

Picture: FERNANDO VERGARA/AP



JUNGLE DWELLERS: A Nukak child with a monkey, kept as pets by the tribe as well as used as a main part of their diet

By Michael Knapp

A PRIMITIVE tribe that believes aircraft run on invisible roads in the sky has merged from the jungle and asked to join the modern world.

For centuries, the Nukak-aku people have lived a Stone Age existence in the Amazon forest.

They have survived by eating nuts they kill with blow-darts and berries scooped from the floor.

A group of about 80 have been spotted in the wilderness of Colombia but a gaggle of children makes it look as if they are ready to merge with the modern world.

Their presence has stunned the world. Some say they should be allowed to go back to their forest.

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Belisario, an speak how the

Nukak would cope with their future. His reply was: "The future - what's that?"

Relatives of the tribe first surfaced three years ago, complaining that Colombia's civil war was threatening their habitat.

Encounters with disease-bearing westerners are thought to have reduced the Nukaks' numbers until there are only 250 left. They have no natural defences to illnesses such as influenza and the common cold.

They still track and eat monkeys, but also keep them as pets.

They arrived at the town of San José malnourished and exhausted, as astonished by a world of buildings, jeeps and paved roads as the townspeople here were astonished by them.

The town and the Colombian government are providing them

with food and clothing in a forest clearing.

Xismena Martínez, who oversees aid to the Nukak, said: "When I asked where they came from, they just said 'the bush'. That could mean anywhere."

The Nukak say "the Green Nukak" - probably Marxist guerrillas, who wear camou-

'All they do is hunt monkeys'

flaged combat suits - told them to leave.

"They said we could not keep walking in the jungle, or there would be problems," explained Va-di, whose words were translated by Belisario. "They told us to go where it is safe."

Colombian officials wonder if farmers growing coca, the crop

used to make cocaine, may have displaced the Nukak, who are peace-loving and unlikely to have resisted.

Another theory is that they were pushed out by a rival Nukak clan.

Because it is assumed they fled the civil war, the Nukak are classified as displaced, requiring the state to provide aid and help them return home.

It is not known if they are native to Colombia. Researchers say they are probably immigrants from another part of South America.

The Nukak have expressed no interest in working or learning Spanish.

An aid worker said: "They say they want to live near us, but they don't want anything else."

"If they catch a monkey, they're happy."

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Stone Age tribe pleads: Let us join 21st century

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All that is known Nukaks is that they a and hunter-gatherers.

They have no und of the trappings of m such as money, propo clearly, transport.

Incredibly, they als perception of time or fact they live in a cou Colombia.

"The Nukak don't b they've got themsel said Doctor Javier M 27, a physician who working with them.

A tribesman called the only one who c Spanish, was asked