

# RAPHIA

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3      SPRING, 2007

## FAREWELL TO JANA AND MARIO

As any of you who have visited Caño Palma Biological Station will know, we have been very fortunate to have had a wonderful husband and wife team to manage the station for the past few years. Jana and Mario have initiated many great wildlife monitoring and education programs and have been instrumental in establishing good relationships with the people of the nearby village of San Francisco, as well as in Tortuguero itself.

Over the years, Jana and Mario further developed and improved the infrastructure of the Station. Thanks to their work, one finds a new dormitory and indoor washroom, a repaired dock, a thatched museum, a new addition on our kitchen and they continue to add improvements such as our new environmentally friendly washrooms. In doing so, they appreciably advanced our mandate and mission by acting as wonderful hosts and offering our facilities to volunteers, student interns, researchers and individuals interested in tropical ecology and the local culture.

Jana and Mario now have a young son to consider, and have decided that it is time to move on. They take with them a tremendous knowledge of the local area, its people, ecology, and administration of the Station. They will be greatly missed, and we want to wish them all the best in the future.

### HELP US TO BE MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY!



We are now able to offer an electronic version of Raphia, and we'd like to encourage as many of our readers as possible to receive our newsletter in PDF format.

If you are interested in receiving Raphia electronically, please forward your name and email address to [info@coterc.org](mailto:info@coterc.org) or contact the COTERC office at 905-831-8809.

You will need Adobe Reader to open the document.

***Nothing living should ever be treated with contempt. Whatever it is that lives, a man, a tree, or a bird, should be touched gently, because the time is short.***

***Civilization is another word for respect for life.***

**Elizabeth Goudge (1900-1984)**

## JOB POSTING for CANO PALMA STATION MANAGER

Caño Palma Biological Station Manager - The Canadian Organization for Tropical Education and Rainforest Conservation (COTERC) seeks a full-time Manager to administer and operate the Caño Palma Biological Station. Our mission is to provide leadership in education, research, conservation, and the educated use of natural resources in the tropics. The Biological Station is located next to the Caribbean Ocean within the Barra Colorado Wildlife Refuge and north of the Tortuguero National Park; a region renowned for its sea turtles and rainforest.

The position is full time with a commitment of at least one year. Preference will be given to candidates with enthusiasm, an excellent work ethic and experience in construction, grounds maintenance, small engine repair and boating experience. Candidates should be proficient in speaking/writing Spanish and have experience working in tropical ecosystems, conservation, research/monitoring and sustainable development.

A record of excellence in dealing with volunteers, student groups, researchers, difficult Work situations and conflict resolution are crucial. A BSc. in biology or ecology is Preferred.

Caño Palma Biological Station has become busy, hosting Global Vision International expedition members, student groups, interns and volunteers, all working on various monitoring and community conservation programs. The successful candidate is foremost expected to conduct daily Station maintenance, repair and improve the Station's infrastructure and trail network, ensure the overall quality of experience of users groups and visitors and compliance with Health and Safety standards. Collaboration and development of wildlife monitoring programs will be an important secondary activity and will include marine sea turtles, migratory and resident birds, primates and other mammals and herpetological studies.

Special attention is to be given to issues of education, community conservation, sustainability and working with a local village. The Manager reports directly to COTERC, and completes assigned tasks as requested by the Board.

For complete job description information, contact [info@cotercc.org](mailto:info@cotercc.org).

**To apply, send a letter of application along with a CV and three references to:**

**Canadian Organization for Tropical Education and Rainforest**

**Conservation P.O. Box 335, Pickering, ON. Canada L1V 2R6.**

**Fax: (905) 831-4203**

**email: [info@cotercc.org](mailto:info@cotercc.org). Electronic submission preferred.**

More information is available through our website: (<http://www.cotercc.org/>). Review of applications will begin immediately with a start date of February 2007.

## Another Successful Tropical Treat

Tropical Treat 2006 was as always a huge success. We can only accredit this to you – our honorable guests, our donors and our many dedicated, helpful volunteers.

