

# Ya'axché Conservation Trust

## 2010 Annual Report



Sustainable Land-use Management • Protected Areas Management • Community Outreach & Livelihoods • Advocacy



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CONSERVATION  
TRUST**

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Ya'axché Conservation Trust  
'2010 Annual Report'  
March 2011

Maarten Hofman  
Ekaterina Alexandrova





# Ya'axché Conservation Trust 2010 Annual Report

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# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## YA'AXCHÉ BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman  
**Valentino Shal**

Vice-chairman  
**Alphonso Cal**

Community  
Rep.  
Medina Bank  
**Victor Ical**  
**Marcos Zuniga**

Scotia Bank  
**Roxanna  
Aleman**

Director  
**Christina  
Garcia**

Indian Creek  
Community rep.  
**Adriano Mas**

Treasurer  
**Barbara Locke**



Dear Friends,

2010 has been a year full of challenges, accomplishments and changes at Ya'axché. Despite the global financial situation, we have continued to advance sustainable development in Belize's Toledo District.

This year, we completed the 4-year medium-sized Global Environmental Fund project that focused on establishing a successful strategy for integrated landscape management in the Maya Golden Landscape. Integrated Landscape Management, the practice of planning how land will be used and resources will be managed in the most efficient and sustainable manner, ensures that all stakeholders have a voice and that all social, economic and environmental aspects are considered. We believe that this approach is key to preparing both the people and environment of southern Belize for the future. These principles continue to guide our endeavours in protected area management, community outreach, and advocacy activities.

Advocacy is always at the forefront of Ya'axché's focus, with active membership in APAMO and BAPPA. This year, however, the advocacy activities have primarily focussed on the illegal feasibility studies for the construction of a hydroelectric dam on Central River. In addition to raising awareness about the consequences of such a project, and directly working with the communities that would be affected, Ya'axché filed a lawsuit to collect damages caused by the feasibility assessments. Regrettably, we lost the case, but with firm belief that justice should be sought, we appealed the case and are also prepared to take it to the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Ya'axché's successes on the ground are always a result of a strong and dedicated team of staff and volunteers. In 2010 the organization saw an extensive turn-over within its staff, as well as on the Board of Directors, but those who have left the organization and those who have recently joined us have extraordinarily contributed to the 2010 activities and achievements outlined in this report.

The support from our funders, assistance from our partners, and encouragement from our friends has been vital and we sincerely hope that you will join us again in 2011 as we continue to pursue our mission.

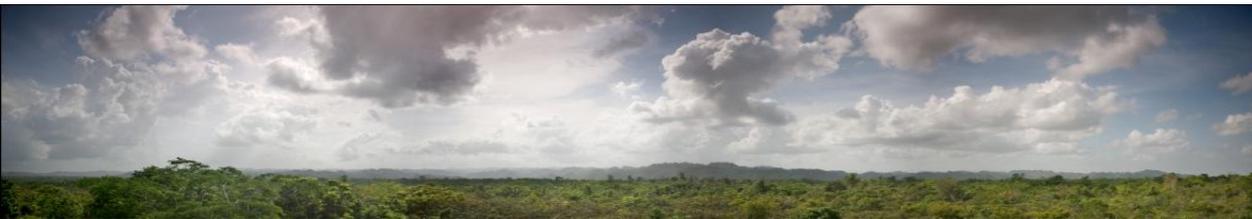
Sincerely,

**Lisel Alamilla,**  
Executive Director

# ABOUT YA'AXCHÉ

## Ya'axché's Mission

The Ya'axché Conservation Trust is a community-oriented organization which advances integrated landscape management for equitable development in southern Belize through sustainable land-use management, strategic advocacy and awareness, and by supporting socially innovative and economically viable enterprises.



## The road towards it...

Until now, Ya'axché has walked, and keeps walking, several paths towards the conservation of southern Belize's natural heritage, to safeguard the natural processes that make it possible for the Belizean people to lead a prosperous life in a healthy community, now and in the future.

One of these paths is the path of **Sustainable Land-Use Management (SLM)**, which advances an integrated approach to landscape management: an approach that takes into account the long term quality of both livelihoods of local people, and the health and carrying capacity of their environment.

Ya'axché also walks the path of **Protected Area Management (PAM)**, by which it enforces the national laws on protected areas, and by which it keeps track of the health of these areas using biological monitoring.

Another path taken, is the path of **Community Outreach and Livelihoods (COL)**. Along this path, Ya'axché informs the people of Toledo about the importance of their environment, and helps them finding alternative ways to make a living that do not erode the future of their (grand-) children's livelihoods.

