Previous Visits. My first visit to the Tambopata Research Center (TRC) in southeast Peru was in October 1996 and the second was in March 1998. Each visit entailed a morning flight to Puerto Maldonado, considered a frontier city by many Peruvians, and a looong 8-hour journey by motorized canoe up the Tambopata River. We arrived at dusk, tired and hungry, and unpacked by candlelight, dazed and confused. When departing, we faced a shorter (about 6 hours) downstream boat ride back to Puerto Maldonado where we spent the night in a noisy hotel prior to a morning departure (there are no afternoon flights) back to Lima. But, each visit was a marvelous experience.

This was my seventh visit to the rainforests of Peru. My passion and quest were to observe parrots and other critters in the wild. The macaw clay licks, revealed by Dr. Charles Munn in his National Geographic (Jan. 94) article, were a major draw and I've seen the "coll-
wildlife) is much more reasonable in cost and has a premier clay lick as well. Also, I wanted to see a new lodge, Posada Amazonas, which now provides a welcome and pleasant break in the long journey to the TRC.

Rainforest Expeditions (www.perunature.com) owns both the Tambopata Research Center and the newer Posada Amazonas (in partnership with the Ese'eja Native Community). This environmentally sensitive organization has won both the Conservation International Ecotourism Excellence and Conde Nast Traveller Ecotourism Awards. For questions or further info about Rainforest Expeditions email co-owner Kurt Holle at: kholle@rainforest.com.pe.

Parrot fanatics should check out: www.perunature.com/parrotlovers.htm

Posada Amazonas
This 24-bedroom lodge has been open since 1998 and consists of several thatched roof buildings used for bedrooms, a library and exhibit building, a meeting center, and a large bar-dining room-kitchen facility. Each bedroom has its own bathroom and shower and the rooms are open to the jungle. Candles and oil lamps provide soothing light after dark. The food is Peruvian-style and very tasty. The bathroom and shower and the facility. Each bedroom has its own bathroom and shower and the rooms are open to the jungle. Candles and oil lamps provide soothing light after dark. The food is Peruvian-style and very tasty. The bathroom and shower and the facility. Each bedroom has its own bathroom and shower and the rooms are open to the jungle. Candles and oil lamps provide soothing light after dark. The food is Peruvian-style and very tasty.

Our guide for the entire visit was Silverio Duri, an Ese'eja Indian, and one of the best I have encountered in all my visits. Rita and I were accompanied by a client, Rita Blakeslee. Our trip was structured so that we spent two nights at Posada Amazonas, four nights at the TRC and then two more nights at Posada Amazonas on the way out. This arrangement really simplified the long journey to the TRC and allowed us to catch a morning flight from Puerto Maldonado without the noisy hotel experience.

Adventures at Posada Amazonas
This lodge turned out to be a most worthy destination in its own right, ideal for the folks that don't have a lot of time and want a genuine rainforest experience. Our flight arrived in Puerto Maldonado late morning and we were met by Silverio, taken to the Rainforest Expedition office for a courtesy break and then to the port to board our 40-ft long motorized canoe. Gone were the pickup truck rides from my previous visits. We rode in a bus-type vehicle with a thatched roof!

We arrived at the lodge and were greeted by a member of the staff for a quick briefing and a refreshing glass of native juice. There was plenty of time to unpack, get acclimated, and visit the bar, all in daylight. Our room was spacious and attractive and we really appreciated having our own facilities. Early March is at the shoulder of the rainy season in this part of Peru. In previous visits, I had experienced rain in the dry season and great weather in the rainy season but, on this visit, we experienced RAIN in the rainy season. It had rained quite heavily in the days prior to our visit and the trails were slick and muddy, often with standing water several inches deep. However, rubber boots are provided at the lodges and we found that they were very necessary for all of our activities throughout our visit. We got a lot of use from our ponchos but our spirits were never dampened because we got to do something interesting for at least a piece of every day.

Our first highlight was to climb a 37-meter observation tower that placed us above the jungle canopy and also treated us to a beautiful view of the Tambopata River. We saw lots of birds including Squirrel Cuckoo, Rufus Motmot, White-bellied Caique, and Yellow-ridged and White-throated Toucans. A good macaw show included Chestnut-fronted, Scarlet, and Green-winged. We also saw White-eyed and Dusky-headed Conures as well as Yellow-crowned and Mealy Amazons.

There are two small clay licks near Posada Amazonas. One favored by the smaller parrots like conures and pionus and the other by the macaws and amazons. Attendance is not as regular as the larger licks at TRC, Manu and Timpia and we didn't have much luck due to the rainy weather. However, we were treated to a rare sighting of a pair of Blue-headed Macaws Propyrrhura couloni near the lick. While waiting at these licks and walking the trail network, we saw Fork-tailed and Sulphur Flycatchers, Black-tailed and Masked Tityras, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Eastern Kingbird, and Yellow-backed Tanager. On our last day, we had about a dozen titi monkeys playing in the trees very near the lodge. Yeah, a great taste of the rainforest.

