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Conservation or Resource Maximization?

Analyzing Subsistence Hunting among
the Achuar (Shiwiar) of Ecuador

Public Presentation

Wednesday 7th November
4:00—6:00 PM

Memorial Student Center
Shawkey Dining Room

REFRESHMENTS SERVED

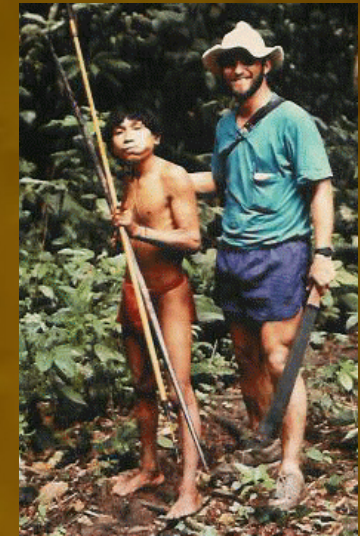
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This presentation explores findings of a study that tests the idea that indigenous hunters employ selective prey and patch choice to augment the sustainability of their long-term foraging returns. **Do Achuar hunting patterns maintain the group's 'harmony' or 'balance with nature,' behaving as conservationists, or do they act as resource maximizers, acting in ways predicted by optimal foraging theory?** Analysis of indigenous hunters' prey choice in light of patch selection and optimal diet-breadth models indicate that the Achuar (with few exceptions) are overharvesting local populations of various species of Neo-tropical wildlife. Significantly, this research documents differential species vulnerability to indigenous hunting pressure which, in turn, affects the sustainability of Amazonian wildlife harvests. Additionally, this research illustrates how a relatively isolated egalitarian and autonomous Amerindian group of subsistence hunter-horticulturalists who maintain many of the traditional beliefs about wildlife population dynamics, are fully capable of overhunting several species of Neo-tropical wildlife. As such, the overharvesting of various types of wild game by the Achuar cannot be considered as being an artifact of Western contact. Lastly, this work examines some of the ethical issues raised by these findings.



Dr. Richard J. Chacon is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Winthrop University. He has conducted anthropological investigations throughout Latin America, including: the subsistence patterns and belief systems of the Yanomamö of Venezuela, the Yora of Peru and the Achuar of Ecuador; ritual violence among the Otavalo and Cotacachi Indians of Highland Ecuador; and, the traditional belief patterns of the Kuna of Panama. His specializations are in optimal foraging theory, Amerindian subsistence strategies, warfare, ritual violence, native beliefs, the development of complex societies, ethnohistory and the effects of globalization in addition to analyzing the impacts of missionization on indigenous peoples. He has a special interest in encouraging members of minority communities to pursue higher education. Among his numerous publications is the recent volume: *The Ethics of Anthropology and Amerindian Research: Reporting on Environmental Degradation and Warfare* (Eds., Chacon and Mendoza), New York: Springer, 2012).