

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## Second Quarter 2013

In a blink one half of the year is behind us. The second quarter of 2013 has been a lot less hectic and busy than the first allowing us to concentrate a great deal of our energies on planting, clearing and building. The third quarter will bring a spike in activity with three groups from Western Washington visiting the Ranch in July, another from Hawaii in August, and our yearly Permaculture Design Course wrapping up our secondary busy season. September, October and November will as normal mark our down months and see ROBIN, SOLE and TIMO visiting family in the States while SCOTT, LAURA and others hold down the fort during the quieter times. We'd like to take a bit of space here to thank our amazing crew of winter/spring interns. They've been trickling out of our town on a regular basis since May and I'd be untruthful to say that the hard goodbyes have not taken their toll on the Ranch. It continues to be one of the more challenging aspects of Ranch-life. MIND FOX, IAN, MARK, LUMI, TIFF, AMELIA, JULES, NIC, BRAD, DAMO, PEDRO, AVE, RJ and AIMEE anchored a memorable planting and earth building push that has thrust the Ranch past the halfway point as we prepare for our incoming summer/fall interns, heavier rains and lower numbers. We are eternally grateful to all that have contributed to our ever changing, improving and impactful project since the new year. Our intense, hardworking little rainforest community continues to make amazing strides towards an evermore resilient and inspirational project during increasingly difficult global realities.



*Juan Luis with Cacao Beans loaded on his Horse*

Thank you to everyone out there for your continued support and interest in our project. We hope that you enjoy the update.

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## RM Program News

### : Deja Vu

#### *Intern Check In*

Normally you find yourself out moving, back to work, but today is the one day of the week that just as the sun starts reaching high in the sky, you find yourself sitting on the couch on the front porch. The sun creeps over the Cranberry Hibiscus and Suriname Cherry, you enjoy its warmth but also feel the stickiness of your sweat against the rough cushions. If you are on the far left the window shudder rests against the back of your

neck. Everyone is in a circle, depending on the week

the atmosphere is either apprehensive or full of quite smiles. No one speaks first, rather the silence allows you to breathe an extra breath, think back over the week that was, and try, as much as you struggle, to put it all into words. The hot sun distracts you in a good way, balancing your thoughts of the past with a feeling of finally being present.



*The Incredible Life on a Little Jungle Log*

#### *Dinner Announcement*

In each hand rests another. Your feet are sore, and you wonder if suddenly you or your neighbor started squeezing harder. If you think hard enough about those hands you forget who is sitting next to you, instead you feel the cold skin after a shower or the heat after a later afternoon Frisbee game, you feel the awkward twist of the wrist, or the tiny timid hand of a newcomer. With eyes closed and hair hanging over your face someone finally announces dinner and there is a jostle of low whistles and excited energy as memories of a favorite meal manifest on everyone's collective tongues. Perhaps the rain is joining in the chorus, as Buen Provecho is spoken, hands move, and everyone forgets which drink was theirs.

#### *Rain on the Roof*

Walking back to the Casucha you hear the approaching drift of the rain through the forest. Closing in just as you make it under the roof line, but you remain dry. In a moment you are crawling into fresh sheets, completely enclosed in the noise of the rain on the roof. Focusing on the drops, wondering how many are hitting at any one time, the sound drowns out all other thoughts and you are in the rain forest. Finally clean and resting after a big day, your book awaits you, you have earned the reward of reading, but you fear your eyes will disobey your hope of one more chapter, as they slowly close to the rain on the roof.

#### *Sunday Leftovers*

Sunday hours go by quicker than you can imagine; brunch, run around, waterfall, read, and you are hungry again. Coming into the main house in the early afternoon, not quite feeling patient enough to wait for your casado at the Soda. But Sunday delivers as a big plate of leftover pancakes sits on the counter top. A pancake, a banana, a little Tapa D, and you are set. Legs crossed in a pit rocking chair, absentmindedly grazing through a random book on the table, a few friends enter with

the same thoughts in mind. They see your Sunday snack and happily decide to repeat your Sunday success. Joining you, chatting about nothing, you start to wonder if this wouldn't be a good weekly tradition but you think better of that and wonder if it isn't time for a nap. And so you stop wondering and do that.

