



El Bosque Pluvial

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El Bosque Pluvial's

YCC Teens + El Yunque = Conservation Conscience

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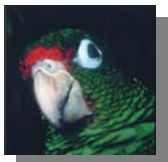
By Pedro D. Rios

filled with interesting stories about El Yunque, America's only tropical rainforest and its staff of Forest Service professionals; browse and enjoy!



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The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program was established by the federal government in 1974. In those more budget friendly times, the YCC summer program at El Yunque often enrolled over 150 young people. Applicants were chosen by lottery; two teenagers (one boy and one girl, 15 to 19 years of age) from each island Municipality. Teens selected would spend much of their summer vacation helping with conservation projects on the El Yunque forest. Each afternoon they would board buses and return to their "summer home," a barracks at Naval Station Roosevelt Roads in nearby Ceiba. There they would eat dinner, socialize and join in recreational activities until "lights-out."

Twenty Five years later I was chosen to take part in El Yunque's YCC program. By this time reduced funding had caused the program to shrink; there were only ten of us - five boys and five girls. We went home each afternoon when our work was done - no more "camping out" at the naval base. Most of us were from the northeast part of the island, the rest were from the San Juan metro area. For a month we repaired trails, went "electro-fishing" (a shocking experience!), cleaned up trash, planted trees and so on. Two years later, my younger brother was selected to take part in the YCC program - like me, he enjoyed it immensely.

The YCC program began as a three-year pilot program, intended to "further the development and

maintenance of natural resources by America's youth." By 1977, the YCC program had proved so successful that a second program, the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) was created. It differed from the YCC program by enrolling young adults aged 16 to 23. Sadly, the YACC program lost its funding and was cancelled in 1981.

The YCC program has thrived - the teens selected to participate in this year's program at El Yunque added new and fresh experiences to their summer activities. The 2008 group (4 girls and 3 boys) was divided into a "recreation support team" and an "ecosystem support team," lending helping hands to support different but complementary forest conservation projects.



17 year old **Jonathan Resto** was joined by **Shantar Monique Deida** and **Catherine Sanchez**, both 16 years of age, to form an "all Fajardo" recreation support team. Their responsibilities included trash pick-up, nature trail renovation, painting and assisting Forest visitors. The "all island" ecosystem support team included **Ingrid Viruet** from Arecibo, **Francisco J. Vega Ramirez** from Rio Grande, both 17, **Jose Alberto Negron** from Luquillo and **Susej Gotain** from Rio Grande, both 15 years

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The Forest Supervisor's Message



This has been an extremely busy time on the El Yunque NF; we've been so busy working with vital Forest projects that we've had to postpone our Forest's "family" newsletter! So, I decided to rush this long-overdue edition into print to bring you up-to-speed on what we have accomplished, and to outline the challenges that we face.

Together we have achieved much; here are a few examples: a "core team" of experts drawn from each leadership team, led by CS&P's Blanca Ruiz have been preparing El Yunque's Interpretation & Conservation Education Master Plan; another team of Forest experts designed and is managing construction of the new Rio de Sabana Recreation Area, serving our neighbors in Naguabo; a Forest civil engineering team is supervising reconstruction of PR road # 966 -- both projects are scheduled for completion in the Fall.

We are facing many new challenges; due in part to Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) federal spending priorities, the Forest Service budget is shrinking. A dramatic increase in fuel cost has added to our fiscal woes, resulting in increased Forest operating costs. To mitigate the effects of this shortfall, we are working non-stop to streamline our Forest organization into a more efficient model, one that will help us to achieve our operational goals while we continue to improve our services to both our island neighbors and our off-island visitors.

Here are some ways in which you can help -- encourage your friends and neighbors to lend us their skills and spare time and become members of our growing El Yunque Volunteer Corps; or ask them to investigate opportunities to join with our corporate partners to help our Forest implement exciting new projects and programs!

