

2007 Wildlife Festival!

"Care Share and Live a Healthy Environment" was the theme for the 6th Annual North Rupununi Junior Wildlife Festival, held at the Bina Hill Institute, Annai, from April 1- 3, 2007. Rain did not dampen spirits or festivities for the 224 youths from the 16 environmental clubs. The costume and banner parade were spectacular, volleyball played, baskets were wove, arrows shot and cotton was spun all with enjoyment.

The festival theme and activities are indicative of capacity and understanding built with the youth during Iwokrama outreach, as caring, sharing and living in and for, a healthy environment is at the core of sustainable resource use and management.

This year's festival brought together elements of several local programmes working in the North Rupununi; the success of the event was a true cooperative effort and synthesis of local effort and agencies working together. The Iwokrama Butterfly Team and Bina Hill Youth Interns were instrumental in logistics planning, implementation and management of the event. The NRDDDB and Bina Hill Institute facilitated transportation and hosted the event, the Annai Secondary School, though the Ministry of Education, provided accommodation and classrooms, the Red Cross, Lethem, Makushi Researchers and Youth Interns facilitated social issues, teachers, volunteers, community members, and wetlands researchers judged events and provided support.

The informal and friendly opening ceremony was held at the Annai benab on Sunday morning, and the rain held up for the costume and banner parade though the village. Virgil Harding MC'd the event and later aired the opening on Radio Paiwomak, the local radio station. Annai club member, Gulene Salty, sang the national anthem in Makushi, and costumes and banners were paraded across the stage for judging and display. President of the North Rupununi Junior Wildlife Development Council, Debbie Jacobus, made remarks, and the festival was officially declared open by two youths, Jonathan Kisson and Harlene Stephen from the Aranaputa Junior Wildlife Club. Members from the Youth Leadership Programme, NRDDDB and Iwokrama also made remarks.

Surama, Rewa and Aranaputa clubs presented cultural items during the opening, and the Aranaputa Junior Wildlife Club wowed the crowd with their latest cultural item "The Mighty Forest", complete with jabiru stork, cock of the rock, spider, jaguar and tour guide. After the song, the choir moved to centre stage and introduced themselves as the animlas of the forest and recited the opening pages of WWF's "My Forest is Special".

As positive social behaviour is necessary for responsible environmental management, 3 social issues classrooms are held. This year, issues discussed were: HIV AIDS, My Rights and Drug and Alcohol Abuse. These topics were taught by the Red Cross Lethem, the Makushi Researchers and Youth Leaders, and Rawle Harry of the Youth Leadership Programme.

The festival is a true celebration of the environment, traditional culture and social skills and is a key community activity for Iwokrama. It however would not be possible without the cooperation of the NRDDDB, Bina Hill Institute, Ministry of Education, Conservation International and the WWF Guianas.

The following agencies contributed generous donations in cash and kind:

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