*Scott Gallant*

### **Building Report: Earthen Hands**

*“And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair”*

□— Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* □□

At only 2 months old our new earthen structure has already been the base for 2 cob and plaster workshops, taken a beating by stick wielding, piñata slaying children during Sole's 5th birthday party and been the location of innumerable dance parties – a dance party being the optimum way of

engaging eager feet in the process of mixing cob. □□ There is something about clay, sand, straw and water and working with your hands and feet that both brings together and reinforces community. Day after day I go out to this construction site and know that people will come and help and feel inspired. There is something so appealing about using materials that not only create no waste but also enhance wellbeing and health. It is rewarding and revitalising work, welcoming and accessible to anyone who wishes to get involved regardless of age or capability. □□

We are firstly and above all grateful to LIZ JOHNDROW for coming and running our first week long earth building workshop back in April. Not only did she help us advance our in-house cob building techniques but she introduced several new wall systems such as Takesal, Mayacyclone, Chorizos and great plaster techniques such as Tadelakt and our new favourite earthen plaster great for sculpting– the levelling coat. This course was attended by an energetic and fun loving bunch of like-minded, international students that were a pleasure to have here at the ranch. □□

The construction received its next big push in May during our month long Resiliency and Sustainability Skills course. Three days of this workshop were dedicated to hands on cob and plaster skills. □□ With asymmetrical walls, various perches to sit and a glorious tree forming the archway we are now getting ready to put in the floor and sculpt furniture. We are so grateful to all the interns, students, hands and feet that have so far helped us create this much-deserved hangout space for our industrious workforce.

*Juliet Davey*



*Jules with the Earthen Touch*





*The Smokey Jungle Frog*

## Conservation Update: Smokey Jungle Frog Meet Our Neighbors

Species Profile: Smoky Jungle Frog  
*Leptodactylus pentadactylus*  
Spanish: Rana Ternero, Sapo Toro

The gigantic, nocturnal, smoky jungle frog has been spotted twice this June, once on the road and once in the front gardens. A voracious eater, the 8" long frog in the photograph had not one, but two good-size frogs in its mouth! Scorpions, poison dart frogs, snakes, large insects, bats, and baby birds round out

this species large and varied diet. Smoky jungle frogs live in ground burrows or rock crevices, venturing out only to feed and procreate. When picked up, they emit a high-pitched scream and secrete a powerful toxin that can cause a painful skin rash--or so the books tell us! Luckily, we have no first-hand experience with that. They are Costa Rica's largest frog and just one of the many species that create a beautiful nighttime chorus here at the ranch.

### Farm Facts: Homer

When I lived at Round the Bend Farm, GOEFF raised pigs and cows for food, trade, and sale. SCOTT and I lived next to one of the rotational pig pens where one rainy day a big sow gave birth. Those piglets were the cutest things in the world, and every morning I would get up early to sit and watch them squeak and tumble. When it rained I hauled them dry straw. When the runt died, I cried. I loved those pigs.

Even so, I knew that one day someone, maybe me, would eat them. Those pigs were destined to be killed, butchered, and enjoyed as chops, sausage, bacon, and lard—foods that I relish and consume regularly. That's the fact of eating animals you raise on a small farm: you end up killing the very animals that you spent so much time caring for.



*Gracie and Homer*

Back at the Ranch, when we discovered that our female dairy goat Fern was pregnant we discussed the options. The reality for domestic dairy animals is that there will always be a higher percentage of males born than are useful on the farm. Given that the females need to regularly give birth in order to produce milk, every farm with dairy animals eventually ends up with more bucks than they can handle. The time, money, and resources necessary to care for those animals as pets would make any dairy operation completely unsustainable. Therefore, most bucks are either slaughtered at birth or fattened and slaughtered as meat goats. We decided that if Fern gave birth to a male we would slaughter him right away for food.

Now, I have some experience killing and butchering animals for food. Back at Round the Bend we slaughtered and ate a goose that broke its foot, a rabbit that got into the lettuce, and a fat little opossum. I have killed, plucked, and eaten a number of chickens. I am familiar with the physicality of dead animal bodies and the process we go through to prepare them for eating. But it is never easy to kill an animal, especially one that you know and care about.

