

Friends *for* Conservation and Development

Promoting Core Conservation

ANNUAL REPORT 2015





The 16th Annual General Meeting event of **Friends for Conservation and Development** is made possible through the full sponsorship of **San Ignacio Resort Hotel**

Cover photo: Milky Way observed from the Natural Arch in the Chiquibul by Tony Rath



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

I take great pleasure to address you as friends; friends bound by a commitment to conservation and sustainable development. This year as we engaged in the process of strategic planning it became clear that FCD could not have a better name. As we come to the end of another very successful year I wanted to reflect on the significance of this name as a way of rooting and routing ourselves.



FCD manages through a co-management agreement the largest protected area of Belize, a truly amazing and important area for Belize. This area contains one of the most important watersheds – encompassing both the Mopan and Macal rivers that go on to form the Belize River. We are connected to the Chiquibul in so many ways. If you have taken a dip in any of the mentioned rivers, had a couple of Belikin’s or everytime you turn your lights on, then you definitely have something to thank the Chiquibul for. However, the Chiquibul Forest, is under threat and this is where FCD is a hero.

FCD is a small organization based in Succotz doing amazing work under the leadership of the Executive Director. My relationship to FCD goes a long way - to the beginning actually. FCD started as the Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG), a group of kids from Succotz who aimed to keep the village and the river clean; loved nature; who through their relationship with the Chiquibul area and the learning space it provided developed not only strong friendships but a strong desire to make Belize a better place. I can still remember having the most profound conversations about the challenges of Belize from environmental destruction, the erosion of community to corruption. I remember writing our first mission statement, building our little office out of scrap lumber and hiking in the Chiquibul.

The ED always makes a point of embarrassing me with my big back pack, a machete half my size, a Rambo knife and a head-band around my head to complete the Rambo picture. I was ready to save the rainforest! This was FCD in the beginning. Young people who loved nature and wanted to make a difference in their community. I recently re-joined FCD as a Board member and it is clear that some things have changed. To begin with, I no longer try the Rambo thing. Those kids grew up, YEAG became FCD, more people joined in and FCD is a professional organization and has taken on bigger responsibilities. It is an organization respected by people across Belize for its integrity and its heroic spirit of protecting the Chiquibul. Derric Chan says that people that come in contact with FCD “get infected by the FCD bug”. That bug is the youthful spirit of dreaming a better Belize and a commitment to make a difference that has been a constant at FCD.

This year, we spent countless hours trying to write our vision statement. In the end we coined the statement: “Healthy terrestrial ecosystems that are sustainably managed for Belize and the region.” It sounds huge. Yes it is huge! But, hey that is what heroes undertake. That is what the FCD spirit is about and we welcome you to join and stay with us to meet that bold aspiration and vision!!!

Dr. Filiberto Penados



Photo by Tony Rath

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are ending this year with a strong, positive outlook. Often we are asked about the status of the Chiquibul Forest and how FCD is doing in addressing the protection of the Western Maya Mountain Massif. In a nutshell, we feel confident that we are learning and putting into action interventions that are proving to help contain the advancement of destruction in this forest. Over the last 10 months, after the graduation of FCD park rangers – apart from being a momentous occasion – we were poised to set in pace a robust program of presence across the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain range. These young people from across Belize are making a difference in the field and elevates our optimism. The common words used in the field includes: SMART patrols, tactical interventions, razor sharp focus and team building. These concepts hit at the heart of professionalizing the FCD effort to new limits.



But maintaining this dynamism, presence and effect on the ground depends on the support from other institutions and the financial backup. FCD's management effectiveness score, after five years of park management, puts us at "fairly successful" and we recognize that multiple challenges remain and perhaps new ones are coming to occur. It remains clear to us, therefore, that protecting vast forest areas requires not only "boots", but instead "good boots" on the ground. We must elevate then to new limits. Safeguarding the Chiquibul must be done in a concerted, coordinated effort and with a high level of focus on the objective. Clearly to us the objective is to reclaim the integrity of the Chiquibul Forest and safeguard this priceless heritage for all Belizeans.

Although we feel confident of the results and breaking new grounds, essentially we also understand that we must improve on our tactics, platforms and strategies. 2016 will see us advancing the recommendations of the next five year strategic plan, instituting an enterprise development program and strengthening the institution with a more proactive Board, more specialized training, and capabilities for the FCD staff. We also anticipate that key hubs of support will be built abroad in the United States and Europe to source a new gamut of ideas and support streams.

