

Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work - remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to jane@rufford.org.

Your Details	
Full Name	Zaira Lizbeth Esparza Rodríguez
Project Title	Local Knowledge and Perceptions About the Historical Use of Primates: an Understanding of Illegal Trade
Application ID	44632-2
Date of this Report	28-dicember-2025

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project’s original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
<p>To document the history of use, perceptions, and threats to primates in a local context, and how these have changed over time.</p>				<p>The objective of the study was fully achieved by generating a robust sociocultural diagnosis of the perceptions, practices, and environmental memories associated with primate use. Fieldwork was conducted between September and December 2024 and included 184 qualitative interviews and the collection of sociocultural information in 14 localities across 10 municipalities in the states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo. The sample consisted of 53% women and 47% men, allowing the study to capture gendered perspectives regarding interactions with primates, including differences in perceptions.</p> <p>The results reveal clear differences among states in terms of beliefs, practices, and environmental memory related to the capture, use, and keeping of primates. In Tabasco, the highest historical normalization of capture and pet keeping was documented. Although there is currently a higher level of awareness regarding conservation, the presence of economic incentives may reactivate supply, as sociocultural conditions continue to allow these practices.</p> <p>In Quintana Roo, a more pronounced history of commercialization oriented toward sale rather than local consumption was identified. Direct capture was reported mainly as a practice that occurred decades</p>

				<p>ago, and supply was historically driven by external demand associated with tourism, zoos, and urban buyers.</p> <p>In Yucatán, monkeys are valued as part of the landscape and local identity, which contributes to the normalization of their keeping as pets within certain community contexts.</p> <p>In Campeche, evidence of occasional capture in the past was recorded, although it was less normalized than in other states, along with a prevailing tendency toward perceptions of community-based wildlife protection.</p> <p>Finally, in Veracruz, a historical use of primates for multiple purposes was reported, including consumption as meat, witchcraft practices, and keeping them as pets. At present, hunting is described as almost nonexistent, although it remains strongly present in collective memory as a practice of the past.</p>
<p>To design conservation interventions by involving communities in the creation of knowledge-based solutions aimed at reducing illegal wildlife trafficking.</p>				<p>This overall objective was addressed through a hybrid intervention approach operating at two complementary levels:</p> <p>(1) an institutional intervention focused on strengthening prevention through strategic, evidence-based public policy recommendations informed by sociocultural, spatial, and institutional data; and</p> <p>(2) a sociocultural intervention focused on the social prevention of wildlife trafficking by transforming perceptions, reducing the normalization of capture and pet keeping, and strengthening community identities centered on wildlife protection through conservation education.</p>

				Together, these interventions worked synergistically across different parts of the system that sustains illegal wildlife trafficking.
Institutional intervention: To develop prevention proposals and public policy recommendations (policy brief) based on sociocultural, spatial, and governance-related evidence.				<p>The project integrated the sociocultural patterns identified through community interviews with the spatial and institutional findings documented in the doctoral research. This analysis made it possible to identify cultural factors that increase or reduce the risk of capture, gaps in information and perceptions, opportunities for environmental education, and critical points within the extraction chain and post-seizure management process.</p> <p>Main output:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A policy brief with prevention and public policy recommendations, differentiated by state and by type of stakeholder (environmental authorities, civil society organizations, and decision-makers), and grounded in sociocultural, spatial, and institutional evidence.
To design and implement sociocultural and artistic interventions , together with accessible outreach products, that translate community knowledge into cultural narratives aimed at preventing illegal wildlife trafficking and strengthening local identities of protection.				<p><i>a) Outreach products (intervention tools)</i></p> <p>As part of the sociocultural intervention, a range of scientific and community outreach materials were produced, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A 360° video short film (virtual reality) narrating the wildlife trafficking chain from the perspective of a monkey, screened using VR headsets. - Two digital awareness campaigns published on social media focusing on wildlife trafficking and primate conservation: one in standard social media format and another in 360° virtual reality format.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two original songs: one created for a theatre play about the story of a young female monkey captured for the pet trade, and another addressing the shift from respectful use of wildlife under an Indigenous worldview to its exploitation to satisfy luxury demand. - A theatre play in which a captured young female monkey tells her story through a hip-hop performance using a puppet. - An informational poster on the use of monkeys in certain Indigenous communities, local perceptions, and key conservation messages related to primates. A total of 42 posters were printed and distributed during the community festivals and outreach activities. - An activity and coloring book on Indigenous peoples and illegal wildlife trade in Mexico, integrating songs, QR codes, drawings, and “Guardians of the Jungle” badges. A total of 35 copies were printed and distributed among participating children. - Two scientific articles derived from this research. <p><i>b) Festivals and artistic interventions</i></p> <p>Two travelling festivals were held in selected communities (Hueyapan de Ocampo and Laguna de Sontecomapan, Veracruz). In both communities, previously designed activities were implemented, including workshops, games, and playful learning activities focused on primates. At the Laguna de Sontecomapan festival, a community mural was implemented for the first time as part of this project. Children painted and described their perceptions of monkeys, depicting them in</p>
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				<p>domestic settings or in their natural habitat.</p> <p>In addition, a theatrical performance titled “Trafficking rhymes, not primates” was presented, featuring a mantled howler monkey puppet (<i>Alouatta palliata</i>) accompanied by an original rap song performed by Ramona, a female monkey who narrates her story of capture, rescue, and release. The performance conveyed the message that monkeys are not pets and raised awareness about the impacts of wildlife extraction.</p> <p>A virtual reality stand featuring the 360° fiction short film “Libres” (“Free”) was also included.</p> <p>The travelling festival, including the theatre performance and the 360° virtual reality campaign, was later presented at an open house event at the Instituto de Ecología A,C (INECOL) for an urban audience, showcasing perceptions of monkeys through digital and immersive environments.</p>
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Sociocultural diagnosis and translation of community knowledge

