



Wildtracks

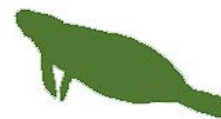
Conservation, Education and Research

The Wildtracks Rehab Newsletter

Issue 01, 2014



The Wildtracker



Welcome to the
World of Wildtracks
Page 2



The Primate
Rehabilitation
Centre
Page 3



Belize's Spider
Monkeys
Page 4



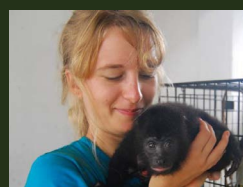
Manatees at
Wildtracks
Page 7



New arrivals,
updates and other
news
Page 10



Wildtracks Support
News
Page 12



The Final Word
Page 14

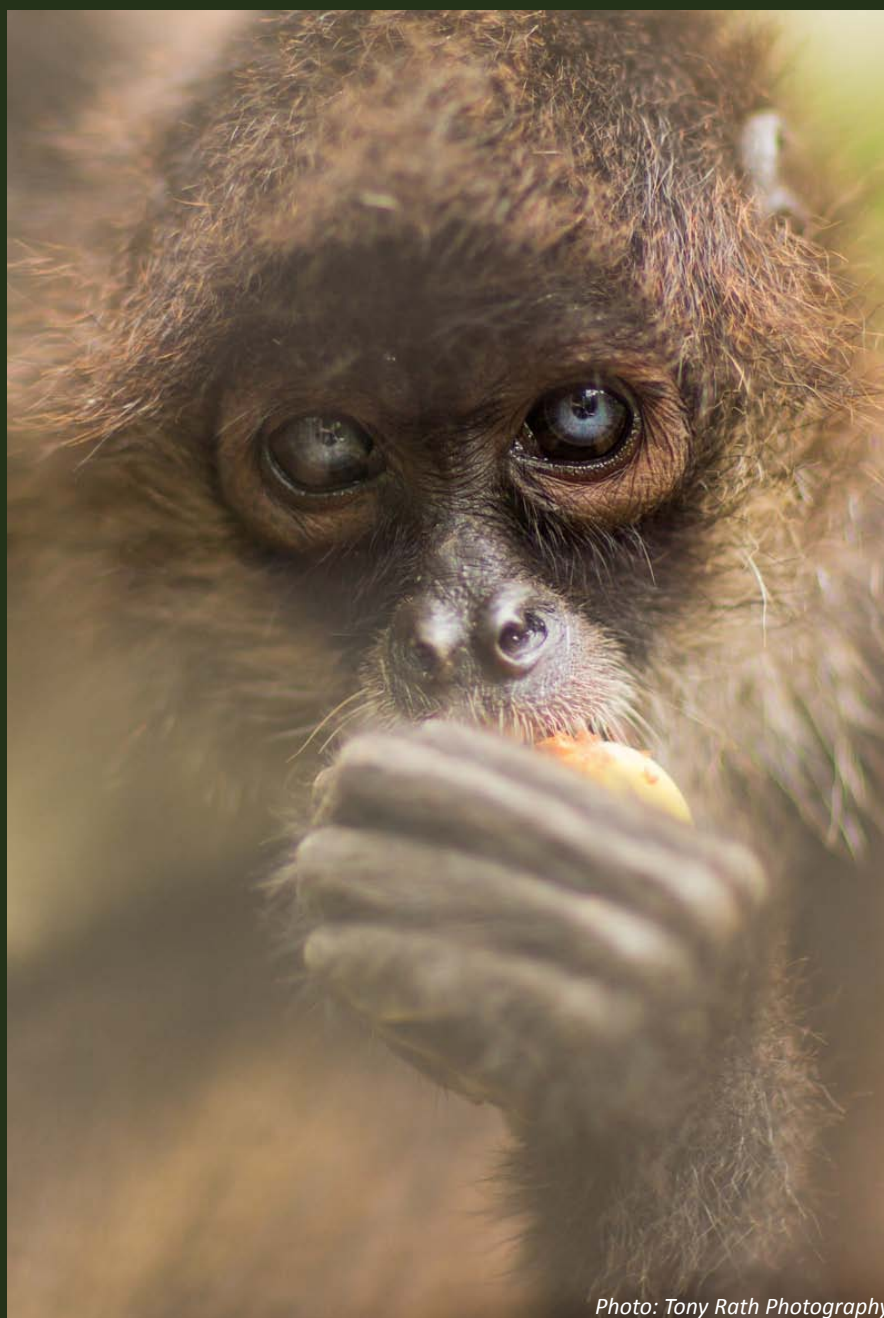


Photo: Tony Rath Photography

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Conservation and Research



Education and Outreach



Sustainable Resource Use



Education and Outreach



Welcome...

