

Rancho Mastatal Updates

June 2005

For the first time in many months we're actually getting this newsletter out before the loosely defined deadline. The central reason that we're able to achieve this miracle this month is because of the enthusiasm, resourcefulness and motivation of our current volunteer reporting and editorial staff led by BRIAN "SPARKY" O'ROURKE. As mentioned at the end of our last update, Brian has taken the initiative to assure that we maintain the quality of our content without sacrificing the number of newsletters that we send out each year. He rocks, just as he will be on our wedding day. This former DJ is putting together the post-band music selection for the festivities on October 15th. We also owe a special thanks to NOAH BUHAYAR, an easy entry into our volunteer Hall of Fame, and definitely eons away from our soon-to-be expanded Wall of Shame, for his contribution to this month's update. Noah spent a few months with us here in Mastatal after AARON

WESTGATE, another future Hall of Famer and soon-to-be Yestermorrow intern, recommended that he spend some time with us during his forays through Costa Rica. Thanks Aaron, we're indebted; Noah is by all definitions a goodin' as we say around here. And Noah, all the best during your upcoming year in the US Tropics and we'll be thinking of you often as you make your way to Osorno, Chile to commence your Fullbright. Buyay!! Maybe, just maybe, we'll see you down that way before you head back north in a few years.

And lastly, an expression of gratitude to JOSH EPSTEIN and ERIN GAINES for their witty and hilarious literary donation to the Volunteer/Guest Gossip section of this month's newsletter. Aside from all of this, we've had an amazing and productive crew of workers these past few weeks anchored by a heroic core of long-term volunteers. "Mil gracias" to RYAN FERESTER, ROGER, MICHELLE LEYTON, Sparky and COLIN MCGREGOR for all of your serious ass kicking. And more thanks to Josh and Erin for getting the kick wheel functioning for all of the potters that pass through our doors from this day on. We've been building, building, building away as we prepare for the arrival of our next group, a class from the University of Vermont headed up by HECTOR SAEZ, due in on August 7. Let's hope that they bring their umbrellas and waterskis as the rainy season has kicked into high gear in these here parts. Roger and I have even made headway on Robin's jewelry bench this month. For all of Robin's jewelry devotees out there, soon, very soon. Other than that, life is good here in Tropicise. Until next time, be well and be swell. Hasta pronto.



Timo

This month's update includes:

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RM Program News: The Legend of Buck

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Buck over a cup of coffee. He has become an important part in the research of insect-life here in Mastatal and will hopefully continue to increase our knowledge of these critters that share our home. What began as a structured interview between near strangers turned into a friendly conversation between colleagues. Here is a little taste of Buck's world to sweeten your own cup of joe...

Before settling into a tenured position in the environmental science department at the University of Washington at Tacoma, he attended the school for math at Claremont, taught in Los Angeles, got his Masters at USC in applied math, taught in Germany, and worked for his doctorate in zoology at UW. After earning his PhD in 1997, he did some post-doctoral research. The focus of this research was reducing pesticides on crop plants, using field experiments and math models throughout the study.

Buck worked closely with a professor from Brown who led him to Washington. Before this time, Buck was known as John Banks (apparently the name he was given at birth). His mentor from Brown would always call him "Young Buck," and the word "Young" slowly disappeared from the nickname over time.

In 2002 or 2003, Buck met Tom McDonald (a.k.a. Tiburon) in Seattle. As Tom has a tendency to do, he mentioned and spoke very highly of Rancho Mastatal (thanks again Tom). Buck came to check it out in 2003, liked what he saw, applied and got approved for a research grant, and returned with Tom, Patty, and Miriam. In 2004, he developed his first research crew to come to Mastatal and examine insect biodiversity around crop areas, and they compared it to biodiversity in forested areas and the fringes between the two. Although the make-up of the diversity in each area may differ, the group found that there is actually as much diversity in the croplands as there is in the fringe and the forest. This year, Buck came down with another crew and examined movement in the insects to discover what causes these patterns.

We're keeping our fingers crossed in hopes that his most recent application for a research grant will be approved. If so, he'll be able to come back at least six more times with groups for more incredible studies. Ideally, he would return for a project using GIS to study large-scale land use and see how it relates to plant and insect diversity on the ground. He's also interested in a larger study in the national park just up the road because of the habitat diversity within and the lack of

information that has been collected there so far.

The reason that Buck likes bringing groups to Rancho Mastatal is because he likes to expose them to the people and the energy here that he considers extremely difficult to find in other places. He loves bringing students to a place that allows them to explore the environment, social issues, international relations, as well as the way other people live. To him, this is all extremely important for a cross-cultural program. We couldn't agree more, and we appreciate the fact that he thinks of Mastatal as a place that does encompass all of this. Thanks again Buck for everything you do for us.

If Buck was an insect, he would want to be a bioluminescent click-beetle. He first saw one two years ago by a waterfall and just thought that it looked really cool. This beetle has two giant glowing eye-spots on the back of its head and actually glows in the dark. Buck the Bioluminescent Click-Beetle. It has a nice ring to it. You may see one out partying one of these nights at your local cantina, but never after 10PM.

