

Amicable Amazon Acquaintances

There are three interesting species in the Brazilian Amazon, about two days trip from Manaus by boat, up the Rio Negro river. All three are dependent for their survival and well being on the others. Monkeys, trees and....well, we'll get to that in a moment.

It turns out that the Amazon forest provides around one third of the oxygen for the entire planet but trees are being cut down faster than the forest can reproduce itself. Since mammals don't fare well without oxygen, that is an important consideration.

Species number one: primates. What do monkeys normally do? They make a lot of noise, especially the howlers, they eat, they sleep, they have sex and they defecate. That's about it. The Amazon jungle has around one hundred kinds of primates: howlers, squirrel monkeys, tamarins, marmosets, capuchins and on and on. They are all endangered. Why? They are edible, some are kept as pets, many are shot because they are deemed a nuisance.

Species number two: fruit and nut trees. Some cannot be grown elsewhere. What do trees do? Trees eat too but as far as we know they don't have much fun. At night they sleep and some go to sleep for a long time if it is too cold. Trees tend not to have very high IQs by human standards, but they damn well know how to survive. Additionally, tree sex doesn't seem to be very interesting, except, perhaps, to the tree.

What do they do for each other? As far as the trees are concerned, the monkeys just mess around. The monkeys, on the other hand, love the trees. They provide shelter and nourishment. But the trees are crowded. Baby trees growing too close to mommy and daddy trees are probably not going to get the sunlight and rain they need to flourish.

Let's look at this whole thing from the point of view of the Creator. First He or She invents light and darkness, then water and land, and trees. Lots of trees along with the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the animals of the land. And all of it was good. And last, but not least, let us not forget the creation of "creeping things" on the fifth creation day.

So let's say that one fine day, God spotted the reproductive problems of the Amazonian fruit and nut trees. There had to be a Divine sense of humor involved in the solution chosen from probably an infinite number of ways to solve tree baby problems.

“Now how can I help these splendid plant things to reproduce more efficiently?” God probably mused. After thinking about it for an eon or two, minutes in creation time, I speculate he said something like, “Eureka!!” His creative finger metaphorically raised in enlightenment as he watched the monkeys playing around on the tree tops. “We could use another creeping thing that eats the stuff that the monkeys are dropping!” Thus the vitally necessary third species: a dung beetle was fashioned.

Mr. and Mrs. Dung Beetle, salivating over the meal at their disposal, crawled over to a big pile of primate waste, rolled it into little balls and flew off to their summer home to store their meal in the ground for future consumption. Some of their meals had nut and fruit tree seeds in them. So in the process of dung-beetle frugality, they incidentally fertilized and aerated the mommy tree seeds... which, I presume, had been produced by vigorous tree sex however that might be accomplished.

And God looked at the whole process and said, “It is good.” Of course He still had the first man and woman to create, which tired Him out so much he needed a day of rest.

And the end result of that creation and its relentless reproductive efforts, seems to be, among other things, to cut down all these trees for buildings and farms and eat monkeys out of existence.

No monkeys, no poop. No poop, no dung beetles. No dung beetles or primates....no fruit and nut trees.

Well, as Kurt Vonnegut would say, “So it goes.”