But whether we think about it or not, killing animals is and always has been part of the reality of our food cycle. Whether we are omnivores, vegetarians, or vegans, we all participate in and buy into food systems that involve both the life and death of living creatures. If we eat dairy products we indulge in a system that necessitates the slaughter of bucks; if we eat eggs we eat them from chickens that almost inevitably will be slaughtered within two short years as they slow in their laying cycle. And if we are vegan and eat soy or nuts grown anywhere except a small farm, we participate in a monoculture agriculture system that destroys vast swathes of animal habitat and creates flora and fauna dead zones. The process of producing food involves both life and death. And whether or not the food we are eating is part of an actual dead animal body, the death of animals is an inevitable part of both large scale and small scale farming.

On large scale agro-industrial farms, animal life and animal death is part of a factory process. Chickens are equal to the number of eggs they produce, cows to pounds of beef, and goats to liters of milk. Human interaction is limited to parts of the process instead of to the animal as a whole.

On small scale and homestead farms, however, we have an amazing opportunity to care for our animals throughout the entirety of their lives, from birth to death. We spend time with them, help them grow, get to know them, and love them. When the time comes and we slaughter them ourselves, we have the privilege of knowing that their death was humane. We know exactly how the animals we cared for lived and died. In knowing, we have the opportunity to truly value the food they provide for us.

When we talked about slaughtering the buck goat here at the Ranch, the idea arose that if we had to kill him, maybe we should have someone else do it, someone who didn't know him and care for him. I don't think that killing animals for food means we suddenly don't care about them, or that our care was never real. When we buy a block of cheese or a dozen eggs, its easy to forget that these products necessitate the slaughter of animals. But if I buy milk, I buy not just the milk, but the service of producing it. This service involves the slaughter of bucks. Whether or not its my hand that holds the knife, I am still an active participant in the process. Personally, I am grateful for the opportunity to know and care for animals that form such a crucial link in our food system, just as I am grateful for the opportunity to give them a clean and humane death if and when the time comes. For me, taking responsibility for the slaughter and butchering of farm animals for food is part of the full process of caring for these animals.

Fern gave birth to two lovely kids, a snow white female and a spotted male. I was out of town, and arrived back at the Ranch a few days after they were born. I went to the barn to see them, and found myself checking them again and again to make sure I knew which one was the male. Killing an animal is not something that comes easily, or lightly, and I had a strange fear that somehow at the last minute I would choose the wrong one to slaughter.

Before killing an animal, it is important to reflect on what you will do and make sure you know exactly why and how you will do it. There is a line from a poem I learned as a child that I still always reflect on before slaughtering an animal. It is from a Native American invocation to the Earth Spirit, and ends with the words, “May I come to you with clean hands and straight eyes.” It is not a line about apology, but about understanding. May I know and understand what I am doing, may I do it with care and good faith, may it be based on an awareness of the cycles of life and death that we are all a part of. May I come to you with clean hands and straight eyes.

When the day came, I sharpened the knife, cradled the little buck goat in my arms, and took him to the place. His death was fast and silent. I tied his body to a tree to skin and gut him. AMELIA tanned the hide, and the next evening we ate a delicious goat and vegetable stew.

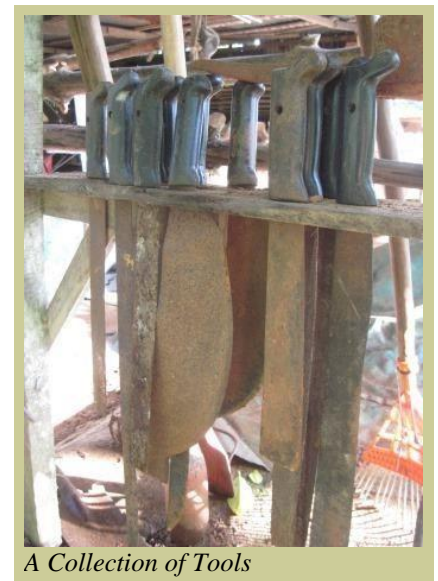
The next morning I got up to milk and care for the rest of our goat herd. This is life on a small farm, and I am grateful to be a part of it.

*Laura Killingbeck*

### **Community Stories: A Machete by any other Name**

So ubiquitous, I am surprised they don’t sell them in the airport yet. How can you come to Costa Rica and not dream of swinging a machete? One of our first workshops during intern orientation is how to sharpen and use a machete, at least gringo style, as nothing we can do compares to the brilliance of a Tico who has been holding a blade since he was three years old. Have you seen an old timer use a machete? It is quite literally an extension of his arm. It is quite frankly a craft. As I was once told by a wise young Tico, your Machete is your resume. Keep it sharp and you will be respected. As a craft, people take it serious.

