



What's Inside...

Project Updates:

Mammal Walks	2-3	Rescue Centre Update	3
Turtle Project Update	4		

Extras!

Volunteer Stories, an unexpected visitor, Volunteer Arrivals & Departures and more....

PROJECT UPDATES

MAMMAL WALKS

Back in July, I wrote about our Sensor Camera Project and how it worked together with mammal walks to help us find out more about the density, abundance and diversity of the mammal species we have within the reserve.

Mammal walks took place back in the wet season along specific transect lines around the reserve. Volunteers and staff simultaneously walked along various specific stretches of trails and recorded information on any mammals seen and where. With this data, Raul Bello, our resident Mammal Biologist, was able to begin to calculate information such as the density of animals present per kilometre squared. Now the dry season has well and truly begun, we have once again started walking along the trails.



Once a week a couple of volunteers and a staff member walk slowly along these pre-selected sections of trails looking out for mammals. We keep the groups small to enable us to walk as quietly as possible. The walks take place early in the morning, between 6am and 8am and in the afternoon from 4pm onwards as these are times when the animals should be most active. Although we may not always see mammals,

when we do see something, we record details such as location and species and number of individuals to enable Raul Bello, our resident Mammal Biologist, to collate the data and compare it with the information we have from during the wet season and from our fixed sensor cameras.



A Tapir Footprint

Also, every two weeks, we undertake a night walk with the same aim: discovering more about the movements of the nocturnal animals. With only torchlight to see by, senses become heightened as you listen for rustles within the leaves or up in the branches of a tree or sniff the air for the unmistakable stench of Collared Peccaries. Often it may only prove to be a falling leaf or twig, but occasionally we are lucky enough to come across something more. So far during the day and night, we have spotted tapirs, peccaries, night monkeys, capuchin and squirrel monkeys as well as smaller animals such as agouti and opossums.

RESCUE CENTRE UPDATE

The ever-evolving Rescue Centre at Taricaya is undergoing another change at the moment: new, bigger, more interesting cages for our trio of Margays. We have a male and female Margay (Ron and Sandy) and a younger female, Lucky (Suertuda) who arrived as a very young kitten back in April. They currently live in our new quarantine cages, but they are past the quarantine stage now and need a different place to live.

Previously, the female, Sandy, lived alongside our Jaguarundi cages, but this has now been lengthened to accommodate the three new cages. Volunteers have been very busy sewing together tough netting, sawing and nailing the wooden frame, painting and decorating the inside of the cages with branches and trunks for the cats to climb along.

TURTLE PROJECT UPDATE

The Turtle Project saw the last of its nightly visits to Playa Alta at the end of August. For two months, during July and August, volunteers and staff have been patrolling the beach about 20 minutes down river from Taricaya in search of Turtle nests. We then collect the eggs and transfer them to artificial beaches that we have here at Taricaya, enabling more of the baby turtles to hatch out safely than would do if left on the beach. The turtles are threatened not only by possible flooding by changes in the river level or by natural predators, but also by humans. Turtle eggs provide a useful source of income for many families living along the river.

This year we found a total of 48 turtle nests, around 1,350 eggs altogether. We also have 4 more nests made up of eggs confiscated by the government organisation INRENA and sent to us in the hope that they may still hatch out. However, this figure is not as healthy as we had hoped. Last year in 2010, 45 nests were found and although we have a few more, when we compare it with the 75 nests found in 2009, it is possible to see how the number of nests found does seem to have fallen considerably. The reasons behind this fall are not clear. Two consecutive years of a low number of nests found may suggest that this is not just a one-off occurrence that can be ascribed to, for example, cold spells of weather (*friajes*).

Alongside the collection of turtle nests from the beach, we also undertake a weekly turtle census of turtles that can be found along the banks of the Madre de Dios River. Volunteers and Daniel Neira, our Herpetologist, take our smaller boat, *Tortugita*, and travel slowly, up and down the river looking out for turtles sunning themselves on the many fallen trunks and branches that are littered along the riverbanks. So far this year, the maximum number of turtles spotted in one day from these trips is 180 and although that may sound like a lot, it is, again, less than has been spotted in previous years. Around 280 were spotted in one day in 2009, for example.

