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SPIDER MONKEY PROJECT UPDATE

Last month, I wrote to you about the exciting release of our group of six spider monkeys: Chamek, Mati, Balu, Sambo, Abi and River. The most recent addition to the group, River, went his own way as soon as the six were free, however the other five stayed together and I can now update you a little on what they have been up to.

Volunteers and staff members have been walking to the site of the pre-release cage, near the start of Eugenio trail, every day, sometimes for a half day, sometimes for a full day and sometimes camping overnight. The monkeys are not usually far away, although some days it is easier to find them than others. Usually, by returning to their last recorded GPS position and by calling (usually for Chamek), the monkeys are found, although it can involve a fair tramp through the rainforest. Their new position is recorded and volunteers can begin to make observations concerning the fruits they are eating, their behaviour and their movements. One of the aims of this research is to develop a map of their territory and the food sources they use within it.



We have had one very sad development, however, since the monkeys were released. On one such trip, a group returned to the last known whereabouts of the monkeys a little later than normal, following a morning of heavy rain. They could hear the cries of a Spider Monkey and eventually came across Sambo, alone, separated from the group. Walking a little further on they discovered Chamek, Mati and Abi together, but seemingly not responding to the cries of Sambo, who could still be clearly heard. Wondering what had happened, as they returned towards Sambo, one of our volunteers came across a very sad sight. The remains of what

looked very much like a Spider Monkey on the ground. It was later confirmed to be Balu. Although we cannot be certain, there is a suspicion that perhaps an eagle was responsible as there was also a broken Harpy Eagle feather close by.

One of the sad, but natural, risks of being in the wild is the threat of predators. However, so far, this has seemed to be a one-off event and not a sign of any ongoing danger within the Spider Monkeys' new territory. The main concern initially was for Sambo, as he remained separated from the rest of the group for several days. If he stayed like this, his survival looked uncertain. It seemed the rest of the group was too frightened to return after what had happened. However, a little while later, our survey group returned to find that, finally, the four were back together and, to date, continuing to do well.

BUTTERFLY PROJECT

A few months ago, we had a visit to Taricaya from a butterfly specialist, Marco Delgado Coila. Along with helpful volunteers and Daniel Alvarado, our resident butterfly expert, he set up traps and went looking for new species to add to our previous list of 259. With many butterfly species being very similar in appearance, it can take a little while to check new species are, in fact, new and so far it seems we now have, at least, around 280 species. Hopefully there will be more to come! In a reserve of this size, we could find, with more research, around 500 species and so we continue to set up traps and walk the trails with volunteers to hunt for butterflies.

In the butterfly house, our owl butterfly caterpillars have also been doing well. We have two slightly different species of Owl Butterflies this year (*Caligo eurilochus* and *Caligo illoneus*) and it is amazing how fast they grow! Hatching out just a few millimetres across, a couple of months later they are six or seven centimetres long and much fatter! One piece of banana leaf is quickly demolished by a few caterpillars, so that they need to be changed daily.



The owl butterfly caterpillars with leaves in specially prepared boxes

Now, we are starting to see the next stage in the life cycle as the caterpillars change into pupa. The chrysalis is carefully pinned to a wall of polystyrene set inside a larger box covered with net and after around 15 days we will hopefully begin to see the beautiful butterfly emerging.



ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

Volunteers come to Taricaya for all sorts of reasons and with different personal goals. It may be to meet new people from around the world, learn a new language, see the diversity of the rainforest or it may be to undertake research. This may be for a university project or, as in the case of Hugh Fincher, it may just stem from a personal interest and desire to do something worthwhile. During his two months at Taricaya, Hugh has taken a major role in the analysis, development and construction of a new enclosure and environment for our jaguar, Preciosa.

Previous volunteers and staff had begun observations of Preciosa's behaviour just before Hugh's arrival. She is a jaguar, as many of you will know, who has lived the majority of her 7 or so years at Taricaya, having been brought here suffering signs of malnutrition after living her early months as pet in Puerto Maldonado. She had been seen showing signs of repetitive behaviour, such as pacing, and perhaps what could be learned, attention-seeking behaviour, such as rolling over on her back. In total, forty-two hours of observations were carried out by Hugh and volunteers which, with the help of our resident vet and mammal biologist Maria Aysanoa and Raúl Bello, Hugh was able to collate and analyse in order to begin to understand the types of behaviour she was displaying. What were the reasons behind them? What needed to be changed? What could we do to encourage more natural behaviours?

Following these initial observations and research undertaken by Hugh concerning jaguars in the wild and in captivity, the ideas began to flow concerning how to redesign her enclosure in order to increase its surface area, reflect the natural environment and, ultimately, hopefully stimulate a return to more natural behaviours for a jaguar. This enrichment consisted of two new elevated perches, one partially hidden from view; three new bridges, one with the potential to be moved up and down; a new and improved water feature and a recycled old waterwheel to provide interest and entertainment.

With Preciosa safely inside her den, Hugh, staff and volunteers went into action reconstructing. Along with the above structures, living plants and trees were planted inside and replaceable foliage positioned in brackets to provide more secluded areas for Preciosa. Finally everything was finished off with a layer of fresh sawdust and the long-awaited day arrived.

With volunteers waiting anxiously outside, the door to Preciosa's den was raised and out she came, blinking, into her new world. Her interest and excitement in exploring her new enclosure surpassed expectations. Even in those first few moments she was seen displaying all sorts of new behaviours: from scent marking

to even eating the leaves of some of the new plants! She explored bit by bit every inch of her new space: trying out the bridges, scratching on the posts and nervously touching the waterwheel and jumping back in surprise as it moved! It was very hard to drag ourselves away from watching her.

The final step was to carry out further observations to look at Preciosa's use of her new enclosure and changes in her behaviour. Hugh has written up his work for us, comparing his results and providing us with a basis for any similar future projects:

Discovering Preciosa: Exploratory Study of *Panthera Onca* at Taricaya

Research Project by Hugh Fincher and Anthony Denise

Photo Diary

Before



During

Volunteers and staff getting busy!



Making a mess...



After

Finished!



Looking down from one of the new elevated perches



Some of the new plants, water feature and old waterwheel.



A job well done!



One contented jaguar!

EXTRAS

PALMA REAL ACTIVITIES

An update on what we have been doing at Palma Real, a local community.



Agroforestry project: Measuring the growth of existing banana, mahogany, cedar and pineapple plants and maintaining and extending the transects to enable us to plant more.

Community Anniversary: Taricaya were invited back for another year's football competition with the locals...with such talent available from staff and volunteers alike it could only possibly be due to *clearly* biased referring that we lost out on winning the final!

THANKSGIVING

We had a number of volunteers from the US and Canada over thanksgiving this year and they all got together to help prepare a yummy thanksgiving meal for us all: thank you!



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