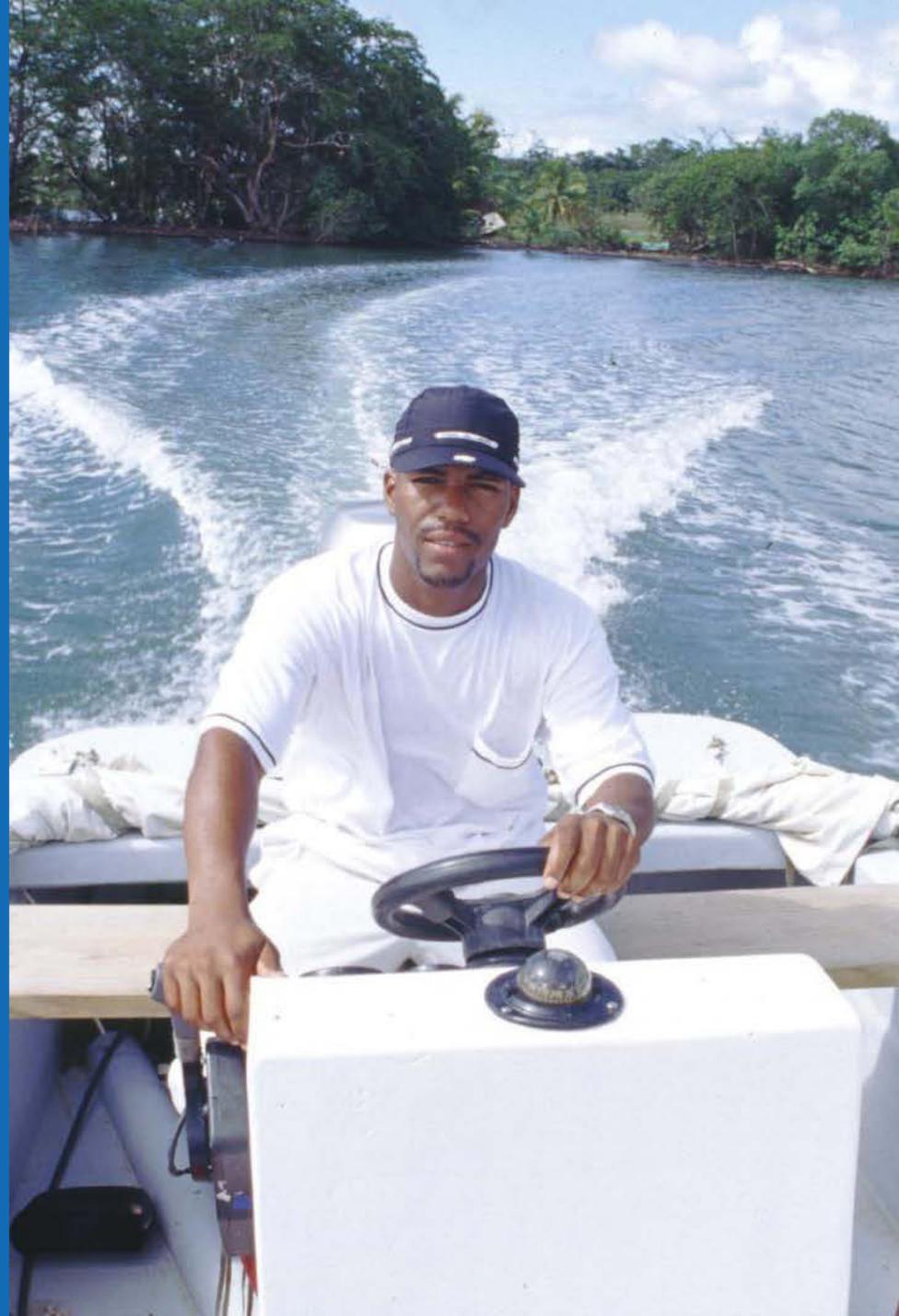


My Dad the Ranger

by David Dudenhoefer
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Hello. My name is Akeem. I'm six years old, and I live in Punta Gorda, Belize. My papa is a ranger in the Marine Reserve. The reserve protects the ocean and a bunch of islands that we call cayes. He makes sure everybody obeys the rules in the reserve.

WELCOME
TO
PORT HONDURAS
MARINE RESERVE



My papa used to be a fisherman, but now he works for TIDE. He stays in the ranger station on Abalone Cay for a whole week. Sometimes I go with him and keep him company. He's teaching me to be a ranger.



It's fun to be a ranger. We climb the lookout tower and watch the ocean. You can almost see the whole reserve from up there. I can't count all the cayes, but my papa says there are more than 100.



Sometimes we go out in the boat on patrol. That's my favorite because we see all kinds of animals. Sometimes we see flying fish or a shark; other times a sea turtle, or a big black manta ray jumping out of the water. There are lots of birds around here too—pelicans, herons, frigates, terns.

I love it when we see dolphins. One time a dolphin swam right next to our boat. He looked like he was smiling. Papa says dolphins are really smart. I wonder what he was thinking?



photo © Mark Lee

Near the coast, we sometimes see manatees. They're kind of slow, so it's easy to get close to them. Manatees are even bigger than dolphins. They're almost as big as our boat!

People used to kill the manatees and eat them, until TIDE stopped them. My papa makes sure nobody hurts the manatees.



photo © U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Along the coast there are lots of mangrove trees. Sometimes we go up one of the rivers, where the red mangrove grow. They grow above the water on long skinny roots that look like giant spider legs. My papa says baby shrimp and snapper and other fish live between those roots, so it's important to protect them too.



