



Rainforest Biodiversity Group

Protecting the Great Green Macaw to Protect Biodiversity

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Hello friends of Rainforest Biodiversity Group,

It is with a somber tone that we bring you this edition of the newsletter. This month we lost a friend and a colleague in Gerardo Vega, Director of the Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center in Chilamate, Costa Rica.

It has been truly invaluable to have had a partner such as Don Gerardo, upon whom we could rely for assistance and guidance in our conservation work within the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor. He played a particularly integral role in the work we completed under the grant from the Program for South-South Cooperation. This grant provided money for a delegation from Costa Rica to visit community reserves in Africa, of which Don Gerardo was a part. The pictures to the right are from this trip to Benin.

Don Gerardo, representing the Learning Center, was also a dedicated member of the Local Council of the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor (CL-CBSS). In thinking of this edition of the newsletter, and this tribute to our friend, it occurred to me that perhaps our constituents would find it useful to have their memories refreshed on what the CL-CBSS is all about. Rainforest Biodiversity Group is a founding member of this group, and we would never have been able to accomplish what we have in Costa Rica without the support from the other organizations that comprise the CL-CBSS.

Partnerships are everything in conservation work, and so we dedicate this edition to our friend, Gerardo, while also taking a look at the past and present of the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor.

Be well,

Holly Robertson, President, Rainforest Biodiversity Group



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The Biological Corridor

The History

The history of the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor is best understood by first taking a look at the larger corridor in which it exists, the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC). The MBC is a multi-national effort to maintain the ecological connectivity through the Central American isthmus. Through the Central American Commission for the Environment and Development (CCAD), the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama have committed to connect their protected areas with biological corridors to preserve migration routes between ecosystems. The San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor (CBSS) constitutes the section of the MBC that connects the protected areas of the lower basin of the San Juan River with the Central Volcanic Range in Costa Rica.

Conservation efforts within the CBSS have focused largely on the plight of the Great Green Macaw (GGM), a critically endangered species. This species has a limited distribution in the humid lowlands of the Atlantic coast of Central America from Honduras to the north of Colombia. In Costa Rica, its nesting range is currently limited to approximately 600 square kilometers of very humid tropical forest in the north of the country, abutting the boundary with Nicaragua. *Cont.*



Currently the following organizations are involved in the CL-CBSS:

- Área de Conservación Arenal Huetar Norte
- Área de Conservación Cordillera Volcánica Central
- Asociación Alianza Garabito de Aguas Zarcas
- Asociación de Productores de Santa Elena
- Centro Científico Tropical
- Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza
- Centro de Derecho Ambiental y de los Recursos Naturales
- Centro de Aprendizaje y Conservación de Sarapiquí
- Chilamate Jungle
- Fundación Ecovida – Refugio Lapa Verde
- Hacienda Pozo Azul
- Instituto Costarricense de Turismo – Oficina Regional Llanuras del Norte (Costa Rican Tourism Board)
- Organización para Estudios Tropicales (Organization for Tropical Studies)
- Padrinos de la Naturaleza (Patrons of the Environment)
- Panthera
- Preserveplanet
- Programa Nacional de Corredores Biológicos (National Program of Biological Corridors)
- Proyecto Naturaleza y Comunidad (Environment and Community Project)
- Chiquita
- Rainforest Biodiversity Group
- Reserva Biológica Tirimbina
- Universidad para la Cooperación Internacional

The survival of the GGM depends on the availability of adequate and intact habitat, which provided impetus for working with various local and national groups to create a conservation plan that would protect sufficient habitat to maintain a small and healthy reproductive population in Costa Rica.



This integral conservation plan gave birth to the San Juan-La

Selva Biological Corridor, and the actors involved comprised its executive committee, or what is now known as the Consejo Local (Local Council).

The executive committee was officially formed in 2001, and its headquarters are based in the offices of the Tropical Science Center (CCT) in San Pedro de Montes de Oca, San Jose. The CCT has assumed the responsibility of the coordination and administration of resources for the CL-CBSS.

A key effort within the corridor has been the creation of the

Maquenque Mixed Wildlife National Refuge in 2005, with a surface area of 54,000 hectares of natural ecosystem including the nesting area of the GGM.

Establishing the refuge was a participatory process that engaged the local communities in the area to assess the impact of such a designation on local livelihoods. However, there has been recent unrest among some landowners in the area, concerned for the value of their land. See box.

The River Foundation

[The River Foundation](#) in Nicaragua has promoted conservation of habitat for the Great Green Macaw since 1999, implement-

Maquenque Mixed Wildlife National Refuge

Over the past two years, various members of the communities and owners of farms within and surrounding Maquenque (RNVSM) have expressed their discontent with the existence of the refuge. A primary reason cited is what they see as a lack of due diligence in assessing the impact of the refuge on the economy of the area, and the lack of engagement with landowners during the process. The price of land has decreased in the RNVSM and many landowners blame this on the land use restrictions imposed by the refuge, which prevent them from developing it in certain ways. They are worried that they could be forced to abandon the land and move to the city to make a living.

Landowners have formed a group called the Defense of Inhabitants (of Maquenque) and have declared their intention to revoke the Decree that created the RNVSM, published in 2005.

The refuge is administered by the Área de Conservación Arenal Huetar Norte, and not the CL-CBSS, but together these two entities have been working to form a response to the concerns.

The first response has been to clarify the process of the refuge designation which engaged stakeholders at every level prior to its formulation. In addition the CL-CBSS has traveled to the region to hold information meetings and distribute pamphlets about the

refuge. The group has also been interfacing with the landowners via Don Gerardo Miranda, a landowner in the Maquenque region. Don Miranda has agreed to be the liaison between the two groups and has been attending CL-CBSS monthly meetings.

