

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/
Conference Title:** Trip to Peru with Operation Wallacea

Travel Dates: 27/06/2014 - 15/07/2014

Location: Iquitos, Peru

Group member(s): Elena Purlyte

Aims: To measure the change in biodiversity of Pacaya Samiria flooded
forests for conservation research

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

Through the expedition there were many different surveys that were carried out by researchers with the help of many student volunteers:

- Counting of the wading birds
- Primate transects
- Terrestrial species transects
- Frog transects in the forests and floating vegetations
- Counting of macaws
- Catching fish
- Counting fishing bats
- Mist netting for birds
- Camera traps
- Counting and catching the smaller caimans
- Counting dolphins

I participated in most of these transects but terrestrial species transect and dolphin counting were the ones that got most of my attention. The final report by Operation Wallacea will be released around Christmas, but while being on the field some changes over the time I stayed there could be seen. Pacaya Samiria is a flooded forest and the water levels of the flood are rising each year because of the climate change causing danger to terrestrial animals such as tapirs and peccaries as the higher parts (levaes) of the forest they live in get smaller and smaller each year and they sometimes get stuck in small "islands" where they get easily predated by other species like jaguars.

There are also problems with hunting of the terrestrial species. The results from Operation Wallacea research helps to set the right hunting limits of many species. Operation Wallacea supports the sustainable hunting in the local communities that depend on the bush meat. Dolphin populations are also changing because of the rising flood levels. Both pink and grey river dolphins move up the river to the flooded forests during the floods as there are a lot of fish to feed on there and they often move to the newly formed lakes and ponds. Pink river dolphin is an endemic species to the Amazon river and they are an endangered species as well. Through the surveys we saw many of them moving up the stream to the flooded forests.

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The same was with wading birds. Especially easy to see the difference in the white egret species - at the beginning of the trip there were only a few of them around, at the end of it they were just everywhere.



Fig.1 Pink river dolphins



Fig.2 White egrets

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Overall, travelling to Peru with Operation Wallacea was a truly amazing experience of fieldwork giving great insight on many issues that researchers come across when designing experiments to measure populations and working in the field. It is probably just once in a lifetime experience to see the three-toed sloth in the wild, hear the giant river otter calls and nearly get bitten by a bullet ant. It was also a great chance to meet many motivated students who are interested in the conservation or zoology. Projects like Operation Wallacea are essential for conservation of populations in Pacaya Samiria national park and so I thank you for funding this great opportunity for me to join this great cause this summer.

Regards,
Elena Purlyte