

CASA

Casa Avian Support Alliance

Volume 2 Issue 3

Modifications and Improvements Continue at Rehabilitation Building and Planning Completed For Intake Structure

Improvements to the Bird Rehabilitation Building that began in June continued through September, and are approaching completion. Per the adopted plan for the structure, the east bank of rooms will house raptor species, and the bank on the west will house songbirds, psittacines, and the occasional water bird. Modifications common to each room includes re-surfacing of the 40 inch high concrete block half-walls with a smooth layer of cement plaster, construction of 44 inch high studded walls atop the concrete half-walls that will be sheeted with Ply-cem.

Each of the walls is then topped with 12 in. of ½ wire mesh, followed by installation of a ceiling consisting of regularly spaced ceiling joists and ½ inch mesh. Each room will be fitted with a doorway; those on the east with solid panels and those on the west with mesh panels.

This construction will effectively isolate, physically and visually, the raptor species on the east from the other species housed on the west. The use of mesh will assist with ventilation in the open-air thatched structure; lighting

will rely primarily on ambient light, although fluorescent fixtures will be hung in the overhead should the need for lighting arise during hours of darkness.

After completing the modifications and improvements to the central rooms on the east and west sides of the structure (this included installation of the upright poles that will support the framing for individual cages intended for birds assigned a limited activity status, and re-surfacing of the walls and floors), improvements to the remainder of the structure were begun. Each of the remaining cells have been re-surfaced, the exterior of the building has been plastered, and concrete steps have been added from



North facing end of Bird Rehabilitation building.
Additional progress photographs on page 3.

the upper to the lower sections of the building, and concrete steps added to the rear. Installation of the wood, Ply-cem and wire-mesh partitioning is underway.

Upon completion of the Rehabilitation Building, work will begin in the Intake Building, where a hard ceiling will be installed in the Medical Room, mesh ceiling will be installed in the Intake-Evaluation and Quarantine-Nursery Room; and a partition and new doorways will be built to physically separate the Laundry area from the avian area. When those modifications are complete a tile floor will be installed in each of the rooms and connecting hallway.

Mr. Julio Hob and his team, a local contractor from Benque Viejo, are performing all work in the Rehabilitation Building and will begin the finishing work in the Bird Intake Structure in late September. All work is anticipated to be completed by November 2007.

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Special Points of Interest:

- Dinner for staff and volunteers of Cornerstone being planned for November
- CASA/CDCB featured among "Top Ten Travel Deals" in August issue of Travel Smart Magazine
- Vegetable garden anticipated to help feed avian guests as well as CDCB table, surplus will be donated to Cornerstone
- Ronnell Manzanero fashions cages and toys for CASA's avian guests

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CASA Receives Injured Red-Lored Parrot

On June 26, 2007, CASA staff received a fledgling Red-Lored Parrot (*Amazona autumnalis*) with critically injured right eye, and wounds to the head. A Spiny-tailed Black Iguana, who includes hatchling avi-fauna among their prey, apparently had attacked the parrot, which had been subsequently rescued and abandoned in the Belize Zoo Gift Shop.

The parrot was received at CASA, delivered by Gerald Wohlers a member of the CDCB and the son of Humberto Wohlers the Wildlife Supervisor at the Belize Zoo, and CASA/CDCB Staff prepared caging. In the weeks that followed Gerald Wohlers, fed, treated and cared for the parrot and instructed CASA staff with regard to feeding and care.

As the wounds healed it became readily apparent that the right-eye was lost and that the parrot would not regain the sight of the right eye. The lack of full-vision and the absence of appropriate training among its own species rendered it a poor candidate for release. The loss of a single eye, given the location of a parrot's eyes on the side of the head, will interfere with flight, in locating food, guarding against predators, and being accepted



Above: CASA Director Jodi Benté begins familiarization with Captain Jack after learning that injuries would prohibit release

among the flock. Communications with local wildlife veterinarian and member of the CASA Advisory Board, Dr. Eduardo Tesecum, confirmed that the parrot was not releasable. Sadly, CASA Staff came

to recognize the plight of the parrot, knowing that it would never be able to join the parrots flying overhead; however, the parrot's gentle disposition and affable personality had earned it the name Lored Captain Jack, and the CASA staff having



Above: 'Lored Captain Jack' in July 2007

grown attached to it, welcomed Captain Jack as the 1st Ambassador to CASA.