On a more positive note, it may be that over the next few years this number begins to rise again as the 6,000 or so baby turtles that we have released over the years begin to reach maturity. At the moment we will continue to monitor the situation. The turtle eggs we have already collected should start to hatch out at around the end of October. They will be kept in our new Turtle House for about a week until we have a group to take back to Playa Alta for release.

VOLUNTEER STORIES

As a break from the usual routine, one hot day in August we ran a trip to Lake Valencia, a nearby oxbow lake, for all the volunteers. Here is the account of the day told by one of our Australian volunteers, *Jarrad Barnes*.

Lake Valencia

It's a bit of a way downriver, maybe an hour and a half or so and stuck somewhere inside the jungle up a tight, tiny creek. When I first arrived it was the tail end of the wet season so I'm sure the creek was quite easy to navigate at that time. Now, however, the river is at least a good five meters lower than back then, and even with my confidence in Gigo [*Daniel Alvarado, in charge of Taricaya's Butterfly Project*] as a boatman, there were times on our slow journey up the creek that it did feel as though the boat might simply break apart, littered as the creek was with fallen trees and any number of other hidden, submarine obstacles.



But all's well that ends well, as they say, and - in one piece - both boats managed to navigate their way to Lake Valencia without any real trouble. Catherine's [*Volunteer Coordinator at Taricaya*] whiteboard blurb the day before had told us to be on the lookout for all manner of birdlife upon the shores of the lake, but I have to say that apart from the odd cormorant in the water or sunning itself on a dead tree, I didn't see all that much. But hey, bird watching isn't really my thing; I was there to relax, have a bit of a swim, a bite to eat, and to forget about the rigors of dry season work at Taricaya for a day.

On a day where the mercury is close to hitting thirty, it doesn't take long for the first person to jump in and for everyone to follow suit soon after. The water was perfect, little patches of warm, sufficiently heated up by the sun on the surface to break up the chill coming from below. Nobody ever strayed too far from the boats - perhaps Stuart's [*Stuart Timson, Conservation Manager at Taricaya*] stories that the only seven-meter caimans still around live in the lakes struck a chord with some people - but everyone enjoyed themselves

thoroughly, some swimming, some floating on life vests (and others floundering a little without them), or just lying around, taking in the sun from the boats.

Lunchtime arrived as a bit of a surprise, the day seemed to be going so lazily, so slowly. As everyone meandered their way to the boats, lunch was handed out wrapped up in banana leaves - "This is a nice change ..." Reina [*Taricaya's cook*] had prepared *juane* for us, something I had never had in my months at Taricaya (although I did attempt it at the Puerto *feria* and it made me a little crook [*or ill, for those non-Australians among us; Editor*☺]).



It's a typical dish, fairly simple, with rice (flavored and colored yellow), egg, a piece of chicken, and an olive or two, and the perfect dish for a day on the lake because, really, you only need your hands to eat it, even though forks were provided.

We were left with very little time after eating to swim as we needed to get back for some volunteers to go on the Turtle Project that night, so a few of us had a quick dip before being forced back into the boat to the mouth of the lake, with a short-ish stop at the shop for people to fulfill their Coke, Inca Kola or cookie cravings; to take a few award-winning shots for the recently inaugurated Taricaya photo competition; or to try a hand at catching some of the small piranhas and other fish that flitted about the shallows, waiting for everyone to slowly filter back to the boat before tackling the creek a second time and heading back to Taricaya.

And so marked my penultimate day at Taricaya; one more day of work left before I say *adiós* and went my way out of the jungle and into the mountains to see which way destiny kicks me.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

On returning from town one Sunday afternoon, we were greeted with a rather unusual surprise visitor awaiting us in Taricaya: a 3-metre long Bushmaster Snake!



The South American Bushmaster Snake (*Lachesis muta*) is the longest pit viper in South America. This one most definitely lived up to such a reputation!

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
Volunteer Coordinator
Reserva Ecologica Taricaya