

TRAVEL

Zoo offers opportunities to explore Peru's rainforest

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

The Detroit Zoo is offering some unusual travel opportunities this year that will allow a traveler to visit an exotic location, experience high adventure and do a good deed.

As a result of an on-going primate census project in Peru, the zoo is seeking volunteers to help with an Adopt-a-School program to furnish supplies for schools along the Amazon River and its tributaries. The zoo also needs volunteers for its ongoing research and census programs.

Terry DeRosa, director of conservation and animal welfare at the zoo, said the primate census project began in 1993, first along the Rio Napo, and then, also, along the Rio Napo. It is a joint project involving the Detroit and Dallas zoological parks, the Peruvian National University of the Amazon, Exploranda Lodges, International Expeditions and Senor and Senora Roberto Rotondo.

"When the river is high, you can paddle along and take a census from the trees, but when the water is low, it's hard to navigate the river," DeRosa said. "We wanted a second site along the Napo River which has the addi-

tional merit of having an Exploranda lodge there, used by tourists who visit the rainforest. We use it as a research site and spend six months on the Rio Napo and six months on the Rio Napo."

The Adopt-a-School program was started in 1994 by teachers who were staying at the Exploranda lodges and is co-sponsored by CONAPAC and the ACEER Foundation, two non-profit institutions working for the conservation of the Peruvian Amazon Rainforest.

"People who have visited the lodge, many of them teachers, saw the schools didn't have information about conservation, it wasn't part of their curriculum and they didn't have school supplies," DeRosa said. "In Peru, they teach by a rote method. If they don't have paper, it makes it difficult for them to learn."

Each April, when the Peruvian school year begins, Adopt-a-School delivers supplies to the 266 schools in the region. A school classroom can be adopted for \$300, which buys enough supplies for a year. In 1997, the program raised \$14,000 for 2,200 school children.

The Detroit Zoo is seeking 15 volunteers to deliver supplies. Five volunteers will be needed

for each of three weeks, April 11, 18 and 25. The cost of volunteering is \$1,700 plus roundtrip airfare to Iquitos, Peru. Volunteers will stay at the Exploranda lodge, organize supplies (notebooks, pencils, folders etc.), deliver supplies by boat and have time to explore the rainforest.

In addition to delivering supplies, the program also reinforces a conservation message. Increased hunting in the rainforest has endangered many primate species and other animals. The area has several primates (pygmy marmosets, saddleback tamarins, moustached tamarins, night monkeys, red titi monkeys, white-fronted capuchins and others).

"Working with the uakaris (red-faced, bald-headed monkeys), we found animals getting deeper into the forest because of increased hunting pressure," DeRosa said.

He said many of the larger primates such as tapirs and anteaters are already gone.

"In December I went down there to see what was going on," he said. "There was a lot of hunting pressure. People are moving along the river, more villages are popping up. People claim a stake of land. That's what they do for a living, they go into the forest to find food for their families or to take to market."

DeRosa said when he was there in December, he found one village where they had created a community garden behind the school to grow food and raise domestic animals such as guinea pigs as food in an effort to relieve some of the hunting pressures. They are also taking the conservation program seriously.

"The process of delivering the school supplies is a big ceremony," DeRosa said.

Local dignitaries attend and



New supplies: Peruvian school children are happy to receive their new supplies delivered by the Adopt-a-School program.

the schools sign a contract that they will teach the conservation curriculum.

"The people are very friendly, helpful and interested in preserving their natural heritage," he said. "They don't take it for granted and are willing to use alternative methods for their families."

The zoo has a full-time researcher in the area, Suzi Leonard, who has spent five years studying primate behavioral ecology in the Peruvian Amazon for the zoo and in cooperation with the National University of the Peruvian Amazon.

"We are trying to document what the primate population is and over time is the population getting better or worse and to make long-term decisions on how to preserve those still in the forest," DeRosa said.

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In August, the zoo will send down an expedition to study bird, reptile and amphibian populations in addition to primates. For that expedition, the zoo needs 12 volunteers for two weeks. The cost for a volunteer is \$2,300 plus airfare to Iquitos. In addition the zoo needs volunteers for its on-going primate census, two volunteers a month through the year. Volunteers pay \$1,000 plus airfare.

The zoo, in cooperation with the Dallas Zoo, is currently surveying a 250,000-acre, sparsely populated area north of the Rio Napo and Rio Napo areas for possible recommendation to the Peruvian government that it be set aside as a nature preserve.

All of these programs are part of the zoo's ongoing outreach,

which includes community programs, cooperative programs with other zoos and captive breeding programs for endangered species. The zoo has also expanded its work with local universities to provide hands-on experience in zoo work for juniors and seniors interested in zoo careers.

DeRosa said the zoo wants "to be part of the process."

Participation in these programs does not require special skills. The zoo will train volunteers. To find out more about these programs or to sign up, contact Terry DeRosa at PO Box 39, Royal Oak, MI 48068-0039 or by phone at (248)358-0903, ext. 3231, by fax at (248)359-4194 or by e-mail at tderosa@detroitzoo.org

Ready for a new year? Peruvian teachers are ready for a new year with school supplies provided by Adopt-a-School.



GREAT ESCAPES



Relaxing: Toscana Gemignani takes a break in his olive orchard near Florence, Italy. His niece Anria Del Pizzo is hosting a trip to Italy and his olive orchard.

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 39251 Schenck, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279. Or e-mail hgallagher@homecomm.net

ITALY TOURS

Anria Del Pizzo is organizing a tour of Italy for Sept. 17 to Oct. 1. The tour will include three nights in Venice, five nights in Florence and four nights in Rome. Highlights include a visit to St. Mark's Basilica and the Ducal Palace in Venice; sites in Florence featuring mini-lectures as your tour museums, churches, cafes and other sights; and in Rome, the

Catacombs, the Coliseum and the Vatican. Special highlights include a dinner at Anria's cousin Alberto's in Florence and a visit to her Uncle Toscano's olive orchard to watch how extra virgin olive oil is pressed.

Cost of the tour in \$2,600 and includes air fare, rail-pass, accommodations, breakfast and a personal tour.

For reservations, call Anria Del Pizzo at (248)474-6119.

David Green is organizing a tour of Italy including Turin,

Venice, Florence and Rome, including a papal audience, May 4 to June 4. For additional information, call Carlson Wagonlit Travel in Plymouth at (800)874-6470 or (313)455-5810.

B&B GUIDE

The 1998 Michigan Lake to

Lake Bed & Breakfast guide is now available in booklet form and on the Internet website www.laketolake.com. The directory is available for purchase for \$4 check or money order to Michigan B&B Directory, 3143 Logan Valley Road, Traverse City, MI 49684.

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