

Nosara Wildlife, ICE Aim to Zap the Zapping

By **Janiva Cifuentes-Hiss**
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Throughout Costa Rica, uninsulated power lines deliver arboreal animals a grizzly death sentence: electrocution. Everywhere bare power lines are installed in their forest habitat, tree-dependent creatures such as monkeys, sloths, squirrels, coatis and iguanas meet untimely and horrific ends, often leaving their young orphaned and defenseless.

In the Pacific beach town of Nosara on the Nicoya Peninsula, the nonprofit Nosara Wildlife is working to save injured and orphaned animals while raising awareness about long-term solutions to the problem.

Nosara Wildlife is a joint project by Refugio Animales de Nosara (Nosara Wildlife Refuge) and Sibú Sanctuary, two organizations with a common mission: to rescue injured, orphaned and displaced wild animals and provide them with immediate medical care, rehabilitation and eventual release into the wild. While the organizations' leaders readily acknowledge that their efforts are only a desperate short-term Band-Aid to the problem, they are working together with the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) to promote a long-term solution: simple modifications to power infrastructure that render it safe for wildlife.

According to ICE, about 90 percent of Costa Rica's energy is generated by renewable resources – water, geothermal and wind power. However, in the process of delivering this energy, wild animals are continually killed, contributing to the decline of already delicate populations. Yet electric power and excruciating death need not go hand in hand. Electricity can be delivered safely to consumers by simply insulating existing power lines or burying them underground, and installing transformer connector covers.

ICE and Nosara Wildlife recently reached an agreement to insulate a total of 20 kilometers of existing power lines and cover



Photo courtesy of Nosara Wildlife

The Shocking Truth: Clockwise from top left, orphaned howler monkeys Elvira and Leslie recover at Refugio Animales de Nosara after their mothers were killed by electrocution from uninsulated wires; Marleni Castillo of the Refugio rehydrates a howler monkey burned by a transformer; ICE worker Ronny Caravaca installs insulation material on power lines in Nosara; a recovering howler monkey contemplates its electrical burns.



Photo courtesy of Nosara Wildlife

“hot” transformers in the Nosara area. Since starting installation work Feb. 12, ICE has insulated 12 km of wire; the remaining eight km are slated for completion by July. Nosara Wildlife has raised funds to assist ICE with the cost of labor and materials to achieve this goal.

“This shows the really compassionate side of ICE,” says Brenda Bombard, founder of Refugio Animales de Nosara, who has been advocating insulated wires since 1998. “They are going to make an example out of Nosara.”

Bombard says she has not received a single call to rescue an electrically burned animal in Nosara since the insulation project started.

“I will be thrilled if I never see another electrocuted monkey again,” she says. “Unfortunately, we still get monkeys from as far as Sámara, Playa Negra, Nicoya and Tamarindo.”

Nosara is just one of many regions in Costa Rica where human development brings power lines into wildlife habitat.

“The only remedy for this problem is a law that mandates only insulated or underground power lines be installed where arboreal wildlife is at risk,” says Steve Coan, 60, co-founder of Sibú Sanctuary. “Unfortunately, we lose more and more wildlife daily to electrocutions.”

This preventive measure makes economic sense; the insulation material costs about \$1 more per foot than uninsulated wire, while it costs more than \$150 per month to care for an injured monkey, not to mention the suffering, injuries and death that would be eliminated.

On an even larger scale, what would



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Costa Rica be without monkeys? Monkeys serve a crucial role as seed dispersers. They reforest the land for free, simply by eating fruits and defecating the seeds as they move through the canopy. The loss a decline in monkeys would represent for tourism alone, aside from the incalculable loss the extinction of a species represents to an ecosystem, makes insulation of power lines a win-win solution.

According to a 2007 study by biologist Ronald Sánchez of the University of Costa Rica, the country lost more than half its monkey population between 1995 and 2007 (TT, April 27, 2007). Sánchez estimated that

spider monkey populations declined 72 percent, squirrel and capuchin monkeys 43 percent each, and howler monkeys 65 percent.

