

# FCD Tracks

The Official E-Bulletin of Friends for Conservation and Development  
March 2022, Issue #42

32 Years of Core Conservation

## In This Issue

Duke and Duchess Meet FCD Staff

Page 2

River Conservation Multiplies

Page 2

Preparing for Dry Weather

Page 2

GIZ Selva Maya Projects Launched

Page 3

New Bikes for Eco-Guards

Page 3

Exchange Program with Archaeologists

Page 3

Nature Defence Seminar for BDF

Page 4

Feste Films with Macaws

Page 4

CORE at Ruta Maya

Page 4

## New Headquarters for FCD



With this new year came the new headquarters for FCD. It had been a long-standing dream for all of the staff that operated inside a fallen apart building. Two years earlier the stage was set for seeking the funds and making the construction possible.

The elevated building constructed by Premier Homes located on the Spanish Lookout Road contains the colors

of the FCD logo that symbolizes the blue water and green forests of the areas where the organization operates.

Several individuals became involved in the design of the building, including Abel Flores from ASCON and Brendan Donaghue. The plans were laid together by Consultancy Designs and Construction while Juan Polanco became the consulting architect. With full approval from the Central Building Authority, the construction phase was finished by the end of the year.

The launching which took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, was marked with a ceremony attended by guests, staff and Board members.

FCD thanks all those that made this dream come true and in particular the funders including The Nature Trust of the Americas, The European Nature Trust, Lucky Dragon Company Limited, Belize Electric Company Limited and the Government of Belize. Much gratitude as well to Belize Roadway Construction and the Inter-American Development Bank for making the building operational.

## PACT Staff Visits Chiquibul

Since 2005 the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) has been supporting the conservation efforts of FCD in the Western Maya Mountains. The most recent project is a targeted investment aimed at instituting a landscape program for the Chiquibul National Park.

During the last quarter progress evaluation conducted in October 2021, PACT noted that FCD had attained a 24% reduction in agricultural incursions, 15% reduction in acreage impacted from gold panning, 47% increase in monitoring efforts and 67% increase in cultural and biodiversity monitoring. The results have proven that the impact of the investment by PACT is high. The program performance in terms of implementation was at 73.2%.

As part of the assessment of the project and with the goal of looking into another possible phase of investment, PACT staff conducted a field visit to the Chiquibul on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of February. During this visit the PACT staff were



able to visit Cooma Cairn, The Bald Hills area, Las Cuevas Research Station and Caracol Archaeological Reserve. A full report of project activities was provided by the FCD Program Managers.

## Duke and Duchess Meet FCD Staff



On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited the Chiquibul as part of their visit to mark her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. They first landed at New Maria Camp, then onward to Caracol where Dr. Allan Moore from the Institute of Archaeology gave them a tour. At the highest point of the Maya temple,

FCD's Executive Director explained the threats of forest degradation due to the Guatemalan incursions into the Chiquibul. After the Caracol tour, the Highnesses returned back to New Maria Camp where the British Army Training Support Unit in Belize toured them on their jungle survival program conducted in Chiquibul. After this, the Highnesses unveiled a plaque which highlighted the Chiquibul National Park as a Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC) Site.

The Chiquibul National Park was designated a QCC site by the Government of Belize in 2016. This initiative began in 2015 as a network of forest conservation programs throughout the 54 countries of the Commonwealth of Nations. By 2016, 16 countries had become involved, and by 2019 the number was 46.

On location were FCD's Board President, Park Manager and Park Rangers who explained how patrols are conducted and the challenges faced in the jungle. Prince William applauded the Ranger's effort, noting that they are the frontline in protecting biodiversity.

### 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.

## River Conservation Multiplies

With financing from the British High Commission Office in Belize a diverse and multiple community driven river conservation program has been ongoing since the beginning of the year in ten communities located along the Mopan and Macal Rivers. These communities include Arenal, Benque Viejo, San Jose Succotz, Calla Creek, Cristo Rey, San Ignacio/Santa Elena, Bullet Tree, Santa Familia and Duckrun II. The Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance (CWCA) has been the leading organization. In Guatemala, likewise the Asociacion Integral para la Conservación de Cuencas Chiquibul y Mopan (ASIPROM) has been actively working in clean up campaigns along the upper limits of the Mopan and lower sections of the Chiquibul River.

