

The Community Baboon Sanctuary and the CBS Women’s Conservation Group – Working to Protect the Belizean Forest

by Wildlife Conservation Society- Belize

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The Community Baboon Sanctuary is located 31 miles NW of Belize City in Belize River Valley (Photo © Trip Advisor)

The Community Baboon Sanctuary, CBS for short, has been a household name in Belize for over 30 years. A protected area established in 1985 and known for conservation of the black howler monkeys and created to help address the threats of unsustainable agriculture practices and logging. Founded by primatologist Dr. Robert Horwich, and local landowner, Fallet Young, and twelve other landowners, with five main goals, education, conservation, community development, ecotourism, and research. The CBS encompasses seven communities including St. Paul’s Bank, Willows Bank, Double Head Cabbage, Bermudian Landing, Isabella Bank, Scotland Halfmoon, and Flowers Bank.

Visitors to the center learn about the importance of biodiversity, sustainability, and the economic development of Bermudian Landing and surrounding communities; the latter being the main role of the Community Baboon Sanctuary Women’s Conservation Group (CBSWCG), which was founded in 1998.

Formed and led by women from these seven communities, the CBSWCG has focused its efforts on improving livelihoods while safeguarding vulnerable wildlife populations through the protection of forest. The group supports the conservation of the black howler monkey, or baboons, in a 6000-hectare sanctuary.



Educational Activity by the CBSWCG. (Photo © CBSWCG)

The 200-plus landowners voluntarily participate in conservation efforts via a pledge system. Since its inception, CBSWCG to date has produced a sustainable land management plan with environmental, economic, and social benefits that extend beyond the protected area.



Howler monkey population has increased from 500 in 1985 to over 6,000 currently. (Photo © Trip Advisor)

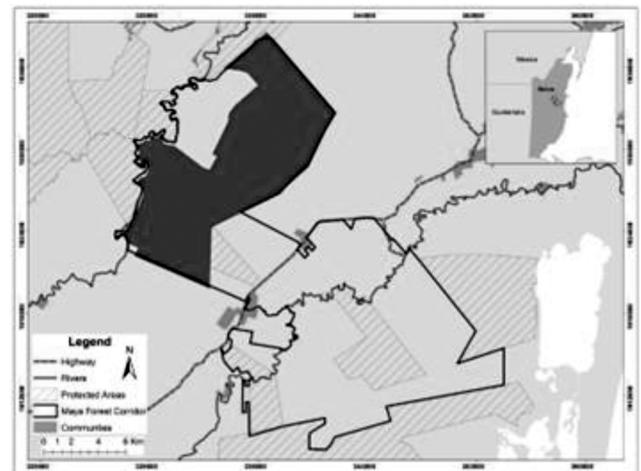
The CBSWCG has been working to help women in the Belize River Valley area, buffer communities for the Maya Forest Corridor, since 1998. Jessie Young is

the founder and president of the CBSWCG. Mrs. Young says that since its inception there has been a large increase in the population of howler monkeys. “Our success in the increase of howler monkey populations from 500 in 1985 to over 6,000 today, is due largely to the combined efforts of landowners and the CBSWCG. Landowners have also increased from 12 to 100 since CBS’s humble beginnings. It is only through this important collaboration that we have been able to address sustainable forest management in the Belize River Valley area,” Young admits.

The Community Baboon Sanctuary Women’s Conservation Group spawned a new era for other women-led community groups in the area and was influential in the establishment of the Flowers Bank Community Group Cohune Oil Processing Facilities, as well as the Dauntless Designers Women’s Group in Double Head Cabbage. Additionally, the Women’s Group has invested over \$1m in conservation, education, and community development to protect Belize’s forest. The CBSWCG distributes small grants to entrepreneurs, which helps to strengthen existing businesses in the area with a focus on those initiatives that promote sustainable use of our natural resources increasing benefits to people and biodiversity conservation. These grant initiatives include training in small business management, organizational management, record keeping, accounting, and business plan development. Youths are also a focus for the Women’s groups. They have provided scholarships for primary and high school students and hold summer camps to inform children about the importance of biodiversity and conservation efforts in the area. “We are also engaged in alternative livelihoods projects such as backyard gardening, tilapia farming, pigs and chicken rearing, and skills training,” Mrs. Young boasted.

Mrs. Young encourages other similar groups and the public to join our efforts to protect our forests by visiting us or making a contribution to our ongoing work.”

She says she is excited to know that the CBSWCG will be collaborating with WCS, under the Small Donations Program “Restoring the Community Baboon Sanctuary Landscape Through Implementation of Climate-Smart Agriculture Practices and Riparian Forest Regeneration, which is cofounded by the EU-Desira project.



The Maya Forest Corridor Landscape. (Photo © WCS)

The Wildlife Conservation Society has been actively working in the Maya Forest Corridor Landscape for almost two years, with support from organizations and institutions such as the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center, Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, and the Belize Maya Forest Trust. The CBSWCG is also one of WCS’s important ally in the work to protect Belize’s Forest

WCS’s works to improve forest sustainability, biodiversity, and protect important species, particularly those that are endangered, such as Baird’s Tapir, the Central American River Turtle, locally known as the hicatee; and the yellow-headed parrot, to name a few. This work is being funded and co-funded by Whitley Fund for Nature and the European Union from the EU-Desira and the Five Great Forests of Mesoamerica.

