



Hunting The Prey

Gingerly hooking a thorny vine away from my head, I cautiously step forward. Sweat beads my brow and a warm trickle runs down inside the back of my already damp shirt.

Although it is not yet noon, the heat from the sun is oppressive. Bearing down through the upper canopy it turns the understorey and the forest floor into an oven. It is also somewhat beautiful. The shafts of light that do penetrate spotlight the myriad of flora and fauna that make the rainforest their home. Huge sapphire Morpho butterflies, disturbed by our movement, streak up into the clouds, an iridescent waterfall of blue from tree trunk to sky. Monkeys chatter incessantly somewhere overhead, as cicadas buzz and click around us.

I peer forwards. My eyes, now accustomed to the gloom, scan the leaf litter warily – no-one wants to step on something unseen and venomous. Satisfied that the next few metres pose no threat, I push forwards into a clearing, opened up courtesy of a huge epiphyte – a water-gathering plant – whose enormous weight had proved too much for the buttress-rooted tree it had piggybacked. Both now lie on the floor.

Curiosity overcoming caution, I approach eagerly, hoping to spot some of the elusive tree frogs who often make these bromeliads their home, camouflaged in their water-filled leaves. The first leaf yields nothing but mosquito larvae, but in another I fare better: spotting first tadpoles, then a miniature yellow arrow frog no bigger than my fingertips. I grab my trusty camera and take some shots, but these are not really the prey I am after.

The river soon comes into view, the trees petering out to a more open, swampy area. I remain concealed in the shadows, training my binoculars, scanning the skies and hoping to find what I have travelled so far to see.

Finally, I spot them. The flash of blue unmistakable as the treasured hyacinth macaw swoops



elegantly through the azure sky. A ballerina bedecked in blue, it alights gracefully, on a tall tree about 100m from us. It hops along the branch and I track it to where I spot... a nest! Here in the wild!

“O Meu Deus!” I whisper in Portuguese.

Carefully, I pull out my telephoto lens and begin to snap away. Each shutter opening collects vital images to add to our research; each click adding potential further attention and sponsorship for our project here in Brazil; each captured moment a chance to persuade local ranchers of the benefits of maintaining the natural habitat of these majestic, distinctive parrots and discouraging the trapping of this vulnerable endangered species.

I finish, letting out a long breath I didn't even know I was holding. Turning to my guide, one of the wardens of the Hyacinth Macaw Project, I thank him. As we trek back, I contemplate the evidence of conservation in action here in this vital ecosystem that supports so much of the life on earth, the planet we and so many other colourful species call home.

EXPLANATION FOCUS

1. The author moves “gingerly” and “warily” through the rainforest. What do these words tell you about their trek?
2. The author describes the butterflies using a metaphor “an iridescent waterfall of blue from tree trunk to sky”, why is this a good comparison?
3. The Macaw is described as, “a ballerina bedecked in blue” as it “alights gracefully” on the tree. What does this comparison tell you about the bird’s movement?
4. How does the author create the impression the forest soundtrack is a gentle hum?
5. The piece is called hunting the prey. The author has used this title for two reasons. What do you think they are?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does “monkeys chatter incessantly” mean?

R

Which two words show the explorer admires the movement of the hyacinth macaws?

I

What has happened to the habitat of the birds? Why is it surprising for the explorer to see them nesting in the wild?

P

What will the explorer use the photographs for? Where might you see them?

S

Sum up how does the explorer feel about the experience of being in the rainforest? Use evidence from the text to help explain your answer.