The level of participation from community members and organizations in both Belize and Guatemala has been enormous, providing a hope for a functional and viable river system. Without any doubt the effort must continue. The results of the clean-up campaign shows that people are still



dumping garbage inappropriately leading to the clogging of drains and contamination of the river. Alone in the area of Benque Viejo, CWCA's President, Mr. Garfield Murillo reported the collection of 117 bags of garbage.

## Preparing for Dry Weather



With the onset of the dry weather, FCD has started preparations in multiple ways to address forest fires. The forecast is that of high temperatures and the threat of forest fires are dire. Farmers in the Vaca plateau

have been trained on the aspects of fire management and preventative methods as well as how to use fire combat tools. Additionally, public awareness has been started among farmers and dissemination of materials is underway in the Vaca Forest Reserve.

Since fires also tend to occur nearby the Guatemalan/Belize border, the matter of fire prevention and combat has to be coordinated with counterparts in Guatemala. As a result, this has been commenced with much vigor through the creation of a Binational Taskforce. The second session conducted during the month of March has led to the development of a two-year action plan. The strategies defined are already being employed to reduce forest fires in Guatemala with the Municipality of Melchor de Mencos leading the way through an active public awareness campaign.

# GIZ Selva Maya Projects Launched



The Selva Maya is the tropical jungle region between Belize, Guatemala and southern Mexico. It is the largest contiguous tropical rainforest in Mesoamerica, that includes the Chiquibul National Park and Vaca Forest Reserve.

For more than a decade a focused attention has been given to the Selva Maya due to the richness of biodiversity and natural ecosystems found there. One of those giants supporting the protection and sustainable use of these resources is the German Cooperation for Sustainable Development (GIZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH).

Starting in March, two projects have been activated by FCD through the GIZ Selva Maya Programme financing. The first one seeks to reduce transmissible diseases in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain biocultural landscape through public awareness, best practices and amplification of risk reduction mechanisms. The second one supports the development and implementation of cross border efforts primarily in areas of watershed and forest protection through environmental education, public participation, joint patrols and creating the enabling mechanisms for joint cooperation. FCD is grateful and honored to participate in the Selva Maya Programme.

## Vision:

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

## Board of Directors

### President:

Mr. Mick Fleming

### Vice-President:

Dr. Elma Kay

### Treasurer:

Mr. Jorge de Leon

### Director:

Mrs. Valerie Woods Smith

### Director:

Mrs. Tanya Santos Neal

### Director:

Mr. Tony Rath

## New Bikes for Eco-Guards

For more than 3 years, FCD Eco-Guards have been based at the Chalillo, Mollejon and Vaca dams. Their main task is to protect the natural ecosystems and guard the hydro facilities. To do this Eco-Guards travel up to the facilities every three days and conduct frequent patrols on more than 1,000 acres of forest.

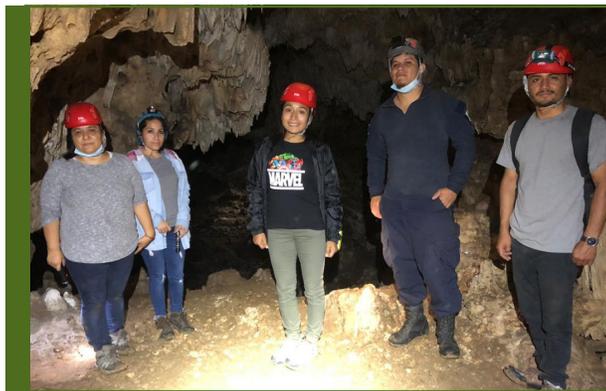
Since the inception of the Eco-Guard Program in the Mollejon and Vaca hydro facility, the road leading to the Vaca has deteriorated and with the rise of fuel costs, the recommendation has been to use motorbikes. With that said, FCD was thankful to the Belize Electric Company Limited for furnishing two HONDA motorcycles that makes mobilization of personnel more efficient.

The FCD Eco-Guards are primarily from the nearby communities of Benque Viejo del Carmen and San Jose



Succotz. Their presence on the buffer areas of the Vaca Forest Reserve also supports to monitor any human footprint expansion threat in the protected area.

## Exchange Program with Archaeologists



Guatemala is well recognized for the Maya temples of Tikal. But Tikal is only one of many archaeological finds across the Maya Biosphere Reserve located on the northern region of the Department of Peten. Their archaeologists are well known too, and thus it has been an honor for FCD to engage

with archaeologists from Atlas Arqueológico and Instituto de Arqueología, Etnología e Historia (IDAEH).