A sociocultural diagnosis was developed to document the historical diversity of uses, perceptions, and threats toward primates in southeastern Mexico, linking these dynamics to the current patterns of illegal wildlife trafficking from the perspective of local supply, particularly primate capture. This process made it possible to translate the community knowledge of Maya Indigenous peoples (Yucatán, Quintana Roo, and Campeche), Ch’ol communities (Tabasco), and Popoluca communities (Veracruz)—knowledge that is often rendered invisible—into a central input for the design of culturally relevant conservation interventions. This approach lays the groundwork for progressive community involvement in preventive strategies against illegal wildlife trafficking, avoiding approaches that criminalize or oversimplify local historical trajectories.

b). Policy influence and redesign of institutional strategies

The development of the policy brief resulted in a set of formal, targeted recommendations aimed at redesigning strategies for the prevention of illegal wildlife trafficking. These recommendations incorporate sociocultural, spatial, and governance criteria into information management, territorial prioritization of surveillance, and the handling of specimens at final destination sites following seizure. The document adopts a conciliatory,

political-strategic approach: it does not impose solutions, but rather proposes a starting point for the construction of a collaborative framework for action among institutions, communities, civil society organizations, and academia.

c). Sociocultural and educational interventions and outreach materials

The sociocultural interventions and outreach materials generated narratives oriented toward the social prevention of illegal wildlife trafficking on the supply side, while also engaging the general public on the demand side. The artistic and participatory activities implemented during the festival facilitated community ownership of conservation messages, allowing children, youth, and adults to recognize themselves as active actors in wildlife protection through the implementation of the “Guardians of the Jungle” badge.

Through puppet-based theatre, the ecological, social, and cultural implications of illegal wildlife trade were presented without resorting to punitive or criminalizing approaches.

The community mural provided a preliminary, non-invasive, and culturally situated exploration of children’s perceptions of monkeys, particularly in relation to their place within the human world and their proximity to or distance from the domestic sphere. It functioned as a participatory exploratory tool to identify local perceptions and the symbolic positioning of monkeys along the domestic-wild continuum through children’s graphic expressions.

The audiovisual materials developed function not only as dissemination products but also as awareness-raising tools that promoted—and can continue to promote—processes of interspecies empathy, critical reflection on the normalization of pet keeping, and emotional understanding of the primate trafficking chain. The use of first-person narrative and virtual reality did not seek to anthropomorphize the animal, but rather to facilitate a shift away from an anthropocentric perspective, allowing audiences to approach the experience of the monkey as a biological and social being affected by extraction and its consequences.

The activity book created a space for identification and dialogue with the everyday lives and cultural memory of children and adolescents who coexist with primates. Through a narrative and playful approach, the material facilitated a gradual understanding of Indigenous peoples’ relationships with wildlife, enabled the questioning of normalized practices without guilt or cultural rupture, and promoted a relationship based on care and shared responsibility.

