



BELIZE  
AUDUBON  
SOCIETY

Celebrating **40** Years

Newsletter

Creating a balance between People and the Environment

Volume 40: Number 3

March 2009

Crooked Tree Buffer Community Children  
Put on a Wetlands Show for Belize City Children



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## ***Belize Audubon Society***

### ***Vision***

*The Belize Audubon Society (BAS) will be a strategic leader in building a nation in which people in Belize live in harmony with and benefit from the environment.*

### ***Mission***

*The Belize Audubon Society is a non-governmental membership organization dedicated to the sustainable management of our natural resources through leadership and strategic partnerships with stakeholders in order to create a balance between people and the environment.*

### ***See anything you like?***

Please feel free to quote or copy any information you find here. Just remember to give proper credit to the *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter* (Vol. No. p. date).

### ***What do you think?***

We invite our readers to submit articles, photographs, or artwork for publication in the *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter*. Letters and emails are also appreciated. We want to hear from you, our readers! What subjects would you like covered in future issues? What environmental issue is on your mind?

***Belize Audubon Society Newsletter***  
is published quarterly by:

**Belize Audubon Society**

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# Belize Audubon Society



## Newsletter

Volume 40, Number 3  
March 2009

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#### FRONT COVER

On February 17th students from buffer communities of the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary put on a show at the Bliss Center of the Arts before an packed audience of Belize City students. See page 16 for more details (*photos by Judy Lumb*).

Designed by Producciones de la Hamaca, Caye Caulker, Belize  
Printed by BRC, Benque Viejo, Belize

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#### **Member, IUCN**

*World Conservation Union*

*Accredited status with the  
UN Convention to Combat  
Desertification*

### BAS History

Since its formation in 1969 BAS has been Belize's foremost environmental organization protecting Belize's precious natural resources while educating the public about their value and sustainable use. BAS has grown from an all-volunteer organization with 55 charter members to a Society of over 1,700 members with a staff of more than 40 dedicated professionals and a fourteen-member Board of Directors.

Throughout its history, BAS has been involved in the development of the legal framework and policy for environmental protection in Belize. From the initial Wildlife Protection and National Parks System Acts in 1981 to the recent National Parks System Plan, BAS has been instrumental in the financing, development and management of protected areas. At the request of the Government of Belize, BAS currently manages nine of Belize's protected areas with a well-trained, knowledgeable staff, most of whom are from the surrounding buffer communities. Environmental education, advocacy, and community activities revolve around these protected areas and their buffer communities.

### Staff

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*Donna Bull*

### BAS-Managed Protected Areas

**Actun Tunichil Muknal Natural Monument (ATMNM)**  
 455 acres—established 2004

*Uriah Rhaburn, Park Director*

**Blue Hole Natural Monument (BHNM)**

1,043 acres—established 1996

*Park Director position open*

**Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS)**

128,000 acres—established 1985

*Nicascio Coc, Park Director*

**Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS)**

41,297 acres—established 1984, Declared Ramsar Site 1996

*Rennie Jones, Park Director*

**Guanacaste National Park (GNP)**

50 acres—established 1973

*Kent Garcia, Acting Park Director*

**Half Moon Caye Natural Monument (HMCNM)**

9,771 acres—established 1928 as a Crown Reserve

*Park Director position open*

**St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park (SHBHNP)**

575 acres—established 1986

*Israel Mansanero, Acting Park Director*

**Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve (TMNR)**

6,741 acres—established 1975 as Society Hall Nature Reserve

*Venancio Cho, Park Director*

**Victoria Peak Natural Monument (VPNM)**

4,487 acres—established 1998

*Nicascio Coc, Park Director*

## *Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary*

# *Verna Samuels of Crooked Tree Speaks at BirdLife International*

**G**ood morning, Your Royal Highness Princess Takamodo. Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a very hot day with a fast wind caressing the faces of the three Gillette brothers as they slowly make their way down the Belize Old River and into the Black Creek. They are tired, you could tell, but they are still hopeful that a little farther down the Creek they are going to find logwood trees that they were searching for.

Look, look, one of them shouted...that looks like a lagoon just in front of us. They started moving much faster down the creek and into the lagoon. They were pleasantly surprised and discussing how fortunate they were to have found this place and how fascinating this crooked tree really is! How could they miss the most crooked tree that they have ever seen in their lives? They all agreed that they should camp and call this great place the "Crooked Tree". Incidentally, this story took place over 250 years ago.

The brothers had not only established the village of Crooked tree, but they also found what they were looking for: a lagoon that was lined with logwood trees, the prize that they were searching for! That tree was special because it was a wood that was exported to the mother country, England as Belize, once a British colony, exported logwood for the production of indigo dye.

