

## **Ecotourism and community development: a sustainable alternative for oaks forests**

**I. Acevedo Rodríguez**\*, A.J. Coombes, C. Flores Huitzil, J.F. López Olguín, and M. Rodríguez Acosta

Botanic Garden of BUAP, Puebla, Pue. Mexico

\*Corresponding author email: [acevedoirinna@hotmail.com](mailto:acevedoirinna@hotmail.com)

Studies of the flora of an area of humid forest in the municipio of Zacapoaxtla, Puebla, Mexico found it to have a high biodiversity including nearly 20 oak species. Guides to show oak diversity were prepared and a series of training courses was given for local people to teach them about the flora and how to recognize the different oaks. With the knowledge they have received we expect it to be possible to develop ecotourism services that will help support the community and help in the sustainable development and conservation of the forests. The majority of the people who received the training in this region of Zacapoaxtla are landowners who have developed environmental alternatives based on their landscape and local traditions to ensure the sustainability of their forest. In this region they have trees we regard as gems in their ecosystems and that they did not know about, such as *Quercus hirtifolia*, *Q. delgadoana*, *Q. crassifolia* and *Q. affinis* among others. Thanks to the training given by the Botanic Garden of BUAP, they now have a clear idea about how this information can increase the quality of the ecotourism activities in their area.

People who visit these ecotourism sites will be able to enjoy a space dedicated to conservation that offers learning services, helping landowners generate income and jobs in their community.

Joint work with the Ministry of Tourism, government and universities in the area is very important to ensure that the information generated reaches the quality and level expected by tourists. For that reason, we trained tourist guides and developed interpretive signs and guides, work that could only have been done with the collaboration of local people. We would like to see this work expanded to cover the entire region and further spread the message of conservation and protection of natural areas, such as the oak forest, in this area of humid cloud forest.