

The Dynamics of Threats and Conservation Efforts for the Tropical Andes Hotspot in Amazonas and San Martín, Peru

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Extended Abstract of PhD Thesis

This thesis examines threats and conservation opportunities in the Tropical Andes Hotspot in Amazonas and San Martín regions, Northeastern Peru, using the yellow tailed woolly monkey (*Oreonax flavicauda*) as a case study. This species and the area suffer severe pressures of varying interests from diverse actors. Although they both rank as global and national conservation priorities, current conservation efforts fail to stop the rapid deterioration of the area or address the species' decline.

This study uses detailed ethnographical descriptions which are analysed within the political ecology framework to explore the sources of threats to the species and its habitat in scales ranging from household to international levels. It also explores the unique cultural features of the migrant campesino populations in Northeastern Peru in relation to their environmental attitudes and ability to implement or cooperate with conservation initiatives. Later, conservation efforts of the state, NGOs, local people and the Ronda Campesina, a grassroots movement are studied. The strengths and weaknesses of each of these conservation initiatives are looked at using different contextual conservation theories as a framework. Special attention is given to the cascade and transformation processes of conservation initiatives, from the international, through national and regional, down to local levels. Lastly, the effectiveness of the different conservation initiatives, as conservation methods for the *Oreonax flavicauda* and its habitat are explored.

The main threats to *O. flavicauda* are caused by both rural campesinos and outside national and international corporations. Severe economic and social pressures are found to force campesinos into unsustainable practices. There is insufficient and/or inadequate state or private support for development of efficient land and resource usage which could reduce rates of land encroachment. Uncontrolled fires, hunting and land tenure problems result from an amalgam of social, environmental and political explanations. The effects of extractive industries and development projects are proved to confirm dire consequences for both the environment and social processes of campesino populations. Climate change is also identified as a serious potential hazard for *O. flavicauda*.

In most cases, campesinos in Northeastern Peru are presented as environmentally and socially deleterious. However, although migrant populations are sometimes unfamiliar with, or wary of, the forest, they do understand its importance to their lives and see conservation as an opportunity for development. Pressures on campesino communities restrict their ability to internally control the sovereignty of more powerful and opportunistic community members, who thrive under a system that favours intensified production and the absence of state environmental regulation. This is true even in cases where illegal activities by powerful individuals threaten the livelihood of the whole society. Also, power relations within campesino communities promote two kinds of authorities; the first is the steward type, sacrificing for the community's social progress and likely to endorse conservation initiatives. The second type is more

opportunistic, hoping to use their authority for personal gain. Cultural control systems such as gossip as well as the augmentation of external development and extraction projects encourages increasing abundance of the later type, hence impeding conservation initiatives.

Environmental initiatives run under the presidency of Alan Garcia are demonstrated to be directly related to international pressure and prospects of economic benefits linked to neoliberal conservation schemes. Some of the initiatives are characterised by perfunctory execution such as cases of ‘paper parks’ and impoverished environmental enforcement agencies. Different case studies demonstrate how these types of initiatives can alienate campesino populations from conservation objectives, stimulating antagonistic relationships. Conservation initiatives run by the regional governments feature similar ideologies and impediments on the ground, stemming from chronic deficiencies in resources and expertise as well as a lack of real participation and communication with local populations.

This thesis categorises and critically assesses the wide range of NGO conservation initiatives in the area. It finds that not all NGOs’ initiatives directly affect forest and species conservation and other initiatives vary in ideologies, roles taken by the NGOs and their effects on the ground. Examples illustrate the problematic complexity of some conservation interventions, where in some cases they resulted in retaliatory activities by local people. Other NGOs support on the ground grassroots conservation initiatives, and are essential to their success; however these methods put the NGOs carrying them under particular pressures related to the nature of NGO funding and operational constraints. Although it is perceived locally that broad inter-institutional cooperation would be the best way towards effective regional conservation, cooperation is rare, mainly due to competitiveness related to economic pressures.

Local campesinos’ conservation initiatives are justified by rationales including aesthetic, economic and social ideals. Conservation initiators attract a lot of social pressure associated with campesino culture which often hinders or even prevents the initiatives. Initiatives related to landscape level forest and species protection, rather than the creation of private protected areas registered with the state, can bypass many of these social pressures. The combination of the two approaches was found to be the most efficient for the conservation of *O. flavicauda* where protected areas give better protection to smaller areas and landscape level conservation gives more partial protection to extensive areas. Initiatives by local educators are efficient in bringing conservation messages to rural populations but accurate information is often missing. Reforestation initiatives can, mainly indirectly, benefit forest conservation and are very popular within rural communities. Economic alternatives were still in their initial stages and were rarely fully functional or profitable.

The Ronda Campesina is the largest and most influential social movement in Northeastern Peru, including hundreds of thousands of people. The Ronda implements or supports many of the conservation initiatives run by local actors, with the addition of implementation and enforcement of conservation regulations within campesino populations. They also protest against external environmental hazards, such as polluting mining operations. By criticism and setting examples the Rondas pressure both the government and NGOs to act more efficiently and morally towards conservation. The main disadvantage of the Rondas as conservation agents is that

being part of the society they are often subjected to the same social pressures of the general campesino population.

Analysing all of the above, this thesis exposes the close connection between the fate of the yellow tailed woolly monkey and of the campesino societies sharing its habitat. It argues that pressures on local communities and forests are increasing and amount to a real threat to this species. Nevertheless, these pressures, together with influences on rural communities, also create positive consequences by creating new conservation opportunities. Conservation efforts cascade from international to local levels; they transform in each level as a result of interactions with new sets of constraints and committed individuals.

Contrary to current opinion, this study demonstrates that local, rural actors in Amazonas and San Martin, actively initiate effective conservation programmes, while struggling with more 'conventional' conservation agents to increase their 'on the ground' efforts and effectiveness.