



What's Inside...

Project Updates:

Turtle Project
Toucan Release

2-3
4

Lodge Maintenance

5

Extras!

Volunteer stories, T.V Film crew visit, Peru's Independence Day, Volunteer Arrivals & Departures and more....

TURTLE PROJECT

It's that time of year again: the turtle project! In the months of July and August, when the river level has fallen and beaches appear, the Taricaya turtle (or Yellow-Spotted Amazon River turtle), from which Taricaya Ecological Reserve gets its name, begins to come to the beaches to lay its eggs. Along the stretch of the Madre De Dios River, where Taricaya is located, there is no protection for this turtle. Other reserves nearby can monitor the situation within their borders and here at Taricaya we have permission from the government to patrol Playa Alta: a beach about a twenty minute boat ride down river.

Turtles have been used for generations here, for their meat and eggs, and today it forms a part of the income for many families that live along the river during this season. Unfortunately it is a resource that is overused and over the years we have been trying to monitor the impact such activity might be having on the local turtle population and trying to help to sustain the population as well.

Every night in July and August volunteers and staff camp on the beach and getting up in the early hours to search for turtle nests. If successful, the eggs are carefully collected and taken back to artificial beaches that we have built here at Taricaya. In the artificial beaches there is a much higher chance of baby turtles hatching successfully: no predators, no chance of sudden flooding if the river rises, and no human threat. As such, around 75% of the eggs can be expected to hatch successfully, as opposed to 40% in the wild. When, about 2 months later, the baby turtles begin to hatch they are taken back to the beach where they were found and released. Over the years, Taricaya has released around 6,000 baby turtles into the Madre De Dios River.



The first few turtle nests relocated to our artificial beach



Excited volunteers off to search for nests!

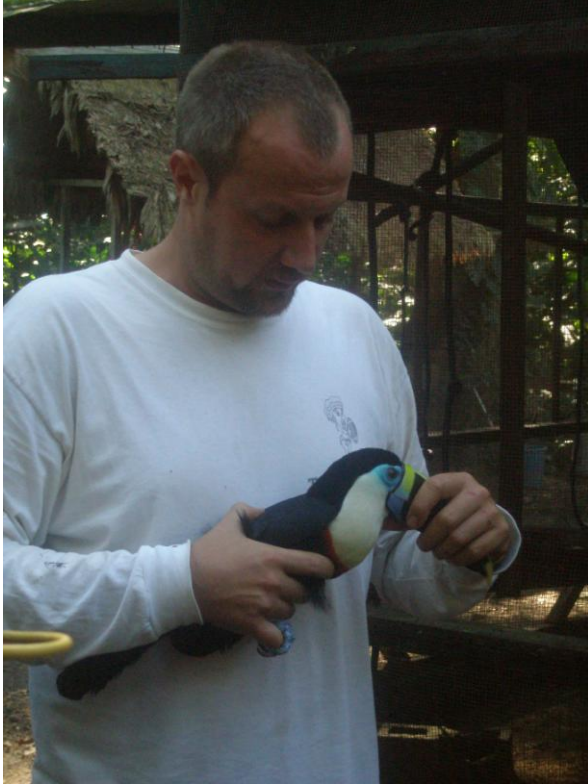
Collecting the eggs



Turtle eggs placed carefully into a bucket with sand, ready to take back to the artificial beaches

ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

Our rescue centre is not all about the animals we receive, but also about those we can set free. When it is possible the aim is to release the animals that come our way and the time came this month for one of the first white-throated toucans who



came to us and has been with us for a few years now. Now that the medical analysis is complete and the toucan is mature enough to be able to survive alone in the rainforest, we are able to release him.

After a short time to give eagerly awaiting volunteers (and a French film crew!) an opportunity to take photos of this moment without stressing the toucan too much, it was released by the Tapirs' cage where it flew onto a nearby tree and took in its new surroundings.

The toucan can now be seen close to the rescue centre at times, but we hope, with time, he will become more and more independent and travel further afield. A few weeks after, in fact, it seemed as if he had already attracted the attention of another wild toucan, which came to visit, attracted by the toucan's distinctive yapping call.

