

Mountain Cow Mania in Belize

As conservationists around the world prepared to celebrate the 4 existing species of tapirs for World Tapir Day, April 27th marked another milestone in The Belize Zoo's rich history, as the Zoo went into "tapir-bration" mode for the first ever National Tapir Day. TBZ Environmental Educator Jamal Andrewin envisioned a government supported day to celebrate our national animal, the Central American Tapir in Belize. The vision was put down in a proposal letter, by TBZ and mailed off to our decision makers, and got a big "thumbs up" from the office of the Prime Minister, as well as support from over a dozen organizations across the country.

While the initiative awaits the final nod from the National Assembly, TBZ pulled out all the stops to mark the big day. And what a day it was! The excitement started early on, and just kept building momentum, beginning with an appearance on the Love FM Morning Show by TBZ officials to promote the festivities happening at the Zoo later that day. The importance of and threats faced by our beloved Mountain Cow's species were actively discussed, and the event highlights to come were made known. This is followed by a song and dance number by TBZ's Founding Director, who serenaded the country with an impromptu performance of the "Mountain Cow song."

All this led up to a glorious merging of conservation and culture at the Zoo, where over 300 students, teachers and special guests were gathered. Entertainment was literally falling out of the sky as the BDF aircraft flew overhead to "drop off" professional skydiver Colin McGowan, who whipped out brand new copies of the "Tambo the Tapir tells his tale" storybook, for its official launch. The Ugundani Dance Group was there to wow the crowd with a stunning dance and drumming presentation. Poems, song recitals and tapir games kept guests busy and happy until it was time to head into the Zoo itself, because Tapir Day would not be complete without a birthday bash for Belize's most famous mountain cow and national treasure, April the Tapir! A beautiful banner proudly declaring National Tapir Day swayed overhead as guests walked the path to the tapir exhibits, where the birthday girl herself, now an impressive 29 years old, stood ready to greet her visitors and cake bearers.

Those visitors included special friends from across the border, as the Director of BioUniverZoo in Chetumal, Mexico, Lesly Paola Martinez, and her officials joined TBZ in this memorable occasion, geared at celebrating and preserving a species that is treasured by both countries. The day ended on a resoundingly positive note with excellent news coverage from both Love FM, and Channel 5 news stations. TBZ will now serve as home base for future Tapir Day festivities, but will work to see it expanded and involve many more schools and organizations across Belize in the years to come. Happy National Tapir Day, Belize!