Back at home, our public outreach must be cemented as another strong pillar of FCD. To do this the Pride campaign, "The Beauty of the Chiquibul" should swing across the entire country building a national support program using the macaw as the Chiquibul mascot. We also anticipate advancing on the areas of karst, landscape and forest management.

But this dynamism and vision to forge forward is fortified by the support from the 2014 Ranger Telethon supporters, colleagues, friends and donor institutions. We remain grateful to all of you and we expect to keep on the pace and rhythm.

We remain attentive, as an avid service institution to this beautiful country of ours.

Rafael Manzanero



Partnerships

FCD is honored to have worked with more than 80 partner institutions from Belize and abroad. From the private sector and community based organizations to government and international organizations, they have made our work more effective and result oriented.



Governmental Agencies

- The Forest Department
- The Belize Defence Force
- The Police Department
- Immigration Department
- Institute of Archaeology
- Agriculture Department
- Department of Cooperatives
- Department of the Environment
- The Mining Unit
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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



- Ministry of National Security
- National Protected Areas Secretariat
- Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and SD
- U.S Department of the Interior
- U.S Fish and Wildlife Service
- European Union
- British Embassy
- UK-Aid DFID/DEFRA
- Ministry of the Environment (Guatemala)
- Municipality of Melchor de Mencos
- National Protected Areas Council



(Guatemala)

- Protected Areas Conservation Trust
- National Association of Village Councils
- Commonwealth of Municipalities of Southern Peten
- Ministry of Agriculture (Guatemala)
- Belize Agricultural Health Authority



Community Based Organizations



- CMMB Watershed Alliance (Belize)
- Grupo Integral para Conservación de las Cuencas
- San Jose Succotz Village Council
- FCD Youth Environmental Group
- Toledo Partners for Conservation & Development
- Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve
- Caracol



Non-Governmental Organizations



- Belize Nature Conservation Foundation
- Cayo Tour Guide Association
- Centre for Strategic Studies, Policy Analysis and Research
- Asociación Balam
- Global Humanitaria
- XMET
- Engaged Scholarship and Service Learning



- Foro de Justicia Ambiental
- Creation Care Studies Program (CCSP)
- Hagen Avicultural Research Institute
- Rare Species Recovery Foundation
- Wildlife Rescue and Referral Center
- The Wildlife Institute
- The Belize Zoo and TEC
- WildTracks
- Scarlet 6



International Organizations

- United Nations Development Program
- Food and Agriculture Organization
- Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh
- Western Kentucky University
- Wildlife Conservation Society
- American Adventure Sport
- GEF-Small Grants Program
- Summerlee Foundation
- Concentric Advisors
- Survival Wisdom
- Restoring Eden
- Lighthawk
- IUCN



Private Sector

- Mountain Equestrian Trails
- Belize Magnificent Tour
- Via Venture Foundation
- Lions Adventure Tour
- Pine Lumber Company
- Bull Ridge Company
- Blancaneaux Lodge
- Idealab Studios
- BECOL
- BCSL

Other Sectors

- Organization of American State
- Godfrey and Valerie Smith
- University of Florida
- Virginia Tech
- Channel 5 OYE
- Channel 7
- Amandala
- The Reporter
- Natural History Museum
- Sewanee University



A Positive Outlook

Protecting the Chiquibul Forest remains the central focus of FCD's effort in the Western Maya Mountains. This year, after finalizing the implementation of the five year Chiquibul National Park management plan, the assessment concludes that FCD did fairly well. During this five year phase, we have understood the intricate web of factors that affect the areas where we work and the effort necessary to reclaim the integrity of this forest. So a "fair" ranking does give us a clear idea of what more we need to do.

In November of 2014, after the untimely death of Special Constable, Danny Conorquie, FCD revisited its environmental security action plan, hired a dozen more rangers and initiated a formal ranger training. Likewise, the national security forces increased their efforts in the region. This heightened presence and new installed infrastructure helped reduce the human footprint expansion, demonstrated by a reduction of illegal logging and xate extraction. For us, however, it is clear that the situation is always a dynamic one and we cannot feel confident that it will remain under control, unless the efforts are sustained and expanded.

FCD continued this year embracing partnerships with Guatemalan institutions and reinvigorated its public outreach. FCD's partner, Asociacion Balam has strengthened its enforcement, community development and policy advocacy actions aimed at instilling governance in Southern Peten.

