

# Valuing Nature Network: 1 April 2021

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Working in Tropical  
Forest



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# What you need:

- Serendipity
- Bravery
- Hard work and dedication
- Flexibility
- Genuine interest in other peoples research
- Effective networking and good colleagues
- Multidisciplinary working
- Funding

# My Tropical experience – primarily as a plant ecologist



- **Brazil** – lived on Maraca Island for one year with return twice for 2 x 3 month field work – Royal Geographical Society and Stirling University
- **Ghana** -3.5 years for Overseas Development Administration (DIFID) & Aberdeen University
- **Puerto Rico** – lived in PR for 15 years and still associated with the project
- **South America** EU project - ROBIN working with many institutions and UKCEH
- **Colombia** – current project - Silvopastoral systems with Reading, Bristol, and SRUC, and in Colombia CIAT and University Amazonas

## Second time abroad:

- It all started when I was fed up writing my PhD.....
- A Friday afternoon Phone call – Do you want to go to the Amazon ??
- Maraca rainforest project – led by Royal Geographical Society





# Take opportunities - volunteer

**BEWARE – MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT TAKING A JOB THAT A LOCAL SHOULD BE PAID TO DO.**

- Royal Geographical Society and Royal Scottish Geographical Society – explorers club and expeditions. Attend lectures and conferences.
- Other societies – British Ecological Society, Ecological Society of America
- Help a PhD student while as an undergrad. Volunteer for your University staff.
- Placements during your PhD.
- <https://www.environmentjob.co.uk/jobs> - Often has volunteer abroad for science research projects
- <https://www.vsointernational.org/volunteering> - Most often take qualified professionals these days.

# Learn about the Culture before you go

- Learn something about the countries history and look at info about the culture before you go. Attend a course if possible.
- Listen to and watch your project colleagues and local people carefully to find out how things are done.
- Whatever your personal view of religion be very respectful of the local people.
- Be careful of differences in European and Latin American/ South American Spanish and Portuguese.
- Find out if you suggest having a meal out or stopping during field work for food if you will be expected to pay for everyone.
- If visiting Colombians in their home, then it is appropriate to take a small gift, such as wine, chocolates or flowers. In Colombia do not take marigolds or lilies, as associated with funerals.
- <https://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/guide-to-colombia-etiquette-customs-culture-business>
- <http://www.colombia.doingbusinessguide.co.uk/the-guide/etiquette,-languages-culture/>

# Follow the country rules:

## Find out the regulations:

- Visas
- Work permits
- Sample collection
- Removing samples from country
- Taking photographs
- Recording conversations
- Employing help
- Contract issues
- Due diligence
- Health and Safety
- Shipping research materials





# Luquillo LTER: Long term ecological research network USA



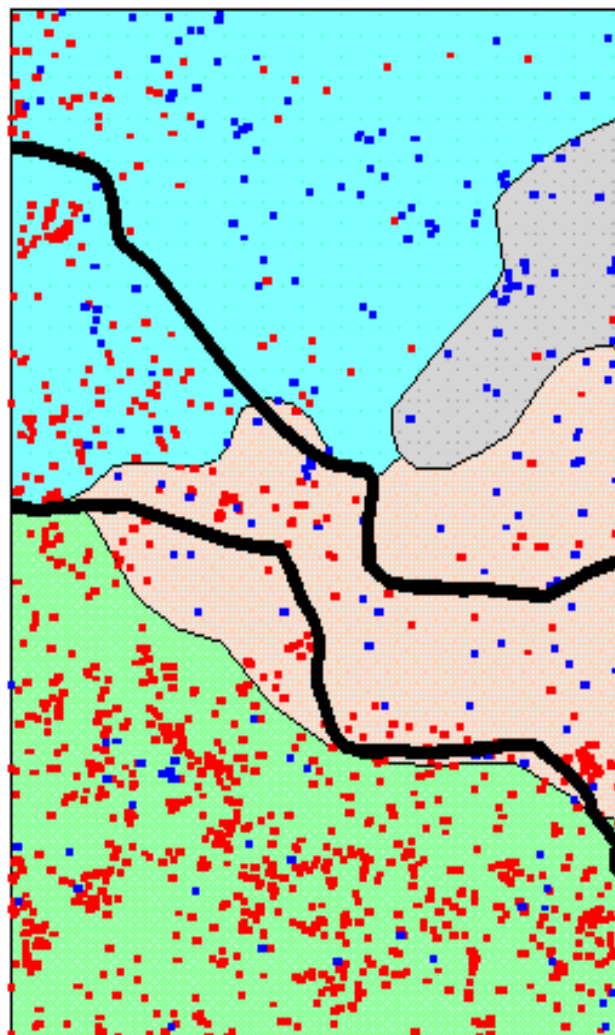
LTER CORE AREAS:

- 1) Primary Production
- 2) Population Studies
- 3) Movement of Organic Matter
- 4) Movement of Inorganic Matter
- 5) Disturbance Patterns

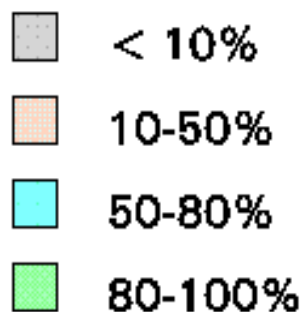
# Luiquillo forest - hurricane damage and recovery



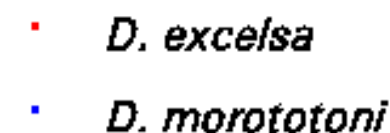
## Distribution of two tree species Hurricane Recovery Plot, El Verde



