

ANALYSIS OF ECOTOURISM:  
THE MUNICIPAL RESERVE “CURICHI CUAJO”  
BUENA VISTA, BOLIVIA

By

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The thesis: “Analysis of Ecotourism: The Municipal Reserve ‘Curichi Cuajo’ Buena Vista, Bolivia” is hereby approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE IN FORESTRY.

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## PREFACE

I earned my Bachelor's degree in Biology and Chemistry from the University of Texas in 1995. After college, I worked in a drug research facility for a few years. I had applied for many positions in the Texas Parks and Wildlife but didn't have the necessary experience. One day I spoke with Blair Orr on the phone for about 20 minutes. It was during that first conversation that I decided to pack up my car with my dog, Leah and all of her and my belongs and make the long haul from Texas to the upper most reaches of Michigan to begin the Masters International Program with Michigan Technological University and Peace Corps. I've never looked back.

My first Peace Corps site was in Sipe Sipe, Cochabamba, Bolivia beginning in 1999 and then had a site change and moved to Buena Vista in April of 2000. This study on ecotourism in Buena Vista, Santa Cruz, Bolivia for the Curichi Cuajo municipal reserve was conducted during my service from 2000 to 2001.

I knew very little about ecotourism when I began. As time went on, after attending conferences, reading books, and interacting with my village, I began to understand quite a bit more about what ecotourism is. Unfortunately today, many businesses and project claim to be 'ecotourism' when in actuality they are not. All too often one will see a so called ecotourism project at a pristine area and the villagers not only not benefiting from the project but maltreated. In this thesis, I have tried to piece together many of the most important aspects of ecotourism, how to improve the quality of life for the villagers while at the same time to preserve the area in question.

"I sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by any means possible, except getting off his back."

– Tolstoy

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Last but most certainly not least, I give my utmost gratitude and love to my mother and father, the best parents anyone could have. I could not have done any of this without their unconditional love and support.

## **CHAPTER 1 – Introduction**

My first real introduction to ecotourism came during my Peace Corps service in Bolivia at an ecotourism conference held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, hosted by Peace Corps. They had invited many guest speakers from different institutions within Bolivia and the Peace Corps Country Director from Belize, Costas Christ, who also happened to be the secretary of The Ecotourism Society. The other presenters at the conference spoke to the volunteers about different sustainable ecotourism projects and how they WERE integrated with Bolivian society. Costas Christ talked about ecotourism not only as a project, but gave an overview of important ideals in ecotourism. At that time, I was already working with the Curichi Cuajo ecotourism project. He had questioned us, asking what makes an ideal ecotourism project, what it took to make an ecotourism project work, and I then looked at my own project. This led me to my thesis. The purpose of this thesis is to examine and list aspects of the ideal ecotourism project and compare it to the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo.

It is important to analyze a proposed ecotourism project beforehand to insure it qualifies as a sustainable business. A project requires considerable planning and preparation. The village must be an active participant in all stages of the project. Ecotourism projects may not be suitable for all areas, nor all villages. Communities all over the world are beginning ecotourism projects, some are successful, some are not, and some are not even appropriate as an ecotourism project in the first place. If one is to determine if ecotourism is appropriate for an area, then one must to understand what attributes make ecotourism successful.



Many people have analyzed ecotourism in the past decade. Ecotourism is not as simple a solution as it has been represented. When someone sees a “nice little hill and valley” they may be tempted to promote ecotourism in that area (Simpson 1996 as cited in Southgate 1998, 96). The problem is there is probably another “nice little hill and valley” right down the road. Not all of them can or will be suited for an ecotourism project.

In order to investigate the suitability of the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo, a general overview of Bolivia is given in the following chapter. It discusses the geography, economy, history, languages, and protected areas of the country. This is followed by a description of the town Buena Vista and then a project description of the study Curichi Cuajo.

Chapter 3 opens by defining ecotourism. It then delves into a literature search of the two main components, physical and socio-economic aspects of ecotourism. In Chapter 4, the methods, especially the interview process, are discussed.

The results and discussion are reviewed in Chapter 5. This analysis is divided into two sections, my views as an outsider and resident views of Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with findings of this study and recommendations for Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo ecotourism project.

## **CHAPTER 2 – Background**

### **General Description of Bolivia**

The landlocked Republic of Bolivia is located in west-central South American (Figure 1). Bolivia is situated between 57° 29' 40" and 69° 33' 36" longitude west and between 9° 34' 50" and 25° 13' latitude south in the east and 10° 56' 40" and 25° 0' 05" latitude in the west (Osborne 1964) covering 1,098,580 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, roughly twice the size of Spain (The Library of Congress 1989). The country borders equal 6,743 km, with Brazil to the north and east and Argentina and Paraguay to the south. Peru lies to the northwest and Chile to the southwest (CIA 2000; Osborne 1964) (Figure 1). The lowest point falls at the Rio Paraguay at 90m, and the high point reaching 6,542m at Nevado Sajama (CIA 2000). The preliminary 2001 census for Bolivia counts 8,280,200 people (INE 2001).



Figure 1 – South America (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu>)



Figure 2 – Bolivia (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu>)

### *Economy*

Bolivia (Figure 2) is the poorest and least developed country in South America. However, it is not poor in natural resources (CIA 2000). It not only has silver, gold and tin, but many rare metals unique to Bolivia, in addition to large quantities of natural gas and petroleum. Bolivia only lacks precious stones, coal, and a few types of metal (Klein 1992; 10).

Inflation averaged at 4.4% and Bolivia's external debt was at \$ US 6.6 billion in 2000. It imports \$ US 1.86 billion of its products, while only exporting \$ US 1.26 billion, according to the CIA 2000 reports. It's principal exports for manufacturing for 2000

come to \$ US 712 million for production / excavation of various metals. Hydrocarbons equal \$ US 260 million and agricultural products \$ US 112 million (Levy 2001, 88).

Though not counted in official statistics, in 1990, coca was an estimated 43% of Bolivian exports (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 35).

Of the working population of Bolivia, 55% of the residents make between 251 – 1000 B's (Bolivianos) per month equaling approximately \$ US 36 to \$ US 143 per month. Eighty seven percent earns less than 2000 B's per month (\$ US 286) and of these 71% makes less than 1000 B's per month (\$ US 143) (note: the current exchange rate is 7 B's = \$ US 1) (USAID 2001a). The average wage for a schoolteacher in Buena Vista, Santa Cruz is approximately \$ US 100 per month.

As the world grows smaller, more people are visiting other countries. In the ten years between 1989 to 1999, the number of foreigners visiting Bolivia has jumped over one and a half times, reaching 340,000 people for 1999. International tourism in 1999 was a large source of revenue for Bolivia at \$ US 179.2 million (Viceministerio de Turismo 2000, 10, 12).

### *History*

Bolivia has some of the most formidable mountain territory in the world; making up approximately one-fifth of the nation, while more than three fifths of the country is tropical forests and savannas (Osborne 1964). The most densely populated areas since the earliest times have been the *altiplano*, the highlands (USAID 2001a; Klein 1992; Osborne 1964). This high, arid region was home to most of the populace within the area of modern day Bolivia (Levy 2001, 1). The first major settlements were close by Lake

Titicaca in the highlands, probably originating around 200 to 300 A.D (Lindert and Verkoren 1994,7). The lush, food bearing, moister tropics were not widely settled until the early to mid 1500's by the Paraguayans, owing to the inaccessibility and diseases of the region (Klein 1992, 35-6).

The Tiahuanaco civilization near Lake Titicaca, the Aymara Empire, became a highly advanced society, peaking around 1000 AD and falling to its demise around 1200 AD (Levy 2001, 86; Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 9). From the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Quechue speaking Incans overtook the Aymara speaking people and slowly absorbed them without substantially changing their culture. They were limited to the highlands, finding the borders of the tropics impassable (Klein 1992, 19; Levy 2001, 86; Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 10).

The end of the Inca Empire occurred in 1532 as the Spaniards landed on the Peruvian coast, searching for lands of gold and riches. The colonizers desired many natural resources of the area and the Indians were forced to mine silver and other important minerals (Klein 1992, 12; Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 25, 34-5). As the silver production in the 18<sup>th</sup> century declined, Spain's control diminished. On Aug 6<sup>th</sup>, 1825, independence was declared in Bolivia, named after the Venezuelan leader of the rebellion, Simon Bolivar. The present central city, La Plata was kept as the capital and later renamed Sucre after Bolivia's first president (Levy 2001, 86; Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 13).

Bolivia originally had a larger territory of 2,373,276 km<sup>2</sup> when it became an independent republic. Beginning in 1862, it lost 170,758 km<sup>2</sup> to Argentina over a period of 20 years. Then, in 1867, Bolivia forfeited 50,733 km<sup>2</sup> of land to Brazil, totaling

490,437 km<sup>2</sup> over time. Next they lost their direct access to the sea, to Chile, equaling 120,000 km<sup>2</sup> in 1879. In 1909, Peru took their claim to Purus, removing 250,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Finally, they lost to Paraguay in the Chaco War the final total of 253,500 km<sup>2</sup>, leaving Bolivia with less than half their original territory, only 1,088,581 km<sup>2</sup> (The Library of Congress 1989; Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 14).

During the 1940s and early 50s, the government gave way to the military, then to right wing rule. The oligarchy maintained power from the Spanish invasion until 1952 revolution when those in charge of the state economy had aspirations for renewal through state intervention. One of the results of this change was that the miners were able to form a union. The government also established universal suffrage for illiterates, Indians and whites, male and female alike. It compensated the tin barons (those who owned the mines), nationalized the businesses and then began a 'land reform program' also known as the Agrarian Reform. With the Agrarian Reform, the government seized the *haciendas* (the large plantations) and divided it between the *campesinos* (countrymen). At this point, President Enssoro planned to populate the territory to the east, Santa Cruz. This accelerated migration to the east (Klein 1992, 231-235; The Library of Congress 1989; Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 18-21).

Civil unrest began once again in Bolivia as the tin prices fell when President Zuazo was in control. Democracy was not long lasting and soon the military returned to political power again, a more authoritarian and brutal regime than before (Klein 1992, 267; Library of Congress 1989). Large foreign debts were accrued and corruption reigned (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 26).

With outside intervention, civil rule returned briefly in 1980's. The political parties began to support human rights groups and to dismantle the military dictatorship (Klein 1992, 269). This did not last long, as those in charge were not competent enough and the state of affairs had been poorly managed for too long. Riots and demonstrations began again and the economy shattered as inflation hit 25,000%. Shortly, radical economic policies were introduced around 1985 under Estenssoro's second administration. The tin mining industry was devastated with the severe drop in prices and over two thirds of the miners lost their jobs. Large numbers of the unemployed workers found work in coca production (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 27-29).

In 1994, the government began to sell 50% of the state owned companies to non-Bolivian companies. Foreign investors such as Texaco and Exxon became interested in the gas resources of Bolivia. Petrol costs skyrocketed and government aid for food and other goods were stopped; severe poverty was seen throughout Bolivia. Foreign food aid smothered the *campo*, countryside, hurting the already impoverished farmer's economy even further. Shortly after 1985, the poor became heavily dependent on international food donations (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 30).

In 1992, over 97% of Bolivians rural population lived below subsistence level. Outside financial help was offered only to the large business owners; those that could quickly improved the economy, not those that poverty affected most (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 32-3).

Despite the turbulence of the past years, the economy stabilized and inflation was one of the lowest for Latin America. The industry that had this balancing effect was not



one that would be documented or recorded in official records, as the coca trade could not be legally justified that easily (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 33).

President Estenssoro was in power until 1989. During that time the government did not tax repatriated money going into the Bolivian Central Bank, nor, by law, were questions to be asked about the origin of deposits. By that time, coca exports, making up almost one half of all Bolivian exports, revived the Bolivian economy and fed many impoverished families (Lindert and Verkoren 1994, 34).

In 1993, Lozada came into power as president, installing new reforms, including privatization of many large institutions and signing a free trade agreement with Mexico (CIA 2000). Privatization allowed foreigners to invest in state companies and a state pension fund was started. The benefits gained by this would later be seen in 1997 during Banzer's Presidency. The native Indian languages were recognized as official languages (Levy 2001, 49) and the Popular Participation Law passed.



Figure 3 – High plains Quechua dress

### *Languages*

“The indigenous population is considered the second most extensive in Latin America.” (USAID 2001a, 16). The practitioners of these Indian languages and cultures have lived and practiced are an integral part of Bolivia, far longer than Bolivia has been in existence as a nation (Levy 2001, 87). Since the time of the Spanish invasion, Bolivia’s official language has been Spanish. These indigenous cultures and languages have been able to remain almost intact and undiluted over the ages due to the difficulty of travel within the country. Often, there are long distances with rugged territory between villages. The Bolivian constitution was updated in 1994 declaring Aymara, Quechua (see Figure 3) and Guarani official languages as well, stating that Bolivia is now “multi-ethnic and pluricultural” (Levy 2001, 87).

### *Protected Areas*

Thirty five per cent of Bolivia's territory is protected area (Viceministerio de Turismo 2000, 10, 12). Bolivia declared its first national park in 1939 (Harcourt and Sayer 1996). Today it has several national parks, including Medidi, Noel Kempff, and Amboró. Its largest park, Kaa-Iya del Gran Chaco has the "largest protected dry tropical forest in the world" and is "co-managed by an indigenous group" (USAID 2001b, 3). Eleven percent of all the bird species in the world can be found in the Medidi National Park (USAID 2001b) while Bolivia has 40 percent of the birds and 39 percent of the mammal species of South America (Harcourt and Sayer 1996).

Bolivia's parks and reserves range in sizes, all having different levels of protection. From 1996 to 2001, Bolivia's certified well managed land area has risen from 100,000 to 1,000,000 hectares. In 2000, over six million hectares of Bolivia's forested areas were regulated by approved forest management plans. While these are impressive figures, 80 percent of communities surrounding protected areas are at poverty level (USAID 2001b). For this and other reasons, ecotourism can help alleviate some situations.

### **Description of Buena Vista**

Buena Vista is in the Province Ichillo of the Department of Santa Cruz. Its location is 17° 20' and 18° 01' latitude south and 63° 28' and 64° 15' longitude west. Buena Vista is the name of the village, but is also the name of the section (county), containing 52 dispersed communities.



Figure 4 – Buena Vista Plaza



Figure 5 – Buena Vista Plaza View

The *pueblo* (village) of Buena Vista (Figure 4 and 5), is located 100 km northwest of Santa Cruz 1 km off of the major highway between Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. The Viru-viru airport is only 12 kms from Santa Cruz along the same highway leading to Buena Vista. In addition there are buses, group taxis, and private taxis available from early in the morning until a little past dark. Transportation is a simple matter to arrange and generally not expensive for the general public.

On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2001 everyone in Bolivia was to stay home. No businesses were running, no buses or taxis moved, no school opened and everyone must stay at their houses, except for schoolteachers and government workers. They were required to work all day that day. They were out asking questions, collecting information and filling out forms with rather personal information, what is your ethnic background, what is your marital status, and what type of flooring do you have inside of your house... Everyone held their breath for that day; they were collecting the data for the first census in 9 years, Census 2001, Bolivia. I was proud, as I was a part of the Bolivian population that day. I was finally one of them, well, in a way. I lived there and they counted me.

As of 2001, there are 8,280,200 inhabitants living in Bolivia, and 2,033,739 of them reside in the department of Santa Cruz, making it the second largest department in

Bolivia. Interestingly enough, the population is split evenly between men and women, 50.37% and 49.63% respectively. In Santa Cruz, 76% of the population lives in towns over 2000 in population in contrast to 50 years previous, when 74% of the people lived in rural areas. The annual growth rate in the department has increased slightly over the years, 4.31% for the past 9 years (INE Bolivian Census 2001).

The Province of Ichillo has a total of 38,705 rural inhabitants, 7.9% of the population of 490,310 rural inhabitants of Santa Cruz. Buena Vista, the *pueblo* where I spent 19 months of my service, has 3,830 residents (INE Bolivian Census 2001). The town is an average size for the community, and has many conveniences: electricity, potable tap water, telephones, public telephones, cellular telephones and towers, a daily market area, hardware stores, internet, a library with limited resources, two paved roads and a beautiful plaza. There are also bars, karaoke, hot dog stands, restaurants, even a French restaurant called Los Franceses with wonderful food, hotels of every price range including two resorts, horseback riding, a tiny outside video store, and several rivers with white sand beaches (see Figure 6), in essence, paradise.



Figure 6 – Río Surutú

## Ecotourism Project ‘Curichi Cuajo’



Figure 7 – Panoramic view from a Curichi Cuajo bird observation tower  
(photo montage courtesy of Davina Pallone)

The project ‘Curichi Cuajo’ is the first municipally protected reserve in Bolivia (Figure 7). This 350 hectare section of land is located one kilometer east of the plaza of Buena Vista, Santa Cruz. The northern most boundary is the Transredes gas pipeline crossing from the road Rene Barrientos Avenue to the eastern boundary of the road to Huaytu. The southern most limits are rice fields and pasture land to graze Brahma cattle. The area of Buena Vista has three Holdridge Life-Zones: temperate humid forest, subtropical humid forest, and tropical humid forest (Clark 1996).

The Bolivian Forest Law indicates the municipality is owner of the 50 meters surrounding a body of water. *Alcaldesa* (Female Mayor) Fanny Steinbach first began action on the legal protection of the Curichi Cuajo in 1999. It was then officiated through Municipal Ordinance in 2000 by the new *Alcalde* (Mayor) Adan Justiniano. The Municipal Government, prohibiting activities such as deforestation, urbanization, clearing, and hunting, protects the area. It encourages biological, topographical and other studies.

