JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/ Conference Title: Operation Wallacea

Travel Dates: 13th June – 13th July 2014

Location: Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, Peru

Group member(s): Victoria Hohendorf

Aims: Assisting the conservation in the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve and learning about research methods and the Neotropical rainforest

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

I spent four weeks as a research assistant in the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve in Peru. It was a great experience which taught me a lot about the biodiversity in a Neotropical rainforest and common survey methods to monitor those. I used the money from the James Rennie Bequest towards my travel costs to Peru.

After arriving in Iquitos we took the bus down to Nauta where we moved on to the Rio Amazon, an old ship from the rubber boom era, on which we would spent the next weeks. During our journey to PV2 Tachacocha, the expedition site, we were given lectures about the Amazonian rainforest, survey methods and ecology. We could also watch the white water of the Rio Maranon mix with the black water of the Rio Samiria and see the first wildlife such as river dolphins, great egrets and macaws.

As we lived on the Rio Amazon we were very close to the river. We used smaller boats to go up and down the river or to drive up a channel to a lake close by. At the site we started doing the surveys right away. We had a rotation system so that everybody had the chance to try every survey. We were surveying dolphins, macaws, wading birds and fish along the river as well as setting up camera traps and doing terrestrial transects for mammals and game birds such as jaguars, tapirs, squirrels, sloths and primates. At night we went out to survey caimans, frogs and fishing bats. In these first two weeks we learned which animals lived in the reserve and how to differentiate between them. Furthermore we learned a lot of techniques such as setting up camera traps or

measuring and weighing animals e.g. frogs or fish and also about the different habitat types within the forest.

After that we were able to sign up to different projects. I chose the primate group with whom we did transects into the rainforest as well as along the river. We often found big groups of squirrel monkeys accompanied by capuchins, but also howler monkeys and tamarinds. So we could gather data on their behaviour and location within the tree. It was a great experience to find yourself standing in the rainforest with squirrel monkeys in the trees all around you.

We were always accompanied by Peruvian guides who grew up in the Reserve and had a knowledge of the animals and plants within the rainforest and where also able to spot even the smallest squirrel monkey on the top of a 20m high tree. We did not only learn how to spot animals and differentiate between them but also which trees where used by the indigenous people e.g. for houses. One of my highlights was when one of the guides cut down a liana from which we could drink water.

The data we collected is used to investigate population fluctuations to show effects of e.g. climate change on the biodiversity. As over the last few years the seasonal floods and draughts showed greater intensity, we monitored marker species e.g. macaws and river dolphins to see the impact on the biodiversity of the Amazonian rainforest.

On the way back to Nauta we stopped at a small village in the reserve called Bolivar and spent the afternoon there; learning how the indigenous people live and dancing and playing football with the children. The village was probably the most peaceful place I have ever visited. From there on we went back to Nauta and on the way to Iquitos we stopped at an animal rescue centre. Were we saw many animals from the reserve and were also able to feed manatees.

I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest for enabling me to be part in such an amazing conservation project. I had a wonderful time learning about the Neotropical forest, the indigenous people and research methods and meeting scientists and other research assistant from all over the world.