

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## April 2004

*April has been a lively month here at the Ranch as we continue to creep deeper and deeper into the green season. There's steady activity throughout Mastatal, especially as the University of Washington's projects continue to take form and evolve. Each student, in addition to their standard course work, is working in some capacity with the community. One group of students is designing and building a new bus stop at the intersection of town using bamboo and cob. Others are teaching English, offering guitar lessons, laboring on local farms, instructing kids how to swim, and more. We're optimistic about what will emerge from these interactions, both from the standpoint of the community and the students. On the whole, all is going super well at the Ranch and in the community. It's looking as if we will have plenty to keep us busy throughout the approaching months. Thanks as always for taking an interest in our projects. We'll be looking forward to see some more of you in the coming months. Until next time, be and live well, and enjoy!*



*Chestnut Mandibled Toucan  
photo by Delfino Cornali*

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### **RM Program News: Ranch Sitting This Fall**

Even though it is almost a half year away, we wanted to get the word out early about our upcoming fall visit stateside. As October and November mark the slowest and rainiest months here in Mastatal, as well as being a wonderful season in the beautiful Northeast, we will be spending a number of weeks in Upstate New York and its surroundings this approaching fall. So, we will again be looking for house-sitters for the 3 residences affiliated with the Ranch. We are hoping to find between 3 and 6 people who are willing to spend up to 2 months in Mastatal later this year to look after the Ranch, take care of our animals (our cat Cururú and our dog Mange), maintain the gardens, and in general, assure that all runs smoothly in our absence. We will not be "closing" during our time away, though activity at the Ranch will be greatly reduced. This is a wonderful opportunity for self-motivated and confident individuals and/or couples to live in a beautiful, quiet town in a wonderful house in Central America. House-sitters will have full access to the Ranch and its facilities. Mastatal is particularly quiet during the months of October and November, so those

coming should arrive prepared with plenty of reading material and a personal project list to work on while here. The ability to speak Spanish will be extremely helpful. Please contact us if you or someone you know is interested in this opportunity. We will go into much more detail about our expectations for house-sitters individually with interested parties. Lastly, if you plan on being back East when we are home, please let us know so that we can connect.

### **Conservation Update: A Bird Bounty**

In the fall of 2003, a visiting birder catalogued 120 species of birds seen here in the vicinity of Rancho Mastatal. Many of the species recorded were fall Neotropical migrants. To compliment that data, a student with the University of Washington in Seattle, DEB HEIDEN, has been studying birds at Rancho Mastatal this spring. Within a two-week period, 68 different species of birds were sighted in one tree species alone, a third of which were Neotropical migrants (a handful of those species being repeats from the fall). Thirty-nine new species were added to the overall list (so far) bringing the total number of species seen at Rancho Mastatal to 159. Besides seeing such diversity relying on a single resource, Deb observed several large flocks (in the thousands of one or a few species) migrating over the area suggesting that this area may be critical stopover habitat for migratory flocks. On a personal note, in the 7 weeks that Deb has been in Costa Rica, she has observed (seen or heard) 344 species of birds throughout the country. Note: 870+ species have been sighted in Costa Rica —as many as all of the United States and Canada combined.

### **Building Report: Hoochin' It Up**

The design team has been back at work making drawings for our next series of new buildings. The tentative plan is to erect 2 bamboo hooches, a cob/bamboo classroom, and a small storage area, all over at Jeanne's. Construction of the first hooch should begin in early June. The hooch design is borrowed from Jo Scheer of Ashland, OR, who built his original hooch in Puerto Rico a number of years ago. We will be using Jo's manual to build our initial hooch in the coming months, and then hope to convince JO to come down at some point during the next year to help us build the second hooch as part of a workshop. We have been thinking about building a structure like this for over a year now, ever since we saw JO's hooch in David Pearson's book, *The House That Jack Built: Treehouses*. Former volunteers GREG and TYLER SEE had a dream while here to build a hooch, so we will be trying to get them down here this summer or later this year to help out with one of them. If you guys are reading this now, need I say more? Need a summer project? Get your ass down here. ANDI's coming back for a bit too. Reunion baby!

The classroom and storage structures will go up after the first hooch. All in all, these 4 structures will most likely take us more than a year to complete, or maybe a decade, the way things move down here at times. The hooches will be used as sleeping quarters and will provide guests with some private space, something that is often times lacking here. The classroom and storage space was designed with the University of Washington and Tropical Adventures in Education (TAE) in mind, as they are in need of and deserve some more space for their programs.