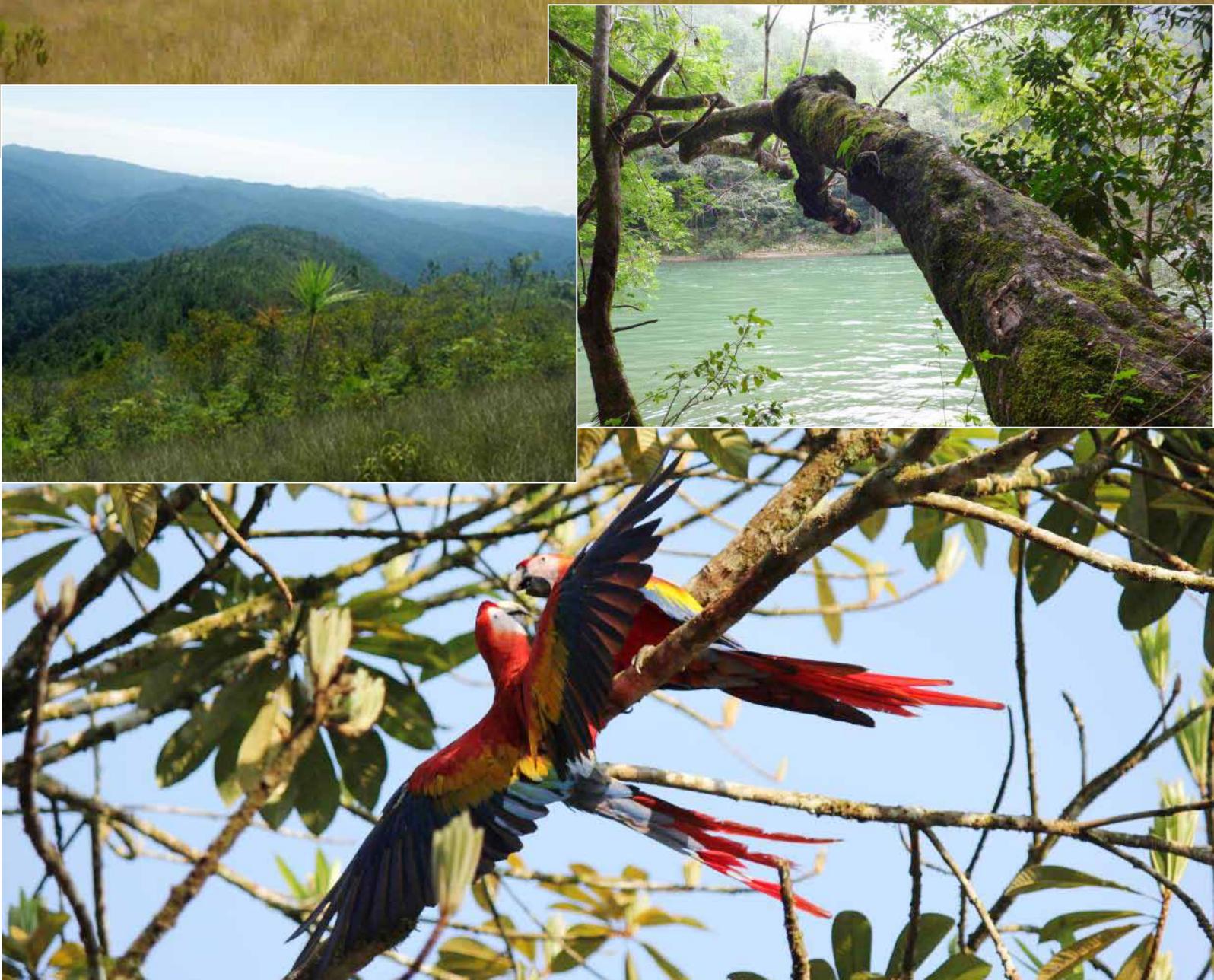
Karst exploration and our research program have also gone steam ahead this year, giving us a better understanding of the state of the natural and cultural resources of the Chiquibul. The data collected, directs us to other key interventions needed and the resources required to make long lasting impacts.

