

Volume 23, Issue 3

SUMMER, 2014



CANADIAN ORGANIZATION FOR TROPICAL EDUCATION & RAINFOREST CONSERVATION

RAPHIA

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Have you ever wanted to duplicate a meal that you had at Caño Palma Biological Station? Have you wanted to reminisce with photos from your time there? Well, now you can do both! Hot off the press we present the brand new "Recipes from Caño Palma Biological Station". Only \$20 Canadian funds plus shipping & handling. Order form on Page 9. Get your copy today!!

Recipes from Caño Palma Biological Station



**Canadian Organization for
Tropical Education &
Rainforest Conservation
(COTERC)**

Notes From the Editor

Marilyn Cole

Hello to all our Members.

At our Annual General Meeting held on May 3, 2014 we said goodbye to three of our Board of Directors, who chose not to run for re-election. On behalf of the Board, I would like to send a heartfelt "thank you" to former Chair Shawn Blackburn, former Director of Finance Brandon Roy and former Director of Education Nia Gibson, for their hard work. It is a rather thankless job to be on a charity's board. Our directors receive no compensation and willingly give up their time not only to attend meetings, but to handle activities in their portfolio. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

At the Board of Directors meeting held on June 25th, the following Directors were appointed to carry out duties as outlined:

Director of Education Patricia Davidson

Patricia has a broad background in various environmental projects, the last one being as head of the Piping Plover Project for Wasaga Provincial Park. As such she has

a good grasp on what is needed for her portfolio.

Director of Special Events Nancy Cox

This position has remained vacant since Annette Simms stepped down earlier this year. Nancy is a Project Manager at Bank of Montreal, and brings a wealth of experience in event planning and fundraising.

Director of Finance Scott Tell

Scott was formerly a zookeeper at Toronto Zoo, and is now an accountant. With his background knowledge of wildlife conservation as well as financial management, Scott will be able to do an excellent job in his portfolio.

Currently the position of Chair remains vacant, and Vice-Chair Marilyn Cole has stepped up as Acting Chair.

We welcome Patricia, Nancy and Scott to the Board of Directors and look forward to their valuable input in the months to come.

The Board breaks for the summer and will re-convene in early September.

In the meantime, a special By-Laws committee consisting of Jim Taylor, Tom Mason, Barry McKee, Colette McKee and Marilyn Cole will be meeting in August to review the current by-laws and make recommendations for the membership to consider at a special meeting to be called in the fall.

New Members

A big "WELCOME" to these new or renewing members:

- Hayden Wilson, Ajax, Ontario
- Nancy Cox, Pickering, Ontario
- Rebecca Eberts, Regina, Saskatchewan
- Doug Durno, Scarborough, Ontario
- Joanne Smith, Scarborough, Ontario
- Sarnia Aquarium Club
- Amanda Tompkins, Ajax, Ontario

Thanks for your support!

GRADE ONE CLASS LEARN ABOUT THE RAINFOREST

COTERC recently received a donation of \$448.25 from the Grade One class at Aberdeen Hall Preparatory School in Kelowna, British Columbia. Their teacher, Lauren Pighin, has been teaching them about the wonderful plants and animals in the rainforest, and encouraged them to hold a fundraiser. They organized a sale of school supplies to raise the funds, and chose to donate the money to Canadian Organization for Tropical Education & Rainforest Conservation.

This is a wonderful gesture on the students' part and it is so encouraging to see a teacher who inspires them not only to learn, but to appreciate the environment of our planet.

We thought it would be interesting to share with you some of the contents of the letters from the students that accompanied the cheque.

Sydney—"This is how you can save the rainforest by planting new plants."

Hala—"It is important to save the rainforest because the interesting animals won't be found anywhere else. My favourite animal is the ruby throated hummingbird."

Paeton—" My favourite animals is a jaguar. The rainforest is the best."

Eden—"I am 6 and I am in grade 1. It is important to save the rainforest because if we don't animals will die. Thank you for saveing (sic) the rainforest."

Joshua—"My favourite animals are an emerald tree boat and a tarantula. The rainforest is awesome."

Luke—"My favourite animal is a orangutan (sic). Have fun."

Linden—"The rainforest gives us medicine. Thank you for saving the rainforest. I love the rainforest."

