Outrage at extreme act of vandalism in San Rafael

Title
Guyra Paraguay (BirdLife Partner) staff in Asunción, Paraguay, have received the disturbing news that three people have burnt down the visitors' house at the Kanguery administrative center in Guyra Paraguay's "Guyra Reta" reserve in San Rafael. According to the official complaint filed by the reserve guards, on Sunday 14 October three unknown people sprayed the walls and roof of the house with fuel and then ignited it, before fleeing.

Despite their best efforts, the guards (who are trained firefighters) were unable to extinguish the fire, which consumed the entire house in just 10 minutes (the fuel-soaked pine wood and straw construction burning very rapidly). This represents one of the most serious attacks on conservation efforts in the San Rafael area. The visitors' house and administrative center is part of a broader initiative/vision of Guyra Paraguay and the Mbyá Guarani Indigenous Peoples to conserve these forests.

Threats of attacks have been increasing recently, mainly coming from people believed to be linked to illegal logging. Guyra has been documenting these threats and illegal activities in its weekly news bulletin "Noticias de la Semana" and making official complaints where appropriate. As a result of this criminal act against private property and personal safety, Guyra Paraguay asks that:

1. There be a concerted effort to ensure the protection of the San Rafael guards, in particular by the national and local police and the Ministry of the Environment (the SEAM), the government authority responsible for the San Rafael area (which has been declared as an area "reserved to become a national park");
2. An investigation be started immediately into the burning of the visitors' house, especially given the suspicion that it is linked to illegal logging and timber trafficking in San Rafael;
3. All sawmills and timber trade centers in the vicinity of San Rafael should be investigated regarding the source of their timber;
4. The Commander of the Armed Forces assigns an Intelligence Officer to support conservation efforts in San Rafael.

In 2001, Guyra Paraguay decided to implement a land acquisition strategy to ensure the conservation of representative areas of San Rafael (also known as Tekoha Guasu, part of the ancestral territory of the Mbyá Guarani indigenous people). This decision was the result of several failed attempts to create a core conservation area within San Rafael (which is entirely privately owned) by various government agencies (Ministry of Finance, National Development Bank, and the Ministry of the Environment).

Today, despite being considered a national protected area (under the responsibility of the Paraguayan state), the only parts of San Rafael which are declared for conservation in perpetuity are those owned by Guyra Paraguay. The two properties which have been purchased most recently are jointly owned (through a “condominio”) with the Mbyá Guarani, and the indigenous community retains traditional use rights throughout Guyra’s reserve.

Given their overall responsibility for the conservation of San Rafael, Guyra Paraguay believes that the national authorities should be held accountable for any new acts of violence against Guyra Paraguay’s reserve, buildings and personnel in San Rafael. Guyra has informed national authorities of this situation and is also advising its foreign donors and their embassies, given the seriousness and urgency of the matter.

Guyra Paraguay continues to believe in Paraguay’s government institutions and in the strength of the country’s legal framework. Through collaborations with these institutions, it believes that many people such as its local and international partners can work towards truly sustainable development. But this requires the enforcement of laws and the effective cessation of illegal activities.

San Rafael is part of the BirdLife's Forests of Hope programme.