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PROJECT UPDATES

BUTTERFLY PROJECT

Volunteers have been lending a helpful hand to Gigo, our butterfly enthusiast, in his ever expanding butterfly project. Eggs are collected and once hatched caterpillars are kept in specially constructed boxes allowing us to observe the incredible transformation process of a caterpillar into a butterfly. A special focus has been on that of the Owl Butterfly which derived its name due to the huge eye spot seen on the wings of the butterfly, resembling owl's eyes.

As we all soon discovered caterpillars are very hungry creatures, therefore feeding and cleaning twice a day is required. Fresh banana leaves which caterpillars feed on naturally are given daily and are ideal for their ever expanding stomachs. Soon the caterpillars start to grow right before our very eyes!

As we have seen, Owl Butterflies go through 4 life stages: (1): the egg stage lasting 10 days-2 weeks (2): the caterpillar stage lasting 2-3 weeks (3): chrysalis stage which lasts up to 2 weeks & finally (4): the adult butterfly who lives up to 4 weeks.



Caterpillars feeding on a banana leaf.

Owl Butterflies are rather large (65-200mm). The eye pattern is believed to mimic that of a predator's eyes, with a light coloured iris and large pupil. This is said to be a good deterrent against small animals that may see the butterfly as a potential meal!

The Butterfly project is giving us the opportunity to witness the amazing transformation process of a caterpillar into a butterfly, as well as gaining valuable information on the feeding behaviour and time scales of each life stage, which in turn can be compared to other butterfly species.

At Taricaya we are graced with a wealth of butterfly species. Peru actually possesses the greatest diversity of butterflies in the world and exceeds more than 3,700 butterfly species. Sadly due to deforestation of the rainforest, the natural habitat of butterflies is being destroyed and many species have disappeared altogether.

We always aim to help local farmers by sharing our tried and tested methods. For example if our butterfly project proves successful, we can promote butterfly farming and collecting as a means to further a farmer's income. Contrary to popular belief, butterfly collecting and farming can actually help in protecting a species. Farmers can continue to breed butterflies and increase the population of species. This in turn enables local people to support their families, giving an incentive to maintain the rainforest and hopefully lessen the need for logging and deforestation.

Volunteers have also been involved in the daily checking of the numerous butterfly traps we have scattered around Taricaya. This will help us gain important information into the diversity of butterfly species within this area of rainforest.



A Butterfly Trap

REPAIRS TO CANOPY WALKWAY

This month volunteers helped make a few minor repairs to Canopy Walkway, an impressive and famous bird watching platform located within Taricaya.

Canopy walkway's claim to fame is that it is the highest of its kind in South America! It was constructed in 2004 and being 90 metres long and 42 metres high it gives everyone an impressive perspective of life up high in the tree tops. It increased our observation database and species list by 50% in the first year alone and continues to do so.

Furthermore, canopy walkway has enabled us to gather data on reptile, butterfly and amphibian species.

Canopy Walkway is a valuable tool in studying the nature around us; therefore throughout the year regular checks are made on what repairs are needed.

Volunteers helped in sewing areas of netting where small holes have appeared over time, plus sections of metal sheeting that form the walkway were replaced.



Canopy Walkway

BABY CAIMAN!

During our weekly Tapir pool emptying and cleaning, volunteers unexpectedly (and surprisingly) found a baby caiman inside the water. Once the initial shock from both the volunteers and caiman subsided, we discovered it was a young Spectacled Caiman, the most common species found in the Madre de Dios River surrounding Taricaya.

We kept the baby caiman for a few weeks, as it's not every day we are lucky enough to observe a young caiman in such close proximity. The caiman has now been released back into the river from where it originally came from before it found its way into our tapir pool!



A surprised baby Caiman inside the Tapir pool

TURTLE PROJECT UPDATE

We are currently making good progress with constructing the turtle enclosure located at New Farm. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the enclosure will be home to specific turtle species found within the Madre de Dios River such as the 'Yellow Spotted River Turtle' (Taricaya turtle) and the 'Toad Headed Turtle'. This will enable us to study and gather data on behaviour, growth, reproduction and feeding patterns of these species.



Yellow Spotted River Turtles.

The wooden frame of the enclosure has now been made and erected with the netting encasing the entire structure. We hope to have the enclosure finished and fully established within the next month or so in time for the summer. However, we are all dependent on weather conditions and due to it being the rainy season it can slow proceedings down somewhat.

However, we are currently well on schedule thanks to everyone's hard work and we can soon begin to create the artificial swamp inside the enclosure. I shall endeavor to keep you updated with all our progress!



Turtle Enclosure construction underway!

EXTRAS

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.

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