



Tropical Ecology Assessment & Monitoring Network Newsletter

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Success of the TEAM Network

This issue of the TEAM Newsletter is dedicated to what makes a site successful. However, not only does the TEAM Network have many successful individual sites, but the Network overall is thriving. This success is due to many factors, but the #1 reason is the people who work all over the world—collecting, uploading and managing data, administering and managing funding, writing scientific papers and presenting about TEAM at conferences.

In July the coordinating unit was pleased to learn that the Gordon and Betty Moore Foun-

ation awarded TEAM a US\$2.5 million grant to continue monitoring, produce high impact scientific papers and engage policy makers.

The proposal process was truly a collaborative effort across the entire Network. The effort started with several site managers writing a letter expressing the importance of TEAM and the need to find sustainable funding for the Network. The coordinating unit then reached out to site managers to seek feedback on important outputs that could be incorporated into a grant proposal. The outputs

recommended by site managers were presented to the TEAM Steering Committee, and the proposal writing process began. This process brought the Network together like nothing has before. It's a challenge to run a global Network with four major partners and over 80 local partners. However, due to the hard work, dedication and passion of every person, the Network continues to flourish. Congratulations to everyone on this wonderful accomplishment.

*By Morgan Cottle,
Project Manager for TEAM*

Local technicians at Volcan Barva are key to success, by Johanna Hurtado

The Volcan Barva site in Costa Rica was one of the first TEAM sites to be established. There were two major attractions for TEAM to select Volcan Barva as a site. One was the La Selva Biological Station, a private reserve owned by The Organization for Tropical Studies, which is widely known as one of the

most active sites in the world for teaching and research in tropical rainforests. A second major attraction was the location of Braulio Carrillo National Park, adjoining La Selva. The park covers 50,000 ha of protected rainforest stretching in a steep elevational transect from 40 m to nearly 3000 m above sea level. It is

the only stretch of protected rainforest in Central America that covers the entire elevational gradient—from tropical wet forest in the lowlands to cloud forest on the volcanic summit.

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The Volcán Barva Transect TEAM Project (VBTTP) was started in December 2003. I joined the project in 2005 as site manager, and in 2009 I took over running the entire project. From the beginning, the VBTTP was designed to function with scientifically trained locals, known as parabiologists, as the main field technicians. This design has worked very well for both TEAM and the local parabiologists.

The juxtaposition of the elevational gradient and its biological resources in Braulio Carrillo

National Park with the scientific research and infrastructure resources of La Selva are unique. Our TEAM site is particularly good because our field sampling is carried out entirely by local technicians. Many of them have several years of experience working on research projects, and they now have expertise in diverse taxonomic groups and

specialized equipment use. The advantages of having local technicians include minimal staff turnover, very highly qualified technicians and excellent quality control.

To have hard-working field technicians is definitely a requirement for this project. Braulio Carrillo National Park is a very difficult place to work. The entire study site is roadless, has very steep slopes, 3 to 9 m of rainfall annually, numerous rivers and creeks to cross and remote field sites with very rustic shelters reachable only after long hours of walking. One site that brought a lot of unwelcome surprises was the site at the top of the transect. We were totally unprepared for the much cooler conditions at this elevation. Nighttime temperatures are regularly below 10° C and can dip close to freezing. Working all day long in pouring rain, driving wind and 10° C was a new experience for all of us.



The cloud forest on top of Volcan Barva, where rain and cool temperatures make for challenging working conditions. Photo by Shelby Riha.

Definitely, the weather conditions are the principal constraint for carrying out the field work. If weather doesn't cooperate we can't just stop and wait for another week because the entire field season is tightly scheduled. We also have the "normal" problems of back-country field work: bridges collapsing, medical emergencies that require evacuation from a walk-in site, or flooded stream crossings stranding staff. We have taken these contretemps into account as part of the normal course of operations.

We make beautiful plans on paper, but in the end it frequently comes down to working around the weather. Another priority of everyone on the VBTTP is to make sure that TEAM protocols are carried out carefully and rigorously. Quality control of data is key to the success of this project, so, we have implemented different routines for quality control for every protocol.

