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PROJECT OF THE MONTH

BUTTERFLY CATCHING

We received our second visit from Marco, a butterfly expert, who was this time accompanied by Amos, a PhD student from Minnesota, USA. Marco first came here in March this year with a colleague to study and collect butterflies within the Taricaya Ecological Reserve. They spent 3 weeks with the help of volunteers setting up traps on different trails and baiting them with, if I may say so, dreadful smelling bait designed specifically to attract butterflies. The aim of their project is to investigate the lepidopteran community within this area, first to find out which species actually occur in this area, then to relate these data to habitat type and find out more about the communities of butterflies in particular areas of forest, for example if a species was only found along one trail and just along a particular part of that trail then why? Another use for butterfly studies is that many can be used as biological indicators, showing us how badly disturbed is a particular area of forest. Presence or absence of certain species indicates how much an area of rainforest has been altered by human use, thus also providing a clue as to whether the area in question may be in need of greater protection.

Marco also works with the Museum of Natural History in Arequipa (in the south-west of Perú) and in his time spent there since March has compiled a list of the species that were encountered on his first trip. Several individuals he was unable to identify to species level, but he informed us that he would be travelling to Lima to identify them with the help of colleagues in the Natural History Museum there. From his first visit, he left us with a list of 85 species of butterfly. Just as a comparison for you, there is a research centre that has been based in the area of the Tambopata River for over 30 years, 4 hours upstream from Puerto Maldonado, that has recorded over 1,200 different species of butterfly.



PROJECT UPDATES

Animal Rescue Centre

This has been an exciting time for the animal rescue centre:

At the beginning of June we received 3 new animals, 2 baby jaguarundis (*Herpailurus yaguarondi*) and a young

female spider monkey (*Ateles chamek*), quickly named

Maqui. The cats are beautiful, although you would not want to put your fingers too close to them. They have the same temperament as our adult jaguarundi, Scar, hissing at everyone who comes near, but if you get too close to them they have a tendency to start fighting with one another. They are

currently residing in one of the quarantine centre enclosures, beside the nursery and are growing nicely on a diet of raw chicken and beef.

Maqui has become an excellent playmate for Lelu, being just a little smaller than her. They spend the nights together in a small enclosure but are outside most of the day in another of the quarantine cages.

However, one sad event I must report is that Gretel, a young spider monkey some of you knew, died early this month.

With the escape and recovery of the tapirs at the end of May, we had to replace the bamboo canes attached to the fence surrounding their enclosure. The bamboo was first installed to prevent them from pressing down on the wire and jumping over (that's what Isabella did in 2008), but with the constant humidity and the high rainfall it seems that they started to degrade a little before we expected. When



kept dry it has a lifespan of up to 7 years – we used bamboo to construct the roof of the farm building and the kitchen/dining room built in 2002. However in the wet it seems that in just 6 months it is necessary to replace them. So, lesson learned, all the canes at the top and bottom of the fence have been replaced and we have the next maintenance scheduled for the end of the year.

Also the tapirs have started using their house a lot more. Originally built in 2006 for Winnie, it has stood up well to the weather but has finally been beaten by the tapirs themselves. It was noticed one day when walking past the enclosure that the tapirs looked slimmer than usual when sleeping, but it turned out to be just that the floor had collapsed in the middle, leaving little of them visible at the usual level!

The net for the pre-release cage of the larger spider monkeys has progressed well, but still requires a little work. Sewing continued this month to complete the roof, several times over in some places, so now we are as certain as we can be without testing that it is monkey proof. The roof panels have all been sewn together and the sides are ready – they will be joined once they have been taken out to the release site. All that remains before carrying them out there is the preparation of the chosen site.

Finally, we are nearing the time that many have waited for, the release of the coatis. The vet is scheduled to make one final visit in July to test them for Tuberculosis, and if they get the all clear then they will be released. Already we have plans to remodel their enclosure for the macaws, whose previous cage will then be divided into three for the margay and the 3 jaguarundis so they may have a little more space.

Butterfly House

This project, after its initial construction is now in a phase that takes slightly longer to complete. For the past couple of months Gigo (Daniel Alvarado) and Plantón (Daniel Medina) have been collecting plants from the forest within the reserve, even from the neighbouring farms to plant within the house ready for the butterflies we hope to breed there. Butterflies are very specific as to which plant species they require for feeding and reproducing, so for the 3 species we wish to start breeding, which include the beautiful Menelaus' Morpho butterfly, we have been trying to fulfil those requirements.

We received a gift earlier this year of tropical flower seeds, which Plantón is also busy trying to germinate, that will be also planted within the house. As well as providing the butterflies with the necessary resources, we would like to make the scenery aesthetically pleasing and have been adding a few extras to comply with this.

The turtle pool, brought down from Puerto Maldonado in May where it was specially commissioned, has finally been completed. It stands near to the rear of the butterfly house with a small fence around and has been surrounded by sand on one side so the baby turtles may feel at home. Very soon we will have a tap set up on one side so the

pool may be easily cleaned and filled, and then the turtles will be transferred. This new location will give them much more light and allow them to sunbathe in the middle of the day, as is natural, rather than trying to sunbathe at night when the lights come on inside the lodge!

Now the last piece of news here, unarguably the most important, is that we received the brief with our official permission for breeding and maintaining butterflies in captivity. What was a surprise to most of us was the name. When Fernando was completing the paperwork, he was asked what name we would like to call our centre. Feeling a little caught out – this was not something that had been previously mentioned – he said the first thing that occurred to him, based on the person who has put in a tremendous amount of work with the preparation and construction: Gigolandia.

