

Latam Eco Review: Witchcraft and wildlife trafficking in Peru

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*The few studies done have confirmed the presence of endangered or endemic species, as in the case of the famous "Romeo," the last known Seheuncas water frog (*Telmatobius yuracare*). The frog's habitat is in the Seheuncas valley, site of the Ivirizu dam. Image by Matías Careaga/Global Wildlife Conservation.*

Among the most read stories at our Spanish-language service, Mongabay-Latam, this past week were articles about a hydropower project in one of Bolivia's most diverse protected areas; Colombian Air Force drones that revealed alarming deforestation in Tinigua Park; and wildlife trafficking and witchcraft in Peru.

Bolivia's Ivirizu hydroelectric project threatens the biodiversity of Carrasco National Park

Experts question how the construction of a hydropower plant was approved in a protected area, especially because of plans to clear 5 square kilometers (1.9 square miles) of forest and the confirmed use of dynamite. An elevational diversity gradient that runs from 300 to 4,700 meters (1,000 to 15,400 feet) above sea level makes Carrasco National Park one of the most biodiverse protected areas in Bolivia (if one of the least studied.) By 2017, 614 vascular plants were identified, although the National Protected Area Service (Sernap) calculates there may be more than 3,000. There are more than 300 orchid species inside the park, 50 of which are endemic. While a Sernap atlas counts 247 bird species, others put the number closer to 700, but they haven't been identified.

Colombian Air Force drones reveal alarming deforestation in Tinigua Park

Air Force drone flights over Tinigua Park in central Colombia show 56 square kilometers (22 square miles) of forest replaced in the first three months of 2018 by coca cultivation, pastures and small-scale land grabs. Behind all of this, according to residents, are former FARC rebels who have taken over and redistributed the territory. The security situation is so complicated that park officials needed to leave over a month ago. The 2,150-square-kilometer (830-square-mile) park, created to unite high plains, montane forest and rainforest zones, is the only part of the country that connects the Orinoco with the Andes and Amazon regions. It serves as a corridor for wildlife, including jaguars, mountain lions and woolly monkeys.

Macabre Market: The role of witchcraft in wildlife trafficking in Peru

A massive police operation to stop a wildlife trafficking market in the center of Peru's capital seized around 1,000 live animals and animal parts. Of five stores searched, two specialized in the sale of toads and two in dried animals, where police found caiman heads, the head of a spectacled bear, the entire body of a deer, toads and dried frogs. The fifth store sold occult items and offered services in spells and witchcraft. The seizure reveals that people are not just buying wildlife for pets, decoration or even ancestral traditions, but for witchcraft.



Heads of wild animals and crafts made with animal parts were seized in the raid. Image courtesy of Serfor.

Fishing and plastics threaten northern Peru's marine protected areas

Peru's Guano Islands and Capes National Reserve System is a marine protected area that extends from Piura in the country's north to Tacna in the south, covering about 1,408 square kilometers (544 square miles). However, the situation for octopuses in northern Peru is precarious. Despite a fishing ban, in the high season each fishing expedition catches up to 2 tons of octopus every 10 days. Meanwhile, plastic pollution endangers life on the region's most important islands.



The Peruvian booby (Sula variegata) is found along the coasts of Peru and Chile. It is one of the principal guano birds of South America. Image by Antonio Escalante.

Nesting projects could revive the scarlet macaw of Central America

In the last scarlet macaw corridor in Latin America, which crosses Guatemala, Belize and Mexico, it is believed there are more of the colorful birds held in cages than the 1,000 estimated in the wild. After years of fighting wildlife trafficking in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere and Mexico's Montes Azules, two NGOs involved residents of both regions in the care of scarlet macaw nests. If these nesting projects are successful, in 10 years the species, *Ara macao*, could be strong enough to maintain its numbers.



Two scarlet macaws about to turn 90 days old and be freed. Image courtesy of WCS/Guatemala.

The war against plastic disposables: What's the progress in Latin America?

Mongabay-Latam surveyed efforts around the region to control plastic in the environment. Its findings included Latin America's first law to ban plastic bags in both supermarkets and small stores in Chile; a bill to progressively eliminate single-use plastic in Peru; regional regulations to limit plastic straws and bags in Mexico; Colombia's tax on plastic disposables; enforcement of rules on disposable plastic in the Galapagos Islands; disincentives against single-use plastic in Costa Rica; and the end of polyethylene bags within 24 months in Panama.



Various Latin American countries are promoting national and local laws to confront the problem of single-use plastic pollution. Image by Alto Nivel.