The University of Florida Tropical Conservation and Development Program (TCD), the TCD Student Group & the Center for Latin American Studies present

TROPILUNCH

EVALUATING THE EFFECTS OF ECOTOURISM ON TERRESTRIAL VERTEBRATES: THE LAPA RIOS CASE IN THE OSA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA

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12:45 – 1:45

GRINTER 376

SUMMARY

Despite claims of environmental sustainability, ecotourism is responsible for disturbing wildlife and damaging the environment in many regions and countries around the world. Determining ecotourism impacts, particularly in highly biodiverse and conservation priority areas like the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica, is key to ensure the protection of critically endangered wildlife species, as well as maintaining livelihood security for local communities. Furthermore, evaluating the potential ecological costs of tourism services and management strategies have on biodiversity is key for the conservation and viability of Private Natural Protected Areas around the world. In this study, we assess the impacts of infrastructure, human activity, and environmental factors on medium-large terrestrial species within the Lapa Rios Nature Reserve. We also investigate the effects of different survey procedures to provide standardized and inexpensive alternatives for rapid assessment of biodiversity and visitor impact. Our study indicates that Lapa Rios conservation efforts and sound management strategies are responsible for the wide range of species, but also minimal

disturbances to wildlife, experienced at the LR Natural Reserve. We propose the use of local knowledge and trails as the most effective procedure to evaluate/monitor ground terrestrial species and the effects of tourist visitation within ecotourism natural preserves, such as Lapa Rios.

BIO:

Beatriz Lopez Gutierrez is graduate research assistant and PhD student in the School of Forest Resources and Conservation, Forest Ecology and Geomatics, at the University of Florida. She is advised by Dr. Broadbent. Dr. Almeyda Zambrano serves on her committee. Bea graduated with an Honours Degree in Zoology at Cambridge Anglia Ruskin University and completed a Master Research in Biosystematics at the Imperial College London. In addition to her academic life, she has been involved in various conservation projects around the world, being experienced in a range of marine and terrestrial surveying techniques. Her interests lie in biodiversity monitoring, sustainability, conservation and development issues in tropical regions, particularly in the Osa Peninsula and Golfito region, Costa Rica, where she has spent the last several years coordinating several ongoing research projects, including water quality and works with camera traps and sea turtle conservation. Her PhD research combines geospatial approaches (LiDAR, satellite) and field surveys of bio-indicators (i.e. key predators and their prey, butterflies, beetles) to assess biodiversity, habitat structure, and connectivity across tropical forests in this region of Costa Rica. Additionally, she is carrying out socio-economic analyses and outreach efforts, including workshops, to further our understanding of biodiversity conservation, sustainability and the role of local communities in conservation efforts in these regions.