James—"There are lots of animals in the rainforest and you need to save the rainforest by not chopping down trees."

Saniya—"It's important to save the rainforest because it gives you important things. My favourite animal is all the animals in the rainforest."

Ryder—"Thanks for the work youv bin (sic) doing. It is important because it gives us oxygen."

Noah—"I think it is important to save the rainforest because...are losing their homes. Good job for helping the rainforest."

Ciro—"My favourite animal in the rainforest is the red eyed tree frog. The rainforest is a cool place. I like the rainforest."

THE ECO-VILLAIN

by Marilyn Cole

Do you read the ingredients on products that you buy at the grocery store? Are you familiar with these terms — sodium laureth sulphate, stearic acid, palmate or even simply vegetable oil? They are all pseudonyms for palm oil. It makes it difficult even for those concerned individuals who do not want to support the conglomerates who are raping the world's rainforests to discern what products to avoid. Even such apparently harmless foods such as an organic granola bar, peanut butter or even shampoo can contain this versatile oil, which does not go rancid, thus making it very appealing to the corporations to use in the manufacture of many, many products.

The oil is derived from the fruit of the oil palm, a tree that thrives in the tropics. But the production of this tree is having a disastrous effect on the plants and animals that occupy the very places where the oil palm exists. And just as disastrous, the production of palm oil is done by enforced labour, as well as child labour in many countries.

Originally from Africa, today, palm oil is grown throughout Africa, Asia, North America, and South America, with 85% of all palm oil globally produced and exported from Indonesia and Malaysia; but most of the time not using so-called sustainable measures.

According to the website SayNoToPalmOil, "the industry is linked to major issues such as deforestation, habitat degradation, climate change, animal cruelty and indigenous rights abuses in the countries where it is produced, as the land and forests must be cleared for the development of the oil palm plantations. According to the World Wildlife Fund, an area the equivalent size of 300 football fields of rainforest is cleared each hour to make way for palm oil production. This large-scale deforestation is pushing many species to extinction, and findings show that if nothing changes species like the orangutan could become extinct in the wild within the next 5-10 years, and Sumatran tigers less than 3 years.

In total, 50 million tons of palm oil is produced annually, supplying over 30% of the world's

household products in countries such as United States, Canada, Australia and England. Palm oil can be present in a wide variety of products, including: baked goods, confectionery, shampoo, cosmetics, cleaning agents, washing detergents and toothpaste."

From a personal standpoint, I find it totally devastating to see You Tube videos of orangutans being burned to death, hacked down with machetes or beaten to death in the most horrible of circumstances, simply because these animals occupy the rainforest area that greedy corporations want to turn into thousands and thousands of hectares of the monoculture oil palm tree. Having spent six months in 1976 following these magnificent apes and having experienced the wonderful biodiversity of the Indonesian rainforest (home to so many animals found nowhere else) I am sickened by the present turn of events.

The SayNoToPalmOil website cites that "90% of orangutan habitat has been destroyed in the last 20 years, and as such, is considered "a conservation emergency" by the UN. An estimated 1000-5000 orangutans are killed each year for this development. The orangutan is a keystone species and plays a vital role in maintaining the health of the ecosystem." For example, many Indonesian plants cannot germinate on their own but must pass through the digestive system of the orangutan, in order to germinate.

In order to make room for the oil palm plantations, the rainforest trees are simply torched; not only is every single animal and plant destroyed by this process, but the resultant burning emits smoke into the environment and is considered a direct cause of climate change.

The palm oil trees are ready for harvest in the relatively short time of three years; the kernels are orange-red and contain a rich oil. The tree itself can continue to produce for 20-30 years, making it a very desirable commodity.



Continued on Page 6

LIVING THE DREAM AT CAÑO PALMA by Helen Pheasey

Its Helen Pheasey here - Sea Turtle Monitoring Project Coordinator. I've been at Caño Palma for four months now so felt it was high time I got in touch to introduce myself. I have a BSc in Environmental Science, 5 years experience as a volunteer coordinator in the UK and an MSc in International Wildlife Trade and Conservation. Since graduating in 2010 I spent two years on a field station in Paraguay as a natural history museum curator. My team was working in a previously un-researched reserve and putting together a case to continue its protection beyond the allocated 5 years. My role involved undertaking the species inventory, collecting and processing specimens and ensuring the collection was well maintained and databases up to date. I also have field experience in Indonesia, Madagascar and Mexico and absolutely love travelling.