A fourth path towards Belizean nature conservation is the tough road of **advocacy**, through which Ya'axché tries to convince policy makers at several levels to incorporate integrated landscape management and nature conservation in their decisions.

A strong **Institutional Governance and Management (IGM)** section is needed in order improve the daily management of the NGO, and react swiftly to arising challenges.

Secretary  
Javier Chan

Fauna and Flora  
International  
Robert  
Bensted-Smith

Ex-Officio  
Lisel Alamilla



# ABOUT YA'AXCHÉ

## YA'AXCHÉ STAFF

Executive  
Director  
**Lisel Alamilla**

Accountant  
**Aretha Morris  
Ivanny  
Hernandez-  
Oliva**

Administrative  
Assistant  
**Venancio Ack**

Sustainable  
Land-Use  
Programme  
Manager  
**Nick Wicks**

Community  
Outreach and  
Livelihood  
Programme  
Manager  
**Bartolo Teul**

Protected Area  
Manager  
**Nathaniel Miller  
Lee McLoughlin**

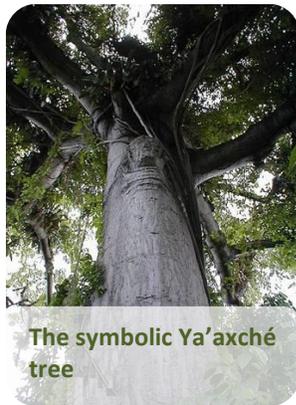


## Ya'axché's History

In 1997, a consortium of individuals including environmentalist Philip Balderamos, local Mayan leader Julian Cho, ecotourism entrepreneur Ken Karas, and community leaders Bartolo Teul, Juan Choc and Juan Pop formed the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (GSCP) NGO, which would later become the Ya'axché Conservation Trust. The NGO was conceived to manage the 9,554 acre (3,867 ha) parcel of the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve, purchased through generous support from FFI.

In November 1998, the organization received its first one-year grant of US\$60,000 from the IUCN for institutional strengthening, hiring of staff, demarcating of boundary lines and procurement of basic equipment. In the same year, GSCP NGO signed a 12-year institutional Memorandum of Understanding with Fauna & Flora International (FFI), the world's oldest conservation organization, based in Cambridge, UK.

The name GSCP NGO was legally changed in 2002 to Ya'axché Conservation Trust, in an effort to achieve greater resonance with the local Mayan community, and so as not to bind the growing organization to working solely within the GSCP private protected area. 'Ya'axché' is the Maya Mopan name for *Ceiba petandra* (cotton tree), a sacred tree of the Maya, which linked Xibalba (the underworld) to the heavens, and, thus, has symbolic importance to the Mayan communities. After Hurricane Iris hit Toledo in October 2001, the huge Ya'axché trees were the only trees left standing thanks to their deep roots and strong trunks, making them highly visible landmarks in Southern Belize, and a powerful namesake for the organization.



The symbolic Ya'axché tree

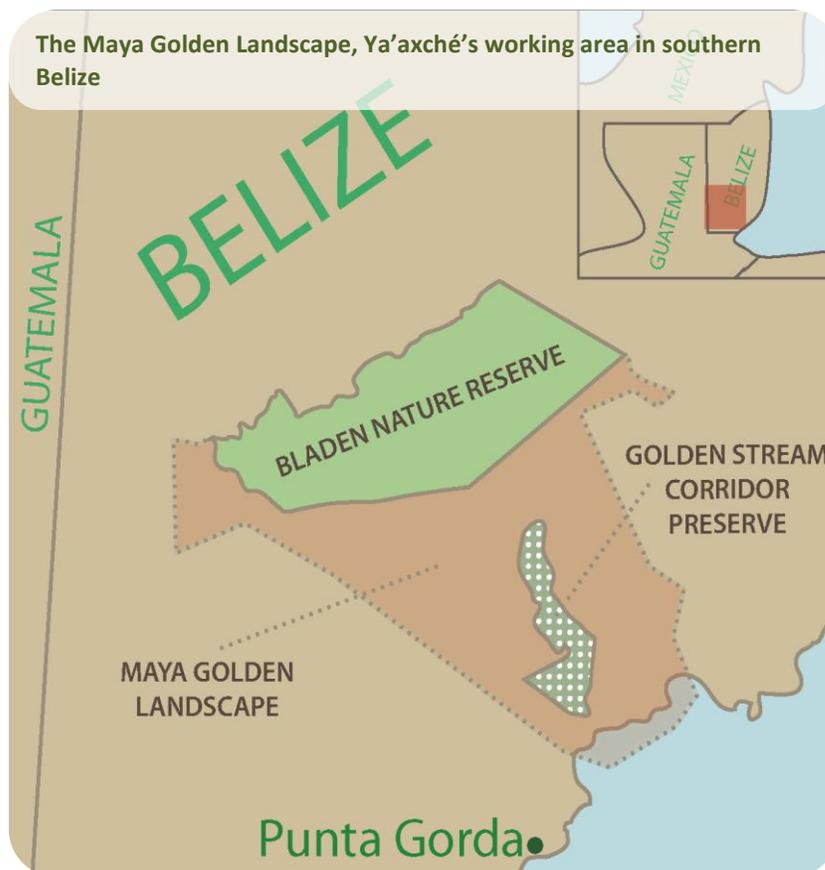
In March 2004, a second Flick parcel was bought with funds from the Grassvalley Trust, and increased GSCP's area by 5,425 acres (2195 ha), to a grand total of 14,979 acres (6,062 ha). While the GSCP expanded in size, Ya'axché was also growing as an institution due to a committed Board of Directors, a small but dedicated staff, and increased fundraising successes. Funding support came from both resident and nonresident international cooperation agencies, and also from local sources. In particular, the partnership with FFI gave Ya'axché critical financial and technical support in its formative years.

