

# TReeS News

The Tambopata Reserve Society  
Newsletter, No. 17

February 1991

## 1991 TReeS membership

1990 was TReeS' most successful year to date in terms of the funds raised, the number of new members and the progress made by the projects that TReeS supports in Peru.

This support remains very much dependent on the subscriptions and donations received from members. TReeS' annual membership runs from 1st January each year, unless you have joined since 1st October of the preceding year. We would be most grateful if those members who do not subscribe by banker's order could renew their 1991 subscriptions accordingly. If you would like a banker's order or covenant form, they are available from John Forrest; paying by either greatly reduces our administration costs. We would encourage all members to persuade others to join.

## TReeS accounts

The unaudited TReeS accounts for 1990 indicate that the Society had an income of around £32,900 (up from £14,800 in 1989), including a sum received on our behalf in the USA. Expenditure was around £13,900 (up from £11,700 in 1989). Approximately 84% of expenditure went on supporting activities in Peru, and the remaining was spent on running costs, administration and the promotion of TReeS outside Peru. A substantial proportion of the funds remaining in the account are already allocated to the work of AMETRA in 1991. In addition, a substantial quantity of postcards and booklets remain in stock. The 1990 balance of account of TReeS USA is around \$350.

The work of TReeS/AMETRA 2001 is endorsed or supported by Helpage, ICBP UK/USA, Anglo-Peruvian Society, Oxfam, the Body Shop International PLC, Kilverstone Latin American Wildlife Park in Norfolk, several FoE groups and schools, and various small trusts and charities.



## Resident naturalist news

The wet season arrived in October and with it higher temperatures - a consistent 29 - 34 C range during the day, and a minimum of 19 C at night. The rains have prompted intense frog activity, and many more snakes have been seen on the trails than usual. The most significant recent sightings were a harpy eagle, which spent nearly two hours close to the Lodge and a jaguar near L. Katicocha. Other interesting sightings include an osprey at L. Cocacocha, green ibis on the Tapir Trail, three laughing falcons near the Lodge, eight coatimundis on the L. Chica trail, a sloth, a prehensile tailed porcupine, groups of white-lipped peccary and a puma near the dock. More regular sightings have included brown capuchin and titi monkeys, red squirrels, anacondas and agoutis.

## Current RNs

**B. Widowson** is compiling a comprehensive field guide to the birds of the TRZ, including a collation of several previous works. **T. Valqui** and **R. Zegarra** are studying smooth fronted caiman in streams on the TRZ. **M. Butt** is assisting **O. Phillips** (see below). **M. Corcuera** is assisting in the establishment of the applied biology projects and planning a joint flora and fauna survey within TCRZ with other organisations.

Research has also been undertaken at the TRZ by several other scientists in the last few months. **O. Phillips** is studying flowering and fruiting trees in the one hectare plots set up by the Smithsonian Institute. It is the first tropical study in Peru to attempt such a comprehensive study of tree species and the

project is also studying similar plots elsewhere in Peru. E.Ortiz is making a detailed study of the Brazil-nut tree population in the TRZ. Populations at L.Valencia and L.Sandoval, along the R.Madre de Dios, downriver from P.Maldonado, are also being analysed.

C.Schenk and E.Staib are studying the status, behaviour and conservation of giant river otters in the Department of Madre de Dios.

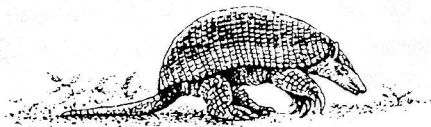
G.Lamas (Director of the Natural History Museum in Lima) and B.Robbins (Smithsonian Institute) are continuing butterfly research. In one week, 20 species new to the TRZ were collected. This autumn a statistical report on the butterfly population of the TRZ should be available.

### **Eco-tourism in the Tambopata area**

'Eco-tourism' is the current buzz word in Cuzco. It appears to have been adopted by several tour companies to add a new dimension to their operations in an attempt to stimulate a market which was declining even before the Gulf crisis. It may also be in use as a means of adding a greater degree of legitimacy to certain forms of tourist operation. Some conservation organisations seem to be prepared to give substantial support to this approach, in the hope that it promotes rainforest conservation.