This project is a coordinated effort between Peace Corps and the Municipal Government. The current managerial board is the *Fundación del Comité Impulsor de Protección de Reservas Ecológicas* (CIPRE), the Committee for the Protection of Ecological Reserves. This committee is comprised of five members, three of whom are Buena Vista residents. They are the decision making body for the Curichi Cuajo. The main objectives of the committee are:

1. To promote the creation of private and municipal protected areas,
2. To promote the natural protection of systems that offer important ecological services,
3. To channel and to administer funds to fortify the capacities of the private and municipal protected areas,
4. To promote and instill the importance of maintaining natural ecological systems, and
5. To contribute to the natural protection of places that are important because of their historic, archaeological, cultural, or social values.

There are three main goals of the Curichi Cuajo project. First, the reserve promotes conservation. The Curichi is rich in biodiversity of fauna and flora, containing a large concentration of different bird species and other animals (Appendix).

Additionally, this is the only potable water source large enough to meet the supply needs of Buena Vista. Second, visiting ornithologists and bird enthusiasts will aid in generating income for the town's tourist-oriented businesses. This highlights the ecotourism aspect, training specialists in this area in particular (Figure 8). Third, the project has encouraged education. The plans behind it have begun with the education of the local citizens first,



giving them a sustainable income by being trained by and later working with this project. In turn, the educated local citizens are able to pass on their knowledge to tourists and other community members (Figure 9).



Figure 8 – Birding course preparation



Figure 9 – Local citizens and guides in bird tower

Approximately twenty of the 350 hectares are classified as wetland. Many small streams originating upslope feed it. This watershed is the only sweetwater water source close enough and large enough to accommodate the needs of all Buena Vista. The area is a mixture of forest, marsh, and pastureland. The diversity of the reserve serves as an important habitat and breeding ground for a variety of both migratory and native bird species as well as other animal such as anacondas, caimans, river otters, capybara, monkeys (Figure 10), and others. Over 400 species of birds can be found in this area alone (example in Figure 11). There are endemic and endangered species of birds here, such as the great-billed seed. This is also the nesting site for several species of birds, including the hoatzin, cuajo, greater ani, amazon kingfisher, and the southern screamer.





Figure 10– Monkey  
in the Curichi



Figure 11 – Toucan in the Curichi



Figure 12 – Bird  
observation tower

Few other sites in Bolivia offer tourists bird observation towers (Figure 12) and professional guides to assist them. Presently, there are two bird observation towers with plans for more. Funding for these were obtained from the Small Project Assistance (SPA) grants administered by Peace Corps. Peace Corps volunteer, Chris Deever and I managed the grants. Local Buena Vista workers were contracted for the towers' construction. During this time, another Peace Corps volunteer, Ari Martinez contracted a British ornithologist, Robin Clarke, and his assistant Ruperto Vargas to teach bird watching classes to eight community members (Figure 13). This resulted in the certification of six of the students as bird guides (Figure 14). These men receive a higher pay for their advanced training than do the other tour guides. They are the only guides allowed to bring tourists to the tower for bird watching.



Figure 13 – Bird guide participants



Figure 14 – Bird guide's graduation

The project 'Curichi Cuajo' was begun by a 'cluster' group of other Peace Corps volunteers (Figure 15): Joel Franqui, Chris Devers, and Al Liu. Jennifer Snyder, Mike Dockry, Anne Cullen, Ari Martinez, Brent Beane and myself all played a part in the cluster of volunteers at later times.



Figure 15 – Peace Corps volunteer cluster in Buena Vista (Brent, Ari, Anne, Chris, Susan)

Together, these many parts make up the ecotourism project 'Curichi Cuajo'. This project has been brought together thanks to the dedication of many active community members of Buena Vista in conjunction with the Municipal Government of Buena Vista. Peace Corps has provided funding for the two towers and bird guide classes. This ecotourism project has been realized with the help of all its participants.

## **CHAPTER 3 – Components of an Ecotourism Project**

### **Ecotourism Broadly Defined**

“Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features--both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor negative impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Ceballos-Lascurain 1996, 20). Another simple definition of ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (Lindberg and Hawkins 1993, 8). While there are a multitude of definitions, I have selected these two representative definitions in order to give an idea as to what the aspects of ecotourism are. Defining ecotourism is half the battle. There are many other questions that must be answered. What is the ideal ecotourism project, what pitfalls await it and where do they go wrong? There are many variances, nuances, and discrepancies when defining WHAT is ecotourism. Likewise, there is much skepticism if there can really be an ideal ecotourism project.

The definitions of ecotourism are broad, leaving room for adjustment depending upon the particular situation and project. More concrete work and examples are required for practical work. I will review the literature looking at the different aspects of ecotourism. These perspectives, main points and experiences of the authors are used to create a model of the ‘ideal ecotourism project’. The model consists of the different common attributes of an ecotourism project. This list is a compilation of many components listed in the literature reviewed, needed in order to make a functional,

successful ecotourism project. The list is summarized in Table 1 (page 38). Some may have more importance than others depending on the circumstances of each project, but it is likely all will play a part at some point. The remainder of this chapter will consist of two main components, physical and socio-economic aspects of ecotourism.

### **Physical Aspects of Ecotourism**

After reviewing the literature, there appears to be four main categories within the physical section. The physical attributes consist of the tangible elements of ecotourism; the location of the area, locally owned businesses within the area, parks and reserves, and the community. I have broken these down into categories in an effort to specify critical points of each part. It is easier to conceptualize the components when using a list. In reality, these attributes frequently overlap and extend further over into the socio-economic aspects and vice versa. This is because successful ecotourism relies upon many other components of the working environment around it, and is often tightly intertwined. In the following section, the physical portions are broken down into sections and analyzed further.

#### *Location:*

The location of a project can be a help or hindrance, depending upon the point of view of the ecotourist (Jacobson and Robles 1992, Kangas *et al.* 1995, Lash 1997, Menkhaus and Lober 1995, Belsky 1999, Honey 1999b, Fennell 1999). A pristine, untainted area may not be easily accessible. This is the case in the town of Toruguero, Costa Rica. It is not accessible by road. Most tourists arrive by boat and just a few by

plane. Because it is difficult to arrive there, visitors must remain there for more than one day. Approximately 49% of tourist expenditures go towards travel in this case (Jacobson and Robles 1995). At Possum Point Biological Station, Kangas *et al.* (1995) explain how tourists fly into Belize City, then take a local airline to Dangriga and finally a bus to the Sittee River. To get to the other sites from Possum Point one must take a boat. The station has several sites, including Wee Wee Caye 15 km into the Caribbean. The visitors' stay here is usually around one to two weeks. Generally, the distance and difficulty of reaching an area does not deter the ecotourist from visiting these remote places, but the location of the area and transportation necessary to reach a destination can dictate the length of the stay. Longer stays require other options for additional services and activities for the ecotourist.

#### *Locally Owned Businesses:*

One ideal behind ecotourism is to have locally owned businesses. The money earned must stay within the community, not siphoned off to an outside proprietor who does not have a personal stake in the cultural or environmental future of the area (Lash 1997, Victorine 2000, Jacobson and Robles 1992, Mansty 2001, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, Belsky 1999, Honey 1994, Honey 1999a, Yu *et al* 1997, Fennell 1999). Lash (1997), in her definition of ethical ecotourism, discusses how ecotourism "...involves not only local people adjacent to ecotourism attractions in the planning and management of these natural resources, but also awards local people the final decision-making power over developmental options, in accordance with their cultural views" (Lash 1997, 178).

Victurine (2000) elaborates on a program for training local small-scale tourism operators. It is important that the business is run and owned by those who live there; this way they will have more control over the impact on the environment. The training program described by Victurine (2000), paid special attention to the topics of small-scale operations and business planning as well as helping link rural, community based associations with national tourism associations in an attempt to help the long-term sustainability of the businesses.

It is valuable and often necessary for guides or other workers to be bilingual or English speakers (Jacobson and Robles 1992, Belsky 1999, Yu *et al* 1997, Wall 1997). Tour guides should have expertise in the field for educational purposes of the visitors (Mastny 2001, Honey 1994). For this reason, using local community members is advantageous, as they are more familiar with the area.

The study in Tortuguero states that half of the residents were employed by several businesses in positions from tour guides to hotel employees (Jacobson and Robles 1992). It is not uncommon though, to find foreigners in the higher paid positions, as is the case in Tortuguero. In Belize for example, foreigners own and manage 90% of the coastal development (Mastny 2001).

There are many aspects of running a successful business, and customer satisfaction is very important. There are certain health and sanitation standards that must be met in order for a tourist to be happy while still giving the tourist a taste of what it is really like in the site visited (Victurine 2000). Locally owned and run restaurants, stores, guide services, bed and breakfasts, homestays and various hotels are also offered in ecotourism. When it is necessary for the ecotourist to remain in the area for a while

because of the remoteness of an ecotourism site, food, and lodging is required (Kangas *et al.* 1995, Jacobson and Robles 1995, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993).

It is important to have the local citizens working in the ecotourism project so they will not have to compete with the ecotourism to survive. As an area becomes more popular and visited, it can cause higher prices and increase the standard of living (McLaren 1998, 31, 46-47). If the local citizen's standard of living is not also raised in conjunction with rising prices, they will not have the money to purchase food and supplies. They may end up competing with tourism for the natural resources to survive by hunting, fishing, collecting vegetation and grazing their livestock (Wall 1997, Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001). The villagers must also have enough input into the direction of the program as to make sure it is continuing to meet their needs as a community (Mastny 2001, Honey 1999a).

It is not uncommon to encounter community members who do not want to work in an ecotourism project. "They didn't want to put in the time and effort that I've had to..." Anderson offered to provide free training for guides but the offer was not accepted (Anderson as cited in Mastny 2001). In developing countries, the societies allow for much more leisure time than does the Western culture. To the West, these societies may seem indolent, whereas in reality they simply attribute greater value to their time off. Additionally, the risk of beginning a new practice, be it a new method of farming or a new form of work like ecotourism, may be too great. The local citizens may have too much at stake if they do not continue their tried and true methods, whether or not it may be obvious to a western observer that one method out gains another one over time. They must live for each day, to feed each child that day. Tomorrow is not today (Beets 1990).

Yu *et al.* (1997) states that local citizens are resistant to settling into the organized life of a laborer. This may be as a result of the villages' perception of low status related to organized work or working for someone else (Beets 1990). Nevertheless, without training, they cannot fill more specialized positions.

#### *Parks and Reserves:*

In many developing countries, there have been national and state laws providing unspoiled, beautiful places protection by designating them as parks or reserves (Goodwin 1995, Honey 1994, Honey 1999a, Honey 1999b, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, Menkhaus and Lober 1995, Yu *et al.* 1997, Isaacs 2000, Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001, Fennel 1999). Other times a private enterprise has purchased and preserved the land (Mansty 2001, Kangus *et al.* 1995).

The presence of park personnel in these preserved areas generates a positive attitude upon the behavior of visitors. It is important for the managers of the park to have sufficient feedback on the park in addition to having authority over incidents occurring there. To prevent problems later, they need control over both the heavily utilized and isolated areas (Lindberg and Hawkins 1993, 64-65).

Interpretive trails and signs are an important aspect to a protected area. These are used for educational purposes (Christian *et al.* 1996, Wallace 1993). Having well constructed trails are also a preventive measure, keeping erosion in check (Honey 1994, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993).

Biodiversity in an ecotourism area is a large part of the attraction (Isaacs 2000, Menkhaus and Lober 1995, Christian *et al.* 1996, Yu *et al.* 1997, Myers 1995, Fennell



1999). Parks and reserves usually have an ambience, a physical environment that attracts the attention of the naturalist. The protection and visitation of these areas are often times the direct result of the sheer uniqueness and presence of endemic and endangered species (Christian *et al.* 1996, Menkhaus and Lober 1995, Kangas *et al.* 1995).

Ecotourism has promoted the preservation of many species of fauna and flora (Isaacs 2000, Christian *et al.* 1996, Honey 1999a, Kangas *et al.* 1995, Yu *et al.* 1997) such as the habitat of the elephant, harp seal (Isaacs 2000), rhinoceroses (Honey 1999a) and several species of parrots (Christian *et al.* 1996). At the same time, the presence of humans can have an adverse effect on the very animals they are trying to protect and study (Christian *et al.* 1996, Burger 1998, Polson 1993, Jacobson and Robles 1992). In the example of Jacobson and Robles (1992), tourists are interfering with and scaring away the sea turtles, preventing them from laying their eggs. It threatens the resource that brings so many tourists to this area in the first place. Better control over the tourists is vital.

The tourist impact on both the site and the community can be substantial, in both positive and negative ways (Theophile 1995, Isaacs 2000, Jacobson and Robles 1992, Kangas *et al.* 1995, Isaacs 2000). Ecotourism will serve as a catalyst for many changes within a village or community. Cultural intrusiveness can become a drawback if not correctly handled, though more positive aspects can also prevail. Ecotourism can help diversify the economy at the local level (Theophile 1995, Fennell 1999). In order for an ecotourism project to benefit a community, the village must participate in the entire process and work together.

### *Community:*

The entire community can be involved with ecotourism at all levels and for many reasons (Kangus *et al.* 1995, Isaacs 2000, Victurine 2000, Belsky 1999, Kavagi 2001, Polson 1993, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, Wall 1996, Honey 1999a, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). There are examples of foreigners coming in, establishing private reserves and hiring the local citizens to work for them. One success story is the Possum Point Biological Station in Belize. Several communities are involved in working and participating in all functions of the Station as guides, cooks, field workers, hosts and other services activities. Much of the earnings of the program are then reinvested into the villages to help improve their standard of living. One such example is a scholarship fund for students to continue their education (Kangas *et al.* 1995).

A community should control and claim ownership of projects that can potentially affect them (Lash 1997, Munn 1998, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). Kavagi (2001) evaluated the impacts of economic, social-cultural and environmental aspects of tourism in Kenya. When conversing with the community, he found they felt they were not able to fully participate in projects, including policy formation. They were not hired for management positions in lodges and reserves.

For ecotourism projects to be sustainable, community cohesion is imperative. Belsky (1999) encountered many conflicts and jealousy among local people. By not working together and competing amongst themselves, the tourist activity in Gales Point Manatee, Belize has sharply declined. In the case of another Belizean expatriate business, many Belizeans were employed and were comparably well paid. However, social unrest threatened the business when outside villagers wanted access to caves on the

private property for tourism purposes. In this case, it appears that this business only worked with a few of the villagers and not with the village as a whole (Mastny 2001). Lieberknecht *et al.* (1999, 121) believes “cohesive communities with distinct self-identity are perhaps the best suited for ecotourism ventures.”

### **Socio-Economic Aspects of Ecotourism**

The remainder of this chapter looks at the socio-economic portion of a successful ecotourism project. The culture of a community makes up an integral part of its society. Similarly, the economy of an ecotourism project adds its own elements to village life. People must decide how they will earn their money and whether it will be at the expense of the environment. The socio-economics of ecotourism are broken down into four sub-fields: education, government, management of the area, and culture.

#### *Education:*

Education is a direct approach to instilling environmental awareness for both tourists and the community (Yu *et al.* 1997, Christian *et al.* 1996, Kangas *et al.* 1995, Lash 1997, Jacobson and Robles 1992, Goodwin 1996, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). Programs are integrated with the community’s school system, working to teach of the youth to protect the environment in the future (Yu *et al.* 1997, Christian *et al.* 1996, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). In addition to teaching at the school level, more advanced forms of education are encouraged in some places. At Possum Point Biological Station they collect donations for the scholarship fund. These contributions go towards the

advanced education of students in the village. The fund is distributed by the community council from the village (Kangas *et al.* 1995).

There are several facets of education that play important roles in ecotourism. On one hand, it is important to promote conservation education by establishing educational programs in the communities (Lash 1997, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999), especially for those who might not have had previous exposure to them (Jacobson and Robles 1992). On the other hand, Christian *et al.* (1996) notes that visitors should have preliminary environmental information before arriving at the site, to limit negative impact on it. The program at Possum Point Biological Station is based on educating the guest about environmental and cultural issues while at the site. During tours in the forest, guides teach about tropical ecology. They point out and explain curiosities such as giant termite nests high in the trees, strangler figs and the effects on their host tree, and native trees and their uses. Guides also teach about an abandoned sugar mill that is now a national historical site (Kangas *et al.* 1995).

#### *Government:*

The government affects all functions of the country it controls. Ecotourism is no exception (Victurine 2000, Christian *et al.* 1996, Honey 1999a, Isaacs 2000, Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, Wallace 1993, Belsky 1999). The stability of the national government has a pronounced influence on tourist numbers (Victurine 2000, Honey 1999a, Christian *et al.* 1996, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999).

Politically stable countries are more attractive for tourism. The former British Islands of St. Lucia, Dominica, Grenada and St. Vincent are all politically stable. They

tout this quality to encourage tourism (Christian *et al.* 1996). Other countries, particularly some in Africa, must overcome a problematic political past (Victurine 2000, Honey 1999a). Victurine (2000) speaks directly about how government instability had ruined the tourism in Uganda and how community-based tourism with participation from other outside sources can help revive it.

Corruption is also a weakness of a project (Isaacs 2000, Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001). In one program in the parish on the edge of Bwindi, Africa, the past local chairman had been embezzling funds from the tourism program. After that incident, there was one village that did not want to make their regular contributions to the program until the budget and financial records were available to everyone. Accountability and transparency is valuable for the success of a program not only at the national level, but is also required at all levels (Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001).

While it might be common for the national government to run and control an ecotourism project, it may not be functional in all cases (Isaacs 2000, Victurine 2000). “Government agencies charged with administering natural resources are burdened with multiplicity of often conflicting goals and so may not be relied on to focus on the continued adherence to the stated principles of ecotourism. Other groups will use the democratic or political process to draw the agency toward other interests” (Batie and Schweikhardt 1995 as cited in Isaacs 2000, 64). The ability and power of the responsible agency within the government may be limited as Yu *et al.* (1997) explained in the case of Peru. The Vice-Ministry of Tourism did not have equal footing with other departments and was not able to wield enough power to promote conservation.