Brian O'Rourke

Conservation Update: Sloth, Leisurely Reminder

A couple weeks ago, Liz looked out from the front porch of the main house and spotted a sloth slowly climbing a tree on the Rancho's property. Everyone jumped out of their chairs to watch the 3-toer through a sunny drizzle. For many of us, it was the first time we had seen a sloth in the wild. For Tim and Robin, it was a refreshing reminder that the actions they have taken have all been worth it. The sloth worked his way to the top of one tree, grabbed onto the branches of the next one, and continued on through Mastatal's forests at an extremely slow pace. The time here often seems to fly by, whether that is because of all the hard work that everyone puts in, the fun that everyone has, or just because of the awe that this place can induce. Our new visitor reminds us to slow down every so often, even for just a couple minutes, just to observe and absorb our surroundings. The results of past decisions made by Tim and Robin can be seen every day by those of us who take the time to look around. Sometimes that can be forgotten as we are focusing on the daily results that occur in the woodshop, at the worksite, in the community, or even in the kitchen. Even with all of these amazing natural building and various other projects occurring, they have an amazing stretch of forested land that they protect and sustainably manage. Hopefully, these random visitors will stop by more and more frequently. Or maybe they're already here, and we just need to look around a little more often.

Brian O'Rourke

Building Report: La Choza and New Hangout

Morale remains high at the building site as the choza's cob walls continue to rise fast. The lintels are in place, the living room and patio floor constructed, the shower and composting toilets lime plastered and washed, and the waddle and daub walls soon to be woven. Many thanks to an excellent crew of volunteers and interns for the time and energy they've put toward this project.

Over the past few weeks, Robin has finalized the design for the new classroom and hangout space. The structure will center around a 24' x 24' room with work tables, benches for microscopes, a

sink, shelving, and a projection wall. When not in use by groups, the furniture can be rearranged to accommodate yoga classes. Robin's design also incorporates a secure and "breathable" bodega for storing equipment; a cob entranceway with benches, a table, and shoe rack; and a bamboo porch with rocking chairs, a game table, and hammocks. The roof will most likely have a clerestory to allow in natural light and four waterways for effective drainage. There has also been some talk of powering the building with photovoltaics, rather than hooking into the local electricity grid. If all goes according to plan, a framework and roof will be constructed in September with the help of MARTÍN COTO from Bambues. That way, groups arriving at the beginning of the New Year will be able to add their energy and experience to the project.

Noah Buhayar

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: A Little Gamey (Mad Libs)

A Little Gamey Mad Libs

At Rancho Mastatal we are (1. adjective) folks. We are vegetarian chefs, good-natured craftsmen, and open-minded (2. plural noun). So why is it that we indulge in competitive leisure activities with crude names such as Asshole, Bullshit, Shithead, and (3. ethnicity) (4. animal action)? It is because we are (5. adjective).

Martin Luther King Jr. cheated on his (6. relation). John Lennon was an arrogant prick at times, and Mother Theresa had a nasty (7. substance) habit. Just as Martin had a taste for women and Theresa a taste for powder, so do we have a taste for (8. noun).

It is this competitive tendency that has led to such occurrences as Ryan (9. adverb) slide-tackling Robin during last week's (10. adjective) Frisbee match. It has also brought us to the deadly game of "Mafia", in which murder and (11. nasty habit) are nightly occurrences.

However, please note that we are not always so void of (12. emotion, noun). Simply look at the righteous words of the recently departed Noah, who said "Thou shalt not take (13. body part, plural) so seriously." Or, observe Ashley's partner yoga sessions, which may resemble the cutthroat game of Twister, yet shift our goal from falling into an orgiastic (14. noun) towards discovering that everything in the universe is (15. number). Above all is the loving work environment that (16. famous couple) foster at Rancho Mastatal, inspiring us to create homes, meals and (17. plural noun) side-by-side.

So judge us not. After so much love and (18. verb ending in -ing), we can't help wanting to kick a little (19. body part). Gaming is in our blood: we play everything from dominoes to capture the flag, from scrabble to horse-shit (20. activity). Even as we try to explain our passion for (21. plural noun) we turn this into a (22. singular version of answer to 21), for you see, we were born to (23. verb).

By Josh "The Boggle-Fiend" Epstein and Erin "I'm the Best" Gaines

Author's Answers: 1.peaceful 2.adventurers 3.Egyptian 4.rat-screw 5.human 6.wife 7.coke

8.victory 9.atrociously 10.ultimate 11.deceit 12.compassion 13.Hearts 14.heap 15.1 16.Robin and Tim 17.art 18.caring 19.ass 20.dodgeball 21.games 22.game 23.game

Sparky's Answers: 1.Smelly 2.red rockets 3.Ethiopian 4.Chingo nut licking 5.English 6.stepsister 7.cob 8.lube 9.haphazardly 10.shitty 11.biting poopy fingernails 12.ecstasy 13.nipples 14.compost 15.4 16.Roger and Kattia 17.empanadas 18.lime washing 19.kneecap 20.cranium 21.mafia 22.mafia 23.puke

Community Facts/Stories: The Shape of Our Roads and Contributing Factors

Another house drove by today. Sounds strange doesn't it? For the past few weeks, huge flat-bed trucks have been passing through town to bring various communities new low-income houses. They basically haul a bunch of concrete slabs to a piece of land and throw a house up in a matter of days. They may not be the most beautiful or even healthy homes in the world, but they go up quickly and do not cost a lot of money.

