

The Research Ambassador Program

Nalini M. Nadkarni, Ph.D., Director

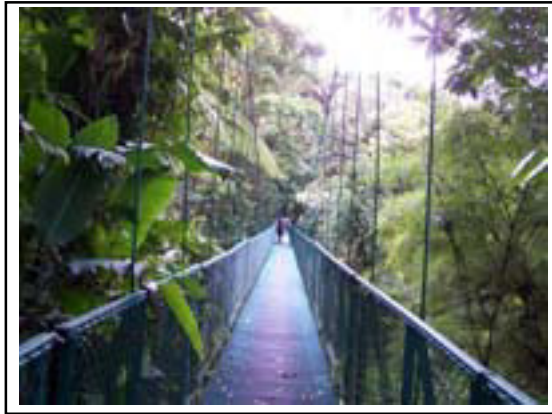
The Evergreen State College

Olympia, WA 98505

(360) 867-6621

nadkarnn@evergreen.edu

www.ResearchAmbassador.com



National Science Foundation
<http://www.nsf.gov>
Informal Science Education Program: NSF
0322214



National Geographic Society
Conservation Trust program
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/conservation/index.html>



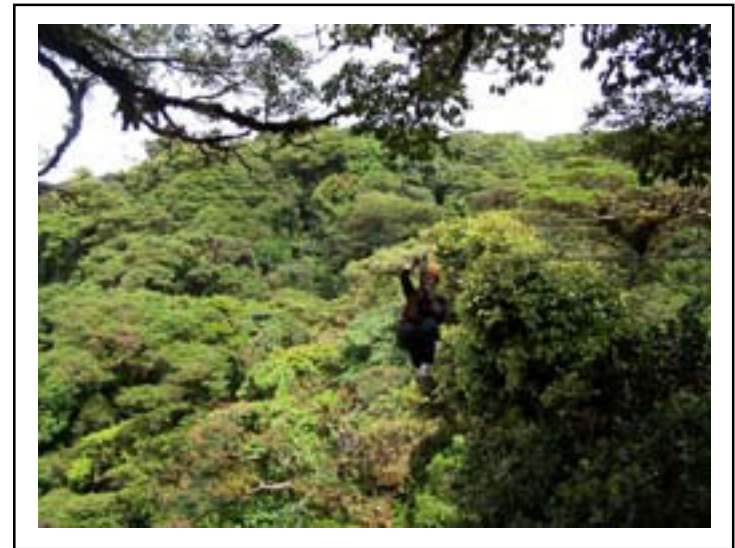
The International Canopy Network
<http://www.evergreen.edu/ican>



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**THE
RESEARCH AMBASSADOR
PROGRAM**

**TROPICAL
ECOTOURISM
ADVENTURE**



An outreach project by researchers to
communicate science to public audiences.

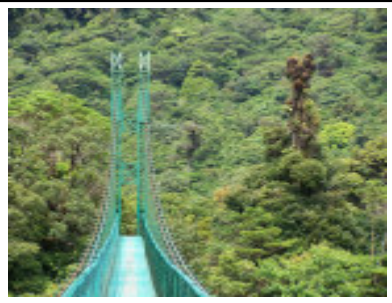
RESEARCH SCENARIO No. 2

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RESEARCH AMBASSADOR

What is the Tropical Ecotourism Adventures Project?

Tourism is the largest industry in Costa Rica, and contributes greatly to ecologically sustainable economic growth. Forest canopy ecotourism - with canopy ziplines bringing thrills to forest visitors - has provided potentially sustainable alternatives to cattle farming and coffee growing. As ecotourism grows, the opportunity to provide scientifically sound information as a part of the adventure experience can also increase. The Research Ambassador Program joined with



Selvatura Park (www.selvatura.org), a leading canopy walkway and zipline operation in Monteverde, Costa Rica, to provide interpretive materials for eco-tourists.

What issues does this project address?

In the past, no educational materials have been available to visitors at *Selvatura*. In April 2005, Research Ambassador representatives visited *Selvatura* and met with the Director. The Director agreed that providing information for visitors would enhance their experience. This is especially critical because many of the guests at this “canopy adventure” facility do not visit the more traditional natural history and conservation oriented parks and wildlife centers in the country.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM?

A major problem facing our society is the widening gap between humans and nature, exacerbated by the lack of connections among science, scientists and society. The Research Ambassador Program helps bridge those gaps by providing academic scientists with rewards and incentives to do direct outreach to the public.

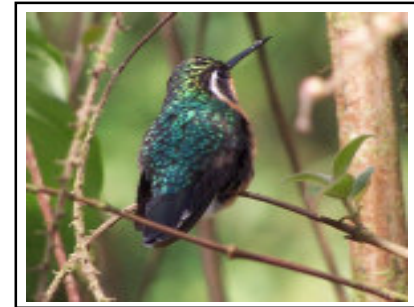
TROPICAL ECOTOURISM ADVENTURE

What were the outcomes?

Results from a preliminary survey indicate that over half of park visitors would like to have more educational materials available. We produced a brochure to describe the general ecology of the forest at *Selvatura*. Currently, all visitors to *Selvatura Park* are provided with this brochure when they purchase tickets for the canopy tours at *Selvatura*.

Future Work

The next steps of the project include the creation of signs to be posted on the bridges, each discussing a different aspect of canopy ecology. Other components include the creation of text and content for the *Selvatura* website, to write and publish a field guide aimed specifically at the biota found in the *Selvatura* forest, and creation of an up-to-date training manual for guides hired at *Selvatura*. In the longer term, the *Selvatura* administration wishes to hire a resident naturalist and create a lecture series about forest ecology, to be held on *Selvatura* grounds.



The Research Ambassador Program, established in 2003, has recruited scientists from many disciplines in academia and trained them to do outreach, especially in non-traditional venues such as churches, prisons, skateboard parks and hospitals. Researchers link their research to the interest of an existing profession, trade or interest group, and give talks or write popular articles about their research as it relates to that public audience. Rewards for scientists include a financial honorarium, a letter of thanks from a high-ranking academic, outreach training, and contacts to communicate in the local community.