The priorities of the national governments' work are generally not aimed towards small community based projects. There are other foreign aid and non-government agencies that work specifically in that area to build the skills and knowledge needed for community-based ecotourism. Kangas *et al.* (1995) shows a more positive example of government participation, when the government began caring for a historical land site in 1992. This was at the Sittee River Villages' abandoned plantation sugar mill. Lieberknecht *et al.* (1999) looks at when a village should use government or outside participation. Collaborating with an outside organization is more suited for communities that "lack strong local institutions or do not have a cohesive social structure" (Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, 116).

The United States Agency for International Development is one example of foreign aid that has programs for training, monitoring, and support services for small community projects. This provides structure and help for areas that may receive little aid (Victurine 2000). Debt-for-Nature swaps give indebted countries more incentive to protect larger tracts of forest or fragile areas and to finance grassroots operations (Wallace 1993).

#### *Management of area:*

Planning is critical for the success of an ecotourism project, as it provides direction and objectives (Belsky 1999, Munn 1998, Lash 1997, Christian *et al.* 1996, Wallace 1993, Fennel 1999, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). Involving the affected community is vital to the process of the creation of the management plan (Belsky 1999, Munn 1998, Lash 1997).

Local communities are frequently involved in ecotourism, although their representatives are generally not in management positions. Instead, foreign investors control how the project is conducted. Munn (1998) and Lash (1997) feel it is important to allow the community to take a more important role in the future of their homeland and culture. Villagers with more autonomy are less likely to allow degradation of their land if they are those who control and own the project.

Projects require adequate consideration at all stages of their development. Monitoring, evaluation and follow-up are needed for feedback to keep the project healthy (Honey 1999b, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993, Christian 1993, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999). Surveys are one method of acquiring feedback about the project (Jacobson and Robles 1992, Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001, Fennell 1999, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). Jacobson and Robles (1992) survey responses gave a range of information from the viewpoints of tourists, guides, and managers. In this case the surveys told them the local guide program was economically feasible. As a result they recommended the extension of the pilot training courses.

Resources for funding a community project can be scarce or unavailable (Wallace 1993). The very poor may not be able to obtain loans, giving an advantage to those who already have resources (Belsky 1999). Furthermore, some funding is affected by the political climate. Politics can in turn affect the flow of money and resources to parks and reserves (Southgate 1998). Park staff working intervals without pay is not uncommon (Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001).

Ideally, the earnings from an ecotourism project are redistributed back to the environment and the surrounding communities (Yu *et al.* 1997, Honey 1999a, Honey

1994, Kangus *et al.* 1995, Goodwin 1996). Much of the revenue is invested in communities' small development projects such as schools, water systems and other ventures (Honey 1999a, Yu *et al.* 1997). Other revenue is placed back into the park in the form of wages of park personnel, trail improvements, and other operating expenses (Honey 1999a, Honey 1994, Yu *et al.* 1997). In some cases, the community does not participate directly in the project. They simply may have an agreement in conjunction with the project not to hunt or forage in a given area in compensation for payments in the form of money or development projects (Honey 1999a).

Another route to retaining earnings within the community is through the local purchase of goods and supplies. It is generally more cost effective to buy local items. This allows different sectors to interact and circulate money throughout the village. Furthermore, this prevents the flight of capital from the village economy and effects more local people than those immediately involved in the project (Fennell 1999, Honey 1999b).

An area should not be dependent solely upon ecotourism. The economy should be diversified enough to sustain themselves with other forms of economic activity during times without tourist activity in order to avoid hardship on the local inhabitants (Honey 1999b). Yu *et al.* (1997) recounts how the Gulf War, a cholera epidemic, terrorist activities and the beginning of a global recession crippled Peru's tourism levels. This is an industry that is particularly susceptible to the impact of negative occurrences. If tourists feel it is unsafe to travel, they will not travel (Yu *et al.* 1997, Honey 1999b). The reserve should hold importance and value for the community even if there are no tourists present (Honey 1999b, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993).



The ecotourism site at Gales Point Manatee, Belize is widely advertised and known through a variety of articles, books, brochures, and videos promoting the area (Belsky 1999). Advertising is an effective way to increase interest and tourism in an area. One such instance where no money is spent on advertising is at Maho Bay tented camp and Harmony condominiums in the Virgin Islands. Word-of-mouth and repeat visitors keep this business in demand (Honey 1999a). While it is not always necessary to advertise, in most cases it is a valuable tool for attracting tourists (Honey 1999b).

Although it is important to have customers and promote a healthy ecotourism trade, one must always be aware not to exceed the carrying capacity of an area. The ecotourism definition for carrying capacity is the “composite early warning measure of key factors affecting the ability of the site to support different levels of tourism”. To determine the capacity, “the amount of use of a given kind a particular environment can endure over time without degradation of its suitability for that use” must be examined (Fennell 1999, 17). Sustainable development in an ecotourism site requires limiting access in order to prevent erosion, wildlife disturbance, and other adverse impacts.

For a given area, the impact and carrying capacity are dependent not only on the size of the group but also on the conduct of the tourists (Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, Wall 1997). For example, disturbing wildlife during mating season is an additional concern (Wall 1997). Burger (1998) and Gutzwiller *et al.* (1998) directly address the concern of human impact upon animal behavior. People want to observe animals in their natural state, but that is rarely possible. Animals are aware of human presence. How much it will affect their behavior is dependent on how noticeable people make themselves. For instance, Burger (1998) studied the differences of feeding habits and location movement

of specific species of birds and found that animals will be affected more by noise levels than by the size of the group. Gutzwiller *et al.* (1998) tested how much intrusion birds would tolerate. They found that they could only endure low levels of infringement before effecting their nesting location. They indicated more research was needed to see if changing site location was forcing them to compete with other birds.

In order for an ecotourism project to be successful, it must include training programs for local participants (Victurine 2000, Jacobson and Robles 1992, Wall 1997, Mastny 2001, Yu *et al.* 1997, Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999, Lash 1997, Wallace 1993, Theophile 1995). Training will enable them to be able to participate in more specialized activities for work. Inadequate training of community members may prevent them from having a fair chance of providing the ecotourist with necessary information and services. Guiding, language, cooking, and managerial skills are all required to run a profitable business (Wall 1997).

In order to give ecotourists a better appreciation of the area, training courses should be given to guides and other service personnel. In Belize the law requires tour guides to take courses before working as a guide (Mastny 2001). In Uganda, small-scale tourism operators had a training program that explained to the village what tourists wanted from their visit, from clean lodging and varied food, to the 'African' experience and community interaction. The program included business support, technical help, and follow-up. After the courses, the participants requested additional training programs (Victurine 2001).

Jacobson and Robles (1992) conducted a pilot training program for local tour guides in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. They used a questionnaire for tourists, present and

potential tour guides, and park personnel. The goals of the training were to decrease impact from visitors, to increase environmental awareness of community members and visitors, and to augment income for the community through ecotourism. The results of their study brought up concerns about the negative impacts from tourism. Furthermore, it indicated the need to train local guides, especially in English.

At Possum Point Biological Station, local people work in all aspects of the operation. The station educates both visitors and the communities it works with, leaving many opportunities for both to have cultural interactions. Ecotourists visiting here had the chance to talk, eat and live with the local people. Cultural interaction was an added benefit to their visit (Kangas *et al.* 1995).

#### *Culture:*

Cultural differences often attract visitors (Fennell 1999, Wall 1997, Honey 1999b, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). While the ecotourism experience is enhanced with cultural interaction (Kangas *et al.* 1995), it is equally important to keep in mind that tourists must not have a negative impact upon the community they are visiting (Honey 1999b).

Exposure to foreigners not only affects the environment, but the culture of the inhabitants as well (Wall 1997, Honey 1999b, Lindberg and Hawkins 1993). Rights are often overlooked and the community can be mistreated when foreigners see the possibility of money to be earned at a site. In his article, Belsky (1999) attempts to draw the attention to the inequities from the political prejudices and the flawed implementation of ecotourism and conservation policies and regulations. He found, among other things, property, cultural and human rights were disregarded at the initiation of the park design.

Belsky (1999) feels closer attention needs to be given to the diversity and dynamics of any given culture within an area for any project, as they can have a more positive impact on the environment with their past knowledge and social history. Overlooking the critical steps of planning with the community can poison future efforts to work harmoniously with them later.

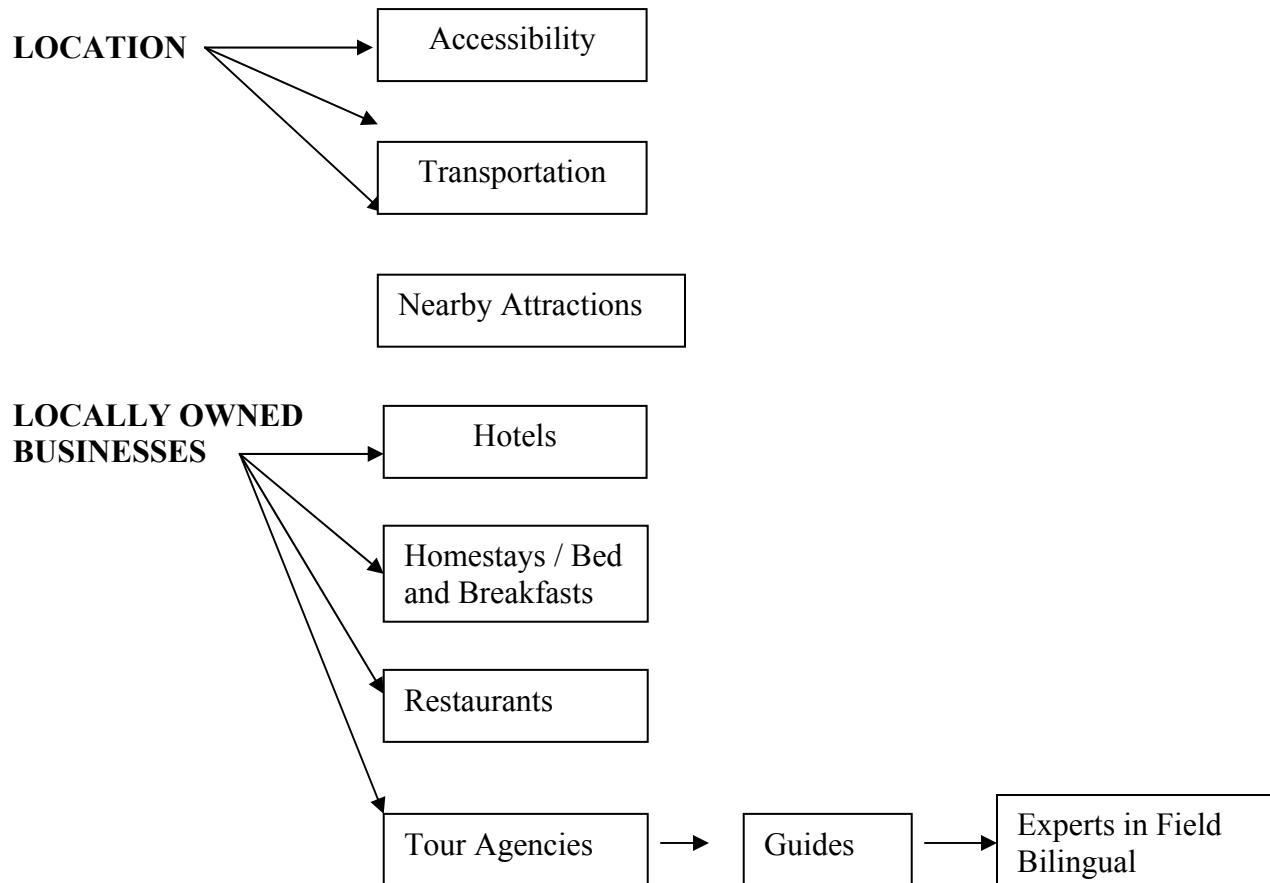
In ecotourism, there are many parts to the whole. The physical factors may be more tangible and, therefore, easier to focus on, while the socio-economic factors are more abstract but still critical. For example, some physical parts, the diversity or uniqueness of flora and fauna, may be a requirement for a project to get off the ground. Yet denying the importance of community participation would be detrimental to a successful outcome in the long run. Each little part can have an impact on the bigger picture. Each portion discussed retains its importance yet cannot stand alone. Without its many counterparts, it would not truly be ecotourism.

The factors for a successful sustainable ecotourism project are summarized in Table 1. It has two main headings, physical and socio-economic attributes, each with four subheadings. Those are further broken down into individual categories, giving more insight on how it is organized. The lists of citations are given for each subheading. This diagram is the basis for the structure of this paper and will be referred to throughout. This is my model for the ‘ideal ecotourism project.’

Table 1:

## **FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM PROJECT**

Physical attributes:



References used:

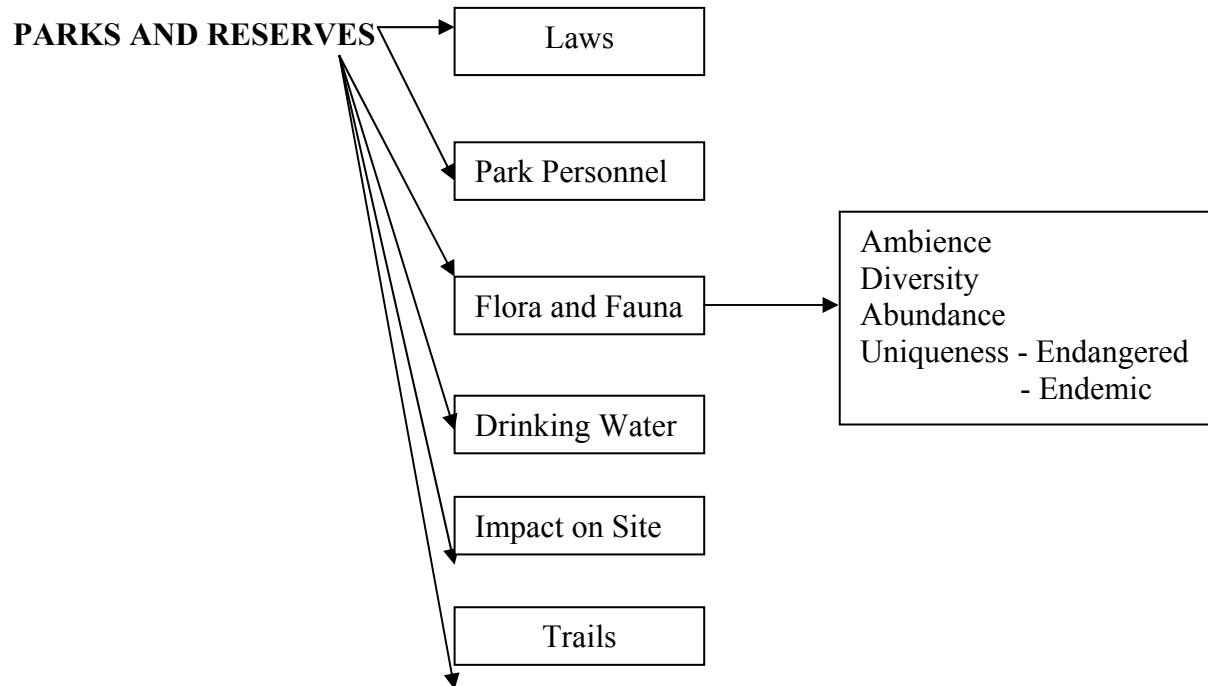
Belsky 1999  
Fennell 1999  
Honey 1999b  
Jacobson and Robles 1992  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Lash 1997  
Menkhaus and Lober 1995

Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001  
Beets 1990  
Belsky 1999  
Fennell 1999  
Honey 1994  
Honey 1999  
Jacobson and Robles 1992  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Lash 1997  
Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999  
Lindberg and Hawkins 1993  
Mansty 2001  
McLaren 1998  
Victurine 2000  
Wall 1997  
Yu *et al.* 1997

Table 1 (continued):

## **FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM PROJECT**

Physical attributes:



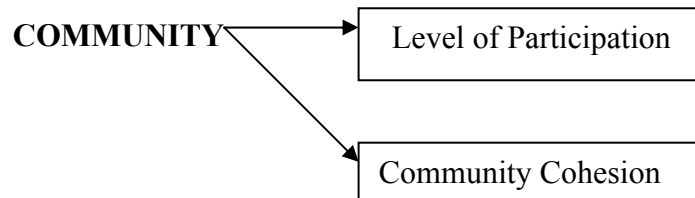
References used:

Archabald and Naughton -  
Treves 2001  
Burger 1998  
Christian *et al.* 1996  
Fennel 1999  
Goodwin 1995  
Honey 1994  
Honey 1999a  
Honey 1999b  
Isaacs 2000  
Jacobson and Robles 1992  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999  
Lindberg and Hawkins 1993  
Mansty 2001  
McLaren 1998  
Menkhaus and Lober 1995  
Myers 1995  
Polson 1993  
Tangley 1998  
Theophile 1995  
Wallace 1993  
Yu *et al.* 1997

Table 1 (continued):

## **FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM PROJECT**

Physical attributes:



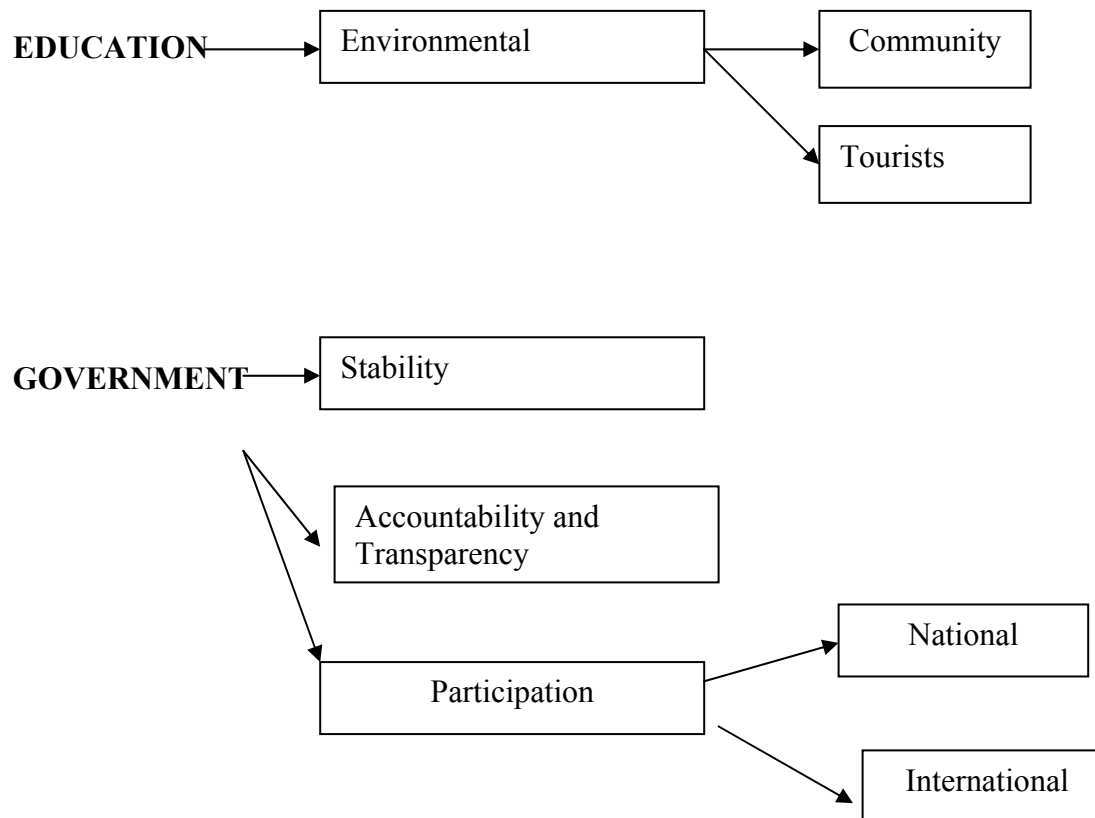
### References used:

Belsky 1999  
Honey 1999  
Isaacs 2000  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Kavagi 2001  
Lash 1997  
Lindberg and Hawkins 1993  
Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999  
Mansty 2001  
Munn 1998  
Polson 1993  
Victurine 2000  
Wall 1996

Table 1 (continued):

## **FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM PROJECT**

Socio-Economic:



### References used:

Christian *et al.* 1996  
Goodwin 1996  
Jacobson and Robles 1992  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Lash 1997  
Lieberknecht *et al.* 1992  
Lindberg and Hawkins 1993  
Yu *et al.* 1997

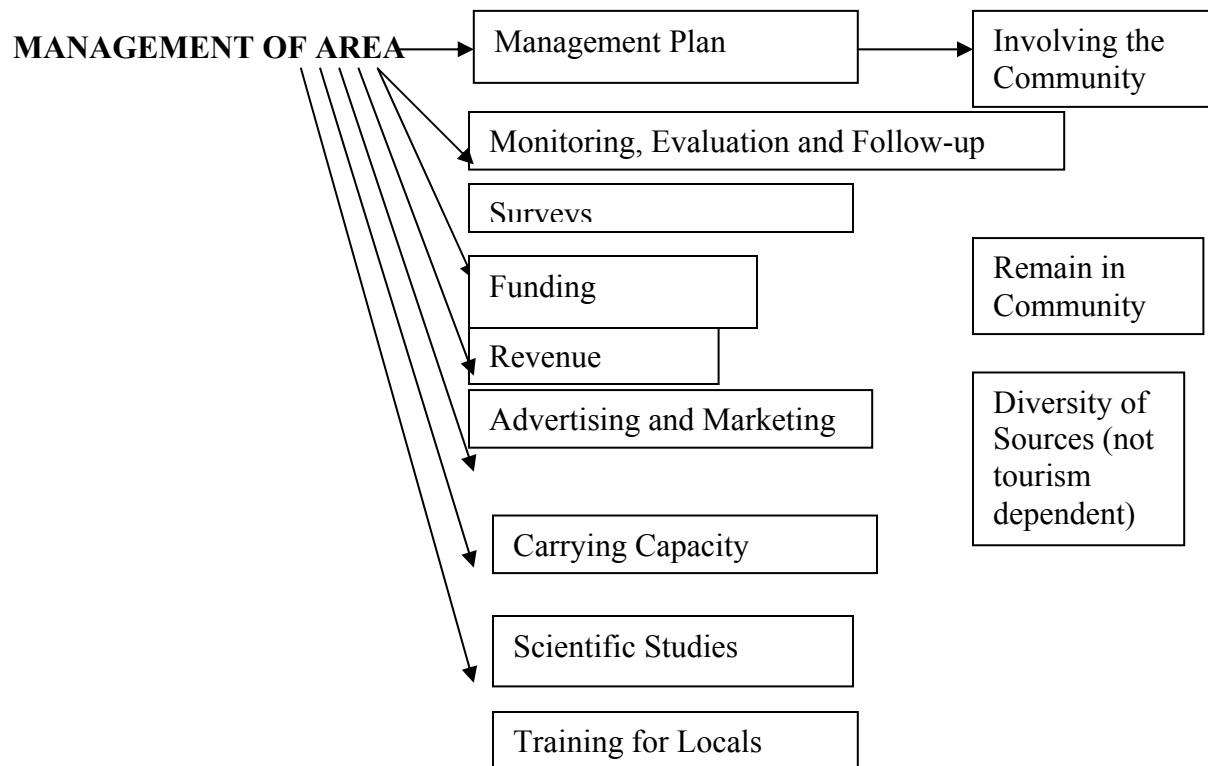
Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001  
Belsky 1999  
Christian *et al.* 1996  
Honey 1999a  
Isaacs 2000  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999  
Victurine 2000  
Wallace 1993  
Yu *et al.* 1997



Table 1 (continued):

## **FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM PROJECT**

Socio-Economic:



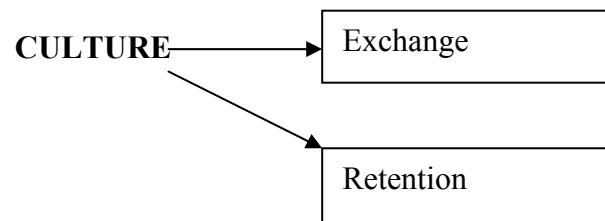
### References used:

Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001  
 Belsky 1999  
 Burger 1998  
 Christian 1996  
 Fennell 1999  
 Goodwin 1996  
 Gutzwiller *et al.* 1998  
 Honey 1994  
 Honey 1999  
 Honey 1999-a  
 Jacobson and Robles 1992  
 Kangas *et al.* 1995  
 Lash 1997  
 Lieberknecht *et al.* 1999  
 Lindberg and Hawkins 1993  
 Mastny 2001  
 Munn 1998  
 Theophile 1995  
 Victorine 2000  
 Wall 1997  
 Wallace 1993  
 Yu *et al.* 1997

Table 1 (continued):

## **FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM PROJECT**

Socio-Economic:



References used:

Belsky 1999  
Fennell 1999,  
Honey 1999-a  
Kangas *et al.* 1995  
Lindberg and Hawkins 1993  
Wall 1997

## CHAPTER 4 – Methods

In Chapter 3, I created a model for an ideal ecotourism project with the associated physical and socio-economic attributes. In this chapter, I will describe the methods utilized to ascertain how the municipal reserve ‘Curichi Cuajo’ compares to the model in Table 1. The first section of Chapter 4 will discuss how and why information was collected through observation and informal data collection. The second section will describe how and why key informants were interviewed within the village of Buena Vista.

### The Participating Observer

I arrived to Buena Vista, Santa Cruz in April 2000 at night. Getting to Buena Vista was fairly simple. I took a *taxi-truffi* (communal taxi) from Santa Cruz to Buena Vista. I had been given instructions to go to ‘Chris’s’ house, a volunteer I had never met before. I was dropped off in the plaza and asked for Chris. A teenaged boy walked towards me and asked if I needed help with the two large suitcases I was rolling along the pebbled road. He knew where Chris lived and took me straight there. That was my introduction to my new village.

Work began slowly in Buena Vista. I quickly reached the conclusion that socializing took precedence over actual work. It was more important to satiate the curiosity of the locals about the new *gringa* (white girl) in town than it was to try to put my nose to the grindstone. My future work associates had to ask all the regular questions. Are you married, do you have children, (yes, in that order) what’s your

religion, how old are you, don't you want a Bolivian husband? Originally, I was the one being interviewed. This was an integral part of becoming involved in my new community and of being accepted. This process was not rapid, but rather occurred over a period of several months. It consisted of many invitations to supper, dozens of visits to the market, and endless hours of sitting in the plaza chatting with many of the residents. When a shy schoolgirl asked me to help her with her English homework, I knew I was on my way. The integration process was trying at times, however it was deeply rewarding as I made new friends and associates.

This is all part of participatory observation, becoming and being a normal part of the community (Sanjek 1990, Bernard 1995, Devereux and Hoddinoff 1993).

Participatory observation "involves establishing rapport in a new community" and "learning to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up" (Bernard 1995, 136, 137).

The use of personal contacts helps assimilate one into the new culture. People are more likely to be accepting if others make an introduction (Bernard 1995). What aided me most was to be introduced by people already known to the others. I was not a stranger; I was a friend of their friend. When the study site has a different language, it is important to learn it and pick it up quickly (Bernard 1995).

It also helped me tremendously when my level of fluency in Spanish was high enough to hold a conversation without having to stop and ask people to repeat it again or explain a word with which I was not familiar. These are some examples which help the outsider better blend into the culture. The main idea is to converse, eat, and live with the community.

### *Types of Interviews*

I used several forms of data collection methods during my time there. I obtained pamphlets from businesses within Buena Vista and other tourist attractions nearby. Informal interviews went on daily. I collected information without control or structure. It was an overheard conversation or a passing comment, through a daily interchange of information and dialog. A more direct approach is unstructured interviewing. In this style, there is less random talking and is more direct in manner, more obviously an interview. Topics are discussed with this in mind and are known by both parties. This is done when there is a lot of time available. Semistructured interviewing is a more refined form of unstructured interviewing. In this case, a “written list of questions and topics” is included in a specific order in an interview guide (Bernard 1995). These three forms of interviews were used for the purpose of my study on ecotourism.

### *Content of Semistructured Interview*

I was sent books and literature to review during my time in Buena Vista. In these, I found information that later became the basis for my list of attributes for an ideal ecotourism project. After forming the model of the ideal ecotourism project, a list of survey questions was created (Table 2). The first section contained demographic information. This consisted of the head of family, the name, age, gender and education of everyone in the family, the role of each within the community and an obvious measure of their wealth. I asked the first three questions directly. For the last question, I would ask such things as, do you own a bike, horse, motorcycle, car, house, land and so forth. This question was not asked directly.

Table 2:

**ECOTOURISM SURVEY**

*DEMOGRAPHICS:*

- 1) Name of household
- 2) Names, ages, gender and education of everyone in the family
- 3) Role within the community of everyone in the family
- 4) Obvious measure of wealth

*OPINIONS OF INFORMANTS:*

- 5) What are your likes and dislikes about the project 'Curichi Cuajo'?
- 6) What do you feel is important for the development of the community of Buena Vista?
- 7) What is lacking in the village? What would you like there to be here in the village?
- 8) What do you think will happen with the project 'Curichi Cuajo'? Why do you think this?
- 9) Why should we preserve this area? Is its preservation worth it for those who do not get to use it now?
- 10) Do you think its water source alone is sufficient reason to preserve the 'Curichi Cuajo' as a protected area?
- 11) What is your experience with ecotourism in the past and present?
- 12) What do you think to do with ecotourism in the future?

*ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:*

- 13) What do you see as good and bad in the project 'Curichi Cuajo'?
- 14) Do you think the 'Curichi Cuajo' will succeed as a project? Why or why not?
- 15) What does this project need to have the success it is aiming for?
- 16) Does the 'Curichi Cuajo' help Buena Vista? Why or why not?

The next part was examining their opinions of the project ‘Curichi Cuajo’. It delved into their thoughts of how the project interacted with the community and the development of the community. When asking these questions, I attempted not to lead or guide the answers of the informants, allowing for them to respond of their own accord. Focusing on the topic of the question, I encouraged them to elaborate their ideas in more detail, permitting the informant to lead the conversation. Some of the participants were asked a second set of questions, similar to the first except with slight variations. This allowed them to go into more detail about what they thought of the project.

#### *Recording of Semistructured Interviews*

I recorded data by three different methods, depending on the wishes of the informant. Most of them agreed to let me use a tape recorder. This is the most efficient and reliable form of interviewing (Bernard 1995). During these interviews, I also took notes in English to capture more of their expression from their body language. One participant requested I not record him. In this case I took notes only by hand. Another informant did not wish to conduct an actual interview and asked that I leave him the list of questions. He later hand wrote his answers, each one or two sentences in length.

#### **The Key Informants**

I needed to interview people with widely varying backgrounds. In this case it was to my advantage to use key informants. This is not simply a random method of collecting information. Instead of speaking with a large sample of the population, it is better to find those who have a good perception of the topic. Therefore it is possible to spend more

time with fewer people and receive more direct and enhanced information. It is best to question those with whom you have a rapport and those whom have sufficient knowledge of the research topic. These people must feel comfortable enough to speak freely with the interviewer (Bernard 1995).

It is best to chose key informants after a period of time, after one understands their roles within the village. Often, the best informants are those who are a bit cynical about their own culture and village. These are not the “outcasts” but solid members of the community. They are “observant, reflective and articulate” (Bernard 1995, 168).

### *Categorizing Informants*

I attempted to use a full range of informants from different walks of life in order to obtain a full range of viewpoints and opinions. Each person interviewed could fall into one or more of the categories below. I categorized them in the following manner:

-rich and powerful	(two people)
-moderate income	(three people)
-small merchant	(two people)
-professional community members	(two people)
-land owners near the Curichi Cuajo	(three people)
-poor farmers	(two people)
-hunters	(one person)
-reserve workers	(two people)
-students	(two people)



In total, I conducted thirteen semistructured interviews. Of those interviewed, four were female and nine were male. I chose my informants several months after I began working on the 'Curichi Cuajo' ecotourism project. Most of these were people with whom I had sat and talked endless hours with on topics other than my project. They were generally people who felt comfortable around me.

Many of the interviewees were people who I knew, though there were two who I did not know. Some people gave answers that they thought I wanted to hear. I avoided leading them and asked them some questions that were similar to see if there were any discrepancies later.

During my time in Buena Vista, I received a number of books and other literature. I began my research and created the basis for the ideal ecotourism project for this thesis with this literature review. With the combined information I constructed the survey and researched the villager's point of view of my project. After returning to Michigan Technological University, I obtained additional literature and material to constitute a more comprehensive literature search. The next chapter combines the literature, the derived model of the ideal tourism project, and my interviews and observations to analyze the Curichi Cuajo Project.

## **CHAPTER 5 – Results and Discussion**

In the previous chapter, I explained the methods used to compare the ideal ecotourism project with the ecotourism project ‘Curichi Cuajo’. I also reviewed how and why the information was collected and the survey was conducted. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the results of the information and survey. This will be separated into two parts. The first part will consist of what I saw in the village, comparing it to Table 3 (page 52), the main attributes needed for a successful ecotourism project. The second part will discuss what the key informants in the survey observed.

Table 3:

COMPONENTS OF ECOTOURISM

PHYSICAL COMPONENTS	Location
	Locally Owned Businesses
	Parks and Reserves
	Community
<hr/>	
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS	Education
	Government
	Management of area
	Culture

## **Analysis of the Curichi Cuajo Project**

In Chapter 3, the physical and socio-economic aspects of ecotourism were described and each was separated into four components. In this section, I will expand upon what Buena Vista, as a village, and the ecotourism project ‘Curichi Cuajo’ does or does not contain from my view as an outsider, someone who could be an ecotourist.

### **PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF ECOTOURISM**

#### *Location:*

Traveling within Bolivia can be difficult at times. One drawback to travel is noticed readily with the rail system. Opportunities to ride by rail in Bolivia are rare in most areas. I’ve had the chance to do so in the first class section. This was a fourteen-hour overnight ride from the city of Santa Cruz to Roberé, a town near the Brazilian border. Before departing the station, there was a delay of four hours as a result of a derailment. The train ride was bumpy and jostling (but nothing in comparison to the same route I would take some eight months later in a pickup on a dirt road pitted and valleyed, sometimes with potholes up to two feet in depth, although even that is not unusual). At least there were no farm animals in this section and the seats reclined a couple of inches. After two sleeping pills, I finally fell into a dazed stupor and slept a couple of hours. On the return trip, we were stopped for another five hours in the middle of nowhere, windows open but still stifling, waiting for them to clear yet another derailment (Figure 16).



Figure 16 – Train derailment

Major highways connect most of the important cities in each Departments, but even then the highways are susceptible to washouts during the rainy season and other environmental effects. Between the major cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, one will find a large portion of the road unpaved. Roads connect some towns, but often places are reachable only by driving in riverbeds, although not during the rain season! A good, mosaic rock road (very bumpy) is appreciated in the *campo* (countryside). Actual paved roads are limited solely to major trading routes, and even then pavement is not common. The CIA (2001a) reports that of Bolivia's 49,400 km of highway, only 5% is paved.