Taken together, the puppet, songs, participatory dynamics, and outreach materials were consolidated as replicable educational tools with the potential to be used in future community awareness and illegal wildlife trafficking prevention initiatives.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

a) An unforeseen challenge was the need to adjust the initial approach to community benefits based on sociocultural findings that emerged during fieldwork. In the early stages, the inclusion of a component related to health and zoonoses (although not an objective of this project) was considered. However, the sociocultural findings showed that some communities maintain their own systems of care and traditional medical practices that are

deeply connected to their worldview and their historical relationship with wildlife. In this context, introducing external benefits without a prior process of intercultural dialogue could have been incongruent or even counterproductive.

As a result, priority was given to developing a deep understanding of cultural practices across different territories, postponing the incorporation of additional components until appropriate conditions for dialogue, planning, and cultural relevance are in place. This adjustment strengthened the ethical coherence of the project and helped avoid assistentialist approaches.

b) Another challenge was the lack of synchronization between certain field activities and the availability of outreach products. In particular, the design of the educational book and the poster was completed after the community festivals had taken place, which limited their direct integration into these activities and reduced their potential as complementary tools during the interventions.

To address this situation, the book was designed as a modular, adaptable, and replicable material, allowing it to be used in future outreach activities without losing coherence with the interventions already carried out. This experience highlighted the importance of allowing wider time margins for creative, editorial, and content validation processes in projects that include artistic and community-based components.

c) The intensive nature of the fieldwork—resulting from the broad geographic range covered by primate distribution in Mexico—combined with the end of the funding period, made it difficult to implement prolonged and systematic feedback processes in all participating communities. Although the original project design included only two community interventions, the lessons learned indicate that this type of work requires more continuous feedback mechanisms that allow for extended cycles of territorial engagement. This helps ensure that knowledge exchange does not remain limited to information extraction, but instead promotes active participation by all communities involved.

d) Finally, the integration of academic research, sociocultural intervention, and artistic production represented an operational challenge. While not a difficulty per se, it is worth sharing this reflection to highlight that these approaches operate on different timelines, languages, and evaluation criteria. Although the project originally planned to submit at least one scientific article during the implementation period, this was not possible because the manuscript is currently under review and approval by the co-authors. This academic timeline also overlapped with the completion of the doctoral degree process and current institutional holiday periods. As a result, manuscript submission was rescheduled for the immediate post-project phase, without affecting the work carried out or the robustness of the results obtained.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

Local communities participated in the project in differentiated ways, both as a central source of knowledge for the sociocultural research and as recipients and co-participants in laying the foundations for the development of awareness-raising and prevention actions.

In a first phase, residents of communities in the states of Campeche, Yucatán, Veracruz, Quintana Roo, and Tabasco actively participated through interviews and dialogue spaces, contributing to the construction of a situated sociocultural diagnosis that documents the regional diversity of historical memories and forms of relationship with primates, which are often rendered invisible by official approaches focused exclusively on a punitive vision.

Understanding these dimensions can reduce the likelihood of policies based solely on punishment by providing evidence that supports preventive and educational approaches, lowering the risk of indiscriminate criminalization and promoting a more just relationship between communities and institutions.

This process was not conceived as an extraction of information, but rather as a point of departure. The findings of the diagnosis informed the design of sociocultural interventions, educational materials, and public policy recommendations oriented toward prevention, in which communities are recognized as allies in wildlife protection. In this way, the project lays the groundwork for progressive community participation based on dialogue, trust, and shared responsibility, extending beyond the moment of the interview.

Based on this diagnosis, the knowledge generated was returned to two sites in the form of cultural narratives and outreach materials, translating scientific information into accessible and culturally relevant messages. In Veracruz, where two community festivals were implemented, children and adults participated in children's workshops, virtual reality experiences, community murals, and theatrical performances, fostering spaces for intergenerational dialogue and collective reflection on illegal wildlife trafficking.

These activities encourage people—particularly children—to recognize themselves as actors with an active role in the protection of local wildlife through the collective construction of the identity of “Guardians of the Jungle.” This symbolic framework strengthened a sense of belonging. The participation of children as creators, multipliers, and transmitters of messages—including music as a pedagogical tool—contributed to intergenerational processes of learning and awareness-raising about the primates living nearby, reinforced by educational materials that remain within the community.

