



Conciencia Amazónica makes exciting scientific discoveries in their ecological reserves located in the Ecuadorian Amazon Province of Morona Santiago January - June 2026

Since 2019, the foundation Conciencia Amazónica has been dedicated to improve environmental education in rural Amazonia in southeast Ecuador. By linking scientific investigation on private ecological reserves, and forming collaborations with Ecuadorian and International Universities, we generate exciting educational materials that we divulge to the local schools, high schools, and communities. In addition, our reserves serve as model farms that demonstrate to local land owners the possibility of ecologically friendly production while also maintaining areas of conservation with appropriate land management practices. Our motto is **“Work with Nature, not Against her”**.

In 2023, we purchased over 450 acres of cattle farms to begin implementing conservation and eco-friendly production strategies. We named the reserve after the primary donor for this project, Jack Agett, and his wife, Claudia Geary, whose kind donation will have a long lasting impact on a key area for biodiversity conservation. We have constructed a greenhouse for organic fruit and vegetable production, implemented small animal production to produce fertilizer for the garden, and have begun the process of long term natural regeneration of cattle pastures to establish large natural corridors for wildlife. Over the last two years, we have generated a base line database of wildlife including large mammals, birds, snakes and frogs, insects, and flora. To date, we have discovered new species of walking sticks, spiders, and several plant species, resulting in scientific publications.

To explore the interactions and ecology of these areas, we work together with the University of Azuay, Departments of Biology and Environmental Engineering. University students receive real world experience in the field, as well as assist the Foundation in our local educational projects by preparing and presenting their findings to the local inhabitants. In addition, we invite professional biologists in several fields of studies to do novel research on our reserves, which has resulted in exciting new discoveries, detailed below.

“Close Encounters of the Arachnid Kind” - Feb 2026

In the last several years, Ecuador has been the site of major advancements in arachnology, the study of spiders. We invited an up and coming Biologist currently in a masters program of the University of San Francisco Quito, Pedro Peñaherrera, who currently has published 59 new species of spiders in Ecuador. After only 4 days of collecting spiders in the field, and several months into their classification, Pedro has identified 5 new species of spiders, and first reports of families of known spiders in Ecuador.



A “pirate spider” of the genus *Gelanor*, belonging to the family *Mimetidae*.

Besides being very beautiful and having that peculiar pattern on their abdomens, these little spiders have a very interesting hunting method, which gives them the name pirate spiders. Instead of building a web to capture their prey, they invade the webs of other spiders and wait for the opportune moment to attack the owner of the web.

For this type of hunting, they have a very useful tool. As you can see in the photos, their first two pairs of legs are quite long and covered in spines (macrosetae), which help them hold onto their prey.

We found these individuals at Jungle Dave's Farm, Morona Santiago.

Text: Jamie Mora, Biologist

Below: 2 new species of spiders found along the ridge in primary forest (1850m)



University of Azuay students visit the Agett-Geary Reserve

Students in their 2nd year of Biology from the University Azuay came to the Agett-Geary Ecological Reserve to investigate the altitudinal variations of plants, insects, and birds to witness the differences in ecological dynamics at different altitudes. The Agett-Geary ecological reserve ranges from 1450m to over 3000m (approximately 4,700 to 10,000ft). With year round growing conditions, you can imagine the incredible biodiversity and specialization of organisms. By examining the interactions between insects, birds and flowers, imagine the dynamics between pollination of flowers, seed dispersals, and feeding patterns, across different altitudes.

The students assist our foundation with their valuable data, with our Project Director, Juan Carlos Sanchez, leading the field expedition in key areas under investigation. Since the property is so large, Juan Carlos has designed the study to focus on specific areas for research, to maximize efficiency of field work and data collection, as well as subsequent analysis. We have begun a large data base across the Reserve, and will continue to monitor the changes and conversion of the areas of pasture being dedicated to natural reforestation, over time.

