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PROJECT UPDATES

TURTLE PROJECT

October was the month of hatching for the turtle eggs being incubated in the artificial beaches at our pilot farm. With the help of many volunteers, we collected eggs from the beach throughout July and August and finally our work was rewarded on October 10th when the first baby turtles hatched out. When they were spotted, the hard work began, with Daniel taking groups of volunteers every morning to check the nests and collect and recent hatchlings. The eggs continued to hatch until the last on November 9th, with an average of 4 nests hatching each day throughout that period.



Just as a reminder, 77 nests were collected originally from the beach in August, with a total of 2267 eggs. Now not all of the eggs are fertile, and since we began this project in 2005 we have been steadily improving the percentage of baby turtles which hatch out from the eggs. This year we hatched 1620 turtles; about 70% of the eggs collected. When the turtles first hatch, they are brought back to the lodge to be weighed and measured, then released in batches back into the river by the beach where the eggs were first collected from; in this case Playa Alta, about 20 minutes downriver from the lodge. There were four batches of turtles released this year; 205 on October 21st, 588 on October 27th, 517 on November 5th (the Taricaya anniversary) and, finally, 300 on November 13th. The baby turtles weighed an average of 20g and had an average shell length of 4.5cm. If you are just looking at the new hatchlings it doesn't sound too small, but when they were compared with the 20 turtles maintained from the previous years' hatchlings, they seemed tiny. Those from 2008 weigh around 60g, about 3 times the weight of the newborns, and have shells measuring 7.5cm, nearly twice the length of the younger turtles. The table below shows how the recent data compares to the previous 4 years that the project has been undertaken.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Nests	39	27	55	60	77
Eggs	1140	727	1550	1765	2267
Eggs per nest	29.23	28.16	29.16	29.42	29.44
Hatched	535	520	1021	1391	1620
Released	522	514	992	1370	1610
% success rate	46.93	71.53	65.87	78.81	71.46

The numbers for each year are evidence of improvements/refinements in collection methods throughout the 5 years. For example, in the first 2 years we attempted this project, we only patrolled the beach in the month of August, and mostly just during the week. For the last couple of years we have maintained a presence on the beach in the nights from the middle of July right up until the first days of September. We hope to continue with our success in the next year.

ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE

There have been several advances within the rescue centre in the last month and a half, the most notable being that of the spider monkey release project. At various points through the year there have been articles in the newsletter about the pre-release enclosure. Well, I am now finally able to tell you all that it is complete!



October brought the final stages of raising and decorating the cage, terminating with an environment measuring 17m x 10m, and with an average height of 7m. This is much larger than the current enclosure, and should help the animals build up some muscle

before their final release into the forest. It was decorated with ropes, branches, tree trunks, both horizontal and vertical and designed to promote movement higher up within the enclosure, as spider monkeys would normally inhabit the mid to upper levels of the canopy. An aerial feeding platform was also installed to accustom the animals to looking for food at the same height, rather than returning close to the ground.

The transfer of the first group of monkeys (Wally, Attila, Dixon and Wolfie) to the pre-release enclosure is scheduled for January, at which time they will undergo 2-4 months of evaluation and monitoring within the cage and, if all goes well, both with behavioural



... and veterinary evaluations, they will be released. The animals are currently ready for transfer but as it is getting near to that time of year when many people want to be closer to home, various members of staff will be absent until the beginning of January so we must delay until we have a complete team. The monitoring will be very intensive, especially owing to the distance between the enclosure and the lodge, often involving teams of people camping out overnight for several days. In preparation for transfer, this group underwent the first stage of their behavioural study during October and November, looking at how they utilize the space within their current enclosure, behaviour patterns, interaction between the individuals and hierarchy. The study involved 30 hours of observations at different time periods throughout the day. The second phase of the study will start immediately following their transfer to the new enclosure, following the same patterns to compare how well they are adjusting to their new environment. Also, during this period, they will be presented with different types of natural foods to be found in the immediate area to evaluate their reactions.

The second group of spider monkeys is also making progress. Since the arrival of the 3rd female, Abi, in September, the group has really been taking shape. After her period of quarantine Abi was introduced to Lilou, Maqui and Sambo, this coinciding with the move

to their new enclosure behind the tapir field. Soon after that, at the end of October, yet another baby monkey was added to the group, this one male and given the name Balu. He was kept under observation for several days, being a little smaller than the rest but when finally introduced to them was readily accepted as a playmate.

BOTANY PROJECT

During October and through to the middle of November the botany project has been forging ahead as usual; among other things, continuing with the collection of specimens. Now, thanks to the efforts of Plantón and all of our volunteers, we have 286 confirmed species of plant registered from within the reserve, the break down being as follows: 286 species of Magnoliophyte (flowering plants), 218 Pteridophytes (ferns) and 44 species of Mycophyte (fungi). We estimate that within the reserve we could register up to 900 or 1000 species of plants, those trees of the high canopy being the most numerous and diverse. In the next few months we hope to be able to take samples from the crowns of the canopy trees, made possible by the (hopeful) acquisition of the equipment necessary to be able to ascend to the right level. This would notably increase our plant species list. With respect to the monitoring of forest productivity (i.e. the leaf litter traps) we are currently in the analysis phase. We have 7 months of data collected from these traps and now, with the onset of the rainy season, can produce a pattern of behaviour for the forest through the year.

