Birder’s Guide
MAY 2017 • VOL. 29 • NO. 2

TO CONSERVATION & COMMUNITY

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Borneo’s Sustainable Forest

Saving Rare Birds in Peru

Maui’s Resilient Kiwikiu

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**On the cover:**

Birds such as this Stork-billed Kingfisher thrive in Borneo’s carefully managed Deramakot Forest Reserve, proving that communities can simultaneously promote both conservation and economic development.

Photo © Alison Világ
Birder’s Guide is published by the American Birding Association, Inc., a not-for-profit organization that inspires all people to enjoy and protect wild birds.

The American Birding Association, Inc., seeks to encourage and represent the North American birding community and to provide resources through publications, meetings, partnerships, and birder networks. The ABA’s education programs develop birding skills, an understanding of birds, and the will to conserve. The ABA’s conservation programs offer birders unique ways to protect birds and their habitats.

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here’s a metaphor that’s become popular to the point of cliche lately but one that I believe is apt for these times. It says that should the airplane cabin become depressurized and the oxygen masks drop, it’s important to put the mask on oneself first, and then and only then assist children and others under your care. To do otherwise may seem altruistic but actually risks everyone suffocating. At its worst, this idea can be used as a cover for hedonic indulgence and selfishness. But I think there’s a real truth in it—if you’re not taking at least minimal care of yourself, your ability to care for others is going to be very limited indeed.

In trying, confusing, and/or stressful times, it’s nearly always helpful to get outdoors and go birding. The blood pressure drops, the mind clears and focuses, and one’s sense of scale and priorities snap back into a more natural order. The benefits one gets, while certainly not identical, are similar to those of working out or meditating. A lot of us depend heavily on our birding, and our birding community, to help us make sense of things.

Yes, many people, sometimes including birders themselves, see birding as a frivolous or inconsequential activity, and it can certainly be that. But for most birders, it is far, far more. It’s an escape that leads you into reconnection. A recreation that actually does re-create our bonds with ourselves, our community, our world.

That belief in the redemptive and restorative powers of birding, and of caring for and participating in the birding community, is a cornerstone of the American Birding Association’s mission to inspire all people to enjoy and protect wild birds. Here in the pages of this *Birder’s Guide to Conservation and Community*, I hope you will find real inspiration—a breath of fresh air that will refresh you and encourage you to keep on getting out there—for yourself, for your fellows, and for the birds.

Good birding,

Jeffrey A. Gordon
President, American Birding Association

Welcome to the fourth annual issue of *Birder’s Guide to Conservation & Community*. Our goal is to highlight the positive efforts being made in the realms of habitat conservation, community building, and environmental education—all of which lead to healthier bird populations. In particular, the popular “Conservation Milestones” (see p. 10) highlights the real accomplishments of birders like you. Consider nominating someone you know—or even yourself—for profiling in next year’s edition!

As always, let us know what you did and didn’t like in this issue, so that we may start planning for the future. If there’s a topic missing that you feel deserves coverage, please pass it along. Even better, write about it yourself for the next issue! Finally, please consider sharing this issue with a friend. You can gift your hard copy when you’re done, or simply send this link, where the entire issue is available online, and for free: aba.org/birdersguide/

Now let’s get out there and do even more for bird conservation!

Happy travels!

Michael L. P. Retter
Editor, *Birder’s Guide*
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Elise Faike is a geologist and adventure travel planner who lives in Challis, Idaho with her husband Dave and their little blue heeler Tater. She enjoys birding and watching wildlife locally and around the world. Elise also likes holding and releasing banded birds for her “birds held” list, which includes a Little Blue Penguin in New Zealand.

Tasha Goldberg is a traveling writer, editor, and video producer for negotiations on sustainable development with the United Nations. She has published and presented on topics relating to ethnobotany, sustainability, and culture. As a trained ethnobotanist and cultural practitioner, Tasha is drawn to the mystical aspects of culture, along with its political and social fabrics. Through her consultancy, Sustainable Solutions, Tasha has worked with diverse international clients in both the private and public sectors.

Daniel Lebbin is a lifelong birder with a special passion for tropical birds and their conservation. As the Vice President of International Programs at American Bird Conservancy (ABC), he works with ABC's partners in Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce threats and to establish, expand, and manage nature reserves for the most threatened birds. He is the lead author of ABC's Guide to Bird Conservation and contributed to the Birds of Bolivia field guide. Daniel earned a Ph.D. from Cornell University, where he researched habitat specialization among Amazonian birds in Peru.

Noah Strycker, Associate Editor of Birding, lives an adventurous life of birds, at home in Oregon and around the world. He writes and lectures about our fascination with birds for a wide range of audiences. Noah has authored three books—Among Penguins (2011), The Thing with Feathers (2014), and Birding Without Borders (2017)—and works as an on-board naturalist for expedition cruises to the Arctic and Antarctic.

Alison Világ is a senior environmental writing and media production student at Unity College in Unity, Maine. A lifelong birder originally from Michigan, Alison has spent the past two field seasons guiding tours on Alaska’s St. Paul Island. After graduation, she plans to continue guiding and sharing nature in as many mediums as she can.
Join us in this nearby birding paradise! We’ve worked with our friends in Honduras to arrange a weeklong tour designed to visit the key birding sites at a relaxed but productive pace. We will seek the endemic Honduran Emerald in addition to a great assortment of neotropical birds on the grounds of our two lodges as well as on our day trips.

Share the charms of Lake Yojoa with our hosts at Finca Las Glorias. Be treated to ecolodge luxury by The Lodge at Pico Bonito on the doorstep of the majestic Pico Bonito National Park.

Meet birders who are making a positive difference for the birds and people of Honduras and enjoy the satisfaction of supporting and participating in their efforts.

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Ah, the Power of Partnerships

Through our Birders’ Exchange program, the ABA aims to provide binoculars, spotting scopes, and tripods—donated by members like you—to programs and organizations in need. These resources help further research, provide educational opportunities, and foster community awareness in Latin America and the Caribbean. The year 2016 was a very successful one for the program. We formed strong partnerships with the National Audubon Society (NAS) and with Holbrook Travel, both of which served as couriers for donated optics to designated recipients. Between these two partnerships alone, the ABA has donated more than 50 pieces of optical equipment, plus educational materials, to such places as The Bahamas, Belize, Guatemala, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Paraguay.

The NAS has an active program training local residents in bird guiding, ecotourism, nature preserve management, data collection, community education, and citizen science. As John Beavers, NAS Vice President, International Alliances Program, shared, “Having equipment and bird guide materials is essential for a guide’s continued education. Audubon is proud to partner with ABA’s Birders’ Exchange program to deliver equipment to some of the most promising guides who have successfully completed their training.”

Partnering with bird tour companies has proven to be an extremely effective way to put optics into the hands of the most deserving individuals. Couriers also gain a strong sense of satisfaction for their efforts. For instance, during a birding trip to Cartagena, Colombia, tour participants Ken and Linda Burgener hand-delivered a spotting scope to biologist Victoria Aristizabal.

For Birders’ Exchange to continue its work, the ABA depends on members like you to donate lightly used, fully functional optics, tripods, and equipment—or, just as important, funds to cover the costs of shipping and processing equipment. If you would like to contribute or have questions about the program, please contact me via the email address above.

Please consider joining us for our first-ever Birders’ Exchange Rally from 1–7 December 2017 in Honduras. There, you’ll enjoy terrific birding with people who are making a difference for tropical and migrant birds. It will be a ton of fun and provide a fantastic window into challenges and opportunities as Birders’ Exchange makes its way into the 21st Century.

Thank you and good birding.

Bill Stewart
Director of Conservation and Community American Birding Association

As a warden with Bahamas National Trust on the island of Abaco, Marcus Davis is responsible for managing Abaco National Park and securing nesting habitat for the “Bahama Parrot”, a locally endemic subspecies of Cuban Parrot. The parrots nest in rock cavities on the ground, so they are susceptible to predation. Through efforts to manage invasive predators, the parrots’ population has rebounded. Thanks to Birders’ Exchange, Davis now has binoculars to use and share for field work and educational programs.

Migdalia López Segura is from the village of La Maquina, Guatemala. She was one of three women in a class of 20 students to successfully complete Audubon’s basic bird guide course given last year in Yaxhá, the second-most-visited archaeological site in the Petén. Although only 18, Segura shows promise for a long career in guiding. Since taking the course, she has pursued her interest in birds and followed in her brother’s footsteps as a tour guide. She is currently enrolled in the local tour guide program offered by the national training institute, INTECAP, and will have just received her license as we go to press. On behalf of Birders’ Exchange, National Audubon was happy to deliver to her, on April 25, 2016, a new 8x42 Vortex Viper binocular and a copy of Ernest Preston Edwards’s Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas.