Many years later this place became a very special village for the entire country of Belize. Many Belizeans from within Belize would spend days here just to go swimming, fishing or just enjoy the peace, quiet and the rich natural area. It was not long when Belize Audubon Society noted that this area was a great place where tons of birds came and so worked to have it established as a protected area and later even the world recognized this as a special area and so it became a RAMSAR site in the 1990's.

As a teenager I used to hear many messages to Mr. John Jex, a local community member, from one of the founders of Belize Audubon, Mrs. Dora Weyer. These messages were always about meeting a group at Double Run, which was a point that

was accessible by boat from Crooked Tree. Initially the village was entirely surrounded by the lagoon.

Today transportation has been made easier as there is a three-mile causeway that allows visitors to visit Crooked Tree much easier. This is how tourism all started at Crooked Tree. And the first man Mr. John Jex was known as the "father of tourism in Crooked Tree." Why WERE people coming? Because of Crooked Tree Birds, Birdwatching became so popular because at Crooked Tree you definitely could not miss the tons of jabirus, cormorants, egrets, limpkin and other birds. You can hear the soprano music, tenor, alto and base when they are singing.

Then Belize Audubon and the Village Council actually got it established as a wildlife sanctuary in the early eighties. And if you visit and I hope you do, you would agree that this area has been an important bird area even before Birdlife International has been identifying important bird areas all over the world.

So what is the role of biodiversity in development? For us in the Crooked Tree village, it can take place together in the community but there will always be challenges. The challenges are even greater when a village is in the center of a wildlife sanctuary which is the situation we find ourselves in at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.

On the other hand development is easier since you can consider yourselves lucky to be born at the right place at the right time because you can take opportunity of this great place with great birds that is an important bird area. And that is what I do, as our family recognized that birds are a major attraction to Crooked Tree and so we decided to establish a lodge called "Birds Eye View Lodge." Of course it had to be related to birds and the name of our lodge says it all. When you come here you do get a bird's eye

view of life. For us we have seen development go hand in hand with biodiversity conservation as we get income from birds and my village is developing because the birds keep our visitors coming. We

*cont'd next page*

## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

### Verna Samuels of Crooked Tree Speaks at BirdLife International (cont'd)



*Ms. Verna Samuels giving a presentation to the entire plenary of the BirdLife International Conference in Buenos Ares, Argentina.*

have hundred of visitors per year. Most of them are birders or naturalists. These visitors create opportunities for development for the community since many of the locals are tour guides, drivers, boat captains, park wardens, cooks, etc. There also opportunities for community members to be involved in the tourism industry, retail shops, and buses all related to the birds attracting people who want to hear their songs, too. Even the farmers produce products that the hoteliers buy. Other community members rent canoes or take visitors horseback riding. Even the local entertainers get an opportunity to make some income. This is what I call development

in Crooked Tree. Other opportunities that conservation brings is that people become friends of Crooked Tree and they provide materials for the schools, the youth, the clinic, etc.

Well, it seems all is well at Crooked Tree, that biodiversity conservation and development go hand in hand. Well, the road is not always straight. It is crooked at times especially when conflicts arise because different people see conservation differently. As a child I used to see more birds and wildlife but today I think that it is no different than in the rest of world where the number of birds are declining. Maybe we caught too many limpkins or black belly whistling ducks to eat, as this was a common Sunday dinner for the people of Crooked Tree.

Many kids used sling shots to kill birds for fun. Or just to get a real close up look of them to see how beautiful they were. This has changed because Belize Audubon has worked very hard with the school children and community members to have us see why we need to protect this area not only for the birds but also for us as well. Many of these kids are now adults and welcome the opportunities that conservation brings.

We have come a long way and we are convinced that biodiversity conservation can work; however, we still have a long way to go when our politicians decide to change our sanctuary anytime. We still have to go a long way when people think that Audubon only cares about the birds and not about the people. I have come to realize that birds and people can coexist and in this case the birds at Crooked Tree are giving us a chance at making a living and we need to give them a chance at their living too. That is our obligation.

I believe that, like the Belize Audubon Society says, it is about “balancing the needs of people and the environment” and that is where biodiversity conservation and development meet. Easier said than done but we can try.

And Now I invite you all to come to Crooked Tree where life is not as crooked as it may seem because conservation is working for us even if not all in my village agree with this.

Verna Samuels, Crooked Tree Village

## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

# Highlights of the BirdLife World Conservation Conference

**B**AS Executive Director Anna D. Hoare and Crooked Tree community member Verna Samuels attended the BirdLife World Conservation Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from September 22nd to 27th, 2008. Both of them made presentations.