# ABOUT YA'AXCHÉ



Ya'axché co-manages  
the Bladen Nature  
Reserve

As a sign of the maturation of the organization, Ya'axché was selected in 2008 by the Forest Department of the Government of Belize to act as co-manager of the 100,000 acre (40,469 ha) Bladen Nature Reserve, the 'crown jewel' of Belize. This caused Ya'axché to readjust focus and include a larger portion of the Toledo district as its focal area. This recently denominated area goes by the name of 'Maya Golden Landscape' (MGL) and includes the Bladen Nature Reserve, the enlarged Golden Stream Corridor Preserve, the adjoining protected areas belonging to Ya'axché's sister NGO TIDE (Toledo Institute for Development and Environment) and a number of buffer communities that lie in the immediate surroundings of the protected areas.



Outreach Officer  
**Julio Chub**

Agroforestry  
Officer  
**Auxebio Sho**  
**Kenny Cal**

Horticulturalist  
**Veronica Pop**  
**Patricia Sacul**

Aquatic Ecologist  
**Rachael Carrie**

Field Supervisor  
**Marchilio Ack**

Ranger  
**Vigilio Cal**  
**Victor Bonilla**  
**Octavio Cal**  
**Abelino Zuniga**  
**Anignacio Makin**  
**Marcus Cholom**  
**Marcus Tut**  
**Rosendo Coy**  
**Alejandro Ical**

Development  
officer  
**Ginny Fuhs**



# SUSTAINABLE LAND USE MANAGEMENT

## YA'AXCHÉ VOLUNTEERS

GIS & ICT  
Maximiliano  
Caal

Environmental  
Impact  
Assesment  
Ben Pizii

Sustainable  
Land-use  
Management  
Bridget Barry

Development  
Officer  
Ekaterina  
Alexandrova

Conservation  
Science  
Chris Hamley

Project Manager  
Matthew  
Nerdman  
Kame  
Westerman  
Maarten Hofman

Institutional  
Development  
Walter & Sybille  
Hossli



The Sustainable Land-Use Management programme integrates social and environmental factors for a landscape-level approach to conservation called Integrated Landscape Management (ILM). To achieve successful ILM requires taking into account the concerns of a wide variety of stakeholders from the full societal spectrum, where cooperation and consultation are key concepts. The SLM programme can, therefore, be considered an umbrella programme for both the Protected Area Management and the Community Outreach and Livelihood Programmes (see p.9 - 15)

Since 2008, Ya'axché has focused on the principles of ILM, and has conducted a number of projects for its advancement. This year, the first version of the report "Integrated Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Maya Golden Landscape" was finalized under the GEF/UNDP funded project "Integrating Protected Areas and Landscape Management in the Golden Stream Watershed". During the conception of this integrated strategy, several consultation sessions were held among stakeholders from the private sector, the government, local communities and NGOs to take into account their concerns. The Integrated Strategy also incorporates common objectives from other existing complementary strategies in different thematic areas (e.g. the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor Conservation Action Strategy [MMMM CAS], Bladen Nature Reserve Management Plan).



A Ya'axché ranger instructs community birding club members

One of the recent steps towards integrated landscape management is Ya'axché's 2-year project "An integrated approach to Neotropical Migratory Bird habitat management for Southern Belize", which is implemented under the US Fish and Wildlife Service - Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) and focuses on Community Resource and

Development Plans, neotropical migratory bird monitoring, agroforestry practices, community involvement, education and outreach.

