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## **Report for trip started 10/05/2008 to Amazon CARES**

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**10/06/2008**

*An amazing neutering trip in Peru.*

### **Amazon CARES, Iquitos: 10th May – 24th May**

#### **Week 1**

Wow - where to start with writing about my time spent in Iquitos?

The place really and truly is amazing!

At the start of the project I had already spent the previous three months travelling other parts of South America. When speaking to others along the way about my plans to head up to Iquitos, reports of the place were always very positive and enthusiastic - and quite rightly so! The city buzzes and you can't help but get swept along with it's energy!

I flew in on a Friday evening and was met by "Harry", one of the local volunteers. He couldn't have been more welcoming and friendly, and great first impressions of him proved just - in fact as the trip went on, amongst us WVS crew, Harry gained *legendary* status. We have decided that Harry actually needs to split himself into about 5 different people because when out on the job you could guarantee at least 5 people would be calling for Harry at once! Whether it was to go catching, hold a dog for sedation, raise a vein, shave the op-site, scrub, top-up anaesthesia, you knew that if Harry was doing it, it would get done with the utmost efficiency and with an added cheeky smile. Brilliant! Harry - you're amazing!!

The journey from the airport to Pevas (the street on which Amazon

CARES clinic is situated) was an experience in itself! With Iquitos being the largest city inaccessible by road, there really isn't a great need for cars. Everybody has mo-peds instead, and taxis are in fact moto-taxis: crazy "tuk tuk" style things with a driver at the front and room for three passengers in the back. In typical South American fashion, the drivers take no prisoners and there appear to be no overtaking, undertaking, or simply taking-a-flyer-at-a-junction-and-hoping rules! Eek! However, despite this, every single moto-taxi journey always ended up with successful delivery to the right place, and with all passengers intact. Bonus! And daily we would load all the equipment onboard a convoy of said modes of transport: from drug boxes, surgical equipment, water, cages, catch nets etc to get to location, so this wasn't bad going at all!!

The WVS gang arrived in stages throughout the weekend. Keara was already *in situ* upon my arrival, Kate came on the Saturday night, and Tamsin on the Sunday. After a night in a local hostel on Friday, Keara and I headed across the road to the clinic on the Saturday morning. It was now that I met Esther (the resident Peruvian vet), Miguel (her husband, also a vet) and Bethjane (the nurse). All bent over backwards to be as helpful and friendly as you could possibly imagine and gave a tour of the clinic. At first instance I was amazed at how well set up the clinic was; with a prep area, separate operating room, place for inpatients and office with computers and fast internet connection. We then had our first patients of the project: two dogs for castration, and a bitch to be speyed. There was a good anaesthetic protocol drawn out, with charts you could just read across based on animal's weight, making life much easier! After a pre-med with xylazine and atropine patients were usually pretty flat so catheter placement and IV anaesthesia was able to be given in as safe a way as possible. Dogs are hooked up to fluids throughout the procedure, and IV top-ups given as appropriate. This is all great in theory, though the catheters used currently are butterfly style and we had a few too many hairy moments when catheters came out mid-surgery. Eek! Perhaps future volunteers could be asked to bring the more standard over-the-needle style with them in order to save themselves from a few premature grey hair growths....!?? (and, of course, to provide the patient with a smoother anaesthetic!). Otherwise the ketamine/diazepam combo provided a good intra-

operative anaesthesia and was followed by nice recoveries.

My first surgery of the project was a scraggly puppy that had been found on the street the previous day. He had moderate mange and significant hair loss. In fact, in the nicest possible way - he hadn't been blessed by the beauty brush! All went smoothly, and he remained in the surgery for the next few days. Street dogs that aren't in the best health don't tend to be released back out on the streets, but are instead taken by boat out to Cabo Lopez where they are rehabilitated and hopefully re-homed. So, on the Monday evening when we departed for the lodge, we had an extra passenger too. We spent the 30 minute journey discussing names.... most of which were based around the poor mutt's unfortunate appearance, which we then decided wasn't entirely fair, so the end result was "Eddie". Now.... Eddie too has gained *legendary* status! He is the friendliest little dog you could imagine and over the two weeks the change in him is amazing; he has gained weight, gained a significant sprouting of hair, but most importantly of all, gained a real personality! He's just great, and comes and meets us every evening when we arrive home to the chorus of "Eddiiiiiiiiiiiiieeeeeeeeeee"! He will be sorely missed by us all!

## Week 2

After a busy, yet successful first week of work at Amazon CARES it was collectively decided that a night out was to be had in downtown Iquitos! Hooray! So Friday night we hit the local salsa club under close supervision by Bruno and Lily. It was (and how shall I put this??) a "memorable" night, and let it be said the gringo girls danced like they'd never danced before - perhaps somewhat helped along by a few cuba libras and the local beer "Iquitena" (pretty good, if I remember!?!).

