2020 has truly been a challenging year, and I hope you and yours continue to fare well and are in good health. Like so many around the world, The Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center (TBZTEC) has endured staggering challenges this year. However, thanks to phenomenal support we have received from local and international supporters, we are also grateful for our achievements despite the dire circumstances.

We continue to provide high quality care for over 200 animals, including new rescues, such as "Fifi" the baby ocelot, and an infant tamandua (anteater). Both animals have touched the hearts of many through our local media. Of TBZTEC's 56 employees, we managed to retain almost 60% on a shift basis, while continuing to pay Social Security for all employees, including those who are inactive.

We closed our doors to the public for two solid months from March to May, before re-opening to Belizean visitors on weekends only and with reduced hours. During that time, our management team worked diligently to implement health and safety measures at both the Zoo and TEC so we would qualify for the Belize Tourism Board's "Gold Standard" program. We were successful in the end, and are able to received international visitors once more.
Due to health risks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person engagement with schools and student groups were no longer possible. One solution? Go virtual! We launched our "Belize Zoo Live!" virtual education program, and have had great experiences sharing our wonderful wildlife with both schools in Belize and abroad through distance learning.

2020 was also a year of loss. "Carlos" the Puma passed away at the age of 17 as signs of cancer began to develop in his body. Carlos came to the Zoo as a cub after being found by a family near San Carlos Village in northern Belize. More recently, we lost "Bullet Head" the Tapir, who we rescued 28 years ago after being found with a gun shot in his head. Although he was blinded the injury, Bullet Head recovered, became trusting of people, and spent almost 3 decades representing his species.

We share their stories as we are thankful to have provided full lives for such amazing animals, and to share them with our visitors, especially school children, as part of our mission to create a positive understanding about the wildlife of Belize.

Our work continues in 2021, and we remain hopeful for more progress and great achievements. Thank you for your continued support, and a happy and safe Holiday Season to all.

~~Sharon Matola