

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## October 2006

Rancho Mastatal **UPDATE** for the month of OCTOBER 2006 The 30-degree nights, pale-faced pedestrians, Christmas in your face, leafless trees and occasional Hummer are an obvious change from Mastatal. Our small collection of long-sleeved shirts and cotton socks are getting stretched as thin as SPARKY as we continue to work our way throughout the lovely Northeast visiting friends and family. All of the running around has been exhausting at times but worth the effort. We've seen a slew of our RM compatriots over the last many weeks and are now gearing up to spend the last few days visiting with the fam before our annual despedida. It's been a real whirlwind this time around. We're excited as always for our return to Tropicise, our projects and our Mastatal family though with so much going on this trip it feels for the first time as if it all went by a little too fast. But then another Santa ho hos his way across the 86" HD Plasma swivel set or the phone rings eight times in six minutes and it all gets a little easier. The following edition was put together predominantly by this year's Ranchsitters with a few contributions from us here in the States. Gracias especially to TYLER SEE for keeping this newsletter breathing during this time. We'll be back in Mastatal sweating our asses off by the time you receive the next newsletter. The newest busy season is just about upon us and we're anxious, in a good way, about what this year holds. It promises to be the most amazing yet. Our winter lineup is chock full of perennial all-stars including ALAN, Sparky, GREG and KAREN, MISS EMILY JUMP, LARISSA, TYLER, NATE, MAXINE and a bunch of new faces so watch out. We may have a few guest appearances as well. We'll keep you posted.



*A community effort, plastering the exterior walls of La Choza  
photo by Aaron Drury*

Early winter highlights should include *Rudolph's Raucous Lip Synch Contest* and a *New Year's Eve bash slipknot Elmer Hohl Campo de Pitching Horseshoe Extravaganza*. And assuming time permits, the first day of 2007 should be opening day for our professional whiff whiff league sponsored by Rock Ice and Caraca's free-range pig. We wish you all an amazing holiday season. See you in Mastatal soon.

## A note from Tyler See

*I just want to send a special thank you to STEPHEN STROUD for being such a great musician. More than anything, though, for his willingness to teach and share with any and everyone. For crying out loud, he's got half the town singing "I Love You Make Me Feel Good." He's showing local kids how to play, and providing endless hours of entertainment for those at the Ranch. That is, as long as it's nothing on his wife PHOEBE's "unrequested" list. For me, it's been a privilege to be able to play with someone who's so good but also so excited to make me better. Mr. Stroud, your enthusiasm for life and music is an inspiration, and I'll certainly miss our sessions. Talk about a free lesson... criminy. May the Ranch be forever more a haven of live music. And Stephen, keep spreading the sugar. You understand.*

Hallelujah to that. Enjoy!

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*Nothing beats a refreshing dip in the river after a hot tropical afternoon's work...*

*photo by Aaron Drury*

### **RM Program News:Upcoming Renewable Energy Workshop**

It's that time of year again. No, not Timo and Sparky's incessant playing of the Caribbean Christmas CD at the Ranch but rather Solar Energy International's yearly Renewable Energy in the Developing World workshop. SEI and Rancho Mastatal are teaming up for the fourth year in a row to offer this extremely popular course.

This winter's workshop will build on the success of our past workshops. The program is focused on learning through hands-on work. We'll spend about one-third of our time in the classroom, studying renewable energy technology basics. The rest of our time will be

in the field or lab, getting our hands dirty, learning by doing. The course is taught in both English and Spanish.

Workshop topics this year include:

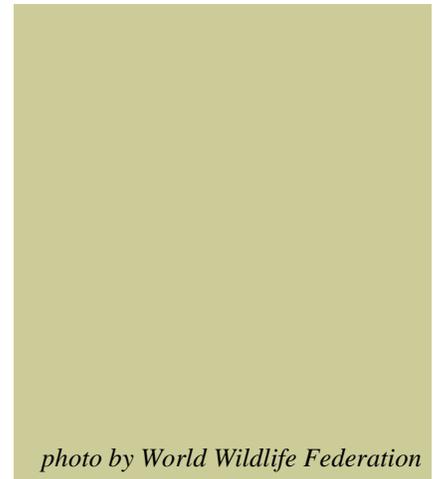
- The design & installation of a solar-electric system at Alsidi's house
- The building of solar ovens with a women's cooperative
- The installation of a methane biodigester on a local farm
- A micro-hydro site survey
- Social & cultural issues of working in the developing world

The course is starting to fill up so if you're interested, let us or the good folks of SEI (Ian Woofenden, [ian@solarenergy.org](mailto:ian@solarenergy.org)) know sooner rather than later.

### **Conservation Update: Lapas Making a Home in Mastatal?**

The sound is almost unmistakable. A quick, loud squawking followed by the distant whoosh of flapping wings. They could be coming from anywhere, you just keep your eyes glued to the sky for a visual. Your mind immediately jumps to parrots, but these are no ordinary parrots. They primarily travel in pairs, rather than large flocks, and tend to be a bit stealthier than their smaller, more gregarious cousins.