...to the first Wildtracks newsletter! We are excited to be able to share with you the many wonderful things happening here at the Wildtracks Centre

A word about Wildtracks

Wildtracks is based in Belize, and has been active since 1990. The organization was registered as a Belize non-profit organization in 1996. It implements its activities through three primary Programme Areas:

- Conservation and Research
- Education and Outreach
- Sustainable Development

...supported by the fourth, the Support Programme, through volunteer work, income generation, grants and donations.

Under the Conservation and Research Programme, Wildtracks hosts two of Belize's four national wildlife rehabilitation programmes - one for primates, the other for manatees.

The Primate Rehabilitation Centre works with the Belize Forest Department towards ending the illegal wildlife trade in monkeys - the endangered Yucatan black howler monkey and Geoffroy's spider monkey - and returning confiscated and surrendered primates to the wild.

The Manatee Rehabilitation Centre is also managed in partnership with the Belize Forest Department, and in collaboration with Marine Mammal Stranding Network and the National Manatee Working Group. It provides facilities for all injured manatees or orphaned manatee calves found in Belize's waters.

Both rehabilitation programmes are focused on returning animals to health, and releasing them back into the wild, once they have gained the skills necessary to survive.

We would like to thank all of you - volunteers and donors alike - for becoming part of the Wildtracks network! Your support is an essential part of every success story!



Photo: M. Bottrell

The Primate Rehabilitation Programme at Wildtracks

The primary focus of the Primate Rehabilitation Programme is to assist the Forest Department in ending the illegal wildlife trade in primates in Belize. To do this, Wildtracks hosts the Primate Rehabilitation Centre, providing facilities and care for all primates rescued by the Belize Forest Department, ensuring that there is space for any monkey that needs it.

Monkeys can reach Wildtracks in a number of different ways. The majority of the monkeys arriving are from the illegal pet trade - when reported, they are confiscated by the Forest Department, and then transferred to the Primate Rehabilitation Centre.

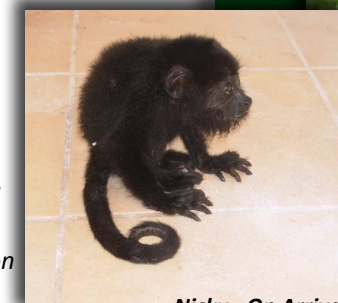
A number are surrendered by their owners once they discover that it is illegal to keep monkeys, or because the animals become increasingly unreliable as they grow larger and older.

Some are also from the wild, when young are found separated from their troops - generally left behind

during troop arguments, or adults attacked by dogs, hit by cars or isolated in urban areas. In all cases, the primary push is to get them back into good health, and back into the wild.

Four Primary Objectives of the Primate Rehabilitation Programme:

- To assist Forest Department in ending the illegal wildlife trade in primates in Belize
- To receive confiscated and rescued primates and prepare them for return to the wild
- To release rehabilitated monkeys back into the wild, with effective post release monitoring
- To develop and support conservation initiatives focused on increasing primate population viability in Belize



Nicky - On Arrival



Nicky - Released

Nicky - Before and After Rehabilitation

Central American Spider Monkeys



Central American Spider Monkeys

The range of the Central American spider monkey (or Geoffroy's spider monkey) extends throughout Central America, stretching from south east Mexico to Panama. This endangered species has a "fission-fusion" social system, with between 22 and 40 individuals in an area, dividing into smaller sub-groups of between two and six individuals, with fluid, variable membership.

Central American Spider Monkey
Ateles geoffroyi

Order: Primates

Family: Atelidae

Average Weight: 5 - 9 kg (12 - 20 lb)

Average Length: Body length: 50 cm (20 in)
Tail: 60 cm (26 in)

Conservation Status: Endangered - habitat loss across its range has been severe such that it is estimated that the species has declined by as much as 50% over the course of the past 45 years (three generations).

Home ranges may exceed 2.5km², this species requires large tracts of contiguous forest, with sub-groups travelling far and wide through the canopy, foraging. Unlike the howler monkey, the spider monkey is largely frugivorous, with fruits making up to 80% of its diet. The remainder is composed of leaves, flowers, insects, honey and seeds.



Spider monkeys are highly arboreal, and seldom come down to the ground. They tend to inhabit the upper canopy in relatively undisturbed forest, where they can move fast through the trees, brachiating hand over hand over highly prehensile tail. To facilitate this movement, they have lost their thumbs, allowing them to swing through the trees more easily.

Females generally have a single young, and invest heavily in infant care. The baby clings to the belly of the mother for 4-5 months, after which it is transferred to the mother's back for another 6 months. They wean at about 2 years, but may well stay with the mother until they reach three years of age.

Spider monkeys in Belize have two main threats – the increasing clearance and fragmentation of large, contiguous tracts of forest, and the hunting of young for the illegal wildlife trade. Whilst there is a popular demand for the young as pets, this species becomes unpredictable when older, quickly becoming frustrated and aggressive.