Likewise, the results obtained constitute a foundation for subsequent planning phases, in which long-term benefits are anticipated through deeper community dialogue around regulatory aspects and the development of alternative livelihoods, particularly in contexts where pressure on wildlife may increase. Although this dimension was not directly addressed in the present project, the findings generated help guide future community engagement strategies that integrate conservation with local well-being and greater benefits for both communities and the primates that inhabit them.

Although a formal quantitative evaluation of the festivals and educational activities was not conducted within the timeframe of the project, their effectiveness was assessed through qualitative observations during the events. Participation levels, the active involvement of children in workshops and the community mural, and the engagement of audiences during the theatre and virtual reality experiences provided immediate indicators of interest and reception. Informal feedback from participants and community members suggested that the narrative and artistic formats facilitated understanding of the impacts of primate capture and stimulated reflection on wildlife protection. These observations indicate that the activities were effective as initial awareness-raising and dialogue-building tools and provide a basis for incorporating more systematic evaluation methods in future interventions.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

The project envisages its continuity from the academic sphere, with a scope that extends into the realm of policy and social impact, understood as processes of follow-up and further development of the work already carried out.

In the academic domain, the findings show that capture practices do not originate in crime itself, but rather in long-standing histories and in economic, cultural, and symbolic contexts. For this reason, I would like to connect these elements with green criminology theory and

to expand the research based on the outputs generated by this project in order to assess demand on social media and the effectiveness of educational interventions—that is, the real impact of festivals, virtual reality, and campaigns on changes in community perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding trafficking, capture, and/or pet keeping.

Given the positive impact of Virtual Reality activities and theatre + rap performances at the community festivals, a key next step will be to expand these interventions to other strategic communities within primate distribution ranges and territories with historical records of capture. This scaling-up is not conceived as a mass expansion, but rather as targeted interventions carried out in coordination with local actors (schools, cultural promoters, and community leaders), with the aim of consolidating continuous awareness-raising processes and, as far as possible, avoiding extractive or isolated dynamics.

The educational book, the puppet, the songs, and the 360° audiovisual materials were designed as replicable pedagogical tools. In subsequent phases, the continued screening of the virtual reality fiction short film is envisaged, along with the free distribution of the coloring book in additional communities and its integration into formal and non-formal educational spaces (community schools, local workshops, and cultural activities), reinforcing the participation of children as agents of change and multipliers of the conservation message. The remaining outreach materials produced (songs, digital campaigns, printed materials) require a broader and more sustained dissemination strategy in order to maximize their reach (see response 6).

Likewise, the policy brief is not conceived as a set of recommendations for direct implementation; rather, it is proposed as a process of follow-up and progressive validation with community members, authorities, academics, and key stakeholders, in order to gather their perspectives and jointly adjust and strengthen the recommendations based on accumulated territorial experience.

The continuity of the work is therefore conceived as an opportunity to consolidate a comprehensive approach that articulates academic knowledge, social prevention, and the design of public policies that are more just, effective, and culturally relevant.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

The dissemination of results is conceived as a multi-level strategy, combining community-based, academic, institutional, and public outreach actions, with the aim of reaching both specialized audiences and non-academic publics. This strategy includes both activities already carried out and planned actions intended to ensure continuity in the process of knowledge socialization.

a) Community dissemination and knowledge return

The results were shared directly with community and urban audiences through artistic and educational interventions. In particular, the play *Ramona* was presented at one of the two community festivals and at an open house event at the Instituto de Ecología, A.C. (INECOL), facilitating spaces for dialogue and awareness-raising on illegal wildlife trafficking for two different audiences. The virtual reality campaign was presented on one occasion, and there are plans to continue sharing these materials at festivals and in formal and non-formal educational spaces, depending on logistical considerations and future financial support. Likewise, printed and educational materials (the book and poster) were designed for distribution within participating communities and outreach spaces. In later phases, their circulation is expected to be expanded to the communities that were interviewed.

b) Scientific and academic dissemination

The academic results of the project began to be disseminated through the presentation of

one of the articles derived from the research at the congress of the American Society of Primatologists (ASP) in Chicago, United States in September 2025. The findings were also shared in an international webinar on pet keeping organized by the Latin American Society of Primatology (SLAPrim), entitled “Primate conservation: a look at pet keeping and its consequences,” which enabled the exchange of experiences and the development of collaborative links among specialists from different countries, as well as through the presentation delivered during my doctoral degree examination held on December 4.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtELL3k_UN0&t=18s