Bolivia possesses two international airports. La Paz has one and Santa Cruz has the other. The Viru Viru international airport is only eleven kilometers outside of Santa Cruz. From this airport, there are one or two direct flights to Miami each day. Direct flights to other countries occur daily, although there are rarely direct flights to and from Europe. Six foreign airline carriers operate and fly to Bolivia (Viceministerio de Turismo, 2000; 7). Flying to Bolivia is more expensive than flying to surrounding countries.

Bolivia in general is a difficult country in which to travel. Nationally, it is more difficult to bring people into Bolivia. Other surrounding countries have a better reputation for traveling. Although, direct flights to Santa Cruz are available. Santa Cruz's international airport allows for accessibility to the eastern lowlands of Bolivia. However once in Santa Cruz, Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo project is convenient and easy to reach.

Buena Vista (Figure 17) is in the Departments of Santa Cruz, Bolivia. The town is located 100 km west of Santa Cruz City on the new highway to Cochabamba. There are buses, public taxis, and private taxis available all day, everyday. The cost ranges from \$ US 1.40 to \$ US 40, depending on the mode of transportation. The trip from Santa Cruz to Buena Vista takes approximately one and a half hours by way of a paved, well-traveled highway. The ecotourism project 'Curichi Cuajo' is one kilometer south of the plaza in Buena Vista. From the plaza it is a five-minute drive or twenty-minute walk down a dirt road.



Figure 17 – Buena Vista map (unpublished map, 2001)

It is possible to take a day trip to Buena Vista, although there are many services and activities for tourist who wants to stay longer. Buena Vista is also known as the gateway to the Amboró National Park. The park is comprised of a total of 637,600 hectares of protected area (CI 2001). The Amboró National Park is a large attraction for national and international tourists alike. Within this park, one will encounter eleven Holdridge Life-Zones, two temperate, two tropical, and seven subtropical (Clarke and Sagot 1996). From Buena Vista it takes between one to two hours to get to the park, depending on the entry point and park station. There are four main park stations: Macuñacu (Figure 18), Mataracu, La Chonta and El Saguayo. It is possible to take a taxi to a drop off point on the main road and then hike twelve to twenty kilometers to get to the park border and park stations. One can also hire a truck directly to the park through



one of the three tour agencies in the village. During the dry season, one can usually reach the park border, crossing many streams and rivers by foot (Figure 19) or in the 4x4 vehicle. Access to the park is open to everyone all year round, but only the more hardy individuals will risk it during the rainy season.



Figure 18 – Macuñacu



Figure 19 – River crossing-dry season



Figure 20 – View of Amboró National Park



Within the Amboró National Park (Figure 20), there are many park guard stations. Several amenities are available at these stations, including clean campsites and facilities such as buildings for the park guards and water towers providing water to a toilet, sink, and cold-water shower at two of the four sites. One of the sites has 2.5 km of interpretative trails. The majority of the tourists who come through Buena Vista are bound for the Amboró National Park.



Figure 21 – Catholic Church in Buena Vista

Buena Vista is part of the Jesuit circuit in Bolivia. The first Jesuit church in Buena Vista was founded in 1694. The third church now stands in the same site (Figure 21), managed by Father Thomas Oates of the Roman Catholic Church. Many tourists visit the church, its museum, and the relics.

Cafetal is a coffee plantation only four kilometers outside of Buena Vista. They offer tours of their plantation, horseback riding, and praiseworthy accommodations

including breakfast, not to mention great coffee. Another inn is located five kilometers from Buena Vista. Bird enthusiasts and scientists from all over have been known to frequent this hotel. They have 50 hectares of protected primary and secondary rain forest to explore and offer tours of other areas including the park.



Figure 22 – Las Cuevas



Figure 23 – El Fuerte

Samaipata, another community which has direct access to the Amboró National Park, is two and a half-hours from Santa Cruz. The town offers a large variety of hotels at all prices, restaurants of many nationalities, stores, and craft shops. Close by town they have attractions such as *Las Cuevas* (the caves – Figure 22) which, surprisingly are not caves but beautiful waterfalls. Also nearby are the ruins of *El Fuerte* (the fort – Figure 23), a large ancient Inca city. Samaipata has a good deal more advertising and marketing for drawing tourists to the town and have a healthy tourist trade with more structured tours.



Figure 24 – Rescued monkeys in the Chapare

The Chapare region, with several hotels and attractions, is four hours west of Santa Cruz. For example, the community Inti Wara Yassi has a reserve, rehabilitating animals and returning them to the wild (Figure 24). The Pantanal is six hours east of Santa Cruz. This tropical area has a great deal of advertising about the Amazon and its wildlife, therefore attracting many tourists.

The Medidi National Park is in northern Bolivia, closer to La Paz. Several La Paz agencies give tours into the park. Many communities in the area have built ecolodges, such as Chalalan. Conservation International began this ecolodge, providing several years of training for the local community to run and manage the business. Now the lodge is almost self-sufficient and is a thriving enterprise. To arrive at one of the ecolodges, Chalalan, one will take a plane ride from La Paz to Rurrenabaque, a five hour boat ride followed by a 30 minute hike to the Ecolodge. The Medidi Park attracted worldwide attention of conservationist and adventure tourists alike when featured in the March 2000 issue of the National Geographic. The tourism rate to the Medidi National Park and Bolivia increased due to the National Geographic coverage.

Overall, there are many attractions for tourists visiting Bolivia. Many of them are advertised worldwide. Numerous smaller tourism businesses add to the activities in which visitors can participate. These smaller ventures do not require worldwide publicity. The large parks and forests draw people to Bolivia and the smaller sites have their businesses advertised within the village or larger city nearby. This is the case with Buena Vista. The Amboró National Park attracts tourists and the smaller attractions help keep tourists in the area for a little longer, providing a wider range of activities. Buena Vista is advertised in a tourism office in Santa Cruz. The Amboró National Park brings in most of the tourists, while Curichi Cuajo project and other smaller activities offer the tourists more to do.

The convenience of the location of Buena Vista makes it a good option for tourists even when they are able to stay only a day or two. The transportation can be as comfortable as one wants to pay for. The ride to Buena Vista is only an hour and a half so it does not limit the possibility for elderly people or children to visit the Curichi Cuajo. Buena Vista has enough activities within the town and nearby to keep one entertained for a long while, a year and a half in my case.

#### *Locally Owned Businesses:*

The businesses of Buena Vista are almost entirely locally owned. Having locally owned operations allow earnings to filter through many parts of the community. The lodging ranges from small scale homestays to larger hotels of varying prices. Tourists with different budgets will have a selection. Restaurants with local fare, offering different meals can be found throughout Buena Vista.

Residents of Buena Vista run most of the hotels. There are three *residenciales* (small pensions) which are located within the living quarters of families' homes. Two are open year round while the other one is only open during festival times. They all have running water, electricity, flush toilets and warm showers. Private and shared rooms are available. The prices range from \$ US 3 to \$ US 5 per person/night. Backpackers most commonly use these facilities.



Figure 25 – Horse and carriage

There are four larger hotels that range in price from \$ US 20 to \$ US 50 per person/night. These are of higher standard than the *residenciales*. They all offer tours of either their private land or the Amboró National Park. Two of them have swimming pools on the premises and one offers horseback riding and horse drawn carriage rides (Figure 25).

One large hotel is not locally owned. This hotel and restaurant caters to those who can pay the \$ US 50 minimum per night. They offer tours to the Amboró National Park, horseback riding, and a swimming pool.



There is a luxury housing complex owned by a previous resident of Buena Vista, although the owner does not currently live in the village. The costs of these houses are comparable to prices in the US, from \$ US 50,000 to around \$ US 120,000 for each house, unheard of prices for the Bolivian countryside. This gated community has small children's parks, a large swimming area, and bar complete with jacuzzi.



Figure 26 – Los Franceses restaurant

There are four main restaurants in Buena Vista, which are almost always open. A French couple who have resided in Buena Vista for the past seven years runs a French restaurant (Figure 26). They offer a different fare than the other food establishments. The food there is very clean and excellent, costing around \$ US 4 to \$ US 5 per plate. The other restaurants have good quality traditional fare, ranging from \$ US 2 to \$ US 4 per plate. Many small *pensiones* (small places to eat) serve snacks or a plate of food from \$ US 0.30 to \$ US 2.00. These places are located in the central market, street corners, or out of people's homes. The *pensiones* come and go, and are not typically as clean as the larger establishments. They serve only local and traditional fare.

With dozens of locally owned stores, there is quite a selection of places to shop. Most stores are located within the central market place, which is open daily from early

morning until 9 p.m. One of the shops even rents movies. Most stores items' are brought from Santa Cruz, while the majority of the fresh foods are bought from nearby farmers and sellers. Several small stores sell local *artesanía* (crafts), specializing in *jipijapa* (artwork made from the fiber of a plant grown in this region). Artisans make hats, animals, baskets, and other crafts from this fiber (Figure 27). One larger non-profit enterprise employs 200 women in nearby communities to create *artesanía* to sell throughout Bolivia and other countries. Almost all of the money received for these items is given back directly to the artists.



Figure 27 – Artisans working with *jipijapa*

Three tour agencies are situated in Buena Vista. One is run by the Amboró National Park, with local citizens working as park guards. The other two are locally run and use local guides on a rotating basis. Local guides average \$ US 15 per day for guiding tourists in the Amboró National Park. I assisted in the planning of a training program for eight local professional bird watching guides in another Peace Corps project. Another Peace Corps volunteer, Ari Martinez oversaw and completed the program. This

program enabled local guides to perform a more specialized function for these businesses. The bird guides average \$ US 20 per day for guiding.

The locally owned businesses in Buena Vista are a positive beginning for its ecotourist industry. The real test will be how the town retains the local ownership of businesses when it becomes more widely known. The town has a wide selection of food and supplies to satisfy most tastes and a large enough stock to allow for large groups of tourists. Places with higher prices are available for those who want cleaner and more private surroundings. In contrast, smaller more communal places are available for those who desire more interaction with the local citizens. The local tour agencies are a plus, especially now with the certified bird guides. With a good selection of lodging, restaurants, stores and tours, Buena Vista holds real potential for ecotourism.

#### *Parks and Reserves:*

The ecotourism project 'Curichi Cuajo' is the first municipally protected reserve in Bolivia. This has served as a pilot project and is now being copied in other areas of Bolivia. *Alcaldesa* Fanny Steinbach, Mayor of Buena Vista, first took this initiative in conjunction with Peace Corps in 1999. The Curichi Cuajo project land is the only sizable potable water source for all of Buena Vista. Article 35 of the Forest Law grants protection of 50 meters surrounding the body of water. Article 4, Inc. 1 and 2, and Article 5, Inc. 4 of Law 2028 of the Law of Municipalities allows for the Municipal Government to administer the territory of its jurisdiction to preserve and conserve the ecosystems of the Municipality and its natural resources (Ordenanza Municipal 2000).



The Curichi Cuajo has been declared a natural reserve. Deforestation, urbanization, burning, and hunting are prohibited.

Plans for the Curichi Cuajo include park personnel, although currently, restrictions are placed on tourists. Tourists and birdwatchers may only visit the bird observation towers (Figure 28) when accompanied by a certified bird guide of Buena Vista. Doors with locks prevent entry into the towers by others.



Figure 28 – Tower in the Curichi Cuajo Reserve

These doors were included as part of the towers for two reasons. As an ecotourism project it should give preferential treatment to those who have taken specialized bird watching classes. The locked doors are a way to ensure that only those bird guides who have advanced training and knowledge of birds are those who use the towers for bird watching. A guide needs sufficient skills and knowledge to be of service to a tourist. By allowing only certified, competent guides in the bird towers, a higher quality of service is provided. This will also encourage other guides to take advantage of future training options. The other reason for prohibiting unauthorized entry into the bird

towers is to prevent injury to unsupervised visitors. The towers are approximately nine meters high and a fall could cause injury.



Figure 29 – Caiman and turtles

The wetland and forested area of the Curichi Cuajo is rich in biodiversity. Over 400 species of birds can be found in this area, along with anacondas, caiman (a small South American crocodile –Figure 29), capybara (a large water rodent), river otters, tejón (like a small raccoon), turtles, jochi (similar to a large guinea pig), and taitatto (a small prickly relative of the pig). Endemic and endangered bird species are found here as well. For example, the great-billed seed finch is known to only nest in this area (Clarke and Sagot 1996). The cuajo, for which the reserve is named, is often seen in the area. A large colony of hoatzins nest near the first tower and can be seen daily, as well as parrots flying north in the morning and south in the night. Many other types of fauna and flora are also found in the area. Further documentation and studies are still needed.

The value of the Curichi Cuajo as a source of water in and of itself is important for the village. The hydrological studies taken in the area have shown the wetland is the only watershed large enough to supply all of Buena Vista. Attempts at digging other wells resulted in salty or dry wells.

Negative impact on the area is currently kept under control by fencing around the perimeter. The fencing was able to prevent cattle from grazing in the wetland. During the first couple of months of construction on the tower, the original fencing was down and cattle roamed freely into the area, causing erosion and damage to the creek beds. Currently the damage to the environment is low. The visitors are few and they do not go far into the wetland, only to the tower and back. The many streams and marshy areas prevent tourists from leaving the trails.

On the other hand, a significant amount of poaching still occurs in the area. Incidents of unattended tripwires connected to a notched arrow have been found in the forested area, left in pathways for jochi and other small forest animals. The tripwires with notched arrows were left on a large landowners' tract who prohibits hunting. This is a private landowner who is a participant in the Curichi Cuajo project. Unattended tripwires are dangerous because they could hit a passing person. Their use is illegal.

Hunting is one problem, whereas land management is another. When landowners farm the land above the Curichi Cuajo, it damages the land when removing forest cover and also contaminates the water for Buena Vista with chemical pesticides and fertilizers. By cutting forest, farmers are actively removing the natural water filtration system for the sweet water supply for the village.

Today, this type of environmental damage is seen in the Curichi Cuajo area. During my first several months working on the Curichi Cuajo project, two plots of land near the first tower were slashed and burned; apparently someone was preparing a farm in the area. Similarly, tourists may encroach upon the cultural aspect of Buena Vista. Only on big holidays does the loud music and racing cars of the national vacationers pollute

Buena Vista. In contrast, on the average day, many villagers can be seen sitting on the porch, chatting idly with friends and neighbors as they pass. Buena Vista has a relaxed and social culture which could be disrupted by too many intrusive tourists.

Trails and signs are part of the management plan for the Curichi Cuajo. Currently the only trails lead directly to the bird observation towers. The current Peace Corps volunteer is planning interpretive trails with signs stating the common name, Spanish name, English name, and scientific name of plants. These signs are helpful for educational purposes for both the tourists and townspeople. Last year, a government official agreed to furnish large signs displaying the name and purpose of the Curichi project as well as smaller signs around the perimeter prohibiting the practices of burning, fishing, hunting, discarding of trash and other harmful practices in the area. The signs have not been installed yet.

The Curichi Cuajo has some municipal protection, although it is not protected on the departmental or the federal level. *Plan de Uso de Suelos* (PLUS) started this project at one point, but it has not been pursued. As well, the Curichi Cuajo needs to have a method of improving security. Park personnel could help achieve this, although education would play a larger factor in altering the behavior of the community. The flora and fauna clearly are an integral part of the Curichi Cuajo, as is the potable water, although for differing reasons. The impact upon the site currently is not great, nevertheless this is just the beginning of the public use of this land for this era. If more people visit the area, the need for regulations will increase. More public trails are needed in the Curichi Cuajo. The only ones currently used for tourism and educational purposes lead only directly to the tower. More trails and signs are needed.

### *Community:*

Although a large number of residents are associated with tourists in one form or another, Buena Vista is a large community and there are many who do not have any involvement with or receive direct benefits from visitors. Many farmers practice subsistence farming and only grow a small amount of surplus crop for sale. Several of the hunters hunt for sport rather than for food.

Many businesses participate in tourism within the pueblo of Buena Vista. Some restaurant and hotel owners cater exclusively to the different tastes of the tourist. Stores stock items such as flashlights, batteries, and camping foods. With some in the community, their whole business and lifestyle is based around tourism.

One tour operator's main source of income is completely dependent upon tourists desire to be driven to the park. He arranges for local guides and cooks as requested by the tourist. Another tour agency is run by several individuals who take turns managing the business. Most of them have other sources of income. For example, one man also has a good job with the Department of Health. This office also runs the organization *Grupo Ecologista Amboró* (GEA), a youth group for current and future ecologists. GEA is run by past youth group members, showing cohesiveness and sustainability over the past eleven years. The group GEA has taken an active role in the Curichi Cuajo project, donating much time and effort to projects such as clearing an area for one of the towers and constructing a pathway to the other tower. The agency also provides transportation to the park and employs local guides and cooks for tourists. The

park guards for Amboró National Park run the third office. The park guards are residents of Buena Vista and are well known and respected throughout the village.

One alliance that has recently joined forces is the '*Asociación de Guías-Ecotourístico*' (Ecotourist Guide Association). This union is formed between the tour agency Amboró Tours, Los Franceses Restaurante, and the Pozazul Hotel. Together they created a colorful pamphlet advertising their businesses and opened an office in the main plaza in Santa Cruz. A women's group of 200 artists living in or around Buena Vista creates many types of crafts which are sold at Artecampo, a non-profit craft store organization.

In general, Buena Vista is a friendly town. However, when visitors ask a restaurant or store owner 'What is there to do in Buena Vista? Where is the park? How can I get there? Who can take me?' the town's people often do not know or may make a rude statement. I occasionally bought bread from one of the stores. Although the family that ran the store knew I was not a tourist, they would not speak to me unless absolutely necessary. I have heard often how storeowners see a tourist or *gringo* (white person) and know that they were just passing through, so it is unnecessary to be polite. They are not as aware of how a bad reputation is spread by word of mouth. Many partnerships within Buena Vista work well together and add to the overall effectiveness of their tourist trade. Unfortunately, isolated incidences involving personality conflicts have occurred between local citizens. Additionally, others and myself have also noted unresponsiveness towards tourists. Ultimately, this will harm many businesses and relations between them. It is always important to remember the interplay between actors affect everyone.



