

Urgent to protect the Coqui Llanero ^[1]

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Calificación:



By Yaritza Rivas Bermúdez / yivas@elnuevodia.com ^[2] endi.com ^[3] The discovery of a new coquí species, that besides an endemic species represents national pride, should be enough reason to spark affirmative actions to protect its habitat. But in Puerto Rico, the priority seems to be another one. Near the wetland where the Coquí Llanero lives, a racing track is being built, and according to the Body of Engineers, lacks the permission from the federal agency that authorizes and regulates activities that can affect wetlands link to navigable waters. Extinction Previous to the discovery of the Coquí Llanero, the last species discovered in Puerto Rico was the Golden Coquí of Cayey (*Eleutherodactylus jasperi*) at the beginning of the 70's. It was described formally for science in 1976. But it was declared extinct at the beginning of years 90. But when we talk about coquies, it is the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DRNA) the agency with the responsibility to coordinate with other agencies affirmative actions to protect the home of the small amphibian. "It is like an intensive care patient", said Miguel Garcia, director of the division of Wild Life of the DRNA. "If we do not give it immediate care it'll die", he added. Garcia indicated that the DRNA already initiated the process to place the Coquí Llanero in the list of endangered species. And although he assured that it is a priority for the agency, he could not say how long the process will be delayed. Meanwhile, time is running for the small amphibian and his limited natural habitat. "Its ecosystem can be destroyed with draining, filling up, extending a racing track - like the one being constructed near the wetland-, with the construction of houses, wildfires, a fuel spill or the entrance of polluting agents from the municipal garbage dump of Toa Baja, that locates in the top of the wooded hills that supply water to the wetland", noted Neftalí Ríos, ecologist who discovered the new species of coquí. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made an inspection in the area, said Brenda Reyes, the agency's spokesperson. After the investigation, the EPA determined that the zone where it is constructed "appears to be a hit

wetland” and they evaluate the possibility of imposing fines and remedial actions. In December, Rios informed his finding to the mayor into the municipality of Toa Baja, Aníbal Vega Borges. The ecologist suggested to the municipality the reclassification of lands to help the conservation of the area. Vega Borges, on the other hand, indicated that the finding was included in the Plan of Territorial Ordering of the Municipality, and is waiting for ARPE’s consultation. He assured that he has an urgent interest in protecting the Coquí Llanero, and is against the development of the area. For that reason he requested the DRNA to stop the construction of the racing track developed by Speed Group International. Nevertheless, he sees with good eyes the possibility of taking advantage of the presence of the new species to develop an ecotourism project there. It is a healthful proposal and in harmony with the management of the municipality to protect bogs, maintained the mayor. For the discoverer of the Coquí Llanero, the previous thing causes mixed feelings on him. On one hand, it is a joy to have found a new species that represents a cultural icon. “You know that you are in front of something that the taíno Indians perhaps saw”, he said when affirming that the finding has motivated the local scientific community that thought there was nothing left to discover in Borinquen. “It is a new opportunity to go to the field and to discover”, he said. But, on the other hand, it is a race against time to save the ecosystem where the Coquí Llanero lives in time. “The importance of the discovery is shadowed by the urgency of protecting it” said Rios.

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