

## Alice Petherick – Guyana, Summer 2016

Guyana is a small South American country about the same size of the UK, but with a population of only around 775,000 and one of the highest migration rates in the world (it's thought there are more Guyanese people living abroad than there are living in Guyana). Mostly covered by tropical forest, most of the Guyanese population live around Georgetown and the coast, and many have never travelled to the interior. The Guiana Shield is one of only four frontier forests globally and hosts many endemic species, making its conservation and sustainable use incredibly important. To do this, it is vital that local people and the government are able to make money from Guyana's rich natural resources sustainably, to allow expansion and development of the human population and economy to coexist with Guyana's amazing diversity.

Operation Wallacea work in partnership with the village of Surama and the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development to demonstrate that tropical forest systems can be used sustainably, benefitting local communities, biodiversity, and global causes. Operation Wallacea do this by working with local people to set up sustainable eco-tourism to provide jobs and income to the local community, while encouraging sustainable use of the surrounding environment. The project is also involved in trialling sustainable logging practices, which could revolutionise the foresting industry if proved successful. Given the current rate of anthropogenic climate change and habitat destruction, this is incredibly important research.

I was lucky enough to spend 4 weeks in Guyana as a research assistant this summer, working at 3 different sites and on 6 different survey projects. The projects aim to look at all different trophic levels, from forest structure and dung beetle diversity (which can be used also as a measure of mammal diversity), to birds, bats, herpetofauna, and mammal surveys. This allowed me to deal with camera traps, mist netting, sound-scaping, tracking, and alcohol insect traps among other things. For a student who wants to work in wildlife conservation, being able to get such broad practical experience in such a different environment to the UK really is incredibly valuable, and I am confident it will help me in my final year and beyond.

Whilst in Guyana I was able to see some incredible wildlife as well, from Brazilian rainbow boas and boa constrictors, to forest falcons, bats, turtles, and monkeys. Being woken up every morning by howler monkeys really is something you never get used to. We were also really lucky to be able to see camera trap images of jaguars and pumas so close to camp, which was an amazing experience for me. Scariest memories include having my hammock swarmed by so many army ants you couldn't see the floor, and several run ins with venomous snakes, Brazilian wandering spiders, and bullet ants. It really was an unforgettable experience for all the right reasons, and I'm so grateful to Pembroke and its Members for allowing me such an unbelievable opportunity.