We stayed the night in a local hostel and were up bright and early at 6am the following morning to depart on our "jungle adventure". Hmm, I hope you can sense the sarcasm....! An adventure though, it certainly was! We had independently booked the trip with a local tour guide, who could not have gone more out of his way to ensure we had a good time. The tour was for the four of us WVS-ers only

and consequently was entirely tailored to what we wanted to do. We gave our guide a short list of “must see and dos”: see pink dolphins, swim in the Amazon, go jungle walking, see local wildlife, check out the giant lily pads, visit local indigenous villages (OK, not such a “short” list!), BUT the guy exceeded all expectations and we had an action packed two days ticking all, and more, of our checklist boxes! I´m sure I can speak on behalf of the other three when I say that I don´t think we could have laughed more if we´d tried in the 36 hours! I would strongly, strongly recommend to any future volunteers to take the opportunity of doing such a trip. It cost less than \$50 for the whole weekend and would have been cheap at twice the price. However, I do attach two warnings to this recommendation: 1. It is not for the faint hearted who like their luxuries. Accommodation was a bed on a platform on stilts, there was no running water, and the toilet, well, I´ll say no more and let you check out the piccie! 2. If the state of my face after the jungle walk is a lesson to you all... TAKE DEET, and lots of it!! Maybe I won´t attach a piccie of that mess!

Food throughout our time in Iquitos was always plentiful! The Peruvian diet doesn´t scrimp on carbs and fat! Most dishes come with rice, fried potatoes or yuka, and fried chicken or fish! How the locals aren´t the size of buses I don´t know! It all tastes great though, and there is fresh fruit around for the more healthy minded. On this subject, I must mention Marlana. Marlana was our heroine at Cabo Lopez who cooked, did our laundry and generally cleaned up after us. Dinner would always be ready upon our return “home” and she never ceased to amaze with a variety of dishes, fresh juices and fruit. Another top tip to future volunteers.... get the pancakes for brekkie as many times as possible- they´re amazing! Gracias Marlana!

The daily commute to work wasn´t your average fight-with-the-school-run, endless red-light-catching battle! In fact, the trip to and from the clinic was a highlight of the day. We would speed along the river in a slick power-boat, wind rushing through our hair and at least *thinking* we all looked very glamorous! Along the way we would pass through a village on stilts (the outskirts of Belen) where the only way to and from each house was by canoe. The whole community was

based out at river, with shops, fuel stations and even a church all raised above the water. The boat trips gave a snapshot incite into local Amazonian ways of life and just how different the daily routine is out there. However, I do have to mention at this point our first trip out to Cabo Lopez. In doing so I feel a disloyalty as it appears I´m making fun of Bruno (really Bruno I´m not, honest!). In retrospect it makes for a funny story. So here goes; having all eventually congregated in Iquitos over the first weekend, Sunday was the night for us to finally see where we were due to be staying for the coming two weeks! Tamsin´s flight hadn´t landed til 6pm so by the time she had moto-taxed out to Pevas it was knocking on about 7pm (i.e. well after sundown). This was the first time “the team” had all been together, and with girls being girls we set off on motor-mouth missions getting to know each other and generally yabbering! We were ushered down to the boat, where we loaded our stuff and set off cruising up the river. All of us got caught up in the moment and all its awesomeness (not a real word I know, but one that I think sums up the occasion quite well!) and didn´t really twig what was going on: i.e. the fact that we suddenly appeared to be stuck in a reed bed, surrounded by nothing other than.... reeds! We (or rather Bruno) turned the boat to head out of said dead-end and yet we couldn´t seem to find our way out! In the pitch black, one clump of reeds seems to look very like another.... and another.... we felt completely useless and not quite sure how to act. Should we try and help? Though we had no idea where we were. Or should we keep schtum and hope? We compromised and all got out our torches to try and at least provide a small amount of light! And, at last.... we made it out! Apparently we had overshot a small gap in the vegetation that led us through to a slip way and onto the next part of the river. The following day we all but missed it again, and this time was in full daylight, so in the dark it was near impossible! It certainly made for a talking point over dinner about how we´d all secretly been wondering whether swimming to shore or sleeping on board would have been the best option!

And finally, as a closing point from me, I have to mention my birthday! I hit 25 whilst out in Iquitos and it will certainly be a birthday never to be forgotten! During the day we were out neutering in Padre Cocha and I had to keep pinching myself to remind myself

that yes, this really was me, in the Amazon jungle, working as a vet! And upon return to the clinic that evening all the team had arranged a “party” for me! The most amazing cake had been ordered and decorated with a personalised birthday message and rum and cokes were passed round in plastic cups! The whole occasion, to me, just summarised the whole ethos at Amazon CARES: everybody is always helping and supporting each other in every way. The enthusiasm for work and sense of being part of a team is strongly evident, and I have the utmost respect and admiration for all of the staff and support crew who really make this organisation deserve to be a success. Thanks so much Amazon CARES!