Figure 30 – GEA - The ecology youth group      Figure 31 – GEA - Working in the Curichi

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC ATTRIBUTES OF ECOTOURISM

### *Education:*

Through environmental education and awareness, changes will be made for a cleaner life. Buena Vista has an ecological youth group, *Grupo Ecologista Amboró* (GEA – Figures 30 and 31), whose function is to help preserve the environment and educate themselves and others on environmental matters. While working with GEA, I was able to arrange different *charlas* (talks) about environmental concerns by guest speakers from within the community and by outsider experts. For example, I had one Peace Corps volunteer come and talk about business issues such as customer service. Another talk was from a German chemical engineer who spoke about water quality. GEA has a total of 25 members and meets weekly or monthly. GEA members were encouraged to give informational talks about the Curichi to local citizens, although not as bird guides. I arranged an evening meeting to give a brief training to the group. The following day practice tours to the tower were to be given. The tour schedules were advertised over the radio. However, town people did not attend.

The group GEA has planned activities during the year. My first year in Buena Vista we took a trip out to the Amboró National Park and hiked to waterfalls (Figure 32),



swam, and took a guided walk with a park guard receiving a *charla* (talk) on the numerous species of orchids. The park guard also spoke about water quality and fish die-off within the park.



Figure 32 – GEA - In the Amboró



Figure 33 – *Día de Limpieza*

For the last two *Días de Limpieza* (Earth Day – Figure 33) all of the school children were invited by GEA to join in a town beautification project. The children were dismissed from school for a few hours to have a well-coordinated trash pick up in the village. At the end when they were finished, one of the GEA leaders gave a *charla* on the environment and refreshments were served for the participants. After refreshments from the last clean up, many of the children threw their plastic cups and napkins on the ground. One aspect of local culture is to drop any trash indiscriminately. This culturally embedded habit is undesirable for ecotourism.

Another environmental activity involving GEA is called *Caminata del Parque Amboró* (the walk of the Amboró National Park). This involved camping at one of the park guard sites in the Amboró and then walking 25 km from the park back to Buena Vista. Attendees included many local citizens as well as some people from Santa Cruz.

One educational tool was the seven month bird guide course for eight community members, four from Buena Vista and four from *Area Natural de Manejo Integrado*



*Amboró* (ANMIA - the area around the Amboró National Park). Six of those trained took and passed the final exam and are now certified bird guides. Currently they receive higher pay than regular guides and are the only guides allowed to use the bird observation towers. All guides, with the exception of one tour agent/guide, do not speak English. They are able to communicate well with other Spanish speakers about the types of birds, the behaviors exhibited, the names and other information. The group was taught to identify many species of birds by sight and sound. The bird guides have learned about birds for nearly the whole region of Buena Vista and the Amboró National Park. The bird guides are more aware of biodiversity now and they in turn share their knowledge with other Bolivians and foreigners.

Most of the Amboró park guides are also well equipped to teach environmental education to the tourists. The majority of the visitors of the Amboró National Park are scientists and backpackers. The tourists visiting the Curichi Cuajo towers include scientists and a smaller percentage of backpackers. Families with children also visit the towers, as a visit to the Curichi Cuajo is very accessible. The opportunity for education is present for tourists visiting the Curichi Cuajo towers since a bird guide must accompany them.

Within Buena Vista, many opportunities exist for further education involving ecotourism and environment. Several individuals are noticeably active in environmental education. Unfortunately, the majority of the local citizens do not participate in the activities offered, even when they state how interested they are. Community members of Buena Vista value their leisure time.

*Government:*

Political unrest has been common in Bolivia the last few years. Numerous times the entire country has been at a stand still. The majority of the protests have revolved around coca; a crop cultivated in the Yungas since time immemorial and an integral part of Bolivia's culture. Now the profitable business of making cocaine is derived from this age old crop. The protests over the destruction of the coca crops and other complaints of the people of Bolivia escalated to large *paros* (strikes). Several times some of the major cities were shut down and food became scarce. Violence and deaths were reported at some of the riots.



Figure 34 – Protests

During protests (Figure 34) I noticed a significant decrease in tourism and visitors. This decrease was caused in part because international tourists do not feel comfortable traveling in countries with problems during political unrest. Additionally, traffic was not allowed to cross certain lines such as tollbooths between cities. In my nineteen months in Buena Vista, there were only two or three times when there were riots in or near town or traffic was blocked from entering or exiting Buena Vista.

Communities are more likely to respond better when there is transparency and accountability in the government. While in Bolivia, I heard of several examples of corruption hindering the development of project implementation. Also, rapid switches of municipal leaders occurred within Buena Vista. These and other incidents led to protests within the community. It is difficult to accomplish tasks when working with constantly changing leadership. New rules and objectives disrupt project continuity.

Many government and non-government organizations work within Buena Vista. Foreign organizations such as *Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza* (FAN), Japan's version of Peace Corps (JICA), and National Protected Area Service (SERNAP) have worked within Buena Vista. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) was a principal player in preventing an oil company from exploring for oil and gas in the Amboró National Park. Plan International is building a hospital in Buena Vista. Habitat for Humanity is constructing many homes in Buena Vista. My counterpart began and finished his Habitat house in town during my time there. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) met in Buena Vista with United States Agency for International Development (USAID). They are considering funding ecotourism programs in this area. IDB also finances the Vice-Ministry of Tourism in Bolivia. Buena Vista was one of three areas in all of Bolivia selected by USAID for special consideration to fund ecotourism projects. Furthermore, USAID has put the Amboró National Park back into the Parks-in-Peril program, making additional funding available for the park. Last but not least, Peace Corps has had five volunteers placed in Buena Vista over the last eight years. I received the second of two Small Project Assistance (SPA) grants through Peace Corps to construct the two bird observation towers and to build the bridge and pathway to the tower.

The village has the manpower, natural resources, and skill in many cases to have an ecotourism project. Although in my observations, some Bolivians do not have the training and experience necessary to begin and follow through with projects nor the sources for funding projects. Some local citizens feel they lack the initiative and motivation to begin and build a project. With the combinations of the skills within the community and the foreign resources, which can provide what they lack, it is possible for Buena Vista to develop, maintain, and expand a program like Curichi Cuajo.

The instability within the Buena Vista government and Bolivia may reduce the number of tourists traveling to Buena Vista. While it is good to have stability in the government, it is beyond the scope of a small project or community. However, if it does improve, I think cohesion throughout the community will also improve. The *paros* (strikes) have hurt several businesses within Buena Vista, not to mention many other institutions throughout Bolivia. Ecotourism can be improved with outside help, although the village must feel they have a stake in the project too.

#### *Management of Area:*

The management plan for the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo was originally written by Peace Corps volunteers with help from the community and was later revised and given new objectives by several local participants and current Peace Corps volunteers. *Fundación del Comité Impulsor de Protección de Reservas* (CIPRE) is a committee created by and for the inhabitants of Buena Vista. Three of the five committee members are Bolivians living in Buena Vista. I am another board member, although the current Peace Corps volunteer, Brent Beane is serving in my place. The other member is

a foreigner who resides in Santa Cruz and is the owner of a large tract of land adjacent to the Curichi Cuajo and three houses in Buena Vista. Other landowners were informed of this project but no formal meeting took place for all of the nearby landowners.

The management plan calls for project monitoring. Control is now left to the initiative of the members CIPRE, as they will be evaluating the project's development. During my time working on this project, I produced and conducted the survey discussed in Chapter 4. The survey was used to obtain the views and opinions of different community members.

In order for an ecotourism project to succeed and become economically feasible, there must be revenue. The earnings also should stay within the community. Fresh foods and local meat and eggs for restaurants and hotels are available within Buena Vista. Supplies for camping trips can be purchased in local stores. Often it is necessary for storeowners to buy other items in the city, where there are large markets.



Figure 35 – Local contractor for first tower.

In the process of constructing the towers, bridge, and pathways, only local citizens were utilized for paying jobs. Local residents were contracted to build both towers (Figure 35). The contractors hired villagers to assemble them. The money from

the construction remained in the community. The youth group GEA also participated in creating a new sand pathway to the tower. A vacationing American and his wife wanted to help with a local project, so they constructed the bridge with help from local people. The couple also donated money for part of the materials.

The bird guides utilizing the towers set aside approximately \$ US 0.80 per person/visit for the use of the towers. During the first six months of use, the contributions to the tower equaled \$ US 25. This money has been given to CIPRE and will be used for maintenance and repairs to the towers. Each student who passed the exam was given a set of binoculars provided by a separate Peace Corps grant. They do not need further supplies for this job.

While most of the people in Buena Vista are not related to the tourism industry, many larger stores and establishments and their income are greatly affected by tourism. Several potential markets exist for farmers. Most farmers sell surplus produce to the larger cities, so an abrupt halt to tourism would not affect them as much as it would for the people who cater solely to tourists. During the strikes in Bolivia, the French restaurant was hurt financially. Their food is higher quality and thus higher price. They accommodate those who want a different taste and are willing to pay for it. It is difficult for such a business to stay open during times of political unrest when few foreigners visit.

No studies have been performed to determine the carrying capacity in this area. Nevertheless, the number of tourists is still small. From casual observation of the village, Curichi Cuajo project, and Amboró National Park, negative effects from foreign tourists have not been noted. Because of the community's desire for additional income, they may

allow too many tourists to enter the park's and the town's facilities. This would reduce the quality of service and products and could potentially harm the environment.

I collected brochures from Buena Vista. The Ecotourist Guide Association invested in bright pamphlets with pictures. These pictures illustrate clear, pristine jungle, waterfalls, and swimming activities with smaller photos advertising the restaurant Los Franceses and the Hotel Pozazul. Small diagrams of the plazas in Buena Vista and Santa Cruz on the pamphlets indicate where to find the offices with addresses and phone numbers written close by. The pamphlet states "Amboró National Park, Noel Kempff N. Park, and Birding". No other written information about guide services, hotels, food, or rates is documented. These three businesses are working together and created a package, deal but their marketing gives only the most basic information.

Inside Buena Vista is a non-profit women's craft store, ArteCampo. This business has bright advertising leaflets showing their artwork. This business is based in and around Buena Vista, with stores in most major cities in Bolivia. Nearby Buena Vista is a large coffee plantation with a hotel, swimming pool, and horseback riding available. Their advertisement is a pamphlet describing their coffee. Smaller businesses sometimes have some advertisement in Buena Vista, generally photocopied papers. While in Santa Cruz, I did not see any marketing for Buena Vista aside from the office of the Ecotourist Guide Association. The only other source of advertisement I have seen and have heard that other tourists have seen is from popular travel guidebooks such as Footprints (Alan 2002) and Lonely Planet (Swaney 2001).

Numerous newspaper articles have been written about Buena Vista and ecotourism in this area. Additionally, two articles have been written about the Curichi

Cuajo (Mendía 2000, Moreno 2000). I presented a poster on the Curichi Cuajo at the Congress ‘Conservation of Biodiversity in the Andes and the Amazon Basin – Linking Scientists, NGOs and Local Communities’ in Cusco, Peru in 2001. This conference addressed conservation of biodiversity, focusing on Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

I also visited with a group of reporters from other countries to the Amboró and to other attractions nearby Buena Vista. The whole group was comprised of reporters from Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia, tour guides, and representatives from the Cámara Hotelera (Chamber of Hotel Businesses). These reporters were traveling around Bolivia as a group to write about tourism projects.

Training is one of the most important parts of a project, especially when the participants do not yet understand how to run the project or what foreigners expect. The bird guide training course was key for the Curichi Cuajo project. Without it local professional bird guide services would not be offered as easily to tourists. While most tourists speak at least some Spanish, it is always an advantage to have guides who can speak English. Five guides, two of which are bird guides, attend English classes provided by Brent Beane, Peace Corps volunteer. The guides understand that tourists like English-speaking guides; unfortunately they are not taking full advantage of the training offered.

The management plan is in the hands of the committee CIPRE. They are now responsible for the upkeep of the reserve. It does involve the community and that will be an advantage in the long run, if the members do not lose interest. The survey of the opinions of the community presented in this thesis is the only one that I am aware of. For projects like the Curichi Cuajo, it is beneficial to understand how the community feels



about a project. Since the businesses are locally owned, the community is able to retain earnings within the village. Furthermore, Buena Vista should have better advertising. Although some efforts have been noted, unfortunately, the advertising lacks key information about Buena Vista itself and nearby activities. Additional work needs to be completed with the management plan and security before the number of visitor's increase substantially. Training has been made available and used, which is good, although more local citizens should participate.

#### *Culture:*

The culture in Buena Vista has seen many changes over the years and has already been influenced in many ways by foreigners. In the late 1600s the Jesuit church, under the authority of Spain, played a large role in the founding of Buena Vista. Later the Spanish colonized Bolivia and recently many Americans and Europeans have arrived. Several resident *gringos* (white people) currently reside in Buena Vista, in addition to Peace Corps. The village is accustomed to many differences in culture and is open to change.

In Buena Vista, one will encounter true *cambas* (people of the lowland). They are a relaxed people and are generally in no rush. The majority of people one will encounter in town claim to be of pure Spanish decent or *mesclado* (mixture). Traditional indigenous culture is less prevalent in the tropics than in the *altiplano* (highlands) of Bolivia. Many farming communities near Buena Vista consist of *collas* (highlanders). The *collas* work more often as laborers and cleaners. Generally they are considered the

peasant class and live away from town. In contrast, the oldest and most influential *camba* families' homes surround the plaza.

Foreigners have the opportunity for full cultural immersion in Buena Vista. During the slower tourism season, few visitors and many local citizens are present. The residents in Buena Vista are sociable and enjoy talking and exchanging ideas with visitors. Native Bolivians can always be found where tourists stay, eat, and take tours. Local citizens run most businesses and thus it is nearly impossible to avoid them. This is a wonderful way for local citizens to learn a little bit of English, just as it is to add to the Spanish vocabulary of the tourist.

Buena Vista is an open community and inviting to outsiders in many ways. The attitude of most local citizens is welcoming and generous to visitors. Enchanting and charming as the town is, it makes a visit enjoyable and memorable. The culture is a delightful mixture of different parts of Bolivia. Visitors have the option to become as much a part of the culture as they please. I too learned to enjoy my leisure time during my time in Buena Vista.

The list of components of ecotourism on page 52 is a theory. In practice, the list presents two problems. First, it is artificial and assumes and assumes all ecotourism projects will be similar enough in content to fit it. In reality each project may have some aspects of most or all of the list, but in different degrees. As well, each project is unique and the uniqueness of each project makes it desirable to ecotourists and the community. In the case of the Curichi Cuajo, water is extremely important for the community of Buena Vista. Drinking water is not one of the components found in the literature review. Every ecotourism project will have its own unique attributes. In general, water will

probably not be a key component of every ecotourism project. In the case of the Curichi Cuajo, the water is a fundamental aspect of the project.

Second, although this section was broken into the eight aspects of ecotourism, they frequently overlapped. Many of the examples are hard to place in one category, but for organizational reasons, the examples were separated and placed in a category that most closely described them. The remaining part of this chapter is also categorized and likewise overlaps at times. This goes to further prove a point; an ecotourism project is like tightly woven fabric. Many parts are integrated to produce a complicated yet balanced product. Sometimes these parts are more difficult to separate because they rely upon other aspects of the whole.

## **Resident Views of the Curichi Cuajo Project**

This section of Chapter 5 is a compilation of the views and opinions of the thirteen key informants surveyed. The structure to the following section is similar to that of the first part of Chapter 5. Each of the listed components of an ideal ecotourism project is addressed. While informants did not necessarily address topics in any particular order, for the sake of convenience the contents are reported by category. Key general questions I considered for each topic are:

1. Was the topic addressed and if so, to what extent? Were discussions long and detailed or short and cursory?
2. Who addressed the topic positively?
3. Who addressed the topic negatively?
4. What specific details and examples were discussed?

## **PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF ECOTOURISM**

### *Location:*

Several informants felt the location of the Curichi Cuajo was an advantage to the project. Only one person, in the rich and powerful category, thought that it was too close to the road and too accessible. Overall, the location was a topic that people made a brief statement about, generally in the beginning of the interview and then they continued on to other views.

The closeness of Buena Vista to Santa Cruz and the quality of the highway travel was mentioned during one interview. One of the benefits noted by many of those

surveyed was that the Curichi Cuajo was very close by to Buena Vista with easy access. Accessibility was not an issue they felt needed improvement. Two people used the Amboró National Park as a comparison. They explained when traveling to the Curichi Cuajo no rivers were crossed and it is always a convenient destination, while to arrive at the Amboró National Park required a much longer journey, crossing many rivers and traveling on roads in poor condition. Another interviewee pointed out how the Curichi Cuajo gives tourists something more to do and that can add an additional day or two to the length of stay and benefit Buena Vista economically. Nearby attractions were described by six interviewees, including the Amboró National Park and its campsites, Cafetal (the coffee plantation), the church and its museum, and the Río Surutú with its white sand beaches. Four people said Buena Vista lacked attractions such as a public garden place and a children's park. They stated activities like biking, horseback riding, and guided walks in the forest nearby the village should be offered.

Others suggested beach chairs, tables, and umbrellas could be rented on the beach at Río Surutú. One respondent felt Buena Vista should have a castrated bull in the plaza, for rides and photos. Two people thought it would be nice to close off traffic to the plaza and allow people to walk and gather in the streets. They felt it would attract visitors to get a taste of how life was like in the days of old.

