

# Dracula Reserve

Casa Dracula, Quinshul, Chical, Prov. Carchi, Ecuador

## Dracula Reserve

The Dracula Reserve, a conservation area, currently consists of three large parts, each of them separated by a distance of about 10 km. The building of this urgently needed reserve began in 2013. The road between Chical and the Mira Valley (Guallupe) has been opened in 2008. As a consequence, the hitherto coherent forest areas were cut apart and trails for animals and plants were interrupted. For monkeys and sloths for instance this means that their populations will be separate without any connections in the future.

## The Name

«Dracula» means «little dragon» in latin. Here, it refers to a genus of orchids whose flowers have some similarity with flying dragons. These orchids are rare otherwise, but especially rich in species in this region.

## Altitude

Forests in the lowest part the reserve at about 800 meters above sea level can be called 'mountain rain forests' (premontane forests). They are rich in lianas. The various parts of the reserve extend until 2300 m, where cloud forests generally are dominating. This means that the forest on higher elevation are submerged in dense clouds almost every day, mainly during afternoon. The resulting fog is often, but not always accompanied by rain.

Cloud forests, which start at about 1500 m, contain fewer lianas than the premontane forest, but have a maximum of epiphytes, creating an immense wealth of (mainly small) orchids.

## Risks and dangers

Most parts of the reserve are primary forests that have never been cut. Now a lot of forest is cleared a long the road to establish new fields of Naranjilla. This plant produces good yields for two years. After that, the soil is destroyed and contaminated with pathogens and pesticide, so the cultivation is no longer profitable. Old fields are abandoned or used as pasture with poor yield.

Another danger are gold mines. The region is currently in the focus of several companies, looking for new areas.

## Dispersal corridor

Directly adjacent to the Dracula Reserve are other two large conservation areas, Golondrinas and the Awá Reserve. Therefore, the Dracula Reserve is building a bridge with continuous primary forest and guaranteeing dispersal corridors for animals and plants from 500 m up to 3000 m.

## Diversity and research

The density of animal and plant species (species number per area) found on the western slope of the Andes is approximately five times larger than in most parts of the temperate zone (e.g. Central Europe). Because of a wide range of altitude and a diversity of habitats, the Dracula Reserve contains a great potential for biological field research, which is currently being carried out here by several national and foreign institutions. Information on the conditions and guidelines for scientific work in the reserve can be obtained from the following persons:

Javier Robayo, f.javierobayo@gmail.com (Spanish)

Lou Jost, loujost@gmail.com (English)

Heinz Schneider, heinz.schneider@unibas.ch (German)

## Foundation, construction and support

The reserve has been founded on the initiative of the Botanic Garden of the University of Basel in the years 2013/14. It is owned by the Ecuadorian foundation EcoMinga, which has completed all land purchases and is responsible for securing the acquired areas through the use of park rangers. The funds are partly coming from the Botanic Garden and its community, partly from two US donors, Rainforest Trust and Orchid Conservation Alliance.

Hence, the Casa Dracula is not only a public guest house, but also serves for the administration and maintenance of the reserve.

## Visit

Our guests are allow to visit the reserve if they are accompanied. The forests are not only steep, but they are also often very dense. Without a machete you can hardly get by (but the guard will carry one, not the visitors!). Fog and a often confusing relief hold the danger of getting lost.

However, having an experienced local assistant, adequate equipment (boots, raincoats) and good health, the visit is easily possible and definitely an unforgettable experience. (For smaller groups boots and raincoats can be provided).

## More information

The blog of the EcoMinga Foundation contains many interesting contributions of the Dracula Reserve.  
[ecomingafoundation.wordpress.com](http://ecomingafoundation.wordpress.com)