There are always herons and cormorants and other birds on the mangroves. i guess they like to eat those baby fish.

When we go far up the river, we see howler monkeys high up in the big trees. They usually growl at us and shake the branches. I watched a little one hang upside down from his tail and put leaves in his mouth. That's what howler monkeys eat, leaves. I wonder if they like spinach?

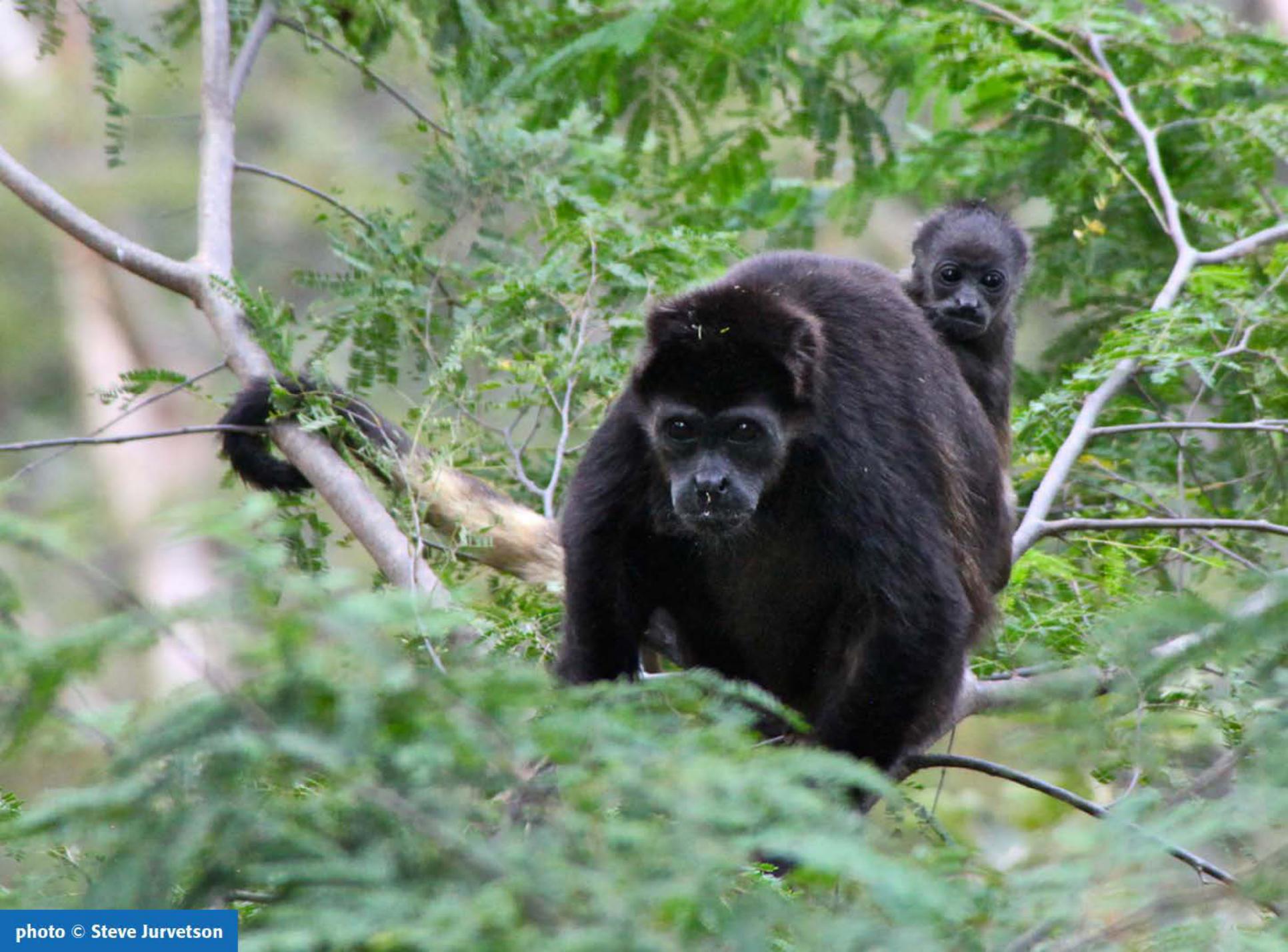


photo © Steve Jurvetson

Once we went all the way out to the Snake Cayes, far from shore. There are coral reefs around Snake Cayes. Papa says more than 100 different kinds of fish live in the coral reefs.

Papa held me over the side of the boat and let me look into the water through a mask. I saw some coral and a bunch of fish—one was green and another was dark blue and some of them were yellow with black stripes. People aren't allowed to fish near those islands, and you're not allowed to even go near one of them.



photo © John Norton

Every time we go on patrol, my papa stops to talk to the fishermen. He knows them all, because he used to be a fisherman too. He makes sure they don't use nets. Only fishing with lines is allowed in the reserve. He also keeps them out of the no-fishing areas.



The reserve is pretty new, so the fishermen are still learning the rules. Some don't like them, but papa says we need the rules. He says there aren't as many fish, lobster and conch as there used to be. If we take too many, they might disappear.



My papa is the best ranger in the world. I'm happy about that. I want him to protect the coral reefs and the sea turtles and the manatees and all the other animals. I don't want those animals to disappear, because I want to be able to protect them when I'm a ranger.



WELCOME TO THE BEACH

CAN DUNK SNOOPY