



What's Inside...

Project Updates:

Spider Monkey Project

2-3

Turtle Project

3-4

Rescue Centre Update

5

Extras!

Government Visit, Fires, Volunteer Arrivals & Departures and more....

PROJECT UPDATES

SPIDER MONKEY PROJECT

Finally, after months, if not years of waiting, I'm extremely pleased to announce that the four adult spider monkeys have been moved out to their pre-release enclosure!

Wallie, Atila, Dixon and Wolfie have all passed the necessary tests and veterinary analyses, the finishing touches have been made to the enclosure and the campsite area, and Raul has decided that NOW is the time!

First of all, only Wallie and Atila, the alpha male and female, were taken to the enclosure (3km from the lodge, on the boundary with Tambopata National Reserve) to test how secure it is as they are the easiest of the monkeys to recapture. And as it turned out the enclosure was not secure! The pair of spider monkeys soon found a small hole in the roof and escaped; Atila was quickly recaptured and placed back in the repaired enclosure, but Wallie disappeared...



In the meantime, the remaining two monkeys, Dixon and Wolfie, were taken out to the enclosure site to join Atila. They all seemed to really enjoy the extra space and exploring their new surroundings.

Wallie eventually found his way back to Taricaya a few days later, looking very tired, hungry and sorry for himself. He was soon re-united with the other monkeys, and at the time of writing all are still safely within the enclosure.

For their first two weeks the spider monkeys will be fed twice a day (which involves a 6km trek by staff and volunteers for each meal!) as they get used to their surroundings. Then, towards the end of September, the second behavioural analysis of the monkeys will take place (the first analysis was last year in their original enclosure).



There will be 60 hours analysis of each monkey, which involves monitoring their activities, interaction and hierarchy. Following this their food will be changed gradually to their natural diet over 2-3 weeks. After this they will be released, meaning they should be in the enclosure no longer than two months in total.

TURTLE PROJECT

The months of July and August mark the most important time for our turtle project as it is the egg-laying season for the Yellow-spotted side-necked Amazon River Turtle (known locally as Taricayas). 2010 has certainly been an interesting, if somewhat disappointing year for this part of the project.

We have permission from the Peruvian government to collect Taricaya nests from an island located 5km downriver from our reserve. This island is called Playa Alta, and in the dry season is surrounded by large, sandy beaches, ideal for turtles looking to lay their eggs.

From mid-July until the end of August every evening, a group of volunteers accompanied by a member of staff and Melvin (a local Ese'ija tribesman and our turtle tracking expert!) head off to the island to set up camp and patrol the beaches looking for turtle nests.



Upon finding a nest, data is collected, including GPS location, depth of nest and whether the moon is present, before the eggs are carefully deposited into a bucket with sand placed over them. The next morning all nests are transported back to our safe artificial beach site at New Farm, where the eggs are weighed and measured before being re-laid in the artificial beach at exactly the same depth as we found them at Playa Alta.

This year the collection of nests was due to commence on 14th July, but there were no beaches around the island as river levels were too high. This was due to a 'friaie' (cold air mass from Patagonia) arriving, bringing cold weather, winds and rain. This particular friaie lasted an exceptionally long time, meaning that we were unable to begin camping on the beach until 21st July, and even then it was too cold for the turtles: the first nest wasn't found until 30th July!



This year the staff member who found the most nests was Daniel (who runs the project) with 26, way ahead of everyone else: This goes some way to rebuilding his reputation after only finding one nest last year!

In total 45 nests were found, with about 1,300 eggs. This was far less than last year, when 75 nests and 2,300 eggs were found. The average of 30 eggs per nest this year, compared with 28 last year, suggests that the turtles in this part of the river are becoming more mature. The dramatic decrease in the number of nests found can, at least partially, be explained by the unusual weather patterns during the past two months. It could also be due to activity in the river from fisherman and canoes disturbing the turtles, or the fact that turtles are being caught in fishing nets and eaten, but we are hoping it was just the weather and that next year there will be a return to normality.

A large decrease in the number of turtles per kilometre had been recorded in our regular turtle censuses of the local stretch of the Madre de Dios River, so it was not a huge surprise that fewer nests were found.

On a side-note, a turtle released by us in 2007 was spotted on a September census. This turtle was identified by a mark on the shell given to all turtles we release, and shows, thankfully, that our turtles are surviving after release.

RESCUE CENTRE UPDATE

We have had two new arrivals in the Rescue Centre this month: A Scarlet Macaw, and a Chestnut-fronted Macaw. Both birds had been kept as pets by locals. The feathers of the Scarlet Macaw (pictured) have lost much of their colour due to



malnutrition, although the colours should return as the feathers regrow.

They will stay in the quarantine enclosure for six weeks, after which time they will be moved to other larger enclosures.

Both have had their flight feathers removed. It takes over a year to grow back these feathers, and then another year to regain the muscle strength required for flight.

A large new enclosure has been completed ready for any future arrivals, and work is due to commence on converting the old turtle enclosure into a large, new (and hopefully escape-proof!) enclosure for Sid the otter.

And an update on Bella, the young jaguar: She will remain with us for one year, after which time the Peruvian government will decide on whether to release her back into the wild, or to give her to a zoo.

EXTRAS

GOVERNMENT VISIT

Government biologists from Lima paid a visit to Taricaya at the beginning of September. They carry out inspections on all zoos and rescue centres in the country, and were very impressed by what they saw in our Rescue Centre. They carried out checks on all animals, enclosures, management systems and paperwork, and found everything to be well-run and managed, much to Raul's relief! They were also particularly interested in our spider monkey project, of which they said they had high expectations.

FIRES

For the past month the skies over Taricaya have been hazy, and the normally spectacular clear night sky at turtle beach has been obscured. The grasslands of Pampas del Heath, downriver on the Bolivian border, are annually set on fire to promote re-growth. This year has been an unusually dry one, and as a result the fires spread into the surrounding forests, causing the smoky haze across the region. Also contributing to this is an increase in new farms in the area, who use slash-and-burn farming to create space for crops.

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.

Dan Howell
Volunteer Co-ordinator
Reserva Ecologica Taricaya

danihowell@hotmail.com