

Volume 24, Issue 1

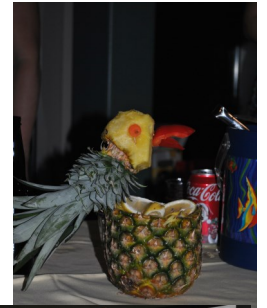
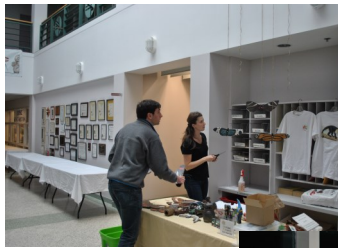
WINTER, 2015

FIESTA VERDE 2014



CANADIAN ORGANIZATION FOR TROPICAL EDUCATION & RAINFOREST CONSERVATION

RAPHIA



FIESTA VERDE 2014

Marilyn Cole

First of all I really want to send out a sincere thank you to Nancy Cox and Susan Kunanec, who did the bulk of the work to make Fiesta Verde 2014 a success. It is a HUGE undertaking and these two women tackled it enthusiastically.

Thanks also to Tom Mason, the top ticket seller as well as all those who donated items for the live and silent auctions, especially Lori Dunn with her spectacular artwork, June & Blue Enright, Rosseau Retreat Heritage B&B, Pennie Mason, Cacts Hotel, Turtle Beach Lodge, Casa Marbella, Susan Vickberg (in honour of her late husband Fuzz Friend).

Thanks also to Toronto Zoo who continue to support COTERC by again providing the Atrium as the venue and to our caterer Vito Clemente, who now has his own restaurant in Whitby called Al Tavolo.

John Lenard and Andrea Beatson handled our two owl guests and who donated a portion of John's sales of wildlife artwork to COTERC.

Ian Shanahan, an ornithologist who leads tours for Quest Tours, gave an informative and interesting talk on the migratory birds who spend summers in Canada and winters in Costa Rica.

We also were able to Skype in with our station manager Charlotte Foale who reports on all the exciting projects happening at Cano Palma.

I dug into my collection of photos from the "early days" and talked about the strides that have been made since 1991, especially with regard to the facilities. In the beginning the "station"

consisted of one thatched hut built by the previous owner; the well consisted of a hole dug in the ground; there was no electricity (certainly no internet); no real toilets or showers. The first station manager Greg Mayne had a lot to contend with. Greg did survive the experience and in fact attended Fiesta Verde. Susan Kunanec did a masterful job as emcee for the evening. Jim Taylor managed the live auction.

COTERC will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2015, so stay tuned for some exciting events coming up!

.And lastly a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped out, either to set everything up for the evening or who helped during the evening. And Joanne Pink, the evening's "official" photographer.

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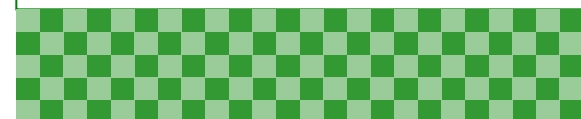
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INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER SARAH MINTER

by Doug Durno

Originally from the one-traffic-light community of Pricetown/Lynchburg, Ohio, Sarah Minter has led 2 groups of Shawnee students to our no-traffic community of Caño Palma. She has remained in southern Ohio and is currently an Ass't Professor of Biology at Shawnee State University. Fascinated by the biodiversity of flora and fauna, Sarah earned her PhD in Entomology, writing her dissertation on the interactions between plants, insects, and their associated predators and parasitoids – which, in short, makes her an organismal biologist.

Q. How did you become aware of Caño Palma?

Dr. Jeff Bauer (now Dean of Arts and Sciences) led the first Shawnee group to Caño Palma. After I was hired, Jeff proposed that I take over the course. Jeff, a geologist, jokingly told me that there were too many plants and animals on the rocks for his continued interest in the region.

Q. Tell us about the 3 groups who have visited Caño Palma.

Though most were science majors, I've also had engineering and education majors take the course. The course is officially titled: Biol 4999, Special Topics Study Abroad Costa Rica and is worth 3 credit hours. However the opportunity is open to community members and we had one travel with us in 2013. He had a blast. The 3 groups have been fairly large. Each had 10 to 14 students who spent 10 days at the research station.

