

Rio Faisanes Stubfoot Toad, by Andreas Kay

PROPOSED PROJECT ECUADOR

Intensify the Fight Against Miners in Ecuador's Cloud Forests

One of the greatest threats to rare orchids is the illegal plant trade. The intricate beauty of orchids makes them the most coveted of rare plants and leads to the majority of criminal activity within the rare plant trade. Although artificially propagated orchids are widely available, certain collectors willing to pay many thousands of dollars for a single plant drive the harvest of untold numbers of wild orchids each year from remote locations across the globe.

The Chocó-Tumbes forest in northwestern Ecuador near the border with Colombia is a biodiversity hotspot. This cloud forest in the tropical Andes is known for having the highest number of unique endemic species of orchids in the entire world, including the rarest *Dracula* orchids. Unfortunately, this makes the region popular for illegal harvesting, which threatens these beautiful orchid species with extinction and disrupts their surrounding ecosystem.

But poaching isn't the only culprit threatening orchids and other rare species here. The area is under pressure from gold mining interests, deforestation for agriculture and the cattle industry, and climate change.

In 2014, Rainforest Trust and our local partner Fundación EcoMinga created the private *Dracula* Orchid Reserve with the support of our donors to protect important habitat for endemic species. We have continued our work together to expand the reserve, which now totals just over 6,500 acres.

STOP GOLD MINING TO SAVE RARE ORCHIDS

In recent years, active illegal gold mining was discovered adjacent to the reserve and illegal miners have been trespassing across the protected area. An Ecuadorian mining company has shown interest in acquiring properties near the reserve that represent the largest portion of remaining unprotected forest.

It is imperative that we raise \$1,318,181 to support EcoMinga in securing an additional 2,500 acres of land to expand the protection corridor around the existing reserve. This expansion will increase the size of the reserve by 56% and protect numerous imperiled species, including the entire known population of *Dracula trigonopetala*—one of the rarest species in the area.



2,500
ACRES

\$1,318,181
PROJECT COST

\$527.27
COST PER ACRE

482,427 mT
CO₂ EQUIVALENTS
STORED

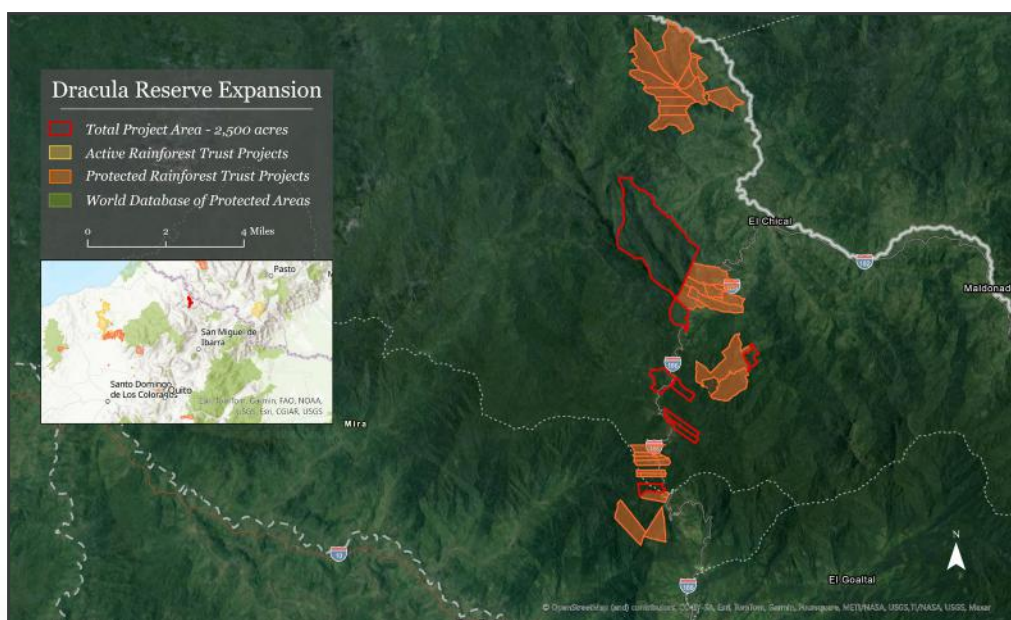
KEY SPECIES:

