

La Laguna del Lagarto Lodge

An Ecotourism Success Story in Costa Rica, opening a poor, isolated area to tourism.

Presented at the 11th BELL Conference (business environment learning & leadership) Sustainable Technology Development & New Market Creation

*July 20-22.2005, Cornell University Ithaca, New York
By **Vinzenz A. Schmack***

Even after arriving late the night before, I could not resist the daybreak wakeup call of Mealy Parrots, Montezuma Oropendolas and many other sounds which quickly enticed me into the 500 ha forest right next to the lodge for a pre breakfast walk. I was glad to see that many of the trees along the main trail were tagged with their latin and common names and that they included some of the increasingly rare tropical hardwood giants.

Not far into the forest I found several large "almendros" (*Dipteryx panamensis*) in fruit with a troop of Spider Monkeys enjoying their breakfast! While watching them I heard the loud squawk of the bird I was here to conduct research on: the endangered Great Green Macaw (*Ara ambigua*). In order to get a look at them and determine what they were eating I hiked off the trail for about 100 meters. Like Spider Monkeys they were also feeding on the fruit of the "almendro". On the ground there were many fruit and the tracks of peccary which must have come to enjoy "almendro" seeds as well. Fortunately, the "almendro" is still relatively abundant on the La Laguna del Lagarto Lodge property. Due to its hard wood, these majestic forest emergents had until recently been saved from the saws of loggers and landowners pushing the forest back to make way for cattle, agricultural crops, and tree plantations. Unfortunately the scarcity of alternative hardwoods and the development of harder saw blades, has resulted in a rapid decline in this "keystone" species for the Great Green Macaw and many other organisms that inhabit this Atlantic lowland rainforest ecosystem. I returned to enjoy my breakfast grateful for my introduction to this important remnant of lowland rainforest.

I have since returned for many early morning walks on the trails of this reserve where I often hear the low drumming call of the Great Curassow and have several times been fortunate enough to find army ant swarms with Bicolored Antbirds, Ocellated Antbirds and many others making a feat of the insects being chased out of their hiding places. I have also found Snowy Cotingas and other fruit eating birds feasting on the fruits of trees and palms next to the trail. I have walked the trails only once at night and heard the calls of a Crested Owl, Vermiculated Screech-Owl, Great Potoo, and Common Potoo. I also saw frogs, and many interesting insects as well as phosphorescent fungi. I heard, but did not see, what was probably a peccary, and caught a glimpse of another large mammal that dove into the bushes from the base of a tree.

Many forest edge birds can be seen from the balcony of the lodge as well as raptors and carrion feeders including King Vultures which are now rare in most of Costa Rica. There is a colony of Montezuma Oropendulas at the end of the buildings which can provide

many hours of entertainment. I have yet to explore the abundant swamps, rivers and lagoons with their unique set of flora and fauna.

Those of us conducting research on the Great Green Macaw are grateful for this small haven that the Laguna del Lagarto Lodge provides for this endangered species. We are also grateful for the project support provided by the owner of the lodge Vinzenz Schmack.

**Dr. Carlos Guindon Standing - Project Coordinator,
Great Green Macaw Research Project**