Belize Harpy Eagle Restoration Program

THE BELIZE HARPY EAGLE RESTORATION PROGRAM (BHERP)

WORKING TO EMPOWER THE MESOAMERICA BIOLOGICAL CORRIDOR, MBC

Introduction:

BHERP is enjoying a positive and successful profile at this writing, and I am pleased to share the progress that the Program has made with all of our readers.

While there are many players and stakeholders in BHERP, it is necessary to recognize the professional approach the program has benefited from by The Peregrine Fund, TPF. Those of us in Belize monitoring the released Harpy Eagles, carrying out Environmental Education on behalf of these raptors, and providing basic resources, are following the lead from TPF, and it can rightfully be assumed that their 30 years of experience to conserve wild populations of birds of prey, is now benefiting Belize through BHERP. The Peregrine Falcon and the Mauritius Kestrel are two species of birds of prey which have been saved from extinction by captive breeding and re-introduction efforts from TPF. Their diligent efforts on behalf of restoring the California Condor back into its former range are recognized throughout the world. We hope that
within the upcoming few years, The Harpy Eagle, brought back to the Meso-America Biological Corridor, MBC can be added to their list of success stories.

The below update indicates that we are headed in a direction of successful restoration of the Harpy Eagle back into the MBC, with Belize hosting the forest landscape for project initiation.

**A. Overflights And Releases**

1. Over flight Received from Eco-Flights/February 2005
2. Over flight Received from Light Hawk/April 2005

Both of these over flights focused upon radio-tracking the female Harpy Eagle who has established a home range in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve. On both flights, a strong signal was received, indicating that she is well and obviously hunting successfully in this forested area.

Over flights are also being received, upon request, from the Air wing of the Belize Defense Force, BDF.

Two more Harpies have been released in 2005. A male was released in Rio Bravo Conservation Management Area, RBCMA, in February. A female was released in April. Both birds are being radio-tracked. Both are thriving.

**B. Prey Items Noted By Field Biologists In Rio Bravo**

- Coati, Nasua narica
- Anteater, Tamandua mexicana
- Grey Fox, Urocyon cinereoargenteus
- Kinkajou, Potos flavus
- Spider Monkey, Ateles geoffroyi
- Porcupine, Coendou mexicanus
The limited research which has been undertaken over the years about the foraging ecology of the Harpy Eagle indicates that they may maintain a balance in a tropical forest, as the eagles tend to prey upon vulnerable animals (Touchton et al 2002).

In the upcoming months, a year long study will commence which will involve tracking two Harpy Eagles, a male and female, to study their dispersal patterns and prey selection.

C. Visits To Bherp During First Half Of 2005

Early during 2005, BHERP hosted a visit from Dr. Lee Jones, author of Birds of Belize. His past work in Belize, collecting data about the Harpy Eagle, has assisted the BHERP in gaining a sound understanding about the former forested lands used by these raptors.

We welcomed the participation from Board Members representing The Nature Conservancy, (TNC), Ohio Chapter, International Division. TNC has been actively supporting conservation work in Belize, particularly programs which are based in RBCMA. It was fortunate timing that their visit to Belize coincided with the February release of a male Harpy Eagle in Rio Bravo. TNC Board members, along with officials from Programme for Belize, PFB, observed the male Harpy successfully released into the forest.

In March, BHERP hosted a visit from Dr. Rick Watson, the International Director of The Peregrine Fund. He was able to observe the program from the forest floor of Rio Bravo, as well as viewing the expanse of tropical forest, home to the released Harpies. BHERP is very grateful for the over flight assistance being received from the Belize Defence Force, BDF, Air wing.

Friends of noted wildlife artist, John A. Ruthven visited in March. They presented Belize Coordinator Sharon Matola with a lithograph (the only one produced from the original painting), of a Harpy Eagle, signed by Mr. Ruthven. This has been presented to The Belize Zoo and TEC for their contribution to BHERP, however, later in the year, this incredible piece of art will find a permanent, climate-controlled and secure place in Belize.

Mr. Ruthven has painted the four major eagles of the world: The African Crowned Eagle,
Stephanoaetus coronatus, Stellar's Sea Eagle, Haliaeetus pelagicus, Philippine Eagle, Pithecophaga jefferyi, and the Harpy Eagle, Harpia harpyja.

His painting of the Philippine Eagle, presented to the former President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, was the pivotal ingredient which persuaded President Marcos to change the name of this raptor from The Philippine Monkey-Eating Eagle to the Philippine Eagle. He also officially had the bird, due to Mr. Ruthven's visit, proclaimed as the National Bird of the Philippines.

In late November 2004, Mr. John Ruthven was awarded the National Medal of Arts from the President of the United States, the highest award for Artist Achievement. Three of Mr. Ruthven's paintings of the Bald Eagle are hanging on walls in the White House, Washington, DC.

