

Amazon Connections: Issue #6

Newsletter of the

Center for Amazon Community Ecology

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Amazon hot pads for Mother's Day during Gifts for Good program



One way the Center for Amazon Community Ecology creates sustainable livelihoods and promotes forest conservation is helping native artisans to develop and market innovative handicrafts. Our Bora and Huitoto artisan partners in Peru have woven six beautiful designs of hot pads with chambira palm fiber that we are offering to people who support the [CACE Ampiyacu Project in Peru](#) on GlobalGiving through May. A decorative hot pad would be a great gift for any mother here that would help a native mom and her community in the Amazon. [See more artisans with hot pads.](#)



Handicraft social rebate used to build community pharmacy in Brillo Nuevo

CACE has been working with the Bora native village of Brillo Nuevo since 2009 to help several dozen artisans develop and market their handicrafts. Since it takes them five hours to get to the nearest town by motor canoe and a 20 hour ferry ride up the Amazon River to reach the city of Iquitos, it is a long and expensive trip for them to sell their work. CACE buys hot pads and other crafts directly from the artisans in the village, and we earmark 20% of our sales to a Social Rebate Fund to help the community meet their local needs in health, education or conservation. Last summer, Brillo Nuevo decided to use part of its account to build a community pharmacy so they would always have access to medicines even when the government health post was closed or poorly stocked. It was sometimes frustrating seeing work start and stop, but people came together to finish the simple building in March. A village leader is now accompanying our CACE rep to buy the first batch of medicines for the pharmacy. Thanks to all of you whose craft purchases made this pharmacy possible.



Rosewood reforestation launched in the Ampiyacu



CACE and its ally NGO [Camino Verde](#) have carried out the first phase of a reforestation and essential oil production project in the Ampiyacu region. In early February, we had 900 young rosewood trees (*Aniba roseaodora*) ready to deliver to their new home down river. CACE's field assistant Italo Melendez accompanied the seedlings on their journey from the government nursery in Jenaro Herrera by truck to the port where they traveled down the Ucayali River to Iquitos and then completed their journey by speed boat to Brillo Nuevo. The young rosewoods were divided up by the five families who had won a chance in a village lottery to plant one of the first batches of these aromatic trees. Each family then brought its crates of seedlings to a patch of secondary forest to plant with guidance from Camino Verde's director Robin van Loon.

Ampiyacu project manager Yully Rojas reported that most of the seedlings were growing well in early April although a few had been chewed by hungry grasshoppers and others had been lifted by jealous neighbors. We are now exploring larger distillation units to extract oil from a modest harvest of leaves in several years.

[See more photos of rosewood reforestation in Brillo Nuevo.](#)



Dr. Audrey Maretzki joins the CACE Board of Directors

CACE is pleased to welcome Dr. Audrey Maretzki to its non-profit Board of Directors. Audrey is a Professor Emerita of Food Science and Nutrition at Penn State University and co-director of the [Interinstitutional Consortium for Indigenous Knowledge \(ICIK\)](#). She has also led and promoted research and other projects to support health, culture and conservation with rural communities in Africa, Latin America and Asia through the Marjorie Grant Whiting Center, the University of Hawaii, and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. CACE appreciates her key role in securing three grants to support its Ampiyacu Project in Peru and introducing us to Robin van Loon – our newest advisor and executive director of our partner NGO Camino Verde. CACE will greatly benefit from her skills as a grant writer and developer of social entrepreneurial initiatives with women in developing countries. [See Dr. Maretzki's profile.](#)



“Rainforest Communities” tops poll for best fieldwork story

My first-hand account about working with native communities to develop essential oils from the resin and leaves of aromatic trees in the Peruvian Amazon was the most popular fieldwork interview published by UK naturalist [James Borrell](#) on his blog. Plowden’s piece describes the location, highlights, challenges, and target species in CACE projects, and tips for doing research in the biologically and socially complex environment around traditional communities in the Amazon. [See Fieldwork: Rainforest Communities.](#) [Check out all 20 fieldwork stories](#) by other ecologists working around the world.



Copal resin and Amazon bees

We have been studying the relationships between copal resin and insects at the Jenaro Herrera field station since 2006 to help develop sustainable methods to harvest this resin to make fragrant essential oil. While most of this research has focused on the weevils that form resin lumps on select trees, another fascinating part of this work is studying the bees that collect this and other plant resins to make their nests. Most are stingless bees, but they can still aggressively defend their nests against intruders. Our field team spends one day a month observing the bees that harvest copal resin and hunting for their nests. We’ve found a wonderful diversity of bee nests in the forest. So far we’ve seen a giant nest surrounding a tree, an entrance tube to a nest inside a hollow tree, a well-guarded dome-like entrance to an underground nest, and black and white oval entrances to bee nests inside termite nests. [See more about our study](#) and check out David Roubik’s classic book [Ecology and Natural History of Tropical Bees](#) to learn more about this intriguing topic.



In memory of two artisan partners

One of the best parts of this work is getting to know people who live in small Amazon communities. They welcome us into their homes, feed us, let us play with their children, and photograph their daily lives to help others appreciate their culture and challenges. The toughest part is realizing that some mothers and daughters who have sold us crafts succumb to the harsher conditions in these beautiful remote places. Two summers ago I was shocked to learn that Alida Soria, a young Bora artisan from Brillo Nuevo, died along with her husband and young daughter when a tree fell during a sudden storm when they were camped by a river. I was sad to learn last month that Carlina Davila, a Huitoto artisan from Puca Urquillo who was the mother of seven children recently died from uterine cancer – an affliction that has taken six other women in the area in the recent years. Girls who are 15 years and under are now being vaccinated against HPV, but older women in the region are still quite vulnerable to this virus. These incidents strengthen my resolve to help improve the economic and health conditions in this region.



All articles written by Campbell Plowden. Photographs by Campbell Plowden, Yully Rojas Reategui, Italo Melendez, and Marissa Plowden.