

## 20 Years of Core Conservation

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## 2019 Chiquibul Challenge Marathon



For the third consecutive year, the Chiquibul Challenge Marathon has successfully been held in the Chiquibul Forest. This time over 120 persons made their way to Las Cuevas Research Station on the 16th of March. The guests were welcomed by the FCD staff and the squawking scarlet macaws that made their presence known on the canopy of the thick green forest.

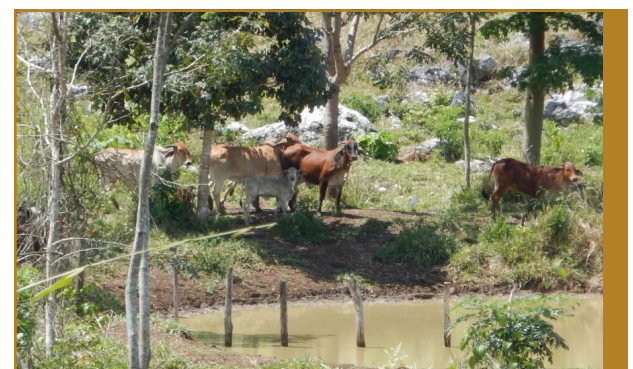
The crowd that gather for the occasion, and who stay overnight camping on the open field and cabanas is the largest group that the station caters annually. Excitement was felt on the air, as guests pitched their tents and underwent yoga and exercise drills in preparation for the marathon. 6:00 a.m. marked the beginning of the marathon. For full marathon runners the beginning was from Las Cuevas while for the half marathon runners, the start point was Guacamallo Bridge. The sun was blistering hot, though the forest canopy provided a relief for runners.

In the words of Dr. Isabelle Durand Pacquet from the Belize Wildlife Referral Clinic, who is the main person behind this event, she notes that “the Chiquibul Challenge Marathon is an event to learn about the Chiquibul, protect macaws, be healthy, and win a little prize.” Macaws were also winners, since as a result of the marathon, a donation of \$3,763.26 was handed over to FCD for macaw protection. Major sponsors to the event were BECOL, Kaana, Ministry of Health and Calico Jack.

## Cattle Ranching Strategy Developed

Four years ago, cattle ranching activity was first detected along the western flank of the Chiquibul National Park. In 2017 with support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service aerial reconnaissance efforts were expanded to cover a stretch of 90 kilometers of the western border to include 4 protected areas, namely Vaca Forest Reserve, Caracol Archaeological Reserve, Chiquibul National Park and Columbia River Forest Reserve. The observations made indicates that over time, cattle ranching activity has been growing in number and extension. By March of 2019, a total of 81 cattle ranches were detected inside the Belizean protected areas, most if not all developed by Guatemalan ranchers.

With bells of alarm ringing, the Ministry of National Security (Defence) recommended the development of a strategy aimed at eradicating cattle ranching inside Belize’s protected areas. Presentation of the strategy was made by FCD, chaired by the Chief Executive Officer in the Ministry of National Security, Mr. Felix Enriquez resulting on an overall consensus that actions must be put into effect urgently. The five-step approach emphasizes the need of informing authorities in Guatemala



and getting their support in order to reduce any conflict along the adjacency zone. This zone includes a 1 km east and west of the adjacency line that runs from north to south of Belize. Key players for executing the plan includes the Belize Defence Force, Police Department, Forest Department and FCD. The plan is to be implemented with support from the Organization of American States.

## Educators in Bolivia



FCD's first education campaign was ran in the early 1990's. At this time, the emphasis, like now was centered around the water resources. In 2006, as FCD entered into a co-management agreement with the Government of Belize, it was understood that environmental education had to be a strategy to generate local support. The methodology used, was one began by

Rare in the Caribbean islands. The Pride methodology had been introduced by FCD's Executive Director who worked with Rare for 11 years. However, FCD's two educators, Justin Pook Jr. and Veronica Avila had never obtained a formal and concrete training on the Pride methodology, yet they had been using Pride techniques over the many years. That changed, when in March both embarked on a two-week training in Bolivia. With the kind assistance and support from Paul Butler, Kate Mannle and Dulce Espelosin, their participation along with other 25 educators was made a reality.

The training was part of a capacity building program that prepared educators on how to develop and implement Pride campaigns. The course was funded through the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety-BMU, based on a decision of the German Bundestag with support from Desarrollo Alternativo e Innovación (DAI Bolivia) and Rare. PACT also helped finance FCD's participation.

### 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.

## Graduation of Arenal Villagers

Arenal is a small community located adjacent to the Vaca Forest Reserve. Most of FCD's efforts have centered in working with farmers inside the reserve, but without discarding the necessity of linking Vaca residents with the reserve. Women in particular felt it was important to give them an opportunity to participate in capacity building sessions. That said, FCD's Landscape Manager visited the village and developed a set of training needs. Thereafter in November initiated a series of community visits, planning sessions, training and practical methods on how to make soap and washing detergents.

