



What's Inside...

Project Updates:

Onset of Rainy Season	2	Christmas Celebrations	2-3
Animal Rescue Centre	3-5	Turtle Project	5

Extras!

POA, Mist-nets, Marking Trails, Local News, Volunteer Arrivals & Departures and more....

PROJECT UPDATES

ONSET OF RAINY SEASON

We finally realized that the rainy season was well and truly on its way in, when the river started to rise. In the 3rd week of December I woke up one morning to find that the ground underneath my bungalow was flooded – a little worrying only for myself, Alejandro and Daniel as our bungalow is the lowest in the lodge area. We were on tenterhooks for a couple of days before the water started to recede, then just after Christmas, the episode was repeated. However, we were lucky enough that it did not rise to within more than 90cm of our floor.

This is the normal activity pattern for the river in the wet season, as the level of water depends on the rainfall up in the highlands of Cusco and Puno. The Madre de Dios river has its headwaters in the mountains near to Cusco, while one of its major tributaries, the Tambopata, flows from the Carabaya mountains of Puno. When those river basins receive a lot of rain, the river by the lodge rises significantly but it can go down again overnight or even in just a few hours. However, when we get a lot of rain in our area then the water level in the creek at the side of the lodge rises, as does that of the bodies of water within the forest, i.e. the swamps, making movement within the reserve a little tricky. The swamps have been late to appear this season, giving us a greater range of movement than we would normally have at this time, but it should not be long until they fill up. So the rain and rising river levels, while not yet critical, have caused a few delays in some of our projects. It is not to be thought of as an entirely bad thing though, with the extra water plants starting to produce flowers and fruits, the animals spread out around the forest and the newly born or hatched animals start to become more evident. This is a time of plenty within the forest and if you take the time to stop and look (or listen) around you there is plenty to see.

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

This time of year is one of the quietest in Taricaya in terms of volunteer numbers, so quite a few of our staff take advantage of this lull to take their annual holiday. A week before Christmas we wished happy holidays to Daniel Neira and Daniel Medina (Plantón) who were travelling back to Arequipa to pass the holidays with their families. Plantón is taking an extra couple of months to complete the write up of his thesis for his university studies. Also heading off to foreign climes (England!) was Stuart Timson, the conservation manager for Peru.

This left very few of us at the lodge, and as we have a rota for who must stay at the lodge over Christmas and New Year, Raúl and I were thinking we would be by ourselves for a few days looking after the animals. But we were lucky enough to have a lovely group of volunteers who decided they would also like to stay at the lodge over Christmas, plus a few extra staff, so we ordered the panetton and chocolate and also received a delicious gift from one of our longer-term volunteers, James Stork, who bought a whole pig from one of our neighbours for dinner on the 25th! In Peru the tradition is that the family sits down to eat late in the evening of December 24th, so we did that and then had another huge dinner on the 25th. The pig-killing was quite an event and for some strange reason several people left with videos of that (James was very efficient so the animal did not suffer). Also everyone who was at the lodge on the 25th participated in the secret Santa, picking a name out of a hat and buying a present for that person, it was great fun. Daniel Alvarado



(Gigo) also left for his month holiday at the end of December, with Alejandro Vigil following him 3 weeks later. The volunteers, after having spent Christmas at the lodge, proceeded to Puerto Maldonado for the New Year parties, starting off at the Tamishito (a small club for parties and events, owned by Gigo's family) and enjoying themselves thoroughly.

ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

This last month has been quite exciting, with a few new arrivals in the rescue centre. First to arrive in the middle of December was a young red howler monkey (*Alouatta seniculus*), recently named Muñeca, about 3 months old and a little feisty. She has been living alongside Nicol, the youngest of the 10 spider monkeys, although in separate cages for the first couple of weeks to ensure she had no illnesses that could be passed on. Muñeca is doing remarkably well and enjoys the occasional stroll around the lodge perched on someone's shoulder – we have to maintain a balance between her need for some kind of 'parental' contact with our necessity to not let her become too domesticated.

