

RAPHIA



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COTERC MEMBERS - THE STATION NEEDS YOU

by Ross Ballard

COTERC and Caño Palma Biological Station have been in existence for nearly ten years now. Our founding principles were to establish ourselves as leaders in tropical education, research and conservation, and to promote the wise use of natural resources in the tropics, a concept now known by the buzz phrase "Sustainable Use of the Environment".

The problem with buzz phrases is that we become de-sensitized as to their original meaning. We tend to brush over the fact that, although they originally encapsulate entire concepts within only a word or two, elegantly expressing at home with widely understood brevity, they also degenerate too easily into clichés. And ultimately, our way of dealing with clichés is to roll our eyes at them, or at best, to be vaguely amused by them. Their original impact is lost as we beat them ragged through overuse. And our capacity for cynicism knows no bounds.

Consider a few of them. "Political Correctness"; "Social Conscience"; "Think Tanks".

I think people basically mistrust the glibness of buzz phrases. Our instinct is to find a way to relegate them to harmlessness, to being mere cultural artifacts, as quickly as possible. And therein lies the danger. Those among us who have grown weary of conservation and its buzz words may retaliate with buzz words of their own. "Tree Huggers" comes to mind.

But consider the words "Sustainable Use



"Little stations like our own are having a tough time competing with stations such as those sponsored by the Organization for Tropical Studies"

of the Environment". All they really mean is using one's resources in such a way that one can realistically count on having a future, barring the unforeseeable and unavoidable.

It refers to the fact that the planet we live on which has, through some miracle or other, evolved to generate life over the last few billion years. A system that is clearly intended to be sustainable indefinitely. Until the sun burns out. Until a massive asteroid obliterates us — the unforeseeable and unavoidable.

It also refers to the only game in town.

It alludes to the realization that the continued existence of human beings, and that of so many of our fellow creatures, is very much in doubt.

Essentially, the avowed purpose of conservation efforts is to redress this imbalance through research into what uses of

Tropical Treat Update

Unfortunately, we overlooked a few donors of items to the Tropical Treat auctions in our last newsletter. Our apologies to all those people, and thank you so much for your contributions:

Pennie Mason (Wizard of Vase)
John Mitchell
Dr. Michael Dixon) Guest
Dr. Loren Ammerman) Speakers
Tippet Richardson
Bell Nèxxia
Susan Vickburg Friend

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the environment can be sustained, and what measures should then be taken to restore a balance. And finally education, which amounts to an attempt to rehabilitate the involved parties — government and community — to implement measures to begin using their environment sustainably. This is not to be fobbed off as "trechugging". The fact is that in *only two hundred years* we have put over half of the earth's tropical rainforest to the torch — and are now destroying the remaining 46% with staggering efficiency, due to methods, 'advancements' which were not previously available. The fact is that even these continually degraded environments — now covering only 6% of the globe's total surface - contain over 55% of all the species of life on earth.

And we live in a world of 'causes' of which conservation is only one. All of them cry out for our attention and our "support" (this is a euphemism, second cousin to a buzz phrase). But the main problem with fund raising in conservation has always been to give potential donors a specific goal, something to really sink their teeth into. I don't find that people are reluctant to render assistance, but without identifying an actual target, people are reluctant to part with their hard earned. There's the rub. And here's the pitch!

COTERC and the field station Caño Palma Biological Station that it sponsors, have been caught in a Catch-22 situation for the past two years. We need to improve our facilities enough to move onto the next phase, which is to further our conservation efforts with land purchase, educational outreach and influence within this community, pitted against our inability to promote the station and attract new business, without providing better services and facilities to the researchers and student groups who would use our services. That is to say, the station must operate as a viable business to remain sustainable. We need to grow.

Recently, cutbacks in education have

severely reduced the influx of clients that the station might normally expect, because researchers proposing subjects of study in the field are turned down by their universities and colleges, due to the lack of funds. Hard decisions are being made by these institutions as to where they might best spend the little money available. Potential facilities for researchers are scrutinized more closely than ever.

