

Peregrine Fund Works to Conserve Panama's National Bird

These notes are listed in reverse chronological order.

October 1999 -- Alberto Palleroni

This month we trapped female MV, now 22 months old and independent for the last ten months, and moved her to Barro Colorado Island (BCI) where she joins James (male DC). With luck they will form a pair in the years to come. Female MV is an accomplished huntress and has been observed taking Howler Monkeys, sloths, and various other prey on the mainland. She will provide us with the opportunity to compare her foraging habits in Soberania with her hunting habits on BCI. On BCI, the proportions of prey animals and the anti-predator behaviors of different animals, particularly primates, are different. Barro Colorado Island abounds with howlers and White-faced Capuchin monkeys, a favorite fare of female MV.

Our resident Barro Colorado Island (BCI) biologist, Yu-Cheng Hsu, returned to Taiwan, not having visited his home since the earthquake. Yu-Cheng logged a remarkably long uninterrupted field study of Harpy behavior on the Smithsonian research island. Notwithstanding the hardships of the rainy season and a case of Leishmaniasis (a dangerous disease contracted from sloths via a fly), Yu-Cheng hardly missed a day in the field. Treatment of Leishmaniasis includes 42 painful injections and Yu-Cheng even administered these in the field. The important data he collected on male DC was during a later phase of development when young Harpies begin to interact with primates seriously. With this daily record of activities and cycles of behavior we can better understand behavior and development of large avian predators.



Colorado biologist Janeen Touchton is continuing BCI observations on the two eagles with a special focus on female MV.

September 1999 -- Alberto Palleroni

Among James' (male DC) prey this month are two young white-tailed deer. Yu-Cheng has also noted that DC takes two-toed sloths almost exclusively in one part of the island and mostly three-toed sloths in another. We have yet to determine if this is related to their relative densities.

Female MV inhabits a remote area of Camino de Cruces National Park. The very hilly area requires six or seven hours of hiking to reach her. We have useful data on her foraging behavior on the mainland and we hope to compare it with her behavior on Barro Colorado Island. Thus far, she eludes our attempts to trap her, often moving away at our approach.

August 1999 -- Alberto Palleroni

Angel Muela and Rafael Alvarez hosted ecologists Susan Harrison, Robert Howe, Amy Wolf, and Sid England from the University of California and the University of Wisconsin. They managed to retrap male DC (James) on Barro Colorado Island in order to refit transmitters as well as confirm Harpy Eagle sightings in the Western Atlantic side of Panama around Bocas del Toro. They recovered the remains of an adult female shot there and managed to convince the local who shot the eagle to work with us in finding birds rather than hunting them. Often, the mere interest in an animal suffices in averting hunting pressure, especially when there is no economic gain involved.

July 1999 -- Alberto Palleroni

Our youngest male, AC, expands his range and catches his first sloth early this month as anticipated.

James (DC) continues to forage successfully on Barro Colorado Island. Within an hour of capturing and devouring a Kinkajo, he caught a two-toed sloth. Yu-Cheng continues collecting foraging data, particularly the early attempts at the more formidable monkeys. We suspect that young Harpies innately recognize sloths as prey but learn to take monkeys only after developing strategies to do so.

Female MV keeps roaming a large area of forest in Camino de Cruces National Park. Having hunted on her own for about six months, she is indistinguishable in her habits from the wild birds we study.

Venezuelan field biologist Rafael Alvarez is rejoining our staff in Panama this month. Rafael has located many Harpy Eagle nests in Venezuela and Panama and will be working with Angel Muela locating and studying wild populations in Darien and Chagres National Parks.



June 1999 -- Alberto Palleroni

On June 15 we released James, our young male Harpy on Barro Colorado Island. We had aborted his hack because he had developed a special taste for tracking humans. Thanks to our access to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's (STRI) facilities we were able to release him in a completely protected area. STRI Director Dr. Ira Rubinof, BCI researchers and staff accompanied us for the young Harpy's release. Our biologist Yu-Cheng Hsu has devoted his efforts to tracking and observing James as he resumes his development as a wild eagle. James was released in the center of the island and has settled in a quiet area abounding with monkeys and other wildlife. After a week of unsuccessful attempts, James managed to catch an adult three-toed sloth. Since then he has caught several more as well as a coati mundi.

Meanwhile, Francisco Barrios, Bernabe Fernandez and Hilario Rodriguez have attempted to trap the elusive and independent female MV in order to relocate her on BCI.

Harpy Eagle Field Notes

May 1999 -- Alberto Palleroni

Female MV forages far and wide within Camino de Cruces National Park while the youngest harpy, male AC remains near his "nest"--the hack site.

This month we toured Panama, presenting our cause to a variety of audiences including schools, communities and various governmental agencies.