



Where I work Inés Azofeifa Rojas

Photographed for *Nature*
by Diego Mejias.

When I was a child living on the southern Pacific coast of Costa Rica, my parents would take me to see golden-mantled howler monkeys (*Alouatta palliata palliata*) in the forest most weekends. Howler monkeys are like big, hairy gardeners, spreading seeds from many trees. I understood at an early age that if we preserve the forest, we preserve the species in it.

For the past decade, I've studied the behaviour of howler-monkey troops in Guanacaste, a region in northern Costa Rica where tourism is growing rapidly and hundreds of monkeys die from electrocution each year. For my master's degree at the University of Costa Rica, I evaluated how monkeys use modern structures such as power lines to navigate through an urban area. I ended up taking a lot of electrocuted monkeys to rescue centres. We are documenting how this species' behaviour is changing in real time.

We track where troops move and what they're eating, and note the percentage of forest cover in each location. Although we

don't know whether the overall number of monkeys is declining, we do know that troops located in healthy protected forests, for example in a national park, have roughly 25–45 individuals, compared with an average of only 7 in urban troops.

In this image, I'm teaching my colleague how best to install a camera trap to monitor howler monkeys. We can then determine where to add a canopy bridge, a structure to help tree-dwelling mammals to complete their routes for food and engage in social behaviours safely. We also use the cameras to monitor the condition and effectiveness of the bridges and evaluate their efficacy.

Over the past three years, our measurements have shown that monkey electrocutions have decreased by 30% after our efforts to maintain connectivity between tree routes."

Inés Azofeifa Rojas is a primate researcher with SalveMonos, a non-profit wildlife organization based in Tamarindo, Costa Rica. **Interview by Virginia Gewin.** This interview has been edited for length and clarity.