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Stuart Timson, Taricaya's
Conservation Director,
releasing the white-throated
toucan



LODGE MAINTENANCE

Perhaps not outwardly the most exciting of project headings, but Lodge Maintenance is an activity that can take on many forms. This particular month it was time to do some rebuilding of some of the steps for the volunteer bungalows. In the humid rainforest conditions, the wooden steps have a limited lifespan and many had already been patched up but a complete renovation was needed to replace the rotting supports as well as the steps themselves.

The first stage of this activity was to collect the wooden planks. Again, although it may not sound the most exciting of activities, it turned out to be a fun, if messy, mornings work. We were to take the boat across to Percy's farm, a neighbouring farmer who has always taken an interest in our work here. There we had to load up the boat with the planks. Sounds fairly simple, however, the planks were at the top of the river bank and the boat at the bottom, and in between there was a steep bank and a very muddy slope. Nonetheless, hardy volunteers got to work and made a chain to pass the planks hand to hand down the bank, across the mud and



onto the boat. Easy enough if you were at the top of the bank, but at the bottom it only took one step onto the wet mud to sink up to your knees. We attempted to use some of the planks to stand on to make a bridge, but in some places it was just easier to stand in the mud. Sand flies hummed around us, taking advantage of our immobility. Someone discovered that mud covered legs seemed to prevent the attacks of the sand flies, so more mud was applied on arms and legs, and even on necks and faces. Some volunteers enjoying their mud bath so much that they ended up completely covered! Still, the wood continued to come. It was hot and hard work, but eventually we reached the end. It was time to get back on the boat, fight

through the mud (as our bridges had to be taken up and put on the boat as well) and head back to Taricaya. At the other end, it was not quite finished as unloading was necessary too. There was much less mud this time though and soon we were all swimming in the shallow waters of the Madre De Dios, clean and cool again.



Some muddy volunteers

VOLUNTEER STORIES

Although turtle nests may not be found every night, it can still be a great experience camping out under the stars along the river. A couple of volunteers went with Melvin, a local man who helps us look for turtle eggs and staff member Alejandro. They had an entertaining time and have written an imaginative account in their own individual style!

Night of the Tortuga

As accounted by Cailie Kafura and Youri Izelaar

It was a dark and stormy night.... Los Gringos boarded the boat, piloted by the almighty-defender-of-turtles Melvin. However, after departure, the turtle crew came to the realization that their turtle buckets had been left behind. After turning back to Taricaya, Youri leaped from the boat with the greatest of ease and returned within a record-smashing 45 seconds with the egg-cradling contraptions in hand. We continued on our expedition into the great unknown of cotton candy vortexical skies. A light rain misted upon us as we neared *Tortuga Island*. Eager to thunder-gaze, we catapulted our bodies onto the moist nesting grounds. Blinded by her passionate yearning to embrace the magnificent power of the storming thunder, the young German girl of the name Sarah - daughter of Walter and Brunhilde - disembarked the floating vessel a wee bit too rapidly, mattress in tow. The Madre de Dios would have welcomed her flailing form with open arms, had it not been for the saviour Alejandro. Unfortunately, our hero only possessed two hands, thus shaping the fate of the mattress as it tumbled into the Madre de Dios. Soaked to the spring, this mattress was utilized to view the breathtaking conglomeration of lightning, rain, and magical clouds all set upon a sapphire-esque background.

Alejandro awaited the rain, for if it came, so would departure.

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Nevertheless, Los Gringos took the reins and set up not just one tent, but *two!* Our compadre witnessed the lack of drops descending from the unsure sky and followed the Gringos' suit and set up the master tent. Little did the Fellowship know that the Heavens would cry their sorrows upon these weary turtle scavengers later that evening. These events unbeknownst to them, they sat upon the mattress and played *dishes** like a boss (*Dishes: A card game frequently played by all in the Taricaya kitchen, often resulting in the cleaning of fellow plates). Upon hearing the rustle of the windswept tent, the dish headers simultaneously took action to rescue the tent from further bullying by the most dangerous force in the Amazon: wind! Yet these attempts were in vain. Alejandro wisely advised us to disassemble the sleeping box. The weary adventurers continued the game of cards until the fateful meal was served. As the toasts were jammed and the eggs mayonnaised some chose to ingest the forbidden fish of tuna, which was not appreciated by some adventurers, who knew the perils of the dwindling oceanic life. Our trusty saviour Alejandro then proceeded to feed our imaginations with a tale that went like this:

Once upon a time, two men got lost in the rainforest. Upon hearing the supposed Peccary, the frightened hombres climbed the nearest tree to escape its potential wrath. However, the peccary was not a peccary at all but a young boy! One of the hombres climbed down to ask for help. After being asked for directions, the boy just glared at the man and continued on his way. The young man who asked the question suddenly found himself vomiting, as if cursed.