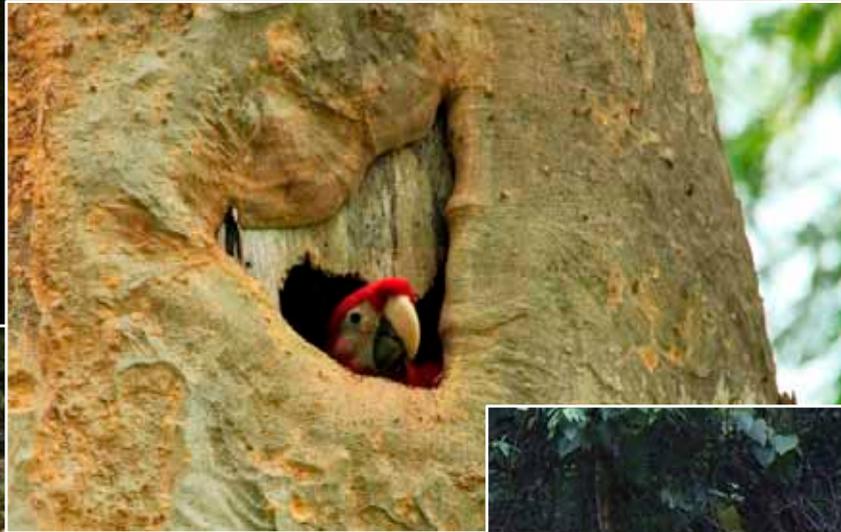
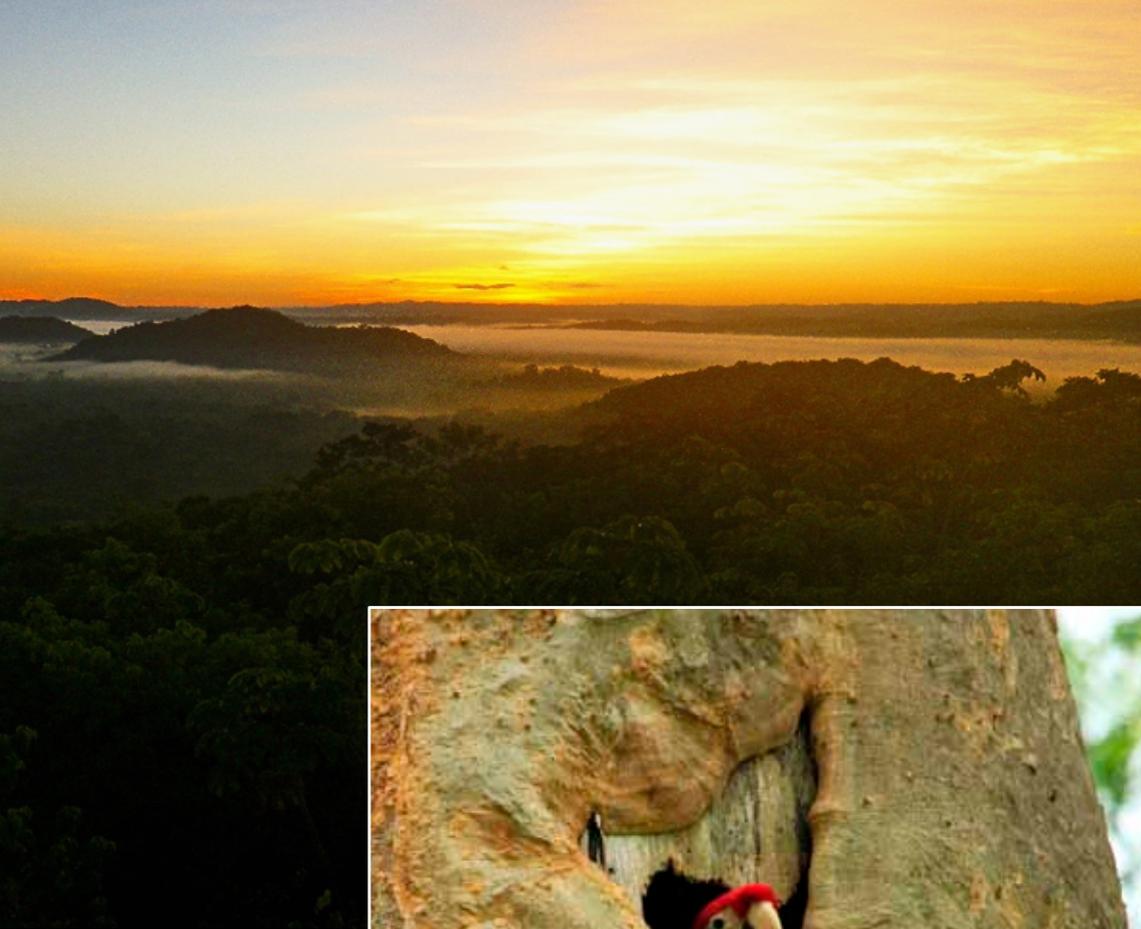
The 2014 Telethon was extremely instrumental in helping us raise the bar in terms of monitoring and surveillance in the Chiquibul. Likewise the support from funders and other donors were key to the success of this year. This remarkable support has enabled us to get closer in meeting the mission of the FCD.



