



Rainforest Biodiversity Group
Newsletter 24
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From The President

Saludos a todos (greetings to all),

I am sure you noticed that this month's newsletter is a bit behind schedule. Please accept my apologies for this. At the last minute I was offered a chance to travel to Japan in order to work with a traditional Native American medicine woman to conduct workshops, which help people to connect with the earth and appreciate nature. It was an incredible experience, and we spent over a month in tiny villages in the mountains and countryside. Though the nation as a whole has a poor environmental record on a global level, there are many organizations and individuals working to change this history. Many people we met had protested against the logging of Central and South American forests by Japanese companies like Mitsubishi. I had a chance to do some more research on Mitsubishi's record in Costa Rica, and it wasn't a pretty story. The logging operations in Costa Rica which are controlled by Mitsubishi are numerous and have an immense impact on the fragile forest ecosystems.

As many past newsletters may have informed you, deforestation is the leading cause in the decline of the population of Great Green Macaws in Costa Rica. That is why RBG has pursued conservation objectives, which focus on forest habitat protection for the Green Macaws and the many other species which depend on the same forest. Some of these species are endangered as well, such as the Jaguar, West-Indian Manatee, and Baird's Tapir. The deforestation that threatens the continued existence of these creatures is largely driven by international companies, like Mitsubishi. Often local landowners will sell their trees to logging companies out of sheer desperation, in order to send their children to school. These landowners receive only a minute fraction of the value of the processed timber on the global market, and the logging companies gain huge profits. The local people suffer the environmental effects of a depleted forest, such as increased soil loss, reduced water quality, reduced flood control, siltation of rivers and streams, reduction in biodiversity and resources, and an overall lower quality of life. The logging companies don't have to stay around to live with these impacts, and the local people are not benefiting economically from the situation in the long-run because the harvesting levels are not sustainable.

There is something that we can all do to change this situation. Even if it feels like a small thing, many drops of water will fill a bucket. We can use our economic power to make a difference and vote with our dollars. We can make a choice to not support companies like Mitsubishi and Dole by refusing to purchase their products, and by sending letters encouraging them to increase their environmental



responsibility. Already the Chiquita fruit company is responding to pressures from the European market to produce their bananas in an ecologically and socially responsible manner. Chiquita is developing organic, sustainable and fair trade banana farms in Costa Rica, which incorporate forest reserves into their properties. We can also support the many conservation efforts that continue daily, working to protect the forests in Costa Rica. **RBG's Adopt-a-Nest** program directly and immediately protects the limited number of nesting trees for Green Macaws, so that we can be sure they will have a place to nest and reproduce each year. We also need to protect more habitat for the macaws' use throughout the rest of the year, and our **Bird Route** project can be an effective way to protect habitat while supporting local landowners. This approach will ensure lasting conservation and a better quality of life for all residents of the Sarapiquí Region, human and non-human alike.

We still need the funding to get the Bird Route active, to adopt more nests, and to hire a full-time coordinator for the projects in Costa Rica. Hopefully some grants and some generous hearts will come through soon, and together with all our colleagues working to protect the forests of Costa Rica and Central America we can see the regeneration of the macaw population.

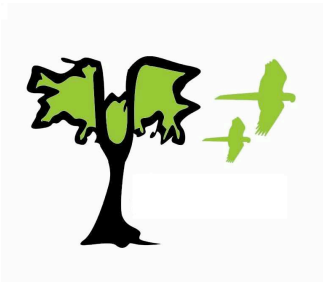
Your convictions and support can make a difference. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,
Harmony Christine Patricio
President
Rainforest Biodiversity Group

Pan-American Roundtable Meetings

By Andrew Rothman:

On November 9th and 10th I was able to participate in the Bird Conservation Alliance Pan-American Round Table Meetings at the Nature Conservancy World Headquarters in Washington D.C. The meetings gave me an opportunity to network with organizations and projects from throughout the Western Hemisphere, and hear about projects and legislation that are affecting our neo-tropical migrants (those birds that travel from WI and the US to tropical locations for the winter).