With the increase in the water level recently we have been embarking on a new activity with Sid, our southern river otter. In an effort to make him more comfortable in larger bodies of water (the pool in his enclosure is quite small) both the volunteers and staff have been swimming with him in the creek alongside the lodge, giving him time to build up his confidence and stamina before his release, scheduled for later this year. He has also been observed investigating a few moving things in the water, starting to hone his hunting skills. He has yet to catch a fish for himself but there is plenty of time for him to progress on to that.

Anyone who was here in the last 4-5 months of 2009 will have met the striped owl. He came from another rescue centre in Puerto Maldonado and was still a baby with all his downy feathers still present. Soon after arriving at Taricaya he started to replace them with the adult plumage, completing the transformation in November. Since then we have been offering him live food on a



regular basis, and although at first he was not too keen he has been gradually becoming more interested, terminating at the beginning of January by killing and eating a large ground lizard which became trapped in his enclosure. As that enclosure was fairly small, we decided to set up several perches within the butterfly house and transfer him there to give him more space to fly around and get the exercise he needs to build up the muscles in his wings. The first time he was transferred was not the most successful, after 5 minutes inspecting all the walls he flew straight to a small hole which had gone unnoticed up in one corner. So we recaptured him, rechecked the enclosure and he is now safely ensconced in the butterfly house awaiting release.

Most exciting of all, on January 6th we had 2 unexpected arrivals in the form of a pair of young Bush Dogs, one of the most endangered mammals in the Peruvian rainforest. We estimate them



to be between 2-4 months old, one male and one female. As they are very rare we would like to breed them and release the young, similar to our aims for the tapirs and the jaguarundis. As these two arrived together it seems most likely that they are siblings, however, we know of one other bush dog in captivity in the local town, so hope to be able to persuade the owner to transfer the animal to our rescue centre.

The available literature for these animals is not very informative about diet except to state that they are omnivores, meaning that they will eat a wide variety of foods, so we have been experimenting with all the different types of food that we supply to the other animals in the rescue centre including fruits, raw meat, eggs, fish, canned meat and even dog biscuits.

TURTLE PROJECT

Most of you will have read about, or participated in, one or more of the phases of the turtle project we undertake every year between July and November. During July and August we collect turtle eggs from the beach at Playa Alta, then place them in an artificial beach for the 3 months they need for incubation. Once hatched the majority are released back into the river at Playa Alta. For the last 2 years we have kept a small sample of the hatchlings to monitor their growth rate so we currently have 20 which hatched in October 2008 and 30 smaller turtles which hatched in October 2009. Monitoring growth rates involves measuring each turtle every month, with more than 20 measurements for each turtle. This is a little time consuming, but necessary, and was made more interesting in May last year when a marked turtle was spotted during a turtle census along the river downstream of Taricaya, one of the turtles from 2005, the very first year that we

successfully released a group of baby turtles.

The larger turtles which hatched in 2008 currently reside in a small pool inside the butterfly house. A fiberglass pool protected from the sun with a layer of plastic, it is just like a regular garden pond but needs a little more constant maintenance. The plastic had been slowly becoming more and more dilapidated, with little holes appearing and mould growing underneath, so we replaced it at the beginning of January to give the turtles a nice fresh start for the new year.

As mentioned earlier, the river levels have affected many projects, the turtle project being one of them. This year there has been a slight change in the erosion processes near to our pilot farm. A small beach has developed just upriver of the farm where a branch of the river runs behind the small island where Enrique and his family live. Just downriver of this beach, the bank has been eroding much faster than usual, exactly at the port which is one of the entrances to our pilot farm. So much has eroded that the sand started to disappear from inside the artificial beaches used for the incubation of the turtle eggs, forcing us to take them apart so as not to lose the wooden frames of the beaches. This erosion also indicates how the bank has changed in the last 5 years, as it exposed the wooden frame of the very first artificial beach, just over a metre below the base of the most recent beaches.



