



"In memory of Pinkie"

TACUGAMA CHIMPANZEE SANCTUARY

Newsletter - May 2005

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Bala Amarasekaran

In early October this year, we will be celebrating Tacugama's 10th anniversary. A mile-stone, achieved under very difficult circumstances as Sierra Leone sailed through one of Africa's brutal civil wars.

Back in 1995, on a gloomy rainy day, 8 chimpanzees moved with me to the Western area forest reserve to become the founder members of Tacugama. After a decade, Tacugama is now home for 78 chimpanzees.

It all started with a rescue of an infant chimp called Bruno in 1987! Year later we rescued Julie. As the years went by the list kept growing. At that time, not even in my wildest dreams, I had thought of setting up a sanctuary for orphaned chimps. But those little chimps touched my soul and changed the course of my life. Leading me to something meaningful, rewarding and challenging.

The past ten years are filled with so many events and memories. Both happy

and sad. Losing Pinkie, the white chimp, and Little boy after a long struggle with mental illness, will stay with me for ever but gives me all the more reasons to continue to care for these chimps.

During the civil war, we came so close to losing the sanctuary on many occasions but we survived! Words cannot express the level of commitment and bravery by each and every staff member during this trying time.

Thankfully, by 2001 the war in Sierra Leone was coming to an end and we were able to embark on various activities. It was time to expand our facilities to accommodate the wave of new chimps rescued and brought to us as a result of years of war. We can now boast of several forested enclosures and larger holding facilities to enable our Chimps to enjoy a semi-wild environment. Our work has greatly complimented the drive to stop the illegal trade and possession of chimpanzees across Sierra Leone through law enforcement,

education and sensitisation campaigns.

Collaboration with the Forestry department, Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, Law enforcement agencies and support from various organisations and individuals has been the key to our achievements so far.

Sadly, the problems these chimps face are far from over. We need to do much more. I dream of a day, when all our chimps can be rehabilitated back into the wild and mechanisms are put in place to protect the ones in the wild. It will be a long and hard journey....

But I will stay the course.

THE CHIMPS AT TACUGAMA

At present, there are three established groups at Tacugama. Bruno leads the main group of 31.

There are four females in Bruno's group that gave birth in 2003. Julie to Jumu, Sitta to Suma, Babes to Bintu, and Gabi to Gara. It was not our intention to breed, but a

short delay with the implementation of a new birth control system was good enough for one of the males, Christo to out smart all of us.



Bruno

However, the baby boom has been a rewarding experience. Bringing in so much of harmony and stronger relationships amongst the group. It has given them a chance to express their ability to love and care. It is so satisfying to see the mothers coping so well without having had the chance of learning from their kind as they themselves were rescued as infants and brought to Tacugama years ago.



Babes, Bintu and Omo

The second group, Rosalind's consists of 18 youngsters and the favourite of majority of the

children visiting the sanctuary. The third adult group, Augusta's, is formed by three individuals with two more in the process of being introduced.

NEW ARRIVALS

With the ongoing law enforcement and sensitisation campaign, we continue to receive many orphan chimpanzees. After the obligatory three-month quarantine period, chimpanzees enter a process of socialisation. Mamma Lucy's group with 18 individuals are going through this process. Mamma Lucy is the eldest one and exerts her authority as a true mama to all the youngsters in the group. As soon as their new holding facilities are ready, they will join Rosalind's group.



Mamma Lucy watching over her troop

Junior, Nyawa and Bebi are the youngest and too young to join the current groups. They will have to wait till a new group is formed.

This month we have rescued three more chimpanzees, Jimmy, Baba and Zack. They are currently in quarantine and trying to settle down.



Willie weighing Nyawa

STAFF

Bala and eight of his comrades (Willie, Mosses, Dauda, Capri, Saidu, Tamba, Ali, Posseh and Aruna), plus two forest guards (James and Winston) continue to serve at Tacugama. Willie and Dauda have been in Tacugama right from the beginning and the 10th anniversary will be a real celebration for them.

VOLUNTEERS

Our last volunteer, Asami Kabasawa, a Japanese anthropologist, left us recently to pursue her PhD studies.



Asami, Willie and Dauda performing a medical treatment to a sedated Chico.