Furthermore, the CL-CBSS has been providing him with technical assistance and funds so that this group of landowners in the RNVSM can establish a formal civil society association of landowners in the RNVSM. This will help the group gain a stronger voice in the management of the refuge and to facilitate working together with the CL-CBSS on sustainable livelihood initiatives in and around the refuge.

ing the “Project of Environmental Education in the Buffer Zone of the Indio Maiz Biological Corridor.” In conjunction with other entities, the organization helped create the Bi-national Biological Corridor El Castillo-La Selva.

With the experience acquired during the process in Costa Rica of establishing a corridor and taking advantage of the fact that one population of the GGM is shared between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, it was decided to unite efforts and develop a bi-national program, working under the assumption that the conservation actions on one side of the Rio San Juan has impacts (both positive and negative) for the other side.

The GGM Research and Conservation Project takes into consideration that the work being done in the Northern Zone of Costa Rica goes hand in hand with the work being done on the Nicaragua side. This premise is not always well understood by Costa Rican organizations and many times, principally at the beginning, it was necessary to carry out a strong lobbying effort to resolve the importance of a Nicaraguan counterpart between the Costa Rican actors.

In the year 2000 began a process to share findings between the institutions of both countries, with the support of the United Nations



Development Program and the Foundation for Peace and Democracy. A year later, these efforts would be known as the “Bi-national Partnership for the Conservation of the GGM, Pride of the San Juan River basin.” The Tropical Science Center in Costa Rica and the River Foundation in Nicaragua coordinate this initiative. Together with other organizations forms a network of social institutions that groups environmental sectors, academics, culture and politics of both countries.

The principal actions completed through the framework of the this bi-national partnership from 2002 to 2009, much has been accomplished: 13 workshops on the biology and conservation of the GGM, 7 bi-national festivals, the formation of the Bi-National Network of Children Monitors of the GGM, and the creation of the Coordinator of the Bi-National Biological Corridors Nicaragua-Costa Rica. See next page for more information.

Current Projects in the CBSS

- Officializing the executive committee as the local council to the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor with the national program CORAC - Regional Councils of Conservation Areas.
- Letter to the Ministry of the Environment in Costa Rica to

- express concerns over planned oil exploration in northern Costa Rica
- Updating the management plan of RNSVM
- Working with local landowners in the RNSVM region to collaborate on and support sustainable economic development
- Encouraging the involvement of a women’s group in Boca Tapada in sustainable development projects in the area
- Exploring funding opportunities for small projects within the Corridor
- Getting the Maquenque National Mixed Wildlife Refuge recognized on maps created by the Costa Rican Tourism Board
- Formalizing a relationship between the CL-CBSS and the municipalities of San Carlos and Sarapiquí, the regions in which the corridor lies.
- Promoting and supporting education activities for school children; currently this focuses on the Great Green Macaw and the Danta (see next page)
- Promoting and supporting education and outreach for adults; currently this outreach centers around the RNSVM
- Supporting the Costa Rican Bird Route through the establishment of a Commission (or sub-committee) to oversee the project



Bi-National Network of Youth Monitors for the Great Green Macaw

Through the framework of the Bi-National Network of Youth Monitors of the GGM, a series of workshops have been completed in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The workshops were a day long and elaborated on the theme of the biology and conservation of the GGM. The workshop also taught students how to use binoculars and record observations of GGMs on a data sheet.



survey form to record observations of the GGM. The students who graduated from the program received those materials as well as a Bi-National Youth GGM Monitor pin and a membership card. Each school also received a pair of binoculars for the exclusive use of the youth monitors.

In Costa Rica, four workshops were held in the months of April, May and June of 2011; the first workshop in Boca Tapada de San Carlos, the second in Santa Elena de Pital, the third in the community of la Unión del Toro en Sarapiquí and the fourth in Boca San Carlos in San Carlos.

In total, the workshops engaged eight schools in the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor. A total of 129 children participated, of those six were in third

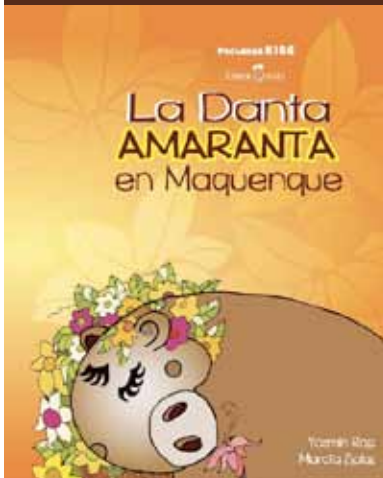
grade, 49 in fourth grade, and 57 were in fifth grade and 17 in sixth grade. 54 were boys and 75 were girls. In addition, 12 teachers were involved (4 men and 8 women). Of the children that participated, 118 graduated as youth monitors (51 boys, 67 girls).

All students participating received a certificate of participation, a GGM pin, a GGM coloring book, and a



Photos: Student participants in the workshops. Photos property of Tropical Science Center and the CBSS

La Danta Amaranta - New Coloring Book for Kids



This educational coloring book for children three years of age and older was recently published by Yazmin Ross y Marcia Salas with financing support from Preserveplanet and the Tropical Science Center.

The coloring book doubles as a story about Amaranta the Tapir and her baby Sandy Light, who can change the color of the landscape with her fabulous secret weapon.

The book is part of a series of publications and online education materials for children by the organization Pachanga Kids. To see more of their work, [visit their website.](#)