natural and Man-Made Plots of a Tropical Savanna.*

Rodet Rodríguez Silva/*Molecular Diversity of Gambusia Fishes in Cuba. Relevance for Conservation and its Use in Vector Control Plans.*

Yoamel Milián-García/*Genetic Characterization of the Critically Endangered Cuban Crocodile (Crocodylus rhombifer) and its Congener C. acutus in Cuba: A Conservationist*

Orestes C. Bello González/*Assessing lake-to-lake heterogeneity as a tool for conserving the interior wetlands of Sabinal Key.*

Format of presentation:

The time of exposition was 15 minutes for project, though in the practice every one explained with total freedom his results and perspectives. All the project presentations followed basically the structure:

- ✓ An introduction centered in the problem of conservation
- ✓ Results obtained up to the moment, showing evidences, emphasizing in the introduction and application
- ✓ State of fulfillment of the proposed chronogram of work
- ✓ Reference to the financial aspects (used amount / task, substitutions, etc.)
- ✓ Principal difficulties, perspectives, possibilities, etc.

Results

Our meeting began with a general summary presentation of the projects that has been financed in the last decade for the Rufford Small Grants Foundation in Cuba.

23 projects have been supported by Rufford Small Grants in the last decade. 19 of them worked in protected areas (some of them extended to localities beyond). Four projects worked entirely out of protected areas.

Principal threats and confronted conservation problems:

- Species, communities and ecosystems threatened by socioeconomic, more or less, legal activity.

- Poor information about the distribution, abundance and other basic aspects of the ecology of biological vulnerable, threatened groups, etc
- Poor information about genetic structure, lost of genetic diversity
- Ignorance on the impact of natural phenomena
- Absence of conservation strategies, not incorporation in management plans of areas or biological groups.
- Trade and illegal hunt

Biological groups studied:

Vascular epiphytes, bats, birds, cave invertebrates, ferns and lycophytes, freshwater macroinvertebrates, amphibians, snails, fishes, butterflies, mycorrhizal fungi and reptiles.

Habitat/Ecosystems worked:

Vegetation in serpentine areas, caves, wet forest, gallery forests, pines forests, agroecosystems, sabana, rivers and wetlands (fresh and brackish)

Most projects has been developed in the three principals mountainous clumps of the country specially in Guaniguanico and Nipe-Sagua-Baracoa, though also there have developed projects that include the wetlands of: Ciénaga de Zapata, Great Wetland of the North of Ciego de Avila and Ciénaga de Lanier in the Isla de la Juventud. The number of new projects approved per year has increased in the last 4 years and nowadays it overcomes two new projects/year.

As result of the conference:

Difficulties founded and directions of future work:

- Impede for the entry to the country of the equipment acquired for the accomplishment of the different studies.
- It is necessary to insert the results obtained in the protected areas in Management and Operative Plans.
- There exists few overlap of different specialists in the accomplishment of the studies and investigations in geographical coincidental or problematic areas or in biological groups narrowly related.
- Still the entail of the results is insufficient to the communities and to the stakeholders. Many results are insufficiently introduced.
- Difficulties for the access to many protected areas.

Positive aspects

- The financing for the Rufford Small Grants is essential for the effective accomplishment of small scale projects focused in biodiversity conservation in Cuba. This one was the first consideration at which arrived unanimously the participants in the conference.
- New horizons were opened on techniques and methods used in some projects and applicable to other biological groups.
- Exchange information about the respective work areas what encouraged new ideas.

- New ideas for work as a team emerge with the perspective of more complete results.
- Several knew others for the first time and others we meet again but we all end this day of work more joined in the common intention.

Between the suggestions proposed to Rufford Small Grants they are:

1. To continue promoting the conferences as an effective form of exchange of experiences between project leaders and project equipments. To develop conferences to a major scale with participants of several countries propitiating the communication and the formation of equipments of work that raise the efficiency of the conservation projects.
2. To continue offering support to the projects in the region bearing in mind the values and threatens to biodiversity, the economic situation and without neglecting the quality and efficiency of the projects.