Little stations like our own are having a tough time competing with stations such as those sponsored by the Organization for Tropical Studies, an effort resulting from a consortium of American universities pooling their resources, business and influence to support a large number of sometimes huge and well-developed field stations throughout the world's tropics. These are the Hilton hotels of this business.

Little stations like our own are having a tough time competing with.....the Hilton hotels of this business

We are different.
The small private biological field stations by comparison are modest.

But we are not obsolete by any means.

We are often the preferred sites for researchers due to the flexibility of our services. A place set up to handle twenty clients is far more reactive to their needs than one trying to suit three hundred!

And the informality of small stations is also appreciated by many field researchers and student groups.

We need your help

The fact that you are now, as members, reading this article demonstrates your prior support of COTERC, and your concern for conservation generally. And many of you also lend your efforts to this organization by participating in Tropical Treat, bidding for items in our auctions, or even flogging hot dogs and hamburgers in the streets of Toronto. And I thank you, my fellow "Tree Huggers"!

I am hoping that you can help us out once again.

We need only to upgrade our facilities in order to remain competitive. I am proud of the services this station offers to its clients. We support a volunteer program which gives biology students and other people interested in the tropics the opportunity to experience this rainforest for themselves, for a very reasonable charge.

Raffle Winner Announced

Congratulations to John Moniz, Pickering, Ontario, Canada, the winner of the COTERC Christmas raffle. John won a framed print of a hawk by renowned artist Marc Barrie.



We offer interpretive tours through our own forested property, and support the local economy by hiring local guides for trips into Tortuguero National Park. We hire cooks and maintenance staff to support the groups we host. We are flexible and reactive to the needs of our clients. But now the station must somehow drum up the \$17,000 U.S. necessary to replace the old dormitory with a new one. As things stand now, we house as many as 14 people in a small, single story building only 22 feet by 19 1/2 feet.

And that doesn't leave a lot of air to breathe. There is also no indoor plumbing, inadequate lighting and ventilation, and insufficient ceiling height to instal fans. Since we are also facing a need for a classroom cum laboratory, it makes sense to me that the two should be combined.

I envision a two-story wood and concrete building which combines both. The main floor of this building should serve as the classroom/lab. The dormitory, above, would be accessible via an external stairway at one side of the building.

The dormitory must be built to serve twenty people, and be divided by partitions to allow a measure of privacy, but as much ventilation as possible through the sleeping area. Ten sets of beds, set up as double bunks would furnish this large room. Four semi-private rooms each furnished with double beds would be built along one side of the dormitory, separated by a narrow hall. This will permit couples, student group chaperones, and long-term researchers full privacy.

The side of the dormitory opposite the private rooms would have a large covered balcony suitable for stringing hammocks and hanging laundry during exceptionally wet weather. The dormitory should be fitted with two toilets. As it is now, the station has only two toilets, situated within an out-building forty yards from the dormitory.

The classroom on the main floor needs to be fully ventilated, the perimeter of the entire first floor surrounded by only

low solid walls with the space over them screened in to allow full natural light and air through the space. A small "dry room", (a sealed room which is heated or otherwise de-humidified), needs to be included at one end of the classroom to hold the station's books and papers, as well as any scientific instruments which are at risk from the humidity. The classroom should also have a single toilet, perhaps alongside the dryroom. Storage space for students' equipment is also needed.

Further, we need about two dozen wooden chairs which can be used in our large dining room, but which can be moved to the classroom as needed. There is a furniture company in Puerto Limon which produces a tough good-looking wooden chair at only about \$20 U.S. apiece. These would replace the long, cumbersome wooden benches we now use.

I am challenging you, our membership, to rally as never before.

Other small and relatively inexpensive furnishings would include four ceiling fans (about \$60 each), four sinks (about \$40 each) and three toilets (about \$50 each).

I would like to see the work accomplished by local construction workers, so that we are playing a useful role in the community once again, but there are a couple of ways that you might help us get this project moving that have nothing to do with direct financial aid.