“In the Nosara area, the greatest threat to monkeys is electrocution,” says Vicki Coan, 57, Sibú Sanctuary co-founder. “If they are to be saved, there must be a change, and it must happen fast.”

Nosara Wildlife operates through two organizations that play different roles in the rescue and rehabilitation process.

Refugio Animales de Nosara rescues all types of injured, orphaned and displaced wild animals, specializing in howler monkeys. Founder Bombard, 55, a native of the U.S. state of California, received her first injured monkey in 1998 shortly after her arrival in Costa Rica. The Refugio, as it is known locally, became an official organization in 2002. It provides immediate emergency medical attention and feeds, shelters and treats animals while supplying ongoing medical treatment by veterinary and wildlife specialists. Last year alone, more than 132 monkeys came through the rescue center. Bombard says 98 percent of the adult monkeys brought in for electrical burns die within several days of coming into contact with live power lines.

Animals that have been rescued by the Refugio and recover to a stable condition are transferred to enclosed habitats in the jungle at Sibú Sanctuary to reintroduce them to their natural setting. The Sibú staff provides ongoing rehabilitative care in the secured enclosure, which is planted with monkey-friendly trees and plants.

After a quarantine period to make sure the new monkeys are healthy, the animals are moved to a step-down secure habitat

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Photo courtesy of Nosara Wildlife

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On Cultural Contrasts



SO TO SPEAK

Kate Galante

There I was, with my friend and my grandchildren, wandering around the Seattle, Washington, drizzle in a beautiful Puget Sound park, when we came to an enormous fenced area. "The dog park," my friend told me. I sighed, thinking about all the eternally chained-up dogs

in Costa Rica. Then we came to a small fenced area in which was posted a curious sign: "For small, shy or recuperating dogs." I laughed. "Only in America," I thought. America meaning, of course, the United States, though I'm sure such facilities can be found in Canada, as well. What struck me, of course, was the cultural contrast. Then I got to thinking about other cultural contrasts between us northerners on the American continent and those south of the U.S. border. So here's a sampling. I'm sure you can think of some more.

Only in the United States...	Only in Costa Rica...
is it difficult to buy anything in a small size.	is it difficult to buy anything in a large size.
does the large double size add up to a 50 percent savings.	does the large double size add up to more than the total price of two of the small sizes.
do you see perfectly good blenders and TVs set out on the sidewalk for Goodwill to pick up.	do your worn-out flip-flops disappear if you leave them sitting by the front door.
do you find 10 different kinds of mayonnaise on the shelves, thus causing some of us to waste 15 minutes trying to make a decision.	do you find not one jar of the one kind of mayonnaise the store carries.
does nearly everyone have insurance of one kind or another, if not every kind.	do people look perplexed when you ask them about insurance.
does everyone have an automatic dishwasher.	does everyone wash dishes by hand in cold water.
do cans of "natural" soda pop in the health food section advertise that they contain "real sugar."	does no one know what high-glucose corn syrup is.
can you complete your month's shopping, be it organic yogurt, prescription drugs, shoes or tires, in a single store.	must you go to four specialty shops to buy shoelaces, thread, perfume and paper clips.
do men look right through women who are in their 50s.	do men still pursue women who are in their 60s.
do people scurry aside if they think they might be in the way.	must you ask for permission (<i>permiso</i>) to get through.
do TV shows cut off whatever is happening in an interview or reality show to run the advertisement on time.	do TV shows sometimes cut commercials and run as much as 10 to 20 minutes late because everyone gets so involved in an interview or reality show.
are doctors venerated as gods.	are doctors often mistrusted and seen at nearly the same level as nurses and pharmacists.
is the ideal female body skeletal.	is nearly any female body acceptable, <i>except</i> a skeletal one.
is a sex scandal political suicide.	is a heterosexual sex scandal not only politically acceptable, but rather appealing.
can you walk into a huge department store and have a difficult time finding an employee.	can you walk into a store and have an employee breathing down your neck while you are simply browsing.
can you sue someone because you tripped on a tiny uneven place on the sidewalk.	must you look down all the time when walking because of all the obstacles, holes and irregularities on the sidewalks.
are there bicycle lanes between the sidewalk and the car lanes along a great many roads and highways.	are you lucky to get a sidewalk at all, or, for that matter, even a bit of room on the shoulder of the road.
do you throw or give away appliances, from blenders to washing machines, when something goes very wrong, because the repairs cost more than the items are worth.	can you afford to keep repairing things time and again at a minimum cost.
are kids expected to move out when they are 18.	do kids live at home until they marry, and sometimes afterward.
must people eat a different meal every night.	do people eat rice and beans every day.
do women have no concept of floor wax.	are women continually waxing floors.
is calling someone "fat" akin to a hate crime.	is "Gordo" or "Gorda" considered an affectionate nickname.
must funeral homes have simple and dignified names.	can funeral homes have names like <i>La Ultima Joya</i> (The Last Jewel).
does it cost \$100 to have someone clean your house every two weeks.	does it cost €10,000 (about \$19) to have your house cleaned twice a week.
is Alcoholics Anonymous always, in fact, anonymous, usually holding meetings in church basements and such.	do you see large signs at AA meeting sites loudly proclaiming their existence, such as "Aqui grupo Alcohólicos Anónimos El Nuevo Amener" (Here, AA group The New Dawn).
do real men never eat quiche.	do real men have no idea what quiche is.

