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PROJECT UPDATES

TURTLE PROJECT

During the past 6 weeks, preparations have begun for the commencement of this year's turtle project.

For those unfamiliar with this annual project, the aim is to help repopulate the local part of the Madre de Dios River with the yellow spotted Amazon river turtle (known locally as the Taricaya, from which our reserve gets its name). This turtle is widely distributed throughout the tropical rainforests of South America, and is probably the most common turtle on the continent.

However, in Peru, as in other countries of the region, the population of this species is diminishing rapidly due to three main causes:

The primary threat is from local people, who illegally extract and sell the turtle eggs (which are considered a delicacy) during the breeding season.



Another threat comes from mining activity, with mercury pollution from the extraction of gold from along the banks of the Madre de Dios River harming the turtles and their eggs.

The third threat is from the deforestation of the riverside forest (from agriculture and logging), leading to significantly declining food sources.

So our turtle project aims to produce baby turtles through the collection and incubation of eggs in artificial beaches, using these turtles to repopulate the local section of the river.

The artificial beaches on the river bank at New Farm that have been used for the past few years were lost to erosion of the banks during the past year, so new beaches have had to be constructed.

A site was chosen suitably far away from the river bank for the threat of erosion not to be a problem: the centre of the former goat field was deemed perfect, as it would still allow plenty of sunlight and warmth to reach the beaches.

The grass in the field has grown long and tough since the days when the goats kept it under control, and it took two days of hard, hot work to clear an area of the grass large enough to house the artificial beaches. But that was by no means the last of the manual labour...



Once the frames of the beaches had been constructed, countless sacks of sand had to be carried from the sand bank in the centre of the river to the site over the course of three weeks. I think many of the volunteers who took part in this will agree that you certainly knew you'd done some work after a morning of sand carrying....and it was certainly a satisfying experience seeing the final bag of sand emptied into the last turtle beach!

The beaches are now complete (hopefully with many years of use ahead of them!) and awaiting their first batch of turtle eggs sometime in mid July.

RESCUE CENTRE

We have recently welcomed a new addition to the rescue centre: Muqui the night monkey (*Aotus Nicriceps*).

We received him from an animal research centre called ACCA. They had found him on the forest floor, at the age of approximately one month, with injuries to his tail and leg, possibly as a result of an animal attacking his mother.

The people who found him kept him as a pet, and after 6 months they contacted us as we are a legal rescue centre.



In the wild, night monkeys live in small groups of no more than 10 monkeys with one reproductive couple. Their main characteristics include large eyes and a long tail for balance, and their diet comprises fruit, insects and seeds.

However, Muqui has problems with his leg and tail from the injuries sustained when he was young, so it will not be possible to release him. Instead he will be used to help educate local people on why not to hunt.

Also, a quick update on the spider monkeys: Their final batch of tests, for yellow fever, hepatitis B and herpetovirus, have all come back negative. This leaves the way open for them to finally be moved to their pre-release enclosure, hopefully sometime in early August.

REVISITED

During June and July we have been re-visited by two former volunteers: Pjotr Lanting and Stuart Tait.

They both originally came to Taricaya during 2003, and were impressed at how much the projects had progressed that were just starting out seven years ago.

One example of a dramatic change is the pilot farm, which was in its early days



back in 2003, with the area undergoing clearing and plantation. Now the trees (such as mahogany), flowers, and fruit plants are all well established, and thanks to the hard work of volunteers clearing weeds over the past few months, the farm is looking better than ever.

EXTRAS

TITANIC

And finally...

After 3 years active service, Titanic, the smallest member of Taricaya's fleet of canoes, was looking a bit the worse for wear.

She was sent back to Puerto Maldonado, and now after a bit of patching up and a lick of paint, she looks as good as new!

Titanic sees a lot of use during the turtle project as her small size makes her ideal for navigating between the beaches whilst the river levels are low.

