



Bi-coloured Hawk

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PROJECT OF THE MONTH

LEAF LITTERFALL TRAPS

The botanical project here in Taricaya has several objectives, including to investigate the composition, structure, interactions and successive changes in the vegetation in relation to the fauna existing within the Taricaya Ecological Reserve. To achieve these aims we are applying diverse research methods such as the collection and identification of botanical samples, also marking and monitoring of key tree species which are of ecological importance to the fauna. Up to now we have 234 species registered, but the collection and identification of species continues, along with the tree monitoring so this list will be increasing all the time. We have a total of 200 marked trees throughout the reserve which are checked monthly to learn about the reproductive cycle of these species which are of vital ecological importance to the forest.

Now the botany project has a new objective, to investigate the productivity of vegetable material of the forest (biomass), which is related to the water and carbon cycles, and to the interchange and flow of nutrients between the plants and the soil. This new project involves the use of global protocols established by The Tropical Ecology, Assessment and Monitoring (TEAM) Initiative, a long term monitoring program started in 2003. The basic idea is to learn about the changes in the forest due to ecological and climatic factors, and the presence of humans. We have started this project by installing 20 litterfall traps in different types of forest within the reserve. With these traps we can monitor the production levels of bark, leaves, branches, flowers, fruits and seeds, the basic components of forest structure and food sources for the wildlife living within. We are planning to complete a network of 100 traps which will be monitored constantly. In the future these will give us a more precise idea of the changes and behavior of the forest, and its relations with the climate and fauna existing within our reserve.



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PROJECT UPDATES

Bird Monitoring

At the start of 2009 we began to capture birds in the forest again using mist-nets, very fine black nets designed to trap birds without harming them, allowing for identification and measuring before releasing them back into the forest. We have been working our way along the trail Quebrada, the longest in the whole Taricaya trail system, using bamboo poles to install the nets at a height of 7m above the ground. They are also accompanied by a couple of nets at ground level as these are areas where we have never set up nets before. The first week was interesting, with captures of mostly hummingbirds and woodcreepers (also, surprisingly, a bat one day at lunchtime), but the second week of netting, in a location further along the trail, was much more productive. We captured 42 birds in just 3 days that included several species only known from a few sightings within the reserve – 2 species of Puffbird, a Curl-crested Aracari, a Chestnut Woodpecker (very painful on the hands!), an Orange-bellied Euphonia and even a juvenile Bicolored Hawk. Our finest moment, however, was the capture of an Amazonian Barred-Woodcreeper, the first to be recorded within the reserve and so a new species for our bird list which now stands at 407 spp.

For the next couple of months we will be working our way down to the end of Quebrada trail and from there along our southern border where it will be the first time we have investigated the birdlife in that region.



Semicollared Puffbird



Curl-crested Aracari



Amazonian Barred-Woodcreeper



Striolated Puffbird



Orange-bellied Euphonia (f)



Chestnut Woodpecker

Coffee

The coffee plants at the pilot farm, having been steadily loading their branches with fruit over the last month or two, are now finally ripening and ready for harvest so coffee picking and peeling has been a major activity in the lodge for a few weeks. The cherries are picked from the trees when they are more than half red, then left in a sack



for several days so their skins can soften. Then comes the fun part, crushing the cherries by dancing on the sack to loosen the beans from their skin, afterwards they are separated out by hand and spread in the sun to dry. Once dry they can be roasted (in a clean dry



frying pan) and ground up to give the coffee. Here we normally use a part of the harvest to make a nursery of coffee plants, ready to transplant should any of our neighbours wish to try growing their own. The rest is consumed by staff and volunteers, and although I personally don't drink coffee I am told by many how nice it tastes.

Clearing Trails

We decided to reopen an old trail, Horner, one of the first trails ever made in Taricaya. It is normally just a 25 minute walk to reach the beginning of the trail but in the 3rd week of April we had a very fierce storm and three quarters of the way there we were confronted by a vast open area of approximately 4 ha. (to say we were startled is a bit of an understatement)! Upon arrival at this clearing our first thoughts were that someone had sneaked onto our land to fell hardwood trees, but on closer inspection we realized that it was an entirely natural phenomenon - all the tree trunks were broken rather than cut and nothing at all had been spared. This happens in the forest on a regular basis and allows for regeneration of the forest with different plant species, diversifying the flora of the area.

Educational Talks

We have a pilot farm project attached to Taricaya, here to explore various agriculture and forestry possibilities for degraded soil i.e. that which has been used for the customary local crops such as maize (corn), yuca (manioc) and rice. It is often a little difficult to explain to volunteers at the farm exactly why at that moment they should be picking coffee beans, measuring mahogany saplings, or cutting tropical flowers. Plantón (Daniel Medina, Botanist) prepared a presentation for the volunteers explaining the history of the farm projects and future plans. Everyone came out of it understanding more about the varied activities associated with New Farm.

Incidentally, if anyone would like a copy of the powerpoint presentation please contact either myself or Maria, specifying Spanish or English, and we will email it to you.

This has been a time for several educational talks given by the staff, with volunteers hearing about the ecology of various types of wildlife including caimans, primates and ants. The Caiman Talk, as tradition has it here, is always followed up by a caiman hunt, that is to say a nocturnal journey along the river searching for caiman on the banks. If possible one may be captured briefly so the animal can be seen close up, and if deemed safe enough (i.e. the animal is small enough and not too stressed) then the volunteers may also take turns holding it if they wish to do so. This latest was particularly successful with Stuart capturing a caiman after just 10 minutes of searching. We are not always quite so lucky.