Modes of transportation were not discussed, nor the difficulty of traveling around Bolivia. Many of those interviewed have traveled outside of Buena Vista, although most residents have not gone much past Santa Cruz. Only three have traveled internationally. They may not have thought of transportation because tourists do arrive here, and transportation may not be a point of concern for the residents. Most of those interviewed

did mention that it was convenient that the Curichi Cuajo was nearby. No one remarked upon the unique situation of Buena Vista's location, near a major airport, and the convenience of transportation. This may not have been stated because they are accustomed to the ease of transportation and think of it as a given.

*Locally Owned Businesses:*

The local businesses of Buena Vista were discussed by seven of those interviewed. Five of them had prior experience or currently had their own business. They spoke about what Buena Vista had and what they would like to have. As a whole, the topic of locally owned businesses was not lengthy, other than when examples of possible business opportunities were cited.

The presence and variety of restaurants, hotels, in-town tour agencies, and guides was discussed by several informants. One landowner commented on how *cabañas* (bungalows) are being sold for weekend houses so city people can be closer to nature. Another commented Buena Vista lacked modern conveniences such as a bank and post office. Some other suggestions were for Buena Vista to have a theater, rent bicycles, horses, beach space, and for local citizens to produce more honey, fruit, and handicraft work in a co-op. One of those interviewed has a bee keeping business and sells small amounts of honey. She told me visitors sometimes want to see where and how she practices apiculture. She has been open to giving them a brief tour.

Other people suggested the average citizen should be knowledgeable enough about the village and the surrounding attractions to be helpful to tourists. Several people thought at least some guides should know English or another language. A student felt the

prices around Buena Vista for lodging and guide services were too expensive and suggested they lower their prices in effort to encourage return visits from the tourists. One respondent commented how Buena Vista needs more experts, but said that they need to be brought in, inferring the average local citizen would not or could not be an expert.

Many felt Buena Vista needed more employment opportunities. While they are aware that tourism brings jobs, they assume the work will be given to the villagers. They do not clearly understand that in larger organizations, often most higher paid, higher skill positions are given to people with more education, generally not people from small villages. So while job opportunities may be increasing in the village, they might not be available to all local citizens. Classes and training are offered but low attendance shows that few are interested in learning new skills such as speaking English and hospitality service. Those without appropriate skills would not be hired when new jobs become available.

#### *Parks and Reserves:*

Every informant commented on some aspect of parks and reserves. This tended to be one of the topics reviewed in more detail. An equal amount of positive and negative aspects were discussed, while a larger proportion of the negative comments were directed towards poaching in the Curichi Cuajo and trash in the village. The fauna and flora of the reserve was spoken about in favorable terms.

Almost everyone interviewed was very aware that the Curichi Cuajo is a reserve and protects the fauna and flora. Many noted the uniqueness and abundance of the plants, mammals, reptiles, and birds. One respondent talked about the red-data book bird

species, the greater billed seed finch nesting and having permanent residency in the Curichi Cuajo. Another person stated how the town was proud to have the first municipal reserve, that no other pueblo has it (at the time of the interview), and it will serve as an example for other communities to follow. Two people thought the Curichi Cuajo was an excellent place for foreigners to come see exotic fauna and flora.

“Buena Vista is aptly named,” states one person. In English, Buena Vista means beautiful view. He went on to describe the rolling hills all around Buena Vista and the greenness of the forests. He finds Buena Vista much prettier than the surrounding villages. Two people said the town would be more attractive if the citizens would keep it cleaner. They should fix the streets and paint over the advertisements on the walls, covering the signs for coca-cola and food items. Another suggested installing signs around the village, stating nearby attractions and street names (there are no street signs with names). Many people commented on the amount of trash throughout the village, countryside, and even areas where it has been dumped into the Curichi. Another comment was made about preventing the construction of more cell phone towers near the plaza. Currently one tower stands next to my house which is near the plaza; I had excellent cell phone reception.

Laws for protection of the Curichi Cuajo were discussed by several of those interviewed. Many felt there should be more laws protecting the area and other natural areas. Concerns were expressed by several over the difficulties of law enforcement. One person was glad that the law protected their private land, which is next to the Curichi Cuajo, yet that individual told me about trespassers who left dangerous traps on the land.



This person also felt laws were important to prevent people from trespassing and taking plants such as orchids, vanilla, and *helechos*, a native plant in the tropics.

Two people felt it was important to have park guards for the Curichi Cuajo. One felt the *alcalde* (mayor) should provide pay for these guards. Two people said that the guards and their families should live in the Curichi Cuajo so that it would be a part of their lives. Another suggestion was to encourage hunters to take positions as park guards, helping with the change in their mentality. A few people felt the Curichi Cuajo should have a information center with photos, maps, and books. This would be better placed in the tour agencies, rather than a center only for the Curichi Cuajo.

“I believe the day that the oil runs out, the world won’t end. The day that gold runs out, the world won’t end. But the day water runs out, the world will end” (hotel owner in Buena Vista). Only one topic was unanimously agreed upon as important. The sweet water source for Buena Vista needed protection. Water was of such importance to the whole village that it should be protected regardless of the usability of the Curichi Cuajo for other purposes like ecotourism. I asked about water directly in the survey, however nine people did bring up the topic of the importance of water before the question was asked. The topic of water still remains by far the most discussed subject. “*Agua es vida*” - Water is life (a guide in Buena Vista). Although this topic is important for those interviewed, one person told me the people in Buena Vista do not talk about the water and seem unaware of the fact that the Curichi Cuajo is the only water source for Buena Vista.

Many noticed the negative impact on the nature around the village. Two respondents explain how the *ripieros* (gravel diggers) damage the Río Surutú as they

excavate the beautiful white beaches for sand, gravel, and rocks. One person also spoke about the people bathing and washing their clothes in the river, and how unattractive that is for tourists. Hunters have become a problem for two landowners close by the Curichi Cuajo. Notched arrows have been left unattended by hunters to kill small passing animals. The landowners are rightly concerned about being shot themselves. Other people worry about the poaching taking place in the forested areas as well as the Curichi Cuajo. “...a jochi comes along, if Juan doesn’t kill it, Pedro will kill it. If not him, then I’ll kill it” (resident of Buena Vista). Other preoccupations include cutting trees and burning of the land. “I want to preserve the ecology of the land” (land owner near Curichi Cuajo).

Trails and fencing were discussed by four people. Two of them felt more trails were needed into the Curichi Cuajo. One respondent brought up the point that access onto the trails needed to be controlled and another one explained how fencing was needed around the whole Curichi and the municipal government should provide funding for it.

Overall, the respondents were verbal about the beauty and diversity of fauna and flora and the water supply in the Curichi Cuajo. Having park guards live in or near the Curichi Cuajo in theory is a good idea. However the area is sensitive because it is the source of water for Buena Vista and should not have many latrines nearby. Furthermore, if an area is more populated and utilized, animals are more likely to be disturbed. It is common that some people hunt and fish simply as an activity to kill time, although many do it for food as well. It would depend on the circumstances and personality of the hunter if he would make an appropriate park guard.

*Community:*

Only five informants spoke briefly about community cohesion and participation. The comments were almost exclusively directed towards community relations and better cooperation between members. Only general statements were stated and no specific solutions were provided.

Two informants commented how some businesses attitudes towards visitors are unfortunate; they feel the tourist “owes them a favor” and they overcharge and take advantage of tourists. Some businesses believe the tourist is only passing through and will not be returning. While this may be true in some cases, the town’s reputation can suffer adverse consequences due to mistreatment of tourists.

Several informants felt the community should participate more in the Curichi Cuajo project. Otherwise, they would feel it was simply a project for a few people instead of a community project. For the project to succeed, it is necessary for the town’s people and the municipal government to work together. Several informants noticed poor cooperation between the groups. One man said egotistical behavior lies behind the divisiveness.

One professional community member indicated that Buena Vista is not prepared to handle ecotourism, while another feels that the town is capable of surviving off ecotourism. Only one man expressed his desire to share his knowledge and experience in environment with others, especially with children. He wants to educate local citizens and tourists. This reserve worker believes unification can occur through education.

Earlier business ideas were for local citizens to produce honey, fruit, and more handicraft work. They stated that while the market for these and other items was large

enough and the production was too small to meet demand. This would require several in the community to work together, pooling their resources. Within Buena Vista, many organizations are beginning to form a coalition. This is a new concept for many, to cooperate with groups outside of the family. The Curichi Cuajo project is one small project that involves everyone, even if they are unaware of it. Not only does it incorporate many businesses involving tourists, but also it provides water for everyone in the village. This will be more evident when the local citizens become more environmentally aware.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC ATTRIBUTES OF ECOTOURISM

### *Education:*

A common but not heavily discussed issue by most of the informants centered on the lack of environmental education. More commonly people felt elementary education for the children was needed, rather than specific environmental education. People agreed some better quality teachers were needed in the schools.

Many commented that local citizens, government, and authorities lacked environmental awareness. They felt the best remedy for the future would be environmental and science education in schools. “Through education, they (the children) will want to care for nature” (an informant). Class field trips to the Curichi Cuajo were suggested. Some offered the idea of teaching guide classes in the school not only to educate the children but also to give them an idea of job possibilities in the future.

Several people pointed out that the Curichi Cuajo is an ideal place to study biology. One of the reserve workers expressed the need for an integrated environmental education, to include agriculture and apiculture, showing their relatedness.

The aspects of my ideal ecotourism project do not include issues of general education in the schools, but each ecotourism project and town have different needs, and this is obviously a necessity noted by many people within the village. Someone explained that the children needed to learn more about their own village, their own heritage. Outside of education for the village, only one respondent mentioned the need for educating tourists. Perhaps this was assumed by some, but it does show a clear priority for the desire of educating their own community first, especially basic education for children.

#### *Government:*

The government, or more precisely politics were held in a critical view by many of the informants. They also felt that there should be more funding and technical assistance from national and international organizations. International groups were specifically targeted since foreign governments are the ones requesting more conservation of natural areas and forests.

Several participants spoke about political imbalance within the government in Bolivia. They felt little could be accomplished with the ongoing change of political parties in charge, thus all the ruling authorities. "... with the government fighting over money and amongst themselves, they are only interested in the themselves, not the village" (a resident in Buena Vista). One landowner thought there was not enough active

municipal participation to solve their own problems. A few informants talked about accountability and transparency within the government. There were a few remarks about mismanagement of funds within the government and disappointment expressed about the situation.

Many people spoke about the current participation of several agencies working within the Buena Vista area. In general, they felt the national and local government should participate in ecotourism projects. One professional community member felt not only should the local government assist with funding ecotourism projects such as the Curichi Cuajo, but additionally they should give more legal guidance and write more laws to help protect it. “The municipal government prides itself on having the first municipally protected reserve (in Bolivia) ...but does not help with the upkeep” (a hotel owner). They feel the Curichi Cuajo requires the participation of the authorities to foster its protection and to offer capacity building courses to local citizens.

One landowner is encouraged by the *Camara Hotelera* (a hotel Chamber of Commerce) in Buena Vista. He states they have several programs and help deliver ideas to Buena Vista. Three other people comment that if it had not been for the assistance of Peace Corps volunteers, the Curichi Cuajo would not have become a reserve. The presence of other groups, local, national, and international are noted by informants in Buena Vista. They feel this is a positive sign of progress. At the same time, they still feel additional assistance would be of utmost use to the community.

*Paros* (strikes) were only mentioned by one informant. Although the riots and violence occurred over the last year and a half, they were not mentioned. They did not talk about how the stability of the government would affect the flow of tourism and

businesses of Buena Vista. Perhaps because communities cannot do much about the political problems in the national government, they did not discuss it. They had some criticisms of the government but few solutions to the problems were given.

*Management of Area:*

The longest discussions were about management of the Curichi Cuajo. The informants mentioned most of the long list of subheadings for the management, except for surveys, evaluation of the project, and involving the community in the management plan. They commented on items that were missing and wanted stronger management, training, and studies in the area.

Four of those interviewed spoke about additional work needed on the management plan. An updated integrated organizational plan and good administration to the project needs to produce and to allow for change. One person said that some people are not prepared for the responsibility of the project and it requires follow-up. Another informant requested that official information be recorded, beyond the original documents. A reserve worker is concerned about who will manage the revenue, and emphasizes again that good management is needed for this project. *Fundación del Comité Impulsor de Protección de Reservas* (CIPRE) was mentioned twice; these two people were confident that CIPRE will help the Curichi Cuajo succeed.

Several people mentioned the current funding and also need for funding for additional aspects to the Curichi Project. Peace Corps is mentioned, again for providing volunteers and grants for the towers. *Plan de Uso de Suelos* (PLUS) is referred for the technical assistance it provided. Two respondents say additional funding is needed for

guards, for fencing the entire area, and for supplementary studies on the hydrology and additional ecotourism projects within the Curichi Cuajo.

“The people of Buena Vista should benefit from the Curichi Cuajo, not outsiders” (a university student who grew up in Buena Vista). His statement is echoed by a professional community member who gave an example of revenue at another village being siphoned off by outside investors. Two other informants list alternate methods of revenue such as growing coffee, *cacao* (chocolate), tropical fruit, seeds, plants, and trees. One points out that Buena Vista currently has a coffee plantation, artisan work, and a biological fruit project. A few men commented on their hopes of beginning a *vivero* (tree nursery) for the youth organization *Grupo Ecologista Amboró* (GEA), as an additional source of income and an educational project.

Advertisement is limited for Buena Vista. While people are aware that it may be marketed, two participants assumed their town was in books or magazines, and that is why tourists knew to come here. Other informants suggested that Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo should be advertised over the Internet. Two people suggested we advertise in foreign countries. One person thought tours should be announced over the radio. Another person interviewed said pamphlets should be made with information on the birds found in the Curichi Cuajo. Overall, the consensus felt there was room for improvement for marketing and advertising in Buena Vista.

Three people mention carrying capacity and restricted access to the forest. One man stated group size in the Curichi Cuajo should be regulated. The other two people are directly concerned about the animals' reaction to contact with people. They suggest there



be restricted areas and days when people are not allowed to enter. “We walk on their paths...(we should) allow the animals peace” (landowner near the Curichi Cuajo).

Training bird guides is mentioned by several people as helpful to the ecotourism trade in Buena Vista. They feel the guide services are the best way to educate tourists. Ideas for other training were extended to the schools, but currently no funding is available for it. The hotel owner is concerned about the attitude towards training for customer service. He mentioned a training event to teach what tourists expect from a hotel or restaurant. He and others noticed an apathetic attitude among those who would serve tourists, “There were classes to teach, but then no one came. They thought, how can someone teach me to make a bed, to sweep, to clean...there is poor education here for this...(the servers) need hotel and gastronomical classes” (the hotel owner).

The respondents mentioned the need for further scientific studies in the Curichi Cuajo. Most of the participants spoke of the abundant fauna and flora in the area. Several people noted the Curichi Cuajo a good source for future studies.

People were concerned about the limited employment opportunities in the area. One hotel owner stated he was experiencing difficult times. His business was suffering and he was losing money on his hotel. Further problems - *paros* (strikes), riots, and other events may reduce tourism. The respondents did not mention complications such as these would produce more hardship and strain on the village economy and the limited diversity of work available. Although not everyone is dependent upon tourism, many of the founding members of Buena Vista have invested much in tourism. This in turn can have adverse effects on other villagers who do not directly work in tourism.

The informants did not mention involving the community in the management plan. The plan was originally written by community members and Peace Corps volunteers. Perhaps this is just an assumption made by those interviewed, or they may not see the importance for them to revise and implement a management plan that will affect them.

*Culture:*

The culture of Buena Vista was discussed briefly by seven of the respondents. They did not go into detail, more generally discussed dislikes of habits of the town's people. They commented on the problems of littering and hunting in and around the village. Only one person, the hunter, said, "the people and the culture of Buena Vista is good for tourism."

A hotel owner felt the community, especially the children should learn more about their own culture and history. Another moderate income community member explained that it is customary for the people in the village to go out to the Curichi Cuajo and other quiet forested areas to hunt and fish, basically to kill time. A woman feels badly knowing adults are showing their children it is acceptable to go out and kill animals for fun, "it is a vicious cycle."

The villagers do not seem to realize that foreign tourists come to Bolivia not only for their expansive parks and natural areas, but also to see and experience another culture. "They (tourists) don't come here to see the face of the people of Buena Vista but to see the nature of the park (Amboró). They (people of Buena Vista) are not beautiful like nature" one schoolgirl told me. Even though many foreigners have settled in the village

and have lived there or nearby for a long time, they still place a different value on leisure time. One foreigner describes the people of Buena Vista as apathetic and passive. He is frustrated that they do not take responsibility, participate or try experiments. While he may see it that way, this is a good example of one of the many common cultural differences between countries one will encounter. In reality, leadership and participation is present in the village, seen in the *Camara Hotelera* (hotel Chamber of Commerce) and the guides participating in English and bird watching courses. One cannot expect the average citizen to always be participating, nor the farm hand to have an interest in ecotourism projects if it is not apparently affecting them. Perhaps this is not a sign of apathy, but that they simply do not currently have a stake in a project or time to spend outside of their own household needs.

Many informants felt that cultural exchange was an important factor in ecotourism. Several people remarked how foreigners could come and see how the villagers lived and learn about nature in the tropics. In turn, the local citizens could learn from the foreigners. One person brought up the fact that Buena Vista has seen many changes over the last ten years because of foreign influence, some good and some bad. He acknowledged Buena Vista never had a closed culture, as its location is positioned along a main highway. The outside has influenced Buena Vista over the years.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the views of key informants in Buena Vista and myself. Table 4 on page 102 summarizes Chapter 5 and ranks each aspect of ecotourism. The column titled 'My View' ranks the attributes according to its presence or absence within Buena Vista or the Curichi Cuajo project, comparing it to the literature reviewed.

