

DIRECTOR'S NOTE – BWRC's 9th year: Wildlife Medicine and Conservation in times of Pandemic, as an essential business, but without income... was only possible thanks to You!



Dear friends and supporters: Looking at the 2019 report I must admit I felt briefly disappointed to see that the BWRC's goals for 2020 will just be carried right over to 2021. Everything looked like a promising year until mid-march. Of course, COVID-19 brought the world to a screeching halt for all of us. Goals for BWRC switched from lofty achievements to "survival" and finding new ways to sustain the charity. When the pandemic was declared we were caught by surprise with 40 animals in the hospital/rehab and in 8 days 100% of our plentiful bookings for the year were cancelled.

With that in mind, I am elated to share that the team managed to keep the doors open and basically continued all charitable services in support of wildlife conservation. Staff rose to the challenge of a busier year than ever, as essential workers in a crisis that kept on going, including evacuating our outdoor cages, twice. I think the team was surprised, but also honored to be recognized as an essential service, to operate even during the most restrictive shutdown. Pandemic, fires and floods, without the --- previously considered sustainable --- income and assistance from international students, made us "take a break" on the goal of finding a permanent home for BWRC for example. Left with a 3-month budget and no foreseeable future in tourism income, grant search and new funding sources, including online teaching became the first priority for me as the director.



Long story short, with 881 patients seen in 2020, BWRC provided free service for more wildlife patients than any other year. All staff were maintained, and in fact had to do overtime. BWRC was able to maintain field support and many highlights occurred in the efforts for the critically endangered scarlet macaws and Hickatees, thanks to our amazing partners. But as always, we saw sad victims of wildlife crime, as well as fire, poor garbage management and abuse; reiterating the need for continued outreach and education (see more below).

Major highlights for 2020 were the outpouring of volunteers as soon as the lockdown restrictions were lifted to help our overworked staff and the increased help from international donors. BWRC was honored to establish new partnerships and receive emergency funding from several foundations to continue our essential service for wildlife, while we adapted to COVID-19 impacts. Another pandemic highlight were the strengthened local partnerships. While the crisis isolated us and took the base of our income it also brought us together in unity to help each other.

By the end of August the BWRC was able to add two more staff members thanks to funding from the Humane Society of the United States. Thanks to the Nature Trust of the Americas, we upgraded the failing x-ray processor and will soon receive a truly portable (dental/avian) x-ray to complete BWRC's equipment. A first 1-month online class and multiple short talks for different programs were completed. Online classes and a virtual classroom



offer a much wider reach for educational awareness efforts as well as for international student income. While there is much more work to do, we also see a future where we can bring awareness and education with a much lower footprint. In late 2020 we established a non-profit organization in the US, with the mission to support wildlife conservation in Belize, which will pursue 501c3 status in 2021. Finally I am elated to welcome Boris Arevalo as a Director to the Board of the BWRC.

Ultimately BWRC has made much progress, despite the pandemic and because of the pandemic we went virtual, we ended 2020 with an enormous gratitude for our health, the support received, and for a strengthened team with amazing partner organizations.



We will have another challenging year ahead. One exciting snippet: We do hope to bring the Wildlife Ambassador Program and training nationwide in 2021/22! Check out the newly revised BWRC website www.belizewildlifeclinic.org where you can also find uploaded resources to help you identify species, know the law and how to respond in case of an emergency or a conflict with wildlife. Contact bzwildlifeclinic@gmail.com if you are interested in learning more about future outreach and training to become a wildlife ambassador. And of course, any time you see imperiled wildlife in Belize call our 24/7 hotline for advice at 615 5159 or 632-3257.

I want to take this opportunity to thank once more all of BWRC's supporters, donors, students and friends. We would not be here without your tireless support. Thanks to the team and thanks to YOU BWRC continued its mission undeterred. The value of charitable services to the BWRC increased by 16% compared to 2019 (see more below).

We face the coming year with appreciation and hope that 2021 will be a successful year with your support.

Yours truly,

Dr. Isabelle Paquet-Durand

Dr. Isabelle DVM, PhD., CWR (Certified Wildlife Rehabilitator)

Director & Wildlife Veterinarian --- BWRC

2020 EVENTS, EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH & TRAINING

- In 2020, BWRC staff hosted international students and veterinarians until the end of March, with our second year of Continuing Education for US veterinarians and technicians through Purdue University as the last group, just before travel restrictions.
- In February, for the 6th year in a row BWRC hosted and provided **free veterinary continuing education training for Belizean Veterinarians and Technicians** in partnership with the Belize Veterinary Association. Thanks to Dr. Corey Blake for assisting with this training.