Q. What's your purpose in bringing students to Caño Palma?

Many students at Shawnee have never been on an airplane or traveled out of the country. In fact, a considerable number have never traveled out of Ohio (believe it or not, we have a few that have never left the county where they were born!). Shawnee State is located in Appalachia, a region thought of by non-Appalachians as being full of backwards, uneducated people. What inhabitants here do struggle with is poverty. Traveling to Caño Palma is not only a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience for them, it is often the key that opens the door to a greater appreciation and deeper understanding of the world as a whole. When our students visit communities near the station, they see poverty in a way that for some seems impossible and for others, familiar. They see people that are incredibly happy, yet have so little. It changes them. It humbles them. I can see it on their faces, in their eyes. Secondly, I believe that it is impossible to impress upon people the fragility of our natural world using only photos and words – they need to experience it. When one of my students experiences Caño Palma, they share that experience with family, with friends, with spouses – they become spokespeople for our Earth in their generation. Seeing is believing. We will never succeed in creating environmental stewards by sitting in our houses and closing our eyes to the global scene.

Q. Do the students have a goal when before leaving for Caño Palma?

Yes. Prior to departure, each student selects a topic to focus on. It is their responsibility to educate their classmates about this topic (be it bats, marine turtles, conservation-biology efforts). Once at Caño Palma, each student participates in ongoing station research that incorporates their topic. This past year, three research students were in the group. Prior to departure, each had helped to develop a proposal for MINAET and a research plan. Projects had to be simple in design and achievable in their limited time at the station. For example, one project this year was designed by a student interested in Mammalogy. He used game cameras established along specific transects to look for nocturnal mammal activity. He also prepared plaster casts of each of the mammalian species that walked through his transects.

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

1. A lack of hot water. 2. Limited access to technology. It doesn't matter how limited their finances, I rarely see a student who doesn't carry a cell phone around as if it were an extension of their hand. I am always relieved to see students lose dependency on these devices and regain an interest in the environment around them. 3. I love spiders – most of my students are normal people who do not love spiders. Often, there was an orb weaver gracefully staged in her web to greet us when we arrived at the boat dock. I saw many students shiver as they realized that organisms in the tropics are often larger than their temperate counterparts. 4. Students are always excited to see all the fresh fruit available to them.

Continued on Page 7



Ross was born in Canada but was a true citizen of the world, exploring various subjects and regions in person or through books. His heart though, was firmly rooted in the tropics. He was one of the longest serving station managers at Cano Palma (1998-2001) and supported the station through a period of change.

During his young adult years Ross lived and travelled extensively across middle and SE Asia in countries that were not listed as vacation destinations. His stories of life on the road were always thought provoking and sometimes surprising.

After managing Cano Palma, Ross worked in other biological stations, including a very remote station in Ecuador. He returned fleetingly to Canada over the years but eventually returned to Costa Rica, which he always considered home. A centre of calm surrounded by spectacular biodiversity.

Ross possessed many highly developed skills, including carpentry, and cooking. Perhaps most intriguing was that he also possessed training in metallurgy and as a goldsmith. Ross' real passion and love though, was for plants, nature and knowledge. He contributed greatly to the botanical composition of the station's garden and was always keen for the garden to be managed as a thoroughfare for animals. He created the station's orchid garden, pond and originated many of the taxonomic lists for flora and fauna.

Ross was a private man who was comfortable with his own company, yet he also selectively built a few strong friendships. He had integrity and spoke honestly. Underneath his occasional eccentric veneer he was a kind hearted, generous and progressive man who was worldly in knowledge and possessed a fierce passion for nature.

It is unfortunate that he will miss the publication of his most recent work investigating historical uses of *Ficus*, that he completed only months before his death. His passing marks a tragic loss of a wealth of knowledge, experience, and great source of friendship.

For many of the students of Cano Palma, Ross was inspirational, a source of useful local knowledge and regular political banter. He touched the lives of many and with his passing, memories of him, his passion for nature and his wise words will be carried on by those whose lives he touched. He will be greatly missed.

