

Guyana - land forsaken or preserved?

Country at a crossroad

By **MARC JOHNSON** and The Honorable **SHIRLEY MELVILLE, MP**
Guyana

The conservation efforts of Foster Parrots in Guyana unfortunately began with the death of a close friend and board member, Nancy Cullity. Nancy and her husband, Brian, had spent many years on the hunt for the remote places where tourists are few and far between. They had taken many adventurous trips including a trek across the Darien peninsula of Panama and deep into the northeast jungles of Peru. Their last trip together was to Guyana where they met the villagers of St. Cuthberts (some 40 miles south of Georgetown, the capital), known to the local people as Pakuri. It was here that they met an indigenous people hanging on to the last vestiges of their cultural past. Brian and Nancy's trip into the jungles just south of the village brought them face to face with the gold miners, washing away the forests with high-powered hoses leaving the land scarred and the rivers muddied and polluted.

Pakuri's culture is suffering from its close proximity to the highly populated areas of the north where over 90% of Guyana's population live. The heritage and culture of this village is fast disappearing as the trappings of the modern consumer culture take hold. Guyana is roughly the size of Idaho. There are only 740,000 people in Guyana, 90% of whom live on the north central/east coast. The remaining 10% are Amerindians. 90% of Guyana is covered by rainforest and 95% of that is untouched. The areas in the north of Guyana have also suffered greatly from easy access by the wildlife trappers, miners and loggers, thus making any eco-tourism effort virtually impossible. The forests were being taken, the animals were hard to find and the culture of thatched roofs and bows and arrows had given way to pickup trucks and jobs in Georgetown.

This is where the true urgency of the choices we make now will determine which path will determine Guyana's future. Many foreign commercial interests are at play with their plundering eyes set on the vast mineral and natural resources of the interior. All of these economic interests threaten the vast wilderness that makes Guyana the unique earthly gem it is today. Must Guyana do what is seen as most valuable for its economic future? Unfortunately the obvious and easiest choice is to exploit what is immediately available... the forests, the animals and the minerals.

The choices confronting Guyana are limited. To leap into the modern industrial world or to take a measured and thoughtful path to become the world's leading rainforest tourist destination is the



Marc and Shirley (trusty Betsy, the Landrover in background) visiting the Farias house.

crossroad that now faces this nation and I often wonder if the people of Guyana even know how special their country really is. Is there any reason for them to know this when one considers the examples of our "modern" world and its trend towards over-use and exploitation in the name of progress and economic gain. Do they even realize that they have any other alternatives?

From our first encounter we knew that there was something very special about Guyana and that we had landed there at that "unique" moment in time when a little effort could make a big impact. Knowing that over 90% of its rainforests were intact we sensed this opportunity would be fleeting and we knew that we needed to explore until we could find the place where our small effort would have the maximum benefit. With the preservation of parrots

Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP



Yellow-fronted Amazon in a Georgetown coconut tree.



Our trusty guide, Paul Farias, getting in some bow and arrow practice!

Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP

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Nestled in the foothills of the Kanuku mountains are the many Amerindian villages of the Rupununi.

and the conservation of their habitat as our goal we set off into the “hinterland”. Again, good fortune would smile upon us as we were introduced to The Honorable MP Shirley Melville. Shirley is an Arawak Amerindian with strong beliefs and motivations to ensure that the forests and the people and animals that depend on them are preserved. Shirley is passionate about Amerindian rights as well as a staunch defender of the eco-systems of the Rupununi region of central Guyana. Her intimate knowledge of the customs and traditions of the Amerindian culture saved our efforts from the many pitfalls that would normally await the uninitiated in the eco-tourism/conservation field. Without Shirley, the difficulties of accomplishing all that we have would surely have been much more difficult, if not impossible. Her addition to our Board and position as



In this photo are those who took the courageous step into their own future. The lodge complex has been built entirely by labor donated by these wonderful people. Entire families have moved onto the site while work is completed.

Project Coordinator has made this project the success it has become. Thank you Shirley for your tireless dedication, hard work and for your vision.

Our proposal to Nappi Village was a simple one. We would provide the funding for the building of a lodge complex in exchange for a pledge by Nappi Village to protect the parrots and other wildlife in the 144,000 acre area under their control. The lodge would be 100% owned and operated giving the village complete control over all aspects of lodge operation.

