

The Orchid Conservation Alliance
 564 Arden Drive
 Encinitas, CA 92024



June 26, 2012

Dear OCA Member:

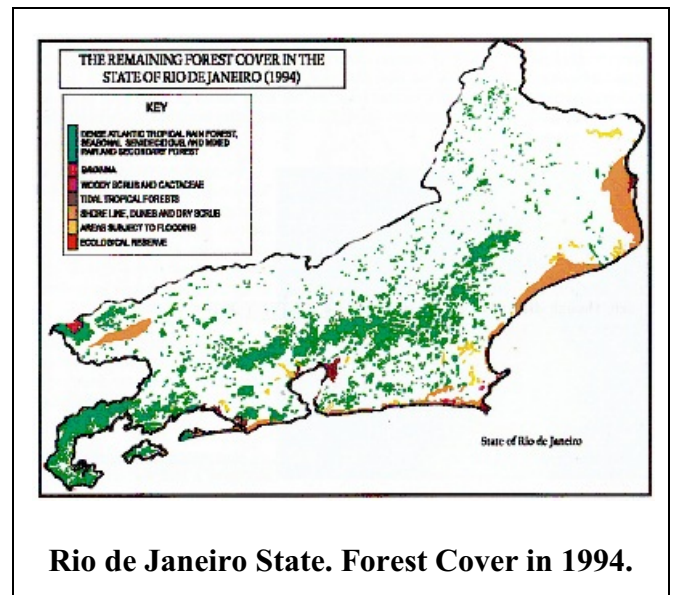
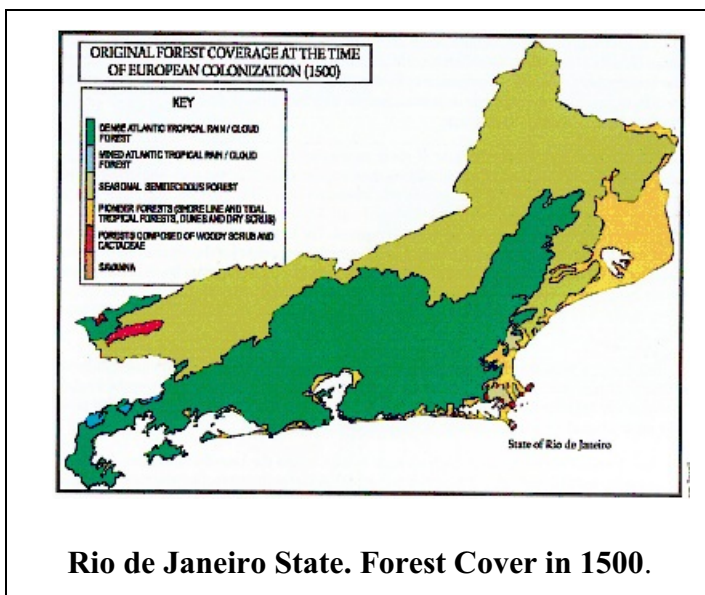
Trip to Ecuador

Our *Orchids in the Wild* trip for 2012 will be to Ecuador and runs two weeks from November 3rd - 18th. Cost of the trip is \$2500 double occupancy or \$2750 single occupancy. This includes all transportation, food, and lodging, but not airfare to and from Ecuador. We already have a pretty extensive list of travelers, but there may be cancellations, so get on the list now by emailing me at peter@orchidconservationalliance.org. Details of the itinerary can be found on our website at www.orchidconservationalliance.org.

Why we're working to conserve orchids

After an interesting discussion with one of our members, it dawned on me (duh!) that I have never laid out the case for why the Orchid Conservation Alliance needs to exist. The short version - it's us. As of today, there are over 7 billion people on earth and we're not going away. We have paved, mined, plowed, and otherwise occupied a lot of land, much of it where orchids grew - note the past tense. If we want orchids to survive in the wild, we're going to have to do it intentionally.

One place where I know something of the problems and the successes is Brazil. Brazil has two great places for orchids, the Amazon basin and the Atlantic rainforest. In fact, the Atlantic rainforest has a greater diversity of orchids because it has a more varied topography. One of the books we sell through the OCA website, Miller et al., "The Organ Mountain Range," has the maps copied below. The area covered by wet humid rainforest is shown in dark green. On the left is the rainforest of the state of Rio de Janeiro as it was in 1500 when colonists first arrived. On the right is the current extent of the rainforest - less than 5% remains. The rest has been lost to agriculture and urbanization. From this area come such iconic species as *Soph. coccinea*, *Cat. intermedia*, and *Onc. crispum*.



