

More Forest Gone



western border in order to document illegal farming activities. The destruction is ongoing and unlike other years, we have seen a progressive movement of farmers destroying the Chiquibul forest in order to plant their crops. We also observed the removal of forests in new areas. An area known as Cebada, which forms an important section of the Chiquibul Cave System has been impacted this year. Several institutions have participated on these over flights including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belize Defense Force, Police Department, Channel 7 TV and Amandala newspaper.

Like last year, FCD with the support of Lighthawk took several over flights along the

As this forest is destroyed the environmental impacts are huge since the habitat of wildlife is impacted and the further degradation of soils into the headwaters is eminent. The Chiquibul forest provides water to over 100,000 Guatemalans and for more than 130,000 Belizeans. The Chiquibul River and Mopan Rivers are invaluable to life for all the villages, towns and cities that depend on this water. As more forest is impacted along the western border, the stability of these rivers can be compromised.

What is Eco-Quest Expeditions?

Belize is a small but rich country. Nature still abounds but not many Belizeans have had the opportunity of visiting wilderness areas that are still undiscovered and found under a forest canopy. At FCD we have been privileged to know many of these areas such as the highest point, the largest cave entrance, the longest cave passage, headwaters of the Chiquibul River, unique rock formations, impressive wildlife species and open spaces found in solitude. These areas have inspired awe and wonder among FCD naturalists, and these are the very same experiences that we hope to share.



With this in mind, Eco-Quest Expeditions was created. The slogan is "Protecting Wilderness

through Adventure." Nature enthusiasts, explorers and those in search of new experiences are encouraged to join us in one of our trips. Presently four trips have been developed. Destination points include: A two day trip to the Chiquibul Cave System; Day trip to observe Scarlet macaws in the Chiquibul Forest; hiking in the Bald Hills; and canoeing in the Natural Arch. All funds derived from these trips are directly used for management of the Chiquibul forest. Your investment in these trips is well worth it. Simply write us at ecoquest@fcdbelize.org or call us at 823-2657 for more information.

What Do People Think About The Vaca F.R?



Thanks to the 980 individuals from four communities that participated on an FCD questionnaire survey we now have a good understanding of the attitudes and behaviors

of people towards the Vaca Forest Reserve. Forty four percent (44%) of those interviewed know that the Vaca has serious environmental problems. Of this total 97 individuals felt that deforestation for agriculture was the major threat encountered in the Vaca Forest Reserve. But more awareness must be built to improve the knowledge among the target groups. Fifty seven percent (57.65%) or 565 of the persons strongly believe that protecting forest reserves is very important. The great majority (75%) believe that the reserve is not close to them and for this reason perhaps they consider that they do not receive any benefit from the area.

More encouraging, it was found out that a total of 62.76% or 615 of the persons interviewed

demonstrated an interest in the formation of "Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve" and at the same time expressed interest in participating in the protection and conservation of the Vaca Forest Reserve. But 88.06% or 863 interviewees claim that they have no knowledge on methods or techniques on how to utilize the land without destroying the forest. Based on these results FCD's environmental educator with the support of the Sustainable Land Management/United Nations Development Program is now engaged on a one year campaign to increase the level of awareness and activism from local people for the protection of the Vaca Forest Reserve. Schools interested in learning more about the Vaca are encouraged to contact FCD at Tel: 823-2657.

For more information contact:

Friends for Conservation and Development, San José Succotz, Cayo District, Tel: 823-2657, Email: fcd@fcdbelize.org, website: www.fcdbelize.org

Friends for Conservation and Development



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FCD Tracks

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Promoting Core Conservation

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Learning About The Vaca

The closest communities to the Vaca Forest Reserve include Arenal, Benque Viejo and Succotz. But interestingly 43% of the people interviewed recently were not aware of the Vaca Forest Reserve, and worst were not aware of the benefits it provides. The Vaca Forest Reserve is comprised of 40,375 acres and is found some seven miles away from Benque. Arenal is the closest community where its boundaries of the village buffer the reserve. The reserve generates the following identified environmental goods: Water for human consumption and hydroelectric power, timber, firewood, medicinal plants, fruits, forestry seed banks, wild animals and fertile soils. This reserve is highly impacted by various human activities such as logging and farming. If measures are not taken to control these activities, it is certain that the reserve will disappear in the near future.

Since more than 12,000 inhabitants depend on the reserve directly, it is essential that all of us learn more



about this area and support its protection. So how can you help? If you observe any illegal activity in the area, call the nearest Forest Department Office to inform them. This is a task everyone can do.