Moises Pérez Díaz, of Jobompiche, Guatemala, has worked more than half of his life as a park guard in the Cultural Triangle Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo National Park, yet he has until recently never owned a pair of binoculars. Over the past eight years, he has served as a community tour guide, and he was recently named a senior park guard. Díaz was an enthusiastic participant of Audubon’s basic bird guide course given last year in Yaxhá, which will allow him to knowledgeably and ably expand into bird guiding, adding to his current repertoire of knowledge in Maya archaeology. On behalf of Birders’ Exchange, National Audubon delivered a Swarovski binocular and a copy of Kenn Kaufman’s Guía de Campo a las Aves de Norteamérica to Díaz on April 25, 2016. Coincidentally, he mentioned earlier in the day that he wished he had a copy of this book.
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Grand Valley Audubon Society: Homes for Owls

At a time when Western Screech-Owl populations are declining in Colorado—by 65%, according to the latest *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas*—you might wonder why the screech-owl tally in the Grand Junction Christmas Bird Count routinely ranks the highest in the world.

Nic Korte, conservation chairman of Grand Valley Audubon Society, is only too happy to solve the mystery.

“Here in Grand Junction, on the edge of their territory, we have counted 99, 86, and 75 screech-owls in the past three years,” he says. “Much of the reason for our high counts is that, over the past decade in particular, we’ve maintained a large owl box program. We have about 200 boxes in our count circle. In those same three years for the CBC, we attributed 49, 48, and 33 of the owls to boxes. There could be more, but these were the ones in or next to boxes when seen or heard.”

As in the rest of the state, owl populations around Grand Junction would be expected to drop as the community grows and people cut down cottonwood trees where owls like to nest. The CBC numbers offer evidence that the owls have stuck around, using the nest boxes in cemeteries, golf courses, schoolyards, parks, and areas of subdivision development.

“In Grand Junction,” Korte says, “we like to think that we have bucked the trend of screech-owl decrease with our conservation program relying on owl boxes.”

Check out the Audubon group’s website (www.audubongv.org) to learn more.

Stephanie Seymour: Cardinal Flower Magic

In her yard in Ringwood, New Jersey, Stephanie Seymour has helped nature achieve pollination perfection.

Shortly after she and her husband, Robert Perry, moved into their new house in the summer of 2014, they planted a small garden of native flowers to make their yard even more bird- and butterfly-friendly than it already was. The next spring, they added *Echinacea* and butterfly weed (*Asclepias tu-berosa*). In the fall, they put in seven cardinal flowers (*Lobelia cardinalis*).

“We weren’t sure they would make it through the winter,” Seymour says, “but the following spring, we watched as six cardinal flowers began to push up through the mulch along with the milkweed.”

Most of the flowers grew spectacularly, to over five feet tall—a few were taller than Seymour—and produced hundreds of brilliant red blooms. Then the pollination magic began.

“We soon happily realized that the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds absolutely loved the cardinal flowers,” Seymour says. Cardinal flowers have adapted to a single pollinator—hummingbirds—and the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only hummer species that resides in northeastern North America where Seymour lives. Seymour was delighted to watch the Ruby-throats sip nectar as they performed their pollination services for the plants.

An avid eBird user, Seymour tracks all
of her sightings of the Ruby-throats and other species in her bird-friendly garden.

“On September 30, 2016, I broke a personal late-date fall record for a Ruby-throated Hummingbird yard sighting,” she says, “and I believe it is because those cardinal flowers were one of the few remaining food sources in the area before those tiny critters began their migration journey.”

Cardinal flowers have become a focal point in the Seymour/Perry yard. Everyone who visits asks about them.

“We also planted three rosettes under our bay window,” Seymour says. “Hopefully next summer, we will see hummingbirds while sitting on the couch!”

**Marcy Summers: Community-Centered Conservation**

Sometimes you just fall in love with a place. That’s what happened to Marcy Summers in the remote Tompotika Peninsula of Sulawesi.

Summers was a program officer at The Nature Conservancy, stationed in Indonesia, in 2006 when she first came to know Tompotika. As a field biologist and professional conservationist, she witnessed both the remarkable biodiversity of the area and its dwindling prospects due to human development.

Among many other gems, Tompotika is home to some of the last, best breeding grounds of the endangered Maleo (*Macrocephalon maleo*). Maleos are chicken-like creatures with bulbous protrusions on their heads that resemble football helmets; they are from a family of ground-dwelling birds that don’t incubate their nests with body heat but instead cover their eggs with big mounds of vegetation and soil that release heat while decomposing. Gone from nearly all of its former range, virtually every Maleo egg laid was being taken and sold as a luxury item for egg collectors by the time Summers arrived.

If ever there was a place crying out for on-the-ground, community-based conservation, it was Tompotika. Summers jumped right in, leaving the security of her job and founding a tiny, dual-country non-profit organization: Alliance for Tompotika (AlTo).

In the past 10 years, AlTo has notched success after success, a testament to Summers’s persistence, humility, and faith in the community-centered approach to conservation. AlTo now employs 10 full-time local staffers, including community organizers and conservation officers.

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Today, virtually all Maleo poaching in Tompotika has ceased. Maleo numbers at the Taima nesting ground are steadily rising—the only place on Earth where Maleo numbers are known to be increasing. Former egg poachers now earn a better wage by guarding nesting grounds.

The success of Summers’s program inspired other local villages to invite AlTo in. That led to similar projects protecting sea turtles, bats, and forest habitat, including the creation of the 10,000-hectare (25,000-acre) Tompotika Forest Preserve. Beach patrols and egg relocation have resulted in a quadrupling of sea turtle hatchlings returning to the ocean each year, and critical fruit bat habitat has been protected through the establishment of a Local Marine Protected Area at Tangkuladi Island.

Outreach to government and law enforcement has led to more enforcement of wildlife laws.

AlTo’s achievements for non-human
species came out of a genuine passion for improving the lives of local people. The organization’s “human” programs include teaching organic agriculture, providing microloans to artisans, distributing eyeglasses, access to clean water, proper trash disposal, and an art festival. ATo has education programs in every one of Tompotika’s more than 100 schools.

For more information about ATo, and to donate, visit tompotika.org

Bailey Eichhorn:
Second-Grade Birders

Bailey Eichhorn of Lexington, South Carolina, started birding at the age of four—before he actually knew what birding was. Now in the seventh grade, he’s spreading the pleasures of birding to second-grade kids.

For his entry in the ABA’s Conservation/Community Leadership module of the 2017 ABA Young Birder of the Year Contest, Eichhorn taught 16 second graders at Joseph Keels Elementary School about birds. Eichhorn won first place in the module and was named one of the two overall Young Birders of the Year in the 11- to 13-year-old age group.

“Of one my goals,” he says, “was to include and educate young kids, who are not often exposed to the birding community, about the joys of birds and birding.”

With the guidance and support of the school principal, Alvera Butler, and science teacher Mitchell Bailey, Eichhorn created three days of science lessons to teach children the basic biology of birds, how to go birding, and how to identify some common South Carolina bird species: Carolina Wren, Osprey, Northern Cardinal, Northern Mockingbird, and Red-bellied Woodpecker.

The second graders got a chance to use their new knowledge during two outdoor bird walks and were especially excited to see an Osprey soaring overhead.

“I had a wonderful time teaching these children and exposing them to something that will enrich their lives and enjoyment of the outdoors,” Eichhorn says. “I have a feeling that they might all grow to be birders!”

The project also had a positive impact on Eichhorn, both as a birder and as a teacher. The kids, he says, “were an inspiration for me to continue to share my passion with others.”

Delta Wind Birds:
Migratory Shorebird Support

In the Mississippi Delta, migrating shorebirds have more places to stop, eat, and rest on their journey, thanks to an innovative program operated by Delta Wind Birds.

Through its Habitat Incentive Program, Delta Wind Birds works with catfish farmers and sporting groups on repurposed catfish farms to maintain their off-season ponds as stopover habitat for shorebird migration. Catfish ponds can be drawn down temporarily to create mudflats around the edges, and abandoned ponds can be flooded with shallow water.

“In 2016, we contracted with two different private landowners, providing approximately 100 acres of high-quality habitat for fall migratory shorebirds in Humphreys County, Mississippi,” says Delta Wind Birds Board member Jason Hoeksema. “This habitat was used by upwards of 9,000 migratory shorebirds, plus hundreds of wading birds, including herons, egrets, Wood Storks, and Roseate Spoonbills.”

The Habitat Incentive Program is an outgrowth of the successful Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative funded by Congress for a limited time to provide migratory bird habitat after the Deep Water Horizon oil spill in 2010.

Delta Wind Birds is a small non-profit group in northern Mississippi with a big mission: to assist declining bird populations, prevent decline of common species, and integrate bird conservation into broader conservation efforts in the region. The group also promotes birding and ecotourism in the mid-South, particularly in the Delta, with workshops, presentations, and field trips.

The group’s work is financed by Strawberry Plains Audubon Center, a grant from Patagonia, a gift from the Memphis chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society, and many individual contributors across Mississippi, Tennessee, and surrounding states.
“Looking ahead,” says Delta Wind Birds Board member J. R. Rigby, “we plan to work on refining the management practices at our two primary habitat stopover sites, focusing on water use efficiency while increasing habitat quality to support more birds. We also intend to provide more education opportunities.”