An evaluation by Mr. Humberto Wohlers, confirmed that the wounds were healing well with no signs of infection, clean vents, vivid color, healthy musculature, reasonable coordination for young bird lacking the site of one eye, the absence of mites, ample appetite and warm personality. A fecal sample analysis, performed on July 27, 2007 indicated no sign of internal parasites. On the evening of Mr. Wohlers' visit Captain Jack was provided the branch of a sour-plum with ample green leaves, Craboo berries (*Byrsonima crassifolia*) and portion of a palm frond. Jack immediately began shredding the bark from the sour-plum, chewing the leaves and feeding on the craboo berries, pleased and apparently full he then perched and rested quietly. Later in the evening the staff and Mr. Wohlers discussed the gardens being cultivated north of Jack's cage and agreed that it should support not only the visiting avi-tourists but our avian guest as well.

As Captain Jack rapidly matured over the weeks that followed a new cage of greater size with more extensive perching was constructed. This caging will serve until the Rehabilitation Building is complete, where Captain Jack will find long term residence in an aviary like cage located on the front, west portion of the structure. In that location, where the

exterior walls will be made of wire mesh, Captain Jack will be able to interface with the staff and public, providing ample opportunity for socializing with the new flock. Should the occasion arise, birds that could share the aviary with Captain Jack might include Aztec Parakeets and/or White-fronted Parrots.

Coming issues of the CASA newsletter will feature a column penned by Captain Jack, that will relate his experiences and his life at the Casa Avian Support Alliance. Additionally, Captain Jack will be exchanging letters with the sixth grade students of Cramer Elementary School of Goshen New York. Instructor, Ms. Catherine Hallock of Wurtsboro, New York, who has been teaching multi-disabled students for 19 years, will assist the students in the preparation of letters that will introduce the students to topics involving Central American geography, environmental conservation, and avian migration patterns involving species common to upstate New York and Belize

The sponsors of Casa Avian Support Alliance extend a heartfelt and sincere thank-you to Ms. Mary Hilderman-Smith of Nantucket Island for her generous contribution to Captain Jack and her wish to establish a fund in honor and support of this little Red-lored Parrot who will for years to come be 1st Ambassador on behalf of Casa Avian Support Alliance.

Captain Jack's Second Cage

A second larger cage was built for Captain Jack in late July. The larger cage provided ample room to install a large branch taken from a citrus tree, which provides the opportunity for Jack to make use of natural perches in a variety of sizes. Many thanks to Mr. Ronnell Manzanero and Mr. Gerald Wohlers for their efforts in constructing this temporary home for Captain Jack.



Above: Ronnell Manzanero finishes 'Lored Captain Jack's' second cage as Jodi Benté looks on

Gerald Wohlers Joins CASA/ CDCB Staff

CASA/CDCB welcomed Gerald Wohlers to the Staff of CDCB this past June. Gerald is the primary caretaker of Captain Jack, and has eagerly and willingly shared his knowledge of wildlife rehabilitation with the CASA/CDCB staff. Gerald is the son of Belize Zoo Wildlife Supervisor, Humberto Wohlers, and a student at San Ignatious School, in Santa Elena, he works evenings and weekends while attending school, and full-time when school is not in session.

Gerald's love of wildlife and skill for rehabilitation was amply demonstrated by his adept care of Captain Jack, and the comfort Captain Jack showed when cared for by Gerald. Gerald and his knowledge are a welcome and much needed addition to the team and we look forward to his continued involvement in the mission and goals of CASA. Gerald Wohlers is pictured below along with Ronnel Manzanero and Captain Jack commenting on the ladder in his new cage.



Above: Ronnell Manzanero (left) and Gerald Wohlers (right) and 'Lored Captain Jack's' new cage in July 2007

Below: Lored Captain Jack in the new cage. Note the handmade ladder built by Ronnell Manzanero and Domingo Mesh.



Rehabilitation Building Progress (from page 1)



Unlimited activity enclosures at the north end of structure. Internal walls will be completed with plywood and external walls with 1/2" mesh wire



Above: West-facing side of rehabilitation structure. Slots at the bottom of wall will facilitate cleaning. Nearest room is future home of Captain Jack.

