

FCD Tracks

The Official E-Bulletin of Friends for Conservation and Development
September 2026, Issue #60

Forging Connections in a Living Landscape

In This Issue

Reviewing
Strategic Plan

Page 2

Promoting Women
Empowerment

Page 2

Expedition for
Search of Macaws

Page 2

Binational
Taskforce Meet

Page 3

FCD Visits
Guatemalan
Community

Page 3

Preparing for
Community
Monitoring

Page 3

Visitor Center
Receives Finance

Page 4

Karst Team on
Patrol

Page 4

LCRS Bulletin
Launched

Page 4

Largest Number of Macaws Released



On August 10th, fifteen scarlet macaws were released from their flight cage in the Chiquibul. This represented the largest single release conducted by FCD. These macaws had been cared for on an in-situ laboratory and hand fed until a time when they were ready to fly independently out from their flight cage into the wild.

Care for macaws at the in-situ laboratory is the last management option provided for macaws that are at risk

of being lost due to poaching or potential death from starvation. With approximately 350 individual birds found in Belize every individual bird counts. FCD's objective has been to increase the number to over 500 individuals which will give the parrot population a better opportunity to thrive in Belize.

Poaching is the most real dangerous threat to the species survival in the Chiquibul. On June 6th of this year the FCD field research team reported through VHF radio, that two macaw chicks had been poached at their main breeding habitat. This was alarming since for at least five years, poaching at that location had not been registered. Macaw poachers known as *guaqueros* from Guatemala have been documented as early as 2006. The FCD Research team and the Ranger Enforcement team have been monitoring and conducting anti-poaching activities for more than a decade and have reduced the incidences of poaching. However; despite several persons having been detained and charged for illegal possession of wildlife over the years, poaching and illegal wildlife trade has not been eradicated.

12 Junior Rangers Graduate

During the month of August, after spending seven days in the Chiquibul, at Las Cuevas Research Station, twelve children were successfully certified as Chiquibul Junior Rangers.

The 2026 Junior Ranger Summer Camp was successfully conducted by FCD's Environmental Educator and the Programs Director, with the assistance of several teams including Rangers, Research and Karst staff.

As a Chiquibul Junior Ranger, the young children who ranged from 10–14-year-olds now understand the dynamics of forests and ecosystems; and the various animal species that live in the forest and their interdependency. The knowledge earned help Junior Rangers become spokespersons for the Chiquibul National Park. By taking an oath on the last day of the camp, they also have made a commitment to respect nature and life in all its forms, and teach others to respect nature. Junior Rangers also gained valuable knowledge and understanding of the duty of a Park Ranger and appreciated the particular skills that are needed to be an effective Ranger,



including jungle survival skills, bush-craft, and mental and physical fitness.

The 2026 Chiquibul Junior Ranger Summer Camp Program was made possible through a private donor from England and The Lodge at Chaa Creek.

Reviewing Strategic Plan



At a Board meeting held during the month of July the first draft of FCD's revised Strategic Plan for the period 2027-2030 was discussed with the anticipation of having a revised plan by March 2027. The actual goal of FCD is to conserve the natural and cultural resources of the western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains for the sustainable development of Belize and envisions healthy terrestrial ecosystems that are sustainably managed for Belize and the region. In order to achieve the mission, two core strategies have been pursued by

FCD, namely Advocacy and Protected Areas Management.

Through Advocacy, FCD aims to increase support for achieving its conservation goals; and through Protected Areas Management, FCD endeavors to reverse the degradation of ecosystems and protect the ecological integrity of the Chiquibul Ecosystem and its buffer areas.

To enhance the achievement of the mission of the organization, FCD furthermore has embraced three institutional key result areas. Through Governance & Decision-Making, FCD aims to strengthen the processes, policies, and regulations affecting the way its Board and staff direct, administer and control the organization; through Resource Mobilization for Mission Achievement, FCD aims to, secure and increase financial resources to support and sustain the organization and its work, while providing benefits to the wider community; and through Management of People, Resources & Assets, FCD aims to improve and strengthen the deployment and management of human, financial and technological resources to support its work.

Goal:

FCD aims to conserve the natural and cultural resources of the western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains for the sustainable development of Belize.

Mission:

FCD pioneers adaptive management of the Chiquibul Forest to improve the ecological and cultural integrity of the western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains.

Promoting Women Empowerment

The Local Chicken Rearing Initiative, implemented under the Resilient and Biodiverse Landscapes of Northern Mesoamerica Project and funded by the Biodiverse Landscape Fund (BLF), is empowering 16 women from Arenal and San Jose Succotz villages to build sustainable, community-based livelihoods. Through a structured series of trainings in aviary health, poultry reproduction, financial management and marketing participants gained the technical and business/marketing skills needed to manage small-scale poultry enterprises. With support from partners including the University of Belize, this initiative combined practical learning with hands-on experience, enabling women to confidently transition from training to production.