The academic dissemination strategy includes the publication of two scientific articles currently in progress, as well as their presentation at future conferences and specialized dissemination forums, contributing to the regional debate on wildlife trafficking and sociocultural approaches to conservation.

c) Public and digital dissemination

Two digital campaigns were developed and disseminated through social media <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLXda61MqN6/> and open platforms https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1t_THlbvqA, including audiovisual content in 360°

virtual reality format and a short film available on YouTube. These materials were hosted on a digital platform created for the project (Selva Acústica), conceived as my space for disseminating audiovisual and narrative content derived from my research and outreach projects, including materials produced through the Rufford Grant, as well as musical and creative projects aimed at fostering understanding of nature and its conservation.

In subsequent stages, the circulation of these contents is expected to be expanded through social media, mass media outlets, local press, and audiovisual materials associated with the songs produced, with the aim of strengthening public awareness of illegal wildlife trafficking through culturally relevant and non-punitive narratives.

Likewise, Selva Acústica is conceived as a platform oriented toward the replicability and transfer of tools, in which the materials generated are understood as open and reusable resources for other organizations, cultural collectives, and educational projects, allowing the impact of the project to extend beyond the territories initially involved.

d) Institutional engagement and public policy

The policy brief is intended to be shared and refined through dialogue with communities, environmental authorities, civil society organizations, and decision-makers, and subsequently presented to members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Submit the articles, disseminate the materials, and ensure continuity of the webinar, as several countries expressed interest in the Muppet song.

I would very much like to pursue a postdoctoral position that allows me to continue conducting this type of research, and I also aspire to join the National System of Researchers (SNI). I will continue attempting to publish my findings for broader audiences, such as Mongabay, even though I was rejected this year, as I am deeply interested in documenting community stories beyond the figures required by scientific research. In this way, I seek to expand this sensitive, culturally meaningful information by combining research with environmental journalism.

Regarding music-based interventions, I am convinced that they have the capacity to be stored in the brain more deeply than spoken language, as they convey feelings and emotions—something I was able to confirm through people’s reactions to the music performed through the Muppet. For this reason, I would like to strengthen the musical and performative components as educational and preventive tools, exploring local training processes (rap, theatre, or storytelling workshops) to enable the future appropriation of these tools by local actors for autonomous use.

Finally, building on these results and the continued follow-up of the project, I aim to design evaluation mechanisms that make it possible to measure changes in perceptions, attitudes, and narratives over time, particularly among children and young people. This will help strengthen the evidence on the effectiveness of sociocultural prevention approaches and allow interventions to be adjusted based on lessons learned. Taken together, these steps will enable a transition from a project focused on knowledge generation and awareness-raising toward a sustained social prevention process, based on collaboration among communities, institutions, and cultural actors, and aimed at structurally reducing the conditions that enable illegal wildlife trafficking.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, it was incorporated into the song, posters, audiovisual materials, campaigns, social media videos documenting the festivals, the presentation at the ASP conference, and the doctoral defense.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Juan Carlos Serio Silva

In addition to serving as my thesis advisor and supervising my doctoral research, he reviewed research progress, validated methods and results, and accompanied the project during a couple of field visits, during which he conducted interviews, supported the full implementation of the community festivals, and acted as a liaison to connect with local authorities in sites where institutional presence and engagement are more limited.

Dr. Wesley Dáttilo, together with Dr. Juan Carlos, provided additional funding for this project and are co-authors of the articles produced. Along with Dr. Inés Arroyo-Quiroz, they contributed their extensive expertise to the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Jorge Ramos was the technician responsible for accompanying field visits, conducting surveys, and actively supporting the project as a co-author of the articles.

Rodrigo Alto Cuate is a biologist and filmmaker responsible for validating the scripts and recording and editing the 360° virtual reality audiovisual materials, as well as assisting with interviews and their transcription.