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Changing Changus**

The inevitable question that haunts all graduates, "What are we going to do next?" loomed constantly in my conversations. My problem was that I lacked an adequate answer. I decided to spend a year or two figuring out a decent response. As part of that process I came to Rancho Mastatal for a month. I wagered there were worse ways to spend my time than volunteering for a

month in a tropical paradise.

I spent my first week in the kitchen. Robin suffered from a fever and the kitchen needed assistance preparing enough food for the group of University of Washington students studying at the ranch. As any of my friends and family can attest to, my skills in the kitchen border a debilitating handicap. However, under the excellent tutelage of Robin and Tim I overcame my culinary disability and developed a blossoming interest and love for cooking, particularly with organic and natural foods. That's quite a statement coming from a habitual snacker and fast food customer.

After my pleasurable time in the kitchen, I began my work with bamboo. Previous volunteers built the basic structure for an outdoor shower that needed some finishing touches. Working side by side with Gus, a fellow volunteer who designed the shower, I learned how to build trim, framing, floors, and walls out of bamboo. He also taught me the traditional construction principles such as "level" and "plumb" do not apply to bamboo construction. Likewise, new terms such as "flexible" and "patience" take on new meaning. Dating back to childhood and countless hours spent with Legos, I have enjoyed working with my hands. My time with Gus was as fun as it was entertaining.

I don't know if I answered any of life's great questions down here. I can say that I feel like my vision is clearer. The community of Rancho Mastatal and the village as well, were both very welcoming. The quality of life here is so drastically different than that of the USA. Friendships and community relations take precedence over all else, which makes for a very friendly environment. If I had to choose between material possessions and strong community ties, I take community every time. If you desire companionship, to cleanse your body, mind, heart, and spirit, I strongly suggest taking the time to visit the wonderful people of Mastatal.

### **Community Facts/Stories: Homestays**

More and more visitors to Mastatal are choosing to stay with local families for part or all of their visits. Homestays offer a wonderful opportunity for both the hosting family and the visitor to participate in an exchange of ideas, languages and cultures. Almost without exception, both parties come away having had incredible experiences and having made new friendships. It also provides the local family with an alternate source of income, without them having to invest a great deal of money. It also helps us when we have an overflow of visitors. It's one of those rare situations where everyone involved wins. We are currently working with 9 families in the community; Luzmilda and Marcelo's, Dunja and Coyan's, Maritza and Juanico's, Doña Flor and Don Tino's, Lydieth and Juan Luis', Maritza and Jaime's, Arabela and Chilo's, Lucia and Don Mario's, and Doña María's. Those doing homestays have full access to the Ranch, and usually eat lunch with us, though family stays can be custom designed for whatever works best for the family and the visitor. We hope to see this program continue to grow in the coming years.

### **Comida Corner: Banana-Oatmeal Power Cookies**

Ingredients:

\* 1 cup all purpose flour (or whole wheat) \* ½ cup flaked coconut \* ½ cup rolled oats \* 1 tsp. baking soda \* ½ tsp. salt \* ¼ tsp ground cinnamon \* ¾ cup firmly packed light brown sugar \* 6 Tbs. (¾ stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature \* 1 very ripe banana, mashed \* 1 egg, at room temperature (we made it vegan and substituted another banana) \* ½ cup chopped dried apricots or

golden raisins \* ½ cup chopped walnuts (we used almonds and peanuts)

Directions: Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F. Lightly grease 1 or 2 baking sheets. In a bowl, stir together the flour, coconut, oats, baking soda, salt and cinnamon. In a large bowl, cream the brown sugar and butter with a wooden spoon until fluffy. Add the banana and egg and beat with a fork until blended. Stir in the flour mixture, about ½ cup at a time, and then stir in the apricots and the walnuts. Spoon the dough by heaping tablespoonfuls onto the prepared baking sheets, spacing the cookies about 2 inches apart. Bake until golden brown, 12 to 15 minutes, switching pan positions halfway through baking if 2 pans were used. Remove from the oven and cool on the baking sheets on a rack for about 5 minutes. Transfer the cookies to the rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days. Makes about 18 cookies.

We also made a batch with chocolate chips for the chocoholics, which was a hit. Happy baking and buen provecho!

**Inspirational Impressions: Hippy**

A fellow who dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah.

—Ronald Reagan's definition of a hippy, quoted in *The Nation*