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Fundación Vuelta Larga in Northeast Venezuela: Development of Environmentally Friendly Rural Technologies and Nature Conservation Strategies

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Abstract

As people become strangers to nature and ecosystems deteriorate and disappear, new approaches to counteract such deterioration are ever more important. The goal of the Fundación Vuelta Larga, a private foundation created in 1988 in Sucre, Venezuela, is to create public awareness in support of sustainable environment and use of environmentally friendly technologies, based on experiences and demonstrations exemplified on an 800 ha area adjacent to the Parque Nacional Turuépano. 80–100 years ago, the vegetation was a high-water table influenced tropical rainforest which because of forest clearing and burning degraded into a savannah floodplain with scattered trees. The foundation's main objective is vegetation restoration and creation of a bufferzone for the Turuépano park including reforestation, reintroduction of endangered species, housing with tropical architecture and tropical furniture, traditional indigenous handicraft, and adapted agriculture and aquaculture. The work is funded by income from ecotourism. The “Ruta de las Cumbres”, an ecotourism pilot project of regional and national importance, offers ecotourist visitors an insight into sustainable rural development projects via a tour through the mountains. Rural development and environmental education workshops for multiplicators are organised in cooperation with the Ministries of Education and Environment. Within educational activities, an important project is the establishment and promotion of tree nurseries in schools. Current scientific studies are about butterfly diversity and the development of secondary forests, particularly about the role of *Erythrina fusca* (“bucare”), a leguminous pioneer tree well adapted to seasonal flooding. In the last 30 years, trees were planted along the boundaries of the foundation's area and along watercourses in order to accelerate the development of secondary forests. Time series of such forests are currently mapped to compare their bucare-influenced regeneration with an area without bucare. Preliminary results show that the savannah where no bucare was planted could not develop into forest although there was no fire during the last 35 years. In the bucare-influenced secondary forests of the savannah, 10 different tree species were found whereas in the bordering hill forests more than 40 species appear.

Keywords: Bufferzone, *Erythrina fusca*, floodplain, savannah, reforestation