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PROJECT OF THE MONTH

SPIDER MONKEY PRE-RELEASE ENCLOSURE

We have been building our main group of black spider monkeys (*Ateles chamek*) now for 3 and a half years, starting with Attila back at the beginning of 2006, and growing to include Wally, Wolfie and finally Dixon (There were others which unfortunately did not make it through to this stage). This year we are working towards their reintroduction into the south-western corner of our reserve, an area which borders on the relatively safe zone of the Tambopata National Reserve, and also a cooperative neighbour who we know from experience would not hunt an animal which he knows we have released.

There are several stages to the release process: the first two of diet and social bonding are complete. In June/July they undertake psychological and physical examinations to determine their potential for release, and if all goes well they will be transferred to a pre-release enclosure in the designated area. Once there, their diet will gradually evolve to include a majority of natural foods from the forest, then the actual physical release will start. The idea is first to release just one animal from the enclosure, most probably Wolfie, the youngest female. She will have the opportunity to explore the area yet will (hopefully) always be drawn back to the enclosure where the rest of her group is. Then a second individual will be released, and finally the other two. This process is designed so that the area surrounding the enclosure will remain in the nucleus of their territory, which could extend to as much as 250 hectares.

But we're getting a little ahead of ourselves there, right now we have been spending as much time as possible sewing together the net for the pre-release enclosure. The panels have all been cut and the volunteers and staff together, with Raúl Bello as co-ordinator, have been sewing them together, also attaching the ropes from which the cage will be suspended. It has been very hot and tedious work, although presenting many with the opportunity to work on their tan. We hope to have the sewing finished by the end of June so that we can take it out to the site and begin construction.

Note: The current estimate of when we may actually have spider monkeys in the wild is October/November 2009.



PROJECT UPDATES

Bird Monitoring

Continuing with the mist nets along Quebrada Trail, we have not caught a huge variety of



Royal Flycatcher

species but those we did capture were definitely interesting. The highlight for myself and the volunteers who accompanied me (Maylis, Alex & Guillaume), was the female Royal Flycatcher. It was a stunning specimen, and one the volunteers knew the name of even before we took it out of the net. Stuart was lucky enough to trap the male back in 2005 along Rio Trail when we first started mist-netting, so this completed the pair.

We also found 2 new species to add to our bird list, the Black-tailed

Leaftosser, and the Cinereous Mourner.

Hopefully next month we will finish with Quebrada (with the help of Mauricio Ugarte, a Peruvian ornithologist) and move on to Alex, although with a whole new set of bamboo posts!



Cinereous Mourner



Black-tailed Leaf Tosser

Butterfly House

The design for the gardens was prepared and material gathered to construct low picket fencing to border the trails. Thus a good proportion of the activities this month have been involved with painting, repainting, and painting yet again all the pieces of wood to make sure that they will be well-protected against the weather. For this we give a huge thank you to everyone who helped, it was a long boring job but we made it eventually.

As soon as the fences were installed Gigo enlisted the help of Plantón for forays into the forest, bringing back those plants necessary for the lifestyle of the butterflies but also some just to make the place look pretty!

The doors have been built also, and progress is continuing along at a steady rate now that the major work has been done. We hope to be able to inform you within the next few months that we actually have butterflies inside the house.

As a side note, any type of animal breeding centre in Peru requires a permit, so Fernando has been working hard to obtain the necessary paperwork for maintaining and breeding butterflies in captivity.

Orchids

Fernando's mother, Señora Elvira has very kindly donated to the cause of the butterfly house her collection of orchids. It has been built up during the years she has lived in Puerto Maldonado and is a wonderful addition to the gardens. Plantón was kept busy for a whole day sorting them into groups according to their environmental requirements, and then planting or installing them in the necessary conditions.

Trail Clearing

The swamps are receding so we have entered a period which many volunteers will remember, although possibly not with very fond memories – the sweat, the blisters, the hardwood trees...

As most trails are dry we need to clear and maintain them, removing fallen trees or branches and replacing signs. Rike Becker, a geography student at Tübingen, Germany, last year mapped with GPS and remarked the whole trail network with an improved system, meaning that this year the trails will be much easier to identify and follow despite being overgrown. Alejandro Vigil Padilla, a new staff member, is overseeing the maintenance plan and is doing a wonderful job – it's amazing the difference it makes to walk along in the forest without having to step over a fallen log or duck underneath overhanging vegetation.

Turtle Census

The 'Titanic' was repaired and relaunched, so preparations were started for resuming the weekly turtle census along the lower Madre de Dios river. The water level has been steadily dropping and conditions for spotting turtles sunbathing along the riverbanks are reaching ideal. At the beginning of May the final piece was fitted – a 15 horsepower outboard motor. Everyone was excited about this and I believe that within the first 3 days almost every single member of staff found an excuse to take it out for a trial run!

So Daniel and Stuart went out for the first census of the year, then the following week were met with a wonderful surprise on their way back. Travelling slowly up river they spotted a turtle perched on a log with a 'v'-shaped notch cut into the right rear side of the shell. This is undoubtedly one of the grown-up individuals from the first year we successfully hatched out baby turtles, in 2004.

It is always easy to explain to volunteers or interested visitors why we undertake the turtle project each year, but up until now we have had no proof that we are having a positive effect on the local population (i.e. increasing it!). This sighting has been an incredible boost for everyone who has helped with the turtle project.



