

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: Operation Wallacea, Guyana 2012

Travel Dates: 14th July-14th August

Location: Iwokrama Forest & Surama Village, Guyana

Group member(s): Robert Ramsay

Aims: Assisting in rainforest biodiversity and conservation research

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

With the aid of the James Rennie Bequest, I was able to join a expedition in Guyana, operated by Operation Wallacea. The expedition took place in Iwokrama Forest, at the heart of the Guinan Shield. This was the first time I had assisted in field research, as well as my first experience of tropical conditions, and it was one of the best things I have ever done. I joined a team of 26 fellow research assistants and 6 staff members, and local Amerindians were our guides (and cooks).

Following an all-night drive along a dirt road from Georgetown, we arrived at Iwokrama River Lodge, where we stayed for 5 days while we were trained in how to identify the fauna being studied and taught how to mist net, as well as receiving a rudimentary guide to forest living. From there, we went to our first camp along the Essequibo River to begin the expedition proper. The next three weeks were spent almost totally in the heart of the rainforest in hammock camps – the first week in a camp beside the Essequibo River, and the subsequent two weeks in camps along the Burro-Burro River. Only during our transition from Iwokrama to Surama Village were we near anything approaching civilisation.

A variety of surveys were conducted from our three forest camps. Bird and bat mist netting took place daily. Bird nets were opened at 6am, weather permitting, and checked hourly until 6pm, and all birds caught were identified and recorded, marked and released. Most of these were small birds, including the fabulous Amazonian Royal Flycatcher, although at one point we captured a rather fearsome forest falcon. Bat nets were open from 6pm until midnight, and all of the captured bats were identified, weighed and forearms measured, and one of every species caught in a night was taken as a specimen. The herpetologist with us took all amphibians and reptiles we caught as specimens, and the entomologist, though focusing chiefly on beetles, took many other invertebrates as specimens too. In addition to participating in capturing these fauna, mammal transects were walked every morning starting at 6am, with target species including red howler monkeys and macaws. Once we were on the Burro-Burro River, river surveys were done every morning to identify river birds and spot caiman and otters.

This was an amazing trip, in what must be one of the most beautiful places on Earth. I was able to meet and work with some great people, and I got to see and handle some incredibly interesting animals. Field research is something I have always been interested in as a career, and being introduced to it in such an amazing place was a privilege. I was able to go thanks in part to the James Rennie Bequest, so, thank you for assisting my fund raising.