
July 2026 — Project Update

Costa Rica: Área de Conservación Guanacaste / ACG Parataxonomists

Field Partner: Guanacaste Dry Forest Conservation Fund (GDFCF)

Background: *Área de Conservación Guanacaste* (ACG) is a protected area and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in northwestern Costa Rica. It comprises 172,000 hectares, stretching through the four distinct ecosystems of ACG spanning the Continental Divide from the Pacific coastal dry forest to the Atlantic rainforest. It is known as one of the most successful tropical restoration and conservation projects in the world. It's also considered a worldwide model for involving local communities in landscape-scale conservation, as a successful collaboration between a non-governmental organization and a national park, and for fostering a bioliterate local population. Biome maintains a trust fund that endows positions for ACG Parataxonomists, who are the 'de facto park guards' for huge swaths of ACG and play the central role in its preservation.

In 2025, GDFCF finalized a leadership transition, institutional restructuring, and the considered repositioning of the Parataxonomists Program for its next scientific chapter.

The first half of 2026 marked the successful implementation of the program under this new institutional structure. Following the transition of all 31 Parataxonomists and associated scientific staff to Costa Rica-based *Asociación de Conservación Guanacaste Bosque y Mar*, the program proceeded to expand its role in supporting the day-to-day conservation and management priorities of ACG.

Throughout the first half of this year, Parataxonomists have kept a continuous presence across ACG, providing protection and maintenance at multiple field stations, supporting scientific research and visitors, and managing a network of more than 100 camera traps for wildlife monitoring and to produce new species' records for the ACG Species Pages. The newly established Parataxonomist Digital Flora Team strengthened botanical documentation through field surveys, made improvements to the *Parque Nacional Santa Rosa's* plant-drying facility, and received specialized bryophyte training, reflecting the program's continued diversification beyond the historic Lepidoptera inventory.

One of this year's defining accomplishments was the **critical role played by the Parataxonomists and the *Brigada de las Brisas* during the severe 2026 fire season**. They contributed hundreds of person-hours to fire-fighting operations, logistics, and post-fire monitoring, while also helping establish sediment traps to evaluate the impacts of wildfire on adjacent marine ecosystems. These efforts demonstrated the Parataxonomist Program's growing importance as an integrated conservation workforce capable of responding directly to emerging management challenges.

Institutionally, *Asociación de Conservación Guanacaste Bosque y Mar* continued to mature as a Costa Rican conservation organization. During the first six months of 2026, it strengthened its administrative and financial capacity through the establishment of modern accounting and human resource systems, successful management of payroll and employee benefits, the hiring of key administrative personnel, and the stabilization of financial transfers from GDFCF. The organization is now operating with the governance and operational systems needed to support the long-term sustainability of the program.

Overall, the first half of 2026 has demonstrated that the transition envisioned over the previous several years has been successfully realized. The Parataxonomist Program has evolved from a research initiative centered primarily on the Lepidoptera inventory, into a locally led and multidisciplinary conservation program that continues to generate world-class science while directly supporting ACG's biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management, and long-term resilience.

with my best wishes,

Carlos R. García

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The Murciélago fire at ACG – April 2026 (credit GDFCF)



Parataxonomists prior to fighting the Murciélago fire – April 2026 (credit GDFCF)



Parataxonomists on location, at the site of the Murciélago fire – April 2026 (credit GDFCF)