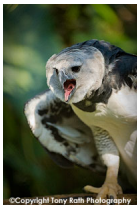


"Panama" The Harpy Eagle Celebrates His 7th Birthday

It was a special day at The Belize Zoo! Balloons and posters decorated the area where "Panama" the Harpy Eagle calls home and some very special visitors were on hand to sing him his happy song!



Seven years have passed since "Panama" was hatched in the country of Panama. He was to be part of the important Harpy Eagle Restoration Program, a vital project aiming to put Harpy Eagles back into the forests of Central America. These beautiful raptors, top predators in the tropical forests, are considered to be "nearly extinct" in Central America. And this vital program seeks to re-establish their important presence.

However, when "Panama" hatched in late 2002, it was noted that his left eye was seriously damaged from this "exit- the- egg" action! And due to this unfortunate hatch-incident, the Harpy chick was unable to be released into the wild. So, the baby eagle was given to The Belize Zoo as an "education ambassador for his species", and his presence at the "Best Little Zoo in the World", has been nothing short of ultra-magnificent!

Named "Panama", to recall his birthplace, this charismatic bird-of-prey has alerted thousands to the important role his species plays in tropical

forest ecology. Children call him by name, and he readily responds! Chirping and opening his massive wings, "Panama" obviously enjoys sharing time with his many visitors.

This year, the children from the local pre-school of La Democracia, arrived to the zoo ready to sing him his birthday song. They were accompanied by Mrs. Barbara Thummalapally, the wife of the USA Ambassador to Belize, Mr. Vinai Thummalapally. Affectionately called "Miss Barbara" by the pre-schoolers, she, herself a teacher, was keen to note the important role that "Panama" plays in bringing to all a greater awareness about our Belizean environment. "Seeing Panama the Harpy Eagle leads to falling in love with him!" Yes, indeed! Saving his species in the wild means that we must protect and respect these rare raptors, and work to ensure that their forest home remains in a healthy state for years to come. Happy Birthday, "Panama"!!