

Report for Lawrence Jacobson Education Development Grant

Stella de la Torre

Environmental education, a tool for the conservation of Ecuadorian primates

Introduction

Ecuadorian primates are a highly diverse and ecologically important group that is facing several conservation problems (de la Torre 2012, Tirira 2011). Data from two preliminary studies at the national and regional levels, suggest that live capture of primates for the illegal pet trade is an important threat despite the legislation and policies that are in place to deter it (Ministerio del Ambiente 2008, de la Torre 2012). Trading of wild animals is forbidden by law in Ecuador; however the enforcement of this law is weak partly due to low public awareness of the negative effects of illegal trading. To improve the knowledge and environmental awareness of communities that have been identified as primary centers of illegal trade in Amazonian Ecuador, in the past year, with the support of an IPS-Lawrence Jacobsen Education Development Grant, we developed a program of environmental education. This report presents the results of this program until March, 2013.

Methods

We coordinated with the regional offices of the Ecuadorian Ministries of Education and Environment, municipalities and environmental and indigenous organizations of the Amazonian provinces of Napo, Orellana and Pastaza, to carry out workshops for high school students and teachers, and leaders of local communities from June 2012 through March 2013. By including teachers and leaders of local communities as a special target, we aimed to develop and reinforce local skills in environmental education to assure the sustainability and replicability of the program. Didactic materials for the workshops were designed with the participation of students of the Environmental Education course at Universidad San Francisco de Quito.

Evaluation of the program results was based on a combination of:

- 1) pre- and post-intervention reports, aiming to measure changes of attitudes and an increase in knowledge about the topics of interest,
- 2) evidences of the sustainability (continuity) of the program through time based on an assessment of the interest of local teachers and community leaders to include related activities in the scholar program.

Preliminary Results

We carried out ten workshops in Tena (a city of approx. 50000 inhabitants in the province of Napo), Coca (a city of approx. 50000 inhabitants in the province of Orellana), Puyo (a city of 35000 inhabitants approx. in the province of Pastaza), San Pablo (a town of 300 inhabitants approx. in the province of Sucumbíos), Iwia (a town of 40 inhabitants in the province of Pastaza) and Tambococha n of Ecuadorian primates.

In Tena, we carried out three workshops; one of these workshops was given to 14 leaders of local communities in the area of Tena, a second workshop was given to 73 students of 5 high schools and the third one to 7 teachers of the same high schools. Three workshops were also carried out in Coca. One workshop was given to 68 students of three high schools, a second workshop was given to 70 students of 5 high schools, and a third one to 25 teachers of 8 high schools. In the city of Puyo we carried out one workshop to nine leaders of indigenous communities. Three additional workshops were carried out, one in the Secoya town of San Pablo to 24 Secoya students, another in the Quichua community of Iwia to five community leaders, including one school teacher, and a third one to 25 guards of the Yasuni National Park in the area of Tambococha.

Each workshop lasted about three hours. In all workshops we presented information about the ecology, behavior and importance of Ecuadorian primates, as a necessary background to discuss the conservation threats they are facing.

The focus of this second section was illegal trade; however, in the workshop to the Yasuní Park guards, we also focused on basic methods to conduct primatological research.

In the workshops for students, before discussing the problem of illegal traffic, we asked eight short questions to students to evaluate their knowledge and actions related to this activity (Annex 1). After the poll, we presented relevant information about illegal trade and the video “Requiem for the forest” (de la Torre et al. 2007) that presents a dramatized history of a captured pygmy marmoset that is rescued and reintroduced to a wild group.

The last section of the workshop varied depending on the public and the sites. Due to time limitations of the high schools in Tena and Coca, out door activities were not possible; instead, groups of students were asked to write a short story (real or not) about a monkey victim of illegal traffic (Annex 2). Once each group presented the story to the workshop participants, we reinforced the importance of primate conservation, emphasizing the problem of illegal traffic: regulations, laws and the power that each person has to stop it by not buying live or dead animals that are victims of this activity.

