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## EDITOR'S LETTER

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Dear Volunteers,

This has been quite a busy month compared to the relatively quiet times we had over Christmas. There have been arrivals, departures and internal restructuring in the animal rescue centre, most of our staff returned from holiday and also we've had a few rather interesting visitors.

If you would 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).

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

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## PROJECT UPDATES

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### ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

As you may have seen in the last few newsletters, there are always happenings in the rescue centre. The first 4-6 months of 2010 will be especially interesting for the adult spider monkeys. Wally, Dixon, Attila and Wolfie are destined for release this year, but have several checkpoints they must pass through before being given the green light. First on the list was the test for tuberculosis. This disease may be picked up from other animals, and as almost all of our monkeys have spent time as pets in the local town, it was a necessary precaution to ensure that we start a new local population in the best possible health and prevent them passing bacteria on to any other animals they may come into contact with in the forest.

The method is very simple, involving an injection of a preparation of the bacteria which causes the disease, just under the skin in an area which is difficult to scratch – in the case of the spider monkeys it was the eyelid. The injection leaves a small pocket of liquid under the skin and must be checked 2 days later: if the swelling has decreased or disappeared then the test is negative, but

if the swelling has grown then it must be measured to determine whether the result is negative or positive. A positive result does not mean that the animal has the disease or will even develop it, just that it is carrying the bacteria. Now there are 3 species of tuberculosis, one human, one avian and one bovine. Humans can carry the bacteria of all 3, but only develop the disease with the human version although they can pass the other bacteria on to other animals. For this reason it is suspected that monkeys may also carry all 3 types of the bacteria. One negative result does not mean that the animal is clear; three tests in total must be carried out, one per month, to ensure that the results are consistent and this requires a minimum of 2 consecutive negative results. So, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of January all but one of our spider monkeys (the youngest, Nicole) underwent the first tuberculosis test and the results of all were negative. In the first week of February we also tested the four capuchins and the two squirrel monkeys. All the individuals involved will return to the hospital for their second test during the first week of March.



On January 20<sup>th</sup> following a week or so stretching his wings in the butterfly house, it was time for the release of the striped owl. He had proven himself well capable of flying, also of catching his own food, albeit within a restricted area. He was taken out late in the afternoon, and after a little



tussle with the trumpeters (they seem to really take exception to any newcomers to the area) and a little wander around on the ground, he was nicely ensconced on the mango tree next to the bridge. We expected him to stay around for a little while, so have been feeding him on a regular basis in the late afternoons as we did when he was in the rescue centre. However, as is the case with most of the birds we have released, we hope that he will gradually become more independent

and spend more time away from the lodge. To date he has spent a lot of time around the lodge, but with a couple of days absence in the middle.

We decided to take further advantage of the unoccupied butterfly house as a flight enclosure for the two white-throated toucans. The toucans have been with us for nearly 2 years, and have completed the moult of their flight feathers. We have noticed them flying in short bursts around their enclosure but space is limited and they did not have much chance to build up their flight muscles. So a number of other perches were installed at the extremes of the butterfly house and the toucans were transferred. The new enclosure is only temporary (until the butterfly traps start

becoming productive) but the time spent there will hopefully give them a chance to build up a little more strength and stamina for flying once they are released.

To round out the month, once the toucans moved to butterfly house their previous enclosure was straightened up and redecorated to become a flight enclosure for the Mealy Parrots and Yellow-crowned Parrots. Their enclosure is relatively small and to our surprise, after a few days in the old toucan cage three of them were flying quite happily from one side to the other. We suspect that one of the mealy parrots may never fly very well and so could become another of those animals which stays around the lodge, maybe as a companion for Beaky (a previously-released yellow-crowned parrot who is missing part of his beak).

An important part of the rescue centre has finally been completed. We enlisted the help of Señor

Wicho and his team of carpenters yet again to rebuild what is now known as the Animal Centre, encompassing the hospital, office, and nursery. Also we would like to thank all the volunteers for their long hours spent painting and varnishing to finish off the transformation. This building is one of the oldest in Taricaya and has passed through many different stages, starting as the kitchen/dining room, moving on to become a number of bedrooms, then the workshop and finally an area to keep the very young animals of the



rescue centre that require a little more attention. We still have the original floor, but all the walls and roof have been replaced and a few things relocated. The workshop is now entirely separate, taking up a small section along the back of the building, while the rest is dedicated to the animal rescue centre. This allocation has made coordination within the rescue centre a lot easier, and is a safe place to bring new arrivals or to treat animals which are wounded or ill.