- In March, BWRC organized and co-hosted the 4th annual **Chiquibul Challenge Marathon** with Friends for Conservation and Development at the Las Cuevas Research Station in Chiquibul. The event gathered 104 participants, raising Bz\$10,443.94 to support macaw conservation by FCD and BWRC.

- **Deadly zoonotic disease** encountered in a rescued fox! Before the lockdown BWRC conducted a workshop on rabies and zoonotic disease prevention for the Forest Department Wildlife Program. This was triggered by the first detected and confirmed case of **rabies** in a fox, which had been rescued and delivered to BWRC.



Wildlife Medicine and Conservation
Study online and support conservation in Belize

Learn about:
Conservation threats and approaches for mammals, birds and reptiles
Illegal wildlife traffic and human-wildlife conflict, common cases and how to avoid them
Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation
Capture and restraint, from iguanas to porcupines
Veterinary medicine for non-domestic species
Veterinary support to wildlife conservation, from macaws to turtles.

Online courses include:
Pre-recorded lectures
Weekly live lectures with discussion
Live stream patient review/emergency
Short videos of current patients and activities
Anatomy and forensics review
Quizzes & final presentations

1st session: July 31st – August 21st
Register now with:
bzwildlifeclinic@gmail.com

Lead instructor: J. Pasquini-Durand, DVM, PhD., CWR
Veterinarian with 25 years experience in neotropical wildlife rescue, medicine and conservation.





BELIZE WILDLIFE & REFERRAL CLINIC
A Wildlife Rescue & Teaching Clinic

- In the month of August Dr. Isabelle launched and taught the first full **online course for international students** and offered free participation for our partners from ACES. The course included 12 modules with 30h of contact time and received excellent feedback. Please contact us if you would like to learn more.

- The **annual BWRC gala** had to be held as a **virtual** event and in November BWRC staff started hosting trivia events, raffles, and other online outreach via Facebook LIVE. Thanks to the raffles, donations, and auction sales in the month of November we were able to fundraise \$Bz10.000. While this does not match our annual in-person

gala of past years and we missed seeing people (as we are sure most of you did in 2020!) we much appreciated the wonderful support received in these trying and distanced times!

WILDLIFE RESCUE, REHABILITATION and FIELD SUPPORT



Patient numbers: In 2020 the Belize Wildlife & Referral Clinic (BWRC) provided **veterinary services to a total of 881 wildlife** patients; once again a considerable increase from last year. Some of these are intakes at BWRC (184), and others are wildlife patients seen in the field (697). 177 patients were hospitalized at BWRC, of which 16% died in care and 6% were euthanized. On a brighter note, 29%

were transferred to specialized wildlife rehabilitation facilities after completing medical treatment at BWRC and 23% were rehabilitated and released by BWRC. 22 patients in rehabilitation were carried over into the New Year. Many will soon be released (Coatis, Kinkajous and Fox), some returned to partner organizations (Iguanas and Hickatees), some remain under observation (crocodiles with ingested trash) and of course our permanent resident Margo the Boa. 2020 brought BWRC some unusual patients whose stories we will tell in our 2020 Patient highlights.



But now to the field support: 2020 was a **busy season for macaw conservation** with the largest confiscation to date of 7 animals captured on poachers, arriving at BWRC in early June. As is so common in wildlife traffic 2 chicks died before rescue . Thankfully the 5 birds that arrived alive were stabilized and returned to the wild through our in-situ lab in the Chiquibul with FCD.

We conducted 3 health checks in the Chiquibul for 13 birds and BWRC facilities also received one injured bird from the field. This fledgling was added to the group in the in-situ lab. Two at risk third chicks were also rescued, of which one was introduced successfully into a wild foster nest and the other one was added to the in-situ lab.



From the in-situ lab a total of 7 successfully rescued and reared macaws were released in early September. And as to be expected with 2020, just as we were getting ready for the



release of the now 7 chicks in the flight cage, along came hurricane Nana. This made extraction of all personnel and birds required. But thankfully Nana spared Cayo as well as the area around Las Cuevas and after a mere 24 h, the chicks were returned from their hurricane shelter at BWRC to the release cage in the Chiquibul. On the 6th of September their cage was opened and the chicks went to join the wild population in the Chiquibul. So a challenging season came to a Happy End!