Is there someone among you with the architectural wherewithal to draw up blueprints for the new building? This would require learning something of the local construction methods and

materials. Are any of you willing to undertake the difficult job of fund raising and handling the Canadian end of the logistics? This may require a small committee and no little dedication. Canadian and American school teachers and their students might be asked to help us raise funds, as worthwhile class projects.

I am challenging you, our membership, to rally as never before. I know that the creative energy and resources among you are equal to this challenge, and frankly I don't see any way that it can be accomplished without you.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY RESIGNS

I think it was four years ago that Amanda Stone first agreed to take on the role of Membership Secretary for COTERC. She probably didn't realize just how big a task it was when she took it on, but nevertheless Amanda persevered and, thanks to her efforts, you received your Raphia, membership renewals and other material. She managed to keep track of people moving to new addresses and even sometimes in tracking down people who didn't send in a move notice.

Amanda has moved herself recently, and now finds that she has not enough time to continue as Membership Secretary. Thank you so much for all your efforts, Amanda, and we wish you all the best for the future.

And of course we now need to fill the vacancy. Anyone interested?

COTERC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Board member Josh Feltham is heading up COTERC's educational programs. He will be presenting two in the near future — one on January 30th at the Toronto District Christian High School "Conference on the Environment" and the second on February 4th at the Earth Summit 2001.

News From La Crisalida

by Rebecca Uncles

It is nearly 5:00 p.m. at La Crisalida Butterfly Garden in Tortugero. Most of the butterflies have settled down for the night in their roosts, all but the caligoes (owl butterflies). They are most active during first light and last light of the day, and at the moment are dancing around the garden and intermittently landing on my head and foot. It's a nice time of day to be in the garden; most of the tourists are catching a boat back to their hotel and it's just me and the butterflies!

The big question is how did I end up here? Tourists coming to visit the garden ask me and I ask myself too! Working in a butterfly garden is not something I had in mind for things I would do in my life. I am not a biologist, zoologist, entomologist, physicist and I'm not even sure I have a green thumb. However, here I am learning about the plants, the butterflies, how to raise them, more about the ecology and life around me in this amazing place I'm living in at the moment.

I must say "La Crisalida" is beautiful. The entrance is an octagonal building with information posters up on each wall in Spanish and English. There is a display case showing various pupae we have at the time and another case showing larvae. Then you enter into the garden. Almost immediately you will see the butterflies; several species of heliconius, pareides, morphos and caligoes and the beautiful swallowtails, all set against the backdrop of a lush and rich garden. The colours and gentle movements of these insects is fascinating and mesmerizing.

As you walk around the path, perhaps you will find a caligo laying her eggs in a heliconius leaf, or amorpho at a feeder enjoying some ripe banana, or a heliconius sara stopping for a sip of nectar at the lantana camera flowers. Maybe there is a new orchid bloom or

even a toad in the little pond.

This place looks great because there are a lot of people involved. Suzanne Hargreaves came down last October to get things rolling at "La Crisalida". Cleaning up the garden, starting to breed butterflies and getting the facility ready to open (which we have been since August 4, 2000). There are kids in during the week helping me weed or look for butterfly eggs. Sometimes they'll pull two weeks or sometimes they'll stay and help for two hours. Cari and Rachel (two good friends, who were both here for several months this past year) also worked hard. Cari gently reminded me to purchase bleach and

Butterflies are viewed here as a "woman's affair" by some people

other necessities and Rachel was the chief bushwacker and pruner. They've both left now and I miss them at the garden! But I have local visitors nearly every day to pitch in or observe. I find

myself having to be mindful of masculinity at times. Butterflies are viewed here as a "woman's affair" by some people. My enthusiastic exclamations of "Let's go to the garden" were immediately halted by looks of horror at the mere suggestion by some male friends here. However, given a little time and me ensuring them that the tasks were and are 'manly', they dared to enter and now there is less inhibition and more comfort and assurance that they are still very much masculine once they have left the garden.