The organizing committee all worked industriously to pull it off, and we want to thank Stephanie Choo Wing, Jennifer Corris, Rachel Atkins, Steven Toman, June Enright and Marilyn Cole for their efforts.

Once again the funds raised will go toward the conservation work of COTERC, both here in Canada and in Costa Rica. Thanks to all of you, we raised approximately \$15,000.

We tempted fate this year by planning an outdoor pig-roast. Well, as you will have it the weather didn't co-operate but our illustrious caterers managed to serve a hearty

our Live Auction items, and Peter Klose, Master of Ceremonies managed to keep the event moving and on track.

It was evident from the applause that everyone loved the music. The band's interactive approach to mix & mingle with guests brought many positive comments.

All the donations received for both our silent & live auctions made the event not only fun but also profitable.

A heartfelt thanks to our corporate donor – Deloitte – thanks for being on board this year. Without organizations such as yourselves, events like

*(Continued on page 8)*



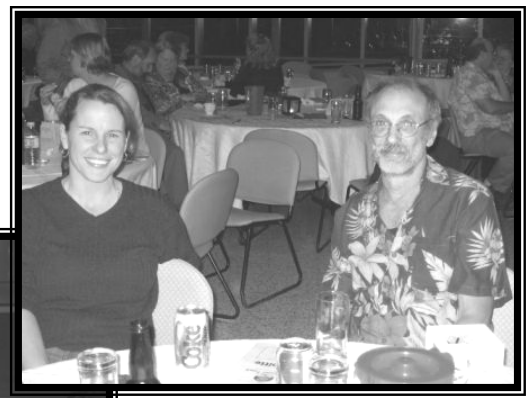
**Tropical Treat Volunteers**

meal despite all odds. Rick Johnson, our auctioneer once again did an excellent job in raising maximum funds from

## Faces of Tropical Treat 2006



**Keith and Leigh Woods**



**Amy Lathrop and Bob Murphy**



**Frederik van Oudenhoven and Greg Mayne**

## **Field Diaries**

In the summer of 2005, I had the great privilege to work at Cano Palma Biological Research Station in Costa Rica. This ongoing internship placement is part of a collaborative effort between York University and COTERC, established in order to better research and protect the nesting sea turtles in the region. Throughout the 3-month placement it seemed like I was completely cut off from the outside world. However, I did manage to keep a journal and I was able to document my experiences. I would like to share some excerpts from those experiences and take you on a journey in the midst of the tropical jungle. Don't worry, *no mosquito repellent required!*

### **Log 1: An Unbelievable Ride**

*After a taxi ride and two bus rides that lasted about four hours, I was finally out of the chaotic capital city of San Jose and at the east coast of Costa Rica where I then had to take a small boat to get to the isolated field station. The boat ride was UNBELIEVABLE. It seemed like I was in the middle of the Amazon jungle. Long-standing and lush vegetation towered over the narrow river - delineating a cleared runway. I could not wipe the smile off my face while cruising along the green scenery and trying to take it all in. After an hour-long boat ride filled with euphoric emotions, I finally reached my ultimate destination. The research station is filled with jungle sights and sounds. By late evening the sounds overpower the sight with the soothing sounds of pouring rain, croaking frogs, serenading birds, musical insects, and howling monkeys - all performers in a synchronized orchestra that plays a melody throughout the night.*

### **Log 2: The Booming Mornings**

*The rainforest is flooded with a commotion of sounds by the animals who call the sun to rise. It is a rush of calls to summon daybreak and to glorify the start of another day. As soon as the sun peaks over the horizon the secretive creatures become more evident, even amidst the engulfing canopy. While dewdrops formed over the vegetation, I started investigating my new environment. The research station, although not an island, can only be described as an island since it is surrounded by thick jungle on all sides. The only way to enter and exit is by boat. Although there is the sense of sheer isolation, the tranquility of the ambiance is also evident. Luckily, the research station offers more than what I could have imagined. There are plenty of insects, amphibians, birds, and reptiles, and a wide pallet of colors, sounds, and movement that appear in waves throughout the day. They all keep me endlessly fascinated.*