BirdLife International was established in 1994 and today has been able to fundraise over US\$ 95 million for its work to support the secretariat and the partnerships. This membership organization has enabled partners to join hemispheric initiatives and to work on several species action plans. In addition to conservation work, 2500 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) have been declared globally.

In Belize's case, six IBAs have been identified based on the global criteria for site selection. The IBA program will consolidate the importance of protected areas in preservation of biodiversity.

Peter Schei, Chair of Global Council, gave an overview of the Conference, saying "it is the fourth global congress with 114 partner countries and six other country participants and with about 455 contributions. With over 200 treaties ratified globally in favour of biodiversity and with an increase in protected areas albeit less in the marine area, there is still a dramatic decline of biodiversity and not only birds. Our life is too short to do all the work that needs to be done. While we need to cultivate our special attributes as NGOs we have been too cooperative with government and slow to critique practices and policies that they have implemented and a more proactive stance is needed. We need to work with all stakeholders and be critical to pulses. If the same policies are being applied which is leading to degradation we need to take our responsibility seriously.

"Since birds have been used by humans throughout history and they can be said that they are the 'princesses of biodiversity' and we need to work at offering a life insurance for these species, the functions of ecosystems to be maintained as this is the insurance of sustainable development. Monitoring IBAs provide an indication of environmental health. Great results have small beginnings and so, while biodiversity represents a wide gamut of species, the IBAs monitoring framework can

help us so that birds can help us track progress. The state of the world birds is not good and birds are sounding the alarm. It is time to listen and take action."

Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado of Japan, the Honorary President of BirdLife International provided a presentation on Birds in Human Societies. Her presentation highlighted the importance of birds in our daily lives. *(photo below shows the Princess with BAS Executive Director Anna D. Hoare)*



Tim Appleton spoke on Bird Fairs as a Species Champion funding initiative. A flagship species needs to be selected. One annual Bird Fair Event generated \$US 35,000 per year.

Anna D. Hoare  
BAS Executive Director

### Fly Over Crooked Tree

On the 5th and 6th August, 2008, Crooked Tree community members Luis Cadle, Amelia Guy Gillet, Michael Gillet Jr., Donald Gillet, Eric Romero, and Alden Wade were taken on flights over Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, along with Community Liaison Officer Orlando Jimenez and Education Programme Manager Olivia Carballo. The flight could only accommodate four visitors and three flying crew, two pilots and the navigator, so flights were taken on two separate days.

The crew flew over to Spanish Creek and Black Creek to observe the water inlet to the three lagoons. The crew flew over the island of Crooked Tree to observe the cattle ranches and the newly built causeway across the Wildlife Sanctuary on Blackburn area of the lagoon. Three large farms were observed on the southern part of the causeway towards Chau Hixx. In the island itself, one large area is cleared in the southern part where the cattle ranches seem to be concentrated. A large portion of the area cleared was under water. In the northern part of the island lies the community.

After one circle, the crew flew to Jones Lagoon. All appears untouched at Jones Lagoon. A graveled road seems to lead directly to the southern part of

the lagoon. We flew over Crockland and had a good view of the developments. The Tilapia fish nurseries were visible as well. The flight took exactly one hour.

The community members were awestricken by the view of the area from the sky. They mentioned how pretty the island and the waters were and that they did not realize how big the wetland was. They were informed of the importance of the wetlands as a water reservoir. The road traversed the narrow strip of forest across the lagoon. From the edge of the water to Lamanai is approximately three miles as the crow flies.

The narrow strip of forest across the lagoon is being cut slowly by cattle ranchers. There is a large portion cleared that belongs to the cattle cooperative. If this section is not protected, it will become a deforested area from the edge of the lagoon to the New River. It is important to highlight this because this forest is maintaining the temperature of the waters in the lagoon.

Orlando Jimenez  
Community Liason Officer (former)



*"May Season," a photo in the exhibition, "Shutter Speed: A photography exhibition showcasing Belize Audubon Society at work," including photos by Dirk Francisco. (see page 22)*

## *Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary*

# *Flood Waters Decimate Buffer Communities of Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary*

*Upstream, Downstream—Wetlands connect us all*

The torrential downpour over most regions of Belize that began on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008, impacted many communities all over the country, but especially those along the banks of the Belize River. It impacted tremendously the people as well as the infrastructure, farms and nature itself.

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS) is an extremely important wetland system designated as a Ramsar site especially for the protection of tons of bird species and other wildlife. This protected area of approximate 32,700 acres is managed by the Belize Audubon Society but during the flood nature was managing itself. Our conservation work turned to mitigation work as staff helped the community to live through the floods.

At its highest, water was six to eight feet deep everywhere in the village, including over the causeway. In the Crooked Tree community, many families and livestock had to be evacuated to higher ground, but not without many of them losing household assets and witnessing the loss of agricultural crops and some livestock due to rapidly rising waters.

