

News from the Field

■ CENTRAL AMERICA

Belize

Central American Tapir Activity in Upper Macal and Raspaculo River Valley

By Sharon Matola

During the first ten days of June 2003, while investigating nesting activities of the Northern Central American Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao cyanoptera*) a total of twelve tapirs (*Tapirus bairdii*) were observed in this remote river valley of the Maya Mountains of Belize, Central America.

On the third of June, a pair was observed mating. Approaching in a kayak, my field assistant, Eligorio Sho, and I heard what I know to be an “alarm” or “stress” call made by *T. bairdii*. We have 2 male and 1 female *T. bairdii* at The Belize Zoo and have heard this vocalisation occasionally.

The pair were mating in the water, in the shallow portions of the river, closest to the riverbank itself. The water level reached their shoulder in depth. They were oblivious to our quiet approach, and when finally sensing us, both left the river, went up the riverbank and in separate directions. We stayed for a while, but they did not return to the river.

Water appears to play a significant role in the natural history of *T. bairdii*. As far as I know, this is the only recording of a mating observation in the wild. However, if the Central American tapir does prefer water as part of the reproduction strategy, then this is an important idea to note as far as inducing breeding within a captive situation, i.e. providing water to encourage breeding behaviour.

It is important to note that this same river valley, the Upper Macal and Raspaculo in the Central Maya Mountains of Belize, would be flooded should the Chalillo Dam go forward. We are still awaiting the Supreme Court to reconvene in order to see what the next position will be on this. With so little quality habitat remaining for the species, this is critical habitat for *T. bairdii* in this part of their range.

Sharon Matola

Director, Belize Zoo & Tropical Education Centre

P.O. BOX 1787, Belize City, BELIZE

E-mail: belizezoo@btl.net

Honduras

Notes on Baird's Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*) from the Southern Region of Biosfera Tawahka–Asangni, Honduras

By Josiah Townsend

During July and August 2001 I took part in a herpetological survey of the border region of Biosfera Tawahka–Asangni in eastern Honduras. During the expedition some observations were recorded regarding the local occurrence of Baird's tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*). Evidence of tapir activity as well as the human exploitation of tapirs for meat was recorded at the following sites in Departamento Gracias a Dios: Casca Tingni, Quebrada de Dos Caras, Caño Awalwas, Cayrasa, Cueriadora and the mouth of Caño Awawas.

Region

We surveyed the environs of the Reserva de la Biosfera Tawahka Asangni (RBTA) in the remote region of eastern Honduras known as La Mosquitia. Formerly an anthropological reserve, RBTA was granted “biosphere” status in 1999 by the Honduran congress. We accessed the lowland tropical forest on the southern edge of the Biosphere via the Rio Coco Segovia, which in that area forms the boundary between Honduras and Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan side of the river is heavily deforested with a number of well-established towns made up mostly of indigenous Miskito and Tawahka peoples. The Honduran side of the river that lies within RBTA boundaries contains large tracts of intact primary forest, with only some minor deforestation on the periphery of the river. This stretch of forest continues nearly undisturbed north to the Rio Patuca, and many of the people living to the south report using this forest as their primary hunting grounds. The southern area of RBTA that we surveyed is relatively flat in comparison to the rugged