Visit the Delta Wind Birds website to learn more: deltawindbirds.org

Will & Matthew Gladstone: Blue Socks for Boobies

Twelve-year-old Will Gladstone and his 9-year-old brother, Matthew, of Arlington, Massachusetts, got interested in Blue-footed Boobies as part of a school science project. When the boys learned that the birds were threatened in the Galápagos Islands—possibly because of a decline in the availability of sardines—they wanted to do something to help.

“Blue-footed Boobies are super-cool birds, and I think everybody should be able to experience just how awesome they are,” Will Gladstone says. “I thought, if they have blue feet, why don’t we just sell blue socks to raise money for them?”

In 2016, the boys launched the Blue Feet Foundation, got on the TV news, and started a brisk business selling their bright blue socks with a whimsical Blue-footed Booby design. People from around the world have purchased the socks at $12.50 per pair, and the foundation has raised more than $20,000 so far. With donations from the foundation, the Galápagos Conservancy hired a biologist to start a population study and conservation plan.

“We hope we go out of business,” Matthew Gladstone says, “because that means we’ve saved the Blue-footed Booby!”

The Gladstone boys’ story will be included in an upcoming book by National Geographic Kids titled 100 Ways to Make the World A Better Place. Meanwhile, you can visit their foundation’s website (bluefeetfoundation.com) to learn more, buy socks for adults and kids, and cruise the photo gallery of Blue-footed People.

Eva Matthews: Tropical Teen Week

Eva Matthews and a small group of teens went south last year to make the conservation connection between North American summer breeding birds and their Neotropical wintering grounds.

In December 2016, Matthews, who is Program Manager of Hog Island Audubon Camp in Bremen, Maine, led a small group of teen birders from across the U.S. in the first Hog Island Tropical Teen Week in Costa Rica.

“This was a one-of-a-kind learning opportunity for teens in the lowlands of Costa Rica over winter break,” she says. “We spent time with researchers at La Selva Biological Station and Tirimbina Biological Reserve, floated down the Sarapiquí River, and birded at high elevation to see our summer mi-
grants on their winter territory. “

The group also attended nightly lectures by local ornithologists and researchers about Costa Rican efforts to create biological corridors and protect bird species in decline. Matthews organized Tropical Teen Week with support from the National Audubon Society and Holbrook Travel.

A highlight of the trip was an afternoon spent working on a reforestation project through the Sarapiqui Conservation Learning Center.

“The teen birders planted more than 50 trees that will one day become the habitat of Great Green Macaws and Scarlet Macaws, which are experiencing a successful conservation comeback to the region,” Matthews says.

She says Tropical Teen Week will become an annual tradition for Hog Island Audubon Camp as part of its aim to provide conservation education to young birders, families, and adults. Learn more at hogisland.audubon.org/programs/teen-week-costa-rica

Claire Wayner: Bird-Friendly Stream

Stony Run is an urban stream that runs through Baltimore, Maryland. It’s a treasured green corridor that connects neighborhoods, city parks, and school campuses—and it was the perfect place for 16-year-old Claire Wayner to help raise awareness about urban birds.

Wayner took on two projects at Stony Run—a bird box trail and an urban festival—as her entry in the Conservation/Community Leadership module of the 2017 ABA Young Birder of the Year Contest. Wayner won second place in this module in the 14- to 18-year-old age group.

Both of Wayner's projects were successful and are likely to become permanent fixtures.

In spring 2016, Wayner enlisted the help of students at her high school, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, and Boy Scout Troop 1000 to build nest boxes for House Wrens, Carolina Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Eastern Bluebirds, and Tree Swallows. The students used NestWatch blueprints, and the project was financed by the Baltimore Bird Club. After nine boxes were mounted on poles, fences, and trees along the Stony Run trail, male House Wrens started nests in every box; females chose to lay eggs in some of them, and an estimated 15–20 chicks fledged successfully.

The Friends of Stony Run group liked the project so much that they incorporated bird boxes into the new strategic plan for the Stony Run watershed.

In September 2016, more than 150 participants—including more than 50 children—took part in the first Urban Bird Fest at Linkwood Park along Stony Run, which Wayner organized to attract visitors to the Stony Run stream, parkland, and footpath and to educate people about the importance of urban birds and habitat.

“Everyone had a fantastic time enjoying birds in nature,” Wayner says. “It increased awareness of urban birds and other wildlife in Stony Run and recruited more members for Friends of Stony Run.”

Friends of Stony Run (stonyrun.org) intends to make the festival an annual event, and Wayner plans to continue her bird conservation activities.

Augusta-Aiken Audubon Society: School Wildlife Garden

A new wildlife garden at Aiken Elementary School in South Carolina is giving students a place to see and learn about birds and nature up close.

“Bird feeders are starting to attract visitors, and the toad house has an occasional resident,” reports Alice Walker, Augusta-Aiken Audubon Conservation Chair. “After benches are built, we hope to start using the garden as an outdoor classroom this spring.”

The idea of building a permanent wildlife garden at Aiken Elementary grew out
of a 2015 program by Augusta–Aiken Audubon that paid for kindergarten teachers to train in a curriculum introducing students to the outdoors. Instructors at the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center conducted the training, which included two field activities for students.

“We felt that if the children were to continue to develop an interest in the natural world around them, they would need an area close by where they could observe nature, long after the funding was gone for field trips away from the school,” Walker says. “So we hatched a plan to build a wildlife garden.”

The garden project turned out to be a real community effort. The school provided an unused courtyard, and the principal personally paid for pavers and plastic sheeting for solarization. The Aiken Master Gardener Association supplied advice and $500 for mulch and an irrigation system. Grovetown, Georgia, Scout Troop 108 donated labor. The Silver Bluff Audubon Center and Sanctuary gave native plants dug up from their land. Audubon South Carolina put in money for bird feeders and water features. Students painted trellises and plant labels. And Augusta–Aiken Audubon donated many hours of labor and planning.

“A lot of groups came together to make this possible, and we can all be proud of the final outcome,” Walker says.

The wildlife garden fits into Audubon’s ongoing Creating Bird-Friendly Communities initiative. To learn more, visit www.audubon.org/content/creating-bird-friendly-communities-1

Daphne Gemmill: Vieques Bird Lady

On Vieques Island about eight miles off the east coast of the main island of Puerto Rico, they call Daphne Gemmill the “Vieques Bird Lady”. And no wonder—she is a recognized expert on the island’s birds, having surveyed them for 34 consecutive years.

It started in 1983, when a friend’s mother who had a house on Vieques invited Gemmill to visit, with the hope that Gemmill would find an endangered species so that the island’s undeveloped habitat could be protected. What she actually found was lots of birds, and she started counting them all. In 2002, the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge was created. Today, Gemmill’s surveys are even more important, as the habitat is threatened by those who want to sell off public lands. Currently, most former Navy lands are protected from development.

Gemmill, of Washington, D.C., who conducts one to three annual surveys during different times of year, also serves as the island’s eBird reviewer. She’s pleased that her data have been used to support conservation initiatives for the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges, and the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. It was also gratifying in 2015 when the Journal of Caribbean Ornithology published a special edition Gemmill’s book, The Birds of Vieques Island, Puerto Rico: Status, Abundance, and Conservation, which is the definitive work on the island’s avifauna (available at Buteo Books: buteobooks.com/product/14509.html).

 Gemmill has a long and productive history with the ABA. She led the development and adoption of the association’s first conservation policy and served as the first chair of the conservation committee.

“I have been interested in natural history my entire life,” she says. “In 1978, I took a Smithsonian ornithology course that engaged me in the fascinating world of birds. By 1988, I had an ABA list over 600 and was on the board of directors of the ABA, on which I served until 1999.”

Go online to learn more about the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust Visit (vcht.org) and Vieques National Wildlife Refuge (fws.gov/refuge/vieques).
Joaquin Galindo, a 13-year-old from McAllen, Texas, isn’t quite sure why birds have always fascinated him. “It may be the flight or it might be the feathers,” he says. Whatever the reason, Galindo is often out in the Rio Grande Valley watching, studying, and photographing birds. When he spied adult and juvenile Gray Hawks in the suburbs of McAllen in 2015, he contacted raptor expert Bill Clark—and since then, Galindo has been helping Clark with studies of Harris’s Hawks and “rare” breeding raptors in south Texas.

Galindo described this research as part of his Conservation/Community Leadership module entry in the 2017 ABA Young Birder of the Year Contest. Galindo won second place in the module and received third place as the overall Young Birder of the Year in the 11- to 13-year-old age group.

The purpose of The Rare Breeding Raptor Project is to identify non-native raptor species summering and nesting in the Rio Grande Valley, and to assess the distribution of native Gray Hawks and other raptors in the area. Galindo and Clark have spent many hours in the field searching for perching, nesting, and flying raptors, often in sizzling heat.

“We have found Swainson’s Hawks summering throughout the Rio Grande Valley, a Red-shouldered Hawk, and a Cooper’s Hawk pair that successfully nested,” Galindo says. “We located Gray Hawks in traditional habitats along the Rio Grande River, and we were surprised to also find them throughout cities and towns, far from their traditional habitats.”