### **Log 3: From the Depths of the Jungle**

*Life in the jungle is peaceful, unpredictable, and vibrant. In comparison with living in a Canadian city, the air is much fresher, the water is non-chlorinated, the vistas are more rugged, and the sounds are more soothing. As a matter of fact, there aren't any cars around for miles, which dramatically eliminates the air and noise pollution. All transportation is carried out by motor boats that only a handful of locales run. There are no factories, no big businesses, and no*



*commercialism. Only nature gets to play a "reality show" and hold up attention-grabbing "billboards". Effortlessly, I always seem to discover new critters and see new blooms in every nook and cranny. It seems like a luxury to be at the station and receive visits by all sorts of wildlife, including all three types of monkeys in the area (Howler, Spider, and Capuchin monkeys). It's great to be reading or working in one of the study rooms and be able to hear and view the wildlife right outside the screen-mesh walls. Even my bedroom comes with a great big view. The screen mesh wall partitions truly allow you to be submerged in the live surroundings.*

*Oh, how sweet it is!*

*- Sami Abdelmalik*

## RAPHIA PALM SWAMPS

*From time to time we will be reprinting pertinent articles from earlier issues of Raphia. Here is one that appeared in our very first issue in 1991 – and yes, we did name our newsletter after this palm!.*

### RAPHIA PALM SWAMPS

By Dr. Walter A. Glooschenko

Faculty of Environmental Studies

York University

When one thinks of palms, we think of swaying trees on a sandy tropical beach. And tropical coastal swamps are considered to be dominated by treed mangrove wetlands.

This is not necessarily so!

Palms are often the dominant form of treed vegetation in tropical freshwater wetlands, especially those subjected to increased periods of inundation. Flooding followed by a dry season and fire appear to assist the development of these palm-dominated wetland ecosystems. A zonation occurs frequently with a freshwater herbaceous marsh occurring next to the water body such as a lagoon or river giving way to a mixed-treed swamp dominated with palms. Such palms tend to occur in wet depressions and



**Raphia palm swamp forest in Conkouati Lagoon (Photo by Tim Dodman)**

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## DIRECT MAIL CAMPAIGN

Our sincere thank you to all the generous members who contributed money in our direct mail campaign last summer. In total, we raised \$1,245 and this money has enabled us to purchase three composting toilets for Cano Palma Biological Station. These are expected to be installed in the very near future, after the necessary infrastructure is finished. If you are not familiar with the design, these toilets will convert human waste into compost, but must be built high enough above the ground to be able to function properly. Thus, the next time you visit Cano Palma, you will literally be sitting on a throne!

This is a significant advance in our commitment to be more environmentally friendly and protecting surface water quality. We are very grateful to our loyal members for making this happen. We would also like

to thank the people at the Sun Mar office in Burlington, Ontario who have been extremely cooperative in providing their expertise, and in arranging the shipment of these toilets to Costa Rica.

**Thanks to our donors: William Jamieson, Johanne Rioux, Dale Smith, Bruce Gill, Dave Lasham, Pringle Smith, Peter & Monika Harmathy, Dwight P. Knapik, Tracy Farmer, Anne Cameron, Richard Pathak, Jill & Dwight Sayers, Charles Bear, Lee-Anne Jack, Clive & Mary Clark, Jacob Wickham, Judy Hall, Ann Millet, and Peter Silverman.**

**Thank You!**

## RAPHIA PALM SWAMPS CONT'D



Corcovado National Park, Costa Rica

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these palm-dominated associations tend to be monospecific, i.e. of very low species diversity in contrast to most tropical forests.

There are three major types of palm swamps named after the dominant palm species. The first of these is the *Mauritia* swamp, which contains up to 21 species of this palm. This is typical of South American wetlands. The second type, the *Metroxylon* swamp, often called Sago palm swamp, is found in the South Pacific and Far East.