Since we have been open in August, we have been able to see some funds go to the local high school. A national foundation came in to help build a basketball court at the high school, and we were able to pitch in funds for gas and the transportation of gravel and sand from the cerro (a non-active volcano up the river). The high school is the main focus for funds at the moment, as they will eventually have their own garden facility for raising and exporting pupae, and being accountable for their own fund raising. It will be part of their curriculum

RAPHIA STAFF

Editor Marilyn Cole

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learning about the plants, butterflies and process of raising them. There are some students that spend time at the garden and one in particular who is eager to learn English, and help out on a regular basis. I'm learning about "Tico time", which means watches are not significant and it will happen — just later than you expect (by hours, days, weeks or even months). So there will be more students coming into this facility to learn and be ready for when the net and garden is set up at their school.

The rainy season is approaching, and I will be spending my first Christmas without snow, and water up to my knees! The rains here (the absolute downpours!) are amazing, and evidence of the power of nature, and how much this area relies on these rains. I hope I can avoid too much toe fungus and moldy clothes. If the butterflies can hack it out, then so can I!!

When I do ask myself "What am I doing here?", I feel lucky to be experiencing it all—the life, the people, the plants, the animals, and yes, even the rain.

Rebecca Uncles is a volunteer who is spending time working at COTERC's sustainable development project La Crisalida Butterfly Garden, which is located in the village of Tortuguero. This project was initiated with the purpose of contributing to the local economy, and with the long-term goal of teaching young local men and women a useful trade. Initial funding was provided by a grant from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).



A Special Thank You

A very special "thank you" to Melissa Racine and her Grade Three students at Mackay Center School in Montreal, Quebec.

The students held several bake sales during recess, and sold handmade bookmarks with environmental slogans. They managed to raise \$100, with which they adopted a White Throated Capuchin monkey

from our Partners in Preservation program. The balance was contributed to our Save An Acre project, a special trust account set up to enable us to purchase more rainforest.

Why not let these children inspire you, and challenge your local school carry on a similar fundraising effort?



Donations to COTERC & Caño Palma

A big "thank you" goes out to the following for their donations:

Mr. Andrew Mott and Warner's Home Video, Toronto for a generous cash donation;

Mr. Mark Herget, Marker Survey, Whitby, Ontario for donating marker tape for the trails;

C. Frenesh Horticultural Supplies, Beamsville, Ontario for donating plant tags, for identifying plants;

Mr. Bert Oldershaw for donating two books to the library at Caño Palma — "So Excellent a Fish", by Archie Carr and "Far Tortuga" by Peter Matthiessen.

South Ajax Medical Centre, Ajax, Ontario, for donating cold remedies and antiseptic creams.

Ross Ballard Leaves Caño Palma

by Tom Mason

After over three years as manager of Estacion Biologica Caño Palma, Ross Ballard has decided to move on to other things. Ross will leave a legacy at the station that will be hard to match. More changes have occurred to the compound than in the last seven years. People who have been to the station in the past will wonder where the large pond came from and anyone who likes orchids will have to be impressed by the nearly 80 species now growing just outside the front door.

Ross was definitely the most controversial manager. He proved to be a person of many depths. This often led to controversy with people, so either he was disliked or was a good friend. He was a loner by nature.

I considered Ross to be a good friend, not only to me but to COTERC. It is hard to pick just a few examples of Ross's dedication

to the station. The station flooded more times in the last 3 years than it had in the 6 years previously. Ross stayed and guarded the station throughout. The communication from the station to San Jose, let alone Toronto, was cut off for at least a month every year, and for 3 months on one occasion. Ross stayed. In fact, there was a time when the water was over a foot deep inside the main building; no land remained above water on that side of the canal. Ross slept on the dining room table with the dogs. Large boats came to the front door; there was no communication with the outside world, as all the lines were down. The only time Ross left was to ensure that the dogs were taken to dry land to run. Not many people would have done that.

Ross was also popular in Tortuguero. Whenever he could, he tried to help the people. Sometimes it was to give them a job. Flora was the cook when a large group stayed at the station, and Mario was the caretaker.

Sometimes he gave them a loan. He was always willing to listen.