Four years ago, a sighting was quite rare, often only attainable from atop the crab in the sky. In recent months, the scarlet macaws have been spotted on almost a weekly basis. Chepo and Junior have reported numerous sightings on the Ranch property alone. I can recall darting out of the workshop twice in one day to see them fly overhead – north in the morning and south in the evening. Driving out of town with Tim and Robin, we stopped the truck right in Santa Rosa to observe FIVE macaws perched in a roadside tree, at least one showing clear signs of its juvenud. Then early one Friday morning, a pair, which I can only assume to be the same one we've been seeing, swooped right through the main drag by Don Bolivar's and took its rest there in a tree above the policeman's house. Hanging out long enough for extensive public viewing, they moved to a perch by the main house, then to another roadside spot by Jeanne's and finally back over the crossroads from whence they came.



*photo by World Wildlife Federation*

For those of us witnesses, it was as if the lapas were making a statement that they were here to stay. Certainly, we're not that far from the Carara National Park, one of their few last major hangouts. Not to mention the livelihood they must experience up here. Indeed, many locals believe they're making a nest nearby. Sadly, others speak of the threat of poaching. "Some people just don't get it," I remember Chepo saying as we talked about it one day. The truth is a single macaw feather is worth hundreds of dollars on the black market, and for some it makes no difference that we're living among a number of protected areas, some of which provide the last refuge in the region for endangered species like the lapas. Perhaps MINAE's increased presence and the birds' sheer magnificence will be enough to deter any such incident.

In the end, time will tell whether the lapas are here to stay or just on temporary voyages from their nests. Either way, whenever you hear that distinct call, take a moment to scope the sky, you might just catch a flash of red. Nice.



## **Building Report: Timber Framing in Mastatal**

We are already gearing up for Yestermorrow Design/Build School's Natural Building Workshop coming to Mastatal in March. After a great Halloween Party at Skip and Lizabeth's in Worcester, VT during our recent stateside trip, we all buckled down (actually it was all Skip) and got a design worked out for Mastatal's first ever timber frame cabin!

We are incredibly enthusiastic about this new project for a variety of reasons. First of all, it is another occasion where we get to team up with two of our favorite people in the world to

create a beautiful structure with a group of diverse, dedicated, and hard working individuals from all over the world. Gotta love it. If all goes well, this technique could prove to be the most applicable building technique yet for the surrounding communities. The wood, tropical pine, is local and plentiful and located in a grove that the owners want to cut down to make way for teak anyway. Perfect. Local sawyers will mill the posts and beams to our measurements and our local building crew (Gilbert, Alex, and Caraca) will be learning the techniques during the workshop so that they may replicate this age old system and pass it along to others and help introduce it to our region. It is also promising because it's relatively inexpensive. It will also go up much quicker than our previous buildings, which is a must as the Ticos need a technique that will go up fast. The wall infill system that we will be using will be wattle and daub with lime plaster and maybe a bit of bamboo, depending on the workshop participant's design.

We are planning on locating this past the Hankey House. We desperately need to have a master plan for that area so that we can incorporate the incoming couple's cabin and future cabins into a well- thought out Permaculture design to assure that this site can not only house people but also integrate food production. Anyone interested in doing a 3-month internship and getting this landscape designed? Let us know.

## **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Cranking It Out in the "Slow" Season**

*Los patrones* may be away, but the work at the Ranch continues to steamroll through the rainy season. Only months away from the start of a jam-packed year, we're looking to make some serious progress on a number of ongoing projects. Here's a brief overview.

**At the classroom**, many hands have gone into the raising of a teak/bamboo/wattle & daub *bodega* which will house instruments of science and other doo-dads on a more permanent basis. The bamboo wattle is in place and ready to receive a daub mix in the coming months. Meanwhile, materials are being prepped to apply the final lime plaster to the classroom entrance, which hopes to host its first official group in early January. Nothing like washing sand, right Gary?

**Over at the Hankey**, it's slowly but surely starting to look like an occupiable space (not that it isn't already being occupied.) The upstairs railings have been completed along the outside, so at least no

one will be falling off the sides. We extended Rob's railing style part of the way and added a bamboo slat half wall in both of the bedrooms. Internal walls should be next. Meanwhile, the electricity is in, so time to pump out those bamboo floor lamps.

Despite so few people at the ranch, there still seems to be a constant flow of activity which has produced even more accomplishments. Jeanne's house is now sporting new trim and an elevated gate – which goes to show that if you leave something on the list long enough (i.e. 4 years), it will eventually get done. The original bank has gotten almost a complete makeover; but don't worry, tellers are still receiving deposits 24 hours a day. And the carport has gone from supporting vines and flowers to actually sheltering vehicles from the rain (beautification to follow).

