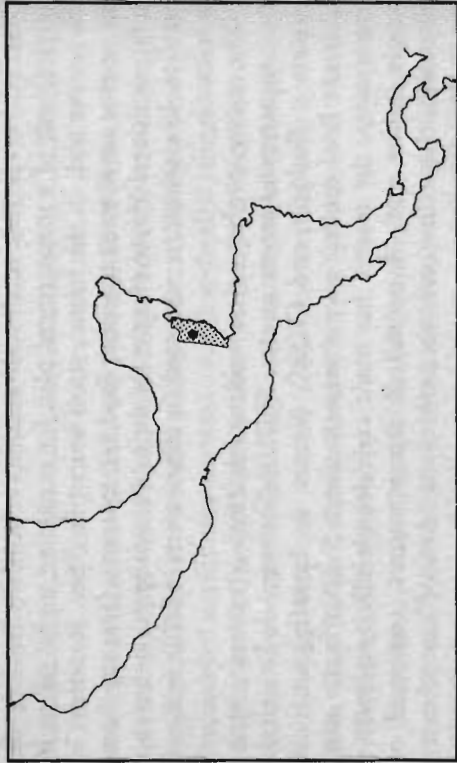


groups of two to ten, eating leaves and fruit. Howlers are so named for the loud lion-like roaring they often perform in antiphonal group choruses. Their range is very limited, and their future survival depends upon the protection of forest within the areas of Belize, Mexico and Guatemala where they currently live. The Creole people of Belize do not hunt howler monkeys for food, a fact which facilitates the development of a community reserve project.

Saving the Tropical Forests, J. Gradwohl &
R. Greenberg, Earthscan Publications, Ltd
London 1988

The Community Baboon Sanctuary: An Approach to the Conservation of Private Lands, Belize



The Community Baboon Sanctuary on the Belize River is a unique reserve created with the help of local farmers and landowners. Their cooperation is essential to the reserve's success, so a major thrust of its work is education. The project must demonstrate that it meets the needs of the landowners as well as those of wildlife.

The original purpose of the reserve was to protect the habitat of the black howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*), also known locally as the baboon. Black howler monkeys are moderate in size (they weigh about nine kilograms) and live in the canopy of tropical forests in



Called baboons in Belize, black howler monkeys (*Alouatta pigra*) and their forest habitat are protected in the Community Baboon Reserve.

Because the sanctuary was planned in consultation with people living in the area, the reserve's aims have been broadened to both protect the howlers' habitat and promote sound agricultural practices. Private landowners have agreed to use their land in accordance with reserve standards; if they do so, river bank erosion will be stemmed and the fallow time necessary for the adequate recovery of soil nutrients between clearing for traditional slash-and-burn farming will be reduced. Achieving these dual aims was a lengthy, but rewarding, process:

Site selection. The reserve site is known to be an area of high howler density and is continuous with other areas of forest habitat. Howler monkeys have few specific habitat needs beyond requiring large enough tracts of continuous forest, so their conservation is synonymous with general forest conservation.

Contact local people. The project was introduced to the community informally through discussions with landowners, village headmen, teachers and other influential people. Only after gaining their approval was an attempt made to obtain formal written permission to begin the sanctuary. During this phase, rather than present specific plans for the project, the organizers attempted to shape the project to fill perceived needs. One request made by the local villagers was that tourism be developed.

Formalization of the plan. A considerable amount of one-to-one discussion of the project took place before the formal plan was submitted. This included giving school talks and distributing a booklet, *Baboons of Belize*, which stressed their uniqueness, vulnerability, and importance as a symbol of the natural heritage of Belize, and discussed ways of helping the howlers to survive. A petition was circulated locally by a sympathetic villager to gain government support for the project. The plan was then presented at a formal meeting in a nearby town, where the development of tourist facilities was approved.

Development of the plan. Protection began at a core area which was carefully mapped with respect to the natural environment as well as to existing land tenure. A land-management plan was developed for each holding, featuring simple but important goals such as protecting a strip of forest along the river and ownership boundaries, and leaving uncut specific food trees that are known to be good for monkeys as well as domestic animals. Exactly how far the landowners would go in keeping land out of production was subject to negotiation. After a mutually satisfactory plan was worked out, the

landowner was asked to sign a voluntary pledge to abide by it. In addition, the landowners received a copy of a map of their plot, a certificate from the local Audubon Society and a T-shirt. Publicity was crucial. A show on Radio Belize sponsored by the Belize Audubon Society, for example, was particularly important in mobilizing community involvement.

Publicity. Publicity not only increased local interest and pride, but helped to foster tourism, one of the goals of the local participants. Local radio and television programs, talks to conservation groups and classes, and discussions with foreign tourist groups and local tour agencies spurred wider interest. To accommodate the new visitors, local people acted as guides and families established bed-and-breakfast inns. General operating rules and prices were established and local ferrymen became informal sources of tourist information.

Expanding from the core area. The sanctuary has been slowly expanding from the core. It now comprises an area of seven villages located along 32 kilometers of riverine forest, a 0.8 kilometer strip on either side of the river and a total of 47 square kilometers of land. Seventy landowners are currently enrolled in the project. In the future, the sanctuary hopes to link up with two other wildland areas, Crooked Tree Waterbird Sanctuary and Mussel Creek Reserve.

Local management and sustainability. Lastly, a system of administration has been established. A detailed operations manual has been written, and a local manager hired. His job includes maintaining the landowners' interest in the management plans, overseeing village education about the reserve, and continuing research programs on forest phenology, soils and monkey populations. A trust fund will eventually pay the manager's salary and expenses.

Project participants: Jon Lyon, Susan O'Connell (Peace Corps), Ed Johnson, Dail Murray, Jevra Brown and villagers Fallet Young and Clifton Young.

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SOURCE: Robert Horwich, R.D. 1, Box 96, Gays Mills, Wisconsin 54631.