As each day passes, we all become more and more aware of the impending challenges of global climate change. To combat this threat we must revise how we think about our island's finite resources. We must adjust our daily habits so we can better conserve our use of the Island's overstressed electrical energy grid; we also must strive to discover creative and practical methods to make our homes and buildings more "green." Even the most insignificant

action contributes to conserving vital resources and will ultimately serve to lessen the effects of global climate change on our island -- it's up to us all to help reduce our "carbon footprint" by being environmentally conscientious, both at home and in our Forest workplace.

A good place to begin is at our Forest's website: www.fs.fed.us/r8/el_yunque; it features links to other sites that provide climate change learning modules.

A reminder to all -- the Atlantic hurricane season began on June 1st -- we must all be prepared! Although our island has been blessed in the past and hurricanes have passed us by, there are no "guarantees," even with the advantages of modern technology, the tracks of tropical storms are unpredictable at best -- by now you should have stocked-up on basic provisions and made specific plans to survive the aftermath of a potential tropical storm.

As always, I welcome your questions; I am anxious to receive your "feedback" on these vital issues.

Finally -- I wish you all a peaceful, enjoyable and productive summer!

Hasta pronto,

Pablo

PR Golf Pro Chi Chi Rodriquez comes to El Portal

Puerto Rico's beloved golf pro **Chi Chi Rodriquez** dropped by El Portal on July 25th -- Welcomed by Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz** and El Portal Rain Forest Center Director **Jose "Pepe" Ortega**, he came to attend a book signing by award winning children's book author **Maria de Jesus Paolicelli**.

When Chi Chi was sent the manuscript of Marisa's book "**There's a Coqui in my Shoe**," he loved it; urged-on by fellow Puerto Ricans: Academy Award winning actress **Rita Moreno** and Grammy winning singer **Jose Feliciano**, he

decided to publish the book himself, after other book publishers had turned it down -- soon after it was published by Chi Chi, Marisa's book won the coveted International Latino Book Award in the "Best Educational Children's book in English" category!

Maria, the book's illustrator and Chi Chi, signed lots of books and like everyone else who attended the event, they had a wonderful time -- "**There's a Coqui in my Shoe**" is currently on sale at El Portal's Eastern National book store and at its satellite locations throughout the Forest.



YCC Teens + El Yunque = “Conservation Conscience”

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of age. Ecosystem support team members worked at electro fishing, river and field projects and trash pick-up. Occasionally the teams would join to share tasks or to “swap” jobs; as a change of pace; one day both teams traveled to Fort San Cristobal to visit and work with fellow YCC workers in Old San Juan.

This year’s YCC program at El Yunque included a new and exciting feature; one day each week both teams attended a training session given by El Yunque staff members - **Jeff Walker** lectured on forest archaeology, **Bruce Drapeau** showed them how to read maps, **Luis Rivera** spoke about the rain forest’s tropical vegetation types, and **Ilda Bonilla** described the process of urban reforestation. The YCC teens enjoyed

and appreciated the training sessions - they discovered new and interesting facts about El Yunque, its historic heritage and its ecological biodiversity – they learned about the Forest Service’s conservation mission – and best of all, they had fun, while getting to know each other better!

Asked what they liked best about their YCC experience, the groups answers ranged from the “fun of electro fishing” to the “lasting friendships we all made during one short month of working together as a team. Ingrid, by far the most outspoken of the bunch, commented “My favorite part has been discovering how valuable and important our natural resources are, from a more serious, “non-tourist” viewpoint.” She continued “A good example of this was when our team developed a “conscience” about the trash problem; we had to pick up so much of it!” “Yeah,” interjected Francisco, “working in the field and

learning a lot about nature has made us realize that if we try hard, we can take care of our environment!”

Over three decades, the YCC program has become a cornerstone of the Forest Service’s commitment to the conservation of our natural resources. The program at El Yunque is especially important; it allows teenage participants to work and learn in America’s only tropical rain forest – a truly unique experience that they will always cherish.

Pedro D. Rios is a contributing writer to El Bosque Pluvial; this Fall he will begin his pursuit of a Master’s degree in English Literature at the University of Puerto Rico, San Juan campus.