CASA Says Thank You to Dr. Debra Scheenstra

Shortly before our July trip to CASA/ CDCB Dr. Debra Scheenstra, a Novato, California based Avian Veterinarian, and member of the CASA Advisory Board, prepared a "First-Aid Kit" for avian wildlife which she then donated to CASA. The kit contained bandages, stethoscope, disposable needles, feeding syringes and related apparatus, gut and needles to suture wounds, and numerous medications.

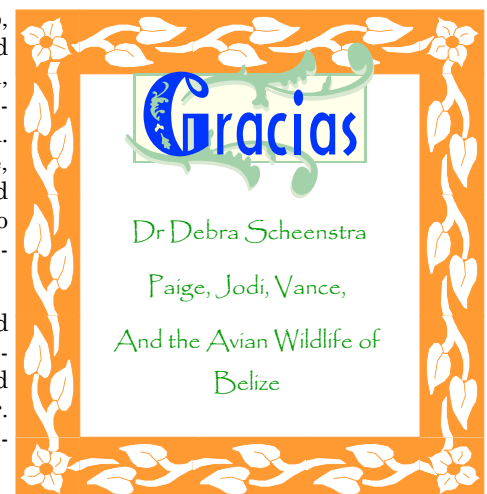
All of the items are safely stored and ready for avian wildlife that might require treatment. The staff of CASA and the avian wildlife of Belize thank you Dr. Debra, for your kind and generous contribution.

CASA Working with Cornerstone Foundation of San Ignacio

On July 23, 2007 Casa del Caballo Blanco hosted a joint meeting of Casa Avian Support Alliance, LLC, NGO (CASA) and The Cornerstone Foundation, LLC, NGO. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the role of each organization and consider how by working together they can best serve the population of the San Ignacio area. Introductions were initiated by a member of the CDCB staff, Ms. Terry Moguel.

The Cornerstone Foundation is a humanitarian service, non-profit entity, located in San Ignacio Belize. Cornerstone focuses on providing support to members of the community requiring assistance, identifying resources to support their mission, empowering individuals and mobilizing communities to assist people in need. The Cornerstone programs include youth programs, HIV/AIDS education, Health, Relief and Aid and Women's programs against domestic violence.

At the April 2007 Executive Board Meeting, the principal sponsors of CASA were charged with identifying, for purposes of future teaming, a local NGO involved in community outreach and education. To this end, CASA is exploring ways to interface with the children of the Cornerstone school lunch program and perhaps involve them in volunteer programs at CASA in which the children can learn about the value and importance of the avian population while assisting CASA in their mission.



Biologists Complete Second Year of Observations

Biologists Wendy Dexter and Jeff Alvarez completed their first full year of dry season observations in the habitat restoration area during July. Utilizing the newly prepared Tz'unuun Trail (see below for details on the development of the trail) linking the observation points established in January of 2006, the biologists observed and recorded changes in the flora, and evaluated changes to the overall habitat.

Mammal and avi-fauna sightings were recorded and motion-sensitive cameras were placed along the trail in the hopes of capturing data on the number and types of nocturnal fauna that might be active during the hours of darkness.

Results of the observations will be compiled in a forthcoming report that will compare and contrast the observation with those from the prior July observations and the year long wet-seasons results reported on in January of this year.

Tz'unuun Trail Opened and Brochure Prepared

During the early months of 2007, Baldemir Manzanero (In-country Director of CASA), Ronnell Manzanero and Domingo Mesh, labored arduously to open approximately one-half mile of trail in the habitat restoration area. The initial effort formed a loop through the 15 acres set aside for restoration and linked the majority of observation points established by the CASA biologists in January of 2006. Additional portions of the trail linking the main trail with outlying observation points were subsequently opened.

In the past few months interpretive signs have been placed along the trail that provide the names (Latin genus species, common names in English, Spanish and Mayan) and uses of the naturally occurring trees and plants that are found along the trail. To encourage use of the trail for naturalists and birders alike a tri-fold brochure has been developed that provides a history of the trails development and a map of the loops and related branches, and the general location of the signs and the floras they interpret. An example, for Cockspur/Bull horn, can be found on the CASA web page at www.casaavian.org.