Last but not least BWRC was elated to recover this beautiful juvenile bird rescued by FCD on the ground in the Chiquibul in Fall 2019. Examination showed that he had a congenital deformity of his wing, which rendered him unable to fly. This meant he could never be released and he was named, after his rescuers, Ranger. BWRC staff and a very special intern (thanks Alina!) spent many months caring for and in fact habituating Ranger, to do things as shown here in the picture: sitting on Glendy's glove. While BWRC works to release as many patients as possible back into the wild and we will in general not interact or train/condition wildlife as this would render them non-releasable, everybody enjoyed this rare exception and the bird's interesting personality. And you can now meet Ranger at The Belize Zoo where he found a permanent home (just as Pirate the one-legged macaw transferred in 2019).



BWRC's most commonly seen species by numbers in 2020, same as in 2019, was the Central American River Turtle (*Dermatemmys mawii*). Even better, most of them were babies to hopefully repopulate this critically endangered species – Thanks to our amazing partners at Belize Foundation for Research and

Environmental education – BFREE! Despite the Pandemic we were able to still conduct the usual Spring health check in March just before movement restrictions. The Fall health check was conducted with a reduced team, without international participants and of course according to hygiene measures for all. We were glad to be able to still provide the service and elated to conduct a total of 676 turtle checks, with the vast majority being babies for future releases. The dedication and drive of our partners at BFREE to ensure the continued existence of this species has inspired us for years and 2020 only reinforced this. BWRC is honored



to support BFREE's efforts with veterinary care and advice and after years of hard work by an entire network, there may be a ray of hope to pull this species off the brink of extinction. Of course years and possibly decades of continuing efforts are needed first. And foremost consumption needs to become more sustainable too. It takes all of us!

2020 PATIENT HIGHLIGHTS and UNUSUAL PATIENTS

April marked **one of the worst burning seasons** so far with the fires reaching the backend of the BWRC facilities, horrific air quality and sleepless nights. This poor kinkajou's case went almost viral, when he was rescued after fleeing the fires, climbing an electric post and suffering electrocution on top of burns. While this animal fought hard he ultimately succumbed to the long term effects of electrocution.



This year once again demonstrated the devastating health effects of the fires not only for wildlife but also for humans. It was however heartwarming to see teams of volunteer firefighters gather and once again human gathering forces in sight of the natural disaster affecting us all. We hope for better fire management in the future!



Some topics remain the same, in different variations and species: TRASH kills! In 2020 the Forest Department and our friends from the Crocodile Research Coalition brought 10 crocodiles to BWRC, of which 5 required high risk exploratory surgery to remove foreign bodies causing toxicity, injury and obstruction. Most of these human caused foreign bodies were fishing hooks but in the case of this patient there was also a large screw, making us choose Tornillo for her name. Pictured is the partial removal of metal objects from her stomach with the help of a mechanic tool. Ultimately she needed surgery before she recovered. So far only one patient died, 7 were returned to the wild and 2 are pending.



Unfortunately 2020 did not spare us a gruesome case of **abuse** with this poor Tamandua, who had been found barely alive under a pile of rocks. It was suggested that the fear of the myth that these animals could “suck out brains, through a persons ear”, may have lead to the senseless act of cruelty against this harmless creature. The patient succumbed to severe head trauma and internal bleeding and reminded us of the importance of education and outreach to dispel myths and encourage compassion for animals like this anteater. We hope to hire another educator as soon as funding can be sourced.



Look at that bulge! (compare size of head and size of belly...) How long would it take you to digest that meal? After the floods in November BWRC received two cases of baby boas, who were found inside people's houses after ingesting rats so big, the snake could not move for a bit... These babies were perfect examples for these useful **natural pest control** assistants' voracious appetite for rats. X-rays showed the rodent skeleton inside the bulge. One had also received a significant bite injury, but both snakes eventually returned to the wild.



The BWRC team and Faith mobilized during lockdown to rescue this young male howler monkey after a fall and dog attack. While the patient was almost in coma upon recovery and he had suffered a fractured skull, the BWRC team was able to stabilize and oversee his recovery to the point of regaining strength and movement, albeit without proper balance, making him look like a drunk. His skull fracture had occurred over his inner ear and this affected his balance while healing. Thankfully we were able to transfer him for further rehabilitation to our partners at Wildtracks who have already introduced him into a troop for future release.

2020 VALUE OF CHARITABLE VETERINARY SERVICES

In 2020, BWRC provided a total value of \$57,117.71 in charitable veterinary services to government and wildlife partners below.

GOB (Forest Department)	\$28,933.92
ACES (American Crocodile Sanctuary)	\$1,980
BFREE (Hickatee Conservation Center)	\$6,049.15
Green Iguana Project	\$2,960.23
Friends for Conservation & Development	\$9,124.19
Crocodile Research Coalition	\$2,139.05
Tamandua Refuge	\$50
The Belize Zoo	\$1,293.62
Total	\$52,530.16



THANKS TO BWRC'S FRIENDS & SUPPORTERS

- BWRC thanks the Summerlee Foundation as our biggest funder for veterinary care and rehabilitation of imperiled wildlife! Words cannot express how important the support from the Summerlee Foundation has been.
- Our gratitude to PACT Protected Areas Conservation Trust as well as the Humane Society of the United States for emergency support in 2020.
- A big THANK you to the Nature Trust of The Americas – NTOTA for taking on BWRC as a partner organization in 2020 and providing one of the earliest rays of hope in early lockdown!
- Thank YOU to our local business supporters for the Chiquibul Challenge and other fundraising events: BECOL, MOH, Blancaneaux, Calico Jacks, Caribbean Spice, Mystic River Resort, Eva's Massage, Ian Anderson's Cavesbranch, Mountain Equestrian Trail, Pelican Beach Resort, Parrot's Nest, Rainforest Remedies, Ramos Pest Control, San Ignacio Resort Hotel and Turtle Inn.
- A HUGE thank you to our supply donors at International Veterinary Care, EdVentures and Project Vets.



- THANK you to all donors online, as well as countless individuals lending a helping hand in 2020. Our apologies for not naming each and every one in this brief summary. Know YOU are appreciated!
- Thanks to our volunteers Craig Gair, Sara Arriaza, Michelle Devore, Trevor Devore, Shauna Morelli, Shelley Osborne, Melissa Ferguson and Marquim as well as a host of temporary volunteers from The Belize Zoo or the CRC (our apologies for missing some).
- And last but not least the directors want to thank BWRC's wonderful team of staff, including our newest additions, Keisha Chavarria And Calvin Gonzalez!
- BWRC could not have succeeded without YOUR help.

BWRC'S 2021 GOALS

- Continue to provide free veterinary care and rehabilitation to imperiled wildlife.
- To find a permanent home; on 20-acres to house a clinic, education and rehabilitation facilities.
- To expand the Wildlife Ambassador program to more communities and enforcement entities with the help of GEF Small Grants Program.
- To hire an additional vet and resume small animal and referral services and to further establish state of the art ultrasound services.
- To expand further sustainable income sources and hire a social media, marketing and fundraising assistant.
- To further increase educational outreach and source additional funding for nationwide Wildlife Ambassador training through PACT.
- To complete a third (voluntary!) external audit.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?



BWRC needs continued financial support to continue to provide free veterinary care to Belize's wildlife. All donations are welcome. Email bzwildlifeclinic@gmail.com or contact us at 615-5159.

- Highest on our list for 2021: BWRC needs land for a permanent location: 20 Acres, in Cayo in reach of the highway.
- Consider becoming a sponsor for one of our many annual events including Chiquibul Challenge Marathon (Different categories).
- Make a donation: Support veterinary care for imperiled wildlife (average cost per animal seen is ~\$75US).
- Sponsor printing of pocket guides for wildlife identification, conflict resolution and emergency response (\$20US/set; goal 500 packets).
- Sponsor a training session for law enforcement or community ambassadors (\$250US/event – goal: 20 events)
- Sponsor BWRC's outreach and education efforts (\$750US per month)
- Sponsor a holding pen for crocodiles (\$750US)
- Help our assistant Melissa to travel to the US for the next National Rehabilitation Conference to pursue her certification as a rehabilitator (\$2,000US).



- BWRC gladly accepts donations of veterinary medical supplies, equipment, and materials.
- Our patients always need: bandage materials, gauze, cast padding, vet wrap, catheters, fluids, iodine, chlorhexidine, wound covers, telfa pads, alginate gel, ectoparasite treatments, pet carriers and critical care diets.
- Donations of used newspaper, towels or cleaning supplies are always welcome.
- If you live in Cayo, love animals and are passionate about conservation, and have some free time: Consider volunteering a day a week.

Contact us with any questions or ideas you may have bwildlifeclinic@gmail.com

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST AND SUPPORT! HAPPY 2021!