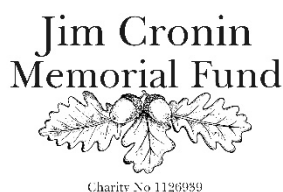

RACHEL'S REPORT

Travel Grant to Esperanza Verde, Peru with the Jim Cronin Memorial Fund



Charity No 11269389



ESPERANZA VERDE
nature conservation - Peru

In May 2018, I travelled to a rescue centre in central Peru to develop an enrichment program for their primates and offer support and assistance to the team at the centre. Esperanza Verde is a conservation project in the Amazon basin of Peru, consisting of both rainforest protection and a wildlife rescue centre which provides a home for animals who have previously been stolen from the wild for either the pet trade, bush meat trade or in some cases, those who are just seen and identified as a nuisance to crops.

Due to its location, the journey to the centre was a little complicated. From the UK I needed to take three planes, a bus, two 4x4s (one of which got stuck in the mud) and a car ferry (plank of wood on a boat) before being instructed to flag down any passing canoe (there weren't any) to cross the river, and walk until the dog barked (it didn't). The centre is home to free-ranging animals that can explore the forest and return for food if they wish to. These include spider monkeys, capuchin monkeys, woolly monkeys, howler monkeys and night monkeys. They have three young semi released howler monkeys who return to their cages at night. In addition to this, the centre also houses animals that are unable to return to the forest due to health or behavioural problems. My first few days at the centre were used for orientation and joining the 'tours'. The volunteers are each scheduled a daily tour, which involves caring for certain animals, working at the veterinary clinic, carrying out maintenance work or making enrichment. Once I had worked all the various sections, I focussed on organising the centres enrichment program and teaching the volunteers. I immediately found that enrichment was difficult and often unenjoyable. There were also some animals who were allegedly 'impossible' to make enrichment for. I made it my aim to increase the enthusiasm levels and knowledge, alongside designing an enrichment schedule.

Each day I took different volunteers to the enclosures and discussed the possibilities for each animal, before designing something, sourcing the materials and making it. We discussed safety, and the needs of different species and individuals. I also did a presentation which I used to illustrate the possibilities.

As time progressed, volunteers started to request more time on enrichment, which meant I could go into greater depth with them and work on bigger projects. For example, we worked on different ways to present the spider monkeys' food and came up with some larger re-usable items like the spinning barrel, as well as using different methods to vary the food presentation, such as hanging it in old socks.

We managed to make enrichment for all of the animals at Esperanza Verde, much to the surprise of the volunteers! This included the howler monkeys, night monkeys, tamarins, woolly monkeys and spider monkeys. To organise and keep track of the work I created a weekly enrichment record, from this we could then see what enrichment each primate has had and work out who was the greatest priority for the forthcoming days.

There was no budget for enrichment, and everything had to be carried a long way through the forest to the centre, so most of the resources we used were discarded items. We started to accumulate stores of what I called 'rubbish with potential', so much so, the directors set about building an enrichment store! Sadly, it was not finished until the week after I left, but apparently it now has a work bench and storage for made and unmade enrichment, which is fantastic! I was also asked to create something to guide future volunteers once I'd gone. So, I wrote an enrichment handbook which focused on ideas for the resident species at the centre, and those that they regularly receive.

When not working on enrichment, I helped to look after a baby woolly monkey named Talisa. She had been kept as a pet by two different households before they decided she was too much trouble and donated her. Although Talisha took up a lot of my time and it made getting anything else done quite difficult, helping to care for her was something I really enjoyed and learnt a huge amount doing. Taking her out into the forest to collect leaves for both her and the howler monkeys was a great experience, particularly as she was so fascinated by everything she saw in the forest.

We also received two tamarins whilst I was there. One had been offered to me and another volunteer in a shop in the nearest big town, Curimana. I explained that I would not buy him, but if they would like to donate him to us then he could be re-introduced to other monkeys and the forest, and I explained why this would be the best thing for the monkey. The lady however, would not give him to us, but just over a week later, he arrived in a cloth bag along with our groceries, he is currently being introduced to another new arrival. I also helped with worming the released monkeys, which involved trying to get medication into individual woolly monkeys and capuchin monkeys who were half way up a tree. Luckily because of my previous experience, I was able to help defend the vet from being ambushed and assist with distributing the meds co-operatively! I also assisted with medical procedures, including emergency surgery, weighing the monkeys and the annual health checks.

Two of the spider monkeys at the centre were not suitable for release, Rimaq and Lucio were extremely people focussed as a result of life in a circus and the pet trade before arriving at the centre. Rimaq had a hand injury, which required treatment several times a day, so I offered to train them both to present a hand. This was the first experience they had ever had at the centre with operant conditioning, and I was able to talk through the process with the managers and long-term volunteers. Having to get used to using Spanish commands took some getting used to, but once the monkeys could present both hands, I worked on injection training with them. It was still a work in progress when I left but I had managed to desensitise them to the needle and they were good at presenting the correct body parts for injection, I am hopeful that this training will continue long into the future.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Esperanza Verde and especially the opportunity to work with some different species. The work was interesting, and I felt that I was able to make a valuable contribution. Thank you to the Jim Cronin Memorial Fund for Primate Welfare & Conservation for funding my travel grant to Esperanza Verde and for making it possible for me to work with and share my knowledge, with the incredible primates, staff and volunteers at the centre.