Finally, although we work in a very wet and hot place, which can be replete with venomous snakes, bullet ants and a diverse range of insects prone to biting or stinging, all our efforts are rewarded when a new individual jaguar or a tapir with her baby appears in our camera traps, or when we end all the vegetation censuses and we know more than 5000 individuals are being monitored year to year. In the coming years, the Volcan Barva Transect TEAM Project could well become the most visible and best-documented site for study of the biological effects of global change in the tropics. If so, that will be in large part due to the hard work of the local parabiologists who are investing their lives in this project, and to the vision and dedication of the scientists who conceived of setting up this project. I feel very lucky to be the latest in the line of scientists dedicated to developing and maintaining this research and conservation vision.

Factors Leading to Success at Udzungwa, by Emanuel Martin

Biodiversity monitoring at the Udzungwa TEAM site began in 2009 following an extensive appraisal period that dated back to at least 2006, when Sandy Andelman visited the area. Udzungwa was the first site of the Network to be established in Africa. Its office is based at the Udzungwa Ecological Monitoring Center (UEMC) in Mang'ula- Kilombero District, a facility which is co-run by Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) through Udzungwa Mountains National Park (UMNP) and Trento Science Museum of Italy. The project has run successfully, with data being uploaded on time. This year marks the fourth year of data collection. Some of the key achievements include the registration of the climate station with the national meteorological agency. We were also proud and pleased to host the fourth TEAM Network meeting, in April 2011. TEAM Udzungwa also facilitated a pilot project aimed at monitoring ecosystem services funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.



On the left, technicians Aggrey Uisso (left) and Steven Shinyambala (right); center, staff members enjoying their colleague's birthday; on the right, Emanuel Martin tying up a camera.

It is not easy for us to say what determined, overall, TEAM Udzungwa to be among the most successful sites, but we believe the following have surely contributed:

Good leadership: The project managers always strive to ensure that every member of the staff is enjoying his/her work. This has been achieved through empowering them, and in this way, every member of the staff feels ownership for the project.

Team spirit: We built a strong team spirit among the whole Udzungwa staff, not only TEAM but also the whole staff at the UEMC, that altogether amounts to over 20 people. This spirit is vividly seen in every aspect of our life, be it in technical stuff such as data collection or in social issues such as being together in both sad and happy moments.

Good collaboration: As an institution, TEAM Udzungwa could not be successful without collaborating with partner institutions in the country. This especially applies to the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute, Tanzania National Parks and the Tanzania Meteorological Agency.

Dedicated staff members: All TEAM staff, from the institutional representative to the manager, driver, and technicians know the area well and are passionate about their jobs.

Good facilities: TEAM supported UEMC to become an even more resourceful facility which has been essential to efficient project implementation.



TROPICAL ECOLOGY
ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING

TEAM delivers multi-scale, real-time understanding of how key elements of Earth's operating system—climate, carbon stocks, biodiversity—are changing, and what this means for people.

TEAM is a partnership among Conservation International, the Smithsonian Institution, the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

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Other News



The 2012 ECO Classroom teachers. Photo courtesy of the Northrop Grumman Foundation.

The first **ECO Classroom** trip brought U.S. teachers to Costa Rica. Teachers learned about TEAM protocols and explored the flora and fauna of the beautiful Costa Rican rainforest. The trip was a huge success and the teachers will bring their experiences back to students who'll learn about TEAM! Many thanks to Johanna Hur-

tado and the staff at La Selva Biological Station for making this a memorable experience for everyone.

Patrick Boundja will be leaving **Nouabale-Ndoki** to begin a PhD program in Natural Resources Management and Policy at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Patrick will study elephant ecology and conservation. Sarah

Yoga will be taking over as site manager, although Patrick still hopes to be involved in the Network.

TEAM's Information Systems Director, Eric Fegraus and his wife Laura welcomed their first child, Benjamin, into the world in May. **Congratulations Eric and Laura!**



Many thanks to Emanuel Martin for collecting stories and photos for this edition of the newsletter!