

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/
Conference Title:** Operation Wallacea, Guyana 2014

Travel Dates: 15th June – 16th July

Location: Iwokrama Forest & Surama Village, Guyana

Group member(s): Suraya Fawcett

Aims: To assist conservation and biodiversity research in the Guyana
rainforest.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The Operation Wallacea expedition to Guyana enabled me to contribute to conservation and biodiversity research in the Guiana Shield rainforest, as well as allowing me to gain hands-on experience in the field. The members of the trip consisted of twenty research assistant volunteers, eleven scientists and two medics. Local Amerindians acted as rangers and cooks. The research expedition was based in Iwokrama: a wilderness preserve focusing on conservation and sustainable use.

The research undertaken by the scientists and volunteers on this expedition aims to understand and improve the impacts of industries, such as mining and logging, on the local biodiversity. The environmental impacts, such as El Nino, are also studied. The data collected is used to identify new areas of forest to be protected and to model species diversity.

The team work with local communities to combine science with traditional knowledge of the forest. The project includes encouraging local communities to create businesses (such as sustainable forestry and eco-tourism) which promote educating people about the forest and its wildlife. It also aims to prevent deforestation and allow people to make money from the forest without destroying it.

The first few days of the expedition were spent at Iwokrama River Lodge and Research Centre where the volunteers were taught about the local wildlife and how to catch, handle and identify the different animals.

Over the next three weeks the group travelled to and stayed in three different camps deep in the heart of the rainforest: Canopy Walkway (Atta Rainforest Lodge), Kabocalli (situated on the Essequibo River) and Surama Pond (near to the Amerindian community in Surama Village). At each camp several surveys were carried out each day.

Mist netting along transects was used to catch birds. The nets were opened at 6am and checked hourly (weather dependent) until 6pm. The captured birds were identified, weighed, had wing and beak measurements taken, sex and age recorded and then the birds were ringed before being released again.

Mist nets were also used and checked hourly to catch bats between 5:30pm and 12pm. The captured bats were identified, weighed, had forearm measurements taken, sex and age recorded and then the bats were marked by wing puncture to monitor recaptures before being released again. Bats of each different species identified were kept as specimens.

Herpetofauna surveys involved standard search scan samples for reptiles and amphibians, many of which were kept as specimens.

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A variety of traps were set up along transects to take invertebrate specimens: pit fall traps, malaise traps, flight intercept traps and SLAM traps. These were left for three days before the samples were collected. Leaf litter was also collected along the transects and sweep netting was carried out around the campsites. Pit fall traps baited with dung were used specifically to catch dung beetles as they are an indicator species of several elements of change in the forest.

Large mammal surveys (which also included large birds such as macaws and guans) were undertaken along two separate surveys each morning at approximately 6am. Animal sightings, sounds and indicators such as scratch marks and footprints were all recorded. Camera traps were also set up in the rainforest and savannah near the camps to photograph and record larger animals. These were left for three months to collect data.

During the last two weeks of the expedition trout lines were set up in the Essequibo River and Surama Pond to catch fish. Fishing trips in the boat also occurred early each morning and in the evening. The fish species caught and any parasites on them were recorded.

This expedition to Guyana to participate in conservation research has been an exceptionally valuable experience. In addition to learning about the flora and fauna of Guyana and handling creatures in their natural habitat, it gave me the opportunity to experience the local culture in an area of the world I had previously never visited. I also met scientists and volunteers who have become valued friends and have inspired me to become more involved in both conservation and biological research.