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the small world foundation

ETHNOBIOLOGY CONGRESS POPAYAN

After a PhD in Canada, Javier Diaz (left on the photo above right and newsletter 20, 25, 35, 38 and 48) has been back in Colombia for over a year and is currently employed as a teacher at the MSc course Environmental Studies at the University of Environmental Studies in Bogotá. He invited José Gregorio Vásquez for participation in the 5th Colombian Ethnobiology Congress held in Popayán (southwest Colombia) between September 28th and October 2nd. The Small World Foundation paid José's lodging and part of the meals. The event gathered about 500 participants and the whole city revolved around it. There were markets, exhibitions, music, culinary gatherings, etc. José held a presentation at the Maps and Territory Symposium about the development of the San Martín maps and their meaning for the ancestral land recognition procedure.

He was also a very active part of the Jaguar Forum discussion panel, about the meaning of wild cats for mankind and the way these predators should be protected (photos below). In general, the Congress of course was a good opportunity to get in touch with people, such as on the photo above left with the director of the prestigious Colombian Institute for Biological Resources Alexander von Humboldt. During the weekend before this congress in Popayán, José Gregorio Vásquez was a guest teacher in Javier's class Sociogeographic Information Systems (photo above middle). He explained about the whole internal process that led to making the maps of San Martín's ancestral lands. Looking back, this process has been quite an experience and certainly enough to tell others about!



MICHELLE HEESTERMANS GOES INTO THE WILD!

Between half August and half September Michelle Heestermans from Ulvenhout (Netherlands) was visiting San Martin for volunteer work. She tells her story:

“After a great boat trip of about 3,5 hours and bathing in sweat and lots of insect repellent, I arrived at tropical San Martin. The adventure could really start now. I would spend a month with Heike and José in one of the two indigenous communities located in the Amacayacu National Park, deep in the Colombian Amazon. I don't really know what I had expected, but of course everything turned out differently and, better said, more impressive and overwhelming than I could have imagined! At first, people would look at me strangely when I walked past, but in this community of only 500 inhabitants everyone had soon been informed in their indigenous Tikuna language about what I had come to do.

Most of all I would dedicate time to the kinder garden, but eventually I participated in many other activities. For them, remembering Michelli, Michelina, Michelita, Michelle, was easy. On the contrary, I had quite some trouble understanding everyone's family ties. Everyone is someone's sister, uncle, grandmother, brother etc. And just like in a big family, everyone is invited at any time of the day to come and eat, drink or to play a game of *parqués*. People really have time for each other and instead of showing off the latest facebook videos on everyone's phone in the evening, here they still tell stories and legends. If there is something to celebrate, they make big 12 liter buckets full of homemade alcohol (*masato*, *guarapo* or *chicha*) and drag those to someone's living room where they dance in couples on cumbia, rumba and Tikuna music. Nobody worries when you can still hear music from the wooden houses at 5am and when the electricity generator will keep working a little longer. After all, they are celebrating!

Still, people always work very hard. They get up when the rooster sings or even before, to do tough physical work during the cool hours of the day such as planting or harvesting on the agricultural plot,



cutting the weeds with machetes, catching fish, hunting wild boar and so much more. If someone has a bigger job to do, people are invited for a *minga*: For the work you do, you receive free alcohol and sometimes food, and a little party after work. I was so surprised after I had started to paint the kinder garden on my own and all of a sudden there were about fifteen people more who had come to help me. In the meantime, they made sure I got enough *masato*, even when I stood high up on the ladder.

The people here are very happy, all jokes and mistakes are good enough to laugh about and everyone helps out where necessary. They are proud of their culture and traditions are kept in honor. Nature is respected, even the little kids in the kinder garden learn songs about the trees they need to breath. The concept of time is also very different here. Their kilometers are expressed in walking time to get somewhere on foot or in a canoe. Clothes and people are washed in the river, where I was often challenged for a swim to the other side. Different kinds of fish and bananas are cooked on a wood fire and juice is made from about 20 different kinds of fruit such as *borojo*, *bacaba* and *araça*, which only grow here. There was something new every day in San Martin: Cooking, painting, talking to tourists, fishing, trying to make alcohol myself, working on the agricultural plot, making bracelets with the kids, organizing a *minga*, teaching English....



And in the end, I was invited for a wonderful trip on the river, along tree formations and to the tourist town of Puerto Nariño. I really enjoyed my time in the jungle in San Martin de Amacayacu. It is hard to explain what an amazing progress the community has made, with the help of Heike, José and so many others, even you!”

On behalf of San Martin de Amacayacu and the Small World Foundation: Michelle, thanks a lot for your enthusiastic company and your effort. Please come back one day. You know the *masato* is always waiting for you!



UNITED NATIONS VISIT ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Representatives of the Colombian United Nations human rights office have been visiting San Martin de Amacayacu regularly since 2014 (newsletter 60). The plan for 2015 was to organize a trilateral meeting of Tikuna indigenous people with the goal to protect their ancestral lands. This goal still exists of course, but the meeting could not be organized. The United Nations do not have funds for this kind of events and no alternative sources were found. Fortunately, the UN representatives keep up their visits to maintain the indigenous communities alert about all kinds of potential threats to their lands and other indigenous human rights.

A very important detail: They had a meeting with the INCODER about San Martin's request to recognise the ancestral lands as an indigenous reserve. Apparently, the INCODER is still busy with this request and more meetings with the UN representatives will follow. INCODER seems to be aware that they have to take the next step. We



think this is quite something and it is great to hear that more people want to get involved, especially of this caliber.

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

Please transfer 15 euro yearly (or more!) to the following bank account in the Netherlands:

Account name: Stichting SMALL WORLD FOUNDATION
SWIFT/BIC Code: RABONL2U
IBAN code: NL28 RABO 0132 7262 03

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

Please DON'T FORGET TO INFORM US ABOUT YOUR NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS!!
(heike_van_gils@hotmail.com)

The contributions will be spent exclusively on the development and realization of local initiatives in San Martin de Amacayacu in the Colombian Amazon. No wages are being paid to anyone. The expenses will be mentioned as much as possible in the newsletters. For alternative contributions, please contact Heike van Gils at: heike_van_gils@hotmail.com.

For more information about this initiative, please check the website:
www.smallworldfoundation.org.