

Volunteer from Oberlin Joins FCD Team

Alex Goldberg from Oberlin College, Columbia University joined FCD's research team during the month of January. His interest to learn more about the challenges faced in the Chiquibul brought him to live and work with FCD's field staff for three weeks. During this time, Alex gathered data about the impacts of poaching on the game species communities, as well as learnt how to cook

Belizean tortillas under the forest canopy! By the end of his term, Alex wrote that he would recommend the program since it provides a "very authentic wilderness experience and helps understand the very real threat that our environment faces." To learn more about FCD's volunteer and internship program contact us at fcd@btl.net



In 2008, FCD with the Belize Defence Force and the Forest Department, launched the first conservation

FCD Expands Presence on Western Frontier

post in the Chiquibul Forest. This post named, *Rio Blanco* due to the river that meanders nearby, is located nearby the foothills of the Maya Mountains and directly facing Monte Los Olivos, a Guatemalan community. Over the years, this area is widely known due to the close contacts that have been made with Guatemalan nationals. The area is considered highly sensitive and dangerous. As a result the presence was predominantly conducted by security forces, but now that has improved.

Thanks to a small grant from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, since December FCD have a ranger presence at all times on that remote area. The aim of the joint forces presence at the Rio Blanco Conservation Post is to monitor the western flank of the Chiquibul National Park and serve as a frontline of surveillance against any encroachers. The reduction of milpa farming and illegal logging are the primary targets of this Unit.

Las Cuevas Improved

Since taking over management of Las Cuevas Research Station FCD has been busy learning and improving the infrastructure. This station is located 15 km from the main road. It is a paradise for researchers due to the diverse opportunities for conducting research and science based activities. Over the last six months, an assessment of the buildings and road conditions have been made; all the trails have been cleared and maintained; the visitor buildings have been cleaned and shined; stakeholders have been contacted and upgrading of the road has begun.

The station is fully operational and ready to serve national and international guests on location. We provide services of meals, accommodations, guides conference room, lab space and transportation. To make reservations contact us at fcd.lcrs@gmail.com

The Las Cuevas Research Station is found in the middle of the Chiquibul Forest Reserve which makes it unique. Not many stations in the world are found deep in the jungle, and once researchers and other visitors are there, it provides a true sense of living inside a botanical garden. Life there is peaceful



except with the frequent sounds of howler monkeys, wild birds and mammals.

River Conservation Efforts reviewed

communities travelled to the Chiquibul Forest to participate on the reunion whose aim was to evaluate the joint efforts conducted over the 2012 period related to the protection of the Chiquibul-Mopan-Macal and Belize Rivers. Results demonstrate that 90% of all the activities planned for 2012 were met successfully by the 18 community leaders.

The leaders attending the working session included from Melchor de Mencos, el Cruzadero, Santa Rosa de Chiquibul, Salpet, Cidabenque, La Polvora, Bullet Tree Falls, Santa Familia, San

Ignacio and Santa Elena. At the end of the session the participants also came up with a community river conservation action plan for the 2013 period. The action plan highlights the activities that each community will commit to achieve for the greater protection of the Chiquibul, Mopan, and Macal and Belize River watersheds.

FCD is grateful to the British Embassy for providing the necessary funding to prepare leaders to mobilize themselves in the protection of their water resources, and develop a sense of ownership towards this precious resource.

For more information contact:

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FCD Tracks

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Promoting Core Conservation

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Macaw Monitoring Ongoing



The 2012 report on the protection of scarlet macaws in the Chiquibul Forest has been completed. This season FCD aggressively engaged in the protection of these magnificent birds, through the use of

standardized and systematic monitoring of nests and by dramatically increasing surveillance and law enforcement patrols in the area totaling 399 man days of field work. A total of 10 active nests were monitored with a total of 23 eggs yielding 8 chicks. Of the monitored nests 30% were poached and 20% failed due to natural causes.

These results indicate that it is critical to have a strong and continued presence along the Macal and Raspaculo Rivers to reduce the probability of nests being poached. For this coming season BECOL has provided funds in order to help protect macaws through monitoring and research. The macaw project will start in March. In addition, FCD is partnering with Wildlife Conservation Society, based in Peten in order to improve our effectiveness. This organization has conducted macaw research and monitoring for more than 10 years in the Maya Forest of Peten. Anyone interested to join this research program contact FCD's Biologist at borisarevalo2008@yahoo.com

FCD's 13th AGM

Every year, FCD traditionally conducts the selection of new Board members. These members are selected from a pool of resourceful individuals who have a deep commitment to the mission of the organization. The 13th Annual General Meeting of FCD took place on the 1st of December where Board members were nominated and endorsed for the period 2013. FCD's Board is now comprised of Mr. Wiezsmann Pat as the President, Mr. Victor Alegria as Vice President, and the other Directors are Dr. Isabelle Durant Ipaquet, Miss Nidia Panti, Dr. Carlos Itza, Mr. Lenney Gentle and Mr. Ronaldi Martinez.