Costa Rica out of Top Ethical Destinations 2015 list

For the second year in row, Costa Rica has been left off the "World's 10 Best Ethical Destinations" list posted by the Ethical Traveler Foundation. This year's list valued the country's natural beauty and wide variety of options for ecotourism. However, Costa Rica failed to make the cut overall because of its "lack of freedom for environmentalists and the issue of child prostitution," according the report. Costa Rica has traditionally appeared on the annual list, but was removed in 2010 for similar reasons.

In 2011 it re-entered the list and remained for two years, even topping the 2013 list before being removed from the 2014 list, and now the 2015 edition. The countries that made the 2015 list — "in alphabetical order, not in order of merit," warns the report — are Cabo Verde, Chile, Dominica, Lithuania, Mauritius, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Uruguay and Vanuatu.

Ethical Traveler draws up the list after researching the quality of developing countries on social and environmental issues, focusing on four general categories: environmental protection, social welfare, human rights and animal welfare.

They also take into account reports from nongovernmental organizations such as Freedom House, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Reporters Without Borders, UNICEF, the World Bank and various LGBT resources. Ethical Traveler is a nonprofit organization founded by the San Francisco-based Earth Island Institute. According to their website, it works "to empower travelers to change the world."

reprinted from the Tico Times, L. Arias

WETLANDS, CARBON and CAÑO PALMA

by Doug Durno

Like me, you've probably heard someone reference a carbon sink when talking about global warming and wondered what it is. It turns out to simply be a reservoir of carbon. Oceans and plants are the main natural sinks. When carbon is sequestered in such a reservoir, it's not readily available to be turned into carbon dioxide (CO₂) and released into the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas, which can then contribute to global warming. Now the question is, aside from a lump of coal, what is carbon? Life as we know it wouldn't be possible without this element. Carbon is called the building block of life because of its abundance and its ability to bond easily with other elements. Examples of carbon-based compounds essential to plant and animal life are proteins (chains of amino acids), which play many roles besides being the building blocks; carbohydrates, which store the energy necessary for life; and DNA and RNA, which transmit genetic information.

Let's go back to CO₂. How is it produced in order to be implicated in global warming? We all know one way – by burning fossil fuels. The fossils in fossil fuels are organic (plant and animal) materials that have decomposed and been transmuted into coal, crude oil or natural gas over millions of years, often in carbon-dense wetlands (peat is 40% carbon). Since wetlands are by definition at least seasonally saturated, the soil lacks oxygen – and carbon requires oxygen atoms to be transformed into CO₂.

Or anaerobic bacteria can do it. But they're slow – so slow that they can't keep up with the production of new soil up above, and the wetland grows. Summing up, wetlands are essential for keeping carbon in the ground, thus reducing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere.

Where does Caño Palma fit into this? It's estimated that the world's wetlands hold from 15% to 30% of soil-based carbon though wetlands make up only 6% of the world's land surface. Most of our coast from Limon north into Nicaragua is wetlands. They're huge carbon sinks. Our boreal wetlands in Canada are also huge, but they're not nearly as effective at storing carbon as Tortuguero NP and the Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge. These tropical wetlands have sequestration rates 5 times greater than cold boreal wetlands as well as having much greater carbon density. Large amounts of carbon are also locked away in the immense expanses of vegetation in our area.

So, why should we preserve the wonderful wetlands around Caño Palma? As Dr. William Mitsch, who has done a lot of research on wetlands and carbon, puts it: "We already know wetlands are outstanding coastal protection systems, and yet wetlands continue to be destroyed around the planet. Showing that wetlands are gigantic carbon sequestration machines might end up being the most convincing reason yet to preserve them."

ATTENTION PARENTS AND KEEN TEEN BIRDERS!