The third type of palm swamp is dominated by two species of oil palms, *Raphia taedigera* and *Elaeis oleifera*. These two species occur both in the Neotropics, from southern Nicaragua to the Caribbean lowlands of Colombia and the Amazon delta, and span the Atlantic Ocean to tropical Africa.

This has led to speculation that the two species originated in Africa and were somehow transported to the Americas.

In terms of Costa Rica, *Raphia* swamps are found on both the Atlantic coast and in the Golfo Dulce region of the Pacific Coast. The Atlantic coast is an ideal habitat, as it is characterized by barrier islands with lagoons landward of them. The barrier islands protect the lagoons from high-energy waves and allow the palms to become established. The islands also prevent the inland flow of salt water which would lead to mangrove-dominated ecosystems. The high rainfall and proximity to steep mountains and high runoff also favour freshwater wetland formation on this coast.

The *Raphia* palm is locally called "yolillo" and the swamps are called "yolillales". They make up 7% of all Costa Rican forested wetlands, and some 5% of wetlands in general in the country. Some 600 square kilometers of *Raphia* swamp occur there. Little is known about the ecology of *Raphia* swamps. They appear to be an important habitat for birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals. Tapirs and peccaries use them for feeding on palm fruits and seeds. They present a major opportunity for research in all areas of tropical biology and ecology.

## REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Raphia is late! Yes, I know and my sincere apologies. There just don't seem to be enough hours in the day to do everything.

The year of 2006 has been a busy one. Our York University intern Frederik van Oudenhoven finished his term assisting with the sea turtle monitoring project, and has now returned once again to look at the possibilities of assisting the local village of San Francisco to be more economically viable.

Our relationship with Global Vision International continues and there have been many volunteers from all over the world working on projects at Caño Palma Biological Station. For most, this has been their first exposure to the tropical rainforest and they have gone away with a greater appreciation of the complexity of this ecosystem. Hopefully they will be ambassadors to advocate rainforest conservation in their own countries.

In a prior issue, we told you about the wonderful Fifteenth Anniversary celebration that we held at the home of Bill Jamieson. "Home" is not quite the right word, as it more like a private museum filled with many exotic and unique objects. Once again, we would like to thank Bill for allowing us into his home on the momentous occasion of our anniversary.

It is still hard for me to imagine that we have now been around for fifteen years, starting from a concept of "wouldn't it be nice to establish a research station in the tropical rainforest?" to the actual dream coming true and growing and developing over the years.

We had another very successful Tropical Treat event, and it is reported elsewhere in this issue.

And, we are working on another exciting event for the spring, again at the home of Bill Jamieson. A big thank you to Fran Mason for heading up the committee to organize this event. Details are included in this issue, and keep on the lookout for more information—you really don't want to miss this!

So, now we are into another year. On behalf of COTERC and the Board, I would like to extend our wishes to you and your family that 2007 will be a wonderful year for you.

Marilyn Cole, Chair and Co-Founder



**Marilyn and Tropical Treat supporters**

Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children. *Kenyan Proverb*

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## Another Successful Tropical Treat cont'd



Rachel Atkins and George Banavage

(Continued from page 3)

this would not be possible.

And now it's time to thank all volunteers, whose tireless efforts were immensely appreciated and without whom our charity could not have presented an event of this magnitude. Whether it was at the bar, or the set-up for the event, the decorating, the food service or greeting the guests when they arrived everyone did an outstanding job.

Now we look back in retrospect, and will analyze how we can improve, add to, and make a more exciting 2007 Tropical Treat.

We welcome any comments and suggestions that you might have. Please send them to [info@coterc.org](mailto:info@coterc.org).

So once again, I would like to thank all as we eagerly look forward to next year's event.

Sincerely,

*Erika Babiuk*

Event Co-Ordinator

### The Silent Auction