In late August early September Ronnell Manzanero created beautiful signage for the entrance, and in the second week of September the sign was installed beneath a palm-thatched *palapa* built by Domingo Mesh, Ricky Manzanero and Ronnell Manzanero utilizing traditional Mayan methods and materials.



Above: Ricky Manzanero trims the thatch

Left: Framing supporting the thatch

Below: The finish trail signs



Curing Banana Leaves for Food Preparation: A visit with Rennato Fruitas

During a July visit to CASA/CDCB the project sponsors were treated to one of those chance opportunities that are sometimes, but all too seldom, encountered when immersed in a foreign culture; a glimpse of the daily round experienced by the local people, and a few moments spent with a truly intriguing and enjoyable member of the local community.

Following a long hot morning that continued into the mid-afternoon the CDCB flat-bed truck was filled to capacity with fallen palms fronds collected from the grounds and prepared for transport. In the past, the fronds were taken to a local waste management facility where they became part of large, unused heap of waste – a hunting ground that was culled by the poor and carrion wildlife alike. But now, mindful of the need to rethink the waste disposal practices of CASA/CDCB the collected palm fronds would become fuel for a local cottage industry.

The Grounds Maintenance Team Leader, Ronnell Manzanero, had recently learned that a neighbor south of

CASA/CDCB, near the Mopan River, would welcome the palm fronds, brittle from the long dry season, as fuel to feed the fires used to cure banana leaves. The cured leaves, sold at market would in turn be used in the preparation of local foods such as 'bollos,' a tamale like preparation containing chicken and vegetables.

This was an exciting change, CASA/CDCB Staff are encouraged to identify and develop means to reduce the environmental footprint of the lodge and avian facility. Providing the fronds to our neighbor assists him with his undertaking, reduces the use of fuel to transport the fronds, saves staff time, and reduces the materials received by the waste management facility. The policies and procedures shared by CASA and CDCB favor the support of small businesses that function in an environmentally friendly manner; supporting such businesses encourages procurement from those businesses, and reduces the energy needs to bring products to local consumers.

Leaving the compound and driving towards the Mopan River the afternoon breezes began to cool; the student interns

rode atop the pile and enjoyed the ride along the pot-holed and mud-caked road. The vegetation near the river was dense, lush and green, irregularly planted fruit trees were alive with numerous species of birds. Cresting a small rise and dropping onto a broad terrace revealed large well cultivated and carefully groomed vegetable gardens. The truck was parked at the edge of the bush. Despite the gardens the area seemed remote and deserted. We left the truck and walked along a narrow foot-worn path through the bush, and there on the trail before us was Mr. Rennotta Fruitas.

As Mr. Fruitas introduced himself, he flashed an engaging smile with one of the warmest and charming hellos we have encountered in years, and beckoned to us with a welcoming wave of his arms. As we were introduced we realized that we had shaken the firm and calloused hand of man who was living his passion. The story of how Mr. Fruitas had become the local purveyor of cured banana leaves began to slowly unfold, and over the next hour he related a bit of his personal history, his attraction to the bush, and his zeal for this little known and practiced cottage industry; in the telling he confirmed for us all that he truly loves his way of life.

As related by Mr. Fruitas, he is married and the father of five children, all grown, educated and in the 'modern' world. When he relocated to the bush, he sold his car and now depends on his horse and friends for his transportation and needs. Speaking of the money he earns, he noted "I don't give it to my car," and my children are grown and self-sufficient, and thus he commented with great cheer "...the money made is mine."

A tour of the area and an introduction to the process of curing banana leaves began with a description of their collection. Typically leaves are cut when a plant reaches two years of age Mr. Fruitas demonstrated the manner in which the leaves are carefully cut from the plant using a knife affixed to a 8-9 foot pole.



Mr. Fruitas and his handmade tool.

When he is ready to cure the leaves he builds a fire that is reduced to coals in the large pit (see picture at right). The leaves to be cured are stacked in piles within reach of the smaller pit to the rear of the larger pit (foreground of same picture). When curing the leaves Mr. Fruitas seats himself in the smaller pit and passes one leaf at a time over the fired-pit. The heat from the coals softens the leaf, making it more flexible and less likely to tear or crack when folded over or used to wrap food for cooking. When cured the leaf is lustrous and pliant. Mr. Fruitas proudly described the curing process and his creation and development of the facility.

