

# A walk in our wilderness

Many Belizeans may have missed last week's Straight Talk and in so doing missed seeing some of the most breath-taking pictures of the pristine and enchanting wilderness being threatened with destruction by the building of the Chalillo Dam on the Macal River.

Committed to fighting a cause well worth fighting for, Zoo founder Sharon Matola along with tour guide Greg Sho ventured where no (or few) men ever dared to go. Living only on limited supplies but with mother nature to lift their spirits, they spent three weeks on the Macal River in the Raspaculo Area gathering data and video-recording a hidden world.

The trip was designed to explore this area which could become non-existent if this government allows FORTIS, BEL and Duke to set up shop and begin construction of the controversial Chalillo Dam.

A lot has been said about the advantages and the disadvantages of the dam, and at the end of the day only one decision prevails. But Matola contends that for a meagre 9 Mega watts of power more, it is not worth destroying such an invaluable habitat and endangering millions of wildlife - from the microbes to the plants.

Of course the protagonists of the Chalillo dam project are refusing to see that it is not a fair and an equal trade off; all they see is a solution to the problem of a white elephant in the form of the Mollejon Hydro Project.

Now we are all expected to pay the price to cover a political decision made in bad-faith when Ralph Fonseca as Minister of State and Chairman for BEL signed away our future. Everyone who agrees to this poor investment has his hands stained in blood and not even all the waters of the Macal River or all the waters of all the rivers, lakes and seas in Belize could wash their guilt away.

But hoping to re-write this historic disaster they are now hoping that the wildlife of the Raspaculo Area will give up their homes and their way of life all because their voices and language is not our own.

Matola and Sho by visiting the area, however, became their voices and are telling their story. The saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words" is so true. Everyone should get the privilege to behold what the eyes of Matola and Sho have seen.

Pandora's Box was fortunate to see those images and if words could paint the picture of the two lovely Scarlet Macaw frolicking in their nest

in the trunk of an old Quam wood tree, then the words would suffice. But how do you put in words their graceful flight as they soar the skies with dozens of their kind.

Or how can words capture the bright eyes of an owl staring into the lens of its intruders, or two young spider monkeys swinging from branch to branch with not a care in the world. And how do you capture in words the family of picarri pigs that solemnly stood together along the riverbank, maybe seeing human intruders for the first time.

Imagine the trauma as they

drown or are displaced from the territory they call home. Even the snake that crawls on its belly in its natural environment did not look scary, but rather basked in its splendour. Then imprinted forever in our minds will be

the hundreds of butterflies fanning their wings as they clustered

together on a tree. Their uniform colours only confirm what an artist Mother Nature really is.

After seeing second hand what Matola and Sho saw first hand, one cannot help but feel compelled to secure

and protect this paradise. Surely the visit has inspired Matola and now Sho to more fervently fight for a cause

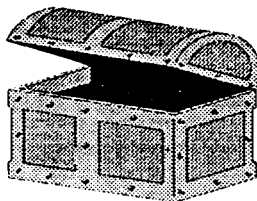
which developers and dam promoters can only interpret in dollars and cents. Undoubtedly the executives of FORTIS, BEL and even the Government have never visited this area and surely even they would feel their hearts melt in the presence of such magnificence.

Matola and Sho are now calling on Belizeans to take an interest and show their appreciation for Belize's very own world wonder. Concerned Belizeans are being asked to write Stanley Marshall, FORTIS' top honcho to let him know how they feel about the proposed destruction of this habitat nestled in the Raspaculo Area on the Macal River.

Write to:

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## Pandora's Box



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