Being large and very mobile when adult, spider monkeys require large enclosures whilst in rehabilitation, providing them with opportunities to exercise. This species is highly intelligent – perhaps the most intelligent of the Neotropical primates, and as such also requires constant stimulation through cage enrichment, to keep individuals from becoming bored and frustrated – a constant challenge during the rehabilitation process

The Spider Monkey Complex

Over the last several months, Wildtracks has been raising funds to build a brand new spider monkey complex. This complex will be used to integrate all 16 spider monkeys here at Wildtracks into troops, with the skills to survive in the wild.

Over the course of several weeks, the enthusiastic construction crew cleared the enclosure site, and erected the massive structural framework of posts and poles for all three satellite enclosures. They have stretched the wire over the frameworks and nailed it firmly into place, and last but not least, installed the internal play and enrichment structures in the first two enclosures.

The first three spider monkeys, Pancho, Pippa and Theresa, have made the move into their new home, as described by Kate Michaud, who works closely with them....

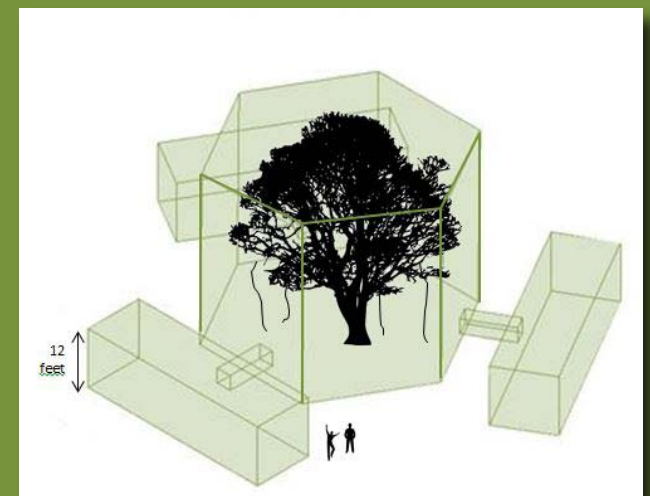
"The monkeys are thriving in their big new home, having been there over a week now. Theresa has been taking advantage of the space most - hopping between perches, scurrying up and around trees, sitting (but not yet swinging) on the log swing, testing each hammock for comfort, exploring everything. She makes delighted chirping noises far more often than she did in the old enclosure, and I've even caught her grooming Pippa."

Pippa is curious about her new home but most importantly she is very vocal. In the smaller enclosure, I'd heard her vocalize a bit, only when eating. Now she chirps consistently just to express how happy she is!

Pancho, whose actions have sometimes been unpredictable in stressful situations, has been inordinately relaxed. He



is spending less time on the ground - hopefully this new enclosure will help him break the habit in preparation for a life high in the trees."



The Concept for the Spider Monkey Complex at Wildtracks



Turning the concept into a reality - the first satellite enclosure is completed



Pippa - at home with Pancho and Theresa in the first Satellite Enclosure

Adopt a Spider Monkey!

As part of the fundraising activities for the Spider Monkey Complex, we launched an "Adopt a Spider Monkey for a Year" campaign.

Of the 16 spider monkeys currently in the Primate Rehabilitation Centre, 6 have now been adopted....that leaves 10 in need of your support!



So you are interested in adopting one of the Wildtracks spider monkeys for a year? This is how you do it...

1. Select your spider monkey (write to us for a full list of monkeys available)
 3. Go to the Wildtracks website, and use the "DONATE" button to donate US\$365 to Wildtracks (this covers the US\$1 per day food costs, for 1 year). Add a note that the donation is for an adoption
 4. The Wildtracks Team will put together the digital Adoption Package and send it to you - a certificate, photo and link to a short video to introduce you to your adopted spider monkey
 5. You will also receive video updates on how your spider monkey is doing
- Note: If the adoption is to be a gift, please provide the following information:
- Name and e-mail address of recipient and a message to go with your gift
 - We will send a confirmation e-mail to you acknowledging the adoption, and once the adoption package has been sent to the recipient.

The Manatee Rehabilitation Programme

Wildtracks has been rehabilitating orphaned and injured manatees since 1999. Working in partnership with the Forest Department of the Government of Belize, it has built on the very modest foundations in the early days, and has had considerable success in the rehabilitation and release of manatees. The majority of animals arriving at the Rehab Centre have been victims of boat impacts – either directly as injured animals, or indirectly as orphans, with boat strikes killing the mothers.

Working in collaboration with the National Manatee Working Group, Belize Marine Mammal Stranding Network, and the Belize Wildlife Conservation Network, orphaned and injured manatees are rescued and transported to Wildtracks for rehabilitation and release. Raising a tiny manatee calf to a 350 lb juvenile with the skills needed for life in the wild takes over three years of very dedicated care and rehabilitation, and a huge amount of milk formula!