All this only demonstrates how little we know about this tool, in fact, what you call a Machete, may actually not be that at all. Or it might. Just as we call a paintbrush a paintbrush, an artist may have a dozen names for each of his tools.



*A Collection of Tools*

With that confusing tidbit of information in mind, let’s find out what a machete is to a seasoned Tico. Juan Luis Salazar of La Iguana Chocolate took the time a few weeks ago to try and sort out this confusion as we were walking through his Cacao orchard. As it turns out there are many different kinds of Machetes, each with its own name, and each with its own purpose. According to Juan Luis what us gringos call a machete may actually be a Cuchillo, Rula, Guava, Puntancha, or yes, actually a machete.

**Machete:** A Machete refers to a short, wide bladed tool, most often used to chop grass at ground level. This tool will have a handle that is angled up from the blade so your knuckles are not dragging in the dirt. If you are going to buy this in a hardware store, you would ask for a machete de tierra. This does not look like your stereotypical Machete.

**Cuchillo:** A Cuchillo is a broad category, divided into the three subcategories of Rula, Guava, and Puntancho. When you picture a machete in your head, you are thinking of some form of a Cuchillo. Of course Cuchillo translates most commonly into knife, so that can confuse you as well.

**Rula:** Now a Rula is a long, thin bladed tool. There is no outward curve on the blade. It is commonly used for splitting bamboo, is very lightweight, and usually, after some use, will significantly taper from the handle to the tip.

**Guava:** A Guava is the quintessential tool. Long, a slight curving out of the blade, and evenly weighted. This is used for a bit of everything. Good for cutting grass, felling trees, and digging holes (if you are a skilled campesino ). When you buy a "machete" in the hardware store you are probably buying a Guava.

**Puntancho:** The Puntancho is recognizable because it makes its user look like a pirate. A medium length, deep curving, wide blade characterizes the Puntancho. Due to the Captain Hook curve of the blade the weight sits closer to the top 1/3 of the tool, which gives it advantages in certain tasks where more force and weight are needed.

Each of these tools has its own job. Looking outside-in towards any craftsman's tools, they will always look the same to us, yet it is the job of the craftsman to wield each in its respective manner and to apprentice others below them so that the craft may continue. The Machete provides a beautiful example of this.

Hopefully this article clears up any confusion the next time you go to purchase a blade. Of course remember that that Machete doesn't come sharpened, so you need to know which is the best tool for that job, Muelejon, Lima, Sharpened Tico Lima, Water Stone, Oil Stone, or Bench Grinder? Sharpening... just another essential craft to learn in Mastatal. But that is a whole other article.

*Scott Gallant*





## **Intern/Guest Gossip: The Human Element**

*A Glance at Morning Meeting*

Upon first walking through the front gate to the main house of Rancho Mastatal, the bounty of the zone 1 garden is evident. Every day the lush beds provide enough leafy greens to make salad for anywhere from 20 to 40 people. Entering the main house, one is certain to see the kitchen abuzz with culinary creativity, be it preparations for a meal or some fermented goody being cultivated for the first time. Art adorns practically everything, from butterfly mandalas on the walls to hand crafted tables, shelves and stools. A natural synthesis of art and functionality permeates the air.

Leaving the main house and heading toward the orchard spaces, several food crops are neatly "permacultured" along the gravel road for easy access and natural barriers. Then you get to the orchards themselves. As TIMO told me during one of my initial tours of the Ranch, "you could take a picture of the Goat Slope and use it in a Permaculture text book." The same could be said of all the orchard spaces at the Ranch, including the most recent micro-orchard, Ian's Alley. Ian's Alley is a newly established Bread Fruit orchard utilizing all of the techniques and principles used throughout the ever growing orchard spaces. It contains Vetiver lines and earth swales for erosion control and soil charging, rows of Acacia Mangia (SP?) to help fix nitrogen in the soil, companion guilding with banana trees. And of course there are the Bread Fruits themselves, planted just a week ago, which should bear fruit in the next 2-3 years.

