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## PROJECT UPDATES

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### ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

In the middle of November we re-established an area for raising small animals, mainly for the arrival of Nicol, a tiny female spider monkey (*Ateles chamek*) weighing just under 700g. With our experiences this year raising Lilou, Maqui, Sambo, Abi, Balu, the young jaguarundis and of course Sid, the southern river otter, a large part of the rescue centre is now dedicated to raising young animals. While young, these animals require a different diet and overall management strategy from the adults of the same species, also we keep a much closer eye on their behaviour, weight gain and size, among other things. Since her arrival Nicol has been doing pretty well, she started gaining weight and has improved so much that we can now reduce her feeds to 4 times a day – when she first arrived she had to be fed every 2 hours, even through the night!



### BUTTERFLY HOUSE

Since we started to populate the butterfly house with individuals collected from the forest, Gigo (Daniel Alvarado) has been checking the plants on a regular basis for the presence of eggs or caterpillars. He was surprised one day near the end of November when checking with Marco, who lifted up a few leaves which had contained eggs to find a whole group of caterpillars of the owl



butterfly tucked away beneath. This is the first positive sign that our butterflies have started to breed. Caterpillars are voracious creatures and require separate handling in smaller enclosures which can be cleaned and restocked with food on a much more frequent basis. So Gigo has started to construct small cages to house the caterpillars until they metamorphose.



While there are a small number of adults within the butterfly house, they have fairly short life spans so we are always looking for more to boost the population and therefore the chances of reproduction. Gigo has been out with volunteers setting up traps along different trails within the reserve for this purpose while Marco, back for his fourth and final data collection visit, has been setting out his traps along the same trails he used on previous occasions to see if there was any variation to be found in the butterfly populations at the start of the rainy season.



Finally, when the butterfly house was first constructed it was supported along the 2 longer sides with bamboo poles planted in the ground at regular intervals. While a good building material, bamboo does not last longer than 6-8 months when exposed to the elements continuously so recently we have been cutting more poles from the bamboo stands at the pilot farm to replace all the original ones. We try to preserve them for as long as possible by wrapping the base with plastic to prevent them from rotting while in the ground, although this only extends their life by a few months.

#### HERPETOLOGY PROJECT

There are 3 pitfall traps set up around the swamp at HOB, one of our bird watching platforms. With all the rain we have had in the last month the swamp has been filling up with water and it seems that the inhabitants have become a lot more active, especially the turtles. There are several species of turtle to be found in the bodies of still water within the forest, and Daniel (Daniel Neira, Herpetologist) has found 6 individuals of 2



species in the traps over recent weeks. At first we only confirmed the presence of one species, the Amazon Toad-headed Turtle (*Mesoclemmys raniceps*). Upon closer inspection of the individuals captured, and a little research, Daniel suspects that some of them were of the 2<sup>nd</sup> species, the Gibba Toad-headed Turtle (*Mesoclemmys gibbus*). According to the available literature the difference can be noted in head size and overall body size, but it is not always completely distinct. As there seems to be a thriving population of both species within our reserve Daniel is planning a breeding study to define further the differences between them so that identification may be made easier and also more can be known about their ecology and reproduction. Many of you should remember the turtle pool out behind the lodge, next to the current spider monkey enclosure. Used for the last few years as a holding pool for the taricayas before release it will be redesigned and turned into a swampy area suitable for the study of these 2 species of turtle.

On the first Friday in December we had a frog talk for the volunteers and Daniel mentioned that with all the rain this was a wonderful time to go out in the evening and hunt for frogs. So the following week we divided up into groups and set out. The sounds were incredible, when you were nearing any body of water you knew because the frogs



Sharp-nosed Jungle Frog



Clown Treefrog (giraffe phase)

were all chirping and croaking very loudly. After 1 hour searching in various places around the reserve we returned to the lodge to check out our findings. Overall we had captured 9 different species of frog, one of which, although we did not know until the following day, turned out to be a new species for our amphibian list. The Sharp-nosed Jungle Frog (*Leptodactylus bolivianus*) is a large animal very similar to a more common species, the Smoky Jungle Frog. Also captured were 2 Clown Treefrogs (*Dendrosophus leucophyllatus*) in different phases. The clown treefrog exists in several different patterns and one of the captures of the frog hunt was one of the more uncommon ones, what is known as the 'giraffe phase'. Finally, just to round it out nicely this month we identified



a new species of snake for the reserve. Found on the roof of one of the bungalows (probably following a rat) Nando extracted an Emerald Palmsnake (*Philodryas viridissimus*), right, a smallish green snake which while beautiful is also rather venomous – not to the extreme that it could kill a human, but enough to cause considerable pain if bitten. Luckily our recommendations\* were followed and the volunteers advised a staff member of its presence before thinking about grabbing hold of it.

\*all volunteers are advised (upon arrival) to seek staff assistance if they come across an animal that is unknown to them or is known to be dangerous.

## NEW FARM

For several months we have been planning the next phase of projects for the pilot farm, upriver from the main lodge. Many of the current projects are simply at a stage of maintenance – we know they are successful – and for use as resources should any of our neighbours be interested in starting a particular project. However there is one part which we are anxious to investigate. At the beginning of December we transferred our remaining 11 goats (various of which were pregnant) over to the farm of Pedro Guevara, one of our neighbours who was interested in extending his goat herd.

This leaves the field free for an important project – the eradication of grassland through agroforestry systems designed for the eventual recovery of a forest environment. It is a little ambitious but if we are successful it could help lead the way for the recovery of abandoned ranchlands around Puerto Maldonado. The type of grass customarily planted for cattle is very tough and does not allow anything else to grow around it, so if we can find a way to remove this grass as the dominant plant of an area and increase soil quality there is a chance that the land could either be used productively again or return to being forest.

## TRAILS

Although a little close to the rainy season, we have continued to try and keep some of our trail network clear. Some trails were cleared specifically for the bird-banding course so they could put up mist nets, while otherwise we have been clearing and then remarking several of the other trails. Most recently we finished clearing Oso Bandera, all 1.5km of it, also Hummingbird which follows the riverbank along to the pilot farm and also Heliconia trail, another trail to the farm which used to be used for donkey training, and still the shortest route there. One thing we did forget and which must be rectified shortly is the collection of any remaining old trail markers. While theoretically the distance markers should be in the same places they always seem to vary slightly, so it can be confusing if

you see 2 close to each other which both proclaim to be 200m along a particular trail!

## EXTRAS

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### BIRD BANDING COURSE

Taricaya had the honour this month of hosting the first bird-banding course in Peru. Co-ordinated and run by Mauricio Ugarte and John Alexander, among others, it attracted students and instructors from all over Peru and also Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica and the USA. Starting on November 15<sup>th</sup> it lasted 10 days and was an intensive course for people from different biological backgrounds to learn current techniques for trapping, measuring and banding birds. The students all underwent practical and theoretical exams on the last day, having to meet over 60 different criteria to pass the course. During the course they identified many birds, both through sight and sound, and actually added another 6 species to our bird list. We very much enjoyed having everyone stay and in traditional Taricaya style celebrated the end of the course with a huge barbecue and party for students, instructors, staff and volunteers. We hope to be able to host more such courses in the years to come.

### RIVERBANK REPAIR

Late November was marked by several periods of very heavy rain, a sure sign that the wet season is on its way. The effect of this rain, however, was to deepen holes in the riverbank which had been hardly noticeable over the dry season. So we brought in plenty of sacks, filled them with mud and filled in the large hole at the top of our flight of steps going down the riverbank. It had just been finished when overnight the river rose and washed away a section of the steps lower down! We have since cut those steps a little further into the bank but have been using the creek as our port since then. With our boats, plus those of the tourists which come to visit us daily all of the movement affects the riverbank but as mentioned in a newsletter earlier this year, we have protected a part of it with plastic, so hopefully we will not lose as much riverbank this year as we have done in previous rainy seasons - the bar is slightly closer to falling in than it was last year!

### LAKE VALENCIA

To take a break from the routine of activities in and around the lodge we made a day trip downriver to Lake Valencia, an ox-bow lake about one and a half hours downriver from Taricaya which is still connected to the river via a small creek. It is a lot larger than Lake Sandoval and does not have so much obvious wildlife as there is a large community of people living and working around it. We took the canoe right up into the lake, spent some time swimming to cool off and relax after the boat ride, did a little of our version of wake-

boarding, then had lunch and a little more swimming before heading back to the lodge in the late afternoon. Here Eilidh definitely deserves a mention as the person who was able to hang on the longest in the wake-boarding.

#### CANOPY WALKWAY REPAIR

Yet again we have been carrying out maintenance on the hanging bridge which leads up to the canopy platform. This time we have gone one step further to making the bridge more stable, bolting small strips of metal to connect firmly each of the iron planks which make up the floor on which you walk. While there has never been any problem with the planks becoming separated, they did occasionally make startling screeching noises when you stepped near to the joins – very off-putting if you are not too fond of heights – also we were slightly concerned that the constant movement would be wearing away at the edges of the planks. Now all are bolted together, leaving you free to concentrate either on the scenery or where you are putting your feet while on the bridge.

#### VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

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When it came to deciding where to go as part of my studies in Development Geography at Bath Spa University the Conservation Project in Peru was for me a clear choice. I wanted to go somewhere that was vastly different to anywhere I had travelled to before in terms of human development but also in culture and climate. The Projects Abroad website simply stated “The rainforest project in Peru is one for the more adventurous!” So I got my Yellow Fever shots, packed my malaria tablets, mosquito net and plenty of insect repellent and off I went! Reserva Ecologica Taricaya is a small conservation lodge accommodating up to 25 volunteers and staff at a time. It was a small cluster of simple buildings. The floors and walls were made from planks of wood. The windows were mosquito netting and the ceilings were made of stretched sackcloth and the roof from palm leaves. Raised wooden paths ran from building to building, a precaution for floods during the rainy season (November-April). Nearby the buildings were various animal enclosures built by staff and volunteers over the 8 years that Taricaya Lodge has existed. About a third of all the volunteering done at the lodge was related to these animals whether it be feeding them (twice a day), preparing food for them, maintaining and expanding enclosures or the infamous ‘Tapir Pool’ cleanout. The animals themselves consisted of spider, capuchin and squirrel monkeys, tapirs, a jaguar, coatis, a peccary and many species of bird including parrots, macaws, toucans and a Spix’s Guan. All of the animals had been caught in the rainforest by locals and Taricaya had obtained them, usually in Puerto Maldonado. The intention is to rehabilitate them back into the wild eventually, although this process can sometimes take weeks or even years. However while

I was there hundreds of yellow-spotted side-necked turtles (taricayas, as the locals call them and how the lodge gets its name) were released into the river. They had been incubated, hatched and reared for a few weeks after birth to ensure greater survival odds for the endangered species in the wild.