Boat strikes and coastal development impacts are the main threats to Belize's manatees, but thankfully the number of manatees needing rehabilitation remains reasonably low. To date, Wildtracks has had a maximum of three manatees in care at any one time. As human/wildlife conflict gradually increases with increasing population and development, there is a trend of increasing manatee deaths and injuries from boat strikes.

Wildtracks is working with its partners to encourage implementation of best practices among boat tour operators and boat captains – to help reduce the number of manatees hit by boats.



Photo: Tony Rath Photography

The Manatees of Wildtracks

Duke



Duke - Before



Duke - After

Rameses



Rameses - Before



Rameses - After

Khaleesi



Belize is home to one of the two subspecies of West Indian Manatee, - the Antillean Manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*). In Belize, manatees are at highest risk from boats - particularly near the mouth of the Belize River. These slow-moving mammals are not adapted for swift evasion from oncoming boats, resulting in injuries and deaths - and orphaned calves.

Wildtracks works with the Forest Department and the Belize Marine Mammal Stranding Network for the long term protection of manatees in Belize. This includes hosting of the Manatee Rehabilitation Programme, providing care and shelter for orphaned and injured animals until they are old enough and strong enough to be released back into the wild, and monitoring their release.

There are currently three young manatees at Wildtracks - Duke, Rameses and Khaleesi.

Duke was rescued from the Belize City area (Duke Marina) in February, 2012. He arrived in a very emaciated state, with a heavy parasite load, and with a deep scar on his nose from entanglement in fishing line. Estimated at just under a year old, he was only 60% of the weight expected for a manatee of his size. Two years later, and he is still giving us cause for concern, with only limited weight gain, despite continued supplemental feeding - thought to be a result of pre-rescue cold stress.

Rameses also arrived from Belize City - he had significant injuries associated with

a watercraft collision, with deep cuts from a propeller across his back, and a collapsed lung. He is now fully recovered, and lives with Duke - these two young male manatees gradually working towards release when they reach 3 1/2 years old.

Khaleesi arrived on the 29th of July, 2013, as a near new-born, orphaned calf. She was found being beaten by waves against the rocks in front of Corozal Town, but was generally in good condition. She has increased in both size and weight, and is doing very well.

The Antillean Manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*) is found throughout the Caribbean and the northwestern Atlantic Ocean, from Mexico, east to the Greater Antilles, and south to Brazil, with the biggest population being in Belize. The largest member of the Order Sirenia, these aquatic mammals can reach up to 1500 lbs. Related to the elephant, they have rough grey skin and 3 to 4 vestigial fingernails on each foreflipper.

Antillean manatees can reproduce at four years of age, though they rarely begin to breed successfully before seven. Gestation is between 12 and 14 months, usually producing one calf, which will stay with the mother for up to two years.

They are herbivorous, with seagrass as their primary food source. Because these plants are so abrasive, their molars are continually worn down and replaced throughout their life.

In the past, Antillean manatees were hunted and used for food. Today, humans are still their biggest threat, though now through boat strikes, habitat loss, illegal poaching and entanglement in fishing gear.

West Indian Manatee
Trichechus manatus

Order: Sirenia

Family: Trichechidae

Average Adult Weight: 1000 - 1500 lbs

Average Length: 2.5 meters

Conservation Status: Endangered - The Antillean manatee subspecies found in Belize (*T. manatus manatus*) is listed as Endangered because the current population is estimated at less than 2,500 mature individuals and is predicted to undergo a decline of more than 20% over the next two generations (estimated at ~40 years for an unexploited population), without effective conservation actions, due to current and projected future anthropogenic threats (habitat degradation and loss, hunting, accidental fishing-related mortality, pollution, and human disturbance).

Twiggy's Release

Twiggy arrived as a 2 week old calf in June 2009, having been found injured and on her own by Heusner Caye, near the reef in front of Belize City. She weighed 56lbs on arrival, with a tip of nose to tip of tail length of 1.18m. By her release she was over 2m and close to 300lbs in weight. The selected release site was in a sheltered bay in Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, about 200m west of one of the key manatee resting holes. Evidence of manatees are everywhere - roots and leaf blades floating in the water.

Seasonal aerial surveys of the Wildlife Sanctuary with the co-managers of Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development) and LightHawk in January and March, 2012, and in February, 2013, as well as boat surveys throughout 2012, had confirmed the presence of two active Manatee Resting Holes in the general area, with up to eighteen individual manatees recorded within a single survey.

At the beginning of March, 2013, Twiggy was caught and carried out by boat to the release site.

After an initial on-site presence, we followed her progress from the office, from downloaded satellite info transmitted by her tag. It is amazing how effective the post-release monitoring is with the information from the GPS component of the satellite tag - many thanks to Save the Manatee Club for its support in ensuring Twiggy was fully equipped for her release!

Her progress was mapped each day - we watched as she spent more and more time at the manatee resting hole with other manatees, and started venturing into deeper water, foraging for seagrass. She has now been in the wild for over a year - a successful release into Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary.