The special guest for this year's AGM was Ambassador Adalbert Tucker. Mr. Tucker has led a life of intense involvement on international activism and social entrepreneurship in the spirit of Marcus Garvey and Garveyism. Coming from a rural background in Belize's River Valley area known for mahogany heritage he began his activism with political action against the infamous 13 Proposals for Guatemalan takeover of Belize in 1966. Since then he has struggled, lived and worked in some fourteen countries from 1967 before returning to Belize in 1993. Mr. Tucker holds graduate degrees from Harvard University in Public Administration and from the University of the West Indies in



Economics and Management. He is a member of the *Chiquibul Think Group*, which represents a set of individuals that champion the cause for the protection of the Chiquibul forest.

Promoting the Chiquibul Caverns



The 55 kilometer length of passageways and the huge caverns of the Chiquibul Cave System (CCS) have been hidden away from humanity since the time of the Maya. It is estimated that the Belize Chamber is the biggest

cavern found on this part of the hemisphere. Yet these features have been observed only by a few people, due to the remoteness and ruggedness of the terrain.

So how could we make these caverns accessible for the average person? Thanks to the Rufford Foundation, a 7 minute video was produced with the intention of bringing home the uniqueness of this natural monument. Producing this video had its own challenges, since there are only a few still shots and video footage recorded of this extensive network.

The task of producing this video was handled by Carol and Richard Foster. The video describes the

beauty of the CCS and promotes the need for this cave to be designated a World Heritage Site. The video was launched on "Open Your Eyes" on the 16th of October on Channel 5 TV. FCD has also produced brochures and posters of this cave system.

FCD is thankful to Steven Alvarez, Tony Rath, David Bunnell and David Larson among others for the still shots. Special gratitude also is given to Dr. Jaime Awe, Director of the Institute of Archaeology who gave his expertise and knowledge on this subject. If you wish to have a copy of this DVD please write us at fcd@btl.net

Employee of the Quarter – Larry Santos

Larry who has been with FCD since 2009 is a symbol of humility, hard work and diligence. He is originally from Black Man Eddy. Larry is being awarded the *Employee of this Quarter* for his flexibility on the job, apart from all the other attributes he possesses. He has demonstrated his agility in climbing ropes to monitor scarlet macaws; drove the skiff and paddled with a small crew across the Chalillo reservoir; is a field ranger

conducting enforcement, and is a tractor driver – in times when we have really needed the assistance to do the job under torrential rains and muddy, inaccessible terrain. His durability and dexterity can only have come about due to his deep commitment to the conservation of the Chiquibul jungles. We take pride in having Larry at FCD and applaud his courage and dedication to the job. Well done Larry, Congratulations!!!



Wildlife Bits Fishtail Xate

The Chiquibul Forest, located in the Cayo District is a haven for the fishtail xate. Xaté, is the largest palm genus in the Central American region and according to the IUCN, it is among the world's most endangered palms, with an estimated 75% of the species threatened. Over the years xate has gained economic importance as an important Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) in Central America. The leaves of this species of xate are harvested and exported to the international floral industry generating increasingly important revenue. The leaves of the fishtail xate are used commercially because they



are attractive leaves that can last for up to 45 days after being cut, maintaining its dark green pigmentation. This makes them popular for flower arrangements. Many local people from Guatemala who extract these leaves, known as

xateros, have relied on the illegal extraction of these leaves as their main source of income. Unfortunately, so much leaf is collected that it has made a large impact on the health and population of the palms in the Chiquibul. The combination of over-harvesting and habitat loss has led populations in this region to becoming progressively more vulnerable.

Fishtail leaf has been over collected in the forests of Guatemala and now the same situation is occurring in Belize. These *xateros* generally earn less than USD\$5 a day; the middlemen and exporters benefit the most from this illegal harvest. Fishtail xate is a top commodity in the floral industry making it a challenging endeavor to maintain its survival in the wild.



Partners Spotlight – Asociación Balam



In 2011, FCD signed a partnership agreement with Byron Castellanos,

Executive Director of Asociación Balam, which solidified a working relationship between the two organizations. The mission of Balam is to conserve the integrated natural and cultural patrimony and the incorporation of civil society in management. Its focal area of work had been in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, but their work has now extended to the Chiquibul–Maya Mountain Biosphere Reserve, located on the southern region of Peten. In a relatively short period, Balam has developed a high level of confidence among governmental organizations, authorities and civil society in southern Peten which has enabled the development of an

interest among several stakeholders to the protection of the protected areas in southern Peten. The work of Balam and FCD is centered on a belief that the protection of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain ecosystem can only be attained through a shared responsibility. Thanks to the work of Castellanos and his team at Asociación Balam we are seeing a new light of care and hope for the protection of the biosphere reserve, which undoubtedly will have positive outcomes for the Chiquibul ecosystem in Belize. We appreciate the support and are proud to have a working program with this great institution.



Xate stocks at Risk

FCD's research team has been busy over the entire year collecting data that can help understand the viability of xate stocks in the Chiquibul forest. The study which concluded in November indicates that the most illegally harvested species in the Chiquibul Forest is the fish tail, where illegal harvesters have managed to extract over 14 million leaves worth US \$ 624,592.00. It is clear that the fish tail populations are being stressed by the illegal and unsustainable harvesting of leaves which may lead to a reduction in plant density that

will eventually lead to a commercial and possible local extinction of the species. Although data from this study did not allow to investigate the impacts of leaf harvesting on reproductive capacity some evidence was gathered that this is being affected by showing a low regeneration plant density and low fertile plant frequency. From these results FCD is now developing a practical conservation strategy to lessen and control illegal harvesting of xate within the Chiquibul forest. This xate study was made possible through a grant from CATIE's MAP program.

FCD Ranked “Very High”



its planning and management vision of protected areas. To quantify our ground efforts, *Wildtracks* used the co-management agreement signed in 2007 between the Forest Department and FCD as the baseline.

The co-management effectiveness review came about at a time when FCD had already reached its five years of co-managing the park (2007-2012). The co-management agreement outlines five thematic areas of work and 30 individual activities to be undertaken. Accomplishing the activities over a time span of five years would signify not only compliance but effective mobilization of management interventions.

The results are impressive and we are grateful to the entire staff for making possible this major conservation milestone. In the concluding statements, Zoe Walker of *Wildtracks* wrote “the

overall success of completion of the activities is rated at 92.5%. These ratings take into account both the use of adaptive management strategies in changing social and political environments, and the fact that some issues are beyond the control of the co-management agency.” On the 22nd of November another co-management agreement was signed between FCD and the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development. A copy of the full report can be obtained by writing us at fcd@btl.net

Individual categories*		
Category	Average score (Out of 4.00)	%
1. Management Planning	4.00	100.0
2. Protection	4.00	100.0
3. Research and Monitoring	3.43	85.7
4. Public Awareness	3.67	91.7
5. Financial Sustainability	3.40	85.0
OVERALL	3.70	92.5

GEF SGP Supports Vaca Farmers

The work in the Vaca Forest Reserve has constantly been producing many positive results. Thanks to the work of FCD's Extension Technician, Arnoldo Melendez, and the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve, the effort is proving to be one worthy of replication in other forest reserves. In simple terms, on this protected area, FCD has demonstrated that local people can be empowered to serve as custodians of forest blocks, while obtaining economic benefits in a manner that respects the natural environment. But this has all been possible due to the support given by institutions like the Global Environment Fund-Small Grants Program (GEF SGP). Last year,

in November the GEF SGP once more funded a one year project, which has enabled for the work to continue with farmers and beekeepers.

The project, aimed at working with 15 beekeepers and 20 farmers, does not contemplate expanding the work of the farmers into the reserve but instead it seeks to promote an improved use of the land so that land degradation is prevented.

Members of the Vaca Forest Reserve Working Group comprised of the Forest Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Cooperatives, Cayo Quality Honey Producers



Cooperative, GEF SGP, BECOL and the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve serve in the Project Oversight Committee. The first reunion has been held to update members of this project.



During the month of October *Global Humanitaria*, an NGO in Guatemala

Global Humanitaria Visit Las Cuevas

graduated over a 100 youth from the Department of Peten. Throughout a period of ten months these youth from rural and urban communities were exposed to various modules ranging from Governance and Youth Action to Environmental Studies and Community Development. They also went on various field visits. One of these field visits was held at Las Cuevas Research Station, a facility managed by FCD. A total of 13 persons from Guatemala joined us on a three day exchange program. Youth

members came from the communities of Santa Marta, El Carrizal, Naranjon, Barrio Las Joyas, Chaan, Boca del Monte, San Jose Las Flores de Chiquibul, and Poptun. The youth were marveled at the intactness of the jungle and pledged to be more conscious of the importance of the Chiquibul forest. Since then FCD has obtained new friends from Peten and have maintained the communication rolling and sharing ideas on how they can make a difference in their own communities.

British Embassy Donates Radios

On the 16th of November at the invitation of the British High Commissioner, FCD's Executive Director Rafael Manzanero met with the U.K Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth in Office, Mr. Hugo Swire. During this event, an overview of the environmental problems along the western border was given to all present including CEO in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Alexis Rosado, and

members of the Referendum Commission including Mr. James Murphy, Mr. Leslie and Ms. Lisa Shoman.

At this event, Minister Swire handed over to FCD a donation of 8 handheld radios and 3 base radios to be used for the field work across the Vaca and Chiquibul. With this donation, FCD will have a wider span and capability of radio communication.