The Welcome Remarks were given by the local alcalde, followed by FCD and GEF SGP National Coordinator, Mr. Leonel Requena who applauded the interest demonstrated by villagers. This was then followed by the handing over of certificates to each of the 24 villagers who participated on the agro-ecological capacity building exercises conducted by the FCD field technicians and Landscape Manager. Words of Reflection were given by Mrs. Nereida Ramos,



who represented the women's group as the Field School Promoter for the village. It is expected that the community group will further organize themselves and move forward in developing products for sale, such as lotion, soap and detergents. The GEF Small Grants Programme has been the primary partner of FCD on this community development initiative.

## Award Winning Journalist Visits LCRS



Mike Unwin is an award-winning travel journalist and storyteller. Author of more than 30 books for children and adults, he is also a regular contributor to

BBC Wildlife, Independent and The Telegraph. He stayed at Las Cuevas Research Station for three days visiting the Chalillo Lake, Caracol and hiked on the nature trails, in pursuit of stories to tell about the beauty of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. He also visited multiple other tourist destinations in Belize. His article on The Telegraph, published on the 20th of June, titled, *The tiny country teaching us how to save the planet*, reads in part, "Chiquibul's riches certainly do need safeguarding. Within the park's 415 sq miles (1,075 sq km) of pristine rainforest is not only a teeming biodiversity but also a huge limestone labyrinth, reputedly the largest cave system in the Western hemisphere, and the ruins of Caracol, Belize's largest and most celebrated Mayan city. Plans are afoot to make the whole region a World Heritage Site. I'm astonished that it isn't already."

## How many Macaws are there in the Wild?



In collaboration with Charles Britt from the Belize Bird Conservancy, FCD's Biologist, Boris Arevalo coordinated and undertook a much awaited national scarlet macaw census during a period of three days in May. Many volunteers came to the aid, making this exercise possible. Count results varied by date, with highest scarlet macaw

sighted at Red Bank, on the Eastern Maya Mountains.

The use of simultaneously surveyed variable radius point counts which were strategically located, allowed the Research Unit to estimate a minimum scarlet macaw population of 334 individuals.

Results show how variable scarlet macaw counts are across the Chiquibul Forest and the Eastern Maya Mountains but fairly constant throughout the count period. Food availability and nesting sites are known limiting factors. Local migration occurs from their main nesting site in the Chiquibul Forest where scarlet macaws are sighted year round but sighting frequency decreases between December to early March when high scarlet macaw activity is recorded on the Eastern Maya Mountains, especially at Red Bank. Migration to Red Bank is triggered by fruiting of *Sloanea tuerckheimii*, *Pera arborea*, and *Xylopia frutescens*, major scarlet macaw food sources but are absent from Red Bank between April to November, which coincides with the scarlet macaw breeding season in the Chiquibul Forest.

## Eco-Guard Program Launched

It has been widely known that private companies or landowners have large tracts of forests under some form of protection. The Belize Electric Company is one of the companies that administrates over 1,700 acres in the Vaca and Mountain Pine Ridge. These two areas are immediately close to the Chiquibul Forest. So, when BECOL representatives met with FCD seeking a partnership to protect their assets, it became an opportunity to work in support of forest protection along adjacent areas buffering the Chiquibul, thereby providing a monitoring presence and a shield of environmental protection.

With this initiative has been born the Eco-Guard Program. The term **Eco-Guard** has been prescribed for FCD personnel who are conducting monitoring and manning of entry points in forested areas. Our Eco-Guards are also



tasked to monitor human footprint activities and prevent illegal encroachments, as well as collect and analyze data for management purposes.

## Furthering the Youth Group Mission



With support from the British High Commission in Belize and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, an array and vibrant set of activities ranging from clean-up campaigns, public outreach, expositions and exchanges

were implemented which solidified the existence of FCD Environmental Youth Group and Todos Por Un Mundo Verde. However, with the conclusion of project outputs and having successfully been evaluated, the question was what next.

During the month of April, a reunion was held at the Organization of American States Office with executive members of both the FCD Environmental Youth Group and Todos Por Un Mundo Verde. The objective was to come up with ideas that could be used to formulate proposals for submission to the Canada Fund and other possible donors. Members from both groups presented their summary of accomplishments, identified their needs and highlighted activities that could enhance their capabilities and leadership skills. Since then commitments have been received from both the British High Commission and the Canada Fund for another year of financial support.

## BATSUB Donates to FCD



The British Army Training Support Unit in Belize (BATSUB) has known of the Chiquibul jungles for a long, long time. For any soldier, the dense jungle provides an excellent opportunity to learn combat under strenuous situations and sharpen team work.