Rio Faisanes Stubfoot Toad (CR),
Carchi Andes Toad (EN),
Dracula terborchii,
Dracula trigonopetala,
Dracula erythrocodon,
Platystele finleyae



PROTECT AN ANDEAN CLOUD FOREST FOR ORCHIDS AND AMPHIBIANS

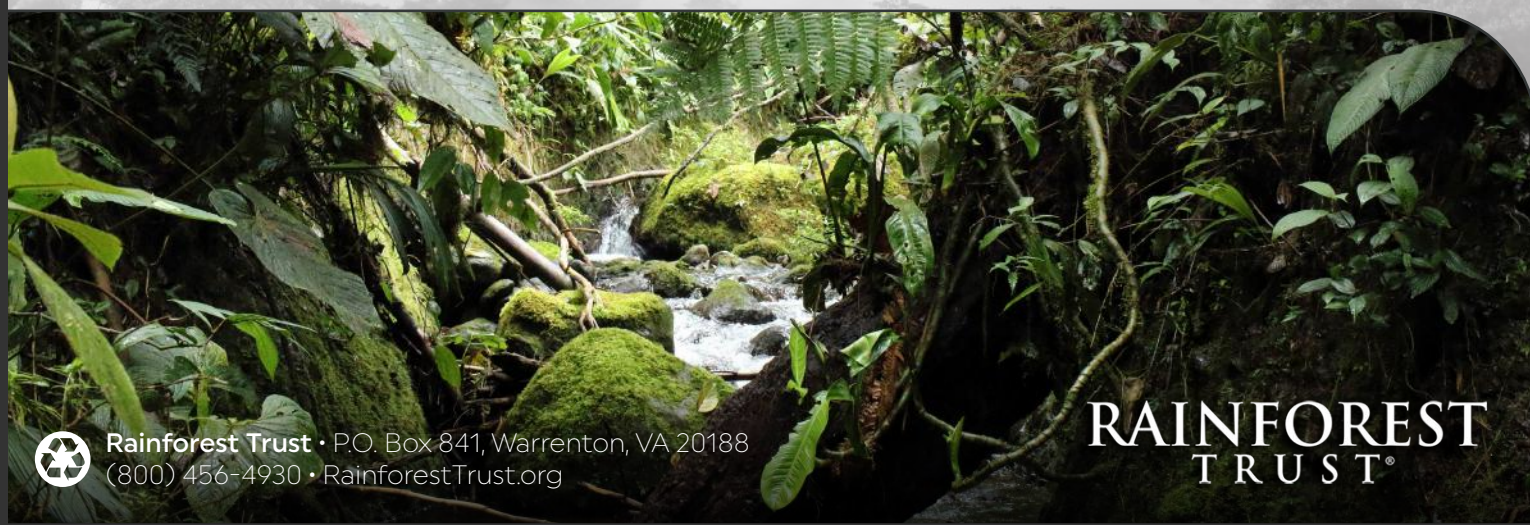
The reserve covers unique habitats between 3,000 and 7,500 feet elevation, home to multiple threatened species, including the Rio Faisanes Stubfoot Toad and Carchi Andes Toad. Newly described, range-restricted species are also present in the area, including Chical Stream Frog, Fischers' Hedgehog-Lizard, and three orchids as well as new species of frogs as yet undescribed. In a 2021 survey, three new vertebrate species were discovered on a single property.



By linking the upper and lower part of the reserve, wildlife will be able to move across altitudes and varying habitats, and their populations will become more resilient. New research and knowledge of the biodiversity value of the area is expected to lead to even more species being identified.

The Dracula expansion will benefit from EcoMinga's existing management guidelines that stipulate only scientific research activities and scientific tourism are allowed to take place. Reserve guards will provide increased vigilance that is expected to reduce illegal activities in the area.

Landscape from Dracula Reserve, courtesy EcoMinga



Rainforest Trust • P.O. Box 841, Warrenton, VA 20188
(800) 456-4930 • RainforestTrust.org

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