Melvin found himself napping the night away. Then, spidey-senses a-tingling, Melvin bounded awake and illuminated the boat, only to discover that the vessel had drifted yonder with the rolling waves. Melvin galloped towards the boat like no man had galloped before him. Luckily for the conservationists, Melvin the Great managed to capture the escaping boat. Following their hardy meal, the Fellowship once again returned to their faithful mattress to gape at the cosmos. However, a gaggle of cumulous stratus clouds had taken their place over the eternal fireflies in the night sky. Nonetheless, philosophical thoughts ensued: war, marriage, famine, and aliens. When the eleventh hour

appeared, the fantastic four gotta mighty fine shut-eye; tent-less, mind you.

In the midst of their nocturnal slumber, Alejandro crept towards the amigos with a blinding torch and spoke the dreaded phrase “Vamos!” With misplaced excitement, the turtle apprentice - Youri Izelaar - propelled his muscular compartments that quivered with anticipation and with a fire in his eyes, exclaimed, “It’s 2am guys! We gotta find some turtle eggs!” The apprehensive gringas dragged their shivering limp bodies to the vertical position and began the long and winding trek to rescue all of the Tortuga babies. With the winding mist being thrust upon them, they trudged for 40 minutes in an unknown direction. Many a flightless bird stumbled upon their path to which the marvellous Melvin harnessed the power of torch and hand to capture those that were unable to take flight due to the mighty mist. After the trailing of countless wannabe turtles ended in disappointment, we returned to the collapsed tent and devoted mattress that the Fellowship called “home.” The fantastic four reconstructed the tent and then proceeded to sardine into the sleeping box. Minutes before drifting asleep, Youri and his brilliant timing mentioned the plot of the Blair Witch Project movie... so on that note, the adventurers attempted to fall asleep despite the now traumatizing rustle of the tent’s exterior. The hour of 5am finally arrived along with Alejandro’s “vamos.” They packed their many belongings and trudged to the eternally feared vessel to unhinge it from the jaws of the quicksand. An hour passed and the almighty gringos finally removed the wooden beast from the depths of the playa. The righteous turtle gatherers heaved themselves upon the now buoyant ship and rode triumphantly into the sunrise: their buckets held no eggs, but their hearts held enough memories to last a lifetime!



OTHER EVENTS

As some of you may be aware, Taricaya is not completely unfamiliar with being in the limelight. We have had one or two film crews here before to film some of the activities and animals and this month two more filmmakers arrived from France. They aimed to make a short documentary about the volunteers and the work they do here. They focused on the journey of one French girl from her departure in France, to her arrival, to her first few activities here at Taricaya. Shots of everyday life, playing cards, helping out in the kitchen and unloading the boat, as well as volunteers carrying out their activities, have been taken so far and the programme “More than a holiday” will be aired in France later this year. Keep an eye out for your favourite staff members and volunteers!

July 28th in Peru is Independence Day or *Fiestas Patrias* and, of course, here at Taricaya, we couldn't let the day go by uncelebrated. Peruvian red and white flag decorations adorned the kitchen and we were invited by our neighbouring tourist lodge, Amazon Planet, to join them in a sports afternoon. Mixed teams of staff and volunteers from both Taricaya and Amazon Planet fought battles on the football pitch and on the volleyball court. It's hard to say who actually won some of the games but it was easy to see that everyone enjoyed the change of pace!



Hi,

If you would just like to send a note, we would love to hear from any of you who have volunteered at Taricaya, it doesn't matter how long you were here for or how long ago, we're always interested in what you're doing or where you are now.

We welcome your feedback for the newsletter as well; what would you like to see or hear about here every month?

Also if you have any queries about the rainforest (or Peru), we have a number of qualified biologists on the team who would be very 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.net.

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

Catherine Turner
Volunteer Co-ordinator
Reserva Ecologica Taricaya