Animal Rescue Centre

1. Jaguarundi

We were visited briefly by Mabe, a veterinarian friend of Raúl (Manager of the Rescue Centre). During the course of her visit she checked on the condition of several of our animals who were a little under-the-weather, one of them being the jaguarundi. We received him back in January from another rescue centre in a very bad condition and he showed good improvement in our care. He was transferred to a larger enclosure after nearly 2 months but then we noticed that he had started to stay much of the time in one space and had lost a lot of weight. With a few changes in the design and layout of the enclosure, implemented by Mabe, and an increase in exercise he gradually started moving around a little more, regaining the muscle tone he had lost. Now although still a way from being completely healthy he can be spotted running around his cage in the early evening, weaving in and out of the obstacles.

2. Parasites!

This month was the time for the regular deparasitising of all the animals managed within the rescue centre using Fenacur, a liquid designed to eliminate or lower levels of intestinal parasites. This treatment is repeated every 2 months to ensure that the animals stay healthy. Parasites are always found in the digestive systems of the forest animals, but those living in the wild use the food they eat to regulate their personal parasite levels. Therefore this must be monitored and controlled differently for animals in captivity as the diet varies a fair amount from what they would be eating in the forest.

3. Spider Monkeys

With the addition of Raúl Bello to our team this year, and the receipt of the final list of animals in our rescue centre that are registered with INRENA (Institute of Natural

Resources), we have been planning for the release of several of our animals. The group of spider monkeys, Wally, Dixon, Attila and Wolfie, are scheduled for release later this year but the process is a long one. The first step is to complete an evaluation of their physical and psychological conditions, and if all is well we can move on to locate and construct the pre-release enclosure. It has been one of our dreams ever since Taricaya began to reintroduce black spider monkeys (*Ateles chamek*) to this area. In April we received the net from which we will construct the enclosure, a thick black net originally designed for sea fishing, which is strong enough so that they monkeys cannot bite through it but also easy to maneuver and transport – essential as the pre-release enclosure will be approximately 3 km into the forest. We have been measuring and cutting the net ready for sewing, to ultimately make an enclosure of 20 m by 10 m, and with a height of 3-5 m – it will be higher in the middle, sort of like a circus tent.

4. Turkey!

Some of you may remember Hamilton, the last white-lipped peccary that we had here in Taricaya. He was transferred to a local rescue centre which specialized in their care, leaving behind an enclosure knee deep in mud which we despaired about using again for another animal. The floor inside was covered with brazil nut shells and the enclosure conditioned with branches, the new home for 'Turkey', the Spix's Guan. He is much happier here, with plenty of space to fly around.



Botany Walk

A standard activity for new volunteers is the botany walk, a gentle stroll along the forest paths with Plantón to learn about the basic structure of the forest, and about some of the more common plants found within the area. The flora of the Madre de Dios region is very diverse and volunteers learn to identify various medicinal, fruiting and lumber species, some of which are very important for the local population.

EXTRAS

Turtle Pool

Part of the plan for the new butterfly house was to incorporate an area for our young Taricaya turtles, so a location was chosen for the pool and in just one morning the hole was completed. The design is for a shallow pool with a sandy beach at one end to mimic

some of the conditions of their normal habitat. As we have a lot of experience with plastic pond liners (they always get pierced by something) and concrete (it cracks, leaks alkaline material into the water, crumbles easily), for this pool we decided to invest a little more and commission a specially designed fibreglass pool liner which will not be affected by the environmental conditions of the area. It will also be much easier to clean and – hopefully – should never leak!

Washing Canoes

One very necessary (and wet) activity which all volunteers get involved in at some point is that of cleaning the boats. With all the journeys we make to collect sawdust, brazil nut shells, leaves for the tapirs, fruits, and even the trips into town at the weekend, inevitably things get left behind. So, on a nice hot Friday afternoon everybody was out on the river bank to scrub the canoes inside and out, and getting just a little wet in the process!

Big Loop

Something we do occasionally is the ‘Big Loop’, a walk around the perimeter of the Taricaya Ecological Reserve which amounts to nearly 10 km. The trails in many places were dry, except for those which are perpendicular to the river. The terrain for these latter goes up and down a lot, and all the low areas are still filled with water from the rains, leading to the necessity of swimming on occasion – does anyone remember how hard it is to swim whilst wearing rubber boots and trying to keep your camera dry?

LOCAL NEWS

Palma Real

Finally to end the month the 1st of May was Labour Day in Peru, and for the occasion we were invited to the native community of Palma Real to take part in their football and volleyball tournaments. The volunteers made a unanimous decision to attend and it was very much enjoyed by all, even though our teams for both sports were knocked out in the first round! The village is located in the centre of a large deforested area (almost 90 ha.) and the sun is very fierce, so many people were relieved that they did

not have to take to the field a second time.

VOLUNTEER ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES

Arrivals: Shelby Campbell, Guillaume Milesi, Jean Luc Roba, Maylis Ferreira, Kathleen Gatti, Adrienne Estes, Sarah Hampson and Florin Kunz.

Leaving in April: Lucy Cardwell, Shelby Campbell, Adrienne Estes, Sarah Hampson and Michele Williams.

DID YOU KNOW?

- If you place fresh coffee beans in a bucket of water the good ones sink while the bad ones will float, allowing you to refine your coffee.
- At any one time approximately 5% of the rainforest is classed as 'forest gap', open areas where large trees have fallen allowing sunlight to reach almost to the ground.

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