In the workshop of San Pablo, students participated in the following out-door activity: two groups of 12 students walked through a trail in the forest near the town, each group was led by a professor. Students were asked to record all animals observed (mainly birds and mammals) and to tell which of those species are affected by illegal traffic and how. When the groups returned to the school, the teachers lead a discussion of what would the forest be without the animals they just observed, emphasizing the ecological roles of each species and asking the students if they know of other animals that were affected by illegal traffic and that are no longer in those forests.

Workshops for high school teachers and community leaders began with a brief review of the ecology and conservation of Ecuadorian primates to introduce a guide of proposed didactic activities to teach about illegal traffic in different areas (mathematics, grammar, arts and sciences, Annex 3). The feasibility of each activity was further discussed. An out-door activity was developed with the group of community leaders of the area of Tena since the workshop was

carried out in the rescue center Parque Amazónico La Isla. In this case, after observing the rescued animals, participants analyzed how frequent illegal traffic was in their communities and all the problems related to the enforcement of national laws and local regulations.

Participants were invited to contact us for more information and to let us know about the implementation of the didactic activities. To date, we have been contacted by 18 of the 60 teachers and community leaders that received the workshop. In all these contacts, participants asked us for more didactic materials (ppt. presentations, videos) or told us that they have applied at least one of the activities we proposed in the workshop to motivate students to prevent illegal trade.

Didactic materials for all the workshops included a brochure about illegal traffic (Annex 4) powerpoint presentations (Annex 5), a guide for park guardians to conduct primate censuses and research (Annex 6), a guide for high school teachers with tools to teach about primates and wildlife traffic and two videos: Pygmy marmosets, tiny creatures of the forest (de la Torre et al. 2004) and Requiem for the forest (de la Torre et al. 2007). A 10 min documentary presenting the drama of the animals victims of illegal wildlife traffic from the point of view of different actors (students, managers of rescue centers, scientists) is currently been produced. The script and about 90 min of footage are ready. The estimated time for completion is July 2013. The video will be distributed.

Concluding remarks

We faced several difficulties in the coordination of the workshops with the local authorities in each city or town, which caused delays in our planned schedules. We also had to deal with time constraints that most schools had for participating in the workshops. Despite these inconveniences, a preliminary evaluation of our program points to two important facts:

- 1) the final discussions of the workshops allow us to state that students did understand the environmental and social problems of illegal wildlife traffic. The participation and motivation of teachers and community leaders during the workshops was also high and about 30% of them maintained a contact with us after the workshop. All these facts point to the short term effectiveness of the program.

2) the answers to the anonymous survey we applied in the workshops evidenced that a relatively high proportion of the participants are or have been consumers of illegal wildlife traffic, either by having a wild animal as pet or by buying wild meat. Given these previous experiences, a single workshop may not be enough to change people's perceptions about wildlife trade. That is why it is extremely important to develop and reinforce the skills in environmental education of local teachers and community leaders. Our

program was well received by these actors but more work is needed to successfully combat an activity that is still widespread in Ecuadorian Amazon and that is affecting almost all primates and several other species.

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Using Student Debate Competitions as a Conservation Education Tool in Kibale National Park, Uganda

Kibale National Park in Uganda is an important habitat for several endangered primates, including its most well known residents, chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*). Despite Kibale's legally protected status, the park faces major conservation challenges due to the burgeoning human population that presses against its boundaries. Thus conservation education and community engagement programs are essential, if long-term conservation is to succeed in this area. Since 1997, the Kibale Chimpanzee Project has partnered with The Kasiisi Project to bridge chimpanzee scientific research with conservation education in schools and communities around the park.

In 2012, these collaborators were awarded the Lawrence Jacobsen Education Development Award from IPS to organize a student debate competition focused on local conservation issues. Participants in this Debate Cup were 100 students from five primary schools near Kibale's border.

The goal of the project was to use a debate format to convey conservation messages to schoolchildren in a fun and engaging way.



Each school debated each other twice, once when they were the 'home team' and once when they were the 'away team'. Participants were in grades primary 5-7 (average age = 13).