

**Volunteer within the Jaguar Camera Trapping Project
at Iwokrama International Centre**

April 30th-May 18th, 2004

By Malte Puck
Student from the Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel/Germany

Ovid sat down on a stone. "Time for a short break."

Ovid was one of the rangers in the base camp that lies along the road of red sand that floats through the Iwokrama forest towards the Brazilian border. Even he was breathing harder now. We had reached the top of the hill.

I was soaked by sweat and the water dripping down the trees. It sounded like poking against cardboard boxes all around, when heavy drops hit the wide leaf of a shrub. It was a great feeling, being outside and experiencing this, for me, new world of the tropics. Since making experiences means to be involved, not only to see, but also to feel and to dig into the atmosphere of a new environment, I was lucky that I found the right access to it. Palm trees, huge Mora-trees with roots like walls, monkeys swinging through the canopy, leaves that suddenly start to move (turning out to be a frog), colorful birds and the never ending concert of thousands of different species, left a deep and rich impression on me.

We were off the main trails to collect the camera traps from the jaguar research project. It was the beginning of the rainy season and we had to bring in the traps before the forest turned into a huge swamp, which would deny any access. We even found one of the traps already dipped under water.

The project was designed to estimate and assess the abundance and density of the local jaguar population. My responsibility during the three weeks as a volunteer at Iwokrama International Centre was to collect the films and bring them back to Georgetown. Later I had to analyze and identify the animals on the developed pictures (focusing and hoping to see some jaguars on them). Further tasks were to view and compare methodologies of camera trapping and help to put up a web page about the project. Besides that, I was able to spend some time at the field station along the Essequibo River or to explore Georgetown during my work in the main office. It was a great opportunity for gaining new experiences and entering a new country, as well as to participate actively in an interesting work, glad to bring in and use some of my own skills. Hence it was never boring. I gained an interesting point of view, standing between the normal visitor, exploring new surroundings and the staff of the organization from which I learned much about the daily processes and life in this country. Besides I was allowed to explore a lot of things off the main trails, wading through swamps and smaller streams, climbing over fallen trees under the harsh protest of some macaws...

The view was amazing. With the evaporating water of the last night's rain, the green tops of the surrounding hills seemed to vanish into the misty sky. We got up, sliding down the wet rocks to collect the last traps.