When cured the flat leaves are torn from each side of the central spine, and then cut into individual sheets. The spines are hung and dried in a primitively screened enclosure and used to create cordage that is used to tie bundles of prepared sheets. Torn or damaged leaves are accumulated and used to compost

the young plants in the plantation.

The individual plants that make up his plantation are located beneath the forest canopy where they receive dappled sunlight, and are protected from the winds that tear the tender leaves. Following our introduction to the processing of the leaves, Mr. Fruitas led us through the plantation towards the river, pointing out fruit trees, medicinal plants and recent additions to the plantation. Upon returning to the processing area, Mr. Fruitas lifted a sheet of black plastic to reveal an abandoned freezer lying in the bush; while opening the lid he commented that his banana trees were grown for the leaves not the fruit, and that no one favored the local banana, preferring the plantain, typically fried or the apple-banana. He then lifted a hand of bananas from the freezer and handed them to us, selecting a plump 5-6" finger from the bunch, and peeling it back offered it to me to sample. Slightly warm the flesh was warm, moist and flavorful, with the slightest hint of citrus, truly delicious.

Hoisting up the hand of bananas we thanked Mr. Fruitas for sharing his hospitality, generosity, and his story, and encouraged him to visit us at CASA/ CDCB. He in turn encouraged us to return during the days leading up to Christmas, when he and his entire family would be curing leaves to supply the local market with sufficient cured banana sheets to meet the holiday demand for 'bollos.'



The curing area



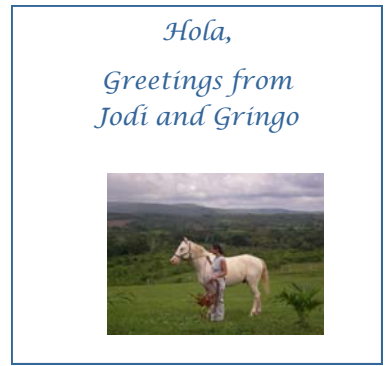
Above: Fire-pit for curing at rear, pit in which Mr. Fruitas is seated in foreground and picture at right

Casa Avian Support Alliance

Birds are the farmers of the world -
help us to help them to continue to sow their seeds

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MEMBERSHIP—The Board of Directors for the Casa Avian Support Alliance (CASA) recognizes the value of interested individuals and organizations (both profit and non-profit), as a means to promote the goals of the organization. Memberships are not viewed as a primary source of income with respect to the sustainability of the NGO, but rather as a means to share the mission, goals and accomplishments of CASA with a broader public. Revenues captured from annual dues will be used primarily to support member related activities such as the Badge of Bird Program and the Quarterly Report to Members.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

REGULAR	Membership Description	BZE	US
Student or Sr. Citizen	Currently enrolled or graduated in last two -years	\$5	\$15
Individual	Individual on card plus one other	\$10	\$30
Family	Two or more	\$25	\$50
Participating Professional	Designed primarily for Veterinarians, Ornithologists, and Biologists involved in CASA's programs	\$30	\$60
SUPPORTING			
Affiliate	Members wishing recognition for affiliation	\$100	\$100
Advocate	Members that actively advocate the mission and goals of CASA	\$250	\$250
Patron	Members who wish to contribute to specific programs underway at CASA	\$500	\$500
Benefactor	Individuals who wish to support and promote the mission and goals of CASA	\$1000	\$1000
Guardian	Lifetime membership	\$2500	\$2500
Non-Profit Organization	Organizations with sympathetic missions and goals that would like to support and identify with CASA	\$250	\$250
For-Profit Enterprises	Enterprises who wish to support the mission and goals of CASA and be recognized for the contribution	\$250	\$250

The benefits of membership at the various levels are as follows:

All Regular Memberships receive a membership card, are invited to the annual meeting, receive a quarterly report, are enrolled in the "Passport Program," are listed in the membership directory, have the right to vote on issues put before the membership, and receive 10% discount on items offered in the gift shop.

Supporting Memberships receive the same benefits listed above and are recognized in the annual report for their contribution to the programs and activities of CASA