

CHANGING PLANET

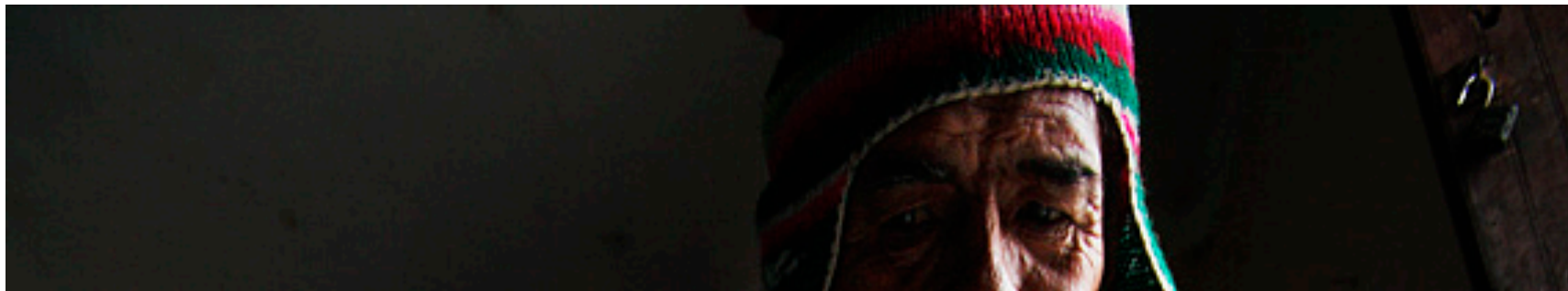


The secret language of the Kallawaya Medicine Men

In [Changing Planet](#) July 21, 2011 [2 Comments](#)



[Joanna Eede](#)







Kallawayá Medicine Man, Bolivia. © 2011 Yoshi Shimizu / www.yoshi-shimizu.com

The Bolivian Kallawayá, itinerant healers who are thought to have been the naturopathic healers for Inca Kings, still travel through the Andean mountain valleys and highland plateaus in search of traditional herbs. They have their own family language that has been handed down from father to son, or grandfather to grandson. Some believe the language, called Machaj Juyai or “folk language,” to be the secret language of the Inca Kings, linked to the languages of the Amazonian forest, to which the Kallawayá once travelled to find material for their treatments.

All tribal languages are rich in spiritual and social insights – ideas about what it is to be human; to live, love and die. *‘Just as natural cures to humanity’s illnesses are waiting to be found in plants in the rainforest, so many ideas, perceptions and solutions about how humans engage with each other and with the natural world already exist, in the tribal languages of the world,’* says Stephen Corry of [Survival International](#), the movement for tribal peoples. But most tribal languages are disappearing faster than they can be recorded; it is thought that by 2100, more than half of the more than 7,000 languages spoken on Earth—many of them not yet recorded—may disappear. The pace at which they are declining exceeds even that of species extinction.

Languages are far more than mere words: they amount to what we know, and who we know ourselves to be. Their loss is immeasurable. In the words of Daniel Everett, linguist, author and Dean of Arts and Sciences at Bentley University, “When we lose tribal knowledge we lose part of our ‘force’ as Homo sapiens. There is an inestimable loss of expression of humor, knowledge, love, and the gamut of human experience. One ancient tradition, a world of solutions to life is lost forever. You can’t Google it and get it back.”





MEET THE AUTHOR

Joanna Eede was an editorial consultant to Survival International with a particular interest in the relationship between man and nature and tribal peoples. She has created and edited three environmental books, including Portrait of England (Think Publishing, 2006) and We are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples (Quadrille, 2009). Joanna writes for newspapers and magazines on subjects such as the repatriation of wild Przewalski horses to Mongolia, the whales of the Alboran sea, the chimpanzees of the Mahale rainforest, uncontacted tribes of the Amazon rainforest and the Hadza hunter gatherer people of Tanzania. Future ideas include a book about Tibet's nomads.



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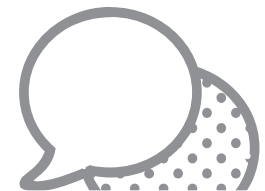
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Keep giving a good work at it!

And let us make this world a better place to live for all cultures.

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The situation is sad and tragic...but even more this reflects the disrespect "modern" man has for our heritage, our world, our environment. This destruction (of tribal peoples and their languages) is symbolic of our destruction of so much else in the only world we have. We all need to support every effort from Survival International and from local, national and international environmental groups to save our world.

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Voices director: David Braun (dbraun@ngs.org)

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