

Preface

by Dr. Josef PÜHRINGER
Governor of Upper Austria

Global issues, such as the destruction of the rain forests and climate change, are among the negative headlines that confront us daily. Nowadays, it seems more crucial than ever to focus on exemplary projects such as the “Tropical Field Station La Gamba” and the “Rainforest of the Austrians”, in Costa Rica. Austrian and Costarican researchers and scientists from various institutes have been working together with and among the local population to not only educate and raise the level of awareness in regards to the uniqueness of the area’s natural surroundings, but also engage in research to protect and maintain natural forests for the future.

For many years, the Biology Centre of the Upper Austrian State Museums has maintained close contact with the team of the “Tropical Field Station La Gamba”, Dr. Werner Huber – a native of Linz – and Dr. Anton Weissenhofer, both working at the Faculty Centre of Botany of the University of Vienna. In 2001, the debut exhibition “Rainforest of the Austrians” at the Biology Centre in Austria brought the rain forests of Costa Rica closer to the community of Upper Austria. The exhibition was later viewed in cities throughout Austria. Many Austrians have also travelled to the “Rainforest of the Austrians” in Costa Rica, including a trip made by the “Friends of the Upper Austrian State Museums” in 2003.

The collaboration has led to the expansion of our collection which is an important contribution to the fulfilment of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio de Janeiro (1992). The publication of this data can be considered an additional step forward towards expanding our knowledge of global diversity as well as learning more about the variety of plant life and animals. In 2008, the Biology Centre and the Field Station celebrate its 15th anniversary and the latest exhibition, “The Trail of the Jaguar”, sends a clear and discernible signal that research in natural sciences, environmental protection and environmental education is more important than ever before.

At the beginning of our anniversary year in January of 2008, a collaborative Austrian exhibition titled

“Austria in Costa Rica” took place in La Gamba, a village located at the edge of the rainforest. The exhibition focused on introducing the residents of La Gamba to Austria by showcasing the community of Weibern. By drawing global correlation and presenting the similarities and differences between a village in Costa Rica to a village in Upper Austria, exhibition organisers were able to introduce Austria to the local population and provide them with unique insight.

The most recent and central project of the “Tropical Field Station La Gamba” focuses on the establishment of “green corridors” designed to interconnect today’s fragmented rainforest. These efforts are not only of great scientific value, but also provide the native population with future perspective. The goal to create sustainable land use as an opportunity for regional development is what links the interests of Upper Austria to this unusually rich area of Costa Rica.

This volume provides insight into the natural and cultural history of the region in and around the Golfo Dulce, as well as the latest research results that trace back to a considerable amount of work accomplished by Austrian scientists.

The exhibition “The Trail of the Jaguar – Tropical Field Station La Gamba” at the Biology Centre uses illustrative material and comprehensive exhibits to demonstrate how – by means of many diverse research approaches and Austrian initiative – a sustainable development can be maintained to benefit the area’s natural resources as well as the population.



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