The Story Behind Rio Anzu

By Lou Jost

My friend and mentor Stig Dalstrom, who painted hundreds of  illustrations for the many volumes of Carl Luer's *A Treasure of Masdevallia* and *Thesaurus Dracularum* (along with many other works) often visited Ecuador, and  we enjoyed exploring its forests together. At the time I only had eyes for Lepanthes, my specialty, but he had an extraordinary eye for finding *Masdevallia* and *Dracula* plants, after painting so many of them. In 2001 we visited the Rio Anzu watershed near the town where I live. We had visited the area a number of times, but this time, after a long hike, we were lucky to find a beautiful patch of enormous tall straight trees, including some that had recently been cut down. Sometimes someone would pass by with large sawn timbers on their backs; the forest was disappearing in front of us. The branches of the fallen giants were covered with an astonishing variety of orchids, from big scrambling *Otoglossum* plants to tiny *Lepanthes*. Stig meticulously examined the mossy branches and trunks, and soon spotted what was clearly a small *Masdevallia* plant, though it had no flower. I don't know how, but he immediately recognized that this was probably a new species belonging to his favorite group of the genus. In spite of all his field work, he had never yet found a new species from that group, so he was very excited. I collected some plants so I could grow them and discover their flower. On the same day we also found a different *Masdevallia* species in a small tree closer to the road.

Both survived, so eventually I had flowers. Carl Luer determined that both of them were new species!! He named the first one *Masdevallia stigii* and the second one *Masdevallia loui*. We also found a new species of orchid  that Carl named *Trichosalinx jostii*. Undoubtedly there are also many new species of orchids, aroids, and other groups in this unique foothill forest on the western edge of the Amazon basin.

In the following years I found other interesting orchids nearby, including a new genus, *Quechua*. Thanks to the OCA and others, we were able to build a small reserve to protect the lower elevations where that genus is found, but the good *Masdevallia* habitat is at slightly higher elevations. In the intervening twenty years since my visit with Stig, much of that *Masdevallia*-rich forest has disappeared, but it is not too late to save some of it. In recent years black jaguars have even been photographed there! Please help us expand our Rio Anzu Reserve to include the habitat of *Masdevallia stigii* and *M. loui*.