Environmental Youth In Action



During the month of April FCD was rejuvenated with the creation of its youth arm. 1989 marked the time when a group of intrepid outdoor enthusiasts formed the Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG) and now after 22 years the youth arm of FCD is launched under the same philosophy and aspirations. It all began in San Jose Succotz and this is where our office is still based. The goal of the FCD youth arm is to create an environmental consciousness among

young people. Today members of the youth arm are from the colleges of Mount Carmel and Mopan Technical. The over 30 members are an enthusiastic crowd of young people who have been implementing clean up campaigns along the Mopan River and in the village, and are planning a summer camp, tree planting and fundraising activities. All young people are invited to join the group by filling a membership form. To learn more on this program just send us an e-mail to fcd@btl.net

Timber Loss In The Millions

The Chiquibul Joint Enforcement Unit is now fully instituted and has proven to be effective in protecting the Chiquibul National Park. The primary aim of the Joint Forces is to detect and address illegal activities in the Chiquibul Forest. So far, several successful tasks have been made leading to confiscation of horses, timber and detaining several persons involved in environmental crime.

The FAO/FLEGT funded project whose objective is to combat illegal logging in the Chiquibul forest is also advancing well in various fronts. A pilot illegal logging assessment has been finalized

and the results demonstrate that the impact is high. Just alone in the 40 plots surveyed inside the Caracol Archaeological Reserve, over 199 trees were logged illegally. The preliminary data clearly indicates that illegal logging is more severe than what was first thought and there are clear indications of no decrease. Illegal loggers have created an entire timber industry, where the estimated economic loss is well over Bz\$ 15,000,000.00. Based on these realities FCD believes that it is essential to improve coordination among security agencies and implement effective interventions rapidly in

order to safeguard the viability of the mahogany and cedar populations within the Chiquibul Forest.



Employee Of The Quarter



Arnoldo Melendez joined FCD this past December as an Extension Technician. Earlier he worked as a Project Officer and then as Programme Coordinator for the Cayo Centre for Development and Cooperation (CCDC), a private non-profit organization for twelve (12) years. Having Arnoldo at FCD has given us a high level of confidence and merit for the placement of an entire new program, namely sustainable livelihoods. Why is this program important to us? As human populations increase there are more pressures exerted on protected areas. This is vividly seen in the Vaca Forest Reserve and the goal of Arnoldo

is, therefore, to reduce land degradation in the Vaca. Arnoldo's experience, commitment, and zeal for excellence are demonstrated every day. No wonder, for this reason the activities in the Vaca are moving beyond our expectations. We are certain that the Vaca has a great future with the inclusion of farmers and the foundations are strongly being placed by Arnoldo. For his enthusiasm and commitment, we are proud to award to Arnoldo the *Employee of the Quarter*. Thank you, Arnoldo for your dedication and ongoing effort.

Wildlife Bits

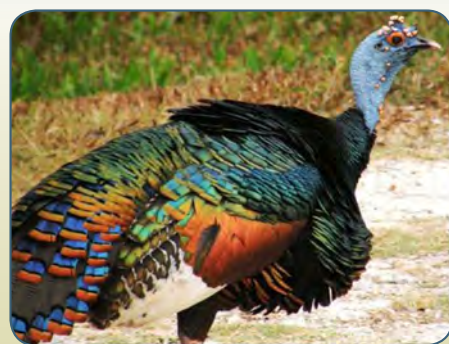
Wildlife monitoring is an ongoing process for FCD. FCD's dedicated team of researchers continue to document wildlife with the use of sophisticated, infra-red Reconyx cameras.

The Ocellated turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*) is a species of turkey found in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico. In Belize Ocellated turkeys are most often found in tropical deciduous and lowland evergreen forests as well as clearings and abandoned farm plots. Ocellated turkeys can be spotted in the Chiquibul forest where it resides as well as other forested areas in the country. This specie of turkey is a relatively large bird, at around 28-48 inches long and an average weight of 6.6 lbs in females and 11 lbs in males.

These turkeys have a brilliant and iridescent bronze-green plumage. The head is blue

in both sexes, but the males have a fleshy crown behind the snood which is covered with yellow-orange nodules. The spots, or ocelli (located on the tail), for which the Ocellated Turkey is named, have been likened to the patterning typically found on peacock's tail feathers. Males over one year old have spurs at least 1.5 inches in length. The eye is surrounded by a ring of bright red skin, which is most visible on males during breeding season.

Turkeys spend most of the time on the ground and often prefer to run to escape danger through the day rather than fly, though they can fly swiftly and powerfully for short distances. An Ocellated turkey's diet consists mainly of seeds, berries, insects and leaves. Roosting is usually high in trees away from night hunting predators such as Jaguars and usually in a family group.



Ocellated turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*)

Female ocellated turkeys lay 8-15 eggs in a well concealed nest on the ground. She incubates the eggs for 28 days. The young are precocial and able to leave the nest after one night. They then follow their mother until they reach young adulthood though often re-grouping to roost at night. In Belize this magnificent bird is threatened by large scale timbering operations followed by slash and burn agriculture and overhunting.