During the audiovisual production process, interviews, and festivals, other members of the Transdisciplinary Primatology Group in Mexico also participated, to whom I am deeply grateful:

- Edelia Gutiérrez - participated in the virtual reality fiction short film and assisted with the administration of interviews.
- Martín Lagunes - participated in the virtual reality fiction short film and assisted with the administration of interviews.
- Estrella Flores - participated in the virtual reality fiction short film.
- Ío Cházaro - participated in the virtual reality fiction short film and assisted with the administration of interviews.
- Karla Natalia Cavazos - participated in the virtual reality fiction short film.
- Alfredo Moreno - served as a field guide during one of the filming sessions.
- María Fernanda - assisted with the administration of interviews.
- Ricardo Ortiz - assisted in the virtual reality fiction short film.
- Tania Fonseca - supported the coordination of the festivals in Hueyapan, Veracruz.

All of the individuals mentioned above, together with Dr. Juan Carlos Serio Silva, supported festival activities, both through existing dynamics and through new activities derived from this project.

Special thanks are extended to local authorities, particularly Manuel Tejero from Balancán, Tabasco, and Don Joaquín from Veracruz, who served as field guides and facilitated engagement with community members. I also thank Rosa Friscione, who granted us access to her Wildlife Management Unit (UMA) and allowed the filming of several scenes of the short film.

Artistic and musical collaborators included:

Helio Martín del Campo, who composed the music for the audiovisual project and served as the music producer of the song “Libres.”

Xavi Guzmán and Jesús Hernández, who participated in the mixing, composition, and mastering of the song “Somos de la Selva,” which was part of the musical theatre

component.

Estephany Mora, Ío Cházaro, and Zaira Esparza, who served as illustrators and designers of the covers, the book, and the poster.



10. Any other comments?

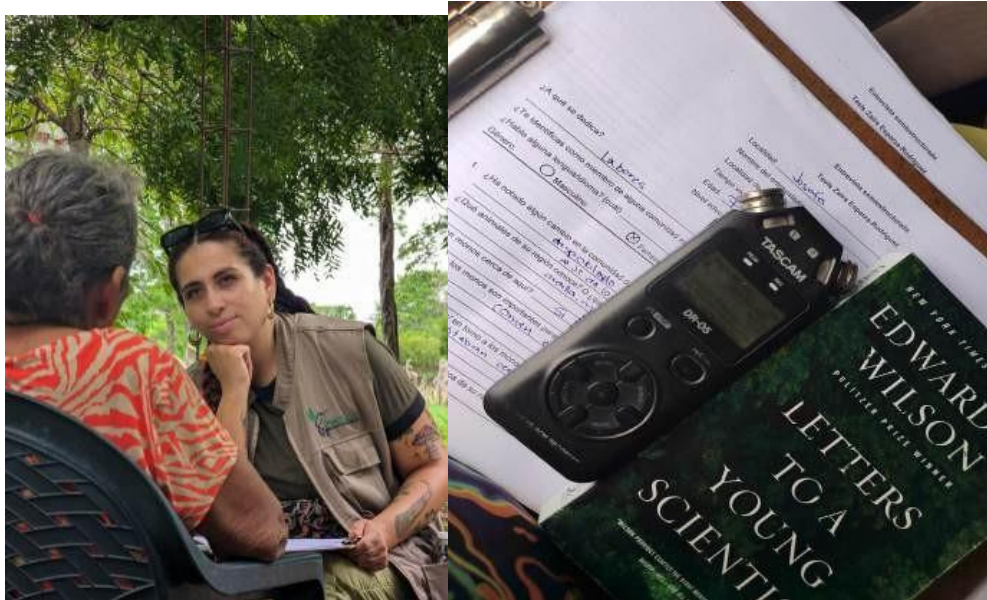
I am deeply grateful to the Rufford Foundation, which for the second time chose to fund this research project that combines rigorous analysis with application in public policy, while also integrating community perspectives and worldviews to better understand the illegal trade in primates. Without its support, these findings would not have been able to move into the sphere of conservation education. Moreover, through this project I discovered my

future line of research, laying the groundwork for continuing this topic from multiple angles, approaches, and disciplines, integrating art and music as languages for education and awareness-raising.

Ethical considerations

The collection of sociocultural information was conducted under a non-extractive approach, recognizing that community knowledge about primates is part of complex historical, cultural, and environmental trajectories. The documentation of past practices and local perceptions was not intended to evaluate, judge, or criminalize communities, but rather to understand the contexts that have shaped human-primate relationships over time.

Interviews





Festivals









ANNEX - Financial Report
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