

# The NEST Trust Newsletter Issue 1

(Nicaragua English and Sustainable Tourism)



[www.thenesttrust.org.uk](http://www.thenesttrust.org.uk)

In August 2006 we formed The NEST Trust so that the work of *the English and eco-tourism project with UCA Miraflor* could grow. Welcome to the first newsletter since then.

For five years the English and eco-tourism project with Miraflor worked well as a personal venture. The first goal was achieved: a group of young people on the Miraflor Nature Reserve who can understand and communicate with visitors in English. For this to be sustainable, there are two more goals: a set of specific teaching materials and local teachers. The NEST Trust was established to achieve these and to expand the project throughout Nicaragua (and maybe the region).

## Achievements and events since August 2006

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**September 2006** The NEST Trust website went live.

**October and November 2006** The final version of Level one *English for rural tourism* teaching materials were written.

**January 2007** We recorded nearly four hours of material to accompany the students' book.

### February 2007

**Computer lessons using solar power** began in El Cebollal. A project student, Deylin has 42 paying students.

**Project students started teaching English:** Nelvis has up to 30 students in her twice weekly English class in Las Palmas (near El Coyolito). Nelvis and Zeydi start giving English classes at their secondary school

**New scholarships** were awarded. There are now seven young women with half scholarships for tertiary level studies.

### March 2007

**Solar panels** were installed at the new community centre for El Coyolito. At the opening ceremony, **2 computers were running on solar power** and youngsters were enjoying table tennis.

**Launch of the NEST materials:** students' book, teachers' notes and 3CDs. Distribution of the materials.

Deylin started teaching a group of ~10 **paying students using the NEST materials book.**

**Update of the website.**

### April 2007

Marlon Villareyna began a one month language and teacher training course at Lydbury English Centre.

### May 2007

31<sup>st</sup> A talk **in English** in Birmingham by project student, Marlon Villareyna from Miraflor

### Volunteers in 2007

April – June: Maxine Boyd taught the guides of UCA San Ramon (near Matagalpa).

Feb – May: Jason Garber was the project's first volunteer teaching English in Jinotega.

*Jane Boyd* has returned, with her baby daughter, Zaira Lily, to live and work in Esteli.

*Coralie Hopwood* returned for a holiday.

## Goals for May 2007 onwards

- Raise funds to bring to more project students to Britain for language and teacher training courses.
- Prepare level two of the NEST teaching materials
- Disseminate NEST level one in Nicaragua. Assess the appropriateness of the materials for other regions of Latin America.

### Report from Jane Luiten

Volunteering in Miraflores was something Chris had found out about years before, and had wanted to do ever since. I was the tag-along, and I arrived in Nicaragua green. I didn't know any Spanish and even less of the people and their history. Our first experiences set the scene for the rest of stay: we were met at the airport, transported by delapidated taxi to a hotel. Twin beds. Concrete walls and floor. It was night time in Managua and the electricity was down. In the tropical heat the candlelit cold shower was bearable, even welcome. The next morning a smiling woman accompanied us to the bus terminal, purchased our tickets, handed back the change, escorted us on board to our seats, and then, before a cheery farewell, set a plastic bag of snacks on our laps.

We lived in the village of El Sontule, up in the mountains of Esteli, two hours bus ride away from the town. We were placed with Bayardo and Rafaela, and their two sons. It was their first time at hosting English profesoras and they were as anxious as us to make things right. We were also the first married couple teaching and Bayardo had made us a double bed specially: "do Western couples sleep together?" Their home was simple: a concrete block structure for the bedrooms and living room, with a wooden plank kitchen and dining room. An outhouse among the coffee trees, a ceramic cistern to wash hands afterwards. No electricity, no running water. The dirt floors, the darkness inside, the kitchen smoke and Chancha the pig all took some getting used to. Perhaps most disconcerting was the language barrier. A week of language classes in Esteli had not prepared us for the volley from Rafaela's lips. It was many weeks before I could make out her simplest sentences or Bayardo's gentle speech. By the time we left however, she had learned to use the infinitive verbs I was familiar with, to slow down. The week before our departure we managed a cosy conversation about love over a pot of frying bunuelos (dipped in honey these are a popular sweet snack).