To share his knowledge and enthusiasm for raptors and other birds, Galindo gives free presentations at local libraries. Nearly 200 kids have attended the four events Galindo has offered so far. “Librarians and parents were amazed that even small children gave their undivided attention,” Galindo says. “Kids quickly learned to identify birds, and Gray Hawk was the runaway favorite raptor species.”

With his sisters, 8-year-old Gabriela and 11-year-old Catarina, Joaquin Galindo has given four public library presentations about raptors and other birds, holding more than 200 kids spellbound. Photo © Gloria Galindo

Peter Wilkinson & Colin Shawyer: Bringing Back Barn Owls

Barn Owls in the U.K. are getting a boost from an informal group of birders coordinated by ABA member Peter Wilkinson and his colleague, Colin Shawyer, both of Hertfordshire.

Wilkinson, who has been banding birds in the U.K. for more than 50 years, first got involved with Barn Owls in the late 1980s. At that time, he was asked to train Shawyer, who had organized a survey of Barn Owls in the U.K. that revealed the species’ significant population decline during the 20th century. Barn Owls had dipped in the U.K. from more than 12,000 pairs in the 1930s to about 4,500 pairs in the 1980s.

Concerned, Shawyer created the volunteer Barn Owl Conservation Network (BOCN), which has for many years put up owl nest boxes to replace traditional breeding sites in large cavities of old-style barns and trees.
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Fortunately, Barn Owls have responded well to the artificial nest sites, and many local farmers and landowners have been thrilled to have owl boxes and owl families on their property. Perhaps as many as 70% to 80% of the population in the U.K. now breed in human-provided sites, and the population has increased significantly from its low point.

Alongside the wider work, Shawyer coordinates the informal group with Wilkinson. “We now monitor about 2,000 boxes a year,” Wilkinson says, “not all of them occupied by Barn Owls, of course, but some of those that aren’t are used by Eurasian Kestrels or Stock Doves—both species of continuing conservation concern.”

In addition to installing and monitoring owl nest boxes, their group bands the owls—mostly chicks, but some adults, too—to track their progress. Over the years, the small group has banded more than 18,000 Barn Owls.

Derek Stoner: Birding Trail

If you build it, the birds and birders will come. Just ask Derek Stoner of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

In 2011, Stoner led the effort to create the Middle Run Birding Trail, a one-mile loop hike at the heart of the 860-acre Middle Run Natural Area in northern Delaware managed by the Delaware Nature Society. “Middle Run is a magnet for migrants,” Stoner says. “The Middle Run Birding Trail showcases the conservation efforts of dedicated volunteers—many of them birders—who help improve habitat through an extensive reforestation effort that creates prime, early successional habitat for birds.”

This year, the Middle Run reforestation project celebrates its 25th anniversary, along with some impressive numbers. Over the years, more than 55,000 trees and shrubs have been planted by more than 6,000 volunteers who collectively contributed more than 40,000 hours of effort to improve the land and benefit birds.

And what do the birds think of the young forest of native trees—oaks, tuliptrees, sycamores, and more—and thickets of shrubs—viburnums, winterberries, and serviceberries—that thrive along the trail? Those numbers are equally impressive. “More than 175 species are observed annually, and more than 50 species breed within view of the trail,” Stoner says. “Prairie Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Black-billed Cuckoo are just a few of the species of conservation concern that are regular breeders along the trail.”

The carefully designed trail is easily accessed and great for birding. It takes birders on a tour of five habitat types, offering plenty of good views and featuring numbered and named trail markers (such as Cherry Tree Island) to orient hikers and designate good birding spots.

Every spring and fall, birders come from around the region to experience songbird migration on the trail, as more than 30 species of warblers and large mixed flocks of Neotropical songbirds visit and take advantage of the food and cover in the reforested areas. Guided walks during peak migration get people close to the birds, and opportunities such as summer camps, bio-blitzes, and migration watches help spread the bird conservation message.

In September 2015, ABA member Bruce Berman of Arizona ticked three Eastern migrant specialties (Least Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and Broad-winged Hawk) on the trail and reached his goal of 600 species in the Lower 48 states. “This story,” Stoner says, “hits right at the heart of the stated purpose of the Middle Run Birding Trail since its creation: Connecting the community to conservation.”

To learn more about the Middle Run Birding Trail, visit delnature.org/middlerun
Do you never leave the house without your binoculars? Are birds always on your mind? How would you like to stretch and grow your birding skills under the guidance of some of the most respected birders in North America, have a lot of fun in the process and win some great prizes? If you are age 10 to 18 years old and enjoy any or all aspects of birding, then the ABA Young Birder of the Year Contest is for you!

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

For more information, including how to enter, prizes, and deadlines, please visit: youngbirders.aba.org/young-birder-of-the-year-contest

To the right are just a few photo and illustration entries from our 2016 Young Birder of the Year winners Caroline Biel and Avery Scott.
t’s humid and closed-in—a shade oppressive, even—about how I’d imagine it feels to sit inside the Earth’s lung. Bornean gibbons whoop their eerie wakeup chant over the surrounding forest; the gloom brightens to emerald as the rising sun plays its fingers up broad trunks, across gnarled vines. Suddenly, I’m engulfed in waves of sound. A few I recognize: resonant Rhinoceros Hornbill braying, a barking deer’s forced blat, the ever-present whine of mosquitoes. Many, I do not. Here I sit, immersed in Borneo’s dawn chorus, entertaining pipe dreams about the day ahead: A Bornean Ground-Cuckoo? A clouded leopard? A sun bear? Here, all are possible.

“Here” is an overgrown logging road snaking through the depths of Deramakot Forest Reserve in Malaysian Borneo’s northeastern state, Sabah. It’s the second morning of our stay; so far, the reserve has been good to us: the slow loris peering between leaves on last night’s drive; the plucky
White-fronted Falconet that sallies for butterflies outside our dining hall. At dusk yesterday from this very patch of leaf litter I’m sitting in now, an endemic Blue-banded Pitta delighted in the frustrating way their kind do—calling, teasing, drawing close just to fall silent for a spell—and, finally, hopping up on a nearby log for us to ogle its impossible scarlet and indigo hues. A meal and a sleep later, I’m back, greedy for more. A small army of tiger leeches scrunch towards my ankles in celebration of my return. I flick them away and continue the vigil.

Borneo’s rainforests are home to a wealth of threatened biodiversity.
Photo © Jay Packer
Deramakot appeared on my radar in September 2015. Then, I was in Alaska’s Pribilof Islands...cold, wet, and aching for trees. Naturally, the thing to do in such a situation is to plan a trip to Southeast Asia, so I did. During the planning, Deramakot came up: a forest reserve in central Sabah that read like a mammal-watcher’s dream. (Tarsier! Orangutan! Clouded leopard! Pangolin!) Reading more, however, I wasn’t sure I liked all I saw. Because Deramakot is an active logging operation, an image search yielded photos of leopards and pygmy elephants but also of muddy log yards and timber-burdened trucks. In Sabah—and for that matter, Southeast Asia—unsustainable land use has been an ugly problem for decades. I didn’t want to visit or support a place where the populations of orangutans and pygmy elephants I’d enjoy had an expiration date imposed by greedy timber concessionaires. However, when the guide I’d been talking to sent me a promising...
The sustainable forestry practices employed at Deramakot allow the reserve to support one of the highest densities of orangutan in Borneo. Photo © Jay Packer

Trip report (Bornean Bristlehead!) and an equally enticing quote, my misgivings ebbed. My friend Scott, equally eager for a change of scenery from the Pribilofs, would join me for three nights there. We’d give it a go.

As it turns out, the state-owned, 342-square-mile (550-square-kilometer) Deramakot Forest Reserve is a crown jewel of Sabah’s forestry department—and, for that matter, of any commercial forest in Southeast Asia. Since 1997, Deramakot has been certified as a well-managed, sustainable forest by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). To qualify for this label, a stringent multi-use plan that demonstrates how the forest will provide economic, environmental, and social needs must be developed, approved by the FSC, and followed. Not only was Deramakot the first forest in Southeast Asia to receive this designation, but it is also the world’s longest-established Forest Stewardship Council-certified tropical rainforest. Though Deramakot is an active logging operation, the multi-use plan drawn to FSC standards accounts for more than financial gain. Implemented practices include a 40-year rotation cycle (where only nine trees of a specific diameter can be taken per hectare), employing residents of nearby communities to mark boundaries and replant logged areas, and leaving fruiting trees that feed wildlife. Every five years, the forest is recertified by the FSC; its next evaluation is scheduled for 2019.