So no matter what time of year you find yourself at Rancho Mastatal, there's never any lack of labor. The next several months should be no different.

### **Community Facts/Stories: Bingo and Bookcase Make Way for Brilliance**

Several Sundays ago the elementary school hosted a bingo event in its comedor, and despite the foul weather enjoyed quite a good turnout. Part of that may have had something to do with the meat and rice pudding, but we all know there are some hardcore bingo aficionados out there. And with 15 prizes to be had, all were in for a long afternoon of gaming.

Juan Luis and his youngest son Roy shared the privilege of calling the numbers, but with the pounding rains and a burnt out light bulb,

the masses were a bit confused at times. Many were particularly puzzled when the same man kept winning, first a saddle pad, then a lasso – convenient. Yours truly even managed to leave the building with some kitchen towels and a bottle of Rompope. But the real winners, of course, were the kids, whose school earned a little money for the new year.



*Mother's Day at the Elementary School*

In addition to its bingo booty, the *escuela* was most recently endowed with a brand new bookcase, thanks to the love and devotion of Team Strazzard. STEPHEN and PHOEBE put in many hours and much care towards the project, employing an incredible amount of patience, good humor and craftsmanship given the condition of the school's wood supply. Luckily, they were in a workshop that has a reputation for producing items that just scream rustic. Truthfully, though, the bookcase was quite a feat, spanning the entire wall space designated for it, and surely to provide much needed shelf space for maestro Humberto. So if you ever come across a bounty of children's books in Spanish (or English), they're sure to find a good home in Mastatal.

### **Comida Corner: Russian Mushroom & Potato Soup**

Now that the cold days of late-autumn are upon us up here in the North, soup is always on my mind (well actually soup is always on my mind, but now even moreso!). This one comes from the

winners of a soup cookoff here in Upstate N.Y. This is Janice Baisley of Mechanicville's recipe. Enjoy!

### *Russian Mushroom and Potato Soup*

- 5 Tablespoons butter, divided
- 2 leeks, chopped (or onions)
- 2 large carrots, diced
- 8 cups chicken broth (or veggie!)
- 2 1/4 teaspoons dried dill weed
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 3/4 pounds potatoes, peeled and diced (could throw a sweet potato in as well)
- 1 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 cup half and half (or yogurt or sour cream)
- 1/4 cup flour
- *I would add a dash of sherry as well*

Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a large sauce pan over medium heat. Stir in onions and sauté. (Once they start browning I would throw some sherry in the pan). Stir in carrots, and cook for about 5 minutes. Pour in broth, and dill, salt, pepper and bay leaf: cover and cook for about 5 minutes. Add the potatoes, cover and cook for 20 to 25 minutes, until potatoes are tender. Remove the bay leaf.

Melt remaining butter in a skillet over medium heat, add the mushrooms and sauté for 7 minutes or until they are lightly browned, then add them to the soup (you could add another dash of sherry here to get all the goodness from the pan). Remove soup from the heat.

In the meantime, combine the half-and-half and flour in a small bowl until mixture is smooth, then stir into the soup, mixing well. Return soup to the stove and continue to cook for 5 to 7 minutes over medium heat until soup has thickened. Serves 6.

*Buen Provecho!*



*One of our fine, furry animal-friends...  
photo by Aaron Drury*

## **F?tbol Follies: Yearning for the New Year**

With the conditions the way they have been, this'll have to be a quick edition of the follies. While some have found a few opportunities to get in on some indoor "papi futbol" action in the salon, and a selected bunch have suited up with other squads just for the chance to play, most have been suffering a severe drought which will only be relieved by the coming of *verano* in what hopes to be another month or so.

In that vein, many are getting excited for the first tournament of the new season, to which Los Galacticos have already received an invitation. In years past, local campeonatos have meant full day excursions down to La Vasconia or Playon, where flat fields of green grass lure teams and spectators from across the region to the Sunday afternoon futbol fest. This time, however, we need not travel any further than San Miguel, where rumor has it all the games will be held. Moreover, our neighbor has been putting in a solid effort towards maintaining its pitch, which even in the height of the

rains is looking superb (a relative term around here if you take a look at Mastatal's field). And so with any luck the rains will taper off soon, allowing at least a few weeks for the yellowshirts to regain their touch.

That being said, don't be alarmed by a lack of follies over the next two months, as there will soon be plenty to report. Until the first golazo of 2007, take care of those boots, summer's coming on.

## **Inspirational Impressions: A few more dollars**

*"I am not quite sure what the advantage is in having a few more dollars to spend if the air is too dirty to breathe, the water is too polluted to drink, the commuters are losing out in the struggle to get in and out of the city, the streets are filthy, the schools are so bad that the young perhaps wisely stay away, and the hoodlums roll citizens for some of the dollars they saved in the tax cut".*

John Kenneth Galbraith

*Abrazos,*

The Ranch Crew