



# **The UK-Colombia Conservation Exchange June-July 2007**

## **Final Report**

Entropika UK  
Fundación Entropika, Colombia

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## Sponsors

The Eden Project  
The Living Rainforest  
The Monkey Sanctuary Trust  
Andrew Hood  
The Rivett-Carnac Family  
Aviatur

## Participants

Entropika UK  
*Fundación Entropika*  
The Eden Project  
The Living Rainforest  
The Monkey Sanctuary Trust  
Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance  
*Comunidad San Martin de Amacayacu*  
Oxford Brookes University  
The University of Oxford

## Introduction

In June 2007, with the participants listed above, Entropika UK initiated a conservation exchange which involved bringing Azulay Vasquez and Mamerto Gregorio, two members of the Tikuna indigenous community, San Martin de Amacayacu, a community based in the Colombian Amazon, to the UK to take part in a series of lectures, talks and workshops to facilitate an exchange of information between Colombia and the UK with particular focus on Amazon conservation and to disseminate our current conservation work in the area. Accompanying them was Andres Barona, a botanist from Colombia and one of the founding members of Fundación Entropika, who brought both his botanical expertise and acted as translator for our indigenous guests.

The aim was to create a forum for discussion with regard to Amazon conservation and to offer people in the UK a rare chance to learn about indigenous people's use of tropical plants, their cultural history and their views on the issues facing the Amazon forests and their efforts to conserve them. In addition, the aim was for Azulay and Mamerto to take the information gleaned from the organisations and individuals engaged with in the UK back to the Amazonas region to share with their community.

During the five-week trip, the group worked with four establishments: The Living Rainforest, The Eden Project, The Monkey Sanctuary and Oxford University.

## **The Living Rainforest**

At The Living Rainforest, an education centre based near Newbury in Berkshire, the group took part in the following activities:

### ***Staff Training***

Azulay Vasquez, Mamerto Gregorio and Andres Barona worked with staff at the centre to teach them about both the medicinal uses of rainforest plants by the Tikuna people, as well as their cultural uses with regard to the Tikuna people's spiritual beliefs.

### ***A Meeting of Minds Conference***

A day-long conference was held to discuss the conservation of the Colombian Amazon from a variety of disciplines. The focus of the day was to explore the way in which "modern" science could work in conjunction with local knowledge to establish effective conservation initiatives. Speakers included Professor Sir Ghillean Prance, Peter Bunyard, Azulay Vasquez and Mamerto Gregorio as well as others from the fields of anthropology, sociology and zoology.

The event was well-attended, with around 60 delegates from varying organisations in the UK and feedback has been extremely positive, with some important links already having been established.

### ***The Spirits of the Forest Exhibition***

In conjunction with the work carried out by the group, the Living Rainforest played host to a photographic exhibition entitled "Los Espiritus de la Selva". The unique series of photographs by Nelson H. Pinilla Moreno explore the traditional belief held by the Tikuna people in the existence of spiritual guardians of the Amazon Rainforest. Present in every living creature and plant, the guardians are ancient and revered gods of the forest. The exhibition ran from 20th June – 20th July 2007.

## **The Monkey Sanctuary Trust**

### ***Presentations on Tikuna History and Plant Use***

The group gave two presentations during their stay to the staff and visitors of The Monkey Sanctuary Trust to discuss both traditional and medicinal plant use and the issues facing the rainforest from their own perspective.

The talks were well-received and initiated some interesting and important discussions from both staff and visitors to the centre.

## **The University of Oxford**

### ***Presentation on Tikuna History and Plant Use***

The group was requested to give a talk at the world-renowned University of Oxford, as a result of the Anthropology department hearing about the trip and expressing an interest to meet the group.

The talk was also extremely well-received and provoked interesting discussion amongst the attendees.

## **The Eden Project**

At The Eden Project, a charity dedicated to education and conservation, the group spent three weeks and took part in a number of different activities.

### ***The Medicinal Trail***

Andres Barona, Mamerto Gregorio and Azulay Vasquez worked closely with John Nichol, the horticulturalist with responsibility for the Amazonian section of the Human Tropic Biome at Eden, to establish a medicinal trail which could be used by visitors to learn about traditional medicinal use of rainforest plants, as well as the way in which the Tikuna people use them as part of their cultural and spiritual practices. The trail will have information next to each relevant plant and, similar to the already-established food trail, will have a stamp system so visitors can keep track of what they have found.

### ***Tikuna Artwork***

To complement the existing artwork and crafts that have been created over the years from visitors from other countries and cultures, Azulay, Mamerto and Andres created three pieces of original artwork to be displayed at The Eden Project. The artwork demonstrates aspects of Tikuna cultural history and each piece will be accompanied by translated explanations as to their relevance meaning. The artwork was created on canvas so that they can easily be moved around the site as the Eden team see fit.

### ***Tikuna Stories***

Azulay and Mamerto worked with the Pollinators (storytellers and guides) to give over a series of traditional Tikuna stories that can be used in conjunction with the teams' existing repertoire as a means of teaching visitors about plants and landscapes. As well as the stories put down on paper for the team to work with in the future, each day with the staff at Eden was used as a means of exchanging tales to build up a rich resource of comparisons of English, and specifically Cornish, folklore and legend and that of the Tikuna people.

### ***Building Cultural Connections***

In addition to the telling of stories, the trip also included visits to ancient sites of significance around Cornwall for the visiting group to learn about the area's unique cultural history. We used this time to draw comparisons between issues affecting the people of San Martin and the issues that have both affected in the past, and continue to affect the people of Cornwall such as exploitation of resources, problems with unemployment and displacement due to financial pressures amongst others. The discovery that, despite the geographical distance between the two areas, problems and concerns for the landscape and its people are remarkably similar led to a deeper understanding on both sides of cultural connections and history.