These sorts of practices anywhere are laudable. They’re especially vital in places like Sabah, which has suffered from decades of unsustainable logging. For many years, timber sales constituted the state’s top export. Then, oil palm plantations, one of the few endeavors that would thrive in such poor soil, took root in the cutover spaces. By 2002, palm oil had usurped lumber as the top export, but this was no reprieve to the integrity of Sabah’s forest ecosystems. Sabah, Malaysia’s third-poorest state, today contains the most palm plantations in the country. Palm oil, a common ingredient in processed foods and cosmetics, can bear fruit two times a month, as opposed to once a year with many other crops. It could appear a veritable savior in a country where, in 2015, 15%...
of the population lived under the poverty line. However, the plantations have marginalized wildlife populations; tropical foresters have estimated that a paltry hundredth of the species that would be found in a healthy tropical forest can use oil palm plantations. In Sabah, some of the most emblematic species (orangutans, big cats, pygmy elephants) are unable to thrive in oil palm plantations. As the timber is felled and the land converted, these species and many others struggle to maintain viable populations.

This problem is one without an easy solution, and its severity is blatant to anyone who visits Sabah. Traveling between the remaining forest islands requires a monotonous haul over endless kilometers of road flanked by plantations and clogged by trucks, burdened by the reddish fruit, that labor up the steep grades. It’s demoralizing.

The drive to Deramakot from Kinabalu Park is one of these—four hours of paved road through the unchanging monoculture. Mynas and Spotted Doves pant on wires; a few Oriental Pied-Hornbills—the only of Sabah’s eight hornbill species that eats the oil palm fruit—flap across the road. Just beyond the dusty town of Telupid, we turn off the sealed road to venture into the bowels of the plantation itself. Two hours over a bumpy, puddled road remain before we enter Deramakot. We pass through uniform palm rows, denuded terraces awaiting seedlings, and frond skeletons littering the ground. The drudgery is broken only when we roll up to a candy-striped gate where proud roosters and defeated dogs loiter—a common sight in this part of the world. Then, we pause for varying amounts of time to shell out varying amounts of ringgit. Mike, our guide, a Scottish rambo who wields a long lens in place of a machine gun, mutters.
“Extortion” is the only word that emerges from the accent. Price paid, the gate raises, and chickens scatter.

Finally, we reach our last gate, the one operated by Sabah Forestry at the border of Deramakot. Our permits are examined, and we enter the reserve. From here to our accommodations, it’s a 40-kilometer drive over rough logging roads punctuated by heaps of elephant dung. We pass by a nursery, a log yard, and sunny secondary forest. I wonder how Deramakot will compare to Danum Valley Conservation Area, which I’d visited a few months earlier. Danum is one of Southeast Asia’s ecological gems and a real nature-lover’s paradise. There, Crested Firebacks saunter around the paths; the canopy walkway provides a kaleidoscopic experience of joining bright leafbirds and flowerpeckers in massive treetops; if you’re lucky, you’ll experience the uncanniness of locking eyes with an orangutan. Danum is phenomenal, and its reputation for providing a premier Asian rainforest experience is well-deserved. Although both Danum and Deramakot are state-run, there is a key difference: at Danum, logging is banned, and some of the forest has remained intact. Deramakot is managed as a multi-use forest, one where revenue, conservation, and recreation are all priorities. There, logging is a regular activity.

The four days Scott and I spend at Deramakot are a thorough exploration, a medley of sweating (and sometimes swearing) up hilly paths and sitting quietly at murky swamp forest stakeouts. During tropical downpours, we linger at meals under the ambiance of a popping bug-zapper; later, we hop into the back of the truck to cruise the steamy, sparkling jungle night—stars above, fireflies around, civet and flying squirrel eyeshine in the trees, Mike plying the light while our driver Lang deftly maneuvers the ruts. Time and time again, Deramakot proves its merit. There’s the road that provides access to an area strewn with the sign of banteng, a shy, endangered forest cattle, haunted by a Giant Pitta whistle—an area that was logged just the previous year. There are numerous orangutan nests and sightings, the Bornean Bristleheads we luck into during a midday walk down the main road, innumerable tales from Mike about clouded leopards, elephants, and

Asian Paradise-Flycatchers are delightfully common at Deramakot. Photo © Cede Prudente
Borneo’s **Deramakot** Forest Reserve

Even a pangolin. Everywhere we go, we find hopeful signs that Deramakot is accomplishing its goals as a successful multi-use forest.

This is not the only evidence, however, that sustainably-managed forests can cater to economic, environmental, and social needs. Aerial surveys conducted throughout Sabah have found Deramakot to have denser populations than Danum, which shows that a well-managed multi-use forest can be at least as valuable as a primary forest reserve; ongoing research at the reserve provides support for the payoff of its management practices; there, rare mammals can

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**Left:** Small forest kingfishers, such as Oriental Dwarf-Kingfisher, are readily found at Deramakot. Photo © Jay Packer

**Below:** Deramakot is a sanctuary for much of Borneo’s charismatic wildlife, including these Bornean pygmy elephants. Photo © Jay Packer
maintain healthy populations. Although commercial logging and oil palm generate a higher amount of immediate revenue, Deramakot has been in the black since 2002, and in 2015, Deramakot’s profit was the highest ever at nearly $1.7 million. This came mostly from timber sales (sustainably produced lumber fetches a “green” premium because of its desirable production practices). In 2015, Deramakot also welcomed its highest number of visitors (392), who contributed to the profit—visitors like us.

My last full day at Deramakot, I sit in the leaf litter watching the leeches inch towards my ankles. White-bellied Woodpeckers knock thunderously on a giant snag downslope, and long-tailed Asian Paradise-Flycatchers float wraith-like around my head. I remain, kept by a feeling the morning still has something to deliver. In the distance, a Blue-headed Pitta, another Bornean endemic, whistles. I whistle back; it draws closer. The pitta and I play its game for about a half hour, and then it falls silent. My attention is wavering when suddenly, in front of me, a glowing cobalt and russet chunk—an iridescent Easter egg with legs—bounces across the road. I capture it in my binoculars for a second before it disappears into the gloom. Satisfied with the morning, satisfied with Deramakot, I take my leave. The sun is higher, the cicadas crescendoing over the bird song, my stomach is rumbling. I walk out on the old logging road, created by the Sabah Forestry Department when they logged this area more than ten years ago. Then, the road created profit, now, its existence made it possible for me to see a Blue-headed Pitta. Because of the management plan that permitted its construction, Deramakot has become a refuge for the forest-dwelling wildlife that throughout Sabah is unduly pressed by unsustainable land use.

Because of Deramakot’s success, the Sabah Forestry Department is looking to certify more of its commercial forests under the same Forest Stewardship Council guidelines. Of Sabah’s remaining tropical forests, 85% allow some form of logging, and only 3% of these forests are protected through intact preserves like Danum. Researchers have stated that, alone, this diminutive amount of unlogged forest is not enough to support viable populations of Sabah’s most emblematic wildlife. However, because of Deramakot’s success, the Sabah Forestry Department has begun modeling more of their commercial forests with a sustainable multi-use approach. Now, nearly 45% of these are being managed similarly to Deramakot. If the charismatic Southeast Asian species like orangutans, pygmy elephants, and more are to survive anywhere in the world, they have a fighting chance in Sabah, where the idea of well-managed forests like Deramakot is gaining traction.

All eight hornbill species found in Borneo thrive at Deramakot. These are Rhinoceros Hornbills. Photo © Jay Packer

Access

Deramakot Forest Reserve is remote. Getting there requires a rugged journey deep into the heart of Sabah. Its mammal-watching opportunities are unparalleled in Malaysian Borneo, and this is the premier site to see clouded leopard, anywhere. Birding at Deramakot is also rewarding; the same cadre of species sought at Danum Valley can be found here. Accommodations are comfortable, though not luxurious. (Each room has air-conditioning and a bathroom.) To visit, it is essential you have a guide, driver, and 4X4 vehicle; for this, I highly recommend Adventure Alternative Borneo (adventurealternative.com/borneo). Its staff is skilled, personable, and accommodating. To maximize the chances of connecting with your target species, I recommend a stay of at least four nights. Your time will be divided between walking roads and trails, boat trips on the Kinabatangan River, and night drives.
It's just after dawn on a cool morning at the beginning of the rainy season high in the Vilcanota Mountains of Peru's Cusco region. More than 13,000 feet (about 4,000 meters) above sea level and the sacred Urubamba Valley, hundreds of Quechua-speaking men, women, and children have gathered. Clad in colorful ponchos, they carry shovels, picnic lunches, and thousands of native *Polylepis* tree saplings that will be planted as part of an ambitious project to restore the area's native high-elevation forests.
The tree planters belong to communities that have been here since the heyday of the Incan Empire, which built the 14th-century fortress of Machu Picchu nearby. Today these villages support the Vilcanota Reserve Network, working together to plant thousands of Polylepis, or (their Quechua name) queuña, trees as part of an intense effort to restore the area’s woodlands and protect the source of their water. This ecosystem supports some of the rarest forest birds in the world. But centuries of burning for agriculture, cutting trees for fuel, and overgrazing have reduced it to less than 3% of its original area, threatening the Royal Cinclodes and other birds that depend on these woodlands.

The tree planters are working to change that. As they walk, the planters pass by stone walls and irrigation canals built by their ancestors, and traditional stone huts covered by thatched roofs. The area’s growing investment in conservation has brought new features to the village, including vegetable greenhouses, a solar water heater for hot showers at the village school, and solar panels to power electric lighting.