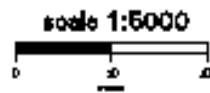
### Forest Cover in 1936



### Present Distributions



Streams



# Join a network - ForestGeo: Forest observatory of large plots



<https://www.forestgeo.si.edu/>

**Towards BioSmart livestock farming in Colombia:  
Cultural landscapes, silvopastoral systems  
and biodiversity- Newton funding UK and Colombia**



# Multidisciplinary consortium



# Project area in Colombia - Sustainable Amazonian Landscapes (SAL)



# Forest remnant and Silvopasture





# Colombia Biosmart: Farmers views and economics of silvopasture

## DECISION MAKING

1. How do farmers understand landscape and how do these visions relate to uptake of silvopastoral systems?
2. How does the socio-economic context relate to uptake of silvopastoral systems?



# Colombia Biosmart - Biodiversity

## BIODIVERSITY

3. Quantify the benefits of silvo-pastoral systems for plant and insect biodiversity

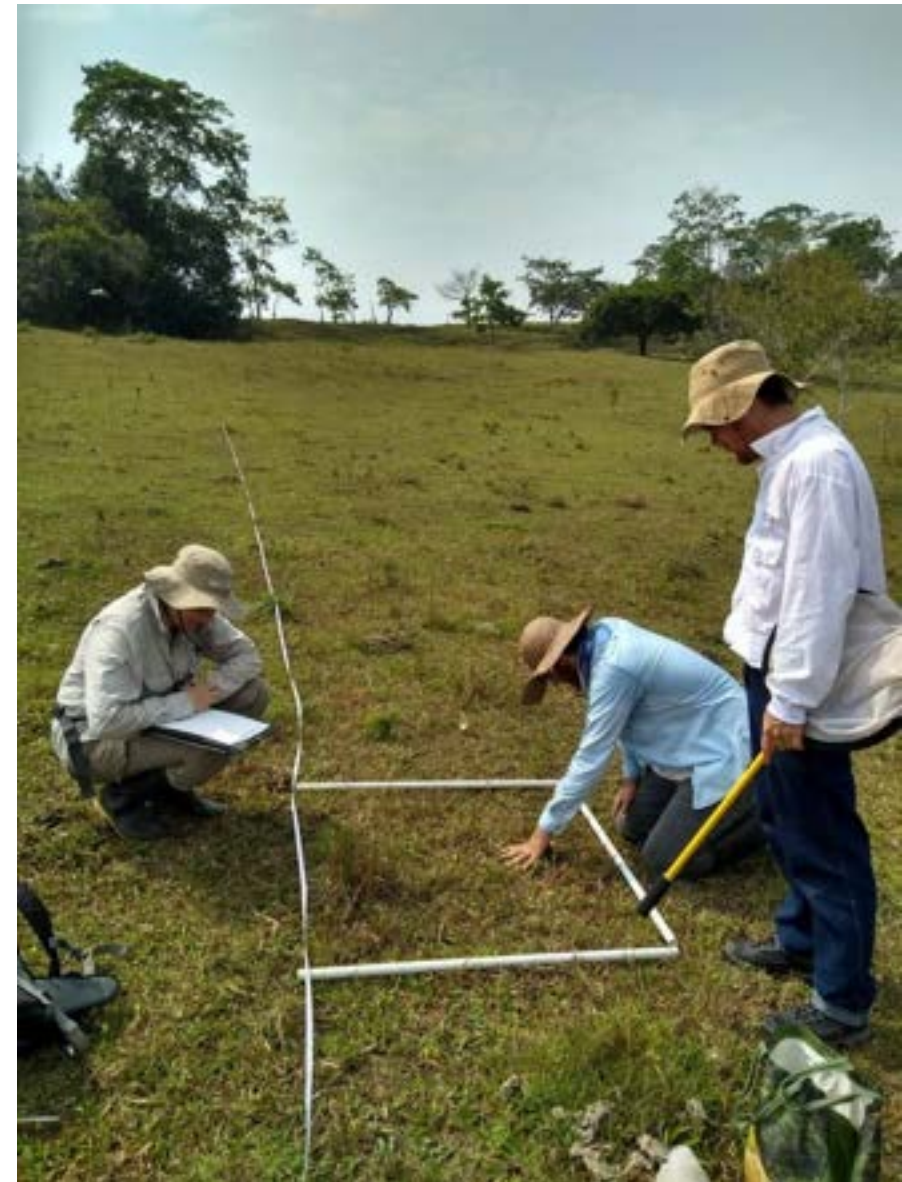


4. Examine the interaction between silvopastoral systems and landscapes

**Silvopastures:** main forage grass “*Brachiaria*” cultivars (*Urochloa sp.*)

**Traditional pastures:** native grasses (*Axonopus compressus*, *Paspalum conjugatum* and others)

92 species in total, 90 transects (62 Trad. past. & 79 Silvop.)



# Funding:

**SPEAK TO PEOPLE** – find out what they know and who they know so that they can introduce you to other people and projects. A connection through a contact is more effective than cold calling.

- Attend lectures and conferences and seek out people that are doing research that interests you.
- Investigate the speakers in advance – read their papers so you have something to talk about.
- Ask senior colleagues to introduce you.
- Engage with people you could work with on social media.
- Give conference presentations.
- Embrace multi and transdisciplinary working – it is more fun and interesting and funders often require it.