



Community & market responsive approaches for Sustainable Tourism development

PRESS RELEASE

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Yupukari Wildlife Club Project Wins ECOCLUB.com 2009 Ecotourism Award

Vancouver, Canada – ATTA member Small Planet Consulting is pleased to announce that *From Wild to Web*, an ecotourism-based wildlife monitoring project in Guyana's Yupukari village was chosen as a winner of the ECOCLUB.com 2009 Ecotourism Awards. The sixth annual eco-project competition, with a theme of "Their Crisis, Our Communities – Progressive Change through Social Ecotourism," asked for "innovative projects that meet urgent needs, help create 'another world' at the grass roots level and improve life for all in their communities."

As a member of Ecoclub.com www.ecoclub.com, Small Planet Consulting submitted the proposal for Yupukari's *From Wild to Web* project in conjunction with Rupununi Learners Incorporated (RLI), a Guyanese nonprofit corporation whose Board and membership are entirely composed of Rupununi village residents. The project seeks to enhance the wildlife monitoring activities of Yupukari's Wildlife Club by providing them with dedicated laptops and cameras. Village youth will learn to digitally document field projects, make web pages, and then upload them to the existing RLI website.

The ECOCLUB Ecotourism Awards fund community and environment-supporting projects proposed and implemented by ECOCLUB members from around the world. Submissions were posted online in a public forum and voted on by members. The field was then narrowed to six finalists and three winners were democratically chosen in late June. In addition to the project in Guyana, the other winning projects are based in Honduras and Peru. Each winning proposal will receive a micro-grant for €1,000 (approximately US\$1,400) to implement the project.

Rupununi Learners Inc. were thrilled to hear that the Yupukari Village *From Wild to Web* project had been chosen by ECOCLUB members, saying, "This award means that the Wildlife Club will be able to share what we are seeing and learning with our village, our region, and the world!"

By adding digital documentation training, resources and implementation to Yupukari Wildlife Club field projects recently funded by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the *From Wild to Web* project will enhance the capacity of village youth to participate in developing local, regional, national and international conversation about the future of threatened Rupununi lands and waters. The Yupukari Village Wildlife Club connects village youth to a synergistic group of learning, scientific inquiry and enterprise activities, all of which are documented in words and pictures at www.rupununilearners.org.

Since September 2005 the villagers of Yupukari and its satellite communities have been participating in and driving a long-term ecological monitoring program for Black Caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*), the first study of its kind in Guyana. The initial project quickly seeded a local crew of trained caiman field researchers and an ecotourism venture based on the caiman catch-and-release attraction.

Both full- and part-time livelihoods have grown from the new inputs, which have included a four-bedroom guesthouse; the Internet-enabled, computer-equipped Yupukari Public Library; a home furnishings enterprise, Yupukari Crafters; and independent housing for up to four visiting volunteers at one time.

The caiman research has for safety reasons been necessarily closed to participation by youth, but thanks to a herpetologist volunteer and recent funding, a monitoring program for herps and amphibians is underway as a collaboration of the village Wildlife Club and the afterschool program in the Yupukari Public Library. Birdwatching is another area of Wildlife Club activity. Accompanied by an experienced local surveyor, Club members practice and build skills in wetland bird survey while contributing to an ongoing National Important Bird Areas survey undertaken by Guyana Amazon Tropical Bird Society.

The addition of a laptop, cameras and training in digital documentation by Wildlife Club members will build the capacity of these future decision makers to investigate, understand, present and advocate for their resources and their future. RLI representatives will implement the project and Ms. Karwacki of Small Planet Consulting will act as project manager. For the past 3.5 years, Judy has also been the Tourism Director for the Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI), a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) project.

Training and support for the technology is already available at the Yupukari Public Library, and the dedicated equipment that will be purchased with the award money will allow the Wildlife Club to undertake a group project in photographing and publishing Club activities and discoveries.

Yupukari village sits atop a hill located along the Rupununi River and thanks to the relatively new Caiman House Field Station the village has been enjoying growth in development projects, new jobs, ecotourism, and conservation ethic. The area around Yupukari is rich in many bird and mammal species and nature hikes and dugout canoe voyages along the Rupununi provide excellent ways to enjoy it.

Visitors are also invited to accompany the caiman-catching crew, which now consists largely of Yupukari locals, and observe caiman capture from a separate boat. Guests are then offered the opportunity to assist in data collection once the caiman is pulled to shore and secured. Caiman are weighed, measured, sexed, and tagged, and depending on the season, caiman nests, eggs and hatchlings are also studied.

For more information about Yupukari village and Rupununi Learners, visit www.rupununilearners.org. For more on tourism in Guyana, visit www.guyanabirding.com and www.guyana-tourism.com.

For over 15 years, Judy Karwacki and Small Planet Consulting have worked with destinations and communities in sustainable tourism development that provides long-term economic, social and cultural benefits while protecting their natural and cultural heritage. To learn more, visit www.smallplanet.travel.



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