Anyway, enough about me let's talk turtles. Well, there is good news and bad news from our program this year. The bad news is that it appears to have been a low year for leatherbacks with almost ½ the number of nesting females this year than in 2013. However, I must share with you one experience I had working a leatherback. As you are probably aware "working" a turtle involves counting the eggs she lays, triangulating the nest so we can relocate it at the end of the incubation period, tagging her if necessary and taking shell measurements and conducting a body check for signs of injury/illness –a fantastic experience in itself and a real privilege to be working towards the conservation of such a unique and amazing species. On the occasion in mind, we were a team of four and had completed our data collection so were able to sit back and watch as this particular turtle disguised her nest and prepared to go back to sea. While we were waiting, she actually



turned and started dragging herself towards us and got closer and closer until we could hear her breathing and grunting with the effort of moving. She was crawling right towards us. Knowing that she would eventually see us we all kept absolutely still (no easy feat with one of nature's prehistoric giants crawling towards you!). Eventually she turned towards the sea but was so close that when she passed us, her left front flipper passed over my foot. A LIVING DINOSAUR WALKED OVER MY FOOT!!! It is so rare that I am speechless, but this experience rocketed to the top of my List of Top 10 Natural History Moments and left me grinning like an idiot for at least a week. (I actually have goose-bumps as I write this). We were then able to creep behind her and "escort" her back to the sea. I think I might just have the best job in the world.

And now for the good news! Hawksbill turtles are a critically endangered species that nest on Playa Norte and are vulnerable to poaching, not only for their meat and eggs but also for their shell which is the classic tortoise shell you may have heard of. This year so far we have had 24 nests. 24 nests! This is a massive increase on last year as it was July before we had any regular visits from this species. They are elusive little things with a surprising ability to hide in the vegetation and disappear, making it a challenge to work them but while they are

on our beach they are reasonably well protected. This season we have only lost four Hawksbill nests (2 suspected poached and 2 to dog predation) which of course is four too many but it does mean we still have 20 nests incubating away and we aren't even in July yet! Fingers-crossed that this is start of a high year for Hawksbills and we keep getting them in these numbers.

Right well I think that is all for now, I am off to keep living the dream and looking after those turtles.

Until next time

Helen

DID YOU KNOW

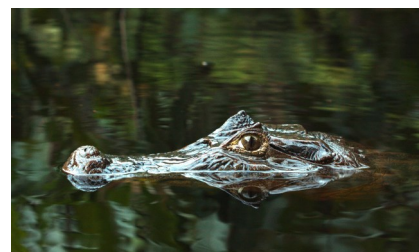
Caimans are a four-legged reptile of the alligator family, closely resembling alligators in appearance, with long, thick tapering tails and elongated snouts, but smaller.

They prey upon a variety of vertebrates and are found



Alligator

through the Caño Palma region. In fact, one particular one, fondly known as Huancho, has made its home near the station dock. At night time he can often be seen floating nearby, waiting for any



Caiman

THE ECO-VILLAIN (Continued from Page 4)

Very often in remote areas there is documented human rights abuse. The oil palm requires different categories of workers. The first group use machetes to cut debris from around the base of the trees — and they use poison to kill any snakes, to ensure the safety of the next group who clear the leaves out of the way of the third group of workers who cut the mature fruit. Some of this fruit crashes to the forest floor, and it is this fourth group that utilizes women and children to pick up any stray fruit and place them in baskets. The strongest workers then load the large pods onto oxcarts or tractor driven trailers that then transport them to a processing plant. The requirement for so many workers results in slave labour.

And even Costa Rica is not immune to this devastation. Much of the western Pacific coast has been converted to palm oil production. When the outbreak of disease started to destroy the banana plantations in the 1940's, The United Fruit Company (Chiquita) stood to lose a vast amount of money. The Town of Quepos was established as an important port for the transportation of bananas to markets in North America and elsewhere. More than 14,000 hectares of land (primarily in the Parrita Valley) had been turned into banana production, and railways for the transport of fruit were built across the land to take the product to the Quepos waterfront. The United Fruit Company had a huge investment in the area and introduced the palm oil as an alternative crop to make up for the loss in banana production.

