

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY BIRD PROJECT

The bird project is now really taking shape. The younger generation has been busy gathering Tikuna stories for the book which eventually will be the tangible end result of this project. All the time even more birds turn out to have a story in the Tikuna culture and like this the collection slowly gets bigger. Some elderly have become a little too confused and they contributed some stories that later turned out to be a mix of several stories. It took a while sometimes to figure this out and this led to interesting discussions!

To take great bird photos for the book and social media (@tikuna_birds), different Amazon ecosystems were visited. Especially now the wetlands (regularly flooded areas) have such low water levels, it turns out some bird species occur in remarkably large numbers whereas the rest of the year they are scarce. Other birds show up in places different from the usual, such as this kingfisher above right. It was spotted right on the main river whereas usually it lives hidden along the small side creeks.



RECOGNITION ENVIRONMENTAL GUARD

With the Colombian constitution of 1991, the indigenous communities of Colombia acquired a lot of rights. Before this time, they were just “*los salvajes*” or the savages. The main directive of these rights is the official recognition of their ancestral lands as indigenous reserves within which they are lawfully autonomous and they need to organise themselves according to their own culture and tradition. The Colombian government also needs to recognise and respect these organisations and structures.

For many indigenous groups, this culture and tradition has been under a very strong influence of the catholic church, colonists and the current Colombian society. As a result, all kinds of modern indigenous forms of government and institutions have been developed over the last decades with characteristics of both worlds. In the Tikuna community of San Martin de Amacayacu, the environmental guard is a good example of such

a locally organised, advanced and regionally recognised structure. In other communities in the country, there may be more emphasis on the organisation of autonomous education or health care.

With the current president Gustavo Petro the recognition process of indigenous organisations by the Colombian government has gained speed. On the Colombian “Day of Races” on October 12 the environmental guard went to Leticia to participate in an official procession of indigenous guards of many Amazon communities. Most of these guards were founded to address general issues such as disturbance, theft, abuse for example and not only for environmental issues.

Different universities and the Colombian National Indigenous Organisation (ONIC) have followed this organisation process closely and supported. October 12th was ended with the handover of the recognition certificates to the trained members of each guard. A crown on a lot of work!





EXTREME DRAUGHT

As has probably been shown in the international media, the water levels in the Amazon reached an historical low during the dry season this year. In the San Martin de Amacayacu region, this low level was mostly visible on the Amazon river itself and in the connecting wetlands. These are called *varzea* here and these ecosystems are completely flooded a few months every year and only partially in the dry season. This year, there was really only very little water left in the lakes and connecting channels (three photos right). The bare shores have been overgrown with grass, which will later provide tons of food for the fish. At the moment, nothing much can be fished at all and most communities are suffering.



The water level in the Amacayacu river was also very low, but not much lower than last year. Additionally, the flow of the river remained strong and the water relatively cool. As such, it was very visible how resilient and thus climate-determining a healthy rainforest is. Due to the enormous capacity for water storage in the lianas, the soil, the trees, the little creeks, the giant beaches (returned again after absence) in the flow area of roughly 30

kilometres long and 5-10 kilometres wide, the rainforest can even give water in this super dry dry season. This water drips into the Amacayacu river everywhere in tiny trickles. There was also not a lot of this (but certainly something!) and hunting provides a good alternative in the ancestral lands of San Mart: Wild boar, deer, big rodents and bush turkeys add some protein to the diet of agricultural products.



Would you like to support the Tikuna indigenous community of San Martin together with the Small World Foundation and stay informed about local developments in this remote corner of Colombia?

You can transfer a yearly amount of 20 euros (or more...!) to:

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Bankaccount name: Stichting SMALL WORLD FOUNDATION at Baarle-Nassau,

Under the reference of 'newsletter' and your Name (BIC: RABONL2U)

Or check out the online contribution module on www.smallworldfoundation.org/?page_id=68

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