Other activities at the Posada

Our 77th Bird Mart
EVERYBODY’S BIRD MART
December 1, 2002
L.A. County Fairplex, Bldg.#4
Pomona, California
9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.
Admission $5.00
Kids under 12 free
The Pomona Bird Mart has become the marketplace for buyers and sellers.

BIRDS•CAGES•FEEDERS
NEST BOXES•VITAMINS
SEED•PERCHES•GIFT ITEMS
parking $4.00
Use White Ave. parking lot (tram service from parking lot to building G)
Everybody’s Bird Mart
P.O. Box 1465, Thousand Oaks, CA 91368
(805) 494-1499
The Original, #1 Bird Mart

the afa WATCHBIRD 23
Amazonas included a visit to a farm worked by Ese'eja Indians where we saw starfruit, mango, banana, lime, papaya and ugli trees, among others. We also visited a medicinal plant center where a shaman not only cultivated many types of plants and trees but also treated locals for a variety of maladies. Fascinating.

**Up the River**

Traveling the Tambopata River is an experience in itself. With the heavy rain coming off the mountains, the river can rise dramatically and the banks calve bringing large trees along with the process. Thus, the boatmen are very careful to avoid floating debris and whirlpools. The distance from Puerto Maldonado to the Tambopata Research Center is about 100km as the parrot flies but much further for us non-flighted folks because of all the twists and turns in the river.

About halfway into the journey, we enter into the Tambopata-Candamo Reserve, over 2.2 million acres of undisturbed and almost completely uninhabited rainforest. There is a myriad of wildlife to see along the way. We saw Great and Snowy Egrets, White-necked Heron, Black Falcon, Roadside Hawk, Orinoco Geese, Brown-chested Martin, Giant Cowbird, White-winged Swallow, and many other birds. A highlight was a group of Capybara, the largest rodents in the world that grow up to as much as sixty pounds. Another treat was a family of Red Howler Monkeys cavorting in the trees right above us.

**Tambopata Research Center**

The 13-bedroom lodge is older and, of course, more rustic. The complex consists of four interconnected thatch-roofed buildings joined by covered walkways. The guests share the showers and toilets. Again, the food was great and the bar served cold beer, thanks to a propane refrigerator. No ice here.

Research is a continuing process at the TRC with researchers almost always in residence. Rather than cite all the “ologies,” suffice it to say that these people are using innovative protocols to study bugs, birds, reptiles, fish, mammals, and plants. During the tourist season, the researchers double as guides. Thus, the tourist is exposed to several guides, experts in their fields, to explain the mysteries of the rainforest. This marriage with ecotourism generates revenue to develop improved services and infrastructure as well as design new and exciting ways to interpret nature and observe wildlife. With 25km of trails at the TRC, there is much to see and explore.

**The Macaws of Tambopata**

Macaws normally lay two or three eggs during each breeding season and begin incubating immediately. Since the eggs are laid three or four days apart, the chicks hatch accordingly with the first chick growing exponentially before the next chick hatches. This first chick is bigger and more aggressive in receiving food from its parents and the smaller, later chicks often die of starvation. In the early to mid 1990s, researchers would climb to the nests (both natural tree cavities and man-made boxes) and pull the weaker chicks for handfeeding. Although some were lost, over thirty chicks were successfully fledged back to the jungle. These Blue and Gold, Green-winged and Scarlet babies, known as “chicos,” added to the aura of the center by flying down to snatch food and interact with the tourists. It is interesting to note that none of the Blue and Gold chicos returned after fledging.

The chico appearances are not as regular now but, most exciting, several have taken on wild mates. During our visit, such a pair of Scarlet flew down to the “treat station” for a banana snack. Some of these pairs have already produced offspring. The research continues under the leadership of Don Brightsmith of Duke University (see *AFA Watchbird* Vol XXVIII, No. 3 for more details of his work). Don spends many weeks in residence each year and supervises a number of staffers who monitor the macaws and habitat in his absence. Rita’s biggest highlight of our visit was to observe the measuring, weighing, and physical examination of a baby Scarlet Macaw.

To do this, one of Don’s assistants climbed a rope, carrying a covered bucket, about 80 feet up to an artificial nest box. She then pulled the chick, placed it in the bucket, and lowered it to the ground by a smaller rope. Here another assistant did the physical, recorded the data, and returned the chick to the bucket for the return trip. Since these inspections are done from the time the eggs are laid, the parents get used to these intrusions without any problems. During the 12 weeks or so prior to fledging, the chick’s tail gets very dirty and damaged due to the close quarters of the nest. During our visit, we saw several flying macaw families with a recently fledged chick as evidenced by a raggedy or missing tail. Neat!