BATSUB last year conducted a two-week training for our park ranger staff, and have since then forged a stronger partnership with FCD. The latest support came in April when BATSUB organized a special event at the British High Commission Office in Belmopan. At this event, Lt Colonel Simon K. Walton with High Commissioner Mrs. Claire Evans handed over a pickup load of gear and equipment consisting of jungle boots, backpacks, GPS, hammocks, t-shirts among other items. The equipment came at the right time, since our field staff needed proper gear to operate.

As a follow up to this activity, Brigadier Simon Stockley OBE, Head of DIO Overseas Region and Defence Training Estate worldwide, accompanied by Ms. Kate Harrison, Mr. Stuart Nash and Lt Col John White MBE of the British Army visited the Park Rangers at Tapir Camp where FCD's Park Manager explained the challenges faced and thanked them for the field gear donated to the FCD Ranger Program.

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The Belize Nature Conservation Foundation (BNCF) funded the project, "Monitoring Terrestrial Fauna Communities In the Chiquibul Forest", whose aim is to understand abundance and improve conservation of terrestrial fauna communities in the Chiquibul. As the project comes to an end, Mrs. Joyce Tun from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust and Mr. Lee McLoughlin of the Wildlife Conservation Society (Belize Program) along with FCD's Programs Director, conducted a one day field monitoring to assess project outputs.

The visiting team travelled up the Chalillo Lake on a skiff, then hiked one of the transects where they got a first-hand knowledge of the tasks. FCD field leader, Francisco Galicia, explained the observations and wildlife encountered when they monitor the transects. He also explained how these are recorded on the wildlife field forms. After two hours of hiking, the guests returned to the base camp for lunch

## BNCF Monitors Project



and then made their way back. Programs Director, Esther Sho narrates, "On our way back, there was a heavy rain and we all got soaked wet, including my bag, notebook, phone and other field items." As for the evaluators, they expressed their satisfaction of the project deliverables.

## Student Research in Vaca



For the third year, students from the University of Tennessee, with funds from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture of the U.S.A visited and worked with FCD and farmers in the Vaca plateau. This time the students

presented their findings of the last two years research. At the Field Farm School located in the Vaca plateau, students presented on water quality, tilapia farming, bats and intercropping practices. They also attended and presented at the 12th Natural Resource Management & Research Symposium which was held in the capital city of Belmopan.

During their stay, the students in addition, organized a field visit for farmers to the Ministry of Agriculture grounds in Central Farm to expose farmers to new agro-ecological methods.

The research conducted in the Vaca by students from the University of Tennessee followed the recommendations presented on the Landscape Management Strategy which encouraged participatory research methods involving local stakeholders with the purpose of contributing to knowledge building, protection, restoration and sustainable use of natural and archaeological resources within the reserve.

## FCD Programs

Protection &amp; Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education &amp; Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research &amp; Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring &amp; Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

## Over 500 Children Visit Chiquibul



A few years ago, it would have been inconceivable for primary schools to visit Las Cuevas Research Station and Caracol temples in one day. Road conditions were worse and safety was always a concern. That has changed. The last 19 km road distance to Las Cuevas is improved and the region is safe for visitation. During the month of May for Education Week alone, a total of 6 primary schools visited the Chiquibul National Park to learn about the features

of this park, its importance, the watershed features, karst features, the flora and fauna of the tropical broad leaf forest and the efforts to protect this natural environment. The schools that visited included Hidden Paradise Government from Duck Run III, Santa Familia RC from Santa Familia, Succotz RC from Succotz, Hills of Promise SDA from Benque, Los Tambos Gov't from Los Tambos and St. Martin de Porres from Blackman Eddy. A total of 525 students, 78 parents and 27 teachers visited the majestic Chiquibul Park during this period.

To facilitate and make the day educational, FCD provided schools with an agenda, map of the route to be visited and a questionnaire in anticipation of the visit. FCD's Environmental Educator joined on all the school trips, where he narrated and explained the natural environment and features observed along the way. He also was the Guide to ensure that the driver followed the right path safely.

Teachers, students and parents returned from the trips with a deeper sense of appreciation for nature and support for the protection of the Chiquibul Forest.

## Eco-Quest Expedition Up and Running

The Chiquibul Forest has many wonderful destinations that lay in deep secret. The region is wild. Nature abounds with sounds, smell and sights of wilderness. You can experience these through FCD's Eco-Quest Expedition tour operator designed to Save Wilderness through Adventure. Contact us at [ecoquestexpedition@gmail.com](mailto:ecoquestexpedition@gmail.com) or [fcd@btl.net](http://fcd@btl.net)



## Coming Up: 2019 Junior Ranger Summer Camp



FCD is proud to announce the 2019 Junior Ranger Summer Camp that will take place on the 4 to 10 August. Age group – 10 to 12 year olds. The Camp is funded by The British High Commission Office in Belize and BECOL. Contact us at [fcd@btl.net](mailto:fcd@btl.net) for further information.



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