El Oro del Cofre: Conservation of endangered golden-coloured Acineta, Mormodes and Lepanthes orchids in the cloud forests of Cofre de Perote, Mexico

Interim Project Update – August 2026

Since mid-July I have been carrying out fieldwork and photographic work in Veracruz. We have completed nine field trips so far and recorded Lepanthes and Acineta at five of the sites.

The results for Acineta are encouraging. The habitat pattern is now clear, we are growing plants in vitro, and we are confident in the reintroduction approach at the Orchidarc Reserve set out in the revised project.

The most significant development is on the Lepanthes side. Across these trips, and through a taxonomic revision we have carried out over the past two months, we have found a number of populations, both within the project area and elsewhere in Mexico, that do not fit cleanly within the currently described species. We now estimate at least three undescribed species and suspect two new natural hybrids. Documenting and resolving them will take the combined field and taxonomic effort of myself and Cristian Tomás.

We have discussed these findings with Dr Rodolfo Solano, the leading authority on the genus in Mexico, and with Herbario AMO, which has led the taxonomic study of Mexican Lepanthes and published the foundational monograph of the genus in the 1990s. The taxonomic and phylogenetic work will be carried out in coordination with them.

In light of this, I believe the strongest course is to widen the Lepanthes component from the Cofre de Perote populations to a treatment of the genus across Mexico, working towards an updated, illustrated account with new macro photography, habitat descriptions, video, and a phylogenetic analysis of the Mexican species. The phylogenetic work is feasible through Herbario AMO and our established partnership with Orchids for Peace. To cover the ground efficiently, Cristian would lead in his native Oaxaca and extend into Chiapas, while I focus on Veracruz and Puebla.

I want to be clear about what this means for the grant. The activities funded by Rufford continue as agreed: the population surveys, the IUCN Red List assessments, and the conservation work with Acineta at the reserve. The wider national treatment and the book are additional work, resourced through Herbario AMO and Orchids for Peace, and the Rufford budget remains consistent with the revised proposal. Reintroduction stays focused on Acineta at the reserve as agreed; the expanded Lepanthes work is taxonomic and documentary and does not involve reintroduction.

If anything, this makes the project stronger. The newly recognised species, and others like them, are highly susceptible to extinction, which raises the conservation value of describing and documenting them and feeds directly into the Red List assessments the project committed to.