FCD's Purpose

Conserving Biodiversity and Promoting
Human Development





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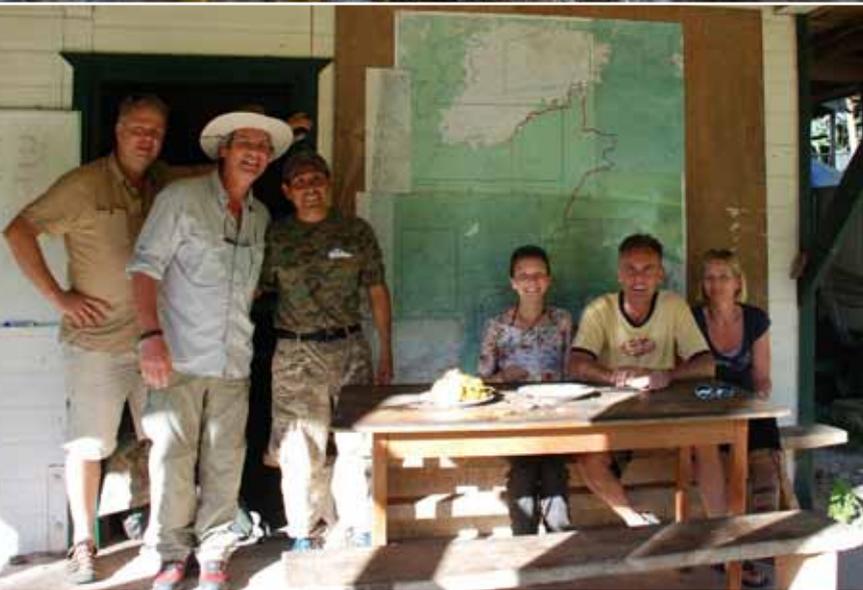
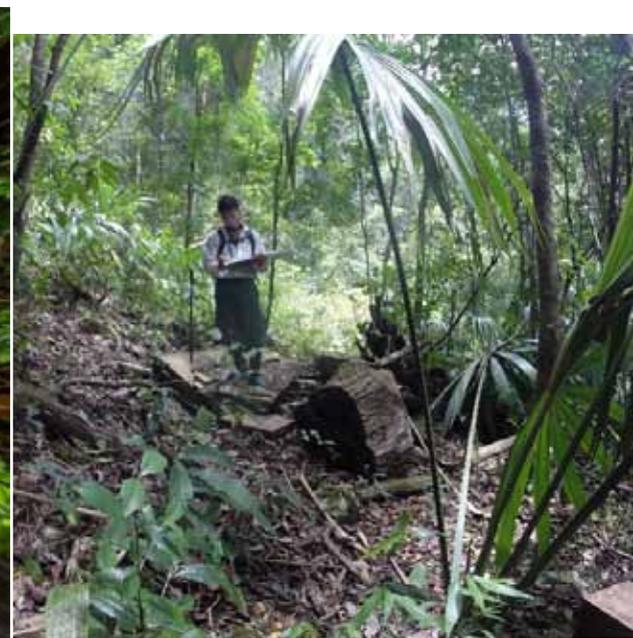


FCD's Effort

Undertaken with deep Passion and Commitment



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Forest Protection



Our projections at the beginning of the year contemplated the movement of 24 park rangers across various conservation posts. These conservation posts, based on our **Environmental Security Action Plan**, were key to deterring incursions and

encroachments along the 43.5 kilometer span of the parks western border. The Prime Minister, a year earlier had confirmed activation of three new conservation posts that would be set on strategic locations. So in total, a deployment of staff would occur across 6 conservation posts. In the end, however, we hired 18 rangers and 4 conservation posts were maintained. Two conservation posts have not been built. The **telethon funds**, the Protected Areas Conservation Trust and the Food and Agriculture Organization were key in helping us expand the ranger effort from six to eighteen. An impressive 115 persons applied to the 12 available ranger posts.

The year began with an intensive course for the entire ranger unit that took them on new areas of learning including first aid, skills at arms, special constable, natural history and ropes. Thus began a new era for FCD. We realized that the protection of the Chiquibul forest required a sense of commitment, loyalty and determination, and we could see these attributes in the field staff. The challenge now remains in sustaining this effort, with a triple elevated cost.