The teaching was fun and not demanding. We had five classes a week in Sontule, for both adults and children, about 8 hours in all. Only a few of the adults had been learning for any length of time, most of the students were beginners. We made teaching resources from scratch, with enthusiastic help from Jader and any other school children who were around. Lessons invariably ended in the dark, in a circle around a solitary candle. Sometimes we were drowned out by a sudden deluge on the tin roof. On Saturdays we taught a group of university students in Esteli. The most exciting development was that Marlon Villareyna, one of the more fluent speakers from Sontule, was keen to take turns to teach this class.

Class attendance was always sporadic. Other pressing demands take precedence in their busy lives: many of the students attend university as well as run their households; they take paid work when they can get it; some are involved with cooperative and community business; Francisco left for work in Costa Rica, his wife Lesbia had a baby. Another possible contributing factor is the lack of opportunity to speak English. Very few tourists make it to Sontule, an issue that the village is grappling with, and one we tried to help along with an English language promotional pamphlet. More tourists would provide the community with both practice and motivation. It occurs to me now that perhaps we didn't learn the lesson our predecessor Ethan tried to impress on us: change happens slowly around here.

That said, I am grateful for the experience, and humbled by the open door into the community's life. Teaching in Miraflores was a way of getting to know grassroots Nicaragua, in a way that gives back to the people as you receive. Our stay was three short months. Long enough to feel the rhythm of campesino life, to sense the solidarity on an Esteli street post-election. Long enough to relax in the warmth of Nicaraguan hospitality and pass the time of day over coffee and bananas. Long enough to drink in the country's history, from books and poetry and song, and

from the stories shared by the village women. Long enough to know that hauling water and grinding corn and sowing seed by hand is bloody hard work. Long enough to learn there is nothing romantic about poverty.

So why do I feel so nostalgic? Carlos Mejia Godoy plays on the stereo, plays with my heart. I am surrounded by all the trappings of life in the developed world: suburbs, fences, broadband, traffic, lawn, malls, breadmakers, supermarkets, job prospects, a household of stuff, landscaping, a second car. And it all trivialises my life, makes the simple living of Nicaragua mythic. Here in New Zealand I can buy processed, refrigerated soya product but I am unable to lay my hands on a single soya bean. Jane

### **Maggie Jo adds:**

And I'm just back in the UK after six months in Nicaragua, by far the longest of my six visits and I too am always nostalgic. Marlon asked me why people want to come and live in Nicaragua when they have so much beauty and affluence around them and so many choices and opportunities. We were sitting in the sunshine on the steps of Birmingham's fountain feature (affectionately known as the floozy in the jacuzzi) after strolling through the modern Bullring shopping complex. I found it hard to answer. At different points later that day I would comment – "that's part of what makes me uncomfortable in the UK." There I admire and respect the personal connections, the time for people:

Shortly before I left a lovely old man, Don Federico, who took care of the Institute died very suddenly. He'd taken the steep and stony path down through the bearded oak woods to visit his sister and a few steps away from her house at the end of the visit he must have suffered cardiac arrest. The custom is for family and friends to hold an all night vigil before the funeral. The community all took time to attend both the vigil in El Cebollal and then the one in Esteli. I have the warming memory of Don Federico's beautiful smile as we waved goodbye to each other the last time I'd seen him.

For me it is telling that the smiles of those I know in communities with little material affluence are absent on the faces of those at the international airport where material affluence is abundant.