BIG LOOP

Every couple of months we do a perimeter walk of the reserve, checking up on the trails, any evidence of other people entering into our reserve, mammal signs, and any other interesting things which occur in the area. It's normally a nice walk which during the dry season can take about 3 ½ hours. The wet season though is a lot more interesting as the swamps start to fill up and in some places we even have to swim a little – tricky when you're wearing wellies and trying not to get your camera wet! Since we had had very little rain, we thought it would not be so much of a challenge, and up until Navidad Trail we were right, but things changed. Normally to cross the creek onto the next trail you walk over a fallen tree trunk but we couldn't find it, so as leader of the group I ventured into the water feeling about for it with my feet. I got further and further, first up to my knees, then my waist, finally reaching the start of the log when I was neck deep in water. Now I'm not that tall, but there were a number of volunteers shorter than me who had a struggle keeping their head out of the water whilst trying desperately to keep their balance on the log, but eventually we managed it, with some even just swimming across. The rest of the swamps were quite tame, there was no more swimming required, only wading, and quite honestly, once you're completely wet a little extra water makes no difference at all.

EXTRAS

POA – END OF YEAR REPORT

With the end of one year and the start of another one, there are several things required from us as managers of our private reserve. The reserve is a concession from the Peruvian government (in very basic terms, we rent it from them) lasting for 40 years, at the end of which time we have the option to renew the lease. As the people responsible for maintaining the reserve, we must first provide an annual action plan, including what kinds of activities and projects we will be undertaking within the area, and then at the end of the year a progress report on what we actually managed to achieve, and what effect, positive or negative (although hopefully positive) it has had on the native flora and/or fauna. The reports and action plans are compiled by Stuart and Fernando, and have been submitted every year since 2004, when we first received confirmation of our application for the reserve.

MIST-NETS

In the second week in January we began our preparations for the mist-netting program. For most of 2009 every 3 weeks there would be groups of volunteers going out for three days to catch birds within the forest at 2 levels, on the forest floor and at mid-canopy level. This year we will be carrying on with that project, setting nets up in areas which have not been studied previously, to our knowledge. The bamboo poles left over from 2009 for putting up the nets at mid-canopy height have long since rotted, so for the moment we shall only be installing nets to trap birds living or using the first 3m of ground from the floor of the forest.

MARKING TRAILS

Usually just before the swamps start to fill with water we try to clear as many of the trails as possible so as to not get confused. This year has been no different; we have had groups out clearing the more commonly used trails near the lodge and also remarking them. All trails have a plastic marker tied around a tree every 25m, and a basic piece of information given to all volunteers is that should anyone find themselves in the forest unexpectedly alone, they know that to follow the numbers going down will lead them either back to the lodge or to a trail that can take them to the lodge. With over 40km of trail within the reserve this is a very simple (yet necessary) system for preventing people from getting lost.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Ants can carry, on average, 10 to 20 times their own weight, often very long distances and even up trees.
- The common mussurana snake (*Clelia clelia*), while not dangerous to humans because it has fangs in the back of the mouth, has a habit of hunting and killing other venomous snakes.

LOCAL NEWS

This is the time of year for the main school holidays. At the end of December we received quite a few requests from local colleges to decorate the auditoriums and centres where they were holding the graduation ceremonies for their students. January and February are the summer months, and coincide quite nicely with Carnival, a time of year we always look forward to.

VOLUNTEERS IN DECEMBER/JANUARY 2009

ARRIVING: Stella Charrington , Livio Rey, Florian Sokolow, Le Udsholt, Dan Suter, Anne Bogler, Daniel Howell.

LEAVING: Stella Charrington, Will Tanner, James Stork, Carmen Chuard, Meike von Horn, Laura McCready, Sebi Tiefenauer, Zuzi Balazaniova, Chris Woodfield.

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

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.

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

rachel_kilby@hotmail.com