Asami worked with us for 4 years and her dedication to serve the chimps is enviable. She will always be part of Tacugama and we will miss her. We wish her all the best for bright future.

We are also very grateful to Dr. J. Mahoney, Ms. Janis Carter and Mr. Mike Pugh, for their kind contribution over the years.

For the first time in Tacugama's history, we have a full-time veterinarian. Rosa M. Garriga arrived in March from Barcelona, Spain after working for 4.5 years at the Orangutan Care Center & Quarantine in Borneo. We sincerely hope that she will have a happier and a longer stay at Tacugama. Dr. Rosa is already contributing much towards our work and busy with the plans to set up a field laboratory at Tacugama.

As there has been a continuous demand to come to volunteer at Tacugama, we have recently finished building quarters for the volunteers. We are now in the position to admit those who are interested in coming to Tacugama to help us. For more and specific information about volunteer opportunities at Tacugama, please write to: tacugamasl@yahoo.com

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Ten years ago, the sanctuary started with just a few large cages where the eight founder chimpanzees lived. Currently the sanctuary has 3 km of electric fences divided into 7 forested enclosures and several dens.

We have also expanded camp with new holding facilities, a veterinary unit and office, a resource centre and volunteer quarters.



New quarters for volunteers

YEAR'S GOALS IN PROCESS AND IN MIND

We hope to build a new quarantine area and a field laboratory.

We are already in the process of building a five-roomed house for the staff.



Construction of the new staff quarters

One of our most challenging project this year is to bring running water to the sanctuary. We have built a dam across the Tacugama stream and in process of laying a kilometre long pipeline up to camp. This will be a remarkable achievement. We can't wait to see water running from the taps!



Tacugama dam and pipe system

We are also building three new dens in order to move in Mamma Lucy's group.



Construction of new dens for Mamma Lucy's group

The access road to Tacugama is being paved, and hopefully no more visitors will get stuck on their way up to the sanctuary.

A welcoming and waiting area for visitors is being planned. This would double as information centre and as a sales outlet to sell some merchandise.

MEDIA

As Sierra Leone continues to enjoy much awaited peace, Tacugama receives more attention from the media. We have completed three film projects. All three are still being aired around the world. Check your satellite channel programme for:

"Tacugama - Forest of hope" Rock Wallaby, 2002

“Chimps under fire”
Southern Star/Animal
Planet, 2003

“Bala friends of
chimpanzees” Strawberry
Films/ Canal plus, 2004

Publicity from these
documentaries brought in
further support to the
sanctuary. A special
recognition goes to Rock
Star, John Lyndon for his
generous donation after
seeing “Forest of Hope”.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Tacugama not only serves
the interests of our
primate relatives, the
chimpanzees, but also tries
to assist the poor people
living in the nearby
villages, Regent, Bathurst
and Charlotte. Our
permanent staff is all from
one of these three villages
and as a policy we recruit
all our labour force from
these villages. We also
buy produce and fruits
from the local community
to feed the chimps.

In the past year,
community people and
institutions, especially
schools, have benefited
from various items
donated by Gatwick
Ground Staff – Aviance.
We would like to recognise
Joseph and Karren
Sabharwal for their
tireless work in organising
and Astraeus airlines for
freighting these donations
free of charge.

EDUCATION

Sensitisation drive
through radio, print media
and school visits
continues.

We have also hired the
services of a local artist to
produce billboards and
messages around the
sanctuary with
educational information
that will be displayed
along the visitor’s trail,
complementing the
sanctuary’s guided tours
to school children and
visitors.



Local artist, Santos, trying out
his skills

VISITORS

Many friends, supporters
and well-wishers continue
to visit the sanctuary. We
were highly honoured by
the visit of His Excellency,
Dr. Alhaji Tejan Kabbah,
the President of the
Republic of Sierra Leone
in April 2005.



Presidential visit

MEETINGS / TRAINING

Tacugama being a member
of PASA (Pan African
Sanctuaries Alliance),
continues to benefit from
training in education and
health care management
organised and sponsored
by PASA in various
locations within Africa.

SPONSORS

Tacugama would not have
survived without the help
and support from many
organisations and
individuals:

AAP, American Embassy
in SL, Arcus Foundation,
Dewar Wildlife Trust, EU,
Aviance - Gatwick ground
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NL, National Authorizing
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