El Yunque NF Comings & Goings:

Biologist **Felipe Cano** returned to us from Arizona; Tonto NF - GIS specialist **Iris Tirado** joined the staff at Camp Santiago - Archaeologist **Raymond Feliciano** leaves Camp Santiago to pursue graduate studies at UPR —

Order of the Arrow Boy Scout Group from Northeast US visits El Yunque NF

The morning of August 7th 2008 was sunny; a light breeze was blowing through the El Portal Rain Forest Center parking area as more than 300 Boy Scouts, members of the Northeast United States Council of the Order of the Arrow, debarked from six large Grayline buses.

At El Portal’s theater, recent Order of the Arrow inductee (and EYNF Forest Supervisor) **Pablo Cruz** welcomed the group to El Yunque – Forest “legend” and long-time Order of the Arrow member **Frank Wadsworth**, who has worked with island Boy Scouts for over a half century, gave the scouts an inspiring message – next on the agenda was a tour of El Portal and its exhibits conducted by **Jose Ortega** and **Blanca Ruiz**. Around noon the scouts were transported by mini-bus to Yokahu tower, where **Luis Rivera** and **Bruce Drapeau** explained

Forest vegetation and parrot habitat improvement. The scouts traveled to Palo Colorado Visitor Center to eat a catered lunch, followed by a nature trail hike – time was running short so the scouts were only able to experience the La Mina river trail, the La Mina waterfall and Big Tree trail. VIS Operation Leader **Victor Cuevas** (a former Order of the Arrow member) and interpreter/guides **Cynthia Manfred**, **Edwin Velazquez** and **Frank Torres** were stationed at strategic points along both trails to answer the scout’s questions.

The scouts were enthusiastic about their El Yunque adventure; they were exhausted, but happy – all agreed that they would like to return again to learn more about America’s only tropical rain forest !

Late that afternoon, the scouts were transported back to El Portal where they re-boarded the Grayline buses to embark on further island adventures!



EL BOSQUE PLUVIAL

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FOREST SPOTLIGHT



By Pedro D. Rios.



This issue's **Forest Spotlight** is focused on one of El Yunque's most versatile employees: Biological Science Technician, Anastasio "Baby" Gomez Matta, who has been a vital part of the El Yunque National Forest team for over a quarter of a century. Anastasio's diverse stockpile of scientific skills is complemented by an innate sense of responsibility and a constant awareness of potential safety hazards. These traits have gained him the respect and admiration of supervisors and fellow workers.

Part of a multidisciplinary group of technicians and scientists, Gomez

Matta lends his expertise to support a bewildering array of Forest projects; identifying and inventorying endangered plant species, building and improving the nesting cavities of *Amazona Vittata*, the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot and lending a talented hand to enhance various fishery and hydrology projects. He also trains and certifies personnel from the Forest Service and associated Federal and Commonwealth agencies in vital field skills such as safe chainsaw operation, proper tree climbing procedures and basic firefighting techniques.

Anastasio was born and raised in the northeast community of Fajardo; while attending high school he was selected to participate in a Forest Service Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program – it was "love at first sight". In 1983 he joined the Forest's Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) program: when that program ended, he was accepted as a full-time Forest Service employee. At one point or another over the years, he has worked in most of El Yunque's job classifications, but his first love remains working in the field with parrots and aquatic species.

In his free time, "Baby" enjoys playing dominoes with his friends or relaxing while reading a good book. Because he is descended from a long line of fishermen, he frequently takes advantage of holidays and long weekends to board his boat with friends and travel to the nearby offshore islands of Culebra and Vieques.

Anastasio likes to work at night; he says that his senses have adapted to the nocturnal environment, making it easier for him to notice things that untrained eyes might miss. Last year his keen eyesight, honed by many years of experience, helped him to identify the Spincheek Sleeper (*Eleotris pisonis*), a fish species never before recorded in El Yunque's streams.

He gets angry when he discovers evidence of pollution in the Forest's rivers or streams – "the damage people do is incredible – each tiny segment of the Forest's watercourses teems with aquatic life — aquatic animals are put at serious risk when humans pollute our streams and rivers" he states forcefully.

He regards his El Yunque colleagues as family – and every Forest employee feels the same about their beloved "Baby."