It is the goal of The Belize Zoo to share Mr. Ruthven's painting of the Harpy Eagle with as many people as possible. A quality photograph and exhibit will appear near the Harpy Eagle exhibit in The Belize Zoo before the end of the year.

**D. Environmental Education**

Posters are being distributed. A new poster depicting the Madonna of the Harpies alongside a Harpy Eagle, stating in both English and Spanish, A HEAVENLY TREASURE. THE PRIDE OF THE SELVA MAYA. YOUR HARPY EAGLE. Has recently been produced and is now being distributed to schools who are visiting The Belize Zoo.

With assistance from UNDP/GEF/SGF, brochures about the Harpy Eagle and the BHERP, have been reprinted and are also being distributed through the Belize Zoo's Education program.

A daily radio program is aired on Belize Radio FM 2000 about the Harpy Eagle. Set to the music of Fatboy Slim's song track, "Bird of Prey", this program covers the natural history of the Harpy Eagle, as well as news about the released Harpies in the forests of RBCMA. It was recently learned that two schools in Belize City listen to the program as part of their Environmental Education lessons.
Sharon Matola, Belize Coordinator, was told that villagers in Sylvestre Village, a small community on the edge of the RBCMA, sighted a Harpy Eagle shortly after the New Year. They were excited to see it, and were certain it was a Harpy as they had received the UNDP sponsored Education Program, focusing upon the bird and BHERP. This incident confirms the important role which the complementary Education Program is playing in the implementation of the BHERP.

"Panama". The resident Harpy Eagle at The Belize Zoo, continues to be hand-fed daily, and is showing a gradual change in plumage, becoming darker as he matures. He continues to enjoy his zoo visitors, and is playing a prominent role in keeping our visiting public informed about the Harpy Eagle in Belize. "Panama" will turn three years old in October 2005.

**BHERP has been written about and profiled in:**

- The 2004 Conservation Annual Report/Columbus Zoo
- Belizean Journeys
- Belize Audubon Society (BAS) Newsletter Fall 2004
- The Houston Zoo/Lecture Series
- The Cincinnati Zoo/Barrows Conservation Lecture Series
- The Smithsonian Institution/National Zoo
- World Wildlife Fund-US/in house lecture

**UPCOMING:**

- University of Connecticut/Edwin Way Teale Lecture Series
- Monterey Bay Auditorium/Lecture Series

**E. Update On Released Harpy Eagles**

A female Harpy Eagle, four years old, was brought to Belize and released in April in Rio Bravo. She had been independently hunting in Panama, however, up to this writing, has not been observed with prey in RBCMA.

One of the male Harpy Eagles, brought to RBCMA last year, was observed to have had an
injured right leg. Monitors reported that he was not placing any weight on his leg and in late April, the eagle was trapped and examined. There was a deep cut on his leg, however, X-rays showed that there was no serious injury, no broken bones or cut tendons. This male remained under observation, his condition improved, and he was re-released in RBCMA in early May.

Another male, not seen for several months, but followed via PTT technology, is known to be 35 km from the Belize border, in the Peten forest of Guatemala. (He is referred to as our official "MBC Harpy Eagle" as he has spent time in the forests of Belize, entered Mexico and stayed there for a while, headed for Guatemala, returned back to Belize, then again, back to Guatemala).

Another male has also not been observed for several weeks in the RBCMA, but again, due to PTT technology, it is known that he is in Rio Bravo and moving a great deal throughout the forest.

A female, released in RBCMA last year, is monitored regularly and remains in the Rio Bravo area. She has not received supplemental food for over three months and is regularly observed with prey.

The female who has established a home range in the Chiquibul Forest is tracked monthly. She appears to be thriving. Before the end of 2005, at least three more Harpy Eagles will be heading to Belize from their initial soft-release forests in Panama.

F. Acknowledgements

This current successful profile would not be possible without the support of the following:

- The Peregrine Fund/USA and Panama
- The UNDP/GEF/SGF
- The Belize Defence Force, BDF
- The Belize Zoo Education Department
- The Belize Zoo Animal Management Department
- Programme for Belize, including all officials and all personnel at Rio Bravo Conservation Management Area (RBCMA)
- Conservation Division/Ministry of Natural Resources, Government of Belize
- The Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA)
- The Nature Conservancy/Ohio Chapter/International Division
- Richard and Carol Foster, Cinematographers

G. References Cited


The attached photos illustrate the BHERP. Please feel welcome to contact me at matola@belizezoo.org, if there are any questions or comments.

Thank you for your interest in the BHERP. And please feel welcome to distribute this document.
Sharon Matola, Belize Coordinator
Belize Harpy Eagle Restoration Program, BHERP
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