

The Escola da Amazônia education project, Mato Grosso Brazil

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For most Brazilians in the cities where policy is determined Amazonia is nothing but a distant place, one they have little or no connection with. For those who live on the Amazon agricultural frontier - for the most part migrant farmers with scant knowledge of the forest - prejudices about the forest and its uses and indifference have resulted in the world's highest rates of tropical deforestation. Escola da Amazônia, Cristalino Ecological Foundation's (FEC) education programme, was created in 2002 to inform Brazilians about Amazon issues and nurture among young people their interest and admiration, and consequently, their respect for the forest.

Despite living very close to the Amazonian forest, young residents who live in the city of Alta Floresta and the surrounding areas have little knowledge or contact with this unique environment and the wildlife it supports. "A Day in the Forest" is a workshop designed to put young people in direct contact with the Amazon jungle. The workshop runs for one day in a well-preserved 50-hectare fragment of the forest, situated in the urban region of Alta Floresta. During the day, students walk in the forest, observing the fauna and flora and carry out activities, which include artistic and team building exercises with the aim of making the forest environment more familiar and fun.



photo: EDSON GRANDISOLI

'A Day in the Forest' children's walk

In Alta Floresta, farming livestock is by far the most important economic activity and is responsible for approximately 60% of deforestation in the Amazon. "Alternative Practices" workshops are intended to stimulate interest in economic activities, such as beekeeping, fruit processing and handcrafts, all which do not involve extracting timber from the forest. Workshops, taught by professionals from different



photo: SILVIO MARCHINI

'Sassá, the Jaguar', theatre performance as part of the Humans and Jaguars Co-existence Project

economic disciplines, take place in rural schools throughout the region and are aimed at students, their families and their teachers.

A twinning schools project brings students and teachers from private high schools of major Brazilian urban centres to participate in one-week workshops. Participants work on joint activities with rural schools exposing them to conservation and development issues. Fostering pair-wise co-operation between visiting and local schools, Escola da Amazônia has academic benefits for both sides as well as economic benefits for the local school; the visiting school donates books and part of the income generated is allocated to local activities. Thanks to this innovative approach to financial sustainability Escola da Amazônia won a Whitley Award in 2007.

The People and Jaguars Coexistence Project research project revealed that jaguars are able to capture the attention of both young and old alike. People regard jaguars as the most fascinating creatures, but also as the most dangerous of pests. The perception of jaguars as a major threat to both livestock and human safety is widespread and explains why these elusive creatures are severely persecuted in this region. In order to draw people's attention to broader conservation issues, including the

establishment of protected areas, Escola da Amazonia is working with FEC's 'People & Jaguars Coexistence Project' to decrease jaguar persecution and explore the jaguar's timeless appeal.

Over the last year Rainforest Concern has been supporting the many initiatives carried out by the Cristalino Ecological Foundation and Escola da Amazônia. It is thanks to Rainforest Concern that education and communication materials could be developed, printed and distributed. One such example are the free T-shirts given to the 50 to 60 pupils, who attend the monthly, 'A Day in the Forest' workshops. Another example is the one thousand copies of the Guia Gente & Onças (Guide to Humans and Jaguar Coexistence) that have been distributed within the community.

Given the precarious situation of public education in Brazil, the alarming rates of habitat degradation on the Amazon frontier and the typically long-lasting effects of educational interventions, this support from Rainforest Concern will certainly have an impact that far outweighs the cost. We strongly believe that this approach will help bring about far-reaching social and environmental improvements. For further information please contact silvio@escoladaamazonia.org