It has been a tough eight months but as the lodge nears completion and the first guests have returned with rave reviews our hopes are becoming a reality. In addition Foster Parrots has provided a TV, DVD player and generator as part of our Video Pal program connecting the Nappi middle school with

one here in Massachusetts. Plans are now underway to outfit a vehicle with similar equipment that will then be able to visit more remote villages and to expand our “lodges for conservation” program. The February trip costs approximately \$2,100, all inclusive - includes the round trip air travel out of NYC (three spots available).

In maps projecting the destruction of the rainforests of the world, Guyana is expected to be one of the last bastions of this quickly disappearing eco-treasure. Little did we know when we visited that we would be able to take part in an effort to save a small piece of this treasure. If we do nothing more than sit in our “comfy chairs” proclaiming “save the rainforest” it should come as no surprise if in twenty years Guyana’s forests and heritage are just a memory.



There are many signs and painted walls declaring the way to a secure future of conservation. This one is located outside Shirley’s home in Lethem.



The interior of the dining “benab”. It will be furnished with chairs and tables and act as a lounge/bar area.

Culture and conservation

a natural union

By The Honorable SHIRLEY MELVILLE, MP Guyana

Rupununi, named after a berry found along the Rupununi river, is a haven for unique and abundant forests and wildlife. To compliment this treasure are the friendly and hospitable people of the Amerindian tribes known as the Wapishana, the Macushi, the Wai Wai and the Arawaks. All are closely tied to their culture and all realize the need to preserve our environment and live harmoniously within it. Changes, however, are occurring which may be inevitable. How will we deal with these changes while at the same time recognizing that a way must be found to keep strong the link between our culture and conservation of our lands.

Foster Parrots Ltd has made a powerful, bold and timely step in a very short time in addressing some of these issues with just a modest but well targeted effort. One must understand it was a step into the unknown. Fortunately for Foster Parrots and the village of Nappi, there are groups of committed and determined persons involved in the Nappi eco tourism project. Just eight months ago a little seed was planted and it has begun to germinate as a result of the caring environment that was provided. Most important is the fact that Marc and the Foster Parrots team recognized and respected the culture and practices of the local people. Therefore, emphasis was placed on the utilization of the villager's knowledge and skills. An educational/cultural exchange program was established with the Nappi school where the donation of a TV, DVD player and generator made the dissemination of information via DVD's possible. Having the educational aspect attended to, the people of Nappi were mobilized to take on the challenge of finding sustainable, economical development along with the conservation of our wildlife resources. The

alternatives to trapping were considered and eco tourism was agreed on as a viable option. Once again Foster Parrots played a pivotal role in making a dream come true. Finances were pledged for the construction of an eco tourism complex with the labour being donated by the people of Nappi Village and despite the harsh conditions of the rainy season (Guyana has two seasons, the rainy and the dry season) we have watched the building of the lodge in record time. It was inspiring to see our people put their shoulders to the wheel, determined to make "Project Guyana" a successful pilot project. Work was done with the macaws flying overhead and monkeys swinging from tree to tree, an experience to take your breath away. We invite you to come and see for yourself!

As the Indigenous Parliamentarian for the largest region in Guyana, it would be remiss of me if I did not embrace such a noble cause and find ways of complimenting the same. Therefore, apart from my responsibilities as project coordinator for Foster Parrots-Guyana, I have held many discussions with leaders across the Rupununi, fellow



Photo: Marc Johnson

Karen Windsor, Marc and Shirley Melville outside the cyber-cafe in Lethem.... yes, you can get your email in this remote town in south western Guyana!

parliamentarians, renowned conservation organizations, tourism agencies, Guyana's wildlife division and other highly influential and concerned persons, on the way forward. The main issues were:

1. to find ways to sensitize our people about the need to value the riches of our biodiversity and,
2. to look at the weak areas of Guyana's wildlife regulations.

Educational programs on the National Television, regional educational outreach programs and the expansion of eco-tourism lodges were well supported by all of these groups. Guyana is a beautiful country with a rich biodiversity and vast uninhabited rainforests. Until the recent ban by the EU Guyana was the fifth largest exporter of live caught birds in the world, mainly parrots, macaws, parakeets, song birds as



Photo: Karen Windsor, Co-director FP

Representatives from all of the villages in the Rupununi don their finest traditional outfits for the opening ceremonies of Amerindian Heritage week, held in late September every year.

Photo: Marc Johnson



Karen and Shirley sit next to the Prime Minister at the Amerindian Heritage celebrations held in Shulinab, a village located at the southern tip of the Kanuku mountains.



