



## **Protecting the Spectacled Bear (*Tremarctus ornatus*): Environmental Education Around Amboró National Park**

Donor: the Scott Neotropical Fund of the Cleveland Zoological Society

### **Project Summary**

Natura's environmental education (EE) project is helping build environmental awareness and knowledge, develop positive attitudes to biodiversity, and enhance skills and participation in environmental protection in the Los Negros valley. For the initial phase of the EE program we have targeted teachers and children ages 8-15 at schools in 6 communities (Santa Rosa, Sivingal, Los Negros, Palmasola, Valle Hermoso and Pampagrande). While we understand that children and teachers are perhaps not the most important group for immediate conservation action, this age group is the easiest to access in a non-threatening way, and that the "trickle-up" effect of conservation ideas from this age group to parents is significant.

After an initial diagnostic of what is currently being taught in the communities, consultants from the Environmental Education organization, REMA, worked with Natura staff and 17 local teachers. Together, they designed an education program that is based in the reality of the local situation while also focused on Natura's objectives--biodiversity conservation and watershed management. Other issues that are important to the downstream

communities, such as pesticide use, have also been included. Early in the project we implemented a questionnaire with the educators and a sample of 50 of their students to assess their current environmental knowledge. In order to assess the program's impact, we will resubmit this questionnaire to the same students and educators after the first stage of the program has been completed.



### **Project Description**

Environmental Education (EE) programs generally have five objectives:

- **Awareness** of and sensitivity to environmental problems
- Basic **knowledge** and understanding of how the environment functions
- Positive **attitudes** and values towards the environment

- **Skills** to identify, investigate and resolve environmental problems
- Active **participation** in environmental protection

Natura's EE project is helping achieve these objectives within the context of spectacled bear conservation in the environment around Amboró National Park. For the initial phase of the education program we targeted teachers and children ages 8-15 at schools in 6 communities (Santa Rosa, Sivingal, Los Negros, Palmasola, Valle Hermoso and Pampagrande). While we understand that children and teachers are perhaps not the most important group for immediate conservation action this age group is the easiest to access in a non-threatening way, and that the "trickle-up" effect of conservation ideas from this age group to parents is significant.

After an initial diagnostic of what is currently being taught in the communities, consultants from the Environmental Education organization, REMA, worked with Natura staff and 17 local teachers. Together, they designed an education program that is based in the reality of the local situation while also focused on Natura's objectives--spectacled bear conservation and watershed management. Other issues that are important to the downstream communities, such as pesticide use, were also included.

Early in the project we implemented a questionnaire with the educators and a sample of 50 of their students to assess their current environmental knowledge. We will resubmit this questionnaire to the same students and educators after the first stage of the program has been completed.

An effective environmental education project has a number of characteristics: knowledge of the target group, a coherent relevant message, and interactive learning. To help us design our program framework for the spectacled bear we used the educational source book "**Exploring Biodiversity: a Guide for Educators Around the World**" published by Conservation International and the World Wildlife Fund and field-tested in Mexico, Guyana, Indonesia and Suriname. Over the next few years, a number of the extension programs will be implemented including EcoClubs, Contests and Forums, Educator Training, Celebrations (such as World Environment Day (June), Earth Week (April), and Anniversary of the Creation of Amboró Park), Awareness Campaigns, Field Trips, Conservation Projects for Students, Radio Programs, Murals, etc. The mix of basic curriculum, extension activities and complementary programs will be designed based on an initial diagnostic of the current status of, and opportunities within, the local educational system.

As the program continues to be implemented, Natura staff member Paulina Pinto will provide technical support and follow up to ensure that each of the 17 educators is successfully managing the material. Over the next few years of the project we expect that Paulina's commitment will be reduced as the programs becomes self-sustaining. In addition, Paulina will work with the educators to design projects through which the education of children can have an effect on their parents, whose activities and decisions are those that will really affect conservation of the Los Negros valley in upcoming years.