

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/

Conference Title: Operation Wallacea

Travel Dates: 13th June – 27th July

Location: Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, Peru

Group member(s): Margaret Bolton

Aims: Learn about the ongoing ecological research in this Reserve and
survey methods, assist in this research and conservation effort.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The six weeks I spent in the Pacaya Samiria National Reserve in Peru taught me a great deal, both about the local ecology and myself. On arrival in Iquitos, and later in Nauta, I was shy of the people around me and unaware of the wonder I would experience working in and learning about the Neotropical rainforest. As we began to travel down the rivers on the Rio Amazonas, a rubber boom era ship, we received lectures on the incredible landscape around us. Having already learnt a great deal from these lectures, on arrival at the study site I was beginning to realise just how lucky I was to be there and decided I would make the most of this expedition come rain or shine.

On site, the tasks ranged from aquatic to terrestrial, day to night, and transects to mist nets. For the first two weeks we worked on a rota, allowing us each to get involved with all of the ongoing projects. Also during this time we got to know the guides and marvel at their skills in spotting all sorts of wildlife and navigating the labyrinth of trees and channels. As these two weeks passed we each became fond of different tasks, my particular favourites being the fishing, macaw, and wading bird surveys. I really loved being on the river itself and over the next few weeks became quite practiced at identifying the various fish species we caught on lines and in nets.

It was the fishing surveys which I chose to specialise in after the first two weeks had passed and we were allowed to choose our own tasks. This was a morning and afternoon survey where we took one of the smaller boats upriver to a selection of fishing sites. At these sites, we used traditional fishing methods of baited lines and gill nets, allowing researchers to estimate the impact of local subsistence on fish populations. Each fish caught was weighed and measured to give an idea of population demographics and distribution. My favourite catch was the prehistoric-looking armoured catfish (family Loricariidae) with their characteristic bony plates.

As well as developing my skills in identification, this survey increased my confidence in my abilities as I began to give others tips on fishing and identification. This was in part due to the enthusiasm of one of the guides who encouraged me to learn the Latin and common names of the different fish species, giving me tips on different diagnostic features.

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

I am clearly deeply thankful for the financial support provided by the James Rennie Bequest as it allowed me to be involved in such an inspiring conservation project. What I have learnt about the Amazon's wildlife and about myself will never leave me.