The spider monkeys of Guyana seem to be as curious about us as we are excited to see them. This particular variety of spider monkey seems much furrier than their counterparts in other parts of South America.

well as mammals (mainly primates), reptiles, amphibians and arthropods. Eco-tourism offers many, the opportunity to economically gain from the forests without destroying them. Therefore, Foster Parrots has started a most meaningful and humanitarian initiative. We invite you to join them and make a difference. Not only would you be able to see one of the wonders of the world, Kaitour Falls 741 single drop waterfalls, but you would be enriching the lives of many Amerindians. There would be a ripple effect with the empowerment of the Indigenous people, the creation of jobs, confidence building, improved standard of living, happy faces, and most of all the conservation of an important part of our planet Earth. As the saying goes, "If you don't climb the mountains, you can't see the view".

Foster Parrots we thank you and we are fortunate to have you as our partners in development. Let us continue to make this world a better and healthier place.

For more information on visiting Guyana please contact us at Marc@fosterparrots.com or visit our website at www.fosterparrots.com



This year saw the first celebration of Jane Goodall's "Roots & Shoots" International Peace Day at the Nappi school where some 85 children and their teachers are now linked to schools in the US via the Foster Parrots "Video Pal" program.

WPT USA branch

The joy of automatic gifts!

Would you be willing to trade in one gourmet coffee drink a week to help parrots? Buy a fancy toy for those wild birds? Or treat them to a luscious pomegranate or organic kiwi every day if they'd indulge? For the amount of a daily piece of fruit, a weekly coffee, or a monthly parrot toy you could have the pleasure of giving a substantial gift to wild parrots. We are happy to offer the ability to make your gift to WPT USA automatic either by direct deposit from your bank account or as a recurring charge on your credit card. Gifts may be made monthly, semi-annually or annually. You won't miss the renewal cards, the memory lapses or the check writing. The parrots will benefit from a reliable source of funds and your contribution goes farther as we spend a bit less time on annual renewals. Contact Joanna Eckles at 651-275-1877 or usa@worldparrottrust.org for details.

Make your holiday purchases count!

The holiday shopping season is upon us. We would like to invite you to consider supporting the World Parrot Trust-USA through an organization called iGive.com. By going through iGive.com to the stores you might normally purchase from online you can have a percentage of your purchase donated to WPT USA. The iGive.com network contains over 650 well-known online stores. Depending on the store, anywhere from 1% to 26% of your purchase is donated here to help parrots. If you join iGive.com and make a purchase within 45 days from one of 650 or so participating stores, iGive.com will donate \$5 FREE!

How it works

1. Go to iGive.com and join to Support World Parrot Trust-USA. It's FREE, private, & easy.
2. Shop at iGive.com at familiar stores like Lands' End, Office Depot, JCPenney, Neiman Marcus, Expedia, Barnes & Noble, and eBay to mention just a few!
3. Up to 26% of EACH purchase gets donated to World Parrot Trust-USA!
4. And, if you download iGive.com's 'shopping window' you will get a notice on your screen when you are shopping on a site within the network when you may not have known you were. That way, even if you go online to shop without going through iGive to that store, the donation still goes to World Parrot Trust USA.

USA Store Update

Our USA Online Store is 1 year old! We have learned a lot this year and continue to try to update the store features to make it easier for you to join, renew and purchase items. Thank you for your comments and suggestions. Some we have incorporated, some we are still working on!

The main store questions we still get are about Logins and Passwords at checkout. A Login name and Password are optional. They simply make it easier when you visit the store at a later time. You have 3 choices at checkout:

1. Create a New Account: Choose this option to set up the Login name and password of your choice for future visits.
2. Place an Order without an Account
3. Login to Existing Account: Use this option to enter your login and password if you created an account on a previous visit.

Attention Birdwatchers in USA and Canada

Great Backyard Bird Count - February 17-20, 2006

Everyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to seasoned experts. During the count, bird watchers tally up birds for as little as 15 minutes, or for as long as they like, keeping track of the highest number of each bird species they see together at one time. People are encouraged to report birds from public lands and local parks in the United States and Canada, as well as from their backyards. Participants enter their numbers online at www.birdsource.org/gbbc and can explore sightings maps, lists, and charts as the count progresses. Contact 1-800-843-BIRD (1-800-843-2473) for more information.