#### PALMA REAL VISIT

Many of you will remember or have read about our projects with the Ese'ejá native community of Palma Real, about an hours' boat ride downriver from Taricaya. We planted a pilot area beside the village with the beginnings of an agroforestry project just over a year ago and have been monitoring and cleaning it on a regular basis since then. Also in May 2009 we donated 3 donkeys and 2 carts so they could use them for work around the village and in the forest. As one of our regular check-ups, we paid them a visit at the end of January – it was not a very good start, for about 5 minutes into the journey downriver it started pouring with rain. Nevertheless we continued, and arrived at the community only a little soggy. Once out in the village checking the

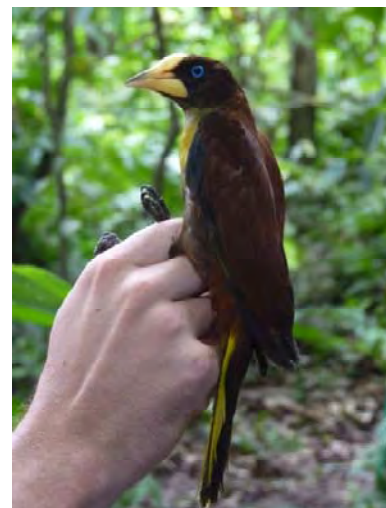
rows of plants though, we became completely soaked and decided to retire early. Some of the plants seemed to be growing well, but not the brazil nut trees which were the basis of the original project. Late last year the community told us they would like to extend the project over several hectares, but changing it to include mainly species of tree which could be logged at a later date, a proposition which is steadily becoming more understandable. Several mahogany cuttings planted there are doing very well for the quality of soil in which they are planted, also some of the palm trees and a couple of the fruit trees (guayaba). The rainy season is a good time of year for planting, so we only await a firm decision from them as to what they wish to do. On a slightly sadder note, it seems as if we may have to remove the donkeys from the village in a few months. Although they started out using them for work it seems that lately the donkeys have been left alone more and as a consequence have become less easy to manage. On this trip we saw that they had actually acquired a pair of oxen to haul carts of wood, although these animals seem to have a much worse reputation. We still hope that we will be able to convince them to return to using the donkeys soon, however, if there is no alternative then we will retrieve them from the community.

The trip will remain memorable to the volunteers and staff for one further reason: on the return journey, still pouring with rain, when we arrived level with Playa Alta where we normally collect turtle eggs we had a little engine trouble, the water cooling system decided to stop working so we could not carry on. Luckily we managed to make it to the banks of the island, and once there with the help of both volunteers and staff we actually pulled the canoe upriver almost halfway along the length of the island, wading through the shallowest parts of the water. We arrived level with a farm on the other side and shouted for help, and they arrived in a small canoe with a peque-peque motor shortly afterwards, kindly giving Fernando and Stuart a ride to Taricaya so that they could bring back the other canoes to tow us home. The last 40 minutes wait was not so bad, the rain stopped and the sun started to emerge so that we started to warm up and dry out!

#### BIRD MONITORING

We returned to the forest at the end of January to continue with our bird monitoring project, this time setting up nets along swamp trail. While quite productive and with some interesting birds being caught (one of note being the Casqued Oropendola, right) there were a few problems with the rain. Swamp trail is about 35 minutes' walk from the lodge, and the trails got ever muddier and the swamps deeper until we decided to return closer to the lodge. It's a little uncomfortable to spend all day soaking wet in the forest, so after 2 weeks of trying to open up the nets there we moved them to sheepfrog trail, a lot closer to the lodge. We hope to continue along sheepfrog and then down along the second half of bushmaster trail.

The plan last year was to set up nets along the perimeter trails of the reserve, slowly working our way around, but we were unable to complete this before the rains started and the swamps reappeared. Now we will be



concentrating on the trails and areas of the reserve which remain relatively dry and have not been previously monitored.

#### STAFF

The end of January saw the return of Daniel Neira and Daniel Alvarado (Gigo), our herpetology and butterfly experts, respectively. After their break they were eager to get back to their projects, Daniel especially as this is the perfect time of year to be out and about in the forest looking for amphibians, so he has been re-opening all the pitfall traps set out to catch those species which live and forage on the ground. While Daniel was away we still checked 2 of the pitfall traps on a



weekly basis, those which were closest to the swamp at HOB, one of our bird-watching platforms. On one of our checks we came across an unfamiliar turtle, the Amazon Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon scorpioides*), which has turned out to be a new one for our species list!

Meanwhile Gigo, in preparation for populating the butterfly house with blue morpho and owl butterflies, has been restoring the butterfly traps, sanding and painting the frames and sewing new mosquito netting

on. As the netting used for the traps is very thin, it does not last very long inside the forest as there are always leaves, fruits and branches falling - there are only so many repairs that can be done before it must be replaced.

#### EXTRAS

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##### NEW FARM ACTIVITIES

One of the activities for the start of the year has been the removal of the fencing at the pilot farm. We had a field of almost one hectare which housed the goats and donkeys, but with the removal of these animals it has not been used. We do not plan to start keeping more animals at the farm, so instead of wasting the wire fencing we have been taking it down and hope to bring it to the lodge to extend the current tapir enclosure. With all the recent rain, plus the overall effect of having tapirs in there for 3 years, there are not many plants left in there and the ground is a little churned-up and muddy. Extending the enclosure at one side would mean that we could give this area a well-needed rest to recover, while also giving Isabella and Bonito a larger and tastier variety of plants to eat.

