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The Iwokrama Centre and Forest: Introduction to Special Papers

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ABSTRACT—The Iwokrama Programme is a partnership between the Commonwealth and the people of Guyana. Iwokrama brings together local people, national and international interests in a variety of businesses. The idea of Iwokrama was born during the 1989 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and Iwokrama has grown to be the Commonwealth's Flagship environment project. Iwokrama is a working example of developing partnerships for effective natural resource management and sustainable human development. This paper describes the background to Iwokrama and the role of the faunal surveys of the Iwokrama Forest led by the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia in the early development of Iwokrama. Thirty researchers spent over thirty months in the Iwokrama Forest, a virtually pristine tropical rainforest, between July 1996 and January 1998. These researchers came from more than ten research institutes to carry out the faunal surveys of the Iwokrama Forest. This work has made the fauna of the Iwokrama Forest one of the best documented in Northern South America. However, much more work remains to be done as we have only scratched the biodiversity surface of Iwokrama. The papers assembled here are the result of that work.

INTRODUCTION

The Iwokrama Forest is in the heart of Guyana, neighboring the Rupununi Wetlands (Fig. 1). Together, these two areas boast an extremely high number of species of fish (over 400) and bats (over 90) in the world. Iwokrama and the Rupununi are also home to healthy populations of some of the world's largest and most endangered species including the Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja*, the Jaguar *Felis onca*, the Giant Anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*, the Giant River Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*, the Arapaima *Arapaima gigas*, the Anaconda *Eunectes murinus*, the Black Caiman *Melanosuchus niger*, the Giant River Turtle *Podocnemis expansa* and the Bushmaster *Lachesis muta*.

The million hectares of the Iwokrama Forest and Rupununi wetlands are an extraordinary ecosystem. They encompass a range of habitats including over 200 lakes, braided rivers flowing over volcanic dykes, 1000 metre mountains, lowland tropical rain forests, palm forests, and seasonally flooded forests and savannahs. The area is also the homeland of the Makushi people who continue to live in the area and use the forest and wetland resources from the area. The Makushi people are perhaps best known for *curare* (a medical muscle relaxant) and a lifestyle based on the staple *cassava*.

IWOKRAMA

The Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development was established in Guyana to deal with the problem of how tropical

rain forests can be conserved and sustainably utilized to ensure ecological, social and economic benefits to local, national and international communities. The Iwokrama Centre is a partnership between the Government of Guyana and the international community represented by the Commonwealth. The Centre results from the offer by Guyana to provide 371,000 hectares of tropical forest to serve as a practical demonstration site for multiple forest use and conservation. This area—the Iwokrama Forest—is situated in central Guyana and is part of one of the four remaining pristine tropical forest areas in the world—the Guiana Shield. Guyana is one of the poorest countries in the world, but has abundant natural forests and very low population densities. The majority of the users of the Iwokrama Forest are Makushi, Wapishana, Patamona and Arawak Amerindians.

Iwokrama is a protected area with a difference. It focuses on involving people in the conservation and sustainable use of Iwokrama Forest. Iwokrama works collaboratively with local indigenous people, but also works with the national and international private sectors to ensure that the forest contributes to achieving local and national development goals. Iwokrama also focuses on learning by doing—by developing cross-sectoral business partnerships (local community, private sector and Iwokrama) to create forest enterprises in timber, tourism and forest management. The hope is that Iwokrama can become a model for business development that results in the conservation of tropical rain forests and through local community partnerships ensures the cultural and social sustainability of the new businesses.

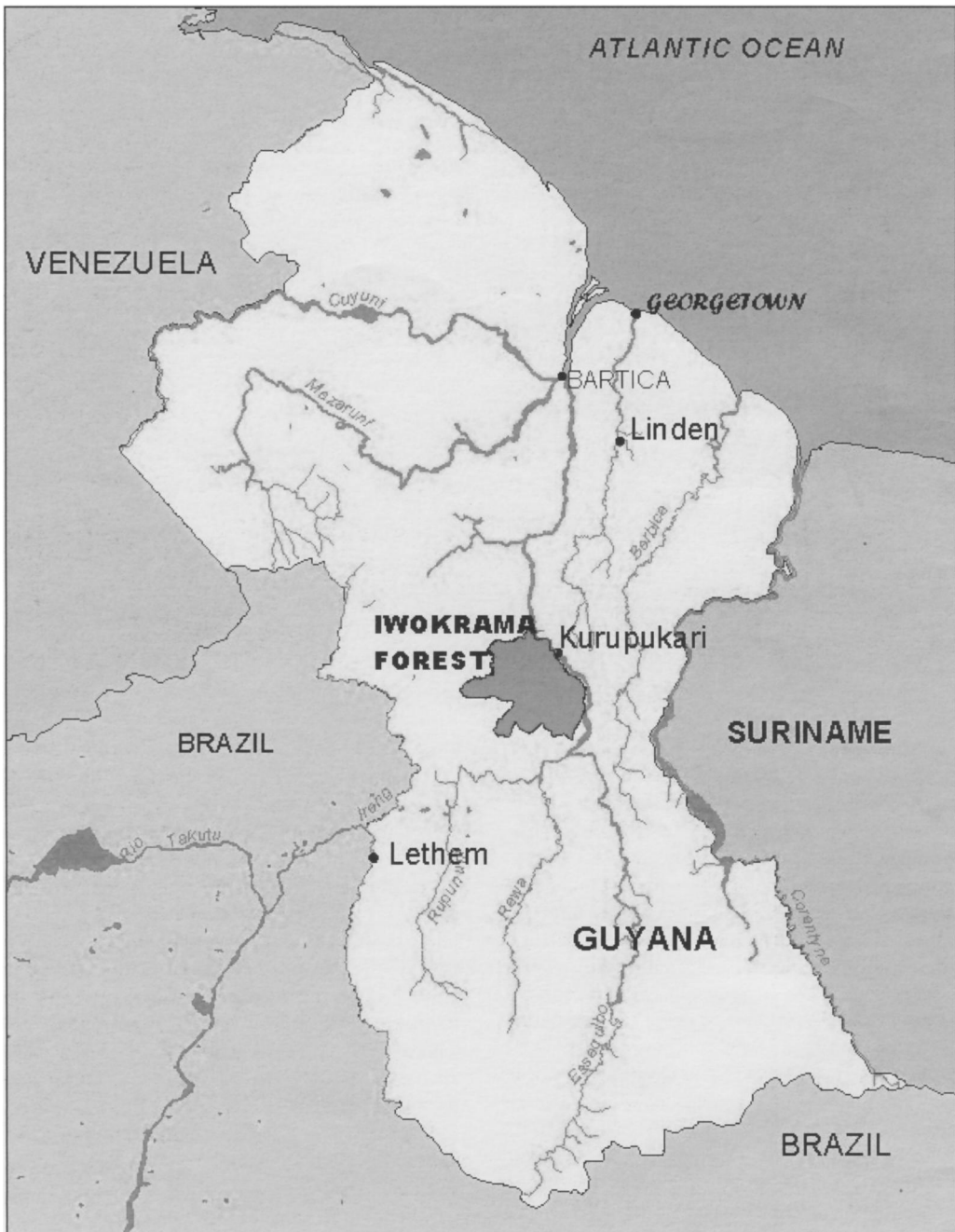


Fig. 1. Map of Guyana and adjoining countries in north-eastern South America showing location of Iwokrama Forest.

Iwokrama also focuses on developing sustainable business by considering all of the values in tropical forests including potential and actual products and the various ecological, social and cultural services that tropical rain forests provide. Iwokrama also ensures that benefits are effectively shared among partners and has recently finalized intellectual property rights and benefit-sharing protocols and agreements

to this end. The Centre is now working on developing model institutional structures and agreements that ensure the long term viability of partnerships. Iwokrama and the local communities already have developed incipient businesses based on environmentally sound and socially responsible niche markets in ecotourism, aquarium fish, training and conservation. Capturing all of these values requires a

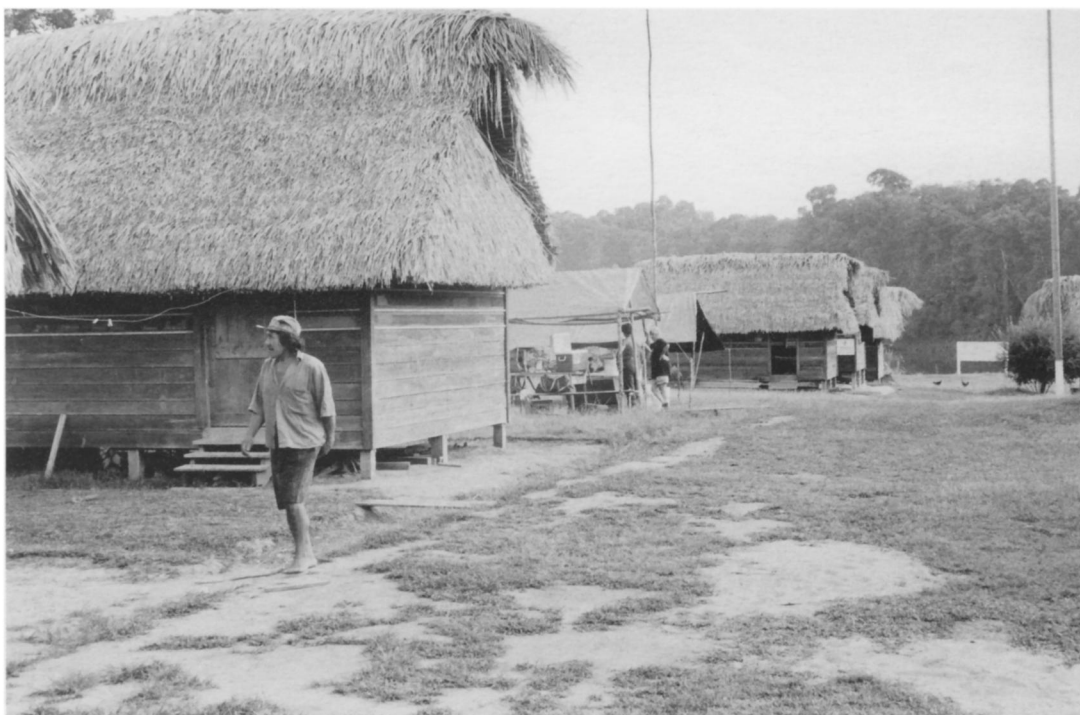


Plate 1. A view of the Kurupukari field base in Iwokrama, September 1997. Photography by Robert M. Peck.

union of science and traditional knowledge, both to develop products and services and to be able to monitor the consequences of forest use.

Iwokrama's vision arose in 1989 at a time when tropical rain forests were being degraded at an alarming rate by the rapacious nature of big businesses combined with poor governance. Fourteen years later, tropical rain forest degradation continues unabated and the role of Iwokrama remains as pivotal as it was when the concept arose. It is not a simple task to find ways of developing tropical forests to meet commercial, local community, and the forest's needs. The major lesson is that success rests on the ownership and commitment of local people and the combined skills of specialists and communities. The Centre has therefore fully engaged with local communities and national agencies to enhance collective capacity to manage the Iwokrama Forest. The Centre has been building these relationships knowing that business as usual—the quick money approach—is an illusion of success that will not serve the local people, the country and the forests of the world. Iwokrama is an international project whose lessons are firmly grounded in the reality of the people who live in forests and whose entire economies rest on the fate of their forests.

THE IWOKRAMA FAUNAL SURVEYS

The major goal of the Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Develop-

ment is to show how to conserve and sustainably and equitably use tropical rain forests and so yield benefits to the people of Guyana and the international community. To aid in this process, on June 1st, 1996 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Guyana contracted the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia (ANSP) to carry out surveys of the fauna of the Iwokrama Forest in central Guyana. These surveys were intended to continue and extend the work carried out before 1993 during the Phase I site resource surveys of the Iwokrama Forest carried out by the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) of the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) (NRI, 1993). The ANSP surveys began in July 1996 and the fieldwork ended in January 1998. Plates 1–3 show various aspects of the field work.

The surveys involved researchers from the ANSP, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Florida International University (FIU), the University of Kansas Natural History Museum (KUNHM), the University of British Columbia, York University, Illinois State University, and the University of Guyana. The surveys were designed to contribute to our knowledge of the vertebrates of the Iwokrama Forest. The fieldwork for the faunal surveys was completed in January 1998 and the papers in this publication are a review of the activities and outputs from the faunal survey. The materials produced from the work carried out during the faunal surveys will be im-



Plates 2 and 3. Loading supplies for transport along the Essequibo River to and from field camps, September 1997. Photography by Robert M. Peck.



portant contributions to income generation in the Iwokrama area and in Guyana more generally through the development of ecotourism and the management of extractive processes.

Besides describing the vertebrate fauna of Iwokrama, the ANSP Iwokrama Faunal Survey also contributed to the University of Guyana and Iwokrama programmes for building Bio-Diversity research and management capacity in Guyana. Fourteen people from the North Rupununi and seven University of Guyana students or graduates were trained in survey techniques. In addition, ANSP staff contributed to teaching classroom and field courses in wildlife management and herpetology at the University of Guyana and staff members gave 26 presentations in Guyana to diverse audiences from local communities to University of Guyana faculty.

IWOKRAMA AND THE FUTURE

For the future, there is growing interest in Iwokrama as a model forest management area. There is strong local community, Guyanese and international support for Iwokrama; the ideas and concepts of equity and social, economic, and ecological sustainability that underlie Iwokrama are those that have eluded development in most parts of the world. Iwokrama's accomplishments have been achieved be-

cause of the vision, foresight and persistence of individuals and the support from numerous governments and institutions including especially the founding partners: the Government and people of Guyana who generously contributed the Iwokrama site, and the Commonwealth Secretariat who gave its patronage and contributed expertise. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), using Global Environmental Facility funds, implemented a project to support the early institutional development of Iwokrama. The Overseas Development Administration of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contributed funds and technical assistance in the early years. The Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) was also a partner to strengthen Iwokrama as an institution and to assist with communication. Principal recent donors include the British Department for International Development (DFID), the European Commission (EC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO).

On behalf of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia and the authors of the papers assembled here, I express confidence that the work reported in the papers will contribute to the realization of Iwokrama's bold vision.