



The first group ready to camp on the beach, from left: Anouk, Elise, Caroline, Ilona, Melvin, Rachel

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PROJECT OF THE MONTH

TURTLE PROJECT

This month saw the beginning of one of our most popular projects, the only one which stays the same every year and which also gives us our name. It is the time of year when the river level is (usually) at its lowest, which encourages the taricayas (*Podocnemis unifilis*), otherwise known as yellow-spotted side-necked river turtles, to venture up onto the newly-emerged beaches to lay their eggs. These turtles only come out once a year to reproduce and are dependent on the beaches for this. They face a number of different threats to their survival, the main one being the extraction and illegal sale of the eggs in the nearby towns. Taking the eggs from the beaches is not illegal, the native people have used them for their own consumption for many years;

however, in the last couple of decades, more and more eggs have been extracted by all the local people who sell them in the local markets to earn a little more money. Such is the demand for the eggs locally that barely any nests are being left undisturbed in their natural environment, and thus very few baby turtles are hatching out to replenish the population. Our project has been running now for 5 years and aims to repopulate the lower Madre de Dios River by hatching eggs in artificial beaches and releasing the babies back into the river. Every year we spend the nights from mid July through to the end of August camped out on the beach of Playa Alta, just 20 minutes downriver from Taricaya. Usually in the middle of the night or the early hours of the morning we patrol the beach searching for footprints left by the females as they come up to lay their eggs. If a nest is found we dig it up, measuring width and depth of the original nest and also taking a GPS



point where the nest was found. Returning to the lodge in the morning the eggs are relocated to one of the artificial beaches at the farm, mimicking the original conditions as much as possible. We have, as usual, requested the assistance of Melvin, an Ese'ija native who lives locally and is an experienced egg collector. One thing that will make the process a little longer this year is the measuring of the eggs. Daniel Neira H., our biologist in charge of the project, wants to know if there is any difference

in egg size between those that are laid early in the season and those that appear later on. Egg size may relate to the size and therefore age of the female, giving us an indication of the population structure i.e. if there are a majority of older females in the immediate area or whether there are younger females present also.

Every year we must obtain permission from the government to carry out the project, and have been very successful so far; however, next year we may have a little competition for Playa Alta but hope that we will prevail as we have a good track record with this project. As I have mentioned in previous newsletters we have had a strange year in terms of climate, and July has been no exception. After Pedro collected the first turtle nests on the 22nd July, we had a very cold spell and the river level rose quite a lot, so by the end of the month we only had a total of 6 nests, whereas in previous years we had collected nearly half of the total by this time. We really hope it warms up enough that the river level will lower and more turtles will appear.

PROJECT UPDATES

NEW FARM ACTIVITIES: About 2 months ago now we underwent some big changes at New Farm. The event that caused this was quite small, but significant – the water tank and platform collapsed! So Pedro (Pedro Toribio Bautista) was left without running water and forced to bathe in the river each evening, not the safest of activities.

Pedro has been working with us now for nearly 4 years looking after the farm and throughout that time has lived separately in the farm house, walking back and forward to the lodge for every meal. So with the collapse of the tank it was decided that Pedro should move to the lodge where a house would be built for him behind the kitchen. To build his new bungalow we had a visit from our local carpenters again, who took apart the farm house and used all the wood still in good condition.

Whereas many of you will remember a view of the farm from the river with the house rising in the middle, it has gone now, although we will replace it with a small roofed structure so that anyone who goes to work there may have a



New Farm seen from the river

place to rest and escape from the sun.

We have had two major crops that have been harvested in the last month, those of palillo (turmeric) and dale dale (a small potato tasting a little like corn, I'm not sure of the English name). Volunteers spent several days digging up the turmeric roots, slicing them open and laying them out to dry so they can be ground into powder. These are just 2 examples of crops which are useful and can be planted in amongst other things such as forestry plantations or tropical flowers.

ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

SPIDER MONKEY PRE-RELEASE CAGE: This has been mentioned in several of the previous newsletters, but it is advancing all the time so there are always updates. In the last 2 weeks of July we got a step further: the nets were transferred out to the pre-release site under the watchful eye of Raúl (Bello, manager of the rescue centre) and installed in a rough position, which gave us an idea of the actual size of the enclosure. The size has been mentioned before, but actually seeing the cage marked out on the site made a huge difference and many people are



Transferring the net to the pre-release site



now able to visualize it better. When Raúl saw it, he decided that a few extra panels could be added to the roof to make it wider, thus allowing us to lift it up further in the middle and provide the monkeys with more space not just on the ground but higher up, hopefully encouraging them to spend more time up in the midstory of the forest where they would naturally be found.

PACARANAS: The pacaranas escaped again! When we first moved them into an outside enclosure they managed to escape; however, we caught them just over a month later when they returned to eat some dropped fruits outside the nursery. Now they have done it again but they are a lot larger this time, almost full adult size, so we had less hope of getting them back. What we did try was searching the surrounding area several nights in a

row with staff and volunteers, but with no luck. We will just have to wait and see, who knows, they may yet return...

FELINE ENCLOSURES: With the arrival of the baby jaguarundis a month ago, we realized that we were in need of a few more enclosures dedicated to cats. With this in mind, we took advantage of the presence of the carpenters to divide the current macaw cage into 3, each with its own entrance leading into an enclosed corridor designed to prevent possible escape. We hope to be able to release the coatis soon, and when they go the macaws will be transferred down there, leaving the 3 new enclosures for the felines: Sandy the margay, Scar the adult jaguarundi and then the last for the 2 new babies. Two of the enclosures were prepared for the animals they will receive including trunks, branches, places to hide etc. so we will let you know when the cats are transferred.



MAPPING SWAMPS: We have a current map of our trail network (co-ordinated and produced by Rike Becker), which is a very good guide to the reserve, but it does not provide much information about the forest itself. Knowing more about the composition of the forest and the location of temporary, seasonal or permanent water sources would be very useful in monitoring certain types of wildlife, so Daniel and Plantón (our herpetologist and botanist) set off into the forest recently with the GPS to map the depressions in the forest where water can be found during the rainy season. They were following the same procedure as the mapping of the trails themselves, taking a GPS marker every 50m or whenever the depressions made a sudden change in direction. These data will then be put into ArcView, a GPS mapping program, and added to our trail map. As many of the trails cross swamps in the wet season it would be useful for anyone arriving to know which trails should be completely dry and passable year-round.

EXTRAS

BEACH GAMES: On Friday afternoons, we try to do something different to break the routine a little; often an educational talk or a games afternoon is organized, so we took advantage of the beach immediately in front of Taricaya a couple of days after it appeared and spent a couple of hours with many of the volunteers playing football and volleyball. It really relaxes everybody and is a good way of getting to know people a little better. As it

was a scorching hot afternoon the advantage to being on the beach was taking a quick dip in the river to cool off!

TERRARIUMS: Last year we had a budget to build a number of terrariums designed to hold amphibians and reptiles for study, and they were installed on the veranda to the rear of the dining room. That area has now been designated for use as a small lab attached to the butterfly house, so the terrariums have been transferred across to the laboratory where the herpetology and botany labs are located.

RUBBISH: or should I say garbage? The previous site where we collected all our rubbish together before taking it into Puerto Maldonado was prone to attract rats and spiders, even a few small snakes on occasion, so it was time to move, especially as Plantón moved into his new room right next door. A new space has been cleared a little way out behind the kitchen with a special path leading to the riverbank so that it may be loaded a little more discreetly, but most importantly taking the smell and the visual interruption away from the main entrance into the lodge area.

MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

One of our recent volunteers leaves her impressions of Taricaya:

Taricaya, un endroit magnifique qui m'aura fait rêver pendant deux mois de mon été sabbatique et aussi un petit coin du monde qui m'aura apporté tellement au niveau personnel! Dans ces quelques lignes, je ne pourrai qu'écrire ce que Taricaya aura été pour moi, car chacun vit ses nouvelles expériences à sa manière... 😊

Avant mon arrivée à Taricaya, il est vrai que malgré mon excitation de découvrir un endroit et un climat qui m'étaient totalement inconnus, j'appréhendais tout ce qui m'attendait et j'avais vraiment en tête qu'il me faudrait quelques jours peut-être même une semaine d'adaptation. Mais dès mon arrivée, j'ai eu un super accueil à Puerto Maldonado de quatre Toulousaines et bien-sûr du staff à Taricaya.

