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2021 Macaw Season Starts



The month of March marks the beginning of the breeding season for macaws in the Chiquibul. This also marks the development of a biological monitoring schedule developed by FCD's Biologist for execution by the FCD Research team. The four-person team will spend the next

six months documenting and caring for the macaw chicks until they fledge and leave their nests. Thanks to Adventure Travel Conservation Fund, this year the research team and volunteers have a more comfortable deck to rest, and will not sleep on muddy areas as in previous years.

During the month of March, the tasking was to identify and conduct an assessment of the active nests and prepare the field camp. April was already a busy month climbing the trees and verifying the status of the chicks. May continued with biological monitoring and the beginning of the citizen science program where volunteers get involved in the protection of macaws. This month also saw the launching of the antipoaching effort, whose main aim is to prevent the loss of chicks at the hands of poachers. The scarlet macaw conservation program is made possible through the support of the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, Belize Electric Company Limited, Lister Foundation, Adventure Travel Conservation Fund, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of the Interior-ITAP, GEF Small Grants Programme and Nature Trust of the Americas.

Las Cuevas Activates

The COVID 19 pandemic has affected tremendously the tourism industry in Belize. This impact has been felt at Las Cuevas Research Station with the absence of student groups and visitors. However; this started to change by April of this year as local guests started to seek the tranquility, remoteness and solitude of the Chiquibul.

Understanding the importance of following the correct protocols, FCD put in place the recommended signage, and practices adhering to the Health and Tourism guidelines. Gold Standard guidelines are in place. Guests that have recently been at Las Cuevas are inspired by the sight of scarlet macaws, the sounds of the howler monkeys, the absence of humans on nature trails and the freshness of the cool air in the dark nights.



As you plan for your next visit in Belize, call us and arrange your visit. Your stay at Las Cuevas helps us protect the habitat and species that inhabit this ecosystem.

Chiquibul Symposium II Held



The long awaited Chiquibul Symposium II finally took place on March 21st under the title, “Restoring Our National Patrimony”. The Prime Minister of Belize, Honorable John Briceno gave the keynote address while the Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Risk Management, Honorable Orlando Habet gave the opening remarks. On his address, the Prime Minister emphasized the importance of the Chiquibul and pledged to support FCD on its ongoing work of protecting this important ecosystem. Hon Orlando Habet, explained more vividly the uniqueness of the Chiquibul, its challenges and the steps taken by his Ministry

in improving collaboration with FCD. Testimonials from the Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance, Belize Tourism Industry Association and Belize Electric Company Limited highlighted the many environmental services and goods derived from the Chiquibul ecosystem. A panel consisting of FCD and the Belize Defence Force described the threats to the Chiquibul, while the Executive Director of FCD outlined ten recommendations, including the re-classification of the Western Maya Mountains protected areas as the Chiquibul-Mountain Pine Ridge Landscape Conservation Trust.

Although the entire Symposium was conducted virtually on Zoom, the video recordings gave the audience a true reality of the significance of the region. It was aired widely through the assistance of the media houses namely KREM TV, Channel 5, Channel 7 and Love FM. Channel 5 CEO Ms. Marleni Cuellar moderated the Symposium, while CEO Nicole Solano coordinated the overall virtual event. The Symposium was made possible through the financial support obtained from the US Department of the Interior-International Technical Assistance Program.

Goal:

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

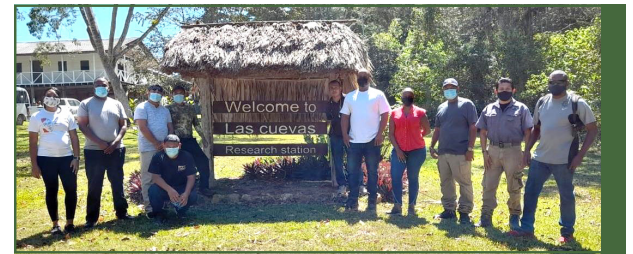
Mission:

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

Prosecutors Visit Chiquibul

Chief Justice Kenneth Benjamin and Chief Magistrate Mrs. Sharon Frazer recommended in 2019 a site visit for prosecutors to Chiquibul; however, due to the COVID 19 protocols established it had been difficult to conduct any face to face meetings, but that changed a bit by March. By then, FCD made preparations to finally undertake a sensitizing activity with Prosecutors with the aim of highlighting the environmental crimes occurring in the Chiquibul Forest and to get from them any recommendations on how to be more effective in prosecuting persons.

The two-day event was held at Las Cuevas Research Station on the 26th and 27th of March. A total of 10 persons participated on the activity, led by the Head Prosecution Branch officer, Ms. Alifa Elrington. The branches represented were from Belize City, Punta Gorda, Belmopan, Benque Viejo del Carmen and San Ignacio. During the event, the Chiquibul National Park Manager, Derric Chan presented on the various environmental



challenges ranging from illegal wildlife trafficking, illegal logging and gold panning, and gave various scenarios of persons detained, and the procedures that FCD follows. The Prosecutors on the other hand recommended training for FCD staff on the Commissioner Guidelines and Electronic Evidence Act.

This 2-day event was made possible by the US Department of the Interior – International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Program.

PACT's Support Ongoing



FCD has much to thank the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) for their ongoing support given since 2005. Two years ago, the Targeted Investment Program (TIP) identified key critical areas for PACT's investment, which included the Chiquibul. As a result, a three-year project titled,

Instituting a Landscape Program for the Chiquibul Forest was begun. The purpose of the project is to improve management of the Chiquibul National Park through biodiversity monitoring, enforcement capacity and financial sustainability mechanisms.