Another important step taken towards ILM is the acquisition of about 9 satellite (SPOT) images of various sections of the MGL through Planet Action, a collaborative initiative between ESRI and SPOT to provide free satellite images and software for conservation planning. These images represent an integral step towards the development of a crucial spatial component to the primarily conceptual 'Integrated Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Maya Golden Landscape'.



A view over the savanna in southern Belize

Photography by Christopher Tranter // [www.ctranter.com](http://www.ctranter.com)



Green iguana



Hibiscus flower



# PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT

## Adaptive management

The Protected Areas Management Programme sets out the guidelines for the management of Ya'axché's protected areas, and implements and enforces these guidelines in the field. Ya'axché believes in the adaptive management approach, which adjusts the management strategies according to the results obtained from previous measures. An example of adaptive management is the 2010 review and update of the "2007 Bladen Nature Reserve Management Plan" and the 'Golden Stream Private Protected Areas Management Plan'. The GSPAM plan evaluates the previous management plan for Golden Stream Corridor Preserve and makes adjustments as necessary. Furthermore, the updated document includes a decision to cooperate more closely with TIDE and their adjoining protected areas, which will streamline management efforts and increase efficiency. Finally, the GSPAM plan takes into account the guidelines set out in the MMMC CAS and the general framework put forward in the 'Integrated Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the MGL' (see previous section).



## Enforcement

Ya'axché's enforcement activities within its protected areas consist of regular systematic patrols to detect any illegal activities. After twelve years of patrolling and informing the people in the buffer communities about the protected areas rules and regulations, this year, Ya'axché took its enforcement to the next level. On two separate occasions in December 2010 and January 2011, Ya'axché's rangers detected hunters in Bladen Nature Reserve and made arrests with the help of Punta Gorda police officers and Special Constables from San Pedro Columbia village. Sentences for illegal hunting and unlicensed firearms are pending for the violators. Ya'axché strongly regrets the effects that these arrests have on the families of violators, but wants to stress that it is the hunters who carry the full responsibility for their actions and the possible consequences.

## Biological monitoring and research

In addition to the patrols that enforce rules and regulations, the Protected Areas Management programme runs biological research and monitoring, which is essential for evaluating the management plans. Ya'axché has recently drawn up a comprehensive strategy called the 'Maya Golden Landscape



# PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT

Biodiversity Research, Inventory and Monitoring Strategy and Protocols' with the aim of standardizing monitoring methods and their quality. Throughout 2010, 7 terrestrial transects have been monitored for selected bird and mammal species on a total of over 30 occasions. The bird and mammal species are selected for their role as indicators of ecosystem health and/or hunting pressure.

In addition to bird and mammal biodiversity monitoring, Ya'axché continues its emphasis on freshwater monitoring in the Bladen and Golden Stream watersheds. Ya'axché's

Freshwater Ecologist has trained 3 rangers in an adapted freshwater monitoring method that focuses mainly on water quality and quantity, riparian

buffer quality and macro-invertebrate diversity. To facilitate the processing of freshwater and macro-invertebrate samples, Ya'axché built a Freshwater Research Lab at its Golden Stream Corridor Preserve Field Center.



Ya'axché rangers monitoring the water quality of Golden Stream

Carefully recording and archiving biodiversity data is as important as the initial data collection. For this reason, a biodiversity monitoring database has been developed, providing ease of data access for analysis and reporting. The gathered data are reported in the yearly Biodiversity Synthesis Reports to detect trends in biodiversity indicators. This year, the biodiversity trends of the last 4 years have been analyzed and reported in a biodiversity monitoring poster. In general, the relative abundance of most bird indicator species has remained stable, and the number of observed species has increased, presumably due to the recovery of the lowland forests in GSCP after the 2001 Hurricane Iris. For most mammals, relative abundance has remained the same, as did the number of observed species. The exception is a decline in the relative abundance in game mammals, which is an uncertain finding, but could be due to continued hunting pressures. These results will be taken into account in future reviews and updates of the management plans.

Research conducted by Ya'axché extends its biological data gathering beyond the monitoring programme in order to increase knowledge on endangered and unknown plant and animal species occurring in its protected areas. Several excursions into less accessible regions were conducted for this purpose. The *Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund* and *Friends for Conservation*



# PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT

and Development financed a Rapid Ecological Assessment of the Central River area at the western boundary line of Columbia River Forest Reserve and Bladen Nature Reserve. The area is home to at least 37 globally threatened species and is under consideration for the construction and operation of a hydro-electric power plant (see Advocacy section). The assessment focused on the ichthyology, herpetology and avifaunal diversity of the area, and reinforced the acknowledgement of Central River's unique ecosystem and rich biodiversity status within Belize.

