

# BELIZEANS CONSERVE THEIR HOWLER MONKEYS

*The nation of Belize is on the East Coast of Central America and borders on Guatemala and Mexico.*

*It was formerly known as British Honduras.*

The establishment of the Community Baboon\* Sanctuary in 1985 began an alternative method of conservation in Belize (\*baboon is the Creole word for howler monkey). The community sanctuary idea was initiated by Dr. Robert Horwich with the cooperation of 12 landowners and the village of Bermudian Landing. Since then, with the help of Jon Lyon, a botanical ecologist, the sanctuary has expanded to include 75 landowners and 8 villages to encompass 18 square miles of riverine forest along the Belize River and approximately 900 black howler monkeys *Alouatta pigra*.

These landowners have voluntarily pledged to abide by a plan to manage their lands in accord with the needs of the howlers and other wildlife. This includes leaving forest strips along the riverbanks, between property boundaries, and across large cleared areas. Landowners have also agreed to leave specific food trees for the monkeys. Most of the landowners are subsistence farmers who depend on their lands for their livelihood, and should be commended for their pledges.

In 1987 Dr. Horwich set up an operational plan for the sanctuary in which a local man, Fallet Young, was hired as the first Sanctuary Manager. The Sanctuary Manager and his assistant work under the auspices of the Belize Audubon Society. The Society's Executive Director, Walter Craig, has administered the project along with other Belizean wildlife sanctuaries for the Belize Audubon Society.

The Community Baboon Sanctuary has 4 main goals of conservation, education, research, and tourism. Although the main emphasis of the sanctuary has been conservation of the howler monkeys, its goals have broadened to include the general flora and fauna of the riverine forest. A study of the endemic, endangered Central American river turtle *Dermatemys mawii* has begun, and plans are being made to replant some of the deforested riverbanks and to reintroduce hardwood tree species.

The education program includes lectures on flora and fauna conservation and natural history to school classes and tourist groups. Most groups are given tours along a labelled trail which coincides with sign texts of the guidebook. This 110-page, illustrated guidebook includes a mixture of general information about the tropical rainforest with specific information about the local flora and fauna (copies are available for \$5 US postpaid from Dr. R. Horwich, Box 96, Gays Mills, WI 54631, U.S.A.).

The most recent addition is a small rural museum which will exhibit aspects of the local flora, fauna, and Creole culture. The museum grounds are currently being planted with local plants. The museum opening is planned for mid 1989.

Research projects are currently being carried out on howler monkey ecology and reproductive biology of the Central American river turtle, as well as the ecology and regeneration of the river



**Black Howler Monkey.**

forest following slash-and-burn agriculture. Finally, in order to encourage local residents in their community conservation, the Sanctuary Manager is working with local residents to establish a small tourist industry.

The innovative approach of the Community Baboon Sanctuary has earned it an honorable mention for the 1987 Rolex Spirit of Enterprise Award and the James Waight Conservation Award from the Belize Audubon Society. Mr. Young has also received a conservation award from the American Society of Primatologists for his work with the howler monkeys. The initiation phase for the sanctuary was supported by World Wildlife Fund-US. Maintenance money for the continuance of the sanctuary is now being granted by the Zoological Society of Milwaukee County. Additional funding for museum exhibits and the river turtle study has come from the Lincoln Park Zoological Society.

The innovative approach of community conservation is rapidly gathering support in other areas. Dr. Horwich has been approached by conservationists in Belize, Guatemala, and the United States to help initiate other similar community based projects. Presently, work has begun with a Wisconsin conservation group to help develop a protected winter roosting area for bald eagles along the Wisconsin River. Community conservation of private lands is helping local people to preserve their wildlife and natural areas while still utilizing the lands for their needs.

**Stop Press:** Walter Craig, Executive Director of the Belize Audubon Society, has informed IPPL that:

Perhaps we may have another monkey sanctuary soon. A young adult male howler has taken up residence in Guanacaste Park, a 5-acre reserve on the outskirts of Belize's capital, Belmopan. So far there is no sign of a troop or other monkey and we suspect "Hank Solo" was banished from a troop after an unsuccessful effort to take control. Park Personnel are very excited and are closely monitoring developments. The park is about 40 miles upriver from the northwestern boundary of the Community Baboon Sanctuary.



**Fallet Young showing school children around sanctuary.**  
Photo Robert Horwich