The contacts and coordination have been facilitated by Asociacion Balam who is the primary counterpart in Guatemala for FCD. Through this engagement, FCD's Cultural Heritage Coordinator has coordinated and undertaken two exchange programs with staff from Atlas Arqueológico that has led to the building of capacities of the Karst Management Unit. The expertise brought has boosted the enthusiasm of the FCD staff in areas of cultural heritage and have elevated their understanding on how to map caves.

Surveys in the Chiquibul Cave System shows that some 65 kilometers of cave passages are found, however, mapping of the cave with the view of documenting archaeological remains, primarily at the entrance of caves, has not been done. FCD believes that the entrance of Actun Kabal, which is the first set of caves require to be mapped since this may well become the main region for tourism activities in the future.

## 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

## Nature Defence Seminar for BDF



Since 2008 the Belize Defence Force (BDF) has been operating on a daily basis with FCD Park Rangers in five conservation posts. The impact of this collective effort has been obvious with the containment of Guatemalan incursions and the recovery of wildlife species. Not all is contained; however, and more targeted patrols are necessary.

The 2019 Joint Forces Protocol signed between the Ministry of National Security, Forest Department and FCD laid the foundation for a more robust joint enforcement effort and defined roles and responsibilities. The primary role

of the BDF is related to national security; however, in the Chiquibul, environmental security goes hand in hand. This prompted FCD to identify ways to sensitize BDF personnel on topics of Nature Security. With the support of the U.S State Department and U.S Department of the Interior-International Technical Assistance Program, FCD was able to produce a module on the protection of nature for the military forces.

Over 125 patrol commanders and troops have now been sensitized on the topics of Chiquibul biodiversity, Green Laws and Military environmental doctrine. The sessions have been held at Camp Belizario under the leadership of Lt. C. Burns and Lt. Duhaney. FCD's Park Manager, Derric Chan, Forest Department and BDF personnel have conducted the presentations.

On a random sample survey undertaken 100% of those interviewed felt that overall the information provided on the sessions were very good.

## Feste Films with Macaws

"Belize Uncovered", a documentary series is the brainchild of Paul Lister, Founder of The European Nature Trust. Paul explains that the informative and educational series will be a charitable production and that it will further inspire Belizeans to feel proud of their natural heritage along with an increased willingness and desire to protect it.

*Feste Film* is a local company with the assignment of recording the footage and preparing the production. They visited the Chiquibul National Park with the primary goal of documenting the scarlet macaws that have arrived from Red Bank to breed in the Chiquibul. The timing of their visit coincided with the period when macaws have laid eggs and parents are caring for the active nest. The Research Unit led by Francisco Galicia took the opportunity to explain the natural history of the birds and showed how the Unit conducts biological monitoring in the area.



The FCD Research Unit will spend up to seven months monitoring and caring for the macaws; until the time when all the birds fledge and leave the nests. With an approximate population of 350 individual parrots in Belize, the FCD Research Unit has an important role in safeguarding each and every parrot humanly possible.

## CORE at Ruta Maya



For all those that joined the Ruta Maya 2022, they must have seen individuals with bright yellow shirts making the plea to keep the rivers clean. That message has reverberated among individuals that form part of Caretakers for Our Rivers and Environment (CORE). CORE is led by Mr. Juan Polanco.

FCD became associated with CORE two years ago and since then have assisted the organization to devise a clear mission and vision, as well as their action plan for a period of two years. Through the financial assistance from the British High Commission Office in Belize, they have been able to put into effect their action plan by implementing various river conservation activities. In 2020, CORE were winners of the Ruta Maya Race but this time around they did not compete but instead joined the caravan and at each stop were helping collect the garbage that was left by the many fans of the race.

The Belize River has many issues related to pollution and contamination. This has stimulated the interest for CORE to establish itself as another watchdog organization relevant to the protection of the Macal and Belize Rivers. The work is enormous and they welcome any person to join them.

### For more information contact:

Friends for Conservation and Development  
Chi-Hah Street, San José Succotz, Cayo District  
Tel: 823-2657 • Email: fcd@btl.net • website: www.fcdbelize.org

### E-Bulletin Funded by:



U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF THE INTERIOR  
INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM