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JOURNAL



Native Planet

Vol. 1, Issue 4



NP Development Manager named UNV Online Volunteer of the Year

NativePlanet News

Indigenous News

January 26: International diabetes experts have warned that diabetes is threatening the survival of indigenous groups worldwide. Historically, diabetes was unknown in indigenous peoples since their traditional diets and lifestyles had protective factors including diets high in nutrient density but low in energy density and sufficient physical activity. However, as indigenous groups are “modernized” and marginalized, they can neither live in their traditional ways nor can they participate fully in more modern health regimes due to their poverty...

To read more about other indigenous news from around the world, visit www.nativeplanet.org/news



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Matsés First Contact: The End of Isolation

By Dan James Pantone and Bjorn Svensson



WWW.MATSÉS.ORG



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The year was 1969. While Americans were busy making their first contact with another world (by landing on the moon), so was the Matsés tribe. That was the year that these indigenous people from the Amazon Rainforest first made peaceful and permanent contact with the outside world. Ironically, it was not with Peruvians or Brazilians, but rather with Americans. The world of the Matsés people would never be the same.

(continued on page 2)

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(continued from page 1)

The Americans were two female missionaries from the Summer Institute for Linguistics. Like their astronaut counterparts, they too spent years preparing for their mission. The young women were Harriet Fields (affectionately called Sister Luisa by the Matsés) and Hattie Kneeland (Sister Enriqueta), who would both end up dedicating their entire lives to helping the Matsés people and preserving their culture. But what were the events that led to these women making the first contact with this tribe and why were the Matsés still in isolation from the outside world? To answer these questions you need to understand a little about the culture and history of these Amazonian natives.

Similar to many Amazonian tribes, the Matsés had a cultural tradition of abducting and assimilating women into their tribe. In the early 1960s, the Matsés were routinely kidnapping Peruvian women from the vicinity of the town of Requena, which is located on the Ucayali River in the Peruvian Amazon, and bringing them back to their villages, located on both sides of the Brazilian border. This practice outraged the citizens of Requena and they formed militias composed of police and local citizens to invade the Matsés communities. For the most part, the raids were ineffective as the Matsés deserted their villages and fled inland before the militias arrived to burn their homes and crops. In 1964, hostilities peaked with the U.S. Army Southern Command sending helicopters from Panama to assist the militias. At this time, the Peruvian Air Force began a campaign of using machine guns and napalm bombs in an attempt to eliminate the Matsés people. As a result, the Matsés abandoned their settlements near rivers and fled deep into the upland rainforest.

One of the Peruvian women the Matsés had kidnapped managed to escape after living with them for many years. Fields and Kneeland found out about her and spent two years with her learning the Matsés language in preparation for making first contact with the Matsés people. They reasoned that their being women would lend them a certain amount of protection and that the Matsés would not kill them as they might men.

In August of 1969, they finally made contact with the Matsés. They flew over one of their villages with an airplane and using loudspeakers told the Matsés they wanted to trade with them. The Matsés responded by waving peccary skins (to this day their major trading item) at the airplane. The Matsés were tired of fleeing from outsiders and living hidden in the upland rainforest. They wanted to return to their traditional living areas along the rivers and streams. Their peaceful contact and acceptance of Fields and Kneeland into their communities made it possible to return and end hostilities with the outside world.

It is interesting to note that the Matsés people considered Fields and Kneeland to be scientists and anthropologists making scientific studies rather than missionaries and to this day refer to them as "antropólogas." Although they were Christian missionaries, they sought to preserve the traditional culture of the Matsés rather than change it and published many scientific studies on them. These two women successfully established a model bilingual educational program that presently helps preserve both the Matsés language and culture. Their unselfish efforts were instrumental in the transition of Matsés people to the modern world and they dedicated their entire careers to living with and helping these indigenous people of the Amazon.



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Dan James Pantone, Ph.D. is the vice president of the Movement in the Amazon for Tribal Subsistence and Economic Sustainability (MATSES), a non-profit organization that provides medical support and other aid to indigenous people. Find out more about MATSES at www.matses.org. Bjorn Svensson is a photojournalist who recently visited the Matsés Communal Reserve and donated medicine and food to the Matsés people. Learn more about his work at www.photosbybjorn.com.