Currently we are also taking soil samples with the aim to find out the nutrition levels and quality of the substrate. Additionally, for the reserve we now have a pluviometer, to measure precipitation (rainfall, in other words), which will help with the understanding and correlation of climatic information in terms of water levels with information regarding the productivity of the forest.

BUTTERFLY PROJECT

Following the completion of the butterfly house situated between the kitchen and the laboratories, Gigo (Daniel Alvarado) has started moving more towards our ultimate aim of maintaining and breeding butterflies within it. At the beginning of October, traps were set up around our trail system with 2 purposes in mind: one, to carry on the inventory of butterfly species within our reserve, and two, for the collection of those species which we wish to breed. The traps are checked and the bait replaced every second day.

We have been monitoring butterflies in this way since the beginning of the year, with a little extra help from Marco, a butterfly expert from Arequipa, and currently have a list including more than 150 species. Marco is due to visit us again soon with the results of his last visit a couple of months ago, so keep an eye out here for any more news.

The butterflies we are trying to establish and breed within the house are those which are

the most colourful and visible within the forest, admired by everyone who passes through. These are of course the blue Morpho butterfly (*Morpho menelaus*, *Morpho Achilles*), and also the owl butterfly (*Caligo eurilochus*).



Over the next few months we are planning to build a puparium to store the pupas while they metamorphose, plus a number of smaller side enclosures for easier management of egg-laying females. There are a number of individuals within the house currently but they require constant replacement until the breeding program is properly established.

EXTRAS

CLIMATIC DATA

Since the beginning of March 2009 we have been measuring the temperature and humidity every day and, as mentioned before on November 10, we acquired a pluviometer to measure the rainfall within the reserve. The activity and behaviour of the flora and fauna of the forest change depending on these three climatic factors. For amphibians, for example, this data is important to establish reproductive behaviour and daily activity patterns.

PALMA REAL

At the very beginning of October we paid a visit to the native community at Palma Real to check up on 2 different projects. Last year we installed a trial area for an agroforestry plantation similar to that in place at our pilot farm, using brazil nut trees mixed in with other smaller fruiting trees. Some plants are doing well while others – mainly the brazil nut trees – have been unable to adapt to the poor soil and strong sunlight. This pilot area has been maintained almost entirely by Taricaya staff and volunteers, but we have heard a rumour that the community wishes to extend this project to cover a larger part of the scrubland surrounding the village, but replacing the brazil nut saplings with hardwood trees which can be harvested for their wood. Also earlier this year we passed them our

remaining few donkeys (Nando, Lisa and Rambito) for use in their daily activities. When they left Taricaya the animals looked a little on the thin side, so we were astonished at the change when we finally caught up with them. All three looked incredibly fat and healthy – and this despite the work they were doing – plus Lisa had given birth just the previous month and was accompanied everywhere by her very cute furry little foal. They are obviously treated very well by their carers and we are happy to see them in such good condition.

REUNION

While back in the UK on holiday I was told of a small reunion happening on the small island of Brownsea off the south coast of England, well-known for its population of red squirrels. Of course I had to pop in and it was great to see Abby, Mark, David, Valerie, Lena and Phil. (If you are really missing a place it helps a lot to be with people who actually know what you're talking about.) Abby is a ranger with Dorset Wildlife Trust which manages half of the island, so we helped out with the burning of large piles of rhododendrons (an invasive species) and of course sat around in the evenings with our photos of Taricaya – we arrived at the conclusion that there's something about trees which makes people take far too many pictures of them!

It was so nice to meet up with ex-Taricaya volunteers, finding out what they have been up to since and what plans they have – guys thank you so much for inviting me.



LOCAL NEWS

TARICAYA ANNIVERSARY

It has appeared yet again; November 5th 2009 was the 8th anniversary of Taricaya. Officially set up in 2001, we always do something special to mark the day and this year was no exception. Despite a little rain, the whole lodge area was cleaned and prepared in the morning ready for games in the afternoon, followed by one of our incredible barbecues and, of course, the party. Also at 4:30pm everyone took part in one of the last turtle releases, taking the boat down to Playa Alta and releasing 517 baby turtles (Taricayas).

VOLUNTEERS IN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2009

ARRIVING: Sebastian Tiefenauer, Cyril Bossavie, Anne Rechter, Alisha Templeton, Chris Woodfield, Tish O'Reilly, Judith Wenckstern, Antti Majaniemi, Riley Patterson, Alishia Pignatti, Will Tanner, Wiebke Bode, Hannah McReary, Matthieu Pierres, Kathryn Lyons, Nathalie Scouarnec, Nura Wolf & Samantha Harrison.

LEAVING: Cyril Bossavie, James Campbell, Alisha Templeton, Riley Patterson, Alishia Pignatti, Nathalie Scouarnec, Amanda Cooke, Kate McNamara, Dylan Heneck, Caroline Kling, Judith Wenckstern, Hanna Schulz, Stef van Kessel, Synne Burglin, Michael Drummond & Jamie Armour.

Thanks for your help guys, we hope you enjoyed your time at Taricaya

DID YOU KNOW?

- Frogs are able to pop their eyes in and out of their heads, a process which aids swallowing.
- The highest concentration of claylicks in South America is in Peru, specifically the Madre de Dios region.

Hi,

This is a little different from the usual newsletters, the updates having been provided by the staff responsible for each project. It has been a busy time with all the baby turtles to be measured and marked before release, so many people were looking forward to the next month with relief, hoping for a well-earned break. There was no one major project this month, all have made significant progress.

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.

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.

Rachel Kilby
Volunteer Co-ordinator
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