Chiquibul is a rugged and distant area to manage. **Mobilization** itself is costly and maintenance is always elevated. Thanks to the CARS I Program of the US Embassy in Belize, some of the costs of maintenance was obtained, and with the support of the U.S Department of the Interior and subsequently the US Fish and Wildlife Service the Park rangers started the use of SMART as a tool for effective patrolling and documenting conditions in the field. FCD's partner institution, the Wildlife Conservation Society, provided training and continued giving technical advice to the FCD field technicians.



Rangers throughout the year were anchored in the conservation posts together with Belize Defence Force and Special Patrol Unit personnel. Special patrols were also conducted to address milpa farming, provide security support to research personnel and protection of macaws from pet traders. The presence has helped highlight Belize's position against incursions, and have reduced the frequency of areas deforested and number of macaw chicks being poached.

Although at this stage, we consider that some **environmental threats** are under better control such as illegal logging and xate extraction, the environmental crimes are seasonal and thus are dynamic in nature. In the latter part of the year illegal activities tend to increase. Macaw poaching and milpa farming are highly seasonal coinciding with the breeding period for macaws and the dry weather for preparing farmlands. Rangers were, therefore, moved across the landscape this year to address specific threats. Whilst doing so, a vast amount of information has been gathered, poachers have been detained and a constant **adaptive planning** scheme is underway. As we enter the new-year, FCD is preparing further training with the vision of making FCD's team a **professional team** of leaders in environmental protection. Given the challenges, we cannot aim for less.

Karst Exploration



Karst exploration is a relatively new program at FCD. For some time now, it had been difficult for FCD to access funds for the activation of a unit that could specialize in exploring and managing the Chiquibul Cave System but with PACT funds this became a reality last year.

The first expedition, coordinated by the **Chiquibul Sentinels**, comprised of avid explorers such as Jim Bevis and Tony Rath joined the Karst team on a scientific exploration of the Nohoch Chen sinkholes. This two week project culminated in the collection of plants, primarily epiphytes that are yet being identified and catalogued through the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. The next expedition was up the Chiquibul River, Natural Arch and Solitaire Valley seeking to photograph the magic of the Chiquibul and explore caves in that region. The reports coming from that expedition indicates of huge trees and caves never visited before after the Mayas left them abandoned with altars, offerings and artifacts. The team also documented the debris of what is considered to have been another **Natural Arch** that stood guarding the Chiquibul River.

Most of time of the karst management team was spent documenting sinkholes and caves that are part of the Chiquibul Cave System. Since the time of Thomas Miller, in the 80's when he did a mapping of the system, there have been scarce research in the area. With new technology now available, it is expected that a more precise mapping can occur that will help further the cause for nomination of this huge and spectacular feature as a World Heritage Site.



Recognizing our limited expertise, FCD partnered with XMET's Director, David Larson and Dr. Jason Polk of the Western Kentucky University to enable the team to learn more about karst management and mapping. The team since then have practiced mapping some features of the cave system that is known to contain more than 55 kilometers of cave tunnels. As the team explores further the system, it is evident that karst management has to be operated more from a landscape level, which opens other disciplines using watershed as the central theme. Fortunately enough the Chiquibul National Park contains the Chiquibul headwaters and it is only appropriate that more attention be put up on the highlands. In the end not only will a healthy headwater assist in the integrity of the cave but essentially provide safe water for over 230,000 people that depend on the Greater Belize Watershed. Keeping this in mind, **FCD's Strategic Plan** for 2015 – 2020 has determined that efforts must be promoted in watershed management. Strengthening this effort, no doubt will require proper planning, guidance, financial and technical support. We are pleased, therefore, that the **Chiquibul Cave System Working Group** has proven to be an enthusiastic set of individuals that are up to the challenge. This year the group met three times and one of the hot topics has been the pros and cons of future tourism in the Chiquibul Caverns.

Community Development



The Chiquibul National Park is surrounded with various forest reserves, such as the Vaca, Mountain Pine Ridge and Columbia. As a result we will not find communities nearby its borders. This is true for Belize but across in Guatemala, there are over 63 communities that can exert some sort of pressure upon the natural and cultural resources of the park. Eleven communities are critically important to engage due to their immediate proximity to the park. These communities are considered hotspot areas for constant incursions.

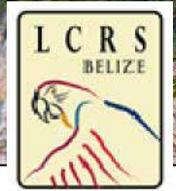
Since 2007 when FCD took co-management responsibilities it became evident that a strategy would consist of establishing community development activities aimed at deterring villagers from depending exclusively on the resources from Belize's protected areas. Thanks to the British Embassy support, over the last four years FCD has been working with nine communities from Guatemala and another ten from Belize with the theme **River Conservation**. This year the program has supported the construction of a community nursery in Peten, training for community leaders and women, and has provided seed funds for community members to participate in reforestation and clean up campaigns in villages such as El Cruzadero, Cidabenque and La Polvora.

