
Argentina: The end of the Green Corridor?

In December 1999, Provincial Law No. 3,631 was sanctioned in Argentina, creating the Overall Conservation and Sustainable Development Area, known as the “Green Corridor of the Province of Misiones.” It involves 22 municipalities and covers an area of 1.108,000 hectares of Parana forest, located in the province of Misiones, spanning a mosaic of landscapes including protected areas, private property put to various uses, agricultural settlements, indigenous communities and varied socio-economic situations and even areas having land use and land tenure conflicts. The idea is to integrate them into a territorial unit with objectives defined on the basis of bio-regional planning, guaranteeing the connectivity of the three main blocks of Protected Natural Areas of the Parana forest.

However, a dangerous initiative that would demolish all the efforts to preserve the natural heritage of Misiones has now arisen. Apparently the Argentine Ministry of Ecology is to authorise the slashing and burning of 30 hectares bordering the Yaguaroundi Reserve, thus cutting off the natural flow of fauna from and to the rest of the forest mass. Following slashing and burning, tobacco will be planted, using agro-chemical weed-killers, immediately followed by the plantation of pine trees as a monoculture. According to the specialists this is the best way of destroying all the prevailing biodiversity for ever.

Furthermore, the scenario for this development is a sector of central hills, where the land is very sloping and where logging would rapidly lead to soil erosion, making it unsuitable for cultivation, the reason why large extensions of forest have survived until today.

This possible threat places at risk the Yaguaroundi project, a dream come true. A few years ago, Martín González decided to contribute to the preservation of the area by purchasing 400 hectares of forest in the vicinity of Fracrán, and together with his wife they decided to turn it into a Natural Reserve.

The reserve includes settlers and local people in the task of defending and getting to know the forest as a profitable and feasible economic activity. This implies banishing forest logging to make way for the plantation of tobacco and tea, that are of scant profitability, exhaust the soil and are extremely dangerous to human health. These unsustainable forms of production usually omit statistics on persons who have died from diseases linked to fertilisers and chemical substances used in tobacco plantations, which attack kidneys, lungs, the heart and other vital organs. Children are born with congenital malformations and their life expectation is very low.

According to Martín González, while this happens, beyond the fantastic sound of the waterfalls or the roar of the bay lion, “the vegetation holds thousands of medicinal secrets that we must discover to save our sick children, men and women. Only as an example we can mention the Káa Kée, a forest herb, which is 300 times sweeter than sugar. But these secrets have been lost with the Guarani tribes and the logging of the forest. Only a few wise people from the last tribes of the Guarani Mbya could reconstruct a part of this glorious past, but they are sunk in poverty.”

Today the need to defend the Parana Forest is on the agenda; that same forest “that during the past century disappeared from the southern states of Brazil and from Paraguayan territory, that forest that saw Guarani culture die, that forest that can give us so much more without falling and that nevertheless sees its children in the deepest poverty, that every evening breathes its last days in a sad rain or in a red sunset like the Apocalypses, that forest that is the last home of butterflies and tigers.” For this reason, the Yaguaroundi Reserve has launched a campaign requesting that messages of protest be sent to the Ministry of Ecology (ecologia@misiones.gov.ar , corredorverde@misiones.gov.ar).