After a couple weeks of rising waters, the BAS Visitor Center was evacuated as water was flowing inside the building. With receding water the Center became the mitigation center for the Defense Force and Coast Guard. BAS wardens worked from 4:30 in the morning to about 7:00 pm to transport the people who were still in the community as some of the homes were still habitable. Most activities in the com-



*BAS staff transporting Crooked Tree villagers during the flood, when the water was all the way up to the CTWS Visitor Center.*



***Don't forget!  
40th BAS AGM  
at Cockscomb  
April 18, 2009***

## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

### Flood Waters in Crooked Tree (cont'd)

BAS hopes the public will recognize that the Crooked Tree wetland system is performing its role as it should, and will appreciate the importance of protecting this wetland system from unsustainable development for the future of our natural resources and our people.



*BAS staff delivered aid supplies to the CTWS buffer communities affected by the floods in October, 2008.*

community ceased except for aid-related activities from various agencies. Of all the communities in the Belize River Valley, Crooked Tree Village was affected the longest due to the fact that the village is on an island surrounded by the wetland system. The water slowly receded over the next two to three months.

Now more than ever before, it is clear that CTWS really does serve as a critical flood control basin for the entire Belize River Valley and Belize City. Its large water storage capacity is quite evident as the entire lagoon was like the Caribbean Sea. Its role in maintaining the hydrological balance in the Belize River watershed is very obvious. As a critical habitat for wildlife including birds, this flooding has many creatures desperately seeking dry areas because they too have lost their home!

The last flood to affect the Belize River Valley communities with this same magnitude was in 1979 when the water was also about eight feet of water. Now almost 29 years later, flood waters rose again, exceeding the flood levels of

1979 in most the areas and taking over three months to dry out! Flooding in the Belize River can be traced to activities along the Macal River, one of the two main tributaries of the system. As a result of the deforestation and development along the river in Guatemala and to a smaller extent in Belize, there is less vegetation to absorb some of the flood waters and as a result, much of that flows down the river and into the low lying areas. The other tributary, the Mopan River which also originates in Guatemala, contributes significantly as rapid runoffs from the Maya Mountains which have experienced massive land clearing exacerbating erosion.

BAS hopes the public will recognize that the Crooked Tree wetland system is performing its role as it should, and will appreciate the importance of protecting this wetland system from unsustainable development for the future of our natural resources and our people. Keep in mind that our wetlands are wonderlands not wastelands and the natural cycle will continue its course.

# Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

**Crooked Tree Wetlands ga wi baak;**  
*as wi develop, mek wi kip it laik dat!*

**English Translation: Crooked Tree Wetlands supports us;**  
*as we develop, lets keep it intact!*

Where did all the water from the October 2008 flood go? Why was Belize City not severely flooded, when it sits at the bottom of all the other communities that suffered from the flood? The answer to this is: Thanks to the WETLANDS OF CROOKED TREE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY (CTWS) that acted like a sponge to absorb all that water!

Today we should all be very thankful and happy that nature placed the wetlands of Crooked Tree exactly where it is and that it has been under protection for 24 years, since 1984, by the Government, people of the surrounding communities and the Belize Audubon Society. If the wetlands of Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary were filled in and developed, they would not have saved the economic capital from the severe flood. The commercial capital would have probably been under four to six feet of water, cutting off economic activity and most importantly paralyzing the relief efforts being efficiently organized for the people living in the Belize River valley.

The Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary's silent role in controlling flood for our country is only evident when catastrophes like this happen. The more evident benefit of protecting Crooked Tree Wildlife Life Sanctuary is that with all the water the wildlife also comes along, fish, reptiles, amphibians and the main reason why the sanctuary was established—BIRDS! Some of this wildlife means food and income for our people, whether they line fish out a Bay Snook fish to go along with their rice and beans for lunch or they take a tour of visitors to see the birds and the wildlife, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary contributes

tremendously to our development. For these reasons this protected area ranks ninth (out of 95) most important protected area in the country and the first most important protected area managed by the Belize Audubon Society (National Protected Areas Systems Plan, 2005).

To honor and share this pride with our local communities Belize Audubon Society is conducting a campaign:

*Crooked Tree Wetlands ga wi baak;*  
*as we develop, mek we kip it laik dat!*

English Translation: Crooked Tree Wetlands support us; as we develop, let's keep it intact!

These are some of the activities we have been doing!



(top right) BAS made buttons for the Wetlands Campaign.