In my visits to the station, one thing always impressed me about Ross above everything else. That was his solid knowledge and deep love for all things in the forest. It was difficult to catch him on anything. He even knew his butterflies.

Ross dedicated three years to Caño Palma and COTERC. We all owe him a great deal. Thank you, Ross. We will miss your humour and your dedication.

DIGITAL CAMERA NEEDED

Does anyone have a digital camera that they would be willing to donate to the Station? This would be a very welcome addition. Please contact the COTERC office if you can help.

WANTED

Would you like to become a member of the COTERC Board of Directors? We will have a few vacancies as of June, 2001.

If you have time and energy to donate, and would like to be considered for nomination, please contact the COTERC office, for more information.

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Robert Bateman Donates Painting

Once again renowned Canadian wildlife artist Robert Bateman has graciously donated one of his prints to COTERC to enhance our fundraising event Tropical Treat.

Details and raffle ticket information for this print will be published in the next issue of Raphia. Stay tuned!

Welcome to Craig Cameron, Cheryl & Mario

Now that Ross Ballard has moved on, it was necessary to find a replacement. We are currently accepting applications.

In the meantime, we welcome Craig Cameron, as Interim Manager. Craig has previously visited and done research at Caño Palma Biological Station. Craig and his girlfriend Cheryl will spend the next three months at the station.

Here is his biography, in his own words:

"Ever since I was two years of age I have been awed by science and the world around me, and this has led to a fascination with dinosaurs and their now uncertain cousins in evolution, the amphibians and reptiles. The fascination has continued from childhood right through to the present day.

My interests have taken on a more serious level in the last few years, as I have studied at the University of Richmond, in Virginia, and have focused my studies on evolutionary relationships between amphibian orders, mainly salamanders. Working there has really opened my eyes to the possibilities of a variety of careers within my field of interests. Some of the projects I have been involved in include working with the Smithsonian Institute on leptodactylid frog genetics, and correlating work

with the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto regarding a new species of amphibians and reptiles found in Vietnam.

I have a year and half remaining to complete my B.Sc. The opportunity to work at Caño Palma Biological Station will make a great addition to my educational career. I believe it will enhance my credibility when I apply for my masters and then grad school.

One of my personal goals while I'm in Costa Rica is to continue to work with my former professor Rafael de Sa by collecting additional information on the leptodactylid frog family, to further his research and to help him complete some of his goals.

As a 23-year old student, I hope to bring a more youthful outlook to the station by completing some

well overdue projects, contributing a little of my own taste and continuing to build on an amalgamation of ideas for Caño Palma, which I hope you all agree will only make it better. In the next three months both Cheryl and I will be staying at the station, so I hope that if you have any questions, you will free to contact us. We will be very glad to keep you informed through Raphia of our adventures."

Joining Craig and Cheryl will be Mario, a young man from Tortuguero who will be assisting them in maintaining Caño Palma Biological Station. Mario is the uncle of Daryl Loth, our former station manager who now lives in Tortuguero.

Welcome Craig, Cheryl & Mario!

Doug Tarry Bird Study Awards For Young Ornithologists

Long Point Bird Observatory is offering a wonderful opportunity to young people to foster the development of ornithological interests in Canadian teenagers. Recipients of the awards attend a week-long workshop/natural history camp at Long Point Bird Observatory, located on the north shore of Lake Erie, Ontario. The workshop runs from July 27 through August 3, 2001.

The workshop focuses on "hands-on" learning and training in field ornithology, providing a unique opportunity for like-minded teenagers to markedly enhance their knowledge and skills in the scientific study and aesthetic enjoyment of birds. Participants learn how to identify, age and sex birds and to study their populations and behaviour.

Space is limited to 6 participants, ranging in age from 13-17 years old. The Award covers all direct costs of the workshop (accommodation, meals, travel while at Long point and professional instruction), but recipients are responsible for their transportation to Long Point. For more information contact Landbird Programs Coordinator, Bird Studies Canada/Long point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario N0E 1M0 email lpbo@bse-eoc.org or visit the web site 222.bse-eoc.org