**Adventures at the Tambopata Research Center**

The normal day for a parrot fanatic at TRC used to be to wake up at 4:30 am or so, have a snack and take the longboat across the river to an island/sand bar to wait for the clay lick “show.”

On this visit, it was the same drill. However, the island was GONE! Must have washed away in a big storm since my last visit. Now the observation is much further to the left,
facing the lick, although just as close
to that portion of the lick face as
before. However, if the parrots decide
(they can be fickle) to visit further to
the right, the distance can be a lot far-
ther than before. The serious photog-
rapher should bring at least a 500mm
lens for acceptable photos.

The show is just as spectacular
whichever the distance. If the weath-
er cooperates (the birds do not usu-
ally come if it is raining or foggy) the
parrots begin to arrive at daybreak
from all points of the compass (great
chance for great overhead pix). They
congregate in the trees above and
beside the clay lick. When each of the
species reaches critical mass, they
begin to descend to the clay lick to
injest the clay (offset their diet toxici-
ity much like we take an antacid). The
smaller birds (conures, pionus,
and parakeets) come first followed
later by the amazons (Mealy and
Yellow-crowned) and macaws
(Chestnut-fronted, Blue and Gold,
Green-winged, and Scarlet). What
majesty! What beauty! Rainbow col-
ors and raucous calling – the grace-
ful flight of the macaws and the ama-
zons flapping so hard to fly. Clouds
of birds flushing off the lick when a
“sentinel” calls an alert. Do you get
the impression that I think this event
is awesome?

After the clay lick activity, we
return to the lodge for breakfast and
prepare to spend a couple hours
exploring one of the trails. Then it is
time to relax before lunch. After a
“siesta” during the hottest part of the
day, we hit another trail before
heading back to the lodge for a cold
one before dinner. Evenings (it gets
dark a little after 6:00) are spent
trading stories with staff and other
visitors, watching a slide show (pro-
tector powered by a generator) or
going on a night hike to look for
dragons, tarantulas, and other noctur-
nal critters. Finally, we go to bed
around 9:00pm or so to fall asleep to
the sounds of the jungle and get
rested for another exciting day.

There is so much to do at the
TRC. A visit to the palm swamp and
climbing a 60-ft tower to see Blue and
Gold Macaws returning to their nest at
day’s end is such a memorable expe-
rience. You can fish for piranha or
look for giant otters at an oxbow lake.
But the overlook trail that winds its
way along the top of the clay lick is
my most favorite place on earth. On a
clear day one can see the snow-
capped Andes in the distance with the
Tambopata River and rainforest in the
foreground.

Silverio led us along this trail
one mid-morning and we were
amazed to observe 60-70 large
(Scarlet, Green-winged, and Blue
and Gold) macaws reach critical
mass and descend to the clay lick
right below us! This late show does
not happen regularly and is counter
to my experience at other clay licks.

On yet another day as we tra-
versed this trail, we saw several spider
monkeys then a group of a dozen red
howler monkeys, and, in the bamboo
forest, a family of dusky titi monkeys.
I was taking photos of this group
when a youngster crept down from
the branches closer, closer and closer
until he was almost full-frame in my
viewfinder. Incredible. As we rested
on an overlook bench, some Cobalt-
winged Parakeets gathered in the tree
above us. Soon there were hundreds.
They would flush off the tree in a
chattering green cloud, swoop over
the river, and return. Again and again.

Silverio was a master at spotting
and identifying wildlife, especially
birds. Our partial list at the TRC
includes Blue-throated Piping Guan,
King and Black Vultures, Tropical
King Bird, Blue-fronted Jacamar, Mag-
pie Tanager, White-fronted Nun Bird,
Bolaceous Jay, Slate-colored
Seedeater, Laughing Falcon, and Sun-
colored Night Hawk.

Mammals, in addition to all the
monkeys, included agouti, bamboo
rat, and red bracket deer. Silverio led
us along trail C-1 and showed us a
tarantula family (parent and two
babies that were plenty big for me).
He somehow spotted a 5-ft caiman
that we had to struggle to discern it
from the vegetation and shadows.

But, the highpoint of my visit was a
snake! We were still on C-1 with
Silverio in the lead, the two Ritas in
the middle with me at the rear. I
 glanced two or three feet to the side
and saw the last several feet of what
seemed to be a HUGE boa constrict-
or. I alerted the others and gave the
snake’s tail a gentle tug and, sure
enough, the head came around to
investigate. That made for some great
photos and even greater memories.

**Closing Thoughts**

My first two visits to the
Tambopata Research Center were
wonderful. Some activities were
rained out but most were not. Some
days the parrots came to the clay lick
and some days they did not. But
each visit revealed new and won-
drous things. This third visit was no
exception and, coupled with the
delightful sojourn at Posada
Amazonas, the third time was defi-
nitely the charm! ✴