



## COSTA RICA

# Buffer land acquired for Pacuare Turtle Reserve

by John Denham, Trustee of Rainforest Concern



**Leatherback turtle hatchlings make a dash for the sea**

The Pacuare Reserve is known mainly for having the most important beach in Costa Rica for the critically endangered Leatherback Turtle but more and more we are realizing that the 800 hectares of forest behind the beach are just as special. Most reserves are much larger but few have the diversity of wildlife to be found in Pacuare. A night walk along the trails with a flashlight and sharp eyes is a revelation.



photo: CAROLINA BROWN

**Keeping an eye out for poachers**

By day, you cannot avoid the three species of primate - Howler, White-faced Capuchin and Spider monkeys. It is normal to see all three in an hour's walk, and the howlers wake everyone at 5.00 am. If you are lucky you might see an armadillo, a brocket deer or racoon, or possibly an anteater, recently a group of peccaries was seen. There were also two big-cat sightings during the season, both by Scott Hardy who was in joint charge of the turtle project.

These are just some of the 27 mammals we have listed at Pacuare, one third of which are on the IUCN Red List for threatened or endangered species. Together with its mammals the Reserve has some 230 different bird species, among them the rare and beautiful Agami Heron, Pacuare is the Agami's only nesting site in Costa Rica and the second largest nesting colony in Latin America. Apart from the sea turtles, of which the Leatherback is the one we know best there are an impressive number of reptiles and amphibians yet to be studied.

The giant Leatherback nesting season stretches from March through to the end of July, with April and May being the peak months. In 2008 we counted 648 nests, which is about average for recent years. The beach was patrolled every night of the season to deter the poachers. In spite of the extensive protection, we still lose an estimated 6% of nests to poachers who sell the eggs for profit in the bars of Limon.

Our Research Assistants (RAs) came from several countries including, Spain, Britain, the US and for the first time, Costa Rica, and we would welcome more Costa Ricans in the RA team. This year, the RAs gave short presentations at the end of the season in our new 'aula', before an invited audience, subjects included: a census

of primates in the Reserve; frogs and toads and a resume of the turtle season.

About 700 visitors came and stayed at the Reserve, mainly in groups brought from Costa Rican and US schools by Ecology Project International (EPI). One group to visit the reserve came from the. We had one university group from South Carolina Coastal University and we would welcome more such groups. On the research side, two young US university graduates, Lizzy and Laura, soon known as 'the monkey ladies', conducted a three-month study of capuchins, and they hope to return next year to continue their research. Another US graduate spent four months researching nest temperature and sex determination in Leatherback turtles.

Thanks to generous funding from Rainforest Concern and Planet Foundation the reserve now has an additional 100 hectares of forestland. This area is on the other side of the canal, with several hundred meters of water frontage. Thanks to its position - the land is situated opposite the reserve where the canal is narrowest - this will make a valuable buffer zone against the relentless advance of the banana plantations. The area, which has suffered from illegal logging, will benefit from regular patrols as well as providing useful work for future volunteers as we begin our reforestation programme.



**A highly enthusiastic volunteer!**

All in all it has been a rewarding year with a lot happening and a lot still to do. If you would like to know more about Pacuare, or provide much needed support by visiting the reserve our website is [www.turtleprotection.org](http://www.turtleprotection.org) Alternatively you can contact Carlos Fernandez who can help arrange your visit whether you are coming to work as a volunteer or stay at the lodge.