#### **RUFFORD PROJECT UPDATE REPORT**

"The tapir as a forest ecosystem engineer in the southern Yungas forests in Argentina" Application ID: 42344-1

Date: 11/02/2025

### **RESPONSIBLE: Maria Luz Thomann**

### 1. Summary

The fieldwork carried out in the framework of the Rufford Small Grants, has been essential to collect valuable data for tapir conservation. During interactions with local communities through educational activities, we observed a growing interest in participating in tapir conservation projects.

These efforts have also helped establish meaningful connections with local residents and park rangers at El Rey National Park, creating a foundation for future collaborations. These relationships are crucial to the success of upcoming conservation campaigns, management plans and initiatives both within the national park and on the surrounding areas. The fieldwork has not only advanced our understanding of tapir conservation, but has also strengthened the social and institutional networks necessary for long-term conservation efforts.

#### 2. Activities carried out

# 2.1 Fieldwork

Field trips: Four field trips have been completed to PNER, each lasting six days.

Sample collection: Over 50 tapir fecal samples have been collected, containing seeds from various plant species. These samples were georeferenced and photographed at the collection site.

Workshops and outreach: Two workshops were conducted, one aimed at the neighbours of PNER and the other at the park rangers, with the goal of raising awareness about the importance and role of the tapir in the conservation of the ecosystem.

# 2.2 Sample processing

Cleaning and storage: All faecal samples were processed in the laboratory by using filter meshes, where seeds were separated from the faecal matter. These seeds were cleaned and stored in paper envelopes for later use in germination tests.

Species identification: Work is underway to identify the plant species to which the found seeds belong, using identification guides and consultations with experts which will enable us to create a list of species consumed by the tapir.

# 3. Preliminary results

Seed diversity: From among the collected faeces, it has been possible to identify the species of some of the seeds contained in them, indicating a varied diet of the tapir in PNER, although focussed on a few more relevant species (*Gleditsia amorphoides*, *Enterolobium contortisiliquum*, *Vachellia aroma*, *Allophylus edulis*, etc).

Workshops and outreach: The workshops conducted with the neighbours and park rangers had good participation and response, showing growing interest in the conservation of the tapir and its habitat. The neighbouring community contributed with many personal experiences and information on tapir sightings, demonstrating a better understanding of local issues and a positive attitude towards the conservation of the species.

Sample processing: The processing of faecal samples has resulted in a collection of over 1000 seeds that will be used in germination tests.

#### 4. Difficulties faced

Due to adverse climatic conditions, such as heavy rains, entering PNER was impossible during the raining season as access to the park is by crossing several mountain rivers that have no bridges. These difficulties delayed some of the field trips, which prevented the collection of samples. In order to overcome the difficulties presented by the challenging climatic conditions, we decided to postpone field trips until a time when access is available and the work site is safe for the work team.

#### 5. Next steps

Seed analysis: A detailed analysis of the collected seeds will be conducted to identify species and assess their viability.

Expansion of educational activities: We plan to conduct at least one more workshop with other communities near the park and students from nearby schools.

Additional field trips and monitoring: We are planning on conducting at least 2/3 more field trips in the remaining time of this project. These field trips will be dedicated to continue collecting more data on dispersed seeds, as well as on the presence of the tapir in PNER.

# 6. Photos

**1.** Flyers and posters with information on the tapir conservation. **2.** Workshop with neighbours of El Rey National Park. **3.** Tapir faeces collection in El Rey National Park.



Flyers and posters with information on the tapir conservation ©Luz Thomann



Workshop with neighbours of El Rey National Park ©Luz Thomann



Tapir faeces collection in El Rey National Park -©Luz Thomann