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Children's Tropical Forests News



Children's Tropical Forests UK
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The abundance of water that flows from the Monteverde Cloud Forest is both the lifeblood of its wildlife and a potential threat to the Forest's integrity. Story below.

THE GREEN GIRLS OF STAMFORD HIGH SCHOOL RAISE £4,000

Inspired and encouraged by their Director of Studies, Frankie Owens, the girls of Stamford High School embarked on a year long fund-raising bonanza for CTF UK in the Autumn of last year. Once again the email exchanges help tell the story.

To: Robin Jolliffe
From: Frankie Owens
Wednesday 21 September 2004

Dear Robin,
Just to let you know that I am planning another big fund raising for the CTF UK Charity this term. I am having another Green week from 11-15 October 2004. It is a few years ago since I did the first one now!!! Let's hope I can raise a lot for Costa Rica again.

To: Frankie Owens
From: Robin Jolliffe
Wednesday 22 September 2004

Dear Frankie,
Great to hear from you again and terrific news about your Green Week and proposed fund raising for Costa Rica rainforest. Thanks so much for thinking of us again and I look forward to hearing from you.

To: Robin Jolliffe
From: Frankie Owens
Wednesday 29 November 2004

Hello Robin,
Just to let you know how we are doing with the fund raising. So far we have reached £1,800 which I am delighted with as we are doing it for the whole academic year. We had a very successful Green Week just before half term with fund raising all week culminating in a Green Day. Girls wore green clothes for a charge and there was a large bazaar with games, home made gifts and a swap shop for clothes. We also had a sponsored Vegetarian Week during Green Week too.

This week we have a disco and further fun is being organised for next term. I don't know if you come out to schools to do Assemblies about the charity, but it could give next term a boost if you are able to come to Stamford. We have 600 girls in the school aged between 11 and 18.

To: Frankie Owens
From: Robin Jolliffe
Wednesday 2 December 2004

Wow Frankie, what a fantastic result!
I would be delighted to give a short presentation next term.

So the morning of 9 February 2005 saw Robin Jolliffe talking to Stamford High's 600 pupils about the work of CTF UK. On 9 March, Frankie Owens was emailing her thanks. 'The talk went down really well with girls and staff saying how much they enjoyed it.'

The school's year long campaign was a spectacular success. The Green Girls eventually raised £4,000 which has been split 50/50 between two of CTF UK's key projects – the Monteverde Cloud Forest in Costa Rica, with which the charity has been associated for nearly 20 years, and our brand new Boa Nova forest purchase project in Eastern Brazil launched in association with Birdlife International in our last Newsletter.

Postscript: Thirteen years ago, the late Tina Jolliffe, founder of CTF UK, standing where her husband stood earlier this year, gave a presentation to the Stamford girls – and that time they raised £2,000 for rainforest protection.



Green jumpers, green skirts, green stockings, worn during Stamford High's Green Week.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST

continued overleaf

The first Children's Eternal Rainforest in the cloud shrouded highlands of Central Costa Rica was established in 1986. With enormous support for land purchase from the International Children's Rainforest Network worldwide, the protected forest in the Monteverde area grew very rapidly in the late Eighties and early Nineties to its current 57,000 acres. But once a Reserve of this size is established that is only the beginning of the story. The triumphs, tests, crises and changes that occur in just a single year of its history show how complex and challenging a job it is to maintain the integrity of such a Reserve. The latest Annual Report from the Monteverde Conservation League, which owns and manages the First Children's Eternal Rainforest, paints a vivid picture of just such a year.

It is hard to raise money for rainforest purchase – but much, much harder to find money year after year to pay administrative staff and forest guards; to maintain and improve offices, field research stations and vehicles; to police and fence reserve boundaries; let alone to finance the legal bills to fight land disputes, some of them illegally trumped up by unscrupulous neighbours.

Payment for forest protection.

And so one fascinating aspect of the Report is the stress it places on what the MCL terms 'self-generated income'. In the past, MCL was dependent on restricted use funds – funds limited or directly related to donors' intents – like the money raised by the Children's Rainforest Network specifically for land purchase, vital though that was in establishing the Reserve in the first place. Critically, by 2002, MCL's self generated income came close to covering year on year operational expenses of the type outlined above. And where much of that income came from was very significant.

Environmental Services Payments contributed 43% of the total. ESP's, put on the World agenda at the 1992 Rio Summit, are based on the acknowledgement by Governments and private companies of the environmental services that forests provide to human society including the mitigation of greenhouse gases; water resource protection; biodiversity protection and scenic and aesthetic beauty.