In Brief

Coming Soon to the Native Planet Website:



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In Focus The Matsés

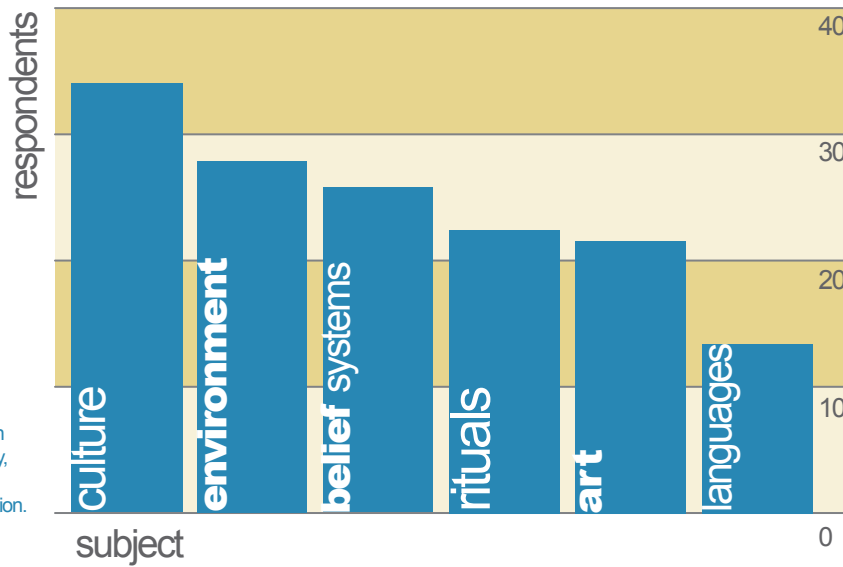
Learn more about the Matsés, the subject of the feature story of this edition of the Journal, in Native Planet's new In Focus section, coming soon to the Native Planet website. In Focus will look in greater depth at specific indigenous groups with their own stories to tell, including the Matsés. Through on-line multi-media content, In Focus will bring you current indigenous news, information on ethical and effective projects working with featured groups, and a window into some of the cultures NP works to preserve by presenting their wisdom, values, music, customs, traditional dress and other information.

Onwards and Upwards

By Helen Billings

Native Planet was founded in 2001 on the vision of our president, Jean-Philippe Soulé, following contact with the Mentawai people of Siberut, Indonesia. But it is built on the dedication and commitment of an entirely volunteer workforce and the support of like-minded people. Below is a very brief summary of the output from surveys answered by 35 (44%) of our volunteers and 162 (8%) of our mailing list. We would like to say a big thank you for the very informative and constructive feedback.

The mailing list survey showed a positive response in what we were trying to do. 29% of respondents were themselves studying indigenous cultures and considered the following areas the most important:



Other subject areas mentioned: health care, globalization, intellectual property, preservation, fashion and accessories, global trends and ethnological interaction.

Volunteers felt they could “Meet, Learn and Share” in a friendly atmosphere, where managerial organization and communication has improved significantly. Said one volunteer, “Every volunteer position I hold helps me grow as a person. I learn more about myself, my strengths, my weaknesses, my passions, my drive, and my motivation.”