If it is scored as a 5, strongly positive, then it is present and a very positive attribute to the Curichi Cuajo project or Buena Vista. If the point is present and is good, then it is listed as a 4, positive. The ranking of 3, neutral, implies it is present and neutral. A score of 2, negative, indicates it is present and poor, or is partially present and fair. The ranking of 1 is strongly negative.

The column titled 'Informant Views' is ranked differently. A score of 5, strongly positive, indicates most of the informants discussed this aspect and most felt it was a positive attribute to the village or the Curichi Cuajo project. A 4, positive, denotes most of the informants discussed this aspect and most of the comments made were positive along with some negative comments or only some of the informants discussed this topic and most had positive opinions. The ranking of 3, neutral, shows roughly half of the observations were positive and half were negative with most to some informants discussing the topic or some participants spoke about it with no apparent opinion. If most people talked about the point in a negative manner with some positive opinions or some discussed this theme with generally negative comments, the ranking is a 2, negative. The score of 1, strongly negative, is listed if most informants addressed the subject matter and most felt it was a negative aspect.

Table 4:

**ASSESSMENT AND VIEWS OF THE CURICHI CUAJO**

	<b><u>My View</u></b>	<b><u>Informant Views</u></b>
LOCATION	5	4
LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESSES	5	4
PARKS AND RESERVES	4	3
COMMUNITY	3	2
EDUCATION	3	2
GOVERNMENT	2	2
MANAGEMENT OF AREA	3	2
CULTURE	4	3

**Key**

**5 - strongly positive**

**4 -positive**

**3 - neutral**

**2 - negative**

**1 - strongly negative**

Overall, my view and the informant's views ranking were closely correlated. The majority of the informants views were scored one point lower than my own. Possibly the participants were not fully aware of their situation. For example, no one broached the topic of transportation from Santa Cruz, with a major airport, to Buena Vista. For me, transportation and accessibility is key for the town. For a small town and project, the access and convenience plays an integral part of the tourism trade.

The parks and reserves section for the informants were rated lower due to number of comments on trash in and around the village and suggestions to clean the area up. They also felt the laws were not enforced and thus the Curichi Cuajo and the surrounding area was still in jeopardy.

The sections for community and education were scored as negative, owing to their view of lack of cohesiveness and education in the village. I scored them as neutral because the businesses are attempting to work together, even if it is not yet working ideally. I was not focusing so directly on the general education of the children in Buena Vista, instead concentrating on environmental education of all of the people in the town, especially of the youth and the tourists.

The one concurring score was negative for the government, but for slightly different reasons. I looked at Bolivia as a whole and then at the political situation of Buena Vista. Participant's views were almost entirely assessing their local situation in town. This is a point of contention for Bolivia as a whole, but this is one aspect that will not likely be improved upon.

## **CHAPTER 6 – Recommendations and Conclusion**

The ideal model for ecotourism in Table 1 (page 38) was created by locating the factors for a successful sustainable ecotourism project in the literature review in Chapter 3. I then developed the methods for examining the project utilizing semistructured interviews with key informants. In Chapter 5, my viewpoint and observations were discussed and the responses from the interview were organized and reviewed. Table 4 (page 102) analyzed the assessment and views of the informants and myself. This chapter will now cover the conclusions of the material covered in Chapter 5 and discuss the recommendations in two parts, one part discussing Buena Vista and the other Peace Corps Bolivia.

### **Ecotourism and Buena Vista**

Buena Vista as a town and the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo have many assets. One of its strongest points is the location of both the town and reserve. Although travel within Bolivia can be difficult, the journey to Buena Vista is not. One can fly from inside or outside Bolivia to Santa Cruz and from there an inexpensive hour and a half taxi ride takes one to the town plaza. The Curichi Cuajo project is easy to reach by car or by foot. It is more suitable for the very young or very old than many other ecotourism sites. During the rainy season it is still possible to arrive there, unlike the Amboró National Park. Both the town of Buena Vista and the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo are accessible and the activities and services are not overpriced.

The conveniences and selection of hotels and restaurants ensures that almost anyone will find an acceptable and comfortable place to sleep and dine. The tour agencies and guide services are improving, with classes for English and bird guide training courses. The fact that these are locally owned guarantees the earnings will remain inside community, benefiting a wider range of local citizens.

Nearby, one will encounter several attractions. Within the town of Buena Vista, the activities range from swimming, hiking, and horseback riding to shopping, fine dining to visiting the church. Near Santa Cruz many other tourist attractions exist, attracting tourists from farther away, offering more activities for tourists to do without traveling great distances. Access to the beauty of the nature is plentiful. As well, the area boasts a healthy diversity of fauna and flora, not to mention endemic and rare bird species. Few other places in Bolivia have bird observation towers and bird guide services.

Currently laws are in place to better serve the protected areas and water source of Buena Vista. Fencing some portions of the land the Curichi Cuajo is an additional measure of physical protection. The municipal government has taken steps and is in accordance to continue to aid the Curichi Cuajo project to some degree. Many members and groups within the community have also been actively participating in the project, a positive sign for the sustainability and longevity of the Curichi Cuajo.

The environmental awareness of the community will depend on future education. Groups within the village, such as GEA, are diligently working to educate themselves and their peers. The guides work directly involves the education of tourists. The training that guides have received in the area is of utmost help to the ecotourism trade, allowing local people to receive higher pay for a higher quality of guiding services, imparting



more information to the public. A good reputation for qualified guides will augment the number of ecotourist visiting the area. Cultural exchange is also a positive attribute for tourists and local citizens alike.

A few things need improvement within Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo. While most businesses in the area are familiar with the desires of tourists, suggestions for training classes covering customer service were brought up during the interviews. Also requests for further environmental education were voiced for the schools and general population of Buena Vista. While laws are placed protecting the Curichi Cuajo and the water source for Buena Vista, improvements still are necessary for enforcing the laws. Poaching and littering still occurs within the protected areas boundaries and has a negative impact upon the site. In addition, governmental and political issues are a drawback for the Buena Vista and the Curichi Cuajo, but improving this situation is not within the scope of the village or project.

The monitoring and evaluation for the Curichi Cuajo project needs to be improved in the future. Also, the carrying capacity of the project is unknown and requires further investigation. *Fundación del Comité Impulsor de Protección de Reservas* (CIPRE) is in charge of the Curichi Cuajo and responsible for the follow-up and pursuit of additional funding for the project. This committee will be an integral part of the building of the Curichi Cuajo and other ecotourism projects like it. Projects in the area should utilize the non-profit status of CIPRE when looking for funding and donation sources.

The marketing for the Curichi Cuajo and Buena Vista can be improved. A few individuals and groups are working towards more widely publicizing the activities and products available around Buena Vista. The efforts produced so far are encouraging.

Southgate (1998) discusses many of the concerns of the pitfalls of an ecotourism project. He refers to the tourists disturbing animals, erosion due to visitor trails, and tourism boats discharging pollution. Moreover, he shows concern for community's and park's ability to earn more of the tourists' money spent while traveling. As Latin America protected reserves are acknowledged as under priced, one solution to helping the local economy would be to increase the cost of access to these places. Though, the point to be taken from his comments on ecotourism is the control over the number of projects and cost, and not overloading the ecotourist with too many high priced reserves. "Every nice little hill and valley isn't going to be able to charge a lot for admission, since there are so many nice little hills and valleys that one can visit" (David Simpson 1996 as cited in Southgate 1998, 96). He also discusses the need for an ecotourism project to have distinguishing characteristics, such as adventure sports, pristine environment, or spectacular or rare flora and fauna. This is needed to attract the ecotourist to the area, allowing more sites to see and activities to do.

Having pristine forests and red-data book species in the area can attract the conservationist. As easily as that may bring them in, if the town does not provide them an enjoyable environment, then they are less likely to remain the extra day or return later. Word of mouth reputation is highly important for areas like this, who do not have large amounts of advertising. If the guides are helpful and polite, if the restaurants provide good service and good quality of food, if the hotels are accommodating and kind, this

reputation will circulate and increase business. The reason to focus on all of these details is because Buena Vista is one of many tourist attractions. It could be just “another pretty hill and valley”. Other natural areas are present in South America and Bolivia. Buena Vista can only maintain a leadership position by building upon and enhancing not only the Curichi Cuajo but the amenities and services within Buena Vista.

## **Recommendations**

### *Buena Vista*

Additional education within the community was suggested by several of the informants for a variety of reasons. I also agree that education will be the leading support issue to facilitate improvements within Buena Vista and the ecotourism project Curichi Cuajo. First and foremost, if Buena Vista elects to proceed with ecotourism as a main trade in the village, it would be to its utmost advantage to invite an authority in the field of ecotourism to give a talk to interested community members. This could also be done with participants from Peace Corps. From there, they should hold talks on hotel, restaurant, and other general business management highlighting tourism objectives. In those talks, it should also be explained how supporting the local economy through purchasing locally made and produced goods, and hiring local citizens are necessary for local growth. It should be illustrated how local businesses versus outside based businesses are much more constructive to the local economy. Furthermore, the point needs to be made how business diversity is extremely important. For instance, if another *paro* (strike) or similar problems arise preventing tourism in the area, the businesses must have other opportunities to sustain their enterprise.

Continuing education in specific subjects such as English and field guide services are recommended. Additional efforts in environmental education in schools and youth groups are encouraged. The youth of today holds the key to the future. The unfortunate habits learned from adults can be altered through education, not simply telling the children not to behave in some manner such as hunting, setting up unwatched traps, and littering, but to explain why it is harmful to the environment and people. Only through education will people be able to learn and adapt to become more environmentally conscientious.

Additional attractions nearby should be encouraged. Interested local citizens should investigate possible ventures such as horseback riding, bicycle rental, and a theater. These will allow for additional income in the village and give tourists more to see and do.

The culture of Buena Vista is an aspect of ecotourism that is not fully utilized. A cultural museum containing history and information of Buena Vista could document oral history, jobs of the local citizens, example tools used in agriculture and the growth and change in the village. This would be a benefit and a source of education for the village as well as a tourist attraction. A hotel owner suggested further education of the culture and past history for the village, and this would help considerably in that area. Not only would a cultural museum help education, but also it would serve as another tourism attraction and job source for Buena Vista. Additionally, local citizens would see ecotourists visiting the cultural museum, placing more importance and pride upon the past of Buena Vista.

Advertisement of Buena Vista is essential. Many tourists are unaware of the presence of the numerous activities in and around Buena Vista. An initial step would be to teach the local businesses more about what is available in the area. Their awareness of attractions in the village and helpfulness will help create a more pleasant atmosphere for tourists. Another important step is to include Buena Vista as a web site on the internet. It could be useful to advertise Buena Vista in other countries, but the critical marketing will be in Santa Cruz.

Enforcement of the law is imperative for the protection of the Curichi Cuajo. Many laws are in place, but little action is being taken to exert control by the authorities. The authorities need to have a stake in the success in this project, thus encouraging them to partake in the Curichi Cuajo. Enforcement and education should work together to control littering and hunting in the area. The municipally protected reserve should be recognized at the departmental and federal levels for extended protection and funding. This may also be easier to justify given the reserve's convenient location as the only potable water source for Buena Vista.

Hiring park guards and fencing for the Curichi Cuajo is important. This will deter poaching, grazing, littering, burning, and farming directly on the land. Again, over time this will be less of a problem originating from the local citizens if environmental education is provided. Unfortunately, funding for the park guards and fencing is not currently available. Managed trails should be implemented, along with the interpretation signs for the plants. Street signs in Buena Vista would aid visitors who need directions. While community participation and cohesion is fairly good in the town, there is always room for improvement regardless of where one is in the world.

In an area as biologically diverse as the Curichi Cuajo, it is a benefit to science and humans alike to continue with scientific research in the area. I strongly recommend inviting researchers to the area, especially in the field of hydrology and ornithology. USAID and BID would be reasonable starting places for the search of funding in the area for future ecotourism pursuits and training sessions and ascertaining the carrying capacity for the Curichi Cuajo. CIPRE is also a valuable asset to the village, for they will soon have a non-profit status and can explore different sources for funding projects.

### *Peace Corps*

Since Peace Corps is promoting ecotourism through volunteers, Peace Corps needs to consider site placement and training workshops to further serve the advancement of ecotourism within communities. Prior to training, trainers need to evaluate the new sites for ecotourism potential for future ecotourism volunteers in Peace Corps. Peace Corps should determine if a site placement is suitable for ecotourism development and should involve a general checklist which can be created by the trainers and applied to the potential sites. There will be basic guidelines to be followed. For example, a village can have rare and exotic beast to boast, but without an well-informed guide, an adequate place to stay, or a source of quality food, the tourist may only stay for a brief time, not spending much needed currency in the village. Transportation must be available. Some villages are remote and difficult to get to and the ecotourist would need a place to stay suitable for a longer excursion. Another consideration for Peace Corps should be focusing on cultural tourism for villages developing ecotourism. Some communities will not be suited for ecotourism. The trainer needs to evaluate if the future site would be

suitable for ecotourism. It is better to assess the village's ability to experience sustainable ecotourism early, rather than trying to force something to work that will not. Ecotourism should not be promoted blindly, careful site selection is important.

Workshops and conferences were beneficial in that it allowed the Peace Corps volunteers to interact with other volunteers, experts, and professors. It also helped reorient the volunteer's point of view as an outsider again, as we do become accustomed to thinking inside the village. The exposure to outside views, especially to those who are knowledgeable in the field is invaluable. These workshops should continue.

## **General Conclusions**

The ecotourism program for Peace Corps Bolivia was in the beginning stages when I first moved to Buena Vista. Very soon after, Peace Corps arranged for an ecotourism conference, inviting several guest speakers from institutions within Bolivia, including the Vice-Ministry of Tourism and the Peace Corps Country Director of Belize, Costas Christ. He is also the secretary of The Ecotourism Society (TES). This introduction to ecotourism facilitated a greater understanding of my conception of ecotourism, and incidentally inspired the motivation for this thesis. At one point Costas Christ told of a meeting with renowned members in the ecotourism field. He had asked them all at one point, if they felt the projects they worked with met the standards of ecotourism. Not a single individual felt their project was a truly successful ecotourism project.

Ecotourism is a lofty ideal. It is a fine balance that is incredibly difficult to achieve. While a project can excel in some aspects, it may be deficient in others. On

paper, anyone can design an ideal ecotourism project. In reality though, one may only come as close to it as possible. While there may be a concept for an ideal project, no project will fit exactly. That does not mean that it will not be functional, but simply that nothing is perfect. Additionally, no single list can perfectly model all ecotourism projects. Each market for ecotourism is unique just as each site is unique.

This is the case with the project Curichi Cuajo. Ecotourism is now beginning to have an effect on a small proportion of Buena Vista, blending itself within the fabric of the culture. As Buena Vista strives to develop as a community, I hope the Curichi Cuajo will be a positive force.





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## APPENDIX

### Partial List of Characteristic Avifauna Species of the Curichi Cuajo

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>
Anhinga	Anhingidae	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
Rufescent Tiger-Heron	Ardeidae	<i>Tigrisoma lineatum</i>
Great Egret	Ardeidae	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Striated Heron	Ardeidae	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
Southern Screamer	Anhimidae	<i>Chauna torquata</i>
Gray-Headed Kite	Accipitridae	<i>Leptodon cayanensis</i>
Snail Kite	Accipitridae	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>
Black-Collared Hawk	Accipitridae	<i>Busarellus nigricollis</i>
Harpy Eagle	Accipitridae	<i>Harpia harpyja</i> *
Orange-Breasted Falcon	Falconidae	<i>Falco deiroleucus</i> *
Rufous-Sided Crake	Rallidae	<i>Laterallus melanophaius</i>
Common Moorhen	Rallidae	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Purple Gallinule	Rallidae	<i>Porphyryula martinica</i>
Limpkin	Aramidae	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
Wattled Jacana	Jacanidae	<i>Jacana jacana</i>
Greater Ani	Cuculidae	<i>Crotophaga major</i>
Hoatzin	Opisthocomidae	<i>Opisthocomus hoazin</i> ++
Common Potoo	Nyctibiidae	<i>Nyctibius grandis</i>
Nacunda Nighthawk	Caprimulgidae	<i>Podager nacunda</i>

White-Tailed Goldenthrout	Trochilidae	<i>Polytmus guainumbi</i>
Amazon Kingfisher	Alcedinidae	<i>Chloroceryle amazona</i>
Green-Barred Flicker	Picidae	<i>Colaptes melanochloros</i>
Yellow-Throated Spinetail	Furnariidae	<i>Certhiaxis cinnamomea</i>
Greater Thornbird	Furnariidae	<i>Phacellodomus ruber</i>
Black-Backed Water-Tyrant	Tyrannidae	<i>Fluvicola albiventer</i>
Rusty-Margined Flycatcher	Tyrannidae	<i>Myiozetetes cayanensis</i>
Social Flycatcher	Tyrannidae	<i>Myiozetetes similis</i>
Fawn-Breasted Wren	Troglodytidae	<i>Thryothorus guarayanus</i>
Black-Capped Donacobius	Troglodytidae	<i>Donacobius atricapillus</i>
Lined Seedeater	Emberizinae	<i>Sporophila lineola</i>
White-bellied Seedeater	Emberizinae	<i>Sporophila leucoptera</i>
Great-Billed Seedfinch	Emberizinae	<i>Oryzoborus maximiliani</i> * ++
Lesser Seedfinch	Emberizinae	<i>Oryzoborus angolensis</i>
Grayish Saltator	Cardinalinae	<i>Saltator coerulescens</i>
Silver-beaked tanager	Thraupinae	<i>Ramphocelus carbo</i>
Solitary Black Cacique	Icteridae	<i>Cacicus solitarius</i>
Unicolored Blackbird	Icteridae	<i>Agelaius cyanopus</i>

\* Red Data book species

++ Species nesting in the Curichi Cuajo

Source: Clarke and Sagot 1996.