### **Report from Maxine Boyd July 2006 - June 2007**

I think anyone would be mad not to want to volunteer here in Nicaragua. No it is not easy and conditions can be hard but the rewards outweigh any of the negatives. Mind you at times when we have shared the toilet with a scorpion, the shower with a frog and a snake, the bedroom with mice, ants and the occasional bat, I wonder if this is true!! No really I love every day here.

I first taught English in a little community called El Coyolito which is located in the Mirafior Nature Reserve. My partner Mike and I lived for 7 months high up the mountain with a fabulous family. When I first saw where the house was located I thought, never never do I want that climb every day, but soon after I could not imagine being anywhere else. Where else in the world do you have a little room off a porch that overlooks the mountains and valleys below? Sitting watching the sun set every night has been something I will never forget. But there is the hard work as well. I taught 5 times a week for a 5 month period. I developed 2 adult classes that I taught twice a week and 2 children's classes twice a week. I then was invited to teach at the secondary school on Saturday and although at first I did not think I would like it, this was one thing I absolutely loved. Mind you teaching three different classes for 6 hours straight on a Saturday took it's toll!

A great result for me here is to see one of my young students, Nelvis now teaching English in the secondary school on Saturday. She, along with her sister Gleydis also run the community English lessons in Las Palmas 2 times a week. This is community development in the real sense when you skill local people to take control of projects previously needed to be staffed by volunteers. However, in saying this, volunteers are always needed for many things and teaching English is only one of them. What skills do you have!!

Then Mike and I did the El Coyolito community centre project. We had raised some money in Australia before arriving and I had also received \$5,000 as a

prize from my work in Australia as "the Lotterywest Volunteer of the Year". What we did here was take the little classroom where previously English had been taught and turn it into a community centre complete with solar panels for computer classes. Three computers donated to the English project mean this small community has the opportunity to learn computer skills, something they could have only dreamed of before (or travelled to Esteli to undertake). And MaggieJo donated some simple equipment for table tennis.

This community centre has so much potential. I would like to see a Youth Worker come and run youth activities. Any time we had the centre open we were inundated with young people just crying out for activities. El Coyolito is a young community with over 100 young people attending the secondary school on Saturday and another 80 children at primary school.

Mike and I are now in San Ramon near Matagalpa teaching English to the young guides on the eco tourism project connected with UCA San Ramon. The 11 guides are very keen to learn English and, unlike the Miraflor mob, turn up nearly every day. We live with a real character called Crisantos. Crisantos really enjoys having us to stay and we talk politics nearly every night. He fought in the contra war and studied in Cuba for three years. He

has many a story to tell and it is so funny to see him and his three friends sitting out near the road every night talking and talking, trying to solve the problems of the world. They are realists though and know that Nicaragua requires a whole lot more positive assistance to move ahead and not remain a very poor country with insufficient health, education and social programs.

I think there are things here in Nicaragua that you just don't get in other places. I have this dream of developing a small business with young Nicaraguense young people making a series of postcards (really hard to get any decent postcards here) called 'Only In Nicaragua'. These images could be of concrete washtroughs being taken up the mountain on a cart pulled by oxen, children hitting a pinata hanging from a tree with pigs, chickens and dogs running below, the many laughing faces of children playing on the streets kicking a stone, playing marbles or playing chasy, many many things that I just can't describe.

What I suggest is that you simply volunteer and come and experience them for yourself!

See you in Nicaragua one day.

Maxine and Mike

## **Achieving the new goals**

- *Raising funds to bring to more project students to Britain for language and teacher training courses.* Marlon's talk raised £231. With earlier donations the Trust has around £1000. To bring each student over we probably need £1600 (assuming that their accommodation and living costs are covered by host families).
- *Preparing level two of the NEST teaching materials:* MaggieJo is working on those this summer and autumn. We hope to collaborate with University of Birmingham on a data collection and analysis project.
- *Disseminating NEST level one in Nicaragua.* Four teachers from Cotham school in Bristol are travelling to Puerto Morazon in July and will be showing secondary teachers there how to use the materials. They will be donating class sets to the schools.

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