Le temps a passé si vite! Chaque journée a été différente par les activités et projets aussi diversifiés que possible auxquels j'ai participé, par le temps changeant, par les départs des anciens et les arrivées des nouveaux volontaires, par les soirées géniales rythmées par la musique péruvienne et internationale et les quelques verres d'amitié.

Et la forêt amazonienne... un endroit où tout le monde devrait avoir vécu même rien que le temps d'un ou deux jours. Depuis l'avion, on la voit qui s'étend sur des centaines, des milliers de kilomètres, gigantesque, et elle paraît tellement intouchable. Tout vous semble plus grand! La faune et la flore sont si impressionnantes par leur dimension et leur beauté, c'est juste magique cet endroit!

Pour toute personne qui aime la nature, le dépaysement total et la découverte de l'inconnu, Taricaya est l'endroit rêvé! Donc foncez et vivez cette nouvelle aventure aussi pleinement que possible!

Pour terminer, je voudrais encore remercier plus personnellement Stuart, pour son super accueil chez lui et sa générosité, Rachel pour avoir fait mieux sa connaissance et m'avoir montré que tout est possible dans une vie, Raoul pour sa grande passion des animaux, Planton pour son amour des plantes et son humanité et Daniel pour sa bonne volonté à essayer de m'apprendre l'espagnol ;) Et bien évidemment Isabel, Pedro, Alejandro et Gigo sans qui tout ce que l'on apprend et découvre là-bas ne serait pas possible. Je me sentais comme à la maison et ils auront été comme une seconde famille pour moi...

Muchas Gracias y en la próxima!

Ilona

LOCAL NEWS

REUNIONS: We received a lovely postcard in June from a group of volunteers who met up for a small reunion in Bamberg, Germany. Kate, Marlene, Sebastian, Lena, Astrid, thank you so much. It was great to hear from you, and we hope you all had a good trip (it's a shame Michael and Alex couldn't get there).

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES IN JULY:

Arriving: Izzy Smith, Abi Flynn, Katie Miller, Laurent Carbonneau, Bessie Weisman, Haik Adgere, Elise LeBlanc, Ben and Jennie Morris, Anouk Voisin, James Campbell, Joe Sabine, Becca Elliott, Beki Hooper, Eve Roach, Kayce Coulterpark, Leora Winkler, Chris Richardson, Lindsey Martin, Svenja Kirst, Zoe Watson, Kin Kupper, Katie Desmond, Clara Ho, Jean Luc Roba, Sandra Caboïs, Eva Tankovic, Jenny Ling, James Stork, Halley Shawn.

Departing: Hannah Weigel, Juliana Kay, Lucy Harman, Laura Grangaard, Magali Baras, Tom Muller, Hannah Jardine,

Violaine Deriat, Michele Brooks, Juliette Luisier, Alix Jubert, Anne-Lise Tailame, Jacob Savage, Laura Mckenzie-Wynne, Giuseppe Sacerdote, Caroline Maqua, Hannah Roynon-Jones, Lena Luers, Abby Gibbs, Robert Aylwin, Phil Oldershaw, Izzy Smith, Dennis Perry, Abi Flynn, Laurent Carbonneau, Becca Elliott, Leora Winkler, Kayce Coulterpark, Chris Richardson, Lindsey Martin, Joe Sabine, Eve Roach, Svenja Kirst, Zoe Watson, Sitah Parnell and Clara Ho.

Thank you so much guys, we hope you enjoyed your time in Taricaya.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Rainforests cover only about 2% of the world's surface, but contain 50% of all the plant and animal life on earth
- One-fifth of the world's fresh water is found in the Amazon Basin

We would love to hear from any of you who have visited Taricaya, it doesn't matter how long you were here for or how long ago, we'd like to hear about what you're doing or where you are now.

Also if you would like to know anything about Taricaya, or have any queries about the rainforest (or Peru), we have a number of qualified biologists on the team who would be 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.org.

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

Rachel Kilby