Animal Rescue Centre – The Great Escape

Those volunteers who were here at Taricaya in August 2008 may remember an incident (or two) with Isabella, our female tapir – then the only one. She escaped from her enclosure 3 times over the course of a month and had to be carried back to her enclosure. Well, a few weeks ago Isabella repeated that escape act, this time with her young male companion Bonito in tow. We mobilized the troops, sending groups of volunteers and staff out all over the reserve whistling for them and found plenty of footprints. However upon returning to the lodge Bonito was spotted wandering around the outside of his enclosure. He's only half grown but still incredibly strong and it took over 2 hours to reinstate him in the enclosure (once it had been repaired). Isabella was a little easier, she responds to her name and whistles and with the help of visual barriers was persuaded to walk by herself back into the enclosure a couple of days later. This is a good indication of how strong the bond has become between the two tapirs. They have also been observed on various occasions attempting a little naughty business but it is clear that while they are very willing to practice, at the moment Bonito is still a little too young.

Palma Real

We made one of our regular trips down to the native community in May, for 2 specific reasons. The first was to weed around all of the young fruit trees we planted as part of their agroforestry pilot project and check on their growth. The second was to collect 2 members of the community to bring back to Taricaya for an intensive 1-week training course in the care and management of the donkeys. A couple of months ago their previous donkey died sadly from an unfortunate encounter with a snake. The community, while at first slow to realize his potential to assist them, had started using him with the cart we provided to carry things, hauling up water from the stream beside the village when their water pump was broken, bringing wood and firewood out from the forest, etc. but there was no specific person charged with his care. Now Walter and Wilber have been trained, and our 3 remaining donkeys, Nando, Lisa and Rambito (although soon to be four), have been relocated to Palma Real. After just 2 weeks we visited to check up on them, amongst other things, and found them to be in wonderful health, fattening up nicely on the large variety of plants growing in abundance around the community. We miss them, donkey training was a very popular activity, but they will be much more useful and happy in their new home.



EXTRAS

Canopy Walkway

It was time for a little more maintenance, some resewing of the net on the bridge and replacing various steps which help when climbing the steeper part of the bridge. These were also fixed in place, to avoid what has been a regular problem recently of the steps slipping out of place and having to be replaced every time a group goes up to the platform for observation.

Percy's Farm

It was time again to check on the progress of our mahogany cuttings, planted at the farm of Percy, a neighbor of ours with an unforgettable smile. He has been involved with some of our pilot farm projects for nearly 4 years now, with a variety of flowers and some of the original mahogany saplings growing very well on his land. He kindly agreed to let us plant some experimental mahogany cuttings amongst his flowers earlier this year.

New Farm Additions

This is the time of year when we often get new additions to the animals at the farm, however we were surprised this year because Sidan, the large male goat was eliminated from the herd over 8 months ago. Although there's now an up-and-coming male to replace him (the wonderfully-named 'Liverpool'), we suspect that the latest 3 kids are the



last from the line of Sidan. He sired a large proportion of the herd over the last 4 years of his reign, also leaving many an unsuspecting volunteer or staff with bruises from the occasional head butt!

Cold Spells!

Although a little later than usual, in the middle of may we got our first official friaje of the year, with temperatures dropping to 17°C overnight. This indicates the start of the dry season, and is due to a change in the airflow so that the winds come up from the south bringing cold air from Patagonia and the Antarctic. They generally occur every 2-3 weeks throughout the dry season until September, lasting for 3-4 days at a time.

Herpetotraps

With the dry season upon us and the swamps starting to dry up Daniel decided to install a pitfall trap right alongside one of the seasonal swamps to see what kind of fauna would be more common in the area at this time. Sadly the week after installation when he returned

to check the buckets the swamp, which before was almost 2m deep, had dried up completely!

LOCAL NEWS

VOLUNTEER ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES

Arrivals: Katrina Abernethy, Alix Jubert, Violaine Deriat, Magali Baras, Anne-Lise Tailame, Hannah Weigel, Laura Mckenzie-Wynne, Annika Johanson, Kasper Nielsen, Catrine Peulecke, Lisa Moore, Morgan Virgilio, Alex Rose, Hadrien Dierickx, Penny Arnold, Mark Eising, Lisa Loka, Soren Skaastrup, Alice Fourier and Karyn DeSena.

Leaving in May: Jean Luc Roba, Kathrin Schluecter, Jean Charles Quinquis, Francesca Whitlock, Agatha Jung, Amelia Hill, Ophelie-Loelia Bonnieu, Katrina Abernethy, Alex Firth, Annika Johanson, Kasper Nielsen, Catrine Peulecke and Morgan Virgilio.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Of the baby turtles that hatch out in one season, only 5% are expected to survive to adulthood.
- There is no official word for donkey in the Ese'eja language (and none of the children in Palma Real had ever seen one).

We would love to hear from any of you who have visited Taricaya, it doesn't matter how long you were here for or how long ago, we'd like to hear about what you're doing or where you are now.

Also if you would like to know anything about Taricaya, or have any queries about the rainforest (or Peru), we have a number of qualified biologists on the team who would be happy to answer any of your questions.

For quick updates or information about Taricaya, check out our website at www.volunteer-conservation-peru.org, or you can reach us through the Projects Abroad website at www.projects-abroad.org.

Have a good month, and we look forward to hearing from you.
Rachel Kilby