In addition, FCD's Bi-National Coordinator has worked closely with collaborating institutions from Guatemala including Asociacion Balam and Wildlife Conservation Society. In October, a new agreement was entered between FCD and Balam aimed at expanding joint efforts and mutually identifying funds to help poverty stricken communities in adjacent Guatemala. Community projects led by strong partners in Guatemala are helping highlight the problems and tensions along the Belize/Guatemala border and have raised visibility for more Government attention. With U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Department of the Interior financial support, FCD's partners in Southern Peten are launching a concept of a **Sustainably Economic Landscape** aimed at establishing a vibrant community platform that can lead to **alternative livelihoods**. Based on lesson learnt from projects in Monte Los Olivos and La Rejoia, the Coordinadora de Organizaciones Campesinas Agropecuaria de Petén (COACAP), will coordinate and implement community projects. Balam has also restructured and strengthened the Commonwealth of Communities of Southern Peten and the Land and the Environment Commission whose goal is to mobilize a socio-economic and environmental agenda directly benefiting the communities located along the western flank of the Chiquibul Forest in Peten.



Back in Belize, our effort in the Vaca Forest Reserve was minimized due to the limited financial resources. The Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve (FVFR), however, is now a registered group and a planning meeting was coordinated with the Forest Department to devise a way forward. FCD expects to re-invigorate the FVFR with support from the Key Biodiversity project implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Data Collection



This year was a particularly busy season for the research team. Thanks to the Protected Areas Conservation Trust and the Food and Agriculture Organization [EU FAO/FLEGT], FCD's four man team conducted the second xate stock and illegal logging **assessments**. The results of the studies now provides us with a sound understanding of the actual situation regarding these natural resources. The data confirms that

although extraction of these natural stocks continues in the Chiquibul Forest, there has been a reduction in the density of extracted produce. Yet we cannot feel complacent and more than ever we must maintain a presence and keep strong interventions in place. With two baseline data established, it is rather difficult to predict trends. Clearly in the Chiquibul Forest, activities are highly dynamic and we must remain alert.

The research team also spent seven months conducting **biological monitoring** of the scarlet macaws and successfully seven of the parrots fledged from their natural cavities. None of the parrots were poached although there were recorded incidents of poachers nearby the nests. With support from the UKAid and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [DEFRA] the research team was boosted up with a formidable ranger presence which helped secure the nests from poaching. In addition, the research team were busy this year putting in place a first ever in situ hand rearing of at risk macaw chicks. This meant constructing a flight cage, learning how to feed macaws in an enclosed environment and maintaining a laboratory setting. This project endorsed by the Forest Department, successfully saw the release of eight macaws into the wild. This effort was made possible by multiple persons and institutions that have cared to rescue and see a healthier population of scarlet macaws in Belize. This initiative had a peculiar hiccup due to naysayers who felt that FCD was secretly doing this on their own and without any expertise. In the end, however, the true evidence of success is gauged by the number of institutions and people that became involved in the conservation of the species and the number of macaws that all made it to the wild.



This year we also spread our research tentacles to identify other potential nests of macaws in the Upper Raspaculo; documented the milpa activities in the Vaca Forest Reserve; explored Nohoch Chen sinkhole and established a baseline for documenting impacts of milpa incursions inside the Chiquibul Forest.

FCD's biologist, who leads the research team, was also instrumental this year to see the upgrade of **Las Cuevas Research Station**. His work has been pivotal in finally securing a 10 year agreement between FCD and the Government for on ground administration of this station. We foresee that the Station will be a vibrant center for research in the Western Maya Mountains that will enable managers to better protect the biodiversity of the Maya Forest.



Capacity building

With a vision towards further professionalizing the conservation work in the Western Maya Mountains, FCD understands the importance for building the staff capacities. This year for the first time, FCD designed a **ranger training program** to help prepare the new ranger team. The eighteen rangers underwent a rigorous six week program after which time they were sent to the conservation posts. The rangers at

the time did not anticipate how rugged the areas were, but with the training they became more prepared to endure long distance hiking, engaging poachers and conducting enforcement activities.

The karst team on the other hand, obtained training on mapping, karst management, first aid, rescue and ropes. The team has two **specialists**, therefore within FCD we are able to provide ongoing hands on training for the rest of the staff.