## ***Woolly Monkeys in the Amazon***

Angela Maldonado worked with the Eden team to incorporate information on the Woolly Monkey and its role as an important seed-disperser in the Amazon into talks given to public. As well as a founding member of Entropika, Angela is director of The Woolly Monkey Project, which is a community-based project focused on large mammal census and education.

## ***Presentations***

The team delivered four presentations to both staff and visitors of The Eden Project to discuss the specific issues facing the community of San Martin and the way in which these issues are being managed.

The talks were met with great interest and provoked some interesting question and answer sessions, also adding a different dimension to the visit of those people present on the day.

## ***Relationships with staff***

Something which we feel was an extremely important part of the visit was the connection made between the group and the staff at the Eden Project. Due to the differences in culture, language and approach, effective communication and mutual understanding could have been difficult and we were delighted that, in fact, the relationship-building aspect of the trip was perhaps the most rewarding for all involved, with strong bonds having been established based on mutual trust and respect.

## Obstacles

The experience was a learning curve for all involved with subject matter and discussions having to be approached with sensitivity due to the often very personal nature of the information being imparted. This was particularly true of the Tikuna stories, many of which have sacred connotations for the Tikuna people and thus the handling of them, dissemination to other parties and discussion surrounding them had to be dealt with respect and only with express permission from Mamerto and Azulay.

An obstacle that we predicted was that of intellectual property rights. All too often information has been gleaned from the Tikuna communities with little or no recompense and so, of utmost importance for the team was to ensure that full consent was gained and credit attributed to the information being used going forward in the establishments within which the group worked. In reality, we were pleased to find all of the participating organisations to be understanding of this concern and thus we have agreement with all involved that all information used will be credited to Azulay, Mamerto and San Martin de Amacayacu where appropriate.

The final predicted obstacle was that of translation so that the group could be understood and that they could be truly involved in discussions and conversations. With the help of Andres, Angela and, to a lesser extent, Liz, we found that this was not as much of a problem as we had anticipated; however, the workload for Andres was immense, with responsibility largely resting on him to provide the majority of translation throughout the course of the visit. As a result, if we were to repeat the exchange in the future, we feel it would be important to ensure that there are more people on hand to aid this aspect of the work.

## Achievements

We feel that, overall, we achieved the initial aim, which was to facilitate an exchange of information, with both the visiting group and the UK teams learning from each other in a number of different ways.

The building of relationships was another important achievement of the trip, with connections being made on both professional and personal levels with all of the organisations that we worked with. We look forward to building on these relationships in the future.

A practical outcome of the trip was that we secured funding for Mamerto to attend university in the next semester, as a result of networking and the kind donations of interested parties. Mamerto intends to study either business or politics and to develop skills which he will be able to use in future to benefit the community of San Martin. We hope that this will be the first of many "scholarships" that Entropika can facilitate to further educational opportunities in the local communities.

Finally, the Meeting of Minds event also created a forum not just for Entropika to expand its network but also for other organisations to meet and learn a little more about each other. We are pleased that we were able to facilitate these communications and have already heard from other groups that links they made on the day have helped to establish ongoing relationships.

In conclusion, we feel the trip was an enormous success and we look forward to working towards similar exchanges in the future.

## **Next Steps**

### ***Presentations in Local Communities and Institutions***

To complete the exchange, it is essential that the information both imparted and learned by the group is transmitted back to the community of San Martin, as well as institutions such as the National Park System and educational establishments in the locality of Amacayacu National Park. Entropika is working with Mamerto and Azulay to facilitate this dissemination and has a comprehensive video record of the trip to aid this process.

### ***The Photo Diary***

Entropika is working on a publication for distribution to all of the organisations involved in the exchange to act as an archive of the trip. We hope to include verbatim feedback from all participants and discuss the achievements, outcomes and evaluation of the trip as a whole. The book will be largely comprised of photographic evidence and wording will be in English, Spanish and Tikuna make it accessible to all parties.

### ***Video Conferencing***

So as to continue building the relationships established during the trip, Entropika aims to work with The Eden Project to establish ongoing contact via video conferencing so that both parties can be updated on the other's progress and plans.

### ***Future Exchanges***

Following the success of the 2007 exchange, Entropika hopes to repeat the process again in the future and welcomes the possibility of UK participants completing the circle by visiting the Colombian Amazon to see first-hand the efforts being made there by local communities and the Entropika team in the locality.

## Acknowledgements

Entropika would like to thank:

First and foremost The Eden Project, The Living Rainforest, The Monkey Sanctuary Trust, Aviatur, Andrew Hood and Sara Rivett-Carnac family for their invaluable support in realising this initiative.

Peter Bunyard, Tom, Mike and Chris Carnac, Brian Milton, Hannah Parathian and family, James Thorn and The Monkey Sanctuary Trust for their kind hospitality and generosity and to Rachel Hevesi for her support throughout.

Erna von der Walde, Jeremy MacClancy and Sir Ghillean Prance for acting as speakers at the Meeting of Minds event.

Karl Hansen, Lisa Mathers and team from The Living Rainforest and Diana, Dina, John, Dave, Carla, Justine, Don, Graham and the Eden team and Oxford Brookes University for their continued support during the trip.

Mamerto Gregorio and Azulay Vazquez for their hard work, and the community of San Martin de Amacayacu for their agreement to be involved in the exchange.