I arrived at the cloud forest in Ecuador ten days ago. I was one of a group of twelve volunteers that wanted to save the rainforest. My reasons for going on this trip were twofold: firstly, I wanted to collect and bring back alive some of the fascinating animals, birds and reptiles that inhabit this region; secondly, I had long cherished a dream to see South America: not the inhabited South America with its macadam roads, its cocktail bars, its express trains roaring through a landscape denuded of its flora and fauna by the beneficial influences of civilization. I wanted to see one of those few remaining parts of the continent that had escaped this fate and remained more or less as it was when America was first discovered: I wanted to see its rainforests, its vast lands of untouched, pure, natural wildlife. We were working together with local people and scientists and we were learning and seeing new things every day. Our lodge was comfortable, had breathtaking views and was in the middle of the rainforest. It was a two-hour walk from the nearest road, and it was even further to the nearest village.

The rainforest is truly an astonishing place. There are thousands of species of plants here and more than 700 species of birds. There are millions of insects and scientists think there may be around forty mammal species that haven't even been discovered. But what I was really amazed at how everything depends on everything else for survival.

Every tree in the rainforest is covered in a species of another kind. The black wasp uses the tarantula as a nest for its eggs, plants need monkeys for seed dispersal, and the clouds are necessary for the survival of the whole rainforest. This is because they provide moisture. The problem is, climate change is causing the clouds to rise by 1–2 meters every year. What will happen to the plants that need this moisture? What will happen to the animals that need those plants?

Our job was to watch this changing ecosystem. One of my favourite projects was the bird survey. Every day a group of us set out at around five o'clock with a local scientist. At this time of the morning the air was filled with the sound of bird song. We had to identify the birds we hear and see and write down our findings. Later, we entered all our information into a computer at the lodge.

We also set up cameras to record pumas, spectacled bears and other large mammals. It was always exciting to see pumas because it meant there were other animals around that they would normally hunt. We fixed the cameras to trees around the reserve, and every day a team of volunteers collected the cameras memory cards.

There was a lot to do in the rainforest, but at least I felt like we were making a difference.

However, soon I started collecting some animals and insects. I realized that as soon as the hunting got under way and the collection increased, most of my time would be taken up in looking after the animals, and I should not be able to wander far from camp. So I was eager to get into the forest while I had the chance.

Nevertheless, I should mention the fact that without the help of the natives you would stand little chance of catching the animals you want, for they know the forest, having been born in it. Once the animal is caught, however, it is your job to keep it alive and well. If you left this part of it to the natives you would get precious little back alive.

Which reason for the trip to the rainforest was NOT mentioned?

1. Dream of visiting South America.
2. Gathering a collection.
3. Thirst for adventures.
4. Saving rainforests.