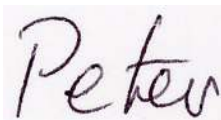
In the state of Rio de Janeiro I know of two sites that are seriously conserving the rainforest. One is Macae de Cima, the reserve created by David Miller and his wife Izabel, two of the authors of the book I mentioned above. In the late 1970's David, an Irish ex-pat living in Rio, had a falling out with his boss and made a significant change in his life, switching from business consultant to rainforest conservationist. With his severance pay he bought 750 acres of remote, inaccessible pristine forest, carved out a road, built a house, and moved in. Over the years David convinced several other like minded folks to buy adjacent land. When we go to Brazil on our Orchids in the Wild trips, we always visit Macae de Cima. Unfortunately David died last year, but Izabel stills runs the property as an ecotourist lodge. Another site nearby is REGUA, the Portuguese acronym for Ecological Reserve on the Guapi Assu River. This conservation effort is managed by Nicholas Locke and his wife Raquel. Nicholas, an Englishman, inherited some land not far from the Millers and has been conserving and restoring it for about 15 years. It is a remarkably successful effort and another site that we visit in Brazil. The websites of the Miller's reserve and REGUA are very informative; www.riotrust.org and www.regua.co.uk, respectively.

Away from the coast where the Millers and the Lockes have their reserves is the Amazon basin. It is said that 1/3 of all species in the world live in the Amazon basin. Thus deforestation there is especially damaging. I saw the images at the right recently on Facebook, which shows what freshly cleared rainforest looks like; nothing left at all. In the state of Rondonia, which is in the heart of the Brazillian Amazon basin, the clearing is particularly severe, as shown in the image at lower right taken from Google Earth. Rondonia is about six times the size of Rio de Janeiro state and, for reference, twice the size of Iowa. All of the lighter green hatchy area has been cleared. The main crop there is soybeans, most of which goes to feed cows, pigs, and chickens, which we then eat.

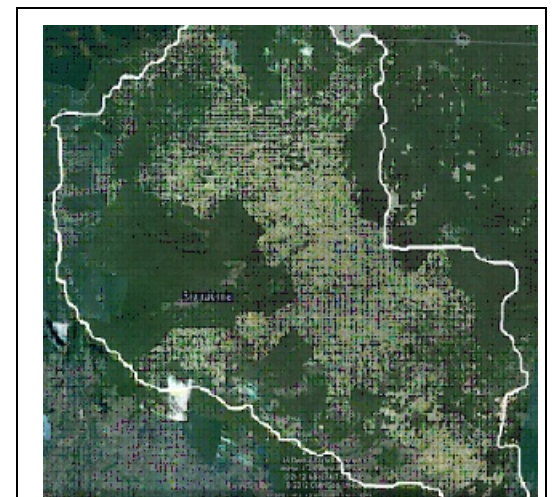
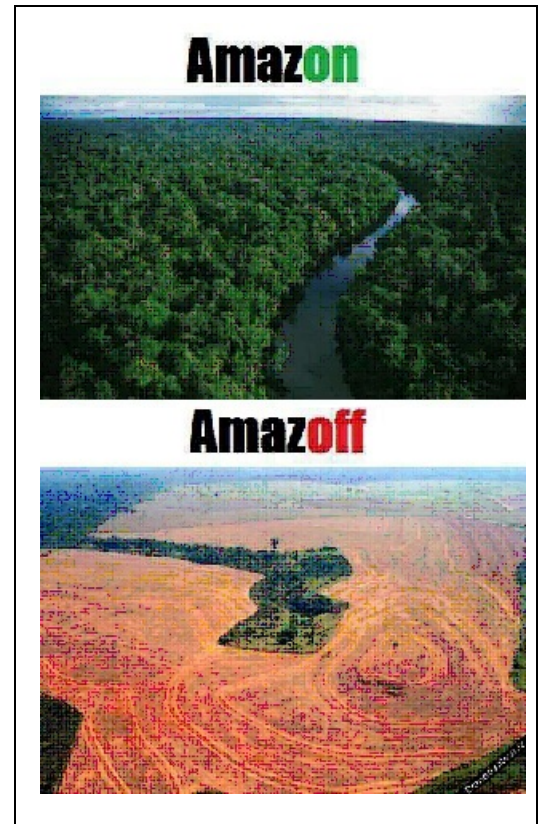
What shall we do about this? The first thing to do is live with respect for nature. If you are an orchid lover, as most OCA members are, act now to do something, anything, to protect the environments where orchids grow. Certainly you can and should do that individually but when we act together we can have much more effect that we can individually. And, when we do act, as we have done in Ecuador with the establishment of the Reserva Rio Anzu, we preserve orchids as well as everything else in the reserve. In the Reserva Rio Anzu Lou Jost has found not just a whole new genus of orchids, but also a new tree species and at least three new species of frogs.

The OCA needs to exist because we are losing nature and we can't afford to lose any more of it. By pooling our resources we become more powerful.

Thanks for your attention,



Peter S. Tobias, President, Orchid Conservation Alliance



Rondonia, Brazil, is outlined in white. The lighter patchy areas are rainforest cleared for agriculture.