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## Caballo Conservation Post Inaugurated



In 2008 the first conservation post was created at Rio Blanco in southern Chiquibul. The objective of this conservation post was to control the agricultural expansion into the Chiquibul National Park. Since then the degradation has been contained and reversed. But other areas have suffered similar degradation, such as the Caballo region, located north of Caracol. Therefore, boosting a

presence was seen necessary. But doing this would not be a simple task. Overall, it took two years in the planning.

First, funds had to be identified, personnel had to be secured, the point was searched and confirmed, road access was marked and opened with heavy machinery, thereafter materials were moved in by Timber Homes Limited and construction was begun. The Caballo Conservation Post was finally handed over on the 31st of July. The event was planned together with PACT and had the participation of the Forest Department, Belize Defence Force, Bullridge Company and FCD among others. The guest speakers included Minister responsible for Forestry, Dr. Omar Figueroa and his CEO Dr. Percival Cho, CEO Enriquez in the Ministry of Defence and FCDs Executive Director.

This newest Conservation Post was made possible through the Chiquibul Forest Investment Initiative which seeks to establish a robust presence in three protected areas, namely Vaca Forest Reserve, Chiquibul Forest and Columbia River Forest Reserve.

## 2017-2019 Binational Action Plan

The number of activities conducted with Guatemalan counterparts have been multiple and diverse. Our primary partner has been Asociacion Balam, but other institutions have joined over time. This support has helped prevent further conflicts with communities nearby the western border and helped reduce environmental impacts in the Chiquibul landscape. But what guides this work? Actually, the actions undertaken are guided primarily by an action plan that is developed and executed by FCD and Asociacion Balam along with their affiliates.

Although the planning session took place some months ago, it was until the month of July that the two-year binational action plan was produced and disseminated. The plan outlines three main areas of work, namely strengthening environmental governance, community insertion in local productive activities and contribute to critical thinking among the young people for sustainable management of the natural resources of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. Activities are to be undertaken jointly by both Belizean and Guatemalan environmentalists



aimed at protecting the Chiquibul ecosystem which is shared by both countries.

The development of the forum and production of the plan was made possible through the project titled, "Implementing a trans-border environmental action plan", funded by the British High Commission Office in Belize.

## Queen's Baton Relay Reaches Chiquibul



The Queen's Baton Relay, is a relay around the world held prior to the beginning of the Commonwealth Games. The baton carries a message from the Head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II. This year, on the 3rd of August, the baton reached to the Chiquibul Forest

thanks to the coordination of Mr. Geovanni Alamilla of the Belize Olympics Committee.

A group of volunteers from Belize City joined on the relay as well as FCD staff and baton coordinators and caretakers who had flown with the baton into Belize. The relay consisted of running with the baton to various areas including Tapir Camp, Caracol monuments and Las Cuevas Research Station. The day started from San Ignacio at 7:00 a.m. and culminated at 8:00 p.m. This event was also an opportunity to unveil a plaque regarding the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, which is a project designated to create a network of forest conservation initiatives throughout the 53 nations of the Commonwealth to mark Her Majesty, The Queen's service and dedication as head of the Commonwealth. Belize, being part of the Commonwealth dedicated the Chiquibul National Park as part of this initiative in November 2016.

## Macro Invert Study Concludes

The entire Chiquibul Forest forms part of the Belize River Watershed. Within that are 2 main sub-drainage systems formed by the Macal and the Mopan. The division between the 2 sub watersheds splits the Chiquibul Forest roughly in two. In the Macal sub-watershed, there exists abundant surface drainage (small streams), while the Mopan sub-watershed has a large subterranean component. To understand any water quality changes over time on these sub-watersheds, FCD's research unit conducted the second freshwater macroinvertebrate study.

In this study 38 sampling sites were distributed covering four sub-basins in the Chiquibul Forest. The results show that macroinvertebrate richness was almost similar to that of the 2014 study but abundance increased by 2.13 times during 2017. The SIGNAL 2 Site Scores plotted as a function of family richness indicate good water quality of the sampled streams but a closer analysis of species composition by sub-basin indicates that the Southern Chiquibul River is undergoing a change in species abundance and diversity.



This change may be attributed to gold extraction (legal and illegal), which is altering species composition favoring more pollution tolerant macroinvertebrates.

Overall, results indicate healthy lotic (flowing waters) ecosystems but it is important to continue conducting macroinvertebrate assessments using the same sampling sites in order to understand if macroinvertebrate community changes are natural or human induced.

## Macaw Season 2017 Ends



Poaching is a major threat to the survival of Scarlet Macaws in Belize. In 2011, poaching rate was a major threat to the survival of the macaws which led up to 89% of the chicks being lost, but intense management and conservation strategies were implemented reducing poaching to an average of 35% of nests lost from 2012 to 2015, while 0%

of monitored Scarlet Macaw chicks have been poached from 2015 to 2017. This season, for the first time two poachers were captured and successfully prosecuted. Although this is good news, we fear that other nesting sites are being targeted by poachers from Guatemala.