In 1995 Chiquita sold its interests to Palma Tica, which is now owned by the Numar group. Today there are many collectives on the southwestern area of Costa Rica producing palm oil. Each pod contains upwards to 4000 seeds. The pods are steamed open to separate the seeds from the skin. The seeds are then ground to remove the oil-bearing flesh from the seeds.

The kernels are then pressed to release the oil. The nuts in the center of the palm kernel are ground and used for livestock feed and the fatty acid oils are used in agricultural applications, mold releases, candle making, waterproofing and other activities.

Large users of Palm oil include Nestle, Proctor and Gamble, Heinz, Cargill and Cadbury Schweppes. According to Steve Linder, "Unilever recently stopped using Palm Oil and encouraged other multinationals to look at the devastation palm oil cultivation has caused to the rain forest and other sensitive environments around the world."

The Costa Rican Dept. of Natural Resources known as MINAET, has cited Palma Tica several times for environmental abuses, but the palm oil production is so profitable that they simply pay the fines and continue to emit huge black smoke clouds over their rendering plants.

So what can we, as consumers do? Most importantly, read the label of ingredients on the products you purchase and reject any that contain palm oil. It is a mental adjustment to do this, but it is vitally important that we, the end users of the products made from palm oil, be aware that we are contributing to the mass destruction of the rainforest and to make a conscious effort not to support the big conglomerates.

Today there are claims of "sustainable palm oil plantations". But what was on this land before the plantations came to be? All too often, the answer is rainforest. They are lost forever, as are the plants and wildlife that lived there. The oil palm monoculture provides no food or shelter for any animal.

In 2010 an 18-year old boy named Thomas who lives in Australia realized the devastation caused by the oil palm production and began a website called SayNoToPalmOil. After starting the site by himself, he now has the support of many individuals and corporations and visitors from 180 countries now visit the site for a total of 500,000 hits annually.

We need more Thomas's in our world!

INTERVIEW WITH BRENNA SWEETMAN with Doug Durno

Brenna Sweetman was lucky enough to grow up in the suburbs of Philadelphia at the Jenkins Arboretum and Botanical Gardens where her dad is the director. Along with the family farm, these beautiful natural settings instilled in her a love of the environment and nature. She graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies, a minor in Spanish, a Certificate in Global Health and a Certificate in Latin American Studies. She hopes to pursue a Master's in conservation biology.

Q. I understand that you are working with students at the local school, close to Cano Palma. What's the purpose of this program?

A. *We are introducing the concept of conservation through environmental education. It's important to provide local students with the means to see the biodiversity around them, teach them why it's important, and help them to preserve and protect it for future generations.*

Q. What is your role?

A. *Five days a week I go to the Escuela Laguna del Tortuguero in San Francisco with my colleague from Spain, Marta Perez. With only 3 teachers to handle 90 students in kindergarten through Grade 6, they have too heavy a work load. So Marta and I help out by working one on one with students learning to read, by teaching kindergarten computer classes, and by filling in when teachers are absent. Initially, I was attempting to teach grade-specific environmental education lessons, but because of the unpredictability of classes due to teacher absences and frequent holidays, my position has evolved to help the kids keep up with their required curriculum. I also run a Conservation Club every Friday afternoon with help from*



volunteers at the station. Each month has a different environmental theme. In May, we focused on animals because it was World Migratory Bird Day. June is plants, and July will be turtles. We organize field trips such as beach cleanups and trips to the jungle to look for mammal tracks. We have also recently created a certificate system to motivate student participation. To attain the highest certificate level, students must create and sustain their own conservation project such as a weekly trash cleanup.

Continued on Page 8

DONATIONS

Many thanks to the following people for their generous donations:

- Linden Cook, (monthly donation) in honour of Paige Novaly
- Laura Rosenquist, in honour of Paige Novaly
- Christina Enns
- Grade One class, Aberdeen Hall Preparatory School, Kelowna B.C.

Interview with Brenna Sweetman (Continued from Page 7)

Q. Why did you want to go to a tropical research station?

A. *With my background in Environmental Studies and Spanish as well as my enjoyment working with children, the education internship offered by COTERC has allowed me to combine all of those interests in a unique and spectacular environment.*

Q. What were the biggest adjustments you had to make in order to live in a remote rainforest?

A. *The biggest challenges have been adjusting to the humidity, daily rainstorms, and massive amounts of beastly mosquitos. But I can't really complain about living in a place where the beach is my backyard, kayaking through jungle canals is my main form of transportation, and patrolling for sea turtles is part of my weekend schedule. Overall it's absolutely worth it. Everything here is so lush, vibrant and full of life that you can practically breathe in the biodiversi-*

Q. You have actually been living in the local community. How has that worked out for both you and the local people?

A. *Entering a new community always a big adjustment, language involved. But the town of roughly 300, is very friendly and accepting. I pass a 25-minute walk to school every day and these people know that I'm committed to helping the kids in the school. They see that I spend more time there than the paid teachers, and for that I think most families are grateful.*



ty. been living in the local community with a different culture is particularly when there is a new in San Francisco, this small everyone has been very friendly the same friendly faces on my every day and these people to helping the kids in the spend more time there than the that I think most families are

community with a different culture is particularly when there is a new in San Francisco, this small everyone has been very friendly the same friendly faces on my every day and these people to helping the kids in the spend more time there than the that I think most families are

My close connection to the community has also allowed me to facilitate cooking classes between several local women and volunteers at the station. This has been a great opportunity for volunteers and interns to experience the local culture in a creative and delicious way.

Q. Has your experience at Cano Palma altered your future ambitions and goals?

A. *Although I have only been here for three months, my experience has definitely helped me solidify my future ambitions and goals. I love science, nature, teaching, and speaking Spanish, and through my internship I've been able to combine all these passions.*

Living here has also changed my perspective on conservation and what it means to live sustainably. In such an isolated community, no one takes resources for granted. It's inspiring to see people who creatively repurpose items. For instance, they turn used sacks into hammocks or old electric cables into baskets. Conservation is about more than just the preservation of flora and fauna. I think we should all learn from that.

RECIPES FROM CAÑO PALMA BIOLOGICAL STATION—ORDER FORM

If you have ever visited Caño Palma, you will want this souvenir, whether you can cook or not!! The divider pages feature colour photos of people, wildlife and station buildings, while the delicious recipes speak for themselves! Marilyn Cole gathered recipes from the cooks, staff and volunteers and compiled the best into this unique cookbook. The Hints and Definitions section feature suggestions that all volunteers need to know! You can order online at http://www.coterc.com/store/c1/Featured_Products.html or contact info@coterc.org Paypal or cheque

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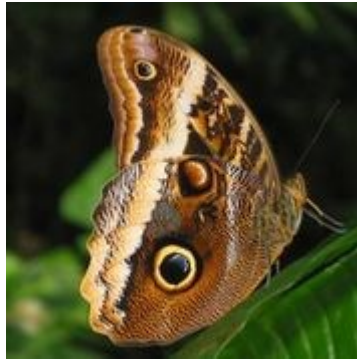
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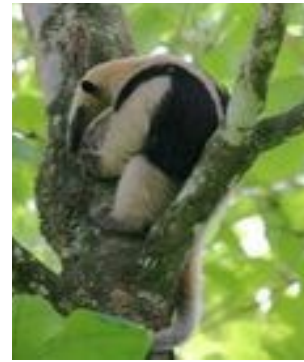
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Geoffroy's Spider Monkey



Owl Butterfly



Tamandua

Canadian Organization for Tropical Education and Rainforest Conservation

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As a member of COTERC a copy of our quarterly newsletter “*Raphia*” will be sent to your primary E-Mail address unless you check one of the following options.

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Launch of a New Logo

Our logo of hands holding trees has been our brand since the inception of COTERC. In an effort to more fully represent the relationship between Canada and Costa Rica, we are launching a new logo, depicting a Canadian sugar maple on one side, and palm leaves on the other, with a monkey in between.

A big thanks to Leslie Crawshaw for the design. We hope you like it!



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome any comments or suggestions from our members so that we can be sure that you feel involved. If you have an idea for an article, or better yet, would like to write one yourself –if you have a photo or two that you think we could use — if you have a suggestion for improving Raphia, please do send it along to us at vice-chair@coterc.org

If you have a general comment about COTERC or Cano Palma Biological Station, please email info@coterc.org