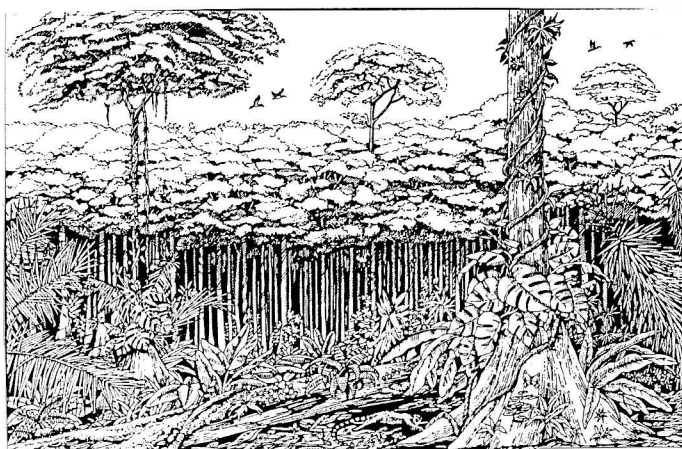
On the Rio Tambopata, there are two new tourist developments in progress. One consists of a new lodge about half an hour upriver from the Explorers Inn, and is due for completion in spring 1991. It is expected to be particularly popular with birders. The other consists of a basic platform facility close to the collpa ten hours upriver from the Explorers Inn. (A collpa is a salt-lick that attracts huge numbers of birds at dawn and dusk to extract minerals from the rocks exposed along the river bank, and is especially spectacular because of its popularity with macaws). The facility at the collpa, set up by Tambopata Nature Tours, which shares investors with Manu Nature Tours, consists of three small covered platforms suitable for camping. Limited trails have been cleared into the forest behind the collpa, but most activities will centre around viewing the collpa from the river. However, there are plans to construct a similar facility further downstream, possibly in the vicinity of the TRZ at Laguna Tres Chimabadas and within the lands of the native community of Infierno. A form of lease back system, under which the

facility would be operated by the native community, is under discussion, but there must be a number of question marks over the suitability and workability of such an operation and the long-term benefits for the native community.



### **Peruvian economic update**

Monthly inflation fell dramatically to 13.80% in September and 9.60% in October but the annual figure for 1990 - 9,442% - is the worst in Peruvian history. The 'inti' is now a victim of the recent economic problems and will be replaced by the 'new sol' (1m intis) in June 1991. Peru has recently arranged a bridging loan with several 'developed' countries, ending four years of isolation from the international financial community. However, the loan will only repay national debt arrears to the World Bank, IMF and others. Fujimori's performance to date is considered satisfactory by most Peruvians, despite the severe economic measures introduced and some concerns about the degree of military involvement in the government. A \$1.2m UN funded family planning program is going ahead despite opposition from the Church, but the government is having to cut its social emergency program due to a lack of funds. There have been a number of major strikes during the autumn and Sendero has continued attacks. The most serious was the destruction of the Mobil oil base near Tarapoto, in north east Peru, which caused millions of dollars' worth of damage.



## **AMETRA 2001 - A brief update**

The 1990 AMETRA 2001 AGM held at Tambopata in December was the best attended to date, with representatives from twelve native communities. All the participants were highly motivated and showed great enthusiasm for the work of the project in 1991. At the meeting V.Canelos was elected President, and Berta Solisonquehua was elected Vice-President. The Ethnobiological Centre was sufficiently near completion in 1990 for it to become fully functional in 1991. Discussions are continuing with the Manu National Park authorities with respect to the continuation of the work of AMETRA 2001 within the Park during 1991.

## **Forthcoming events**

**20th March: An Anglo-Peruvian Society evening** on Madre de Dios with short presentations by Tony Morrison about his work in the area, and by TReeS about the work of AMETRA 2001. Further details are available from The Anglo-Peruvian Society, 20 Copperfields, Beaconsfield, Bucks HP9 2NT

## **AMETRA T-shirts, TReeS postcards and Rainforest Sounds Tape**

AMETRA T-shirts (S & M), TReeS Postcards (showing Tapir, Hoatzin, Tree-frog, Hummingbird and the AMETRA Centre), and Rainforest Requiem cassette tape are all still available as per the details in recent TReeS Newsletters from John Forrest, 64 Belsize Park, London NW3 4EH.

**The Ecology of Tropical Rainforests - An introduction for eco-tourists** by P.van Ipenburg, a former RN, is a small booklet recently published by TReeS and available to members at £2.50 including postage.

## **Visitors to Peru and newsletter distribution**

We would be extremely grateful to hear from anyone who is flying to Lima this year and who could carry a few items needed out there by AMETRA and the other research projects that TReeS is supporting. We would also like to hear from anyone who can devote one evening per year, with some friends, to mailing out the TReeS Newsletter (there are

approximately 400). If you can assist, please write to John Forrest with your phone number.

*TReeS News aims to provide a forum for members' ideas and opinions on rainforest conservation and on green questions more generally. Do send your contributions (or replies to contributions) to John Forrest. However, we would stress that any pieces reproduced here are the writer's own views, and do not necessarily represent those held by TReeS.*

## **Rainforest conservation and the green question - Eustace Barnes**

It seems inevitable that the world's rain forests will be reduced to the degraded remnants of existing reserves. This reduction will involve the first mass extinction produced by human agency. The issue which we must face, however, is whether or not this poses long-term problems for social development, and if so, how these might be mitigated.

The resource's value is determined by its utility to society, and not by its intrinsic qualities. The distinction is crucial. Rainforests present a vast array of immediately exploitable resources that have value to people and therefore enter into the microeconomics of survival. Degradation of this ecosystem will not limit economic development but promote it. In the short term, rapid exploitation of resources, particularly in the Third World, makes good economic sense.

This exploitation, however, takes no account of the regional and possibly global climatic importance of the forests. These 'use-values' are inestimable, and remain external to economic rationality. Yet they are not considered in economic decisions, which are individual and unconstrained by notions of 'ecosystem integrity' or 'ecorationalism'.

Capitalist decision making is not, therefore, an 'ecologic', although it might continue to confine its impacts within ecological limits in order to provide an environment for its continued existence. The question is whether it can be confined in the first place,

and, secondly, whether it can come in a desirable form.

Environmental crises are social issues, and precipitated out of social action. There is a pressing need not only for short term measures to preserve patches of forest, but also for a redefinition of developmental objectives. This redefinition requires a critique of economic rationality, so as to identify the possibilities for reorganising humanity's priorities and economic structures so as to resolve the contradictions of global capitalism; that is, to provide for human needs according to social justice whilst avoiding ecological destruction.

Current 'green' answers in the west revolve around palliative measures to curb the impact of economic pressures. They have therefore been coopted as part of a conservative, authoritarian response to ecological disruption. This strategy neither answers nor solves environmental problems; it offers superficial, temporary solutions.

In the 'Third World' this authoritarianism is armed with an idealisation of indigenous agriculture, which is represented in South America by remnants of the pre-columbian societies apparently outside the capitalist economy, which live a mythical arcadian existence in 'interesting' habitats. These social fragments present science with additional strategies for forest management. Their prescription for rainforest conservation, however, would be founded upon green nostalgia and a fundamental misconception of society.

Anthropologists currently attempting to record indigenous peoples' traditional uses of tropical forests have shown how complex ecological symbolism and social controls accompany their strategies which are not, therefore, simply a set of techniques. Non-capitalist forest utilisation operates well within ecological limits often shaped by other, non-ecological pressures, such as fear of discovery and the avoidance of enslavement. The knowledge of these traditional practitioners is of use to medicine and the management of reserves, but outside these

contexts it provides only a naive framework for a hopeless utopia.

Pan-tropical application of such strategies for forest management would require massive subsidisation given the evident unacceptability of their consequent lifestyles. This is a particularly unlikely scenario, given the nature of underdevelopment in the third world.

It is clear that it is social structure and culture which is crucial in determining the outcome of environmental interactions. Technology and technique are the outcome and support of these two factors, not their determinant.

In short, then, the answer to the environmental crisis does not lie in denying the advances of technology, or the benefits of modern life. Nor is it to be found in the 'ultimate' technology, nor the use of traditional knowledge. There is no green agenda with sufficient social and political cogency to direct change. This can partly be attributed to the failure of communism, which has left the capitalist west occupying the moral high ground with bewildering authority. Capitalism is now considered almost 'natural', and consequently tampered with at great cost: Russia is often used as the classic example. However, looking at capitalist developments in the global economic periphery, one might question this conclusion as unacceptable defeatism.

The impetus for political struggle derives from real economic contradictions, but the speed of its advances are controlled by the extent to which the contradictions are understood. Critical analysis of the class-based and ideological pressures in a system that consumes and wastes resources in a blind clamour for growth is crucial. The Green movement needs to make connections between social structure and environmental changes. There has to be a realistic understanding of our quite unique society, which is driven by the particular social configuration of capitalism. Ideas can focus the struggle, provide it with direction, and thereby enable success.