One of Ya'axché's rangers participated in a national hicatee population assessment initiated by the Turtle Survival Alliance, which concluded that the hicatee population is heavily depleted in most of Belize as compared to the 80s and 90s, but healthy populations remain in a few remote areas.



Hicatee sticker, part of the outreach and awareness campaign of the National Hicatee Conservation & Monitoring Network

Consecutively, Ya'axché participated in the first National Hicatee Forum and Workshop, and together with Belizean NGOs and international experts established the National Hicatee Conservation & Monitoring Network. This network is committed towards ensuring the continued survival of hicatee in Belize. Ya'axché is currently taking the lead on the network's outreach and awareness campaign that will encourage the public to avoid consumption of hicatee meat and join in efforts to save the species from extinction.

Ya'axché also led a 2-day bird count at Richardson's Creek in the Bladen Nature Reserve, which resulted in a total number of 92 bird species observed, or 27.3% of the total number of bird species known to occur in the area. Fourteen of the observed species were migrants, providing background knowledge for the NMBCA project.

## Capacity building

Ya'axché continuously strives to improve its methods for effective achievement of the organization's mission. The Protected Area Management Programme enjoyed the benefits of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's 'Wildlife



# PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT

Without Borders' grant for strengthening its ranger team's capacities through a series of workshops, each conducted by a leading expert or organization. The training sessions focused on skills such as fire management techniques, freshwater monitoring techniques, herpetological field sampling, vascular plant identification, and bird ecology and monitoring techniques. These were complemented by specialized training sessions to get the rangers certified as official Special Constables and First Aid responders.

In addition, a feasibility assessment for the establishment of a high quality ranger school in GSCP is being conducted. The school will serve to standardize and improve ranger practices in Belize, and to attract expertise from abroad. The school will be the second of its kind in Central America.



Fire management workshop



Bird ecology and monitoring training with H. Lee Jones



Bird count in Bladen Nature Reserve



Organic vegetables in Ya'axché's greenhouse



Watershed weekend at GSCP



Rio Grande waterfalls



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND LIVELIHOODS

## Outreach

Ya'axché's Scholarship Programme supports children through four years of high school education. To be selected, children must meet criteria of academic merit and economic need, and be recommended by their village leader. In 2010, the scholarship programme continued to help 36 students to pay their school fees, and five more scholarship students reached the end of their studies and graduated successfully. Ya'axché also made over 25 visits to schools in its focal area to educate their scholarship students and other children about the environmental concepts and problems that (are predicted to) affect their lives (forest fire, ecosystems, watershed, riparian buffer zone, conservation, protected areas, climate change, pollution, etc.)

In order to directly and indirectly raise awareness regarding the conservation of the Maya Golden Landscape, village leaders, as well as news and video crews, received an opportunity to participate in one of eight Lighthawk flights (free flights for charity) over the MGL area. One of the video crews shot footage for the "River to Reef" video produced by Ya'axché and Ajax Films with support from the Rapid Response Facility. The "River to Reef" video aims to inform people about the connection between the freshwater in the rivers upstream and the effects it has on the aquatic ecosystems downstream, including the reef ecosystem of the second largest barrier reef in the world along Belize's coast. The video has regularly been broadcasted on local television and Ya'axché will additionally present it in the communities that buffer its protected areas. As a complementary outreach activity to the video, the UNDP COMPACT initiative funded a total of 4 boat trips for teachers, students and their parents to visit the mangroves and offshore islands in the Caribbean Sea, and link their



Local students visit West Snake Caye for environmental education



Watershed weekend at Ya'axché's GSCP Field Center

beauty to the health of the rivers and riverbanks. In the same framework, a 'watershed weekend' was organized at GSCP to inform the public in an informal way about preservation of healthy watersheds – with a kayak race, volleyball competition, showing of the River to Reef video, display of a freshwater model, display of macro-invertebrates using microscopes, and painting activities.



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND LIVELIHOODS

Part of Ya'axché's outreach programme is framed in the 3-year project "Building Sustainable Community Enterprise Development Capacity for Poverty Alleviation Among Indigenous Communities in Southern Belize", funded by the Organization of American States (OAS).

Ya'axché organized a series of two workshops for the local community leaders on constructive leadership and good governance.

## Livelihoods

This year, Ya'axché continued to work with over 80 farmers from all buffer communities of the Maya Golden Landscape to guide and support them in their transition to cacao-based agroforestry farming, a more environmentally-friendly form of agriculture than the traditional slash-and-burn technique. In collaboration with the Caribbean Network for Integrated Rural Development and with funds from the OAS, Ya'axché developed an extensive cacao management training folder with information on planting, seed care, plant care, etc. and an Agroforestry Marketing Manual to give background on why and how to switch to agroforestry. Both booklets were distributed to all agroforestry farmers.