The first two years has seen much improvement and success in the research, enforcement and capacity building project components, with financial mechanisms being a challenging one due to the pandemic. With the beginning of the third year, a visit was conducted in April by PACT's Executive Director, Mrs. Nayari Diaz-Perez and other staff to present the 3rd year financial award. The event was held at Las Cuevas Research Station where FCD gave a tour of location, important developments at Las Cuevas and the challenges and aspirations. The cheque of over Bz\$480,000.00 was presented by Mrs. Nayari Diaz Perez to FCD. Receiving on behalf of FCD was the President of the Board, Mr. Mick Fleming.

Training to Combat Forest Fires



Last year the forest fires in Chiquibul, Caracol and Vaca were devastating. By the end of the dry season over 22,000 acres had been impacted. This urged FCD to seek ways and means to better control and combat forest fires. With support from the US Department of the Interior – International Technical Assistance Program a training and

acquisition of equipment was made. Training came in two areas: the theory section and a practicum. On the 18th and 19th of March, ten FCD field staff were trained on the use of fire equipment in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve.

With support of Forest Officer Raul Chun, the necessary permit was received to conduct the practicum. The planning and organizing for the two-day activity was conducted by retired Forest Officer, Mr. Domingo Ruiz. By the end of the training, FCD staff had learnt handline, blacklining, spot firing, strip firing, ring firing and backfiring techniques.

To date the fires in the Vaca and Chiquibul have been lower in scale compared to those of last year. However, it is clear that fires are now a threat to the ecosystems of the Chiquibul and FCD will require to develop a proper Fire Management Plan in order to comprehensively address this new threat.

Vision:

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

Board of Directors

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Mr. Mick Fleming

Vice-President:

Dr. Elma Kay

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Management Effectiveness Review

Management effectiveness is an activity conducted annually at FCD to assess management performance of the Chiquibul National Park. The 2019 assessment report stated that management effectiveness of the protected area had increased since the first national assessment in 2006 from 39.3%, before FCD took on the co-management role, to 76.3% in 2019. Management of Chiquibul National Park is significantly challenged by transboundary agricultural, hunting and gold panning incursions from communities on the Guatemalan border.

The report further notes that the Chiquibul National Park is an excellent example of the positive impacts an NGO co-management partnership has for protected area management effectiveness in Belize for protected areas managed under the Forest Department, providing a successful model for strengthening protected areas within Belize's National Protected Areas System.



This year the assessment exercise took place on the 13th of April, moderated virtually by Mrs. Zoe Walker of Wildtracks. Those attending included FCD senior staff and Mr. Saul Cruz, Compliance Officer of the National Biodiversity Unit. The results are yet to be finalized.

Extinct Bear Revisited



In the 1980's Dr. Thomas Miller conducted an intensive research and exploration of the Chiquibul Cave System. The amazing stories of discovery were published on an article

in the National Geographic, Volume 197 of April 2000. Expeditions led by Dr. Miller not only surveyed the extensive passageways but also found fossilized remains of bats and bones of an extinct bear.

With the expertise of the FCD Karst Management Unit, one of their assignments was to find the remains of the bear and to document the status of it after more than 35 years of its discovery. Waddling through the muddy and moist environment with an ever-present river inside the cave, the team successfully found the remains and the many skeletal remains of bats calcified in time.

The skeleton of what has been identified to be a Florida Cave Bear cub appears to be intact. The area where it is found has suffered a small lift and the room is surrounded with formations that are extremely unique. Scientists such as Dr. Blaine Schubert are yet to further study the remains via photographic samples taken.

Strategic Plan Reviewed

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability



FCD's Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was developed through a participatory and forward-thinking exercise involving the FCD Board, staff, key members and other selected core

partners. The planning process strengthened the group identity, built team spirit, and energized the organization. It resulted in the formulation of the organization's core attributes and an articulated plan, intended to lay out the medium-term strategic direction for FCD and providing the foundations for the future stage of fundraising efforts and the preparation of work plans and grant proposals.

Now after five years, it was time to review the achievements and identify other steps and recommendations to undertake. To do this, a Board of Directors session was conducted at Las Cuevas Research Station with financial support from the US Department of the Interior - ITAP. The Executive Director presented the results of each action recommended on the plan and where necessary Board members provided inputs and steps for further implementation. The aim will be to meet those outstanding tasks prior to conducting a revised strategic plan for the period 2022-2026.

Outreach Proves Successful

This dry season, FCD's Environmental Educator, Justin Pook conducted a public outreach campaign aimed at preventing forest fires. The outreach activities were implemented in 7 communities located in the Cayo District, namely the Vaca plateau, Arenal, Benque Viejo del Carmen, San Jose Succotz, Cristo Rey, San Antonio and Seven Miles. Via site visits, one on one presentations, TV and Radio shows, distribution of materials and social media, the intent was to reach out to approximately 12,305 inhabitants.

Last year the Vaca Forest Reserve was heavily impacted, therefore a special interest was made in reaching out to the Vaca farmers. By the end of May, a total of 16 famers had been sensitized and reminded about the importance of soliciting their permit for agriculture burning, and were urged to follow all guidelines such as development of proper fire lines to reduce the incidence of wildfires.

The implementation of this Environmental Education Outreach was made possible with the financial support



from the U.S. Department of the Interior-International Technical Assistance Program. The action plan was endorsed and supported by the Belize Forest Department and the Ministry of Agriculture.

E-Bulletin Funded by:



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