



Promoting Core Conservation

Photo by PhD student, Lauren N. Wartine and PTECS.

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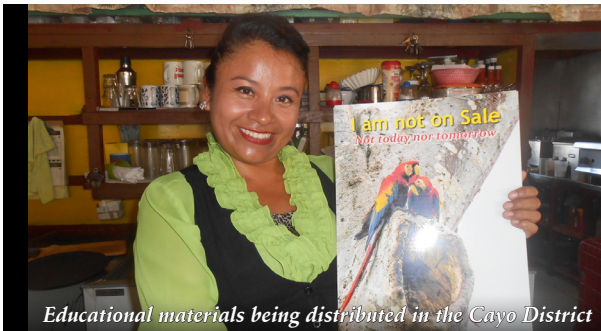
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IWT Efforts Expanded



Educational materials being distributed in the Cayo District

In 2014, FCD started a DFID/UKAid supported project along with the Wildlife Conservation Society in Peten and other Guatemalan conservation organizations to eradicate illegal wildlife trafficking in Belize and Guatemala. The three year project is specifically aimed to safeguard wildlife species including scarlet macaws, other parrots, 2 species of primates and three species of felines. FCD assigned the Park Manager, Derric Chan, as the Illegal Wildlife Trafficking (IWT) Coordinator. As a result of the increased patrols, monitoring and exchange of information across borders, no macaws

along the main breeding area in the Chiquibul Forest has been poached over the last two years; more knowledge has been acquired on the manner that poachers operate and three wildlife traffickers have been arrested in Guatemala.

In April of this year, the IWT effort was expanded with the support from WCS and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) of the Government of the United States. Funds were provided to inform the general public via Love FM about the wildlife species of the Chiquibul Forest, and to discourage Belizeans from illegally buying and selling wildlife. We expect that Belizeans can serve as direct guardians, report cases and stop buying wildlife as pets, once they have been informed of the regulations and offences.

IWT is a serious evolving problem in Belize and FCD is taking steps forward to address it. A strategy has been developed for the Chiquibul and a task force comprised of enforcement agencies has been created to strengthen the enforcement effort.

Mexican Ambassador Visit

Even though we tend to appear on national television frequently to raise awareness of the state of the Chiquibul Forest, we do agree that the best way to understand the challenges is to be on site. As a result FCD has been encouraging people from all across Belize to visit the Chiquibul Forest. This May, we were honored to have the Mexican Ambassador, Mr. Carlos Quesnel visit us. The trip coordinated by FCD took him and his staff to the Caracol Archaeological Reserve, Tapir Ranger Camp, Las Cuevas Research Station and the Tower Lookout.

By the end of the trip, Ambassador Quesnel remarked that the trip was a fully educational one



Ambassador Quesnel and his staff at the entrance of Park

and that the site visit made him feel more versed of the environmental threats faced in the Chiquibul Forest.

Chiquibul Headwaters Project Launched

FCD Mission

FCD is a non-profit, non-governmental organization whose primary goal is to protect and manage the natural environment through adaptive resource management, conservation awareness and development of the human resource.



FCD's educator hands Watershed Atlas to DOE Officer

The Belize River is the most critical source of water for almost half of the Belizean population. Its headwaters are located in the highlands of the Chiquibul Forest. Despite its national importance, the true value of the watershed is not widely considered. Preliminary assessments demonstrate that illegal gold panning is already starting to have an impact on the integrity of the watershed and that more punctual, coordinated efforts are necessary. To address this need, FCD sought and obtained the

support from PACT during the month of March for an 18 month effort.

Actions are being coordinated towards maintaining a combined effort with BDF, Police and the Forest Department in Southern Chiquibul; improve the monitoring of macro-invertebrate communities in the streams of the Chiquibul Forest and highlight the importance of the watershed through community outreach across Belize. These actions are aimed at solidifying a long term, comprehensive protection of the Belize River headwaters, and help complement the strategic goals of the National Protected Areas System Plan.

As we prepare for the launching of public outreach in July, educational materials have been developed including an Atlas, badges, posters and brochures. The theme of the program is "A Bi-National Watershed Resource - The Chiquibul, Mopan, Macal and Belize Rivers: From the Maya Mountain to the Caribbean Sea."

Chiquibul Listed as a Tourism Hub

On the 8th of March the kick off workshop for the Sustainable Tourism Program under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation was held in Burrell Boom. This 5 year program will see the development of the Mountain Pine Ridge, Chiquibul and Caracol as another tourism destination hub.