A healthy cacao pod



Organic vegetable garden in Indian Creek Village

2010 was also the year that marked the revival of organic vegetable production, both within Ya'axché and among farmers in the local communities. After an unsuccessful attempt to start a communal organic vegetable project, Ya'axché decided to take a different approach. Interested individual farmers received help with seeds and planting for initiating their own organic vegetable production. The

choice of whether to form groups for marketing the products was left to the farmers.

10 farmers from three different villages currently produce organic vegetables and herbs such as cucumber, cilantro, peanuts, tomatoes, hot and sweet pepper, pumpkin, etc. All of these farmers have been helped in setting up irrigation systems to ensure survival of the plants in the dry season, and continue to receive assistance with best organic farming practices.



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND LIVELIHOODS

Organic vegetable production within Ya'axché started with the ultimate aim of establishing a continuous source of income for the NGO. With the support of OAS, a 12 by 30m greenhouse was built, where a consultant assists in selecting the crops to grow and in developing the planting schedules. All produce is grown according to organic standards and paths are explored to obtain an organic certification. Besides providing income for Ya'axché, the greenhouse also serves as a showcase for the farmers and neighboring organic producers, and as a research facility for testing different crops.

Ya'axché's greenhouse



As a consequence of the organic production by the farmers and the greenhouse, Ya'axché has explored ways to market the produce. It has contacted a number of hotels, resorts and stores throughout Toledo and in Placencia to supply vegetables and herbs, and has secured the supply for, among others, the Machaca Hill Resort, one of the most luxurious resorts of Belize.

Since 2001, Ya'axché has provided tree seedlings to farmers and communities from its own tree nursery. After a first expansion in 2005 and a second one in 2008, a third expansion in 2010 increased the holding capacity of the nursery to 45,000 seedlings. Several fruit tree species, a number of hardwood tree species, riparian tree species and cacao trees are available at a subsidized cost to the public, with 100% of sales redirected back into the programme to purchase composting materials and plant bags.



The tree nursery can hold about 45,000 seedlings



Bee hive at organic agroforestry plot in Indian Creek Village

As means of further income diversification, Ya'axché encourages farmers to try new products. Along with the agroforestry materials, a bee keeping manual was produced in cooperation with Tumul K'in Learning Center, and five farmers from Indian Creek village started hosting their own bee colonies. They harvested the first batch of honey in 2010.



# ADVOCACY

## National Cooperation

Ya'axché maintains a presence at the national level for the promotion of sound protected area laws. As a member of the Executive Committee for the Association of Protected Area Management Organizations (APAMO), Ya'axché promotes collaboration among governmental bodies to influence key policies. In 2010 APAMO released the State of Belize's Protected Areas report, noting priority recommendations, and issued the Responsible Tourism Policy to guide the tourism industry in appropriate practices.

Ya'axché is also a representative to the National Protected Areas Committee of the Belize Association for Private Protected Areas (BAPPA). This technical committee is dedicated to implementing the National Protected Areas System Plan with the current focal project, "Strengthening the national capacities for the operationalization, consolidation, and sustainability of Belize's protected areas system." The project aims to strengthen the legal framework for the protected areas in Belize and assesses the financial sustainability and management capacity of the protected areas.

In 2010 Ya'axché also continued to be a vocal committee member of the Belize Organic Producers Association (BOPA). BOPA is a consortium of NGOs, government ministries, and businessmen working to develop nationwide standards for the certification of organic products; however, the certification guidelines are yet to be negotiated with the Belize Bureau of Standards.

Finally, Ya'axché continues to support the community forest management plan in Boom Creek, which was developed as part of the Toledo Healthy Forest Initiative and aims to prevent deforestation through sustainable timber extraction. Boom Creek is currently waiting for the Forest Department to approve the 20-year logging license.

## Maintaining integrity of protected areas through legal action



The Chalillo dam on the Macal River

The proposed construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Central River bordering the community of San Pedro Columbia, the Columbia River Forest Reserve and Bladen Nature Reserve has compelled Ya'axché to take on a new advocacy role. After months of unlawful feasibility studies and associated activities in the nature reserve, the Belize Hydroelectric Development and Mana-



## ADVOCACY

gement Company (BHD) applied to the Forest Department for a research permit, which the Forest Department granted, by so violating the National Parks Systems Act. After an order for BHD to “cease and desist”, Ya’axché filed a request for judicial review of BHD’s research permit to the Belize Supreme Court on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2011, aiming to preserve legal rights in the event that these activities are allowed to continue. *After almost a year of delays and hearings, the Belize Supreme Court issued a decision on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 stating that (1) although the Belize Hydroelectric Development and Management unlawfully caused damages to the protected area, the company will not be charged, and (2) the Belize Forest Department could not issue a permit for such feasibility studies within the nature reserve; however, the permit has expired and no charges will be issued.*

Ya’axché believes an appeal to be the next option for ensuring that Belize’s protected areas law is upheld and that a precedent is not set for inappropriate and illegal development within Belize’s protected areas.