But the **specialized training** was found not to be enough for the field staff. As the team gets bigger, Chief Rangers have found themselves administrating other staff and this meant training on work ethics and leadership. Thanks to a **capacity development** fund from PACT, all the field staff comprised of 22 took several courses at the Belize Institute of Management. The field staff found this training appropriate, which has enabled them to see the value of proper planning and coordination.

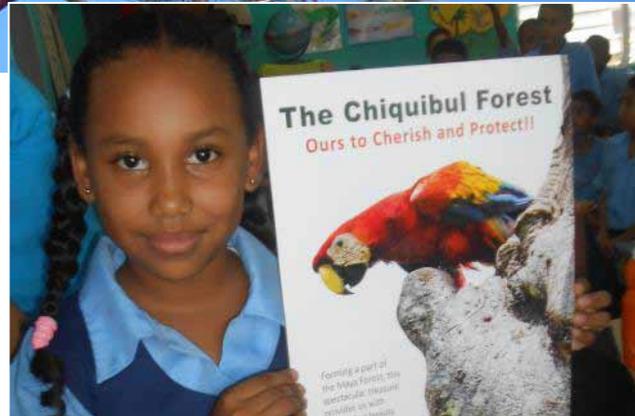


The research team on the other hand learnt how to feed macaw chicks and conduct maintenance of a laboratory. To do this the Belize Wildlife and Referral Clinic guided the staff and FCD's Biologist travelled to Guatemala and Mexico to observe the methods used in macaw management and conservation. As FCD prepares to cater for tourism at Las Cuevas Research Station, the station staff visited too Las Guacamayas Biological Station in Peten to learn about visitor services and catering.

Before the conclusion of this year, FCD is already preparing for a new training program for the field staff. This will take FCD to another level of professionalism, and as we do so, we can preempt that our screening process for new staff will be more rigorous, and only those that have a deep interest in a nature conservation career will be selected. Training is an expensive component of FCD and we wish to give the opportunity to Belizeans who are going for the long haul.

Public Outreach

In 1989, the Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG) centered much of its activities visiting schools, celebrating special global events such as EarthDay, Arbor Day and Rainforest Week. But as YEAG metamorphosed into FCD, our focus became more oriented towards ecosystem protection. Although we have maintained education efforts, these have not reached wide audiences. That has been so until now.



This year with support from the British Embassy and PACT, we have coined two programs that promises to be a launching pad for an aggressive **public outreach campaign**. The first program led by FCD's environmental educator based in Melchor de Mencos, Guatemala seeks to galvanize support from 19 communities for the protection of the Chiquibul and Mopan Rivers. This bi-national program already counts with much community support in areas of reforestation, clean up campaigns and confidence building between community leaders of both Belize and Guatemala.



messages in both Ketchi and Spanish.

In Guatemala the formation of a **Permanent Environmental Education Commission** headed by the National Council of Protected Areas, Asocacion Balam and FCD is further promoting the importance of the southern reserve, namely the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains Biosphere Reserve. Although the reserve is highly fragmented, the slogan – “It is Never Too Late” – serves to instill in the population of four municipalities the value of protecting the remaining forest that is keeping alive the Chiquibul and Mopan Rivers. Radio Utan ‘Kaj and Radio Mopan are prominent in airing key

The second campaign, led by the other FCD Environmental Educator is aimed at promoting the importance and beauty of the Chiquibul Forest. The campaign is targeting children, youth and adults, starting in the Cayo District and then expanding into other districts. During these visits the educator distributes posters, brochures and folders. Teachers are asked to fill in an evaluation sheet. The educator is joined by **Scarlet**, the scarlet macaw mascot, which symbolizes the majestic Chiquibul Forest. To conduct this work, FCD's educators interviewed over 2,000 people which helped them establish the smart objectives of their campaigns.

FCD has also been prominent in **raising visibility** of the challenges in the Chiquibul by means of the media. Both Channel 5 and Channel 7 have been exemplary in making people aware of the situation and have kept the public abreast of developments. The local newspapers have also published our press releases. Yet we are certain that more has to be done to reach a wider public so that the population does not only stay with reminders of a forest that is under threat, but more so about a forest that gives life to Belize.

CHIQUIBUL PROTECTION Telethon Sponsors



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FCD is extremely grateful to each one of our corporate sponsors and all the many other individuals that provided financial support to the Park Ranger Program.

Board and FCD Staff

MISSION STATEMENT

Friends for Conservation and Development is a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to motivate the public to protect the environment through conservation awareness while enhancing the development of the human resource.

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