Currently, MCL has successfully included nearly 5,000 hectares of the Children's Rainforest in different ESP programs. Some payments come directly from the Costa Rican Government and some from private electricity generating companies which depend for their water power on the constant supply regulated by the rainforests covering the slopes of the Reserve's Esperanza and Aranjuez watersheds.

Government ESP contracts run for five years, with payment increments per hectare each year, and the electricity generating companies' payments are linked to their increasing annual electricity output. Both give some level of continuity to MCL's annual income.

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A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST continued

The other rapidly rising source of income (31% of the total in 2002) was from student, tourist, volunteer and research groups staying in the Biological Stations situated deep within the Children's Rainforest. Not surprisingly, many of these visitors came from the USA but regular groups now visit from Spain and Germany as well as Costa Rica itself.

In September 2002, the MCL became a paying member of the Monteverde Tourism Board to promote stays at its Biological Stations.

Threat from extraordinary law

But the same Government which is making the Environmental Service Payments has recently approved an extraordinary law which could undermine much of the splendid work done by previous Governments and private nature conservation organisations in preserving 25% of Costa Rica's land area for wildlife. Known as the 'Conelectricas Law', it allows the Government to seize land in national parks, biological reserves, protected zones and private protected areas on behalf of energy generating companies for the development of hydroelectric and geothermic projects.

Environmental Service Payments contributed 43% of the Monteverde Conservations League's income in 2002.



With its obvious potential for such projects the Children's Rainforest is a prime target. Indeed, MCL has already been approached by one of the energy companies to allow them to research and evaluate a possible future geothermic project in the heart of the protected forest encompassing a 5-10 square kilometre area. MCL considered this inconsistent with our philosophy and thus voted unanimously to refuse this permission. We know that if ICE wishes to perform this study or complete this project, there is little we can do because it is Government backed. But we considered it important to clearly state our opposition and not facilitate the study.

The hydro-electric projects for which MCL receives Environmental Service Payments are outside the Reserve but use water from rivers with their sources within the Children's Rainforest. But what is to stop these companies from appropriating the protected watersheds within the Reserve using the Conelectricas Law to avoid making the ESP payments? It is early days to assess how the law will work in practice. But MCL, along with other leading Costa Rican conservation organisations, is at the forefront in mobilising opposition to the law and attempting to get it taken off the statute books.

It is worth noting that CTF News sought a comment from Professor Dan Janzen who is the driving force behind the Bridge and Rincon Rainforest Projects in North-Western Costa Rica, both heavily supported by the CTF Network worldwide. His immediate response was that the Conelectricas crisis 'is overblown'.

Plainly, we have to await developments but, as this law could potentially have a profound effect on CTF supported projects in Costa Rica, we shall do our best to keep our supporters informed and present a balanced view of the threats it poses.

Local Schools planting trees

But meanwhile, back to positive swings of the pendulum in the MCL year. With the continued support of Children's Rainforests, Japan, MCL produced 12,500 native tree saplings of 7 different species in its tree nursery at San Gerardo de la Tigra in the 8 months to August 2002 (our most up to date information). The seedlings were planted in sixteen different properties and local conservation projects. These included a project called 'Rescue the Rio Barrito' which is being undertaken by the San Francisco de Penas Blancas Elementary School and a group from the Santa Clara Nocturnal High School whose students are reforesting an area in Bajo Rodriguez de los Angeles de San Ramon.

So perhaps, as well as nurturing saplings, the tree nursery is nurturing the next generation of conservationists.

Another major step forward for MCL was the formation, in April 2002, of the Monteverde Conservation League, U.S. which will serve as a support and fund-raising centre for the League in the United States. MCL US has already taken over the administration and financing of MCL's annual fund-raising 'appeal letter' in the USA and it is researching possible large donors from whom to request funds.

But its list of priorities based on information received from MCL in Costa Rica is very revealing, reflecting the changed requirements of this large mature nature reserve. They include:

- Improvements to the Poco Sol Biological Station, described in the Annual Report as being in 'poor condition' - to make it more attractive to potential visitors to the Reserve.
- The repair or replacement of vehicles in poor condition and the purchase of an ATV vehicle quadracycle.
- Repair of the hydro-electric plant in San Gerardo.
- Protection of the Children's Rainforest by raising money to pay forest guards and maintenance personnel; and critically, to provide funds for fighting legal battles over land. MCL is under constant threat from bogus legal claims - some from landowning families who actually sold the land under dispute to MCL while the Reserve was being expanded.
- Construction of new and more adequate office space in La Tigra.