The Long Point Bird Observatory is looking for keen teen birders to apply for the 2014 Doug Tarry Natural History Fund - Young Ornithologist Workshop to be held from August 1 to 9, 2015. Participants will receive hands-on training in field ornithology including bird banding, monitoring, field identification, birding trips, preparing museum specimens, guest lectures, and more! Six of Canada's most promising ornithologists between the ages of 13-17 will be selected to attend, and will receive the Doug Tarry Bird Study Award to cover all on-site expenses. Applications are due April 30, 2015. For more information and an application form visit www.birdscanada.org/lpbo, or contact lpbo@birdscanada.org

LIVING THE DREAM AT CAÑO PALMA

by Helen Pheasey

Editor's Note—this article was originally written in the summer of 2014

Hi everyone,

Its Helen Pheasey here Head Intern for the Marine Turtle Project. 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 co-ordinator 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 were 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 programme 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 she 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 very 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 here 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 which is 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

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.

The following is an update from Helen in October, 2014

The turtle nesting season is officially coming to a close here on Playa Norte. We are seeing fewer and fewer nesting females and are gearing up for a busy month of excavations to assess the success of our nests.

We LOVE that after such a slow year the turtles started to nest in force, but it did make for something of a logistical challenge! Most of our interns are now here to work on projects other than turtles (see previous posts for details) so thank goodness they are all so enthusiastic and are stepping up to patrol the beach night and day for the turtles

I mentioned excavations (eggscavations?!). October is proving to be an eggscavation eggstravaganza, no yolk! OK sorry, enough of the terrible puns; this is what happens when you spend so many hours of your day in the sun, digging holes to collect data on nest success. So far this month we have excavated 18 Green nests and 2 Hawksbill. And we are starting to get some results from our mesh protection project. We have had a number of nests where we placed a mesh over the egg chamber but had seen signs of predation. So it was with little optimism that we went in, fearing the eggs had been predated. However we are delighted to report that despite the dogs being able to get through the mesh, on several nests they haven't been able to access the egg chamber. *Continued on Page 8*

Q. What memories remain in the students' minds the longest?

That's hard to say. As each student's background and life experiences are unique, Caño Palma and its opportunities mean something unique to each of them. It changes them. They talk about the trip for the entire next year and longer. It gives them a sense of pride and uniqueness – they got to do something special. Something truly unique. They get to know each other. They build lasting friendships. Each student prepares a journal for the trip and these are collected once we land back home. They all seem to look at the world in a new way.

Q. Did the experience of being at a research station alter the future plans of any of your students?

I believe so. One young man worked with several turtles as they laid eggs and disguised nests. He also saw that many of the developing young succumbed to bacterial infection. On the flight back to the States, he informed me that he's decided to focus his medical-school studies in obstetrics. A second student, a female, became seriously interested in pursuing a career in conservation biology.

Q. Do you have any suggestions that might make Caño Palma a better experience for volunteers?

The station manager, Charlotte, is an absolutely delightful person and my students quickly fall in love with her humor. Otherwise, I do think volunteers can do more for the station. My students leave behind pillows, pillowcases, mosquito nets, medical supplies, etc. If the station received a steady supply of donations like these, it could focus more of the funding it does have towards its ongoing research projects.

Shawnee State University Students



Q. I understand the students have done fundraising for Caño Palma. How did that come about?

Several of the female students on my first trip fell in love with the children of the surrounding community. They felt more could be done to help them and to encourage their educational success. I think they realized that even though they themselves had little by some standards, they were wealthy compared to some children they met. A club was started here on campus with the goal of promoting activities that help the environment. The fundraiser for Caño Palma and its surrounding community was their way of indirectly helping the environment (by helping the people that care for it). I came up with the idea to do a split fundraiser - half the funds raised helped sponsor the Shawnee students, the other half was saved to buy supplies for the school children. We raised nearly \$1000. It became clear to me that it would be impossible for us to carry all of the supplies that \$1000 could purchase. We compromised, spending some of the money on supplies and giving the rest to Charlotte. We knew that she would use the funds appropriately to help the school children. I think it meant as much to the students to be able to help as it meant to Caño Palma and the elementary school to be on the receiving end.

WELCOME TO EMILY KHAZAM

In our last edition of Raphia we said farewell to Elias Bader, Research Coordinator, who has completed his contract and has now returned home. Emily Khazam has just joined our research team at Caño Palma Biological Station.