Over the last 3 years, we have already witnessed a change in areas where cattle pasture has been lost and the process of reforestation has begun. Our database clearly shows an increase of birds and insects linked to vegetative coverage as pioneer species of plants replace the pasture. Trees grow rapidly, as their root systems are intact from previously being cut, and luckily, slash-and-burn practices were never implemented. Trees provide a framework for lichens, bromeliads, and orchids to grow, which attract insects and birds,



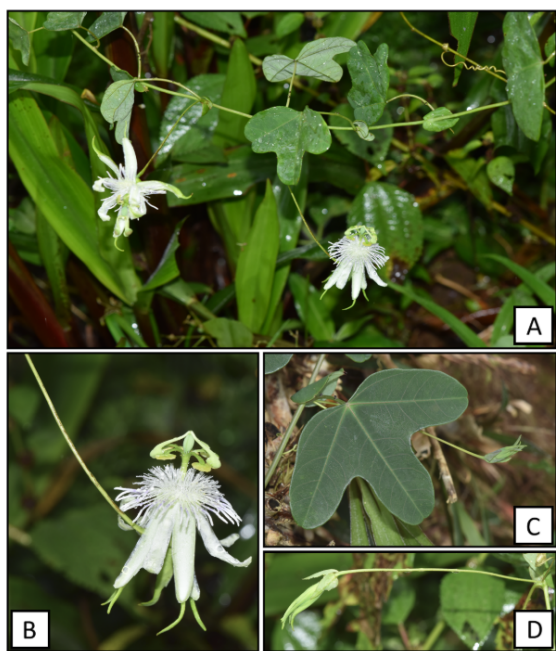
An insect on *Melastomatacea* sp.



A Green Jay (*Cyanocorax ymca*)

New Scientific Publications in 2026

Given the extensive biodiversity, as detailed above with spiders, we often find un-described species, including plants from a variety of families. In addition, as we explore the reserves, we often observe novel interactions between the flora and fauna. Dedicating the time to complete the Academic Research, which includes reading countless papers from numerous journals from many countries, has led to important collaborations with biologists from many different countries. In the case of botany, we have recently published an article regarding a new species of Passiflora, *Passiflora veronisiae*, in the Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. The first author, Yero Keuthe, is from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and has collaborated with Conciencia Amazonica in Academic Research since 2023. <https://journals.brit.org/jbrit/article/view/1475>



We have also described another species of Passiflora, *Passiflora julioriveraea*, which is currently under peer review in the Nordic Journal of Botany. This passiflora was observed with flowers by Julio Rivera, in Agett-Geary Reserve in 2024. Julio continued to monitor the plant until a small fruit was formed. The biologist Henry Garzón found additional plants (photos shown below), and with our colleague from New Zealand, we scrutinized the details of several individuals, and confirmed it as a new species. For his work in the field, as well as so many other supporting works in the reserves, we honored Julio Rivera by naming the species after him.

While observing closely a Peruvian Racket-tail hummingbird (*Ocreatus peruanus*) feeding from several flowers, we filmed an interesting interaction with it and butterflies, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VliqQ19WyEE>

We wrote a short field note regarding the reaction, which has been accepted for publication in the Revista Ecuatoriana de Ornitología:
“INTERACTION OF OCREATUS PERUANUS WITH LEPIDOPTERA”

Finally, we observed a Western Striolated Puffbird (*Nystalus obamai*) entering a small hole along side an access road on the Agett-Geary Reserve. We placed a wildlife camera, and recorded over 1100 videos of an adult entering and leaving the nest. The resulting short communication is currently under peer review for publication in the journal Ornitologia Neotropical, where we detail the feeding patterns and important milestones of development for this species. A summary video can be seen on the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foGkvQKhYe0>

Presentation of Results at the County Fair, San Juan Bosco

In San Juan Bosco, Morona Santiago, we presented our results and promoted our ecological projects during the county fair. Well over 100 people of all ages visited our stand, where we showed results of our wildlife camera study of large mammals, videos of mixed flock of birds, and a stereoscope where we showed grasshoppers, butterflies, ants, and a beetle, to show details of their morphology to the interested public. We also presented the results of an altitudinal study in the Ecuadorian Amazon to assess amphibian distribution across the province of Morona Santiago, where we did field studies to identify species at low altitude, (San Jose de Morona, 230m), mid altitude (Macuma, 600m), and high altitude (San Juan Bosco, 1800m).

The biologist Estefania Solis who studies entomology focusing on walking sticks and Acari (a subclass of Arachnids), manned the stand with assistance of a visiting student from Princeton University, Colin Vickrey. Our stand also included real world ecological strategies local farmers can implement on their own farms to improve water quality, soil quality, and production. We also engaged in conversations with several farmers to coordinate visits to our reserves, so they can see our projects first hand.



To complete 2026, we are continuing with many studies in several branches of field ecology, meticulously adding to our database for future comparative analysis. We are continuing without work with wildlife cameras, observation and banding of birds for population, health, and interaction studies, as well as further botanical and entomological investigations. We are most grateful for the support we receive from Friends of Ecuador, without whom this work would not be possible. Our work will continue to have a long-lasting positive impact both for the environment, and the local inhabitants for generations to come.