
July 2026 — Project Update for The Kingfisher Foundation

Ecuador: The Next Generation Club

Field Partner: Fundación para la Conservación de los Andes Tropicales (FCAT)

Background: The Tropical Andes in northwest Ecuador is home to the Chocó, a biogeographical region of outsized importance for conservation. As you know, FCAT is a grassroots Ecuadorian organization started in 2002 to address the alarming rate of deforestation in the region. It is the only conservation NGO actively working in the 120,000-hectare Mache-Chindul Ecological Reserve (MCR). The 734-ha FCAT Reserve (located within the MCR) serves as a base for education, interdisciplinary research, community-based conservation, and positive societal change in one of the world's most biodiverse and endangered habitats. In 2022, with your/our support, FCAT launched the 'Next Generation Club', which provides local youth with structured conservation training and mentoring.

In the first half of 2026, FCAT provided continuity and support for the 2nd cohort of the 'Next Generation Club' and commenced recruitment for the club's 3rd cohort of students. In February of this year, the call for applications was opened and, for the first time, a digital registration form was implemented to enhance the recruitment process. After receiving 7 in-person and 23 online applications, the 3rd cohort was officially inaugurated on March 7, with a total of 23 children and youth hailing from 9 communities surrounding the FCAT Reserve.

Throughout the past semester, the FCAT team, with the help from volunteers and graduate students from Tulane University (New Orleans, USA), facilitated 5 workshops for the 3rd cohort of students on the following themes: basic botany (plant biology and the ID of native species); art and biodiversity (an environmental illustration workshop and creation of a community mural); guardians of the soil (on sustainable agriculture, eco-fertilizers, and composting); wildlife of the Chocó (focusing on birds, bats, and macroinvertebrates, led by Tulane University graduate students); and, on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Through theoretical classes and practical experiences in the forest, these activities promoted observation, experimentation, and critical thinking, strengthening the exchange of knowledge between instructors and students.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that a few former club members (3 graduates from the 'Next Generation Club') have become valuable contributors, acting as vital community liaisons on the team of young rural extension agents providing support to local farm owners (e.g., with planting activities, flora monitoring, and plot follow-up, etc.) involved in FCAT's agroforestry systems project. This agroforestry project will incorporate 200 new hectares of sustainably grown and wildlife-friendly cacao, as part of a mixed conservation strategy around the FCAT Reserve to help address deforestation and increase habitat for wildlife species. The Next Generation Club continues to play a pivotal role in building a future where local ecosystems are protected and valued by the communities that depend on them in the Ecuadorian Chocó!

Thanks again for your support for this work!

with my best wishes,

Carlos R. García

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Selfie with 'Next Generation Club' kids, during Ana Mandri's project field visit in July 2026.



Inauguration of the third cohort in 2026 – 'Next Generation Club'.