This initiative comes at the right time when FCD is presently developing its Enterprise Development plan. Neil Rogers, who has consulted for a range of EU funded INTERREG projects in Sweden, Norway, Finland and the BalBc States, for the Government of Guyana, the UNDP and Wild Salmon Centre in Kamchatka, Russia and a past member of the Belize Tourism Board's Marketing Advisory Committee, is tasked with developing our Tourism Plan, Business Plan, and Visitor Impact Monitoring Framework.

Following his technical advice FCD has moved to put in place a Tourism Management Unit headed by Gliss Penados. This new program has been set in motion at the Las Cuevas Research Station, with the intent of the station serving as a hub for the



Paddling the currents of Solitaire Valley

Photo by Tony Rath

conduction of tours and expeditions inside the Chiquibul.

FCD anticipates that with IDB finances derived under the Sustainable Tourism Program we will be able to build a robust research and recreation program that will help generate finances for the management of the Chiquibul Forest. The Chiquibul Forest has magnificent sites and vistas barely known by the outside world including the Natural Arch, Chiquibul Caverns, Chiquibul River, Solitaire Canyon, Sink-Holes, Highest Point and wildlife such as scarlet macaws and morelet crocodiles.

Scotland Aboard Chiquibul



Nairn/Belize members present donations to FCD's Director

Irene Bews and Ally Sangster of AdventuraScotland learnt of Chiquibul and immediately fell in love with the forest. This year, we were graciously visited by them and this time they brought in several other people from Scotland. This included a group called Nairn/Belize who spent days at Las Cuevas Research Station studying and volunteering with the Las

Cuevas staff during the month of June. After their stay in the Chiquibul and before they departed Belize, the young members of Nairn/Belize called on FCD as a recipient of a donation. The funds, which they fundraised themselves in order to reach Belize and do their assignments, was stretched to serve the important work of conserving the Chiquibul Forest. FCD is humbled at this gesture from the young people of Scotland, and we are making sure that the funds will be used for impact oriented activities.

This year, FCD also took advantage of Irene and Ally's extensive experience and knowledge of outdoor experiential learning, and on April they trained rangers on aspects of Outdoor Leadership. Nine rangers attended the training which was held at Tapir Camp. Certificates were provided to all those present for the training. FCD remains extremely grateful for the support given by AdventuraScotland.

Macaw Protection Receives Support

Every year starting March the Chiquibul Forest becomes an active breeding ground for scarlet macaws. These colorful birds are highly prized and the race is always present to protect them from being stolen. Reports indicate that Guatemalan poachers are able to sell a macaw for up to \$16,000.00 quetzales or Bz\$4,700.00. Annually, FCD has to put in place a biological monitoring effort for a period of up to 7 months to protect these birds. The task is shouldered by FCD's Research Unit headed by Biologist Boris Arevalo.

The Belize Electric Company (BECOL) has been supporting this program for more than 3 years, and like other years, they have financially supported this year's work. The US Department of the Interior has also supported this year's work. With this support FCD is able to subsidize the cost of the manpower and fuel as well as maintenance costs of the skiff.



Dr. Isabelle and Forest Officer feed macaw chicks

The season for macaws have started. By June a total of 11 active scarlet macaw nests had been identified. All nests, with the exception of one, was systematically monitored. This has brought a total number of hatchlings to 21 for the 2016 season of which 20 chicks are still alive. Five of these are found in the field laboratory. All 14 chicks in their natural cavities being monitored are in good physical condition.

Taiwanese Site Visit

The Chiquibul Forest is normally characterized as a dangerous environment to function, but that is not altogether true. Due to the vastness of this forest

that spans over 289,000 acres, the hotspot areas can easily be isolated to that area nearer to the western border with Guatemala.



Taiwanese visitors at Caana temple in Caracol A.R.

On the 12th of June, FCD had the privilege of hosting Republic of China (Taiwan) Embassy personnel and their families in the Chiquibul. The trip was enjoyed by everyone who had the opportunity to climb Caana temples at Caracol; observe macaws flying on the nearby trees and admire the vastness of the tropical jungle. The visitors, led by Mr. Yang Zao-Wei also observed the infrastructure that has been made possible through the financial support provided by the Council of Agriculture and Forestry Bureau of the Government of ROC Taiwan.

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

British Embassy and Watersheds



School students of El Cruzadero tend to nursery.

By March of this year, FCD concluded another year of British Embassy support. Both High Commissioner Peter Hughes and Deputy HC Mrs. Grace Chun are strong advocates of forest protection and bi-national cooperation. The British Embassy supported project which was a success, brought together these two components, with the purpose of enhancing the stability of the Chiquibul and Mopan Rivers through community participation.

TMNR Comes Alive Again

When we were yet members of the Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG), two areas that we visited frequently were the Vaca Forest Reserve and the Society Hall Nature Reserve. At the Society Hall, which eventually was renamed as Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve (TMNR), we were immensely greeted by late Mrs. Svea Ward. Her staunch position was to keep her land; transferred to Government; as a pristine area where wild animals and plants could flourish. But with her passing away in 2015, and Belize Audubon's no longer presence in the area, the nature reserve remained in a critical state of destruction. So when Dr. Jake Snaddon from the University of Southampton, United Kingdom, expressed his interest to explore ways for a renewed management, we had to support and encourage him.

The vibrant and sincere interest of Dr. Snaddon and his family has subsequently led to a planning session convened by the Forest Department. This brought together personnel from Pook's Hill, Belize Audubon Society, FCD and the Forest Department, leading to the creation of a TMNR Working Group. The Working Group was tasked

Within a period of 9 months, FCD's two environmental educators, who were assigned to this program, were able to register officially the Guatemalan Integrated Watershed Commission; strengthened the Bi-national Watershed Alliance through training, produced educational materials for both Belize and Guatemala; and reached out sensitizing Guatemalan and Belizean communities about the importance of the shared watersheds. A 5,000 seedling nursery has been established in the village of El Cruzadero under this project and a two year action plan among 19 communities is being mobilized.

The protection of the Belize River is a challenging endeavour because it requires a strong bi-national focus. At FCD we understood this from the early 2000 when we first created the Belize River-keeper Program. At that time we partnered with Naturaleza Para la Vida (NPV). This program has now grown with community participation across borders and has driven the point that communities across borders can work for a common goal despite the tensions.



In memory of late Mrs. Svea Dietrich-Ward

with supporting the development of a patrol program, conduct public outreach, and improve governance and protection of the nature reserve. FCD's Park Manager and FCD's Naturalist Lenney Gentle, who participated on the session expressed a high level of optimism and enthusiasm to follow through with the recommendations.

At FCD, we believe that Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve should be rescued from its present level of threat inflicted by nearby community residents and be restored to what it was once. The legacy of Mrs. Svea Ward should be kept alive through the eyes of the wild creatures and the gentleness of the leaves that makes the reserve their home.

Scanning of Belize Chamber



3D Scanning team prepare to descend into Belize Chamber

The last explorers to go inside the largest known cave room, the Belize Chamber, in the Chiquibul Cave System was in 1999. By then the technology was not advanced as today. So how can we tell if the chamber still remains part of the top largest cave rooms in the world? To answer that question, we were thrilled to know that a group of British explorers led by Mr. Andy Eavis, was on an

assignment to conduct 3D Scanning of the largest cave rooms on Earth, and that the Chiquibul Chamber was on his list!!

Rapidly we established contact and in June, FCD's Karst Management team partnered with the Institute of Archaeology and Andy to make possible a three day expedition to scan the room. Working with Andy and his team was a truly learning experience for the FCD staff. He is known to be the human being that has discovered more land, all of it underground. In a record two day 3D scanning exercise, the task at hand was finished and they were back in town ready to take a flight back to England and ready to continue their scanning activity elsewhere in the world. For us, we keep our fingers crossed that the scanning activity will indeed place our cave room among the biggest on this planet.

Results of Game Poaching Produced

The results of the survey to assess impacts of poaching on game species communities in the Chiquibul Forest are now final. The document, which has been reproduced and distributed among key institutions is the second study of its kind that helps understand trends over time regarding the health of wildlife populations.

The study, undertaken by FCD's research team shows that a total of 1,022 individuals representing 24 species (14 mammal and 10 bird species) were recorded during the 2013 surveys, while in 2016 a total of 1,184 individuals representing 25 game species (16 mammal and 9 bird species) were recorded. All



Photo by PhD student, Lauren N. Watine and PTECS.

but five (5) games species (4 mammal and 1 bird species) recorded in 2013 were also registered in 2016. The study further shows a decrease in hunting which can be attributed to the dramatic decrease in illegal xate extraction in the area plus the complete cessation of illegal logging. We certainly hope that this situation remains and that wildlife numbers rebound into healthier populations.

E-Bulletin Funded by



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