The women wear traditional hats that shield their eyes from the sun and also signal their marital status. A few European tourists look on, here on a holiday trek to see the area’s snow-capped mountains and glaciers, and the remains of its Incan past. Having just visited the ruins at nearby Machu Picchu and Ollantaytambo, they see that this is the living Inca Trail.

Mountain Forests, Rare Birds
The trees, too, have been here for centuries. In the Vilcanota Mountains, Polylepis woodlands grow at higher elevations than any other forests in the world. The trees represent several species of the genus Polylepis, members of the rose (Rosaceae) family, and many of these species are endangered. The trees have small, serrated leaves and...
thick, gnarled trunks covered with red flaky bark—the general impression being of the treelike Ent characters in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings*. These woodlands harbor a unique community of forest birds that depend entirely on this habitat. The Royal Cinclodes is the rarest of the birds here. Critically Endangered, it numbers roughly 230–280 individuals, all of which are found in Peru and Bolivia. The largest population of these birds—about 150 in all—survives in the Vilcanota range.

Also found here are the Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant, a spritely endangered flycatcher with an oversized pied crest, and the White-browed Tit-Spinetail, also endangered and endemic to southern Peru. Other charismatic habitat specialists include Tit-like Dacnis, Giant Conebill, Thick-billed Siskin, and Stripe-headed Antpitta. Andean Condors can sometimes be seen soaring overhead among the mountain peaks.

Not only are these forests critically important for these and other birds, but they also matter to people. Communities have traditionally depended on these forests for fuel and construction materials, medicinal plants, and, most importantly, water. Moss that grows on the ground in the forest shade helps capture and hold water during the rainy season. The forests slowly release that stored water during drier seasons, providing local farmers with a year-round supply for drinking and agriculture. As climate change melts local glaciers and changes
rainfall patterns, these forest remnants help ensure consistent water supplies for local people as well as for bustling urban areas and tourist venues in the Sacred Valley below.

**Connected to the Spirits of the Mountains**

Constantino Aucca grew up in these mountains. He’s president of Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN), a leading bird-conservation organization that works with U.S. partner American Bird Conservancy (ABC) in the Vilcanota range to protect and restore forests. The work has both ecological and spiritual meaning for him.

“Since childhood, we learned from our parents about ancient practices and their meaning,” Aucca says. That includes respect for apus, protective mountain spirits often associated with the highest snow-capped peaks.

“These places are the origins of our gods, where our water originates, and home to our spiritual protectors like pumas and condors,” Aucca says. “In August, we make food offerings and blessings to the apus and mother Earth, including all the protectors, to give thanks for so much provided to all of us.”

Nemesio Echame Melo shares that sense of deep connection to the mountains. Melo is the president of the local Huilloc community, which is in the process of creating a protected area for its forests. “The queuña forest represents a relic of our ancestors,” Melo says. “It’s part of our identity, just as our clothing is. The forest represents our experience.”

Huilloc and other indigenous communities have turned that ancestral connection into conservation action. Working with ECOAN and ABC, indigenous communities of the Vilcanota range have planted more than one million *Polylepis* trees to restore the an-
American Bird Conservancy works with partner organizations and communities to conserve birds elsewhere in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Learn more about these projects at abcbirds.org/program/communities/. If you are interested in visiting reserves established by ABC partners, learn more at www.ConservationBirding.org, which includes other community-run reserves for great birds such as the Red-fronted Macaw in Bolivia and Marvelous Spatuletail in Peru.

cient woodlands, and they have protected more than 18,000 acres in Private Conservation Areas. PCAs are reserves owned and managed by the communities within the Vilcanota mountains, and they are recognized by the Peruvian government as part of the national system of protected areas.

Since 2015, communities, donors, and volunteers have organized an annual Queña Raymi festival to plant more than 50,000 Polylepis trees in a weekend. In some areas, forests are naturally regenerating within areas fenced by the communities to keep livestock out.

The area’s birds are benefiting along with the forests. ECOAN has been monitoring local bird populations since the reforestation efforts began. The group’s surveys indicate that Royal Cinclodes numbers—once thought to be declining—have at least stabilized and may be increasing. As the trees mature, they create the shady, humid conditions that support the moss that the birds forage on for invertebrate prey. The Ash-breasted Tit-tyrant, which forages on the outer parts of the tree, appears to be recovering even faster.

**Planting the Seeds of a Conservation Network**

Without these conservation efforts, Vilcanota’s forests and their endemic birds could well have continued to disappear. ECOAN’s work in the area dates back to 2000, when the group began to talk with the people of a community called Abra Malaga about the plight of the local forests. Abra Malaga made sense as a starting point; it was the most accessible patch of forest near a paved road that birding guides typically use to take visitors to look for Royal Cinclodes and other birds.

ABC, concerned by data showing the loss of Polylepis forests and the plight of their birds, engaged with ECOAN in an ambitious plan to halt forest loss in the area. Thanks to the initial support of Adrian Forsyth and Enrique Ortiz through the W. Alton Jones Foundation, ABC and ECOAN started restoring habitat in conjunction with local communities. As word of the project’s success spread, ABC and ECOAN attracted new partners in the conservation community to support this work, including the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Global Conservation Fund, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, FONDAM (Fondo de las Américas), the MacArthur Foundation, and others.

ECOAN began as a group of four friends from Cusco, two botanists and two ornithologists serving as birding guides, who together worked on conservation in their spare time. The founding members of ECOAN “came from farm-

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**TOP:** Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant is a Polylepis specialist occurring in both Peru and Bolivia. Photo © Fabrice Schmitt

**BOTTOM:** Hundreds of people circle around the saplings they will plant at the Queña Raymi festival. Photo © Alejandro Tello
ing families and went to university to become leaders and give back to our communities,” Aucca recalls. “Forest conservation provided us this opportunity.”

ECOAN’s founding members recognized that successful conservation depended on local involvement. They spoke Quechua and knew that the local people depended on the forest for fuelwood for cooking and heating. As a first step, the group began to provide community members with fuel-efficient stoves that cut their fuel demands by 80%, which meant that less fuelwood had to be harvested. ECOAN also provided alternative fuelwood harvested from less-sensitive areas at lower elevations.

Isidro Calisaya is the president of the Abra Malaga Thastayoc community where ECOAN first started working in the Vilcanota Mountains. With ECOAN’s help, Calisaya and his neighbors created the Abra Malaga Thastayoc Private Conservation Area. It protects not just nature but a way of life.

“Many animals, birds, and other wildlife live there, and we are part of the forest,” Calisaya says. “Our pure water comes from the forest springs, and our livestock and our agriculture depend on this. The bigger the forest, the more clean water. Without the forest, there would be no life.”

Women in the Vilcanota Mountains produce high-quality textiles, which are great purchases for tourists. Photo © Daniel Lebbin
Over the years, ECOAN has continued to work with Abra Malaga and with 20 more communities, building the trust that is essential to successful conservation partnerships. In total, ECOAN and ABCs project has provided 6,765 stoves to more than 8,059 people over 10 years to reduce fuelwood demands.

The communities faced other challenges, including how to improve nutrition for people, especially children, who depended on a diet traditionally dominated by meat and potatoes. ECOAN helped communities construct 60 vegetable greenhouses to grow cabbage, carrots, and other produce.

The communities’ legal status presented another opportunity for ECOAN to be of service and to build trust. These farming communities, known as Comunidades Campesinas, were only legally recognized by the Peruvian government in 1987. ECOAN helped them define and legalize their boundaries to reduce conflict with neighboring groups. Not only does that empower local people, but clear land tenure is a prerequisite for establishing nationally recognized protected areas in Peru.

Designated protected areas carry several benefits beyond ecosystem conservation. They put places on the map, attract tourists, and enable better zoning and land-use planning within each territory. Together, these communities have formed the Vilcanota Reserve Network to increase tourism and conservation throughout the region.

Drawn by scenery and history, many tourists already visit the area for trekking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and birding, creating economic opportunities for residents. Community members work as guides and cooks, handle mules and horses, and host visitors in their houses. Women weave intricate and colorful textiles, and sell these as souvenirs. Several communities in the Vilcanota Reserve Network have built visitor centers and lodges. The hope is that, as they work together to support and attract still more tourism, and by collecting and reinvesting the entrance fees paid by visitors, these communities will be able to expand and support the reserve network they have created while continuing to improve their lives.

The Vilcanota area provides an authentic trekking experience that offers visitors an alternative to the popular but busy Inca Trail while remaining close to the amazing birding of Machu Picchu, where birders search for Torrent Ducks, Inca Wrens, Andean Cocks-of-the-rock, and a dazzling variety of hummingbirds and tanagers, some of which have highly restricted ranges.

**Land and Livelihoods**

In the Vilcanota Mountains, the local communities control the land where the forests and birds survive. These lands are not for sale, and working with the people who live here is the only option to conserve them. Local livelihoods depend on these forests as well, providing natural incentives for conservation, and local traditions are well suited to reserve management.

