

## Preface

by O. Univ. Prof. Dr. Georg WINCKLER  
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The rainforests of the Golfo Dulce area in southern Costa Rica belong to one of the most species-rich forests in Central America. Yet, this forest was in danger until the National Park Piedras Blancas was founded in 1991 with the help of the Association Rainforests of the Austrians. This association also emphasized the scientific relevance of the rainforests and, as a consequence, established the Tropical Field Station La Gamba in 1993. Since then, this scientific station has evolved over the years to an important base camp for international scientists investigating one of the most diverse tropical lowland rainforests on earth.

Today, the Field Station is associated with the University of Vienna and is an important part of the curriculum of students preparing for further research in the tropics. From the very beginning, the University supported tropical field courses and helped to prepare diploma and doctoral theses as well as scientific projects in this area. In addition, applied research methods like case studies and field works were helpful to find new strategies for a globally and locally sustainable development, taking into account both aspects, nature and culture. Conservation efforts, sustainable land use and climate change are global topics requiring solutions in connection with other problems of developing countries such as the ecological and economical land use, the increase of life quality and the problem of migration. The Tropical Field Station conducted and still continues to conduct research at the very core of these problems. It offers scientific and practical advice in the sustainability discussion.

The present book “Cultural and Natural History of the Golfo Dulce region” is the outcome of many years of international and interdisciplinary research. It provides an overview of the scientific progress in the relevant fields, it gives advice for current development strategies and offers an outlook to what might happen in the future.

By supporting the publication of this book, the University of Vienna hopes to contribute to solving the global problem of ecological sustainability, an issue which concerns all of us.



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