



# **TREE Foundation Annual Report**

**November 2009**

Compiled by Dr. Meg Lowman, Executive Director

Annual Meeting – November 12, New College Foundation Boardroom 5 PM

Cover: Canopy access workshop for students at 5<sup>th</sup> International Forest Canopy Conference in Bangalore India, co-sponsored by TREE Foundation

## **Officers, Directors and Research Associates 2008**

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Bryson Voirin, Research Associate (non-voting)

Graduate student research associate  
Max Planck Institute  
Germany

Dr. Soubadra Devy (non-voting)  
Research Associate  
Ashoka Trust for Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)  
Bangalore, India

Dr. Alemayehu Wassie Eshete, Research Associate (non-voting)  
Research Associate  
Forestry Department  
Addis Abba, Ethiopia

Dr. David Jarzen (non-voting)  
Research Associate  
Senior Scientist, Museum of Natural History  
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Dr. Leon Kaganosky (non-voting)  
Research Associate  
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Student Interns (Center for Canopy Ecology)

Dayna Lazarus

Elizabeth Crate

Pamela Montero Alvarez

David Mitre

Ricardo Rifulgo

Hannah Wilkins

Salome Graslans

Erik Wallimaa

Guillermo Sanchez

Marcos Oversluijs Vasquez

Marcos Oversluijs



## TREE FOUNDATION

Dr. Thomas E. Lovejoy, President, The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics, and the Environment  
Honorary Board Chairman

### **TREE Foundation Highlights for 2009**

Despite the economic downturn of the past year, TREE is pleased to report new initiatives and solid support of existing initiatives. Now, more than ever, both local and global governments and citizens recognize the value of our environment and the services that ecosystems provide for humankind. The role of the TREE Foundation to conserve forests and to educate the public about our environment provides a critical function, and your support is essential to our mission. Thank you to all TREE supporters for your great achievements during the past year.

1. TREE co-sponsored the 5<sup>th</sup> international forest canopy conference in Bangalore, India, the culmination of four years of efforts to bring together forest scientists from 35 countries. This conference focused on the future conservation of the world's forests, and inspired important research efforts in India, home of four biodiversity hotspots including the last remaining tigers, Indian elephants, and many other species of plants and animals. (Note the TREE logo next to Tata Cars in the conference banner – see photos attached). Dr. Lowman co-chaired the conference with Dr. Kamal Bawa of University of Massachusetts – Boston.
2. Dr. Lowman received a National Science Foundation grant to fund three critical elements of program at the Canopy Conference in India: 1. key scientists to give plenary talks, 2. young postdoctoral fellows and assistant professors to attend the conference representing the next generation of canopy scientists, and 3. a student workshop to train the next generation of India's canopy biologists.
3. Our National Science Foundation exhibit, Out on a Limb, circulated to schools for six months, and then spent six months on display at New College of Florida. Its bilingual activities, games, and educational lessons, in both English and Spanish, continue to educate thousands of students in SW Florida about the value of tropical rain forests.
4. The Fedder lecture series celebrated Charles Darwin's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in February with a gala lecture by world Darwin historian, Dr. Tim Berra, author of the recent book "Charles Darwin: The Concise History of an Extraordinary Man. A full house enjoyed Berra's talk, and ate the enormous Darwin birthday cake afterward! Thanks to Joel and Ellen Fedder for funding our community lecture series.
5. TREE hosted two research associates from India, Dr. Soubadra Devy and Dr. T. Ganesh. Devy is India's top canopy scientist, and has made important discoveries about pollination and canopy biodiversity. Ganesh is an expert on tigers and other animals of India's forests, and both served as coordinators for the canopy conference. Thanks to the Booths for funding our global intern program.

6. TREE hosted several additional community lectures this year as a result of our expanding programs. Our research associate DC Randle (K-12 teacher and role model for minority students) presented on “Science Education Outreach – role models and field activities as methods to inspire the next generation.” TREE also co-hosted a lecture with Environmental Defense, entitled “Save the Rainforest, Cool the Planet” featuring Dr. Christina McCain (EDF, Washington DC) and Mr. John Carter (founder, Allanca da Terra, Brazil).
7. TREE has launched its second flagship education project: the creation of a TREEhouse for local children and families. A successful fund-raiser was hosted at the home of Susanne and Henry Rodriguez on Casey Key, raising over \$10,000. This amount will be matched in a subsequent grant or fund-raiser by The Crowley Nature Center, where the TREEhouse is scheduled for construction in 2010. Our website now accepts online donations. Committee members Laura Peters, Carolyn Johnson, and Susanne Rodriguez are to be congratulated for one of our first gala fund-raising events!
8. Our original flagship project, the Myakka River State Park canopy walkway, continues to achieve national recognition and hosts hundreds of thousands of annual visitors. New signage reflecting an updated map of canopy walkways of the world, plus a new conservation sign, are underway. The long-term bromeliad data monitoring program – undertaken by local elementary school students and representing the longest-term data collection in the forests of Sarasota County – is now posted on the TREE website. Check out the wonderful illustrations and field notes of local fifth graders tracking the growth of their bromeliads! Frequent guided walks are hosted by TREE Foundation throughout the year, including our (now infamous) fifth annual Boxing Day canopy walk. Thanks to the Spurlino Foundation for continuing to fund the walkway and these local education programs.
9. A new forest research and conservation project was launched, “Saving the Church Forests of Ethiopia” under the leadership of Dr. Lowman and our Ethiopian research associate, Dr. Alemayehu Wassie Eshete. Currently, Ethiopia’s last remaining forests are housed in the church yards of approximately 31,000 Coptic (or Orthodox Christian) churches, but they are fast shrinking due to the pressures of timber-gathering and agriculture. Working with the local bishops, TREE Foundation hosted a workshop for the clergy last January 2009 to educate them about the value of their forests, especially the ecosystems services of trees such as pollinators and as the major supplier of fresh water springs. The church is enthusiastic and grateful to work with TREE Foundation, as well as the local villagers, to undertake conservation efforts to conserve their last forests as an important part of their economy, spirituality and health. A big thanks to TRIAD Foundation for providing seed funding to launch this important global initiative, and to the Jarzens for the lead gift toward the biodiversity expedition in 2010.
10. TREE Foundation has a grant pending with National Geographic for funding to conserve the church forests of Ethiopia. In addition, approximately 8 professional scientists have volunteered their time (and funds) for August 2010 to participate in an expedition to explore the biodiversity of Ethiopian church forests, in particular to identify the important pollinators of local crops.

11. TREE Foundation partnered with Dr. Francis Gatz of Environmental Expeditions to create the “Amazon Amigos Program”. Similar in structure to Heifer International, this conservation initiative specifically targets forest “hands-on” conservation activities in the upper Amazon. Teachers and students who have attended workshops with EE or TREE can make donations to fund local conservation programs, including sustainable furniture-making, fish farms, and providing fresh water in villages. All of the funds support basic needs, conservation, environmental education, and sustainable development for Amazon villages.
12. Meanwhile, in our own backyards, TREE was instrumental in sounding the alarm about invasive Burmese and African rock pythons. These enormous reptiles currently pose a serious threat to Florida’s forests and watercourses. Initially thought to have been released by unsuspecting pet owners, pythons now number >30,000 in the Florida Everglades and > 2,000 in Myakka River State Park. Lowman organized a workshop of nationally-recognized herpetologists to educate Sarasota County staff about invasive reptiles. In addition, TREE’s website features an online component to identify all of the 44 invasive reptiles in Florida. While gigantic pythons may not appear to be related to a Foundation whose mission is trees, the impact of these 200-pound invasives on our forest ecosystems is extremely threatening, especially to native wildlife. TREE hopes to work with the Garden Club in 2010 to bring a rapid response training class to Southwest Florida, since the County not budgeted for this issue.
13. TREE students, interns and research associates continue to disseminate important information about trees. Students at New College produced a guide to the world’s rain forests, now available on our website as a series of powerpoints. TREE research associate, Bryson Voirin, was recently funded by the Booths to attend the canopy conference; Bryson is currently a graduate student with the Max Planck Institute in Germany, where he continues his forest canopy career doing a PhD in sloth sleep research! Research associate Leon Kaganowsky has worked with students to create a computer model about herbivory on the TREE website.
14. Executive Director, Dr. Meg Lowman, made numerous local and national presentations about forest conservation and education outreach, including a joint presentation with marine explorer, Eugenie Clark; invited lectures at University of South Carolina, University of Santa Barbara – California; Atlanta Botanical Garden; Valencia Community College; University of Florida; Audubon Society; St. Olaf’s College; and University of Wyoming.
15. Executive Director, Dr. Meg Lowman, received the 2009 ACE award (Achievements in Canopy Ecology) for her global education and research activities. This was presented to her by our Honorary Board Chairman, Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, in Bangalore India on 28 October 2009.
16. TREE has entered into an MOU (memorandum of understanding) to participate in a forest conservation initiative for Viet Nam, which currently has no national parks and hopes to undertake a program called 4-E: education, ecology, energy, and economics on a country-wide scale.
17. Three student interns were funded for research on the Amazon forest canopies. Congratulations to Salome Grasland, Dayna Lazarus, and Elizabeth Crate. TREE

- also funded Amazon research projects, including an ethnobotany brochure, for several students who worked on these as college tutorials. Thanks to the Nellie Mae grant for funding important New College student environmental projects.
18. TREE continues to distribute canopy books to students in developing countries, including Ethiopia, Brazil, Peru, Belize, and India. As a result of the canopy conference, approximately 40 books were presented to Indian biology students, who were thrilled to receive this gift! Thanks to the Booths for making this possible.
  19. Nature's Secrets, a fortnightly science column in the Herald Tribune, continues to communicate the message and mission of the TREE Foundation, especially fostering an appreciation for Florida's natural treasures.
  20. TREE Foundation will have a presence at the upcoming Copenhagen meetings in December 2009, where Dr. Lowman will work with other forest-based NGOs and non-profits to communicate information to the delegates about the value of global forests. Lowman will also write for the Herald Tribune about the activities of policy-makers. Stay tuned!
  21. TREE and the Myakka canopy walkway have our tenth birthday in 2010. We are planning a gala moonlight pig roast under the walkway, and will hope for your support to celebrate this milestone.
  22. And last but not least, your Executive Director ("Canopymeg") would like to express her heartfelt thanks to our President, Gerri Aaron, whose enthusiasm and support for all things unspoken that really make the TREE Foundation such a highly productive foundation.

