

GENETICS FOR CONSERVATION NETWORK (ReGeneC)

Within the framework of the Biodiversity Agenda, the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICIT) of Venezuela approved in the year 2000 the project 'Genetics of Conservation of Mammals and Reptiles of the Venezuelan Fauna', coordinated by the undersigned and with the participation of researchers from the Universidad Simón Bolívar (USB), the Universidad Experimental Francisco de Miranda (UNFM), the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (IVIC) and the Instituto de Estudios Avanzados (IDEA). As one of the products of said project the creation of an inter-institutional network on genetics for the conservation of the fauna (ReGeneC) was proposed. The latter was formalized in 2004 as a national (Venezuelan) network and later was it was enlarged in order to cover all of Latin America, considering the characteristics shared in the region, such as the great biological diversity and strong pressure for its use, limited availability of economic and technical resources, shortage of qualified personnel in the area of genetics for conservation and the need of a common legal framework for the regulation and the access to the genetic resources, such that will guarantee its sustainable use.

The aim of this network is to combine and cohere the efforts, knowledge and abilities of researchers, administrators and legislators (lawyers and specialists in legal proceedings) with expertise in conservation genetics or in related areas (i.e. population genetics, molecular biology and ecology, evolution, bioinformatics, biotechnology, bioethics, biosafety, handling of resources and biostatistics, among others) in Latin America. The specific goals of ReGeneC are to contribute 1) to integrate groups of scientists of the region that are currently carrying out research on taxa (families, genres, species) from the Neotropics or whose

distribution includes the Neotropical region; 2) to train, in Latin America, personnel with the capacity to actively collaborate in the use and conservation of biodiversity, with emphasis in its genetic and population characteristics; and 3) to coordinate advances in scientific matters with the legal framework and national, regional and worldwide policies regarding the access to genetic resources and the use and the conservation of biodiversity.

Within this framework, ReGeneC has organized nine events so far, the first of them under the modality of symposium-course and the others as graduate courses (www.regenec.ula.ve/), in which 208 students and 41 professors from 19 countries of the region have participated. This initiative, carried out in different headquarters in Venezuela, Chile and Brazil, and supported by international and national institutions, has been successful in the training of personnel, a fact that has been captured in the results obtained in successive surveys of participants, and was the fundamental motivation to organize the First Latin American Congress of Genetics for Conservation (www.regenec.org/taller/may2014/) from 05/05 to 05/09/2014 in Macuto, Venezuela, as a scenario to gather professors and students in the different courses, as well as researchers interested in conservation genetics.

In this first congress, 53 papers and seven plenary lectures were presented, and three courses and three special events were completed, with the assistance of researchers from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, USA and Venezuela. The high level of the papers presented and of the discussions that took place in several topics in the field of conservation genetics is to be noted. We are satisfied with the development of ReGeneC, but we are also conscious of the great challenge represented by the conservation and use of our resources.

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