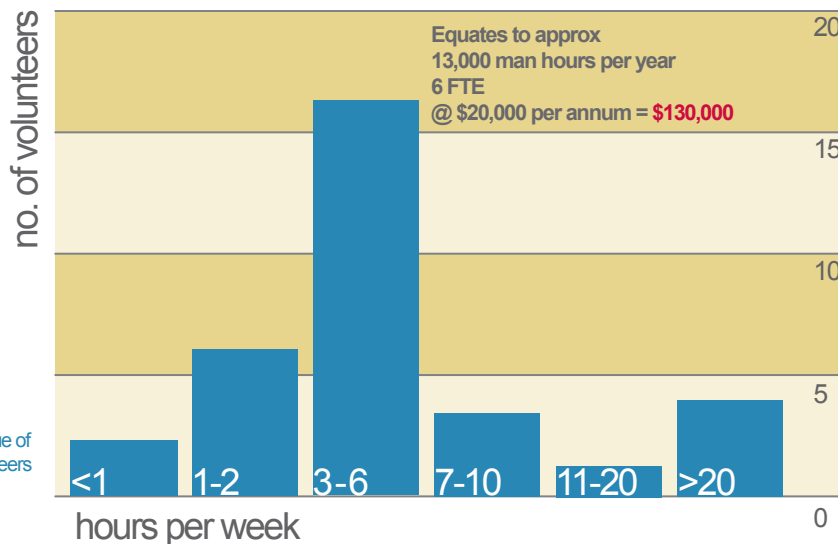


Fig 1. The approximate monetary value of volunteer time, based on the 35 volunteers answering the survey.



"Native Planet is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the worldwide preservation of threatened indigenous cultures. Using ecotourism, education, documentaries and humanitarian projects, we offer native peoples a global voice and promote the self-empowerment necessary for them to protect their own land and lifestyles."

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A.W. Viewfinder is a stock photo agency that provides Native Planet with all of its photo documentaries. A.W. Viewfinder also donates a percentage of the proceeds from each photo sale to Native Planet projects.

There was positive feedback for both the website and Native Planet Journal. We want to broaden the in-depth cultural content with the new In-Focus pieces (coming soon to the Native Planet website). We need to “understand how the people see the world and why they respond to it as they do” as well as “compare one culture with other cultures and test its understandings of the world against reality.”

Some of the suggestions we received for developing the organisation are already being worked on: linking with organisations with a similar ethos (including relevant university programs); ensuring fresh material is constantly being added to the website; further refining the management structure, accountability and communication; keeping promises and meeting deadlines; and improving communication and collaboration opportunities between volunteers and improving volunteer management and development.

Some responses gave us targets for developments we have in mind: specific grant bodies for funding; relevant media outlets for promoting ourselves; and audiences for seminars and so on to improve visibility.

Other suggestions gave us the confidence to re-think ideas that are currently on the back-burner. Examples include implementing blogs to cover volunteer and supporter travel and experiences; setting up local organisations of volunteers and supporters for fund-raising; and networking and establishing an e-chat for volunteers and supporters.

Yet further suggestions have given us whole new avenues to explore, like establishing self-funded volunteer vacations to help with practical projects and making the next translation of the website Spanish.

Native Planet has come quite a way since its inception. With the positive feedback you’ve given us, along with the ideas and impetus for moving forward, 2007 will be a very exciting year for the organisation, its volunteers and its supporters. So, onwards and upwards, together.



In Brief

NP Development Manager Ayan Humbert-Droz named UNV Online Volunteer of the Year

Native Planet’s own Ayan Humbert-Droz has been chosen as a United Nations Online Volunteers Online Volunteer of the Year. This international honor is bestowed upon only 10 people annually for their outstanding contributions to human development.

Ayan, currently NP’s development manager, has held many other posts during her time with Native Planet, and has excelled in them all. As Indigenous Mapping Project Manager, for example, her incredible communications skills, never-ending enthusiasm, and innovative ideas helped her motivate a team of over 80 volunteers from 45 different countries to produce quality work on indigenous groups around the world, and to strengthen NP’s infrastructure and efficiency. She consistently gives 20 to 30 hours each week of her humor, talent and time to Native Planet – and she does it all while running her own business and going to school, too.

Says Ayan, “Online volunteering will open up doors that you never expected, it will educate you, it will open your mind to new perspectives, it will ignite your imagination and allow you to make a personal impact on issues that are close to your heart.”

Like Ayan, you can make a significant contribution to protect, promote, and preserve indigenous cultures through Native Planet. Visit www.nativeplanet.org for more information on how you can get involved!



Cultural Documentaries

Native cultures are fast disappearing as they are forcibly assimilated into “mainstream” society. See the heritage Native Planet is preserving through online cultural documentaries: www.nativeplanet.org

Did You Know?

"Linguists estimate that every two weeks a language dies, taking with it unique ways of thinking, communicating and living - and generations of irreplaceable knowledge." (National Geographic)