The initiative has since expanded into a fully operational model project, providing beneficiaries with chicks, equipment, feed, and ongoing technical support. Additional investments such as incubators, coop materials and a comprehensive marketing plan (including marketing and sales materials) are strengthening long-term sustainability and market access.



By producing and selling local eggs and chickens, the women will improve household income and food security while responding to demand for local, fresh, sustainably raised products. This initiative highlights the power of women-led enterprises to drive economic resilience and contribute to conservation-friendly livelihoods in rural Belize.

Expedition for Search of Macaws



A three-day biological monitoring expedition was carried out in July, on the upper region of the Chalillo Lake with the intent of searching for new active macaw nests. The expedition was part of the FCD Research Unit's aim to locate new areas where macaws have been known to dwell. During the first expedition, the team had identified a total of 16 suspected nests, but only one was documented to have

a high possibility of being used as a nest by macaws. The team now had the intention of gathering more information and reconnaissance for any additional nests.

The patrol effort covered a total of 66.8 kms of upstream river in a total of 21.4 hours. On a 17.8 kms upstream range the team documented potential nest cavities. The area was found to be a good breeding ground for macaws since it has many viable cavities. Continued potential nest preparations at the end of the nesting season and prior to the initiation of the next season has been recommended to enhance the use of natural cavities on the area investigated. The preparation of potential nest cavities has been known to encourage macaws to nest in these cavities.

The area, likewise, appeared with evidence of illegal wildlife poaching activities along the riparian zone. These observations have validated that these areas are being targeted by Guatemalan poachers, and therefore, becomes a new area of high importance and need for more targeted patrols.

Binational Taskforce Meet



With high temperatures becoming more predominant the incidences of forest fires also become more acute. In the Chiquibul ecosystem, fire impacts are primarily caused by Guatemalan farmers who use fire to prepare their lands for cattle ranching or crop production, and depending on the direction of the wind, unattended fires can spread into the Chiquibul National Park. As a result, FCD created a binational taskforce several years ago, where Guatemalan and Belizean members on the taskforce engage

on prevention and suppression techniques to reduce the effects of forest fires across borders.

The taskforce over the years has been expanded to include other organizations in Belize that share a boundary with Guatemala such as Programme for Belize, Belize Maya Forest Trust, and the Spanish Lookout Mennonite community.

On July 30th, the Binational Fire Management Taskforce met at the Municipality of Melchor, Guatemala to present the status of forest fires for the 2026 season. Attending were 36 persons from both Belize and Guatemala. Reports were presented by CONRED, Programme for Belize, the Belize Forest Department and FCD. FCD highlighted the collaboration received from the village of La Rejoya, who helped combat forest fires from reaching into Belize's protected areas this year. The village residents used the firefighting tools that were donated by FCD three years ago.

The taskforce is programmed to convene before the end of the year to initiate the development of a two-year binational fire management action plan.

Vision:

FCD envisions healthy terrestrial ecosystems that are sustainably managed for Belize and the region.

Board of Directors

President:

Mrs. Susana Vanzie

Vice-President:

Dr. Elma Kay

Treasurer:

Mrs. Tanya Santos-Neal

Secretary:

Mrs. Valerie Woods-Smith

Director:

Dr. Dionne Chamberlain Miranda

Director:

Mr. Gregory Maheia

Director:

Mr. Hector Guerra

FCD Visits Guatemalan Community

The Chiquibul Maya Mountain Biosphere Reserve is located in Guatemala, adjacent to Belize's Chiquibul National Park, Caracol Archaeological Reserve and Columbia River Forest Reserve. Due to a biosphere categorization, the reserve has permitted communities to exist within the buffer and multiple use zones. A few Guatemalan communities are within the one-kilometer distance from the Chiquibul National Park boundary and have been known to exert a heavy pressure upon Belize's natural resources.

Over the years FCD's strategy has been to monitor for illegal human advancements and apply the protected area regulations. However; five years ago, it was decided that an approach using an open dialogue and community engagement would be a reasonable intervention that could reduce tension and conflict between Belizean authorities and Guatemalan communities.

On September the opportunity arose for FCD staff to visit one of the closest Guatemalan communities, accompanied



with Guatemalan institutions including the Municipality of Melchor de Mencos, Asociacion Balam and el Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas. The aim of the visit was to present to the community the benefits of a community conservation agreement and to gauge their interest for a partnership. Members of the community expressed their support which promises to open a new page of engagement with this local community. FCD is encouraged and is investigating ways to support the community.