Since the start of BHD development activities Ya’axché has worked with all affected communities to ensure that they are fully informed of the proposed development, to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders, and to give communities support for voicing their opinions on the use of resources within their lands. As mentioned above, Ya’axché also completed a rapid ecological assessment of the Central River area early in 2010, demonstrating the environmental significance of the region and the severity of the threat posed by BHD’s activities.



# INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

In 2010, Ya'axché's Executive Director, Ms. Lisel Alamilla, was awarded the Conservation Leadership Award from the Marsh Foundation in the UK<sup>1</sup>, a confirmation that Ya'axché is walking the right roads towards sustainable development and conservation.



Ya'axché benefited from an even closer co-operation with FFI, through exchange of expertise (e.g. fundraising, budgeting) and financial assistance, and from project updates and featured articles on the FFI website<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, a number of training sessions were organized, aimed to increase institutional government competencies within the organization. During a two-week consultation, two Canadian NGO experts provided Ya'axché with a mount of information and advice on how to successfully govern the NGO. Early in 2010, a training session on internal communication was given for all permanent staff members by a Belizean expert on this topic. This session resulted in a revision of the pre-existing internal communication strategy.

As part of its communication policy, Ya'axché is also very actively spreading its vision and achievements online using the social networking site Facebook<sup>3</sup> as a powerful tool. Furthermore, a series of publications were featured in the national and international press, an article about the planned hydroelectric dam was released online at Esperanza Project website<sup>4</sup>, and a Channel5 news crew (Belizean national television) reported on Ya'axché's fight against the dam and illegal xaté palm extraction<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, all Lighthawk flights for Ya'axché in 2010 were reported in a special issue of Waypoints<sup>6</sup>, the LightHawk newsletter.

Ya'axché's freshwater ecologist keeps the public updated on recent achievements through the website of the Rufford's Small Grants for Conservation<sup>7</sup>. And finally, a joint press release between Ya'axché and the Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education was published on Mongabay.com<sup>8</sup>, a major environmental news website for Latin America, announcing a Harpy Eagle nest found in Bladen Nature Reserve, making it the first nest observed in Belize since the 60's.



# INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

2010 was characterized by numerous changes in Ya'axché's staff positions. Ya'axché wants to thank Nathaniel Miller for his invaluable input in the PAM programme during his time as Protected Areas Manager. His role was successfully taken over by Lee McLoughlin. Also, Ya'axché is very sad to have lost one of its monuments, Nicholas Wicks, who was Sustainable Land Use Programme manager and had been working for Ya'axché for six years. Ginny Fuhs played a pivotal role in securing adequate funds for the last two years, but has left the organization at the end of 2010. Aretha Morris kept track of Ya'axché's finances and handed over her task to Ivanny Hernandez-Oliva. Meanwhile, Venancio Ack joined the team to assist with bookkeeping. Ya'axché's permanent staff was supported in crucial areas by more than 10 national and international volunteers throughout 2010.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fauna-flora.org/news/lisel-alamilla-wins-marsh-award/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fauna-flora.org/explore/belize/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/yaaxche>

<sup>4</sup> <http://theesperanzaproject.org/2010/10/taking-a-stand-against-unsustainable-hydroelectric-development-in-the-maya-mountains/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/44416>

<sup>6</sup> [www.lighthawk.org/WayPoint/Waypoint%20November%202010.pdf](http://www.lighthawk.org/WayPoint/Waypoint%20November%202010.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.ruffordsmallgrants.org/rsg/projects/rachael\\_carrie](http://www.ruffordsmallgrants.org/rsg/projects/rachael_carrie)

<sup>8</sup> [http://news.mongabay.com/2011/0106-morgan\\_harpy\\_belize.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2011/0106-morgan_harpy_belize.html)



Ya'axché's Board, Staff and volunteers at the GSCP Field Center



# CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE



Local youth at Rio Blanco waterfall



Blunthead tree snake on the banks of Central River



Community leadership workshop for village leaders



Deforestation in the Toledo district

Even though the aftermath of the worldwide economic crisis also hit the non-profit sector in 2010 and funds were not easy to secure, Ya'axché has achieved numerous successes throughout the year. Sustainable land-use strategies were developed, biological data were collected and analyzed, the enforcement of illegal extraction regulations in the protected areas stepped up to a higher level, the tree nursery, the organic gardens and agroforestry plots have expanded, several outreach activities have been organized, and the destruction of the biodiverse Central river habitat was prevented due to Ya'axché's advocacy work.

