Integrating capacity building and nature conservation in large-scale biodiversity surveys

Our Planet Reviewed Papua New Guinea 2012-2013

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our planet reviewed

During the terrestrial survey of the ***"Our Planet Reviewed"*** project in **Papua New Guinea** we created a bridge between biodiversity research, capacity building and nature conservation.

The scientific aim of the project was to estimate, for the first time, the biological diversity generated by altitudinal turnover of insect species.

The project was set up by the Natural History Museums of Brussels (RBINS) and Paris (MNHN), the NGO Pro-Natura International, the French IRD and, as local partners, the New Guinea Binatang Research Center (BRC) and the University of Papua New Guinea.

Half of the core scientific team (ca 50 persons) was made of local research assistants and the other half of international biodiversity experts. Local research assistants (called paraecologists and parataxonomists) were recruited in local communities, trained by BRC and supervized by the international experts.

Collection of specimens by paraecologists

Sorting of specimens by parataxonomists supervised by experts

Remote field research station where samples were pre-sorted

Does money grow on trees? Conservation royalty payment of K10,000 (U.S.$3680), in K10 bills displayed in traditional fashion on bamboo stalks, made to ten clans from Wanang village for conserving 10,000 ha of primary forest while their neighbors opted for logging.

Locals were involved in sample collection, sample pre-sorting and received training and salary. This not only speeded up sample collection, but simultaneously supported nature conservation as the locals had means of income other than from commercial logging. We also paid land-use fees to land owners as compensation for collecting plants and animals in their forest plots. Conservation initiatives by local communities were further supported by funds from private sponsors raised by BRC. Funds were also collected to allow local scientists to visit overseas laboratories and to participate to international conferences.

To summarize, large-scale biotic surveys are not only essential to understand the functioning of complex tropical ecosystems where biodiversity is highest but can also be important drivers of capacity building and nature conservation.