

Biodiversity

At least twelve different kinds of forest have been identified in the San Lorenzo Protected Area, including mangroves, floodable cativo forests, moist forests, semideciduous forests and other high-humidity ecosystems.

We know of almost 600 species of vertebrates, a third of all those identified in Panama, including 430 birds and 81 mammals. On the mouth of the Chagres river (right), Members of the Panama Audubon Society counted 357 species of birds in a single day in the area, during the annual Christmas count in 1999 -- a record for the western hemisphere. Jaguars and tapirs can also be found in the area, which reflects the health of this ecosystem, despite its relatively small size.

The differences in rainfall between the north and south of the isthmus of Panama have attracted the interest of scientists. In the Panama Canal area rainfall on the Atlantic coast is twice that of the Pacific, at a distance of only 70km. This presents a unique opportunity for scientist to easily do research on the effect of climate on ecosystems.

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) has set up a crane in the middle of the San Lorenzo Protected Area to study the forest canopy, which takes scientists above the trees in a metal gondola, providing access to more than 9000 square meters of forest.

The San Lorenzo Project intends to achieve protection and exploitation of the area's biodiversity as a resource for the benefit of the country and the communities. Birdwatching courses and training of local guides allow them to profit from tourism to the province of Colon. Moreover, the Community, coffee and environment project being implemented in the area teaches people how to practice coffee agriculture in harmony with the forest, without having to cut down large plots.