Depending on the day there are other obvious signs of the inspired work taking place at the Ranch. You might be lucky enough to walk through the delicious smell of smoked peppers, pineapples, and possibly pork, at the custom built smoker that lives between the garage and Jeanne's bunk house. Or you might behold the semi mystical power of the two 55 gallon biochar barrels harnessing fires upward of 600 degrees celsius, turning rotten or otherwise unusable organic matter into stable carbon to use as a soil amendment.

A lot of the daily splendor being fermented at the Ranch is obvious. The agricultural and educational developments are apparent to even untrained eyes. All it takes is a tour with any one of the knowledgeable long term members to be captivated by the field work and culinary experimentation to understand what attracts so many interns, volunteers and educational groups to this incredible place. What is not as immediately obvious, however, but just as vital to the prosperity of the Ranch, is the human element.

What is the human element? The human element is an intangible quality that permeates the myriad interactions taking place every day. From cooking shifts to meals, morning meeting to work parties, ping pong tournaments to bon fires, the blend of unique personalities seem to weave together into an ethereal mosaic that changes daily. There are staple colors, of course. The steadfast ethic of Timo helps everyone stay balanced, Sole provides bright hues of light sprinkled throughout the day, and Robin is an ever-present force of stability and good advice. Yet there are also long term members who bring foresight, half year interns who carry projects through the months and changing seasons, and short term volunteers who provide important bursts of energy and enthusiasm.



As an intern embarking on a six month stay I anticipated much of the work I would be doing. I did not anticipate the human element, or how vital each and every individual would be to what I have learned. Plants can inspire. So can building with cob or milking a goat. But the people are what I will remember most about Rancho Mastatal. Every beautiful, quirky, and inspiring personality adds to this place in ways indescribable. The incredible work taking place is only possible because of the incredible people. □

*Alex Gardner*



*Cuadrados in the perfect light*

### **Comida Corner: Uttapams**

Uttapams, are fermented, thick pancakes, cooked with ingredients right in the batter. These originate from southern India and are often characterized as an Indian pizza. Delicious, nutritious and fermented!

□ □ Ingredients:

2 c. rice

1 c. lentils

¼ - ½ c. kefir or yogurt

Reserved soaking liquid, as needed

Rinse and combine rice and lentils. Soak the grains in water for 24 hours. Drain and reserve the soaking liquid. Next add kefir/ yogurt to the grains and blend in a food processor until smooth, using some of the reserved soaking liquid to make a pancake batter consistency. Cover batter tightly with a cloth and allow to ferment at room temperature for 24 hours. Batter should have small bubbles on the surface and taste slightly sour when the fermentation is complete. □ □ Optional: To make a fluffier

pancake, add ½ - 1c. of cooked rice or chickpeas to the batter and re-blend. Additional liquid may be necessary to maintain a pancake batter consistency. □ □ Now is the time to add the veggies and spices.

□ 1 t. salt or more to taste

1 t. spice of choice (cumin, coriander, fenugreek, garam masala, curry)

And any of the following to the batter:

Diced onion, garlic, chili, tomato, spinach, chives, herbs, chutney, coconut, cabbage □ □ Mix together and pan fry over medium heat until both sides are slightly brown and crispy. Serve hot with accompanying chutney.

## **Futbol Follies: Relampago and Campeonatos**

*Los Amarillos* made it to the finals of a one-day 16-team annual tournament in La Gloria in May only to lose 3-2 in a closely fought battle that had our boys hanging their heads after a poor defensive showing. The team from *Las Delicias* ended up bringing home the new set of uniforms and trophy while Mastatal returned to town with merely a new ball as a consolation for their second best efforts. It was an unfortunate result though brought hope to the resurgent men's team as they prepared for a regional cup in La Vasconia while *Las Munecas*, a team combined of Zapaton and Mastatal women, got ready for their big tournament in Naranjal. As the tournaments evolve as of this writing, both the girls and guys teams are in must win situations as they wrap up the group stages of their respective cups. Both have had good showings but also experienced some tough losses on their quest for a spot in the knock out stage. We'll bring you the results of their efforts in the next update.



*VIP Ride to the Big Game*

## **Inspirational Impressions: Schumacher**

*"Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology toward the organic, the gentle, the elegant and beautiful."*

E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*



*Roots holding the Soil Back*

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew