

FCD *Tracks*

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30 Years of Core Conservation

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End of Year Greetings from FCD



Photo by Tony Rath

The scarlet macaws, with bright red plumage made the perfect photo for this year's season card. Macaws are

rare birds and although their population is considered to be slowly growing in Belize with some 344 individuals, it has been a painstaking task to protect each of these birds. Every year FCD spends 7 months dedicated to the protection of these birds through biomonitoring and enforcement efforts. The macaws have become the symbol of the Chiquibul and we are thankful to all those that help us protect this species.

The work of FCD cannot be done without the support of so many staff, members, individuals, institutions and organizations like you. FCD takes this opportunity to thank you for believing and supporting the FCD mission in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. May the glory, splendor and magic of these jungles boldly remain and that 2022 bring you blessings of positivity, good health and good tidings in you and your homes.

FCD's fiscal year ends in October, thus by year's end we would conclude our reporting to our members. Sticking to tradition, our 22nd Annual General Meeting took place on the first Saturday of December. This time, due to COVID protocols, a limited number of guests were invited in person while a zoom link was sent to friends and other guests, inviting them to the event held at Chaa Creek.

During the event, the President of the FCD Board welcomed everyone, while opening remarks were done by the Executive Director. Technical and financial reports were made by the Programs Director and Finance Manager. The Guest Speaker was Hon. Orlando Habet, Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, who announced that his Ministry and the government, "will be establishing a full-fledged and detailed agreement that recognizes the government's role and obligations and FCD's participation and management responsibilities in what can only be a synergistic and mutually beneficial relationship with the ultimate benefit for all Belizeans now and in the future." He further informed that his Ministry, "is now prepared for the long-awaited

FCD's 22nd AGM Held



expanded role of the FCD to become more prominent at the landscape level and the concept of a Chiquibul-Maya Mountains Landscape Conservation Trust as pointed out on the Government #Plan Belize Manifesto, has to come to fruition this coming year. This, along with the drive to designate this area as Belize's second World Heritage Site must be foremost...." At FCD we are grateful for the confidence expressed by Minister Habet.

BRC and Conservation



Belize Roadway Construction (BRC) Limited has been busy upgrading and paving the A10 Road and the San Antonio Road. The area has become more accessible to the average Belizean, and now the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve is being enjoyed by many folks from far and near. This area has so many wonders, and provides multiple environmental goods and services such as water to many communities particularly San Antonio and Seven Miles

village. To understand more of these and the importance of this region, which forms parts of the Greater Maya Mountains, BRC Limited has partnered with FCD aimed at raising awareness among youths of four villages, namely Georgeville, Cristo Rey, Seven Miles and San Antonio.

FCD's environmental educator mobilized the FCD Environmental Youth Group to lead this effort. During the month of November, a total of 32 youths (16 males and 16 females) participated on field visits and environmental activities at Noj K'aax H'men Elijio Panti National Park. Sessions included Learning about trees, forests and the Maya Mountain Massif. These sessions were also intended to promote the importance of protected areas such as Chiquibul National Park, Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve and Don Elijio Panti National Park. Youth that participated were appreciative of the visit as they got the opportunity to visit the Noj K'aax H'men Elijio Panti National Park for the first time.

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.

The Raymond Milefsky Award, is an honor given by Durham University's Centre for Borders Research (IBRU). This year, FCD and Asociacion Balam from neighboring Guatemala were recipients of the Award, named after a long-time borders' expert with the U.S. State Department. The nomination was done by Mr. David Gibson, Founder and Coordinator of the Centre for Strategic Studies, Policy Analysis and Research based in Belize who wrote, "Faced with a situation of diplomatic inertia caused by Belize's protracted territorial dispute with Guatemala, and concerned about tension causing incidents resulting from interventions by Belize's security forces, including civilian fatalities, FCD recognized the need for a cross-border conflict prevention initiative and successfully engaged with its Guatemalan counterpart, Asociación Balam, to take action."

In granting the award, IBRU Director Philip Steinberg noted, "Borders, which are so often associated with tension and

Milefsky Awards FCD/Balam



conflict, can also be sites where communities come together to improve livelihoods and manage environments. IBRU is proud to honour the work that FCD and Asociación Balam are taking to build a foundation for peace and understanding across this transboundary region."

2021 Macaw Season Concludes



Another year of scarlet macaw protection has been concluded. This year a total of 18 scarlet macaw nests were systematically monitored during the 2021 breeding season in the Chiquibul Forest. By the end of the season, 17 chicks successfully fledged from natural cavities equivalent to a fledging rate of 65.4%. A total of 35.3% of active scarlet macaw nest did not produce any fledglings flying naturally into the wild during the season. Chicks found dead within

the nest cavity with no apparent physical injury accounted for 11.76% (2 nests) of nest failures, followed by nest predation (1 nest) and poaching (1 nest) each accounting for 5.9% of nest failure. For the additional 11.7% (2 nests) of the active nest, the chicks were extracted due to high probability of being poached and reared at an in-situ field laboratory. Between the 2015 to 2019 breeding season, we had managed to report 0% poaching of monitored nests but during the 2020 breeding season 14% of nest were poached and this season (2021) 5.9% of monitored nests were lost to poaching

In Belize, the range of scarlet macaws is restricted to the Chiquibul/Maya Mountains Massif, with an estimated population of 300-350 individuals. The scarlet macaw nesting habitat is concentrated to the riparian zones of the Chiquibul Forest (CF), where individuals primarily use natural cavities in emergent quamwood trees.

Like several of FCD's thematic areas, PACT in part subsidizes and makes possible this program that helps safeguard the Chiquibul biodiversity.

Preparing for Fire Season



2020 was devastating to the effects of forest fires, that destroyed over 8,200 acres in the Chiquibul and another 14,000 acres in the Vaca landscape. The Vaca Forest Reserve was the primary impacted area due to agricultural fires that engulfed large areas, affecting wildlife species, loss to farmers of over Bz\$100,000, and a cause of serious concern for human health due to the amount of smoke on the air.

Earlier this year FCD launched a public campaign among key villages around Vaca, and in Guatemala, the Municipality of Melchor de Mencos was engaged and supported. The efforts helped reduce forest fires in both Chiquibul and Vaca; however, the fires scars are still obvious and dominant across the landscape. An FCD report showed that in the Chiquibul Forest, 655.09 hectares had been affected from June 8th, 2020 to March 25th, 2021. While this indicates a drastic reduction in forest fires, the fire scars attained in 2020 had not fully recovered.

In preparation to the 2022 dry season, FCD with support from Mr. Ramon Pacheco of Programme for Belize, trained 15 local farmers in the Vaca plateau to open fire lines and use of equipment to combat forest fires. Preparations are also underway to activate a public outreach campaign in both Belize and Guatemala target communities with the intent of preventing fires and a binational taskforce to address forest fires has been activated. These fire components are supported by the British High Commission in Belize.

Vision:

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

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Forecastle Foundation Visits Chiquibul

For FCD, Forecastle Foundation (FF) is synonymous to karst management. FF is based in Kentucky, home to Mammoth Caves. FF have been financing FCD's Karst Management Unit for more than 4 years.

During the month of September, a team of Forecastle Foundation members visited the Chiquibul, led by Jerry Scrogam. Their visit was aimed at seeing first-hand the work of the Karst Management Unit and to understand the importance of the Chiquibul as a key biodiversity area. They were thrilled at the wildlife they encountered including tapirs, crocodiles, macaws, howler monkeys and oscillated turkeys. Their stay at Las Cuevas Research Station was educational, where several presentations were made explaining the challenges and opportunities in the Chiquibul for education, research and recreation. In addition, they visited a small cave to understand the richness of the cultural resources.



Karst team members showed the highlights of the cultural inventory that has been ongoing for several years and which is being consolidated into a technical report by FCD's newest staff member, the Cultural Heritage Coordinator.

Lobbying for Eco-Tourism



With the advent of a major road development up to Caracol, the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains and its treasures will become more accessible. This reality for some is good business, but for us we are concerned and worried that time is upon us and instruments and mechanisms will need to

be established urgently to manage visitation and keep vigilant on the many interests that are mounting.

For FCD, well designed eco-tourism ventures with their own carrying capacity and visitor impact monitoring frameworks can do well in pristine destinations, which is precisely what FCD started to exercise over 6 years ago through its Tour Operator venture named, Eco-Quest Expeditions.

During the month of November and December, FCD hosted Belize Tourism Board personnel, representatives of various lodges and the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations personnel, led by CEO Mrs. Nicole Solano with the objective of explaining our efforts in the field of tourism, our signature experiences and our aspirations for the area to be designated a World Heritage Site. CEO Solano, agreed that the vast area is so rich in natural and cultural resources and that she would welcome FCD's inputs regarding the establishment of proper mechanisms that can regulate and prevent compromising the sensitive destinations of the Chiquibul forest.

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

Police Department Visits Chiquibul



Earlier this year with support from the US Dept of the Interior - International Technical Assistance Program

(DOI-ITAP), and US Dept of State - Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (DOS-INL), FCD conducted a two-day trip for Prosecutors to the Chiquibul Forest. This time during December, different Units of the Police Department were hosted similarly.

The trip was aimed at sensitizing Police Officers about the threats affecting the Chiquibul and the key regulations and legislations that apply to protected areas. Presentations were made at Las Cuevas Research Station and field visits were made to the Tower Lookout, Caracol and the Chalillo Lake. By the end of the trip, Officers understood the significance of protecting the forests and got a more holistic understanding of the role of FCD.

Vaca Farmers in Action



When a community cares for its natural resources then there are more probabilities for sustainable development. This has started to become more apparent in the Vaca Forest Reserve where the Extension Technician has ignited interest among local farmers to rescue key areas degraded inside the reserve. The efforts of the dozen farmers have been to recover Cacao Creek by cleaning the creek from accumulating debris and planting trees along the 66 feet buffer.

To encourage the farmers to further protect the forest reserve, an exchange visit was made with farmers to Toledo to observe inga alley cropping and wild animal rearing. In addition, the Officer In Charge of the Cayo Range as well as the Deputy Chief Forest Officer visited the area and met with farmers. The farmers have steadily expressed their willingness to support protection of the reserve, and have made a call on the Forest Department to address the matter of new comers into the area who are not following the guidelines outlined by the Department.

The Vaca Forest Reserve is one of two national critical areas where the recovery of the land, forest and water is of dire need. The involvement of farmers in the area makes it complicated, but a new light of hope has been sparked among the local farmers that understand the importance of stewardship and are embracing the new philosophy promoted by FCD.

Rangers Hired for Bald Hills



For more than a year, FCD has been expecting the launching of the Cooma Cairn Ranger Station, and

now with an upgraded infrastructure, paid for by GIZ/ Selva Maya, the Forest Department is prepared to launch a program of monitoring and reconnaissance on that location of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve by January 2022.

With funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, FCD has interviewed and selected 2 Rangers to operate closely with Forest Department (FD) personnel. A preliminary visit was done in early December by FD/FCD to evaluate the housing facility and identify steps to launch the program. FCD's role will be to assist the Forest Department in watershed management and biodiversity monitoring, as well as fire monitoring and surveillance.

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