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PROJECT UPDATES

PILOT FARM

The Pilot Farm at Taricaya has seen various changes over the years. With the overall aim to show how it is possible to use three hectares of land in a sustainable way, it has many establish plants such as coffee, cocoa, pineapple, lemon, mandarin, various flowers and mahogany trees all doing well. In the past, some of you may remember the guinea pigs, the goats and the donkeys as well. “Donkey Training” was always a popular activity! We were able to prove that these animals could survive in the Amazon and some local farmers and communities have taken on board these ideas: our donkeys are working hard at the community at Palma Real and the goats are helping out across the river.

So, it is time for a new reforestation project at the farm. As we no longer have donkeys and goats, we have one hectare of grassland being largely unused. Similarly, many farmers along the Madre de Dios River often raise cows, which need huge areas of grassland to be sustained. If we want to reuse this land, what can we do? As many hot, tired and sweat-bee covered volunteers know, cutting down this grass by hand is tiring and slow work. With a little hard work with machetes, however, we have created two transect lines in which we have planted quick-growing banana plants. The banana plants should grow rapidly, creating shade and killing off the grass underneath, making it easier to clear and so enable us to begin to reuse the land.



Volunteers have been working hard to keep the area around the young trees clear and the banana plants are growing well.

SPIDER MONKEY PROJECT

For the last 30 – 40 years there have been no Spider Monkeys found in this area of the *Madre de Dios* River. Our Spider Monkey project aims to re-introduce groups of monkeys back into this area, with the view to creating a larger, more stable population. As social animals it would not be possible to release one at a time because there would be no wild groups for them to join.

Following the semi-successful release of our first group of Spider Monkeys last year, this month we have begun the behavioural analysis of the second, younger group planned for release.

The initial group released was successful to some degree, in the fact that at least three of the four Spider Monkeys have been seen and are known to be still alive. However, one of the problems is that the group has not stayed together. The current group we have consists of four monkeys who have been together for quite some time now, plus two newer arrivals – River and Simon – who, on the completion of their quarantine period, were moved to the larger cage with the original group of four: Maqui, Abi, Sambo and Balu. Before these six monkeys are moved to the pre-liberation cage on the other side of the reserve, we need to check how the social hierarchy has developed within the group. If this is secure, then the Spider Monkeys have more chance of staying together as a group when they are eventually released.

The behaviour evaluation process takes place over two hours. Three volunteers are given two monkeys each to focus on and every two minutes they note down what the monkeys are doing at that time. It could be anything from sitting, swinging or grooming to aggressive behaviour, eating or even pooing and peeing! Raúl will then collate the data, together with information on the interactions between specific individuals to form a clearer understanding of the relationships within the group.

BAT PROJECT

As I was able to report last month, Hugo Zamora Meza, our visiting mammologist, has been continuing to study the bat species in Taricaya. One of the main aims of the study was to attempt to recapture what seems to be a variation of the Niceforo's bat (*Trinycteris nicefori*). Despite physiologically being very similar to this known species, the bat that he captured appeared to show some variations in colour and Hugo is keen to recapture it to find out more.

Despite not capturing this bat again as yet, it has been an exciting month because the total number of species of bats that have been found in the reserve now stands at 52! One new species has been discovered and two more which may also prove to be new species for Taricaya.

To put this number into context, this means that around 5% of the world population of bats can be found in Taricaya Reserve! Similarly, the rare Yellow-throated Bat (*Lampronycoris brachyotis*) which has only been captured twice in all of Peru has already been captured three times here in Taricaya. Showing, again, what a rich biodiversity we have here.



The Yellow-Throated Bat
(*lampronycoris brachyotis*)



Bat Species number 52 for
Taricaya: The Riparian Myotis Bat

AROUND THE LODGE

Our lodge area has undergone a few small changes and developments here and there this month.

A new area has been cleared near to Preciosa's cage, in order to construct a new, larger, set of quarantine cages. Volunteers and staff have been working hard and it is taking shape; hopefully it will be complete and ready for use next month. The old set of cages, outside the Nursery may then be free to be converted for another task: possibly as a storage area for the plastic bottles, glass bottles and aluminum cans we want to recycle.

Also, all around the reserve, we have put up new information posters explaining the purpose of each different project. The Butterfly house, the Animal Rescue Centre and the Pilot Farm now all have clearer information on what is going on at each site: helpful for tourists and volunteers alike.



The volunteer bungalows, too, have undergone some small, largely aesthetic, changes. They are now all clearly numbered, named and painted. Volunteers voted for their 10 favourite animal species: amphibians, mammals, birds, butterflies etc. Signs were then made and doors were painted with a picture of the animal, so now volunteers may be housed anywhere from the Clown Frog Bungalow, the Jaguar bungalow to even the (Brown-throated, Three-toed) Sloth bungalow!



EXTRAS

ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

At the end of May was a very special day for our Animal Rescue Centre: its three-year anniversary as Peru's first official Animal Rescue Centre. It was a day that definitely needed to be celebrated in style.

During the afternoon, the volunteers got in touch with their competitive sides. Teams competed in games such as egg throwing and tug-of-war and finished off with a Treasure Hunt: searching the Rescue Centre for some very well hidden clues!

It was then time to go back to the rooms and get ready for the evening: a fancy dress competition with animals from the rescue centre as the theme. The volunteers had had the weekend to prepare their ideas and look for any additional props in Puerto Maldonado and there was a great variety of creativity and imagination involved. The costumes were paraded in front of our judging panel: Stuart and Fernando (Director and Lodge Administrator of Taricaya) and Wendy and Joanna (invited guests from our neighbouring lodge Amazon Planet) and the participants judged not only on creativity and imagination, but on their acting skills too. It was a close call towards the end, with two participants tying in first place: "Beaky" Jamie and "Jaguarundi" Abbie... with one more performance to go the "Jaguarundi" edged it, despite some great "AGUA!" impressions on behalf of "Beaky".



A Jaguarundi, a Tarantula and a Night Monkey!

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.

Catherine Turner
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Reserva Ecologica Taricaya