Emily grew up outside of Baltimore, MD., and fell in love with the tropics and field biology while spending a semester in Costa Rica as an undergraduate. She subsequently shaped her undergrad curriculum around conservation biology.

As an undergrad, Emily worked on a series of behavioural ecology projects, focused on damselflies. She conducted fieldwork on odonates from Michigan to Mexico before starting her Master's degree. Her Master's research focused on movement of giant damselflies throughout the San Juan - La Selva biological corridor in Northeast Costa Rica.

Working at Cano Palma gives her the opportunity to explore another region of Costa Rica and learn about/work with many new taxa, and we get some interesting new ideas and perspectives to shape 2015.

We're excited to have Emily on board, and gearing up for a very busy and interesting 2015!



Continuation of Helen Pheasey's Article from Page 6

On the first nest we found 98 undisturbed empty shells. That's 98 hatchlings that made it to the surface who would have been predated were it not for the mesh. AND better yet on another occasion we found live hatchlings ready to head out to sea! They were active and when we checked their plastron (belly) it was closed. We left them alone to make the journey to the sea.

Relief followed by elation flowed by high-fives all round! It really makes all the effort worth it.

A mahoosive thank you to everyone supporting the turtle team at the moment, Andrew Glinsky gets a special thank you as he really is an unstoppable mesh making machine, Marvin, and Rachel, the last of turtle team crew who have been with us for months and months and are still standing.

Thanks also to everyone who is taking time away from their projects to help us, Marta, Brenna stepping in from the community program as well as Roy, Bas, Lieve, Christina, Greta, Megan, Jeffrey, Sofia, Carlotta and Chiara... You are all wonderful and we would be lost without you!



9,400 sea turtle eggs were found in the trunk of a car outside Nicoya, Guanacaste in September, 2014 as reported in the Tico Times Jan. 5, 2015. A very disturbing discovery.

WONDERFUL NEWS FOR OUR EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAM

by Charlotte Foale, Station Manager

The community project will look a little different in 2015, as interns will be living and working much closer to the school. With a loan from family, Manuel and Charlotte finalized the purchase of property close to the school at the end of November. The property has a large garden with a variety of fruit trees, and two houses.

The purchase of the property stemmed from a desire to have a space away from the school, from which student centered activities could be run. As we have developed the education internships, there have been a number of challenges in working in the limited



space at the school. We've also become more acutely aware of the misuse of donations solicited for the school. Very often, requested resources haven't made it into the hands of the students, and have ended up sitting in boxes in the schoolhouse. Having such an ideal space to use as this property presents, we hope to be able to continue to build on recent program successes, and provide many more hands-on learning opportunities to the students we work with. To this end, we're looking to use one of the houses as a library and resource center. It'll provide an area for educational support activities, as well as a "clubhouse" for the Conservation Club.

- As the entire property is fenced, the garden is secure and suitable for students to plant, so lends itself to composting, and different garden-based science projects. The school football team will earn some extra money for equipment and away games, by helping to take care of the garden.
- The second house on the property has 3 bedrooms and is in excellent condition. It will be used to house education interns, with the proximity to the school an obvious benefit.

As the new school year starts in February, we'll be mobilising volunteers to get the library ready, and the property is already proving to be a handy get-away for researchers looking for a quiet space to write up their reports. Within the first week of purchase, it also proved its worth as an evacuation point when the station flooded!

We're really excited about the opportunities that this purchase presents, and are extremely grateful to Rick and Cilla Vickers for loaning the money that has made this possible!

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! The cost is only \$ 20 plus shipping & handling. You can order online at http://www.coterc.com/store/c1/Featured_Products.html or contact info@coterc.org PayPal or cheque

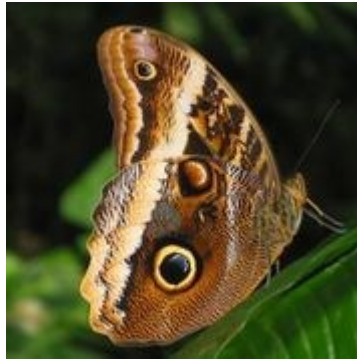
Recipes from Caño Palma Biological Station



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Tamandua

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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