

Texas A&M University Funds Bird Research With Course

Parrots of the Amazon Rainforest course sends students to Peru

By Erin O'Brien

The Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences and the Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center are sponsoring the first continuing education course of its kind, Parrots of the Amazon Rainforest, which will be held in the lowland Amazon rainforests of the Tambopata National Reserve in southeastern Peru from Jan. 26, 2009 through Feb. 1, 2009.

The course will allow up to 18 students to study parrots in their natural habitat and learn about them from Drs. Donald J. Brightsmith, MS, Ph.D., and J. Jill Heatley, DVM, MS, Dipl. ABVP, both experts in the field. Brightsmith is a researcher at the Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center who has traveled throughout Latin America and worked in Peru "every year since 1993 for at least two to five months of the year." Heatley is a clinical associate professor of Zoological Medicine and Surgery Service at A&M who has taught case-based avian medicine to students, veterinarians and technicians for 10 years.

"You can go to lectures and learn about parrots," Brightsmith said, "and there are places you can go in Latin America and Australia to see parrots, but it's very rare that you have the opportunity to learn about the birds from the experts and see the birds in the wild."

Brightsmith adds that while the course is open to everyone, including those not affiliated with A&M, "veterinarians, veterinary technicians, aviculturists, bird enthusiasts and pretty much anybody who has a great interest in parrots" are the ideal participants for the course.

The location, which features the world's largest diversity of amphibians, butterflies and birds, including 20 species of wild parrot flocks, will provide students with first-hand experience in the tropics, which Brightsmith says is a must for any parrot enthusiast.

"The site is one of the premier rainforests in the New World," Brightsmith said. "We're in the middle of a park that's about the size of Connecticut. We hear about 'rainforests' in the media, but if you've never been to a tropical rainforest, you don't have any idea what it's like. So it's always fun to introduce people to the tropics."

The course was sponsored in part to raise money for research on parrots, according to Brightsmith. It also provides "a unique opportunity to get people into the environment with experts so that you get to see the animals and learn about them as you see them. I think veterinarians, aviculturists and bird enthusiasts should really see [parrots] in the wild in order to get a better understanding of the birds they have in captivity. Seeing the animals in their natural environment gives you much more background on the animals."

Pre-registration for the course is required on or before Nov. 15, 2008 for a fee of \$2,500. Space is first-come, first-served, so people are encouraged to register early. They also need a passport and a vaccination against Yellow Fever.

"I'm looking forward to getting a group of people down there," Brightsmith said. "I really enjoy sharing my knowledge about these birds. In the past, I've had a lot of people who were really affected by their experiences there; they've changed their lives and the way they see their birds at home, and I find that very rewarding."

To register online or receive more information on the course, [click here](#).