For instance, the villagers patrol and manage the reserves via Rondas Campesinas. These teams of volunteers keep an eye on community territory and maintain law and order on their lands. The Rondas began as self-defense teams decades ago, when Peru suffered domestic terrorism, and the system has been maintained in remote areas where police rarely travel.

The tree-planting efforts draw on an even older local tradition. Communities in the Vilcanota Mountains gather together for one day each month to work on a community project. Known as faena communal in Spanish or minga in Quechua, these work days are mandatory for every member of the community, and the practice dates back to ancient...
Inca culture. Group tree-planting efforts take place on these days, which help reduce the labor costs of reforestation.

Community-driven conservation works because people want to protect their forests and watersheds. They want their lands to be in better condition for their children. Where community demands for conservation align with bird conservation goals, there is tremendous opportunity to work together.

Christopher Quispe Laucata is the president of the Rumira Sondormayo community, which has established the Qosqocahuarina Private Conservation Area. “The forest is our livelihood, and something we leave to our children as a legacy of our ancestors,” he says. “Our forest sequesters carbon, so it helps us reduce global warming.” The people of Rumira Sondormayo recognize that the forest “is the birthplace of our lakes and wetlands, and sustains our agriculture,” he says. “Each year, we work to continue planting more trees with the support of ECOAN, because if we do not plant, we might not have water.”

**More Work to Do**

As Laucata notes, forest conservation in the Vilcanota Mountains is ongoing. The Peruvian government is reviewing proposals for additional reserves, and ECOAN and ABC continue to help communities develop ecotourism. Besides creating a structure to collect and reinvest admission fees charged for protected areas, the groups help communities with business plans and marketing strategies in consultation with tourism professionals in the region. The goal is to assist the communities to make the most of the products and services they provide to visitors and, ultimately, sustain tourism as a viable source of local income.

Some tourism operators, including Amazonas Explorer, actively support conservation work and tree-planting efforts. But some operators still bring groups of foreign tourists into the reserves and communal lands without paying entrance fees. ECOAN and the reserve network are working to create consistent policies on entrance fees and services so the communities here can capture their fair share of the tourism revenue flowing through their lands.

“It is heartbreaking for us to see clients paying thousands of dollars for a trip to Peru while operators try to save by avoiding the few dollars in fees it would take to support the very resource they depend on for the long run,” says Mike Parr, ABC’s Chief Conservation Officer. “This is neither fair nor sustainable.”

**Make a Difference**

The Vilcanota Mountains offer amazing opportunities for trekking, experiencing Andean culture, and birding as a stand-alone trip or as an add-on to visits to Machu Picchu and Cusco. If you go, make sure your tour operator supports local communities by paying the entrance fee. Visitors can also support locals by purchasing textiles as souvenirs. Respect these lands by taking only photos and leaving only footprints. Thousands of tour companies operate in this region. ECOAN recommends the following five as responsible agencies: Amazonas Explorer, Outlook Expeditions, LATA, Grupo Inka, and Discover Adventure. Several larger international bird tour companies use these ground agents, as well. You can also support this work with a tax-deductible donation through American Bird Conservancy.

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Kiwikiu
A Story of Survival and Adaptation from Maui

High above homes and beyond the sounds of society, a series of short whistles is fanned by a stiff, cool breeze. The whistles share a mysterious tone, as if whispering a secret softly hidden among the ‘ōhi’a trees. Rare are actual sightings of this tiny yet mighty Hawaiian honeycreeper, whose brilliant yellow eyebrow matches its tail and belly feathers. This is the story of the Kiwikiu, a small and mighty bird—a tale of resilience and adaptation.

Continued life for most endemic Hawaiian forest birds requires resistance to a variety of artificial dangers, such as invasive species, habitat destruction, and mosquito-borne diseases. But few of these endemics face more pressure than the Maui Parrotbill, also known as the Kiwikiu. There are only about 500 of the little yellow birds left, making Pseudonestor xanthophrys the most critically endangered forest bird on Maui.

An impressive, powerful beak helps the parrotbill find its food. Small insects are found by removing bark and wood from small trees and shrubs such as ʻakala (Rubus hawaiensis), kanawao (Broussaisia arguta), and ʻōhi’a lehua (Metrosideros polymorpha).

Today, Maui Parrotbills face challenges brought about by alien species, particularly feral ungulates such as pigs and deer. From 1945–1995, feral pigs invaded Haleakalā, caused chronic habitat degradation, and facilitated the spread of disease-carrying...
Birds ... are sensitive indicators of the environment, a sort of “ecological litmus paper” ... the observation and recording of bird populations over time lead inevitably to environmental awareness and can signal impending changes.

—Roger Tory Peterson
mosquitoes (*Culex quinquefasciatus*) which in turn brought avian malaria (*Plasmodium relictum*) into the remote areas of the rainforest. Additionally, the introduction of other exotic animals—such as rats, mongooses, cats, and other forest birds—threaten Maui Parrotbills as predators and as competitors for food.

Climate change and pressures from land use have caused parrotbills to retreat to higher altitudes. While they once resided in drier koa forests, they now have to eke out a living in incredibly wet ‘ōhi’a forests.

In this new habitat, heavy rainfall adds another challenge and often leads to very unproductive breeding seasons. Typically, between November and June, the female builds a nest out of *Usnea* lichens and twigs of pūkiawe (*Styphelia tameiameiae*). Fledglings typically stay with both of their parents for 5–17 months to learn how to properly forage. This long dependency time restricts the species to a maximum of one chick per year. Furthermore, studies from the Hanawi Natural Area Reserve in east Maui determined that a mere 19% of nests were successful and that, in many years of research, only 49 of 106 breeding pairs successfully produced a fledgling.

The Maui Parrotbill was designated as an endangered species in 1967. Between 1976 and 1983, the population was calculated to be about 500 individuals, 71% of which occurred above 5,000 ft. (about 1500 m) in elevation. Since then, population sizes have remained consistent. In 1984, the Maui-Molokai Forest Birds Recovery Plan began building fences in east Maui in an attempt to mitigate the threat of feral un-
The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project has plans to repatriate Maui Parrotbills to the drier leeward slopes of the island within Nakula Natural Reserve Area, shown here in 2012, before reforestation efforts.

Photo © Chris Farmer

Unlike most other native Hawaiian birds, such as the ‘I’iwi and the ‘Akiapōlā‘au, it seems the Maui Parrotbill did not have a native Hawaiian name. Or, at least, the name was lost over time as the birds quickly disappeared from most of the island. After years of observation, the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project organized an official naming ceremony in 2010. There, the Hawaiian Lexicon Committee dubbed it the Kiwikiu. It is named for its curved, sickle-shaped bill, its whistle, and the cold wind blowing over the mountain on which it lives. During the naming ceremony, Sam Ohu Gon III, a local expert in Hawaiian culture, shared a chant that reveres the bird, its beauty, and the beauty of its home.

From the lofty summit of Hāna Mountain
The high, dark forest flank is visible
However, it is obscured by the strata of clouds
The upper windward flank of countless birds is hidden
The echo of many bird voices comes up from below
And the Ko‘olau district is brimming with birds
But harken now to this that strikes the ear
The clear call is carried by the kiu mountain wind
The call of the understory shrubs it is heard
By the birds of the wet forest so
By the ‘I’iwi that is dampened by the rain
By the ‘Akihekohe grooping in the forest
By the yellow Nukupu‘u with its curved bill
Oh Kiwikiu
Oh Kiwikiu
You’re such an outstanding bird and blessed with beauty
Oh Kiwikiu
Oh Kiwikiu
Your stout curved bill is always snapping
Approach and occupy your perch
Here is a thriving bird
And may you thrive indeed

—Sam Ohu Gon III

But harken now to this that strikes the ear
The clear call is carried by the kiu mountain wind
The call of the understory shrubs it is heard
By the birds of the wet forest so
By the ‘I’iwi that is dampened by the rain
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And may you thrive indeed

—Sam Ohu Gon III

The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project has plans to repatriate Maui Parrotbills to the drier leeward slopes of the island within Nakula Natural Reserve Area, shown here in 2012, before reforestation efforts.

Photo © Chris Farmer

gulates. Still, the International Union for Conservation of Nature currently lists the species as critically endangered.

“These birds are confined to about 50 square kilometers of really wet rainforest,” says Dr. Hanna Mounce, coordinator for the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project (MFBRP), which was formed in 1997 and has focused on saving Maui Parrotbills since 2006. “They are there because that is the only pristine forest left on Maui—but it is really hard to be a 20-gram bird living in an area that gets 300 inches of rain.”

The species’ low density in a marginal habitat means that releasing more birds won’t help the situation by itself.

“We really can’t sustain more birds within the forest we have,” Mounce says.

So the solution isn’t more birds. It’s more—and more suitable—forest.