Saving Nosara's Monkeys

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with an open canopy, so they can begin to relearn how to survive in the wild in a troop and wean themselves from human care. Eventually, healthy animals are then released back into the wild, with the support of the Environment, Energy and Telecommunications Ministry and other agencies involved in wildlife protection. Since opening in March of last year, Sibú Sanctuary has released six monkeys into the wild.

With annual operation costs running upward of \$135,000, Nosara Wildlife runs solely on donations and the personal savings of the founders. The Refugio is working toward a goal of raising \$150,000 to create an emergency treatment facility with attached baby nursery and loft for visiting veterinarians, while Sibú Sanctuary is trying to raise \$4,000 to complete its open-canopy step-down habitat. It also needs \$25,000 to build a life-term habitat for animals too disabled from dismemberment and burns to be released back into the wild.

Although 99 percent of the animals brought to Nosara Wildlife are there because of electrical burns, wildlife also faces other human-caused threats, such as habitat loss and forest fragmentation. This destruction can be mitigated by protecting land in biological corridors, connected swaths of forest habitat that allow sufficient space for populations to remain healthy and genetically diverse. Dogs should be leashed and well fenced to prevent them from attacking wildlife. The problems of hunting and poaching for the illegal pet trade are highly culturally and economically ingrained; curbing them will likely require long-term alternatives and education campaigns.

Until all new and existing power lines are either insulated or buried underground, Nosara Wildlife and like-minded organizations will continue their tireless work of rescuing animals that survive electrical burns and rehabilitating them or their orphaned young for eventual release into the wild. Nosara Wildlife is one of several organizations throughout the country rescuing electrically burned animals. But the real, achiev-



Photo courtesy of Nosara Wildlife

Miracle Charlie: This howler monkey was thus nicknamed for managing to survive despite the death of his mother and amputation of several digits burned by power lines.

able solution is prevention. By mandating insulated lines wherever arboreal life exists, Costa Rica could prevent unnecessary suffering and death of animals.

"We have the resources and ability to live in harmony with wildlife," Vicki Coan says.

Because of the highly sensitive nature of their work and the risk of the spread of disease between humans and monkeys, neither Sibú Sanctuary nor the Refugio are open to the public. However, the public can support their work by regularly inspecting power lines and transformers, making sure vegetation is professionally cut back from lines, planting trees, leading environmental education programs, fundraising and advocating for safe, eco-friendly delivery of electricity. ■

Contact Info

Nosara Wildlife: Find information on how to donate and support the "Stop the Shock" campaign at www.nosarawildlife.com.

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Sibú Sanctuary: Vicki Coan, 2682-1474, 8866-4652, vicki@nosarawildlife.com.

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