Working With People

Five months ago, FCD for the first time became engaged on a sustainable livelihood program funded by GEF/SGP and the UNDP. The aim of the project was to develop a pilot landscape management strategy in the Vaca Forest Reserve as well as institute a honey-keeping project in the area. Since then Arnoldo Melendez, the Extension Technician at FCD has identified the bee-keepers, conducted training activities, visited farmers in the Vaca and is seeking further assistance programs for farmers. In this very short time, farmers have become engaged on sustainable activities; have successfully managed and cared for their bee-hives; and are developing a stewardship behavior that promises to aid in the maintenance of the

Vaca Forest Reserve in the long term. The successful work of the bee-keepers has been possible due to a collaborative effort. On one hand the Forest Department has enabled the activity to take place inside a forest reserve by the provision of a honey-keeping concession to the Cayo Quality Honey Producers Cooperative. The technical expertise provided by personnel from the Department of Agriculture and CATIE has also been extremely important in guiding the new honey-keepers to success. In the next few weeks the honey-keepers will be able to harvest honey for sale and hopefully generate some financial gains. What we are certain right now is that farmers in the area are no longer expanding into new areas to farm.



So the initiative is working although there are some other farmers who are arriving in Vaca, and it is our only desire that these newcomers receive their cease and desist order from the Forest Department. If this is not done, then land degradation in the Vaca will continue to occur.



With the support of the British Embassy a vibrant community program is underway



Eco-Blocks

for the protection of the Mopan and Chiquibul Rivers. Four communities were selected as part of the pilot program with the aim to implement community based activities complimentary to the protection of the rivers. In Guatemala the village of Arenal and municipality of Melchor de Mencos are part of the program. The Arenal pilot project is well underway with the construction of an eco-school room. Parents and children of this village over the last few weeks have been engaged in the collection of plastic bottles, and plastic bags which eventually have become

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eco-blocks. Like in the concrete blocks there are also several sizes of eco-blocks!

During the month of April the Arenal villagers conducted an event symbolizing the launching of the eco-school room construction. Speakers to the event included the alcalde from Melchor de Mencos, Mr. Ricardo Avila, Vice alcalde from Arenal, Executive Director of FCD, Mr. Rafael Manzanero, and teachers from Arenal Primary School. To learn more about eco-blocks and eco-construction contact us at FCD.

Visits Across The Maya Mountains

FCD has always recognized that the Chiquibul National Park is part of a bigger and larger block known as the Maya Mountains. As a result the threats and challenges occurring in other parts of the massif can have serious implications and vice versa - any threats in the Chiquibul can spill-over into other areas. Likewise, stories of success can have an opportunity of being replicated. This is precisely what FCD's environmental educator has been doing in other parts of the Massif.

With the assistance of the Extension Technician at FCD and members of the Cayo Quality

Honey Producers Cooperative during the month of April, visits were made to the villages of Trio, Bladen, San Pablo, Steadfast and Red Bank in the Toledo and Stann Creek Districts. The purpose of the visit was for community members to learn about the sustainable livelihood pilot project being conducted in the Vaca Forest Reserve, namely bee-keeping and landscape management. More than 200 community members from the five communities were able to learn about the work of the cooperative, the joint effort underway in the Vaca, and the importance of developing sustainable and environmentally friendly activities nearby protected areas. The



next step is now to bring community members interested on these programs to Cayo and see first-hand the work of the Cayo Quality Honey Producers Cooperative.

Partner's Spotlight

Centre for Strategic Studies, Policy Analysis and Research

The Centre for Strategic Studies, Policy Analysis and Research (CSSPAR) is a multi-disciplinary virtual 'think-tank' conducting research, and future oriented studies, for high-level public policy decision making.

CSSPAR conducts studies and assessments, directed towards strengthening the central minds of public sector organizations for decision making in key strategic issue areas. CSSPAR's Coordinator, Ambassador Mr. David Gibson, a professional policy analyst and negotiator is one of the *Champions of the Chiquibul*. For over a year, Mr. Gibson has provided detailed advice in our ongoing efforts to findings solutions for

the Guatemalan incursions in the Chiquibul forest. His contribution has been formidable and his passion for the protection of the Chiquibul is tremendous. He has been one of the key individuals that not only has heard about FCD's cry for guidance, but has come aboard to assist in making a difference. His participation in the *Chiquibul Think Group* is exceptional and his many recommendations for trans-boundary solutions are found in the many facets of our work. FCD is proud to have CSSPAR as one of our formidable partners and remains grateful for all the ongoing support.



Archaeological Survey Training

From time to time the field personnel at FCD observe archaeological remains in the Chiquibul forest, but recording these has been sporadic and inconsistent. To address this, a two day training on Archaeological Survey and Mapping was conducted by Mr. Rafael Guerra from the Institute of Archaeology (IA). Field personnel learnt about mapping techniques,

field identification, plotting, verifying field data and collecting field data. Data sheets were also developed for the staff and it is intended that all of the data collected will be transferred to FCD's Research Coordinator who ultimately will enter it into a database. FCD is thankful to IA for making this training possible.