



"Singing in the rain" travelers explore the forest on one of Rachel Crandell's recent trips.

► Ensuring biodiversity and the survival of the rainforest

Monteverde Conservation League US, Inc.

BY CHRISTOPHER CUSSAT

IN JUST THE PAST YEAR SINCE *GBQ* FIRST profiled the Monteverde Conservation League US, Inc. (MCLUS), this preservation group has admirably grown in size, success, and scope, in addition to growing trees.

According to president Rachel Crandell, one of the most important results of MCLUS's efforts has been successfully sustaining the natural balance of biodiversity in The Children's Eternal Rainforest (TCER), which is owned and protected by the Monteverde Conservation League (MCL) in Costa Rica.

Biodiversity refers to all of the different existing varieties and forms of life on the planet. "We have more biodiversity in the tropics than any other region in the world," notes Crandell.

In fact, many of the species living in TCER are endemic, which means that they live nowhere else on Earth, and the habitat ranges of some of these plants and animals are relatively small—for example, localized to one particular side of a mountain at a specific altitude. So if even a small portion of one section of rainforest is destroyed, an entire

unique species can be lost forever. Crandell adds, "Biodiversity still exists here because years ago, MCL bought the land and protected it; now animals that were no longer here have returned."

MCLUS and MCL continue their preservation of biodiversity in Monteverde's rainforest by partnering with the Costa Rican government and buying more land—adding to its current 54,000 acres in TCER. In fact, as an incentive to protect its hydroelectric turbines, the government's environmental-services program pays landowners who do not cut down trees. This prevents the silting of lakes, which would damage power plants and subvert Costa Rica's energy needs. These payments account for half of MCL's yearly budget.

For the past three years, MCLUS and

CONTINUED SUCCESS

With MCLUS' influence spreading far and wide, Rachel Crandell sees strides in improvement and growth as the organization continues its success since *GBQ* featured MCLUS in Fall 2008. So far this year:

- \$52,000 raised (as of June '09) through MCLUS' Land Purchase and Protection Campaign
- \$23,000 raised through MCLUS educational trips to Costa Rica
- \$22,000 grant approved by US Fish and Wildlife Service to help protect 200 US tropical bird species that migrate between Central America and US

AT A GLANCE

HEADQUARTERS:
ST. LOUIS, MO

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
RAINFOREST
CONSERVATION AND
PRESERVATION

2008 ANNUAL
DONATIONS:
\$671,000

TOTAL ACRES
SAVED TO DATE:
400

TOTAL FUNDS
RAISED TO DATE:
\$1.5 MILLION

AVERAGE YEARLY
PROJECTS:
12+

“Biodiversity still exists [in TCER] because years ago, MCL bought the land and protected it; now animals that were no longer here have returned.” *Rachel Crandell, President*

MCL have focused on raising money to create a *biological corridor* on the mountain's chopped-down Pacific slope. They want to achieve this while also helping the local people remain self-sustaining. “We’re hoping to find farmers whose piece of stream-based land is contiguous to TCER and also has important biodiversity, trees and appropriate seed sources left, and proof of title.” The two organizations hope to buy land, but not the farmers’ houses and gardens—allowing them to stay

on the land while paying them to plant trees and reforest the degraded cattle pastures. This will create habitats and food sources for species that need to migrate down the mountain—like the famous resplendent quetzal.

Crandell believes that biodiversity is extremely important because it is not completely known how each form of life affects another, or what consequences would occur if even one insect were allowed to become extinct. She quotes

Aldo Leopold, the father of conservation in America, “If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of eons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts?” Crandell paraphrases, “We don’t know all of those little connections in the web, and so we really shouldn’t be getting rid of anything—because it wouldn’t be here if it didn’t have a specific purpose.” **GBQ**

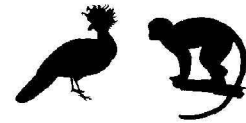
RESTORING ANIMAL SPECIES

Rachel Crandell tells how MCLUS and MCL facilitate the return of species to their original homes.



BARE-NECKED UMBRELLABIRD

With nesting grounds on the Caribbean slope of the Tilaran Mountains, these birds migrate annually up and down the mountain to mate, nest, and fledge their babies. “They continue doing that because we never, ever allow that forest to be cut. The fact that we protected this particular place where they nest is why they’re still here.”



GREAT CURASSOW AND SPIDER MONKEY

Initially hunted out, these two species were aided by the organizations’ conservation process: “Some of the land that MCL bought included farms where people had previously chopped down trees, built houses, and hunted,” Crandell says. “We just let the farms grow back into secondary forest with an absence of hunters—so in the last 20 years, great curassow and spider monkeys have returned.”



BAIRD'S MOUNTAIN TAPIR

Averaging 500 pounds, the largest mammal in the neo-tropics (Central and South American rainforests) still roams this forest. “We protect the tapir and other endemic species from poachers by hiring guards who patrol the perimeter of our rainforest.”



RUFOUS-EYED STREAM FROG

This tiny frog lives only along the headwaters of small streams, also on the Tilaran Mountains. Crandell notes, “If we had not bought the land, it would have gotten cleared and these frogs would be gone.”