Dartmouth Studies in Tropical Ecology 2001

Editors

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Note from the Editors

The following reports are the concrete products of a once-in-a-lifetime experience given to 16 young ecologists: an entire term of study in some of the most beautiful and biologically diverse sites on earth. Upon arrival, we could do little more than stare googly-eyed, mouths gaping, at the postcard scenery and unbelievable wildlife. But our professors and TAs had more in mind and pushed us to see beyond the pretty picture to the mind-boggling ecological webs within it - to create provocative hypotheses, test them rigorously, and present them clearly. While we may not all continue on to illustrious careers as tropical ecologists, we have all learned how to think and question intelligently.

From our first meeting in San José to our last bus ride from La Amistad Inn, we were in good hands with the Organization of Tropical Studies, which arranged luxurious travel by bus, boat and tractor for us and every ounce of our mountain of equipment. In addition, each location introduced us to individuals who gave respite to our weary bodies and exhausted minds by filling our tummies, cleaning our clothes, greeting us with smiles, and in general lending a hand when needed. Nicole took care of us at Palo Verde and kept spirits high with soccer games out on the airstrip. Richard LaVal (aka "Batman") shed some light on bat biology and gave us our first intimate encounters with these flying marvels at Monteverde. At Cerro, Carlos Solano welcomed us to his home, shared information on the towering oak forests, and fed us some of his home grown trout. Rodolpho shared with us the amazing lives of tropical flora at Las Cruces. At La Selva, Matt Clark brought us into the high-tech world with GIS. Last, but not least, the crew at Discovery Bay was tremendous. Director Dr. Norman Quinn, Peter Gayle, and Anthony Downes kept us afloat and out of trouble and put up with the inexperienced divers in the group. Mrs. Smiley kept us going with the jerk chicken, Mr. Smiley with his fine groove, Dalton with his smile, and Robert with his lessons on the art of spiking a volleyball.

We'd also like to thank the howler monkeys for their 5 am wake-up calls and free showers, Gino the ant lion for being our mascot, and the snakes, acacia ants and long-spined sea urchins for keeping us ever-observant. And, of course, the makers of Lizano for making all those mouthfuls of rice a little bit more exciting.

Now for our professors: David Peart, Dick Holmes, and John Gilbert. We'd like to give a heartfelt and well-deserved thanks to this special group of people who gave up their cushy lecture slots on campus to traipse through the jungles and snorkel the reefs with us, ready to help at any moment. Whether in the noonday sun or the middle of the night, they showed us the magic of ecology. They shared their endless knowledge of the plants and animals, coached our experiments, edited countless versions of our reports, and showed us that hard work is FUN. To Nick and Steph, our graduate TAs, what can we say, but we pity da foos next year who aren't going to have you guys. Who's going to explain how to analyze the data? And to Craig, the Dude who saw us through everything from our first days in Bio 14 lab to the Santa Rosa Bowl, thanks for your patience and attitude.

Special thanks go to Jay Campbell and Pat Leslie for assembling our photos, and to Margaret Grace for slaving over a computer through a long hot summer to gather all the maps, figures, and other pesky things into this one beautifully cohesive book.

Bjorn, Christina, Margaret and Chris