This year, although the breeding season started slow, a total of 9 breeding pairs were reported laying 24 eggs of which 11 chicks hatched and 8 of those chicks were able to fledge successfully into the wild. Three of the chicks were lost due to natural predation. The 2017 six-month bio-monitoring effort conducted by FCD's research unit and park rangers was made possible through the support of the Belize Electric Company (BECOL), US Department of the Interior, Belize Wildlife and Referral Clinic and the Forest Department.

## FCD and Business Sector Partner



The Toyota Chiquibul Challenge took place during the month of May with a unique blend of objectives, including that of a fundraising drive, generating awareness about the Chiquibul forest and creating a great adventure in the Chiquibul wilderness for Toyota owners.

In September, FCD saw the result of the fundraising campaign, when Belize Diesel and Equipment Company Limited (BDE), through Operations Manager, Mr. Ryan Marin handed over the keys of a brand new 2018 Toyota 4x4 pickup. The pickup was provided to FCD with the aim of assisting in mobilizing staff.

FCD is extremely grateful to the 21 institutions and businesses that helped make this donation possible. These companies include: BDE, RF & G Insurance, Belize Bank, Radisson, PACT, BullRidge, Prudential Management Firm, MNM & Hardware Service Station, Femagra, Banana Enterprise, Sea Charters Limited, Valley of Peace, Belize Tourism Board, Belize Telemedia Limited, Chaa Creek Inland Expeditions, Northern Fishermen Co-operative Society Ltd, Courtney Coye LLP Attorneys at Law, Cisco Construction Limited, G.A. Roe and Sons Ltd, Benny's and McNab Visual Strategies.

## Vaca Farmers Visit Peten

FCD has been centering its community development efforts in building the capacity of the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve. Twenty-three farmers constitute the registered group, most of whom are inhabitants of the buffering communities of Arenal, Benque and Succotz. As part of the exposure to new ideas and experiences FCD has undertaken two visits with farmers to Peten, Guatemala. With support from ACOFOP (Association of Forestry Communities of Peten), the farmers have been able to observe the manner that communities have become immersed in the sustainable use of their forest resources in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Farmers have observed agroforestry and agroecological model farms, tilapia farms, women involvement mechanisms and have been exposed to community organizational and governance experiences.

But the exchange visits does not end only with the trip. Farmers are tasked with exploring the applicability of the techniques observed and develop possible scenarios at their farm level. Once these are practical, FCD has been engaged



subsequently in helping farmers develop these ideas into pilot projects in the Vaca Forest Reserve. Funds from the GEF Small Grants Programme, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the British High Commission Office in Belize are currently being used to subsidize the development of the projects. In the end, the primary objective of the support to farmers is to develop a community stewardship model based on best principles of sustainable management and utilization of the natural resources inside a protected area.

## FCD Youth Group Rising



The Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG) was started in November 1989. This group eventually evolved into FCD. As we have grown in extent and composition it has firmly been recommended in our strategic plan that the youth engagement and participation should always be a part of FCD. With this in mind, FCD's Environmental Educator, Mr. Justin Pook was tasked with

bringing back this group. To do this he visited the nearby high schools and identified key individuals to support him in coordinating the body of youth. It did not take long for the youth group to be activated.

The intent of the youth group is to get young people involved in environmental action and create a strong environmental ethics among its members. Like the YEAG of the 1980's, we expect that by the outdoor exploration and natural history experiences obtained by the youth, they will be able to understand and admire the beauty of Belize and generate a love for the land.

FCD congratulates the members that form the interim Executive Committee, these are: Mr. Bay Rivas, Mr. Dennis Reid, Miss Stephanie Cunil and Miss Valerie Pantl. The membership is open and anyone interested can learn more of the group through the youth group Facebook account.

## 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

## Taiwan Ambassador Visits Chiquibul



A helicopter had not landed at Las Cuevas Research Station in many years. That changed in September when the Taiwanese Ambassador to Belize, Mr. Charles Liu and his staff, accompanied by the Commander of the Belize Defence Force, General David Jones visited the

research station, located in the heart of the Chiquibul. The objective of the visit was to observe the majestic Chiquibul forest, the Chiquibul caverns and make a handing over of a donation to FCD which would be used for protection of the Chiquibul Cave System.

For the third year in a row, the Council of Agriculture and Forestry Bureau of Taiwan has approved FCD's proposal, that has enabled us to enhance protection of the scarlet macaw, improved FCD facilities, and this year will strengthen the capabilities of the karst management unit.

FCD is thankful to the Council of Agriculture and Forestry Bureau of Taiwan and the Republic of China (Taiwan) Embassy for their ongoing support in building the capabilities of FCD.

## CCS Working Group Reconstituted

The Chiquibul Cave System contains over 55 kilometres of passageways; however, much is yet to be explored and mapped. As we expand our knowledge of the area, FCD's Karst Management Unit requires technical guidance and support to ensure that we do the management appropriately. With this in mind, the Chiquibul Cave System Working Group was developed over three years ago. The members of the group consist of cave experts, tourism experts and academics. The reunion held this October, led to the selection of a new Chair, namely Mr. Gliss Penados. Mr. Penados is a tour guide, cave expert and is a longstanding member of FCD.



*Photo by David Larson*

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