<http://www.wildtracksbelize.org/rehab/manatee/tracking-map/Twiggy/>



Save the Manatee Club

Wildtracks runs almost entirely on volunteer support, and whilst working with the Belize Government, has no financial support at national level. At times, infrastructure and ongoing milk costs can be beyond the funds available from donations. However, since the establishment of the Manatee Rehabilitation Centre, we have been fortunate in having the support of Save the Manatee Club, based in Florida. From grants towards pool construction and scales for monitoring weight, satellite tagging equipment, winch systems and, when Wildtracks funds are particularly limited, milk supplies - Save the Manatee Club has made a significant difference to the viability of manatee rehabilitation in Belize.

"Without the support of Save the Manatee Club, we would find it very difficult to achieve the successes we have had with the rehabilitation of Belize's orphaned and injured manatees - especially in the current economically challenging climate. Our sincere thanks to Save the Manatee Club, and its supporters, who have made a huge difference in helping ensure the provision of care needed by orphaned manatees like Duke, Ramases and Khaleesi"

Wildtracks, 2014



Weighing Khaleesi - equipment donations from Save the Manatee Club, like these scales, are invaluable in monitoring and ensuring the good health of manatees at Wildtracks

New Arrivals, Updates and Other News

New Arrivals

Wildtracks has recently welcomed one of its newest arrivals to the Primate Rehabilitation Centre!

This beautiful new female, **Penny**, is our 14th Central American (or Geoffroy's) spider monkey here at Wildtracks. The entire team is taken with her unusual colouring and slightly different dialect. Though still using the same chirps, whistles, and barks, hers have a discernible "accent" when compared with the rest of the spider monkeys here. Very sweet in nature, she has completed quarantine, and is now happily integrated with Mel, of a similar size and age



Photo: M. Davis

Kenya, our 61st primate arrival, has come a long way from the underweight, scared little female Yucatan black howler monkey that arrived in February! She is about eight months old, and quickly developing quite a character as her dedicated carer spends time with her, building up her confidence to prepare her for her introduction to the other young monkeys in the nursery. She loves her hammock, playing with her enrichment toys, and climbing trees.

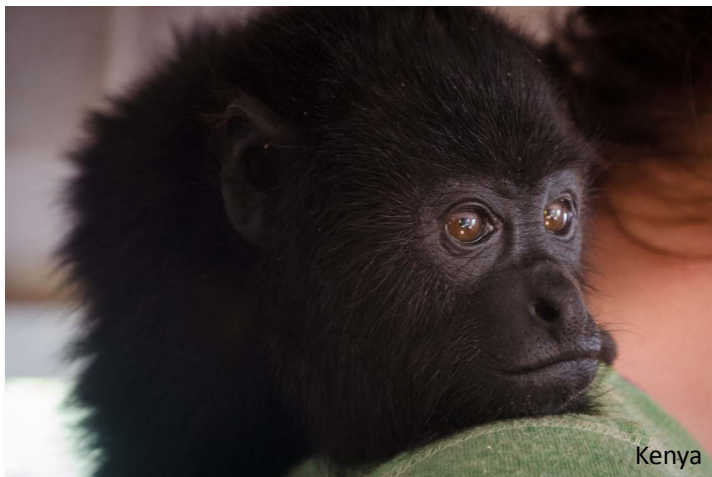


Photo: E. Farlow

Large and beautiful, **Sweetie** is 20 years old - the oldest howler monkey we have received to date. We are currently working with Sweetie to develop her climbing and social skills before introducing her to other monkeys - as this poor female has been by herself her whole life!

Integration

Integration - introducing monkeys to each other - is a slow but essential part of primate rehabilitation. It is important for monkeys to have a social group, just like humans. Here, we work very hard to ensure each integration is carefully thought out, monitored, and suited to the personalities of each individual monkey.

Izzie arrived as a 10 month old Central American spider monkey, badly injured and full of shotgun pellets. She is now almost 2½ and has begun her integration with **Chippa**. Chippa, from the Nursery Unit, is 15 months old and even bouncier. The two were first introduced in neighbouring enclosures, able to see each other and communicate and touch through the wire, but easily separated if needed. Once we felt comfortable with their level of interaction, we then opened the doors!

We are happy to report it went very well indeed! Lots of chirps, head shaking, chuckles and tousling. Their play dates have involved a fair amount of chasing each other, as well as Izzie hugging and grooming a very surprised looking Chippa! The two continue to spend their days together in one of the large outdoor integration cages.

The Nursery

Hobbes, who arrived in November, has now completed both his quarantine and his full integration with the other babies. Although there was originally some conflict at the start with Chippa, the two are now the best of friends with Chippa showing her superior speed and Hobbes unwaveringly trundling after her.

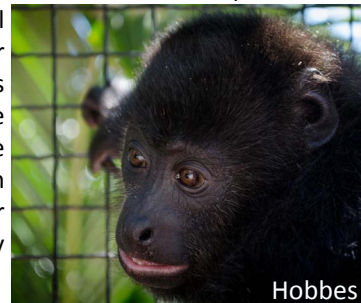


Photo: E. Farlow

Jessie and **Suri**, the double-trouble friends, are as rambunctious as ever. Whilst Jessie is quickly becoming the largest of the Nursery group, Suri is proving herself the most adventurous, performing daredevil jumps each day.

John Wayne, affectionately known as JW or JDubs, is the nursery cowboy, constantly providing entertainment. He is starting to finally grow and has no problem telling us how much of a tough guy he is. That is until Jessie steals his fruit. Then he'll tell us all about how unfair it is.. for the next 10 minutes.

Little Bean

Little Bean, affectionately known as "the Bean Machine", was the youngest monkey on arrival at Wildtracks, arriving on March 7th 2013, when she was about a week old. She was a suspected infanticide victim, found on the forest floor at the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, covered in ants on a trail at the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, by Keith Kremlick, a visiting student. The Cockscomb staff worked with the Belize Wildlife Conservation Network to ensure she was on the last flight out of Dangriga that evening, to be picked up by the Wildtracks Team in Belize City.



Photo: K. Kremlick



Photo: A. Jennewein

When Little Bean arrived, she still had an unhealed umbilical scar and no teeth! She required intensive care for the first two months, giving her carers many sleepless nights as they fought to save her life. Over the last year, she has grown into a confident little character, and has been fully integrated into the nursery group, sharing hammocks and food with the other young monkeys.



Photo: E. Farlow

Weight Gain

Khaleesi, the smallest manatee calf Wildtracks has ever seen, has started to gain weight. Making the leap from 39 lbs to over 64 lbs in the last months, Khaleesi is now no longer dependent on Paul and Zoe for her feeds, thanks to the implementation of a new feeding technique. Her feeding is now the responsibility of the "Mana-team" - the volunteers dedicated to the care of the three manatees at Wildtracks - from pool water changes, scrubbing, manatee manoeuvres, feeding and exercise.



Photo: L. Maarten

World Wildlife Day

Wildtracks has renewed its formal Memorandum of Agreement with the Belize Forest Department for the two wildlife rehabilitation programmes (Primates and Manatees). The Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development organized the first National Wildlife Day, as part of the World Wildlife Day in recognition of global wildlife.



Photo: I. Paquet-Durand

Signing the Rehabilitation Centre Memorandum of Agreement with the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development

Wildtracks in the News

An important part of the Primate Rehabilitation Programme is raising awareness in Belize. Wildtracks has had a number of visits in the past few months from local news agencies. Early in January, the local CTV3 crew visited Wildtracks for a day of filming and interviews with Paul about Wildtracks' mission, and the current problems surrounding primates and manatees in Belize. Two segments have been broadcast to date, one on primate rehabilitation and one on manatee rehabilitation.

In April, Wildtracks hosted a team from the BBC's children channel the CBBC. They were here filming an episode of Naomi's Nightmares of Nature. The goal of the show is to dispel myths about animals considered unusual or scary. In this case - howler monkeys, and how they can seem extremely intimidating in the jungle when they are howling. Howler monkeys use their enlarged hyoid bone to amplify their calls so their howls can be heard for many miles.

We were also visited by Colette Kase from the "My Beautiful Belize" blog. After spending the day with us she wrote an interesting article showcasing the ongoing rehabilitation activities at Wildtracks.



Links:

Wildtracks on CTV3

<http://mybeautifulbelize.com/making-tracks-back-wild/>

Wildtracks Support News

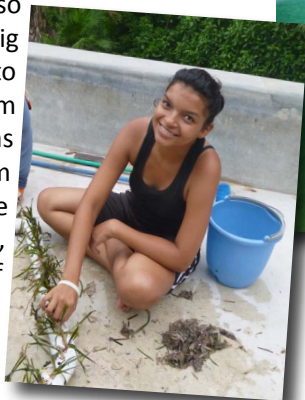
Wildtracks is supported by you - those of you who dedicate your time as volunteers and those who donate funds to support the Wildtracks rehabilitation activities. Together we have achieved notable successes in the rehabilitation and release of both manatees and howler monkeys. We have assisted the Belize Forest Department in reducing the number of known primates being kept illegally as pets from 54 to 10. We have improved the quality of life and pre-release skills development for the increasing number of Wildtracks spider monkeys. These are your successes as much as they are ours. Together, we are the Wildtracks Team!!

A huge THANK YOU to all those people who have volunteered in the first quarter of 2014 - and all who have volunteered in previous years! Particular thanks have to go to those who have returned - we really appreciate your commitment to Wildtracks and the animals in rehabilitative care.

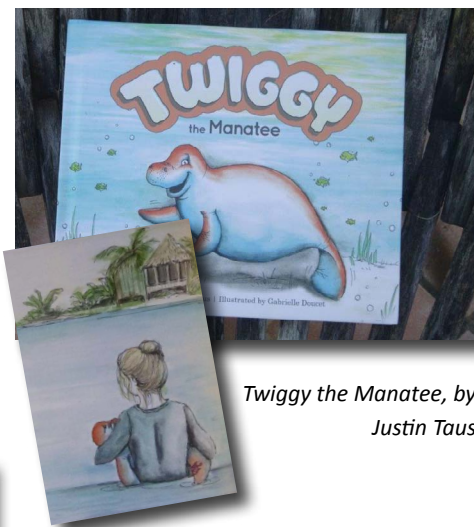


The Wildtracks Team, 1st Quarter, 2014

We would also like to give a big thank you to **Jaimilee Cruz**, from Sarteneja, who has joined our Team and taken on the Nursery Monkeys, as well as care of Duke, the older manatee.



Our volunteers often get up to amazing things when they go back to their countries...many work tirelessly on behalf of abused dogs and cats, in animal shelters, saving whales, studying monkeys...**Justin Taus**, from Canada, has just completed a children's book to raise awareness of manatees - in particular, Twiggy, one of the Wildtracks manatees, and to raise funds for the Manatee Rehabilitation Programme - you are fantastic, Justin!! Thank you!!



Twiggy the Manatee, by Justin Taus

Lynda Green, another long term Wildtracks supporter, has also expressed her love for these amazing marine mammals through a book - "*Mollee Manatee visits the Reindeer People*". The amazing illustrations are by local artist Felicity Ensor - Neto's wife.



Illustration from Mollee Manatee (Lynda Green / Felicity Ensor)

Jamie Knight deserves mention not only for the delicious falafel he made while here, but also for completing a half marathon to raise funds for Wildtracks - congratulations Jamie!



Jamie Knight, after finishing the BTR Liverpool Half Marathon

Marathons have also featured in fundraising efforts in the USA - we have been very fortunate to be supported by **Lesley and Brian McDonald**, who organized the "Back to the Wild" run at the Lake St. Claire Metropark, Harrison Township, Michigan. With 230 runners, the event was a definite success!



The Back to the Wild run (B. McDonald).

Special thanks go to **Wini and Steve**, of the Artful Dodger Sail and Canvas in Placencia, who made a brilliant stretcher for transportation of the larger manatees. Very functional and beautifully made, it now plays a central role in the capture and transport of Duke and Ramases when necessary...THANK YOU!

Recognition also needs to go to the Belize Wildlife Conservation Network - particularly Gillian, who works tirelessly on behalf of Belize's wildlife.

A Huge Thank-you to our Donors!

Wildtracks is achieving impressive results - to date we have a 100% post-release survival rate in the manatees we've rehabilitated and 95% with the howler monkeys - unparalleled elsewhere in the region. To provide this level of care and commitment to these animals, even without salaried staff, requires not insignificant funding: Bz\$1,000 (US\$500) or more a week on milk formula and fruit alone, on top of the ongoing infrastructure upgrades as we continue to expand our enclosures and support facilities. This would not be possible without the generous support of past volunteers, their families and friends, private individuals, anonymous donors, organizers of fund-raising activities, and donor organizations. Achieving such high levels of success in wildlife rehabilitation and release back into the wild on the scale

now being done is only possible as a team effort, and every donor is very much part of that team. We cannot thank you enough for your much-needed support, without which we would be so very much more limited in the scope of work we can achieve.

Wildtracks works in partnership with the Forest Department of the Government of Belize. Through its Wildlife Programme, the Forest Department is very active in Public Awareness and Enforcement activities in pushing home a zero-tolerance policy for illegally kept pet monkeys. The Belize Wildlife Conservation Network plays a critical role in locating pet monkeys for confiscation or surrender, and the Belize Wildlife and Referral Clinic provides the all-important veterinary support to help us heal these often very sick animals and keep them healthy for release.

Donate Now
Make A Difference!

Do you have what it takes to be a Wildtracks Volunteer?

Wildtracks has been hosting volunteers since its establishment, with volunteers being at the core of the success of Wildtracks initiatives. The Wildtracks Volunteer Programme has been established to provide people of all ages with the opportunity to gain experience in tropical conservation...particularly work in wildlife rehabilitation, focused on primates and manatees. As an NGO, Wildtracks has only one paid staff position... Jaimilee, our local intern - other than that, all levels from directors down are unpaid.

Learn more from
www.wildtracksbelize.org/support/volunteer

Join us! Make a Difference!

"A group and a place I'm never going to forget...The people that run it are amazing, and the people you meet there will be too. You don't have to be doing biology or have any experience - just be willing to get the job done."

I seriously cannot recommend this project enough!"

Hugo, 2013

From the Volunteers...

"Having had the privilege to work with Khaleesi, as well as Duke and Ramases, is an experience I will never forget. It is also amazing proof that if enough dedicated people care about the future of these animals, no orphaned, injured or abandoned manatee is a hopeless case, and that at Wildtracks, they will have probably one of the best chances in the world of getting released back into the wild and ensuring the continued viability of this amazingly gentle species."

Kathryn, 2014

"Attitude is everything at Wildtracks, and at the end of the day I always have a smile on my face, grateful that I get to wake up the next morning and spend the day here. I am a new person because of my experiences here. I am a stronger, more confident person. In fact, that tarantula 5 feet from me...no big deal!"

Stefanie, 2014

"To many, Wildtracks is a sanctuary from the outside world. It is a place where you are surrounded by like-minded people who share a common passion. I know that nostalgic memories will continue to resurface in my mind for quite a while. But I also know that this second experience will serve as a motivator to continue conservation efforts from home, and new projects have already began sprouting. I already look forward to one day returning and making new friendships and caring for other animals. I t will surely be different, but an amazing adventure none-the-less."

Justin, 2014



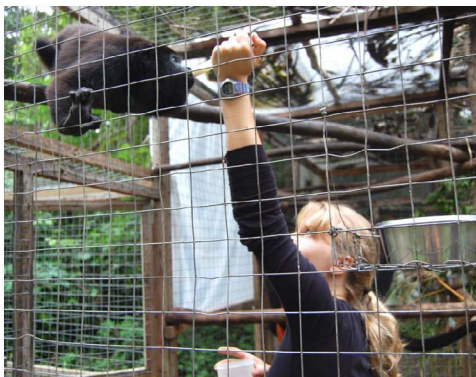
Photo: Tony Rath Photography

The Final Word

The final word comes from one of the Wildtracks Team - Spencer - who worked with Beth, a young howler monkey rescued from a bar in Belmopan...

Like many young howlers at Wildtracks, Beth was an illegal pet, and had been kept on display as entertainment in a bar, with cruel rope around her waist uncomfortably to the point that it rubbed a painful sore all the way around her small and fluffy body. She was confiscated by the Belize Forest Department and brought to Wildtracks. For the first several months after Beth came to Wildtracks, the result of her past mistreatment and confinement at the hands of humans could be seen in her overall solemn demeanor and great apprehension toward her new human caretakers. She would nearly always remain withdrawn in the shaded corner of her enclosure, only moving around when food was brought to her.

Ty is a bit younger than Beth, and was also kept as an illegal pet earlier in his life, until his rescue. He is currently in his "teenage" stage of growth. This is a time in a monkey's life that is dedicated to playing and roughhousing as a means of strengthening social bonds, developing climbing skills, and expending lots of energy. Being younger when he arrived, and growing with other monkeys in the Wildtracks Nursery Unit, Ty was quite accustomed to both other monkeys and his human carers as playmates, and had a personality that was overall very confident, rambunctious, and affectionate, all quite opposite to Beth's behavior.



Beth had recently finished her initial quarantine period at Wildtracks, and Ty has recently found himself on his own due to his bullying behavior with the other monkeys his age - so it made sense to try to integrate the two together.

Beth was quite wary of Ty, perhaps due to the fact that she had not encountered another of her own kind in a very long time, but also due to the high energy with which Ty approached her at first. She would allow Ty to come near her, but as soon as he wanted to play she'd run off to the other side of the enclosure to end the activity.

We were left to reflect on this initial stage, feeling some concerns as to whether Beth would ever warm up to Ty, or if she would express interest in other monkeys at all. Perhaps her abuse had been too great, and her social isolation too lengthy to allow her to bounce back from.

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Our fears were soon put to rest. Ty, who had been previously known for bullying and being a bit rough with other monkeys, began showing incredible compassion and tenderness towards Beth, approaching her very calmly, simply sitting by her and gently grooming her as much as she would allow. After Beth had warmed up to this interaction, Ty began to try playing with her again and she would actually engage in this for a time.

Soon, Beth even began initiating play with Ty, chasing him around, wrestling with him, making monkey laughing sounds we'd never heard from her before, and being more active than ever. They would peacefully eat browse from the same branch, sunbathe on the same palm leaves, and if Beth felt the need to retreat to her usual corner, Ty would lay in her hammock beneath her as

company (I suspect he also enjoyed the novelty of a new hammock). From Ty, Beth seemed to learn anew how to be a monkey, as her previously repressed social instincts flourished with his gentle coaxing and patient companionship. Beth and Ty's successful integration greatly exemplifies numerous amazing characteristics of primates: their incredible resilience to suffering, ability to forgive, and the healing power of their friendships, which we can easily see across many species including our own.

Primates are inherently social creatures that thrive on their interactions and sense of belonging in a social group with one another, and thanks to Ty, Beth's true personality and identity as a howler monkey were brought back to life. Together with the bond they share, they have a bright future ahead of them as part of a larger troop released back into the wild.

I will always cherish my experience in being a part of their new beginning.

Spencer volunteered at Wildtracks from October until December 19th, 2013.

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