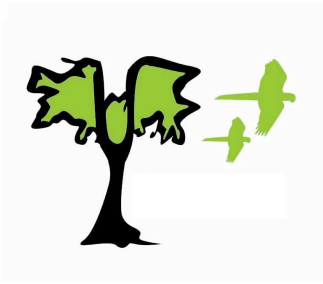


Topics ranged from Avian Flu to Bird Route development in Ecuador, and included getting the low down on the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker! Below is a summary of the two topics I think may be most interesting to you our members.

AVAIN FLU: By now everyone has heard of the “new” Avian Flu, and the media has us scared to death (please excuse the pun). I was able to both good news and bad news for those of you wondering about the real situation. The good news is that there is not any type of Pandemic yet, and Avian or “Bird” Flu has not reached the US. A Pandemic would only occur if the current viral strain H5N1 were to get into a human who had the common influenza (flu) virus, and the two viruses essentially hybridized creating a new human passed Bird Flu. As far as Science knows this has not yet happened and the only people who have been infected are those who have been in close contact with infected bird fluids such as excrement. The bad news is that this H5N1 viral strain is unusually lethal. Of the 100 plus people to be infected, 61 people have died. The other bad news is that there is potential for the disease to be moved via wild birds; obviously this includes migratory birds.

Effective control of the disease needs to come from focusing on the domestic poultry industry, limiting the contact between domestic and wild birds and increasing global monitoring programs. Strains of animal related infectious diseases have been with us forever. These diseases however have been on the increases, and include everything from Lyme’s Disease, to Monkey Pox, to West Nile. We as humans are ultimately responsible for these new diseases as we as a society continue to encroach on Mother Nature we create the systems necessary for these diseases to mutate into diseases that effect our own health. Habitat loss, Biodiversity loss, Habitat fragmentation, global toxification, climate change, increased human travel, and exponential human population all greatly contribute to development of these types of diseases.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT: Some of us think of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as one of the most important pieces of legislation ever written in regards to the protection of our vanishing wildlife. The historic bill of mid / late 70’s is under attack, and the Senator Plombo (Republican, C.A) proposed Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery act of 2005 HR 3824 could drastically effect the power of the ESA. The new bill would put the pressure on the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine, if every single proposed private project would affect an Endangered Species, rather than keep the pressure on the developer to prove to the USFWS that the project will NOT harm an endangered species. The USFWS will have 180 days to make their determination. If the USFWS fault on the 180 days, the project automatically gets the green light and the project cannot be reviewed for its



affects on endangered species for 5 years! If the project is approved as non harmful to wildlife it cannot be reviewed for 10 years, and the get this...if the project is deemed harmful to endangered species the USFWS is required to compensate the developer for lost money and even potentially lost money! Meaning the developer must get paid for the project, with USFWS (tax payer) money, even if the project is going to threaten or endanger a species! We already know that budget cuts often drastically affect the natural resource division (just ask WI-DNR), so where are these dollars the USFWS is going to need to review the innumerable development projects going to come from? They will probably never materialize thus creating a path for innumerable development projects to passed over, not be thoroughly reviewed and encroach on our Endangered Species. This bill needs to be STOPPED! It is probably one of the worst pieces of wildlife legislation ever drafted. Please write or call your senators asking them NOT to support bill HR 3824. Thank you!

MEMBER ACTION REQUESTED!!

As a member or interested patron of Rainforest Biodiversity Group, we would like to ask you two questions.

1. Would you like to receive information via our newsletter on issues related to bird / wildlife conservation in general such as presented in the previous article?
2. Would you like to see RBG become a member of the Bird Conservation Alliance? Joining Bird Conservation Alliance would give us access to materials and information that we could pass on to you, would give us a vote on BCA issues, give us the chance to sign on to BCA sponsored letters or petitions, and give us access to BCA events and job postings.

Please send your comments to amigosdelalapa@yahoo.com or to the address below:

Thanks for your help!!!