Bird Monitoring

With little left to go before finishing the mist-netting along Quebrada trail, we were trying to complete but kept getting thwarted by the weather. We tried, with extremely bad timing, to open up the nets on the 23rd, just to be forced to close them at the start of the friaje which I am told occurs every year around the time of San Juan, the 24th of June. A week later Mauricio Ugarte arrived, the Peruvian ornithologist we have been working with for 5 years. The weather however did not want to play along. After several days of waiting for the rain to stop long enough to open the nets, he managed a few days of capturing birds but with few interesting species appearing. We hope that when he returns at the end of July things will go much more in our favour.

Botanical Studies

Within the various activities that comprise the Botany Project, we have started collection of pollen from all the species of flowering plants present in the Taricaya Reserve. The objective is to collect different samples for a project being undertaken by the University of Göttingen which aims to investigate the ecology of palm swamps as carbon and methane sinks which play a fundamental role in climate change both past and future. Lisa Schüler, a biologist and ex-volunteer from Taricaya, is participating in this project and requires pollen samples for analysis to understand and reconstruct the vegetation structure and climate in the late Holocene and Pleistocene.

To carry out this task, every week there are walks with the volunteers along the different trails in the reserve, collecting only mature flowers with large quantities of pollen; later the samples are processed in our new laboratory so they can be sent on to the university in Germany. This is a long-term project and in the future we hope to receive a detailed report on this project, as it is one which we believe will be an important contribution to the research around climate change.

EXTRAS

CWW

Talking of change within the forest, as we move (slowly) into the dry season several significant changes have taken place that some of you will remember. The first is the canopy walkway tree, the kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*). It is the season for flowering so it has lost all of its leaves, allowing the blooms, when they appear, to be spotted easily by those creatures looking for the pollen. It also means we can see a lot further when up there



looking for birds, but it does have one bad effect: many insects are attracted and on a warm day there may be many wasps, bees and flies all trying to get into your eyes and ears.

Water levels in the swamps within the forest are also declining. The swamp, which is overlooked by HOB, has been steadily decreasing, so very soon the fish will be fighting for space and the bird community in the area will change to include more fish-eating species such as herons and kingfishers. Also the hoatzins will start to disappear, moving deeper into the forest where there are more permanent water bodies.

Enrique's Project

Many of you met Enrique and his family while here. We started working with them four years ago when they moved into the area having left the native tribe. We helped them to set up a small tourist business demonstrating to visitors how the people of the Ese'ejá tribe lived traditionally, with Enrique himself doing a wonderfully entertaining show to explain everything. Recently he has extended slightly his facilities, making a trail in the forest around the island he lives on and at various points along that trail has built examples of different types of traps used by his people to hunt animals. As something that can be visited without the presence of Enrique or a member of the family, we designed signs to explain briefly the function of each type of trap. As there are now several places that do a similar type of show, we hope that this extra may attract more visitors for Enrique and family .

Reforestation

Anyone who went out walking in the reserve this month was asked to be on the lookout for seeds, specifically those of the ironwood tree, as this is the time of year when they are

produced. The ironwood (local name: shihuahuaco) is a hardwood tree easily recognized due to its orange bark and enormous size, and it has a high commercial value. Our main reforestation project at New Farm involves mahogany trees but we hope to extend that to include the ironwood. This is the time of year to collect but not to plant, although many seeds have already started producing shoots. At the end of the dry season, around October/November, when the rains start to become more frequent we will be planting these in a nursery bed at the farm so that if any of our neighbours should wish to start a plantation we will have the resources to assist them.



LOCAL NEWS

The 24th June was San Juan, the national day of the jungle. There were celebrations throughout the Amazon region, but here in Puerto Maldonado it all depends on where exactly you go. A large proportion of the population of Madre de Dios is from the highlands around Cusco, and the 24th June also happens to be the day of Inti Wasi. So here there are 2 different celebrations of the people for their cultures, and you can see both the highland processions and the native dancing of the rainforest tribes.

VOLUNTEER ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES

Arrived in June: Myriam Tourniere, David Bribach, Lena Luers, Valerie Smith, Robert Aylwin, Laura Grangaard, Ilona Hirschi, Chloe Chadwick, Juliana Kay, Lucy Harman, Abby Gibbs, Marie-Laure Jeffredo, Lexi Slade, Caroline Maqua, Giuseppe Sacerdote, Jacob Savage, Hannah Jardine, Michele Brooks, Hannah Roynon-Jones, Phil Oldershaw, Tom Muller and Juliette Luisier.

Left in June: Lisa Moore, Penny Arnold, Alexander (Xerxes) Rose, Nicholas Bannan, Florin Kunz, Mark Eising, Lisa Loka, Soren Skaastrup, Alice Fourier, Karyn DeSena, Myriam Tourniere, David Bribach, Chloe Chadwick, Marie-Laure Jeffredo and Kathleen Gatti.

MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

An account of one event outside of our normal activities that has stayed in the mind of one volunteer, and may remind some of you of previous encounters here:

“We were returning from one morning activity when one of the staff came dashing over saying ‘Snake!’ We dropped everything and ran after him. It turned out to be a rainbow boa that was trying to disappear into the breeze blocks at the base of the parrot enclosure. Stuart (conservation director) managed to grab hold of the tail firmly and eventually pulled it out, with other people poking at it with grass stems to coax the head out. When he finally managed to pull it out it reached about two metres long and quite a crowd had gathered to see. It was very exciting to see it and be able to hold it afterwards to take pictures.”

Abigail Gibbs

DID YOU KNOW?

- Butterflies require salts, so if you see one sitting on the nose of a turtle along the riverbank it is consuming the salts from the mucus of the nose or eyes.
- Spider monkeys have only four fingers on each hand; they hook their fingers over branches as they swing through the trees and the thumb gets in the way, so they have evolved to lose the thumb on their hands, although it is retained on the feet.

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