Preparing for Community Monitoring



On the 3rd and 4th of September a group of community leaders from the Belize River Valley converged at Las Cuevas Research Station with the purpose of establishing a monitoring working group and formalizing an agreement for the protection of the Belize River.

The community leaders attending were from Willow's Bank, Flower's Bank, Isabella Bank, Bermudian Landing, Valley of Peace, Scotland Halfmoon, Teakettle and Ladyville. They unanimously endorsed the formation of a community monitoring group which would look after the safety and

integrity of the Belize River. Since a few other leaders from the targeted region were unable to attend, a decision was made to conduct a second meeting which would bring together leaders from the Upper Belize River. As a result, on the 26th of September leaders from the communities of Esperanza, Spanish Lookout, Santa Familia, Ontario, Roaring Creek and More Tomorrow met at Roaring Creek to further discuss the opportunities and needs for establishing a community river monitoring group.

Leaders have vividly described that the Belize River faces several threats including garbage pollution, erosion, loss of the river bank, over fishing and contamination. They expressed their concerns over the recent fish kills observed on the Belize River which signifies that deadly contaminants are being dumped into the river and they have reached to a conclusion that communities will have to play a pivotal role if the Belize River is to be safeguarded. As a consensus the communities have recommended the activation of a Belize River Watch Patrol System. FCD expects to organize this community group by the end of the year.

FCD Programs

Protection &
EnforcementCommunity
DevelopmentBi-national
RelationsEducation
& Public
AwarenessKarst
ManagementResearch &
MonitoringLandscape
ManagementMonitoring &
EvaluationFinancial
Sustainability

Visitor Center Receives Finance



The Chiquibul National Park Visitor Center was first launched on the April 5, 2014 as a first entry and introduction platform to the park. But it never became functional for multiple reasons. Since a year ago the infrastructure was moved from its actual location to an area which is more accessible to the public and where the environment is more welcoming. With this change, FCD now has the impetus to meet the goals

of the Center. The purpose of the Center is to generate local and international awareness and support for the protection of the Chiquibul National Park and FCD's conservation efforts.

Apart from illustrating the beauty, challenges and history of the Chiquibul National Park the visitor center will provide an avenue for restroom access, amenities, souvenirs, maps and equipment rental. It will be a hub for providing guidance, recommendations and important information related to accommodation, transport and activities in the area.

With the financial support from Blancaneaux Lodge and Turtle Inn, the Visitor Center is opening its doors to the public. The finances from these lodges provide for the hiring of a Visitor Center Interpreter, development of exhibits, basic maintenance and mobilization of the staff. Photo exhibits have been coordinated and donated by Belize's premier photographer, Tony Rath.

Karst Team on Patrol



Monitoring is a fundamental component of effective conservation management, providing a systematic method for early detection, documentation, assessment, and reporting of illegal activities and human disturbances within the Chiquibul National Park (CNP). Through coordinated joint foot patrols, the Karst Management Unit (KMU), along with CNP Rangers, conduct field-based monitoring across designated areas of the park to assess site conditions, identify potential threats, and document changes affecting cultural heritage resources, including caves, rockshelters, and Maya archaeological sites.

With funding from the Belize Nature Conservation Foundation, during the months of July to September, the KMU team along with Park Rangers, conducted a total of 20 joint foot patrols across the Chiquibul Cave System (CCS) and the Chiquibul National Park, including Retiro, Kumb' Site, Cocoom Cave, Putz' Bak Cave, Sotz' Cave, Cowboy area and the Vaca Forest Reserve boundary.

Key threats identified and documented during these patrols included poaching, cattle ranching, looting, timber and non-

timber resource extraction, encroachment, and pollution. These activities directly or indirectly compromise the integrity, preservation, and archaeological value of cultural heritage sites.

Findings were systematically recorded using the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) application, which helps on the planning, design and application of enforcement interventions.

LCRS Bulletin Launched



With a new Memorandum of Understanding signed in February between the Forest Department and FCD for management and administration of Las Cuevas Research

Station, a new attribute to Las Cuevas has been the launching of a news bulletin named *Las Cuevas Explorer*. The bulletin will be produced two times a year to highlight advancements on research, field studies and education at the research station.

The first issue of *Las Cuevas Explorer* was produced on September with an introduction given by the Station Manager. The standard sections to the Bulletin include: A Look at the Past, Research Spotlight, Wildlife Highlight, Researcher Testimony, Monitoring Update, Life at Las Cuevas, Camera Trap Corner and Recent Publications.

The bulletin can be found at Las Cuevas website:

www.lascuevas.org

or for a copy please write to:

fcd.lcrs@gmail.com

For more information contact:

Friends for Conservation and Development
Chi-Hah Street, San José Succotz, Cayo District

Tel: 823-2657 • Email: fcd@btl.net • website: www.fcdbelize.org

E-Bulletin Funded by: