

FCD Tracks

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32 Years of Core Conservation

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Macaw Season 2022 Ends



The 2022 Scarlet Macaw nesting season has ended with much success in the Chiquibul, thanks to a total of 13 volunteers that assisted in biomonitoring and the arduous

work of the FCD Research Unit. By the end of the season, in September, a total of 24 macaws made it to the wild. With a population of approximately 350 individual parrots found in Belize, these young macaws will improve the natural population.

The Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao cyanoptera*), representing Belize's largest parrot species, is locally endangered primarily due to wildlife trafficking and habitat loss. It is listed as a species of high conservation concern in the Wildlife Protection Act of Belize. The Chiquibul Forest is the key foraging and breeding habitat for the species in Belize, as a result FCD has systematically been documenting and conducting biological monitoring of the species for more than eight years. The conservation effort this year was made possible with the financial support from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, Nature Trust of the Americas, Harvest Caye Conservation Foundation, US Department of the Interior, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Fortis Belize Limited.

Junior Ranger Summer Camp Undertaken

The Chiquibul Jr. Ranger Summer Camp 2022 program was organized for a duration of 7 days from August 13th - 20th, catering for children between the ages of 10 to 12. A total of 13 children participated from the communities of San Antonio, Cristo Rey, Georgeville, Seven Miles - El Progreso, Bullet Tree Falls, Benque Viejo del Carmen Town, San Ignacio Town and Santa Elena Town in the Cayo District.

This 2022 summer camp program was an overall successful program having all participants developing a memorable, overwhelming and caring experience for the Chiquibul Forest. Instructors used an activity module, for children to discover the beauty of nature; learn how animals and plants co-exist and learn the importance of caring for the natural environment. The teaching method was centered along the concept of the 4Es: Engaging, Explaining, Exploring and Evaluating.

As a Chiquibul Junior Ranger, children participating are now able to understand the importance of having wild animal



and plants, the benefits derived from the Chiquibul Forest and methods to protect it. The Junior Ranger Summer Program was made possible with the financial support from the Belize Roadway Construction Ltd.

Itzamna Society Partnership

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.



On the 23rd of July a partnership agreement between FCD and Itzamna Society took place at Itzamna's

headquarters in San Antonio village. The agreement sets the tone for improving efforts in the western Maya Mountains primarily in areas of public outreach, training of rangers and open communication. The agreement is set for two years with the first step being the development of a working session with technicians from both FCD and Itzamna to identify more specifically the activities.

FCD has seen vital the development of this partnership, particularly since FCD now has Rangers at the Baldy Beacon area in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve and the closest non-governmental organization with a similar work is Itzamna Society. Itzamna has a co-management agreement with the Forest Department for the management of Don Eljio Panti National Park. The 12,600-acre park has boundaries with the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve.

Updating Institute of Archaeology

During the month of August, a technical session was held with staff from the Institute of Archaeology (IA). The session served to update IA about the work of the Karst Management Unit in areas of mapping and inventory. The Cultural Heritage Technician gave a power-point presentation, outlining all the key features documented so far from the Chiquibul Cave System, while the FCD Executive Director further explained the governance issues related to cultural affairs and management of the Chiquibul National Park. The presentation was well received by the IA Director and other staff present, where they reiterated the importance of the partnership with FCD since they have limited resources to cover the Chiquibul landscape and the wider country.

FCD has a co-management agreement for the administration of the Chiquibul Cave System since 2008. Based on this agreement, it has remained clear for FCD on the need to



maintain a good communication flow. At the session, it was agreed for a review and strengthening of the co-management agreement as well as an improvement in communication and training between both organizations.

Addressing Cattle Ranching



For the last five years FCD has been sounding the alarm of illegal cattle ranching activities occurring on the western

flank of various protected areas including the Chiquibul and Caracol Archaeological Reserve. This led to the development of a strategy three years ago, with eventual targeted actions undertaken by the national security agents which included the removal of fences, and an informational campaign in Guatemala. Despite these efforts, the cattle ranching activity has not been contained.

Together with the Belize Defence Force a new strategy has been developed to bolster actions in addressing this problem which is a primary cause of deforestation. FCD also met with personnel from el Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas from Guatemala on the 11th of July at the OAS main office to discuss among other things the matter of cattle ranching. The authorities in Guatemala, are cognizant of the challenges faced, since they have similarly been addressing these issues inside their protected areas for many years. The new strategy developed, requires a more targeted approach and inclusion of other institutions.

Improved Pasture Management



Continuing with the topic of cattle ranching, in the Vaca Forest Reserve the possibility of cattle ranching activities further moving inside the reserve by Belizean farmers is an increasing threat. This also can increase forest fire incidences. Due to this the FCD Extension Technician has been identifying a method to improve pasture management in the Reserve. A proper pasture management system requires that farmers

develop a proper pasture management plan with paddocks in place to have greater feed utilization and land use.

Cattle ranching activity on the periphery of the reserve is occurring for some years now and at least two farmers have extended their pasture lands inside the reserve. Because the reserve prohibits cattle ranching, the idea has been to contain these from advancing into the protected area.

In late August, an electric fence system using solar panels to generate the energy was instituted by the Extension Technician for two farmers. Once the cattle touch the electrocuted fence they are repelled, preventing them from wandering further. Based on observations, this method appears to work well and it is an effective method encouraged by farmers. The use of solar electric fences will, in addition, reduce the need for farmers to cut trees for fence posts. This climate-smart practice will ultimately increase the efficiency of land use and provide an opportunity for farmers to implement a proper grazing system for cattle, while reducing the need to deforest areas for pasture expansion.

Vision:

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

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On the 5th and 7th of July two combined linkup patrols were carried out in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. This marked a first of its kind, where natural and cultural resource managers met with Guatemalan authorities and villagers at the Belize-Guatemalan border in the Chiquibul Forest. The first combined linkup occurred in the area of Retiro, adjacent to the Guatemalan village of San Jose Las Flores and the second in the area of Valentin, Caracol Archaeological Reserve adjacent to the Guatemalan village, La Rejoya. Both La Rejoya and San Jose Las Flores are considered hotspot areas of permanent threat upon the resources of the Chiquibul and Caracol. FCD's Park Manager explained the regulations that protect the park. Guatemalans on the other hand expressed their desire to be more neighbourly and that they understood the impacts created by their actions.

For many years the Guatemalan Armed Forces and the Belize Defence Force conduct linkups but these ones undertaken



by FCD and led by Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas in Guatemala served as an opportunity to highlight the environmental threats and degradation. By the end of the exercise, the outcome was that this type of activity helps promote confidence building and opens an important dialogue with community members from Guatemala. This initiative supported by the GIZ Selva Maya Programme provides for three combined link-ups; however, more of these will be planned due to the positive results obtained.

Vaca Governance Planning



In August of 2021, the Ministry of Sustainable Development provided an endorsement letter for FCD to streamline its activities in the Western Maya Mountains. This included a review of the governance framework for the Vaca Forest Reserve. With this in mind, FCD has conducted three stakeholder consultation workshops, facilitated by Dr. Percival Cho. The first session took place on the 1st of July while the second was undertaken on the 8th of July with members of the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve, comprised mainly

of farmers. Thereafter on the 8th of September, the third session was attended by members of the Vaca Forest Reserve Working Group. The Working Group is comprised of the Belize Defence Force, Police Department, Fortis Belize Limited, Forest Department, Department of Agriculture and FCD.

During these workshops, an analysis of the key stakeholders, actual trends and challenges in governance have been discussed. The Vaca Forest Reserve appears to be a singular reserve in that it contains farmers within its limits and they have been left to operate under the pretense of using the land through integrated farming systems. This; however, has not been fully adopted by farmers. In the end the reserve appears to be further fragmented with illegal logging, forest fires and poaching of wildlife. The governance framework developed should serve to recommend a way forward, making FCD's effort in the area more assertive and lead towards a recovery of the reserve.

Combined Link Up

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

Upper Macal River Stakeholders



With over 900 meters, the Baldy Beacon area is the third highest point in Belize. This region contains the headwaters for 4 sub-watersheds. In this same region is

found Pacific Heights and other housing facilities, primarily owned by Mennonites. The housing facilities are more used for retreats and weekend outdoor activities.

On the 7th of July a session was held for the Mennonite owners, led by the Forest Department. During this session the Deputy Chief Forest Officer explained the diverse set of activities occurring in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve (MPRFR), ranging from logging, recreation and protection. He further described the work of FCD where the Rangers are based at the Cooma Cairn Ranger Outpost.

The Mennonite leaders expressed their support and presented a declaration of their good intents for the protection of the area, through the prevention of contamination of the water ways, prevention and combat of forest fires, reducing garbage pollution, respecting the MPRFR regulations and collaborating with the Forest Department and FCD Rangers.

Mopan River Communities Identify Projects

During the month of September, FCD and the Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance organized and facilitated a planning session with the participation of 5 community leaders, namely from Arenal, Benque Viejo del Carmen, San Jose Succotz, Calla Creek and Bullet Tree Falls. This session took place at Log Cabins with the aim of identifying and jump-starting river conservation activities. This session allowed leaders to brainstorm, plan and identify public participation interventions at their community level.

With the identification of community activities, the leaders were then invited to send small project proposals for their financing. Project ideas ranged from installation of drums, chopping and cleaning the riverside and planting of trees. The GEF Small Grants Programme is supporting FCD's



initiative in promoting public participation for protection of the Mopan and Macal Rivers.

AGM Announcement



All FCD members, friends and collaborators are informed that the Annual General Meeting is set for the 3rd of December, 2022. Venue to be confirmed on our social platforms. Renewal for membership can be done at the entrance door, similar to other years. Looking forward to seeing you all!!!

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