Reestablishing a native habitat entails repatriating native species and excluding non-native ones, both plant and animal—a daunting task. This is exactly what the MFBRP took on when it first formed. Operating out of an old warden’s house from a defunct jail, a small group of passionate people has been working towards this lofty goal. With support from the University of Hawaii and other sources, in 2012 the MFBRP finally set about creating that more suitable forest. Progress has been steady. MFBRP and State of Hawaii partners have planted more than 53,000 native plants in a 420-acre fenced area of the Nakula Natural Area Reserve on leeward Haleakalā, and 10,000 more are due to be planted this year.

A captive breeding program was established to rebuild the population, and the first chick hatched in 2003. In January 2018, the MFBRP plans to repatriate the first group of Maui Parrotbills. These individuals will come from the two captive populations maintained by San Diego Zoo Global as well as individuals taken from wild populations. After this point, the project’s focus will pivot to supporting breeding and self-sustenance within the new populations.

It took almost 200 years for the Maui Parrotbill’s forests to disappear, and restoring that habitat won’t happen overnight. “It might take 25 years to have a really beautiful koa forest,” Mounce says, “but we still have to start now.”

When Maui Parrotbill populations flourish, it will signify that water resources have stabilized, soil integrity has improved, and native forests are once again intact—thanks to conservation action and community support.

To learn more about the efforts of the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, contact Hanna Mounce at mounce@hawaii.edu.
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Humbanding in Idaho
Hummingbirds Inspire the Next Generation

One of the most exciting events in the world of birding is witnessing hummingbird banding, affectionately called “humbanding” by enthusiasts in Idaho. It’s fascinating to watch the banders in action and to listen to them spout intriguing hummingbird facts, such as “The Calliope Hummingbird is the smallest bird in the United States. At 2–3 grams, it weighs about the same as a penny. Black-chinneds weigh about a nickel.” But the coolest part of all is when it’s your turn to hold a hummer for release, and the bander places it gently on your open palm. Sometimes, before a bird realizes it’s free to leave, it may stay there for a moment. Its tiny, rapidly beating heart feels electric in your hand.

A Rufous Hummingbird shimmers from its perch in Challis, Idaho.
Photo © David Faike
Experiencing this may not be easy for everyone to arrange, but it’s possible at two different venues in Idaho that are open to the public: the Intermountain Bird Observatory (IBO) banding station at Idaho City, affiliated with Boise State University, and the Rudeen Ranch Hummingbird Roundup in southeastern Idaho. At both places, the banding is conducted on private property that the owners graciously open to researchers and visitors.

Although definitely fun, the true purpose of banding hummingbirds is to study and monitor their population dynamics and migrations, to learn about their life histories, and to contribute to their conservation. The return rate of all banded birds is relatively low—generally less than 1%, but for hummingbirds in Idaho up to 15%—so the more birds banded, the better the chances are for banders to someday hear about one of their own bird’s travels. Each recaptured bird teaches us something new, and some have amazing stories to tell, often tales revealed
Humbanding in Idaho

only through humbanding.

Two different Black-chinned Hummers banded in Louisiana have turned up in Idaho. One banded in Idaho turned up in Colorado. And yet another, banded at Rudeen Ranch, was recaptured in Hamilton, Montana, one month later. Interestingly, Rudeen Ranch recaptured the same bird originally banded in New Mexico two years in a row.

Permits and Rules

A U.S. Federal Bird Banding and Marking Permit is required to band any wild bird in the U.S. Permits are issued by the Bird Banding Laboratory at the U.S. Geological Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, which also provides bands and stores all data collected. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game also issues state permits. To discourage hobbyists, it has become more difficult to obtain a master banding permit. Today, permits are issued only to legitimate researchers.

To maintain the highest standards possible, humbanders adhere to a strict code of ethics that applies to every aspect of banding. The North American Banders’ Manual for Banding Hummingbirds includes “The Banders’ Code of Ethics.” While banders have additional responsibilities, such as ensuring data are accurate and complete, they are first and foremost responsible for the safety and welfare of the birds they study.

Humbanding in Action

If there’s anything you’d like to know about hummingbirds, just ask the humbanders as you watch them in action. You may also take photographs at almost every step.

To catch hummingbirds, the bander selects a place with active, ongoing feeding and then goes fishing for hummers. The bander takes down all but the most popular feeder so birds won’t have a choice where to feed, then sets up a cage on an ad-
justable table to surround the feeder. The wire cage has a sliding door attached to a fishing line on a fishing reel. When a hummer flies inside, the bander instantly drops the door and traps the bird. Reaching inside, the bander carefully grasps the tiny creature, puts it into a cloth bag, and brings it to the banding table.

Soft-sided mesh traps are also used, depending on the situation and the bander’s choice. All traps are constantly checked to ensure no birds are left inside for too long before removal and processing.

Next, the bander checks to see if the bird is already banded. If so, is it from another place or time, or one that was just handled and recaptured? Some banders put temporary paint on the birds’ heads to tell more easily whether they have been captured recently.

After enfolding the hummer with a corner of nylon or flannel, “processing” begins. This means that the bander inspects, measures, and weighs the hummer to determine its species, age, sex, and general health. Other data recorded include tail, wing, and bill lengths, bill grooving, number of gorget feathers, and fat.

But first, using small special pliers, the bander places a miniature aluminum band on the bird’s leg—a band cut from a 4” x 5” sheet with 300 uniquely numbered and lettered pieces, rolled and strung onto a clip, in order. It’s tedious to do, but the reward is getting to clamp the “jewelry” onto a bird’s leg. The bander then checks to make sure the band fits correctly.

Even for birds so small, there are different band sizes, in increments of 0.2 mm, each with its own specific pliers. For example, gravid (“pregnant”) females require larger bands to accommodate swelling in their legs, which they use with their bellies to incubate eggs. Males take smaller bands. Don’t worry—the bands are so light the birds hardly feel them.

Grooving on the bill determines age. “Hummers hatch with ‘wrinkles’ on their
Humbanding in Idaho

Making Reservations
Humbanding takes place in Idaho City from mid-May through mid-August. Crews band for five hours, starting at sunrise. Usually, about 500 Calliope, Black-chinned, and Rufous hummers are banded per season. Because these events have become so popular, a prior reservation is required. Please contact the Intermountain Bird Observatory for a reservation: ibo.boisestate.edu

The Rudeen Ranch Hummingbird Roundup is currently held during the first weekend in June. No reservations are required for this free event, but for the exact date and directions, visit hummingbirdroundup.com. An average of 550 Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, and Calliope hummingbirds are captured at the ranch each year.

bills,” says Fred Bassett, an Idaho humbander. “As they age, the grooves fill in, making their bills smooth.” If many grooves remain, it’s a young bird. Otherwise, it’s an adult.

Iridescent gorget feathers on the throat help determine age and sex. The iridescence is created by a combination of pigments (that absorb and bend light) and microscopic structures (that bend light). Tail feather colors and shapes, and tail and wing measurements help determine species and sex.

Next, the bander uses a soda straw to softly blow feathers aside in order to look beneath the transparent skin at the amount of yellowish fat stored on the bird’s body. Fat collects on the breast, below the chin, and on the sides, and its presence or absence is a good indicator of a bird’s health. More fat is better, because the bird will burn it quickly during migration.

Finally, the bird is weighed on a digital scale and given a drink of sugar water before its release.

Sharing Hummers
Now the real fun begins. Younger schoolchildren and scouts are first in line to hold and release the hummers. As one of them takes the tiny bird on his palm, listening carefully to the bander’s instructions as they watch and wait for it to fly away, the delight on the kids’ faces is immeasurable. All of this is sure to make a lasting impression.

And, indeed, that’s the idea behind IBO’s public education programs. IBO’s mission is “to impact human lives and significantly contribute to the conservation of western migratory landbirds and their habitats through cooperative research and public education.” Via its community outreach programs, IBO actively promotes public involvement, stewardship, and wildlife viewing. Hundreds of visitors from all over the U.S. and beyond come to their banding stations and events at Lucky Peak near Boise, Idaho City, and other venues every year. Birders, school children, college students, scout troops, parents, teachers, volunteers, international interns, and other interested guests all can enjoy world-class encounters with wildlife.

Hanging out with the birds is way too cool to keep to themselves; accordingly, the humbanders delight in sharing their work with the public. Their infectious enthusiasm and impressive knowledge can’t help but rub off. Hands-on close encounters like these can lead to a subconscious conservation ethic.

“While IBO’s research is all-important and interesting,” says IBO’s Executive Director and co-founder Greg Kaltenecker, “we believe that it means nothing if we can’t share the results with the general public. Only through their knowledge of our research will we really ever affect conservation of these species in the long run.”

The humbanders at Rudeen Ranch agree. “The one-day roundup is held as a repeatable sampling event at the same time each year to build a long-term dataset documenting the population,” says humbander Carl Rudeen. “Opening the event up to the public for education is arguably more valuable than the data. It’s hard to reach more than a few people at a time if you don’t have an organized way to do it.”

Idaho’s humbanders always eagerly anticipate their next banding sessions. Their ongoing research and monitoring efforts provide a deeper understanding of the region’s hummingbirds and help to foster in the public a love and greater appreciation of nature and its conservation.
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