##### VISITORS

At the beginning of January we were joined by Talía Salas and Dora Velarde, veterinary students from Lima completing a period of practical experience here and also assisting with the animals in the rescue centre. Last year Talía started an adoption program for some of our animals, advertising it in the San Silvestre School in Lima. In total we have 6 animals adopted by the girls from the school, and received a visit from 4 of them who came to see how the animals were progressing and also learn more about Taricaya and the projects we run. Francesca, Giannina,

Diana and Caterina were lovely girls who joined in with the volunteers and all of the activities very happily. At the end of their stay we decided to have a games day, starting with football and swimming after lunch over at Nái Mací, a tourist lodge a little upriver from Taricaya where we sometimes play football with the staff. We carried on after that with the Taricaya Games, a series of races between mixed teams of volunteers and staff such as egg-and-spoon, sack and wheelbarrow races, and ending with the egg-throwing and tug-of-war. It was great fun and got a little competitive, but Stuart and his team triumphed in the end although there wasn't actually a prize for it.

This was followed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February by a brief visit from Ross Kemp and his film crew. They were in Peru filming a documentary for Earth Day, due to be shown on Sky in May this year, about the environmental effects of cocaine production in the Vrai Valley near Ayacucho, and also those of the widespread gold-mining operations in the rainforest. After so much destruction they needed a little hope, so visited Taricaya to talk with Stuart and Fernando about the projects we do, and to get an idea of what can be done to help the environment and the people in this area. (Sadly as they were only here for a very short time we failed to get any photos – I think everyone was a little starstruck!)

#### SIGHTINGS OF THE MONTH

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This month we were lucky to have amongst our volunteers Livio Rey, a very keen birdwatcher with an incredible camera. Thanks to Livio we were able to add the Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*) to our species list, with this amazing photo to prove its presence:



Also we received a brief visit from the Marina. A group of marines stopped by Taricaya one afternoon with a Gray Brocket Deer, one of the rarer species of deer in this area. They had found



it swimming in the river and (mistakenly) assumed it was in trouble, so captured it and brought it to us. Deer are nervous creatures and this one had sustained a few scrapes from struggling in their boat, so we treated the grazes then released it to find its own way into the forest.



Finally, in one of those surprise encounters that occurs now and again, a Common Mussurana (*Clelia clelia*) slid into the hands of Daniel, having been found near the animal enclosures by Raúl and the volunteers who were on feeding duty.

## VOLUNTEER LETTERS

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This is an extract from an email we received recently from an ex-volunteer, Joel Hale:

Hi Rachel and the Taricaya team,

I love getting your updates, loved my time there even more! I was there late 2005 around the same time as Sarah, Molly, Phil and Emilie. Nando also injured his knee playing a football game against us. Maybe you remember Nando hobbling around for a while?

I'm at uni in Edinburgh and in my 3rd year which is awesome, I can't wait to finish and get out and about. I will definitely be making a return to the lodge at some point. Ever since I left, and while I was there, I always thought it would be absolutely amazing to work there! Although I'm doing a business degree, :- ( , I still hope to be able to help you out in some way or another one day! Has Puerto changed much since 2007? Is it a lot more touristy now?

Thanks for another great news letter and I hope to hear from you again.  
Joel

Joel it was great to hear from you, it's nice to know you're still thinking of us even 4 years after you were here. Taricaya has changed a fair bit since 2005, as has the local town. Puerto has become a lot busier, but not with tourists. A couple of years ago construction began on the Interoceanica, a road similar to the Panamerican Highway which will eventually stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, right across the centre of South America. The sheer scale of the project has attracted many workers and their families, changing Puerto from the sleepy little

frontier town it once was into a bustling community which continues to grow. We wish you well for the final year of your degree, and hope that you continue to enjoy the newsletters about Taricaya.

#### LOCAL NEWS

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Taricaya staff member Daniel Neira, our herpetologist, is going international! After a long time working through the paperwork and visiting the consulate in Lima, Daniel has finally succeeded in obtaining a month-long tourist Visa to visit his partner (Rike Becker) in Germany. He leaves here on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, and would be delighted to hear from any ex-volunteers who are in the general area. (The rest of us have, of course, already placed our orders for chocolate, among other things!)

*VOLUNTEERS IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010*  
*ARRIVING: Mie Rømer, Mads Pedersen, Victoria Dewavrin, Lauren Hicks, Kaise Bollinger, Rachel Bramham, Ben Medd, Hannah Regitze Kristensen & Matt Phillpot.*  
*LEAVING: Florian Sokolow, Daniel Suter, Livio Rey, Lauren Hicks, Nura Wolf & Antti Majaniemi.*

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

#### DID YOU KNOW?

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- The Madre de Dios River, alongside which Taricaya is situated, runs for 1,450 km and has a total drainage area of 250,000 km<sup>2</sup>.
- The saddleback tamarin monkey (*Saguinus fuscicollis*) is the smallest monkey found in the Taricaya reserve, measuring up to just 20cm excluding the tail.