

# THE WHALE TAIL PROJECT

## Puerto López, Manabí, Ecuador

In collaboration with: The students and teachers of Jaime Roldós School  
Lu Johnson (Artist)  
The Foundation of Nature & Art (FNA)

In August 2010, artist, school and foundation got together to clean up the excessive litter on the northern sector of Puerto López Beach, Manabí, Ecuador. The next part of the project was to utilise part of the collected waste to form a sculpture of a whale's tail, incorporating environmental awareness and an art exercise. It just so happened, that at the same point in time, Foundation Santiago Guayaquil (in unison with the European Union and *Mundus maris*) was organising a contest for artists in the local area to create a sculpture using recycled materials in the form of a whale or part of a whale, of which the school and foundation was entered as participants.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Puerto López

Puerto López is a small fishing village off the Ecuadorian coast where fishing is the main industry as well as a steady sprinkling of tourism that is growing every year (especially in months June to October, as interest to embark on whale watching excursions increases). The town sits amidst Machalilla National Park, a wildlife reserve. Although its' dry forest, marine park and other surrounding ecosystems are protected, there is still a long way to go in relation to tightening up fishing restrictions and other environmental issues, embedding the urgency of these concerns into the everyday lives of local families and businesses.

#### The Foundation of Nature and Art

FNA is a small foundation operating in Puerto López since November 2007. The main objective being to create awareness to the protection of marine mammals in Ecuadorian waters via the means of education and art. Up to now this has involved the creation of public sculptures on the beach, information boards displaying over one hundred facts relating to the humpback whales that come to reproduce each year (in 4 languages) and the reconstruction of the skeleton of a humpback whale found on a beach south of Puerto López a few years back. The foundation has recently begun the initiative to work with the school Jaime Roldós (and perhaps other schools in the future) here in the village to intertwine creativeness with educational awareness.

#### Jaime Roldós School

This school (grades 2 to 7) exists in the fishermen sector of the village and was an ex-municipal school. Municipal schools were notoriously underfunded and in recent times the laws changed, which meant that existing municipal faculties were either converted to fiscal education or abandoned to find their own income. Fortunately, Jaime Roldós School went fiscal and will continue to survive although with seemingly little financial assistance.

Arla Good, a Canadian university student studying Music Psychology was on work experience at the school for 2 months teaching the children and introduced us to the Director of the

school. We discussed our idea to clean the beach and build the sculpture with the Director, the teachers and the students, and they all readily agreed.

### **The Artist**

Lu Johnson, an artist from England, travelling through Ecuador was our creative director in relation to the design construction of the sculpture, and the coordination of the children throughout the 3 days that the project was in progress.

After weeks of walking down a beach, heavily littered with washed up waste consisting of plastic bottles, forks, spoons, take away tubs, boat oil containers, cups, sacks, ropes and all sorts of discarded rubbish, it was decided we needed to have a bit of a cleanup. Not just to tidy up the beach, but to involve a group of young minds to join our mission and start implanting the seed to a healthier environment to live in, respect for nature and forming it into a piece of art.

### **24<sup>th</sup> August 2010: The Beach Cleanup**

46 students and 3 teachers from Jaime Roldós school, a group of volunteers (FNA and Pacific Whale Foundation) and Lu Johnson hit the north part of Puerto López beach, equipped with sacks and cleaned up just under 2kms of coastline.

After a good couple of hours of litter picking with many sets of hands, the rubbish was loaded onto a truck and carried to the sculpture site at the other end of the beach to be sorted.

### **25<sup>th</sup> August 2010: Sorting & Cleaning**

Students came in 2 hour intervals throughout their school day in groups of 2 grades to help wash the waste we were going to use for the sculpture and sorted the rubbish into colours, shapes and textures. All additional unusable rubbish was collected promptly by the municipality and disposed of.

In the afternoon, Lu Johnson and team started to build the main structure of the whale tail in preparation for activities the following day.

### **26<sup>th</sup> August 2010: Decorating the Sculpture**

Students returned to the sculpture site in their grades for 1 hour intervals during school time and helped to cut plastics into shapes, and prepare a variety of waste to be threaded onto drift ropes found on the beach that would then decorate the whale tail frame. All students threaded, tied or weaved their creations onto the sculpture frame. Apart from a few purchased supplies such as wire, nails and bolts, the sculpture was constructed entirely from debris collected from the beach during the cleanup.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> September 2010; RecicliARTE - The Contest**

The sculpture was entered into the contest RecycleARTE and was displayed during the week up to the event in the public plaza of the village. Several other teams from the surrounding area entered the competition, which was judged in 2 categories: children's groups and artists. We participated in the children's category and won first place, which consisted of a cash prize at the value of \$150.

It was decided that the prize money would be spent to improve the facilities at the school. After discussions with the director and the teachers, the priority was to install some or all of the 3 doors required for 3 of the 4 existing classrooms as well as to fix the entrance gate into the school yard. As the classrooms are completely lacking doors, the general consensus was to provide a less distractive environment for the children and teachers to work in.

### **The Aftermath**

To follow up the project with the students, we returned to make a poster with the children that was composed of photographs of the sequence of events that they chose themselves, to write captions or draw pictures of their own interpretations of the project; what it made them feel, their perspectives and what they learnt. The poster is now up on the wall for all to see and remember.

For a first project, we all feel that the outcome was a positive one but that our experience has exposed the need for a more structured, consistent and interactive approach to how we will execute upcoming activities. We have learnt a great deal of how to improve our techniques to steer future activities to a more effective education of environmental issues.

### **Future Projects**

FNA would like to work on further projects with the students on a consistent basis. Its mission is for the children (with assistance from their teachers) to think for themselves and have a role in creating their own projects relating to the marine and natural life that surrounds them. They will be supplied the base idea, structure and guidance, but they themselves will be encouraged to manifest the artistic outcome in order to create a deeper learning process.

Other ideas of future projects include nature walks to certain areas of the beach and surrounding coastline to learn about local, coastal wildlife, as many of the children who live here have never visited the national park attractions that exist so close to their doorsteps.

Art and creativity will play a prominent role in the process of each project. Each initiative will be concluded with an artistic representation of what has been learnt and understood from the course of activities undertaken (theatre production, paintings, sculptures, etc.).

The students all had a great time partaking in the construction of their sculpture, "La Ballena", which now resides on the southern part of Puerto López beach for all to see.

Laura Hester