Eighteen years on, the Children's Eternal Rainforest (Bosque Eternos de los Ninos) is intact and supporting a huge range of neotropical flora and fauna. But only through the continued dedication of the MCL staff and the support of interested conservationists around the world, with an appreciation of its changing priorities, will it survive into the future.

BLACK CAIMAN - DOING BETTER WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM ITS FRIENDS

The Black Caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*) is the largest South American crocodile and the Amazon's biggest predator. But despite its size and power it can be hunted with ease and the species has been reduced in numbers by 99% over the last century. The wild population is estimated to be between 25,000 and 50,000 and is restricted to slow-moving rivers, streams and lakes in rainforests and seasonally flooded savannas in the Amazon basin.



The Amazon's biggest predator.

It is now considered to be dependent on human conservation initiatives and occurs in the CTF UK supported reserves at Jatun Saha in Eastern Ecuador and at Uwasu in Central Brazil.

Black Caiman, which can grow up to about 20 feet (6 meters) long, swim very well, mainly using their tails to propel themselves through the water. They are supremely adapted to aquatic life with eyes and nostrils at the top of the head.

Mostly active at night, they hunt for fish, including piranhas and catfish, birds and turtles and even the largest Amazonian land animals like capybaras. Some 75 long, sharp conical teeth are used for catching prey - but not tearing it apart. They swallow their victims whole!

Females build a huge mound nest of soil and vegetation about 5 feet across and lay 50-60 eggs in each clutch. While the eggs are incubating, the females guard the nest and are dangerously aggressive at this time. The sex of the Black Caiman offspring is determined by the temperature in the nest rather than by genetics.

Black Caimans are found in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana and Peru with unconfirmed reports from Venezuela. In reserves where it has substantial protection, most populations appear to recover well from previous heavy hunting pressure.

AMAZON BRAZIL - STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH NEW CHALLENGES AT UWASU RESERVE

The creation of a huge new 'Sustainable Development Reserve' by the Government of Amazonas in central Brazil has posed serious legal and conservation issues for the Uwasu Rainforest Reserve which we last reported on in our November 2002 newsletter.

At the World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa in September 2003, the Governor of Amazonas, Sr Eduardo Braga, announced that a vast area of 1.05 million hectares (over 2.5 million acres) to be known as the Piagucu-Purus Reserve has been set aside for 'sustainable development'. And according to Dr Carlos Perez of the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia and one of the founding fathers of the Uwasu Reserve, Piagucu-Purus has effectively incorporated Uwasu.

The implications of this are two-fold. With the well-known complexities and pitfalls of Brazilian land law, it poses questions about the validity of the land titles held over the Uwasu reserve by the conservation bodies concerned. And because 'sustainable development' actually means that activities in the Piagucu-Purus will be dominated by human extraction of natural resources, including hunting, fishing and logging, Uwasu's pristine wilderness is potentially under threat.

'The whole thing is a bit of a mess' says Carlos Perez in an email to CTF UK on 25 May 2005, but to use a very common modern expression, his basic view is that the conservation bodies should 'hang on in there'.

Strictly protected

So, over the past few months, a strategy has been worked out to do just that. It has two main thrusts.

Firstly, to try and influence the long term management plan for Piagucu-Purus in particular as it concerns Uwasu. The specific objectives are 'to convince the directors of Piagucu-Purus to establish their research base in Uwasu, making Lago Uauacu the epicentre for conservation research in the region. And, crucially, to ensure that the Lago Uauacu region becomes a strictly protected wildlife sanctuary within the much larger Sustainable Development Reserve. Indeed, Carlos Perez attended two major conferences in Brazil in July of this year where he was able to have talks with all the other parties involved in the long term management of the Piagucu-Purus.

The second objective is to maintain a continuous management and research presence at Uwasu itself. To this end, a Norwegian biologist, Tor Haugeasen, who has already spent 21 months at Uwasu researching its mammal populations, is to spend a further three years at the Reserve. He has just been awarded a 3-year post-doctoral fellowship by the Norwegian Government Research Council to return to Uwasu for further studies, including research into population levels and sustainable harvesting of natural stands of Brazil nut trees.

Combined with this, and supported by the conservation bodies involved with Uwasu, including CTF UK, he will take up some of the management duties at Uwasu, in particular the communication with local communities.

Clearly, the situation at Uwasu is complex but nothing is cut and dried in efforts to conserve these beautiful and diverse habitats. We shall monitor developments at Uwasu and in the wider Piagucu-Purus reserve and do our best to trace the unfolding story for our supporters.

Strictly protected research centre?

