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Palma Real

We visited the Ese'eja community of Palma Real at the beginning of the month to complete the final stage of the agro-forestry plantation. Having cleared and planted several rows of brazil nut saplings interspersed with fruit trees over the last few months, we returned to plant one final row, this one being the control row. All of the previous plants had been given fertiliser (goat manure, which we have plenty of), so this last row was planted without to see if the fertiliser would make a significant difference. On arrival we were very well organised with teams of people clearing, digging holes, and planting trees. We also had enough plants to replace the few that had died or been removed from the previous rows. For once things went very smoothly (apart from the fact that the little shop had no drinks to sell at all, just a bucket of mazato, a local fermented drink made from yuca) and we arrived back in Taricaya just after lunch, a lot earlier than expected.



Volunteers and staff at the end of the day

Animal Rescue Centre Update

We had planned to rebuild the old ocelot enclosure, and finally this month we were able to do so. Pepe, our favourite carpenter, came to help us out and had the enclosure practically finished within 4 days. He put up the basic structure and some of the wire mesh, but was helped in this last by groups of volunteers who went through the painstaking motions of nailing it down every 2 inches or so, and rechecking everything once all had been completed. It has a dormitory on the back similar to that which we now have on the side of the spider monkey enclosure, so we have plans to use this for the next group of spider monkeys.

Also Raul, the biologist now responsible for the rescue centre decided that it was time to introduce our new toucan to the others in the larger cage. He has been placed in a smaller enclosure inside the large one, right next to the food table of the other toucans. This will give them time to get accustomed to one another, so when he is released into the larger environment he will not be uncomfortable with his companions.

Animal Traps

With the return of Gigo (Daniel Alvarado, butterfly expert) and Daniel (Daniel Neira, Herpetologist) we have started to focus a little more on their respective projects. Over the last year Gigo has been collecting butterflies from all over the reserve to make an inventory of the species that are present within this area. In the last few weeks he has been out with volunteers collecting up all the traps to repair them, and finally setting them up again in new locations. In this we have been somewhat thwarted though, as every time he goes out to put bait in the traps (usually banana or papaya) there is heavy rain and it all gets washed away!

Daniel has also been revising all of the reptile and amphibian traps, repairing some, moving some, and finally installing new ones along the trails. These are pitfall traps based on a low plastic fence up to 60 m long, along which buckets are dug into the ground. The idea is that any amphibian or reptile moving through the forest which finds itself next to one of the fences will probably go along one side to try and get around it, so at some point they will hopefully fall into a bucket where we will find and identify them before releasing them back into their habitat.

Talking of amphibians, we went out in the forest at night recently to search for frogs, but even though it had just stopped raining and they could be heard calling everywhere, they proved to be unusually difficult to find, and of the 5 groups that went out, just 4 individuals were caught. It was a night for surprises though, as one group found out when they heard loud rustling a little way ahead of them. Advancing warily there was some relief when inside the base of a hollow tree they found 2 nine-banded armadillos searching around for



food. Around Taricaya recently we have seen several of these animals, which is unusual as they are very sensitive to noise.

One startled armadillo headed straight for the group; they don't have very good eyesight, usually relying on their sense of smell or their hearing.

Also last week we decided to go and look for caimans. It wasn't a very good moment, the river was very high and it was not very dark; however, we persevered and after more than an hour of searching we finally saw a pair of bright red eyes shine back at us in the torchlight. Expectations were high, but we just had to laugh when Stuart pulled out a caiman just about 40 cm long, one of the smallest we have ever found on a caiman hunt! But we were lucky; it was the only caiman that appeared in the river that night. At this time of year when the river is high and fast-flowing the caimans usually abandon their normal posts and head for the more peaceful swamps and lakes, which lie inland.

New Farm – the last group of Guinea Pigs

In the second week of February we moved the last of our guinea pigs over the river to Percy, a farmer with whom we have been working for the last 3 years. Percy and his wife Marisa expressed an interest in breeding guinea pigs, so we helped them to build an appropriate enclosure, and once they had made the finishing touches we were ready to go. They received 15 guinea pigs, 2 being babies who had been born just 3 nights previously. We know that they are being well-looked after by the family and hope that they are successful with breeding them.

Filming

A volunteer arrived this month with a request that she be allowed to undertake a project here, making a film documentary about Taricaya. Sophie has been following groups of staff and volunteers through their activities with animal feeding, observations and others, also interviewing people to find out their interests in the project. We look forward to seeing the finished film.



Sophie Rostaing

Carnaval!

Many of you know that February is carnival month in Puerto Maldonado, but our current volunteers were not quite sure what was involved. So to explain about a local custom we decided they had to see for themselves and were taken to visit a club in town on the 21st, the main day for Carnaval. No sooner had they got through the doors than they were bombarded with coloured powders, paint and white foam by a crowd of delightful locals. They had a very warm welcome and thoroughly enjoyed themselves joining in the fun.



Nate, Kai, Keira, Gigo, Jen and Amelia having a little fun at Carnaval!