



## Elizabeth Bean '14: Jungle Love

### by Elizabeth Bean '14

Since graduating from Darrow, I've been traveling the Americas looking for adventure while also attending Washington & Jefferson College. I fell in love with Latin America and the Spanish language during a Spring Term trip to Ecuador my senior year at Darrow, and now the language and culture is part of my identity.

Over the years, I've received grants from my college to study ceramics in Uruguay, environmental management in the Galapagos Islands, and eco-tourism in Costa Rica, where I am finishing my last semester conducting independent studies in Jungla del Jaguar (The Jaguar's Jungle), the remote coastal jungle I call home.

My thesis project is a study I started more than a year ago on jaguars and other wild cats of the Osa Peninsula. I conduct the study with camera traps and designer fragrances such as Chanel No. 5, Calvin Klein's Obsession for Men, and L'Air du Temps. The \$6,000 project has been funded by the Washington & Jefferson Environmental Studies Department, and it has been so successful that I plan to continue it after I graduate as the head biologist of the organization I am co-founding, Corcovado Rainforest Research (CCR).

CCR was created in conjunction with Jungla del Jaguar Eco-lodge and Biological Station. The lodge hosts student groups through biology exchange programs, and the CCR Fund supports scientific research on the biological reserve. The data from my camera-trap investigations contribute to large-feline and peccary studies conducted by Osa Conservation and the Costa Rican government. The paper summing up the results of my research to date will be made available in May 2018.

When I first traveled to Jungla del Jaguar the summer before my junior year of college, I immediately fell in love with the rain forest and the lifestyle it provided. I met a man who had brilliantly managed to stay wild in this modern world. He taught me how to spearfish for food, diving deeper than 60 feet for minutes on one breath. He taught me how to tie knots, how to filet different species of fish, sharpen knives, and drive a boat. Most importantly,



Elizabeth Bean '14 in her jungle home in Costa Rica, where she is studying the behavior of wild jaguars as part of her senior thesis at Washington and Jefferson College

he showed me how to live a life of constant learning and fulfillment.

Society is seductive. It's good at telling us what we can't do, can't have, and can't be. There is no shortage of rules about what we are "supposed" to be doing, and it usually just boils down to what everybody else is doing. Most of the time I feel like we impose these rules on ourselves, but they are culturally embedded in our minds, as well. When I was a student at Darrow, I, too, wanted to be a rich and powerful businesswoman because that seemed to be the best quality of life I could give myself. However, unconsciously at the time, Darrow was teaching me that there are endless possibilities to what I could do. Once I began exploring the world, I sought a different type of power—freedom.

In the jungle, I am free from the Internet and all outside communication. I'm free to walk outside my cabin, jump into the ocean, and shoot myself a fish for lunch. No five-star restaurant can compare with the flavor of wildness. I'm free to walk around barefoot, carrying a big knife and climbing trees to collect fruit. At night I go out on the rocks at low tide and catch crabs with my bare hands and a butter knife. Sometimes I handline fish for sharks to make ceviche, and about twice a year we

collect marine snails for a snail soup and big crawdads from the fresh water streams.

When asked by professors and students at college what I want to do after graduation, my response is received with stricken looks of concern and confusion: "I'll probably continue what I've been doing for the past year," I say. "Live in the jungle and spearfish to survive."

I recently started making fish prints from those we spear or catch. After I print the fish, I paint in the details of the eyes and make frames for them out of various types of wood found in this primary forest. This idea stemmed from the desire to make great art while commemorating the beautiful creatures that we use for food every day. People quickly became interested in buying these prints once they saw how they were done. I never thought about making money with my art at first, but it has become a great way to support myself financially.

I'm currently building a website to showcase this work, but it's a bit difficult to work online from the jungle. However, you can see my work and follow my adventures on Instagram @jungle.thrills.

Contributions to the Corcovado Rainforest Research Fund can be made via Paypal to [corcovadoresearch@gmail.com](mailto:corcovadoresearch@gmail.com).