They may, however, affect the community (and neighboring ones) in ways unplanned. Every loaded truck that comes through means more thick, treaded, and weighted tires digging into our local unpaved roads. It is the rainy season, and the roads have become wetter and softer. The bus that usually runs a daily route from Zapatón to Puriscal and back can not manage to make it up some of the hills. Anyone who wants to get into town for any reason may need to find another mode of transportation (which is often not an option) or make a long walk to the bus (which now starts after a forty-five minute walk up the road from Mastatal, a walk that would be extremely difficult for those with goods to carry, especially for those that live farther away than us). Many other vehicles, even trucks, have been having trouble traveling on these roads.

What is the solution? Dare I say better planning? The government has come up with something else: dump a few big piles of gravel in the areas that are becoming problematic and let the local towns figure out how to fix them. A group of volunteers from the Ranch recently accompanied Chepo and Bolivar to attempt to fix one stretch of road that was torn up by the flat-beds (one of which was stuck at the bottom of the hill as we were working on the repair). The repair work consists of shoveling the gravel from the piles and spreading it out across the slippery areas of the road. The problem is that the clay and mud sucks the gravel right back in, thus creating another slippery situation. We also dug pathways so that running water will stay on the sides of the road or even run off completely. These are temporary solutions to recurring problems.

If only we could convince everyone to build their own cob houses. Unfortunately, a common response to that idea is "I'd love a cob-house... if I can't get a free concrete one from the government." It's tough to blame someone for saying that. The government will continue to dump blocks onto people's lawns and build them their lego-houses without care for neighbors. It's odd to think that they would build these homes for people with little money without thought of how they may adversely affect others who may rely on the roads for their income or livelihood. A pile of gravel can only do so much.

Comida Corner: Botanical Burgers (and Lime Tarragon Mayonnaise)

Oh my word! It looks just like real beef! It isn't. Although the resemblance is uncanny, these nutritious and completely vegetarian burgers are the perfect treat for your local barbeque. Once

again, the *Rebar Modern Food Cookbook* gives us something to flip for (pun intended).

Ingredients:

2 tbsp (30 mL) olive oil
1 yellow onion, minced
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 cup (240 mL) grated carrot
1 cup (240 mL) grated turnip
1 cup (240 mL) grated beets
1 cup (240 mL) grated zucchini, water squeezed out
2 tsp (10 mL) salt
1 tsp (5 mL) dried dill weed
1 tsp (5mL) cracked pepper
1 cup (240 mL) cooked brown rice
½ cup (120 mL) hazelnuts, roasted
2 tbsp (30 mL) soy sauce
2 tbsp (30 mL) nutritional yeast
2 tbsp (30 mL) minced tarragon
2 tbsp (30 mL) minced parsley
fresh breadcrumbs (optional)

1. Heat oil in a wide-bottomed pan and sauté onion until translucent.
2. Add garlic, grated vegetables, dill, salt, and pepper.
3. Stir thoroughly and cook for 10 minutes over medium-high heat, stirring regularly.
4. Transfer to a large bowl and cool.
5. Place cooled vegetables, rice, and hazelnuts in a food processor and pulse until coarsely combined.
6. Transfer to a large bowl and mix in all of the remaining ingredients. Season to taste.
7. Take a handful of the mix and test to see if it holds together. If not, add breadcrumbs, ½ cup (120 mL) at a time, until the mixture firms.
8. Shape into 5 oz (150 g) patties and sauté in olive oil until browned on both sides.

A great choice of condiment for Botanical Burgers is a Lime Tarragon Mayonnaise (also from Rebar)... Take the following ingredients:

- 1 cup (240 mL) regular, homemade or egg-less mayonnaise
- zest of 1 lime
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) minced tarragon

and combine them in a small bowl and stir thoroughly. Serve or refrigerate for up to 3 days.

Buen provecho!

Inspirational Impressions: And the Sign Says...

“WITH MAN GONE, WILL THERE BE HOPE FOR GORILLA? This sign stopped me – or rather, this text stopped me. Words are my profession; I seized these and demanded they explain themselves, that they cease to be ambiguous. Did they imply that hope for gorillas lay in the

extinction of the human race or in its survival? It could be read either way.”

-Daniel Quinn's Ishmael

See you next time.

Abrazos,

Brian, Noah, Josh, Erin, Tim, Robin and the Rest of the Crew