

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/

Conference Title: Mixed (Ecological/Rehabilitation) Internship at Hoja Nueva

Travel Dates: 25th May 2026 – 18th June 2026

Location: Hoja Nueva Research Centre, Madre de Dios, Peru

Group member(s): Jocelyn Cartner

Aims: To gain experience in a real conservation area with native, endangered fauna species while working with experts.

Photography consent form attached: ☐ Yes
(please refer to your award letter) ☒ No

OUTCOME (a minimum of 500 words):-

Thanks to the fantastically generous funding provided by the James Rennie grant, I have been allowed the opportunity to travel to Peru and participate in a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I have completed a three-week internship with Hoja Nueva, a rewilding facility located in a remote part of the Amazon Rainforest in Madre de Dios. Not only have I been granted the opportunity to develop my scientific knowledge, but I have also learned about life in a place so different from home. My aims to learn more about the endangered species of the Amazon have been greatly surpassed, which could not have been achieved without this funding.

As a third-year biology student aiming for a Zoology Honours, this internship seemed completely ideal for my interests. With a combination of both ecological and rehabilitation activities, I have seen a wide scope of parts of life in the rainforest.

For example, not only was I working with the animals in the rehabilitation centre, I also spent most days on site, monitoring the wild monkeys and doing tree inventories. Two or three times a week, the day would be spent in the rewilding centre. The rewilding centre itself was host to many species which are endangered and native to the area. For example, I spent time with an ocelot living in the sanctuary, as well as kinkajous and coatis. They are kept in a generous sanctuary which is designed to mimic their natural habitat, as well as being provided with homemade enrichments, suited to that particular species. It was my task as an intern to make these enrichments and carry out precise measurements of food, as well as more mundane tasks, such as foraging for leaves and cleaning out cages of live rats. By carrying out these different areas of work, I learned that no job is more important than another.

On the days where I was not required to work at the centre, I spent the mornings carrying out 'monkey monitoring'. This meant that a team of roughly four of us would go out at 0700 with a GPS and note any monkeys from the area and how they behave. Most commonly, we saw troops of up to fifty squirrel monkeys swinging overhead, closely followed by troops of capuchins, as they tend to travel together. Often an indicator that we were about to witness

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a troop would be the alpha male scout which would trek ahead to show the path and look out for danger. The rest would follow soon after with juveniles often travelling together, and mothers holding onto babies. We would identify their sex and rough age, then describe their individual behaviours and how they interact with one another. These morning walks also allowed us to see whatever other wild animals we could spot. For example, one morning a juvenile harpy eagle landed about five metres away from where we were standing. This was an incredibly rare sighting, and we were very lucky to witness it.

Monitoring of the jungle was also conducted in the dark, as the sun went down at around 1800. I often went for evening walks with our group, and for about a night a week, there was a more organised 'night monitoring session'. This was where an individual would go up a tower of about 50 ft each two hours on rotation and use a thermal monocular to spot mammals. This was brilliant for learning to climb the tower as well as learning to identify South American mammals using thermal technology. During the evening walks, there was an even bigger arrangement of animals than during the day, that we would search for using head torches. Some examples of what we found were wandering spiders and poison dart frogs.

I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the opportunity this money has provided. I believe I have come on leaps and bounds as a biologist, as well as grown as a person. Although this experience has been the most challenging thing I have ever done, I am so fortunate to have been able to push myself and find something that I really enjoy. The challenges of being constantly damp in extreme humidity and living on a very simple diet were inconsequential compared to the fantastic experience of living in the jungle.