However, the plight of Belize's rural population, its healthy forests and abundant natural resources is far from being solved. Although the hydroelectric dam plans are shelved for the time being, the community of San Pedro Columbia and the Bladen Nature Reserve face yet another threat: oil exploration and extraction. Ya'axché has decided to take the path of dialogue with the Government of Belize in order to minimize the negative impacts on the environment and indigenous people, and increase the share of the possible benefits for the local communities.

The increased level of enforcement has already reduced the rate of illegal extraction, but Ya'axché remains on guard by keeping up regular patrols in every corner of its protected areas. In the mean time, Ya'axché wants to



## CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

attract national and international researchers to assist in the documentation of the unique set of fauna and flora within its working area, and to design monitoring programmes to keep track of the biological and socio-economical situation.

To help improve livelihoods in the local communities, we will work on increasing organic vegetable production and the acreage of agroforestry, while striving to increase crop diversity by creatively including local crop species for short, medium and long term productivity, so as to provide alternative habitat to the region's abundant wildlife.

Without the understanding and support of the local communities, all the above initiatives would be fruitless. The Outreach component of Ya'axché's work aims to build the knowledge and the attitude of the people to understand and support the nature of Ya'axché's efforts. Aside from teaching school children about environmental problems, we will also formally instruct teachers and encourage them to include environmental problems in their science classes.

Each and every one of Ya'axché's paths towards nature conservation and responsible and sustainable development in southern Belize goes steeply uphill and over rough terrain. Sometimes the road is clouded and the end is not in sight. However, fueled by mountains of motivation, Ya'axché is determined to take on this very challenge with firm steps, and walk the road with courage, perseverance and wisdom. The destination is a biodiverse, healthy and long term symbiosis between the people of Belize and the natural treasures of their extraordinary homeland.

Aerial view of Punta Gorda, Toledo district, southern Belize



# THANK YOU!



Ya'axché's principal institutional partner, who has supported its work from the beginning.

## Granting organizations

- Protected Areas Conservation Trust
  - Community Management of Protected Areas Conservation Programme, Global Environment Facility Medium Sized Project, via the United Nations Development Program
- Organization of American States (OAS)
- Rapid Response Facility UNESCO
  - United States Fish & Wildlife Service, Neotropical Migratory Birds Conservation Act
  - Planet Action - Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI)
- Fauna & Flora International (FFI)
  - Grassvalley Trust
    - Panthera Research and Conservation Grant
    - Mohammed Ben Zaïed
- Whitley Animal Protection Trust
- Caribbean network for integrated rural development
  - Conservation International - Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
    - Matsarol Foundation
      - Oak Foundation
    - Valentine Charitable Trust
    - Rainforest Action Network
    - USFWS - Wildlife Without Borders Latin America and Caribbean

## Partners

- The Government of Belize- Forest Department, Fisheries Department and Policy Unit
- Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations (APAMO)
- Belize Association of Private Protected Areas (BAPPA)
- Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)
- Sarstoon-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM)
- Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education (BFREE)
- Toledo Healthy Forests Initiative (THFI)
- Grassvalley Trust
- San Pedro Columbia dam group
- Toledo Cacao Growers' Association (TCGA)



# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

<b>OPERATING INCOME</b>	
Grants	\$936,740.50
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$936,740.50</b>

<b>LESS EXPENSES</b>	
Community Sub-Projects	\$53,247.14
Salaries	\$421,768.98
Advertising	\$705.10
Consultancies	\$186,119.74
Audit (2009 & 2010 Audits done in 2011)	\$0.00
Communication (Telephone/Satellite)	\$24,722.45
Equipment-Motor Vehicle Maintenance	\$14,325.17
Field Supplies	\$6,426.00
Fuel	\$30,794.69
Insurance	\$1,021.83
International Travel	\$1,362.14
Licensing	\$400.00
Local Travel & Subsistence	\$1,468.41
Materials and Supplies	\$4,094.71
Membership Fees	\$106.94
Office Supplies	\$8,665.47
Miscellaneous Supplies	\$4,729.00
Plant Stocks	\$750.00
Postage	\$827.20
Office Rental	\$12,000.00
Scholarship	\$741.75
Training	\$12,447.15
Utilities	\$5,158.86
Office Equipment	\$11,505.40
Infrastructure	\$1,816.91
Field Equipment	\$92,699.56
Promotion	\$254.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$898,158.60</b>

<b>Loss/Profit for the Year 2011</b>	<b>\$38,581.90</b>
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