There were three bird-watching towers, set in various different habitats and at different heights. One was known as the 'Canopy Platform' and was perched 42m above the forest floor. The view over the forest canopy was amazing but the 90m long rope bridge up to the platform was quite an adventure in itself. One night I camped up on this platform: the sounds of the rainforest fauna and a thunderstorm that rolled over made it into quite an eventful night! The final major area of work I did at Taricaya was assisting local communities with sustainable community planning. Within a 20 km radius of Taricaya, and always next to the river (the sole transportation link in the Peruvian Amazon), were a handful of local communities with a population size ranging from 4 to 500. Some were indigenous to the area and had lived off the land for many years whereas some had moved to the area in the last couple of decades to grow crops and log the land. We were constantly visiting these communities and suggesting ways to get the most crop yield from their land without causing further deforestation. The whole scheme was based on a venture called the 'Pilot Farm' which was located near the main Taricaya Lodge. This gave examples of how a farm in the Peruvian Rainforest could be sustainable and productive. Every piece of equipment and all the building materials had come to the lodge on one of the two Taricaya canoes. These canoes could just about accommodate everyone who needed to use them plus a large amount of supplies. The staff always seemed to make it work! Several times the motor broke down, sometimes I was caught on the boat during a tropical storm and sometimes the boat ran aground in the shallower parts of the river. That meant that everyone would have to help push it off the sandbank which sometimes was only at knee depth under water. But these canoes were our lifelines. They were literally our contact with the outside world, our supply route and our emergency transport to the town which was nearly 2 hours away. The 'plight of the rainforest' is a very well known one but to see the Amazon Rainforest up close really increased my understanding of what this means. The rainforest is strong, dangerous and resilient, but as more people in Peru feel the pressure of globalisation and come and take a slice of it, the habitat and thus the biodiversity will be lost. I am very privileged to have been able to go to South America and genuinely say "I tried to save the rainforest".

Alexander Cowan

## LOCAL NEWS

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### STAFF CHANGES

This month we said goodbye to 2 members of staff: Leandro Gonzales Farfan has been our cook for the last 7 years and Pedro Toribio Bautista has managed and maintained our pilot farm for the last 4. We truly appreciate their efforts throughout that time and wish them all the best for the future.

### MINING PROTESTS

Around Puerto Maldonado there are four main industries: tourism, fishing, lumber, and gold mining. The mining industry is a large one, very important for the local economy, and expanding all the time as the price of gold keeps rising. In the middle of November we saw some protests in town as the government threatened to ban all mining activity in the Madre de Dios area. The protests were largely peaceful, but upon

### *VOLUNTEERS IN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2009*

*ARRIVING: Samantha Harrison, Evelien Verkerk, Elizabeth Sims, Zuzana Balaziova, Emma Hershey, Carmen Chuard, Meike von Horn, Martin Spurr, Frederick Van den Eede, Laura McCready & Stella Charrington.*

*LEAVING: Simon Lassen, Christian Andersen, Norbert Kaehler, Tish O'Reilly, Anne Rechter, Wiebke Bode, Hannah McCreary, Matthieu Pierres, Kathryn Lyons, Eilidh Southren, Zack Kennedy, Evelien Verkerk, Elizabeth Sims, Emma Hershey, Meike von Horn, Martin Spurr, Frederick Van den Eede & Laura McCready.*

*Thanks for your help guys, we hope you enjoyed your time at Taricaya*

seeing the strength of the arguments behind keeping the industry alive, the government is rethinking its previous decision.

### DID YOU KNOW?

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- Peru is among the top five countries in the world in terms of diversity of flora and fauna.
- The banana plant (for it is not actually a tree) originated in south-east Asia but is now cultivated in many countries throughout the tropics and is very important for their economy.

Hi,

So we have reached the end of another year at Taricaya. We have accomplished so much this year with the help of the volunteers, staff, and local community so we would like to say a big thank you to everyone for helping us get this far.

We are also looking forward to the coming year, with several interesting new projects to get started on, and most especially the long-awaited release of some of our longest residents in the animal rescue centre.

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](http://www.volunteer-conservation-peru.org), or you can reach us through the Projects Abroad website at [www.projects-abroad.net](http://www.projects-abroad.net).

All the staff at Taricaya would like to wish you a Happy New Year!  
Have a good month, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Rachel Kilby  
Volunteer Co-ordinator  
Reserva Ecologica Taricaya

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