(above) At the **Wetlands Summer Camp for Crooked Tree, Lemonal and Biscayne primary school teachers**, Teacher George Tillet gets excited and helps to demonstrate the importance of wetlands. (photo by Derrick Hendy)

## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

# Crooked Tree ga wi baak (cont'd)



At the Wetland Summer Camp CTWS staff talk to the teachers about the biodiversity of CTWS using the Visitor Center as the educational tool. (photo by Olivia Carballo-Aviles)



Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary Staff hosted the teachers from the Wetlands Summer Camp for an overnight and talked to them about how Cockscomb is connected to Crooked Tree. Part of the Belize River Watershed starts from some waterfalls in Cockscomb. (photo by Nicasio Coc)



(above) The teachers wanted to share the knowledge they acquired with their community so they turned the first part of their Parent Teachers meeting into "crooked tree wetlands ga wi baak " session! (right) Teacher Katie Gillett conducting her wetlands demonstration for the parents. (photos by Dirk Francisco)



## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

### Crooked Tree ga wi baak (cont'd)

Farmers, Agriculture Department and Belize Audubon working together to keep Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary "laik dat"!

Thirty-one farmers from Crooked Tree, Lemonal, Gardenia, and Biscayne attended a Cattle Farming Best Practice session organized by BAS and skillfully implemented by the Agriculture Department's Extension Officer Manuel Cowo. (photos below by Dirk Francisco)

The BAS Education programme is now implementing demonstrations on the ten practices developed in collaboration with the agriculture department. These practices are geared toward reducing impacts to the wetlands, such as soil compaction, deforestation, grazing and decrease in oxygen levels and water quality. (see sidebar at right)

These practices will be promoted in the form of a comic booklet, a DVD showing implementation by farmers and explaining methodologies, a detailed booklet, cattle farmers' demonstrations and a cattle farmer's forum. These will act as materials that will educate farmers on sustainable cattle farming practices.

#### Cattle Farming Best Practices for Crooked Tree Wetland Conservation

- 1) Fencing of cattle to avoid loss of cattle and loss of energy as well as to keep them off the wetlands and the community roads.
- 2) Pasture Management (growing grass) to supply feed for cattle in the contained areas.
- 3) Leaving 300 feet or more (500 feet) of forest cover around waterways to avoid losing land or land erosion as well as to keep the role of trees in filtering pollution.
- 4) Leaving primary canopy (e.g. Ceiba trees) in farms for shade, water retention and Jabiru nesting
- 5) Uses trees such as Madre Cacao or gumbo limbo for fencing, to improve soil conditions and reduce logwood cutting.
- 6) Uses legumes or adequate types fertilizers that do not harm the environment.
- 7) Uses some type of supplement feeding for cattle. (Sugar cane, hay, molasses blocks etc.)
- 8) Creative and profitable use of cattle dung, so it does not run off into wetlands (vegetable gardens, composting and use in biogas)
- 9) Keeps animals contained during the dry season for the majority of the time to reduce soil compaction and grazing on the wetlands
- 10) Keeps records of their business activity.
- 11) Treat cattle with appropriate vaccines and medication.



Manuel Cowo conducting indoor (above) and outdoor (right) sessions for farmers. (photos by Dirk Francisco)



## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

### Crooked Tree ga wi bak (cont'd)



*The campaign's Jabiru mascot was named by the children of Crooked Tree Government School: Jimbo Roo the Jabiru! (above)*

*(left) Teacher Ulanda Jones wrote a beautiful poem for the children to read to Jimbo Roo!*

*(below) Jimbo Roo congratulates Teacher Katie Gillett when she receives her Training Certificate.*

#### **The Jabiru**

There are lots of birds that fly  
In our beautiful blue sky  
Wonderful creatures God has made  
Birds that live on land and  
those that live in the water wade

But there's a special bird  
with a crimson band around the neck  
Sharp sword-like beak that peck  
At swamp eels and fishes found deep  
In our Lagoon on legs long and steep

Jabiru with your wings so wide  
Here in Crooked Tree  
you don't have to hide  
Here we will keep you safe and free  
Welcome to our lagoon and tall pine trees  
Bring all your families and stay  
In our Lagoon and waterways!

—Ulanda Jones



## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

### Wetlands Day 2009

On February 2nd 2009 BAS joined the rest of the world in celebrating international wetlands day under the theme: "From Mountains to the Seas Wetlands that Work for us". This year BAS hosted a leaders visit to the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary and there it launched the "Crooked Tree Wetlands Video," completing the day with a wetlands boat tour.

Invited guests included the Governor General his Excellency Sir Colville Young, Hon. Edmund Castro—Area Representative and Minister of State in the Ministry of Works, Hon. Gaspar Vega represented by CEO Mrs. Beverly Castillo, Chief Forest Officer—Wilber Sabido, Village Councils of Crooked Tree and Lemonal Village, as well as teachers, children, and other community leaders.

"Crooked Tree Wetlands ga wi bak; as wi develop, mek wi kip it laik dat!" (*Crooked Tree Wetlands supports us; as we develop lets keep it intact*) was the main message shared during this Wetlands Day celebration. BAS President Earl Green welcomed the guests to the event after which the Chief Forest Officer shared the role of Belize in the Ramsar Convention and explained why Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary was designated Belize's first Ramsar site.

Mrs. Beverly Castillo, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Natural Resources delivered Hon. Vega's message on the commitment of the Ministry of Natural Resources to maintain Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary as a protected area and a Ramsar Site. Hon. Castro shared his views about balancing the need for development with the protection of the wetlands of Crooked Tree and Ms. Verna Samuels shared experiences of living near the wetlands and how the many resources have helped the community develop.

The Belize Audubon Society conducted this activity in an effort to bring leaders together to talk about the importance of Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary and the need for planning development.

Olivia Carballo-Avilez  
Education Programme Manager



(above) Hon. Edmund Castro addressing Wetlands Day 2009

(below from left) Hon. Edmund Castro, the Governor General Sir Dr. Coleville Young, and CEO Beverly Castillo at the Wetlands Day Ceremony.



## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

### Crooked Tree Buffer Community Children



Children from Lemonal, Biscayne, and Crooked Tree came to Belize City to tell the city children about wetlands in a totally entertaining way. They played to a full house of Belize City students.

A Recorder group from the Crooked Tree Government School opened the show with the National Anthem (*center left photo on the front cover*)

Students from Lemonal Anglican School presented “What is a Wetland?” (*photo above*)

The wetlands campaign theme “Crooked Tree ga we baak” was dramatized by Crooked Tree Government School students. (*center right and top photos on the front cover*)

Lemonal Anglican School students presented “Protect our Wildlife” in drama and song. (*lower right, center right and bottom on front cover, and top p. 17*)

“Tilapia and Cow Dilemma” was presented by the Biscayne Government School students. (*center left and right on p. 17, front cover center right*)



# *Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary*

## *Put on a Show for Belize City Children*



## Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

# Janelle Chanona Evaluates Crooked Tree Project

*The following evaluation was done by Janelle Chanona in response to a request by BirdLife International named "trial by media." Reporter Janelle Chanona met with park wardens, community youth, concerned citizens group members, older persons in Crooked Tree and participants in the different activities to interview them in reference to the project entitled "Garnering support for Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary by creating opportunities through capacity building for the local community to benefit from conservation practices", which had been completed by Belize Audubon Society. The following are some excerpts from her March 2008 report:*

The area's real attraction is found in the network of inland lagoons, swamps and waterways, which span more than sixteen thousand acres. Every year in the dry season (February-May), the water level drops and hundreds of different species of migratory and native birds descend to capitalize on the food trapped in the thick mud. The Jabiru with a wingspan of more than eight feet is the largest among them, but birds rare to Belize like the Southern Lapwing, have also been spotted in Crooked Tree. The world's fastest falcon—the Peregrine—is also among the predators.

In recognition of the lagoon's importance, in 1984 the wetland was deemed a protected area and the Belize Audubon Society became the co-manager. Ten years later, the protected area was declared a wildlife sanctuary. In August 1998, Crooked Tree was elevated to internationally-protected status when it became the country's first Ramsar site, a designation that supports vulnerable and endangered species or threatened ecological communities. The residents of Crooked Tree watched these developments with interest from the sidelines; after all it was the water being protected...not the village. However, Ramsar did point out in its evaluation that traditional use could negatively impact the wildlife if left to continue unchecked. So when "No Fishing" and "No Hunting" signs went up, the villagers took it personally.

Of the approximately eight hundred residents of Crooked Tree, many raise livestock (cattle roam freely in the village so it's a good idea to watch out for cow piles), others are subsistence farmers, many fish and hunt to

supplement food sources and income and of course, several expertly roast cashew nuts and make wines from seasonal fruit. In response to the steady stream of visitors, a small number have turned to tourism – setting up small hotels and restaurants and guiding guests in boats in the lagoons or along the longest elevated interpretative boardwalk in the country. But such work is seasonal, so when the birds aren't around, it may look like a lot of villagers "hang out" all day. And they'll be the first to tell you they don't really have to worry about money.

No there isn't oil or gold in Crooked Tree. It's just that on average, every villager has at least three relatives in the United States (and other parts of the world) who financially support their wants and needs. But the cash flow seems to have created a nonchalant attitude about employment, leading some people to argue it has also stagnated development in the village. ...

In 2007, the Belize Audubon Society and the Local Advisory Committee teamed up to launch a series of skill training workshops. The focus of the project was to "garner support for Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary by creating opportunities through capacity building for the local community to benefit from conservation practices". Translation: "attempt to create entrepreneurial spirit in the villagers so they don't negatively impact the resources around them." Funding of a little more than sixty thousand dollars was provided by the Dutch Government through BirdLife International, a partner organisation working in more than a hundred countries to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity by

## *Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary*

### *Janelle Chanona Evaluation (cont'd)*

working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. To encourage maximum participation, courses were held in the summer and included classes in handicraft and painting, public relations and communication, agro-processing, hospitality and business development. On average, thirty-six people regularly showed up to class, the majority of them women. In December, the men in the group pooled efforts to construct the only boardwalk within the village, along Limpkin Trail. Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the initiatives but those who later expressed an interest in using their new skills in a commercial venture, quickly pointed out that they would need help accessing money to get their ideas off the ground.

Audubon's project coordinator Orlando Jimenez accepts that the outcome was below expectation but considering the usually tense relationship between villagers and Audubon, it was anticipated. Remember those "no fishing" "no hunting" signs? Well residents here still have a bad taste in their mouths over them. But the project's results have been the disturbing trend in Crooked Tree. Hundreds of thousands of dollars from different organizations across the world have been channelled into Crooked Tree in skills training but there is little to show for it. Why? One popular answer is those same skilled workers often migrate to urban areas in search of employment. Audubon has been persistent in its attempts to change the status quo, but Jimenez admits Crooked Tree is his toughest assignment. ...

There has been steady success in places like the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, another site co-managed by Audubon. After a rocky start, the Society helped the women of Maya Centre organize themselves into a cooperative and today, the gift shop they built makes a tidy profit. But more importantly, the villagers are now strong allies to Audubon's protection efforts. ...

The same plans and similar funding were pumped into Crooked Tree, so why hasn't something similar happened there? BAS Executive Director Anna D. Hoare believes the

villagers have yet to internalize just how valuable the wetland is and therefore are unable to capitalize on the opportunities. In BAS' determination to hammer in that message, the environmental organization conducts classes for adults and children about the resource and proper management. To connect with the villagers, employees have even done things like judge the local beauty contest. Relations are a lot more civil than they were initially but the fact that people and conservation are inextricably linked has yet to sink in. ...

But if the residents of Crooked Tree are content to continue their traditional lifestyle, shouldn't they be left alone to do so? After all, they're not indigent or uneducated. And they aren't unhappy. Well, should I hasten to add that their general demeanour doesn't mean villagers don't have complaints or needs. That list is long but basic. Chief among them of course is the paving of the road to the village. Successive governments have promised to do so but none have delivered. One election pledge went so far as paving all the streets in the community.

Politics aside, today village chairman George Guest is convinced that not only is the road driving visitors away, it's actually become a hazard. According to him, the approaches of both bridges on the causeway need to be strengthened for safety reasons. Another big complaint is that there's no interest free or minimal rate loan programme accessible to villagers who want to expand on their development ideas. Makes me think that perhaps Crooked Tree residents have been disappointed so many times they're afraid to believe in the promise of the future. ...

It is clear to me that if the villagers decide to keep the status quo, it must be a cognizant decision and up for constant review. Because if residents don't take ownership of their impressive resources and tap into the area's potential, it'll only be a matter of time before people from outside the village move in and do it for them. ...

Janelle Chanona  
March 10, 2008

## **Janelle Chanona Wins James A. Waight Award**

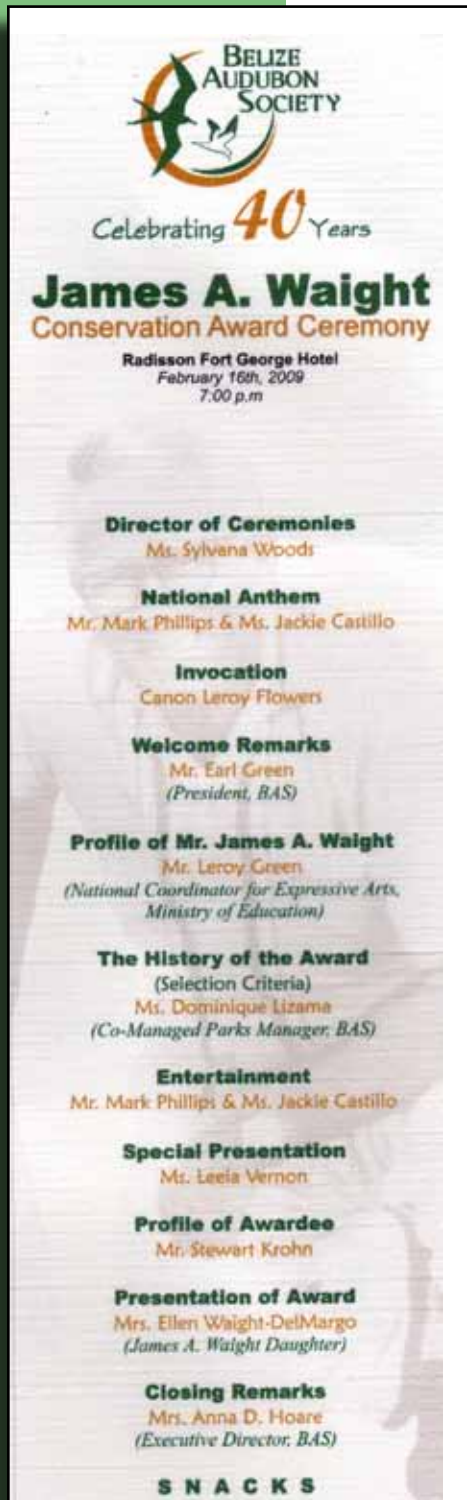
On February 16, 2009, BAS held the 23rd James A. Waight Award Ceremony. The Award was established in 1987 to honour the Society's first President, James A. Waight.

Rudi Burgos was Director of Ceremonies, substituting for Sylvana Woods, who was not able to be there. He also offered the Invocation as Canon Leroy Flowers could not be at the Ceremony.

This year's honouree is journalist Janelle Chanona for her outstanding environmental reporting which has raised awareness and environmental consciousness in Belize. A profile of her work at Channel 5 was given by the former owner of the station, Stewart Krohn, after which a series of video clips demonstrated the high quality of Janelle Chanona's reporting.

Ellen Waight DelMargo, daughter of James and Lydia Waight, presented the award on behalf of BAS, Lydia Waight and the rest of the Waight family.

Several special presentations enlivened the Ceremony. The life of James A. Waight was profiled in a creative dramatic presentation by Leroy Green. Mark Philips's jazz trio entertained before and after the Ceremony. Jackie Castillo joined the trio to entertain with her beautiful voice.



*Ellen Waight-DelMargo, daughter of James A. Waight, presented the Award to Janelle Chanona.*

## *Janelle Chanona Wins Award (cont'd)*



*(above) Members of the Waight family attended the ceremony. (above from left) Gloria Waight, Christopher Waight, Daniel Waight, Ellen Waight DelMargo, Sir Dr. Colville Young, Governor General of Belize, Janelle Chanona, John Waight, Gerard Waight, BAS Executive Director Anna D. Hoare.*



*(left) Each year the Award Ceremony includes a biographical sketch of James A. Waight, the first BAS President. This year James A. Waight was profiled in an excellent dramatic presentation by Leroy Green.*



*(right) BAS President Earl Green congratulates 2009 James A. Waight Awardee Janelle Chanona. (photos on pp 20 and 21 are by Judy Lumb)*



*The award is clear, but placed against a dark background so the writing is visible.*

## **BAS 40th Anniversary Celebration Kicks Off with “Shutter Speed”**



**F**orty years ago on February 6th, 1969, forty people gathered at the Premier’s Lodge to meet with C. Russell Mason, then the Executive Director of the Florida Audubon Society. At that meeting the Belize Audubon Society was formed.

BAS kicked off a year-long 40th anniversary celebration with the opening of “Shutter Speed: A photography exhibition showcasing Belize Audubon Society at work” at the Mexican Embassy in Belize City.

The beautiful photographs are the creative work of Dirk Francisco, BAS Public Participation and Publicity Coordinator (*left*). BAS Vice President Michael Heusner welcomed the guests to the Opening Ceremony (*below left*). Licenciado Luis Manuel Lopez Moreno, Ambassador to Belize from Mexico, opened the exhibit at the Mexican Embassy. The exhibit was declared open when the Mexican Ambassador, Manuel Rubido, Ambassador to Belize from Cuba, and the BAS Vice President cut the ribbon (*below right*).

Attendees were entertained by the music of Mark Philips and his jazz trio. Snacks and drinks were served.



*BAS 40th Anniversary Kick-off (cont'd)*



*(top left) The exhibit banner features an Osprey.*

*(top right) Intently viewing the exhibit.*

*(above) Sarita Tillett enjoys the exhibit.*

*(left) the Mark Philips trio entertaining at the Opening Ceremonies of "Shutter Speed" (photos on pp 23-24 by Judy Lumb)*

***A Gallery from “Shutter Speed:  
A photography exhibition showcasing  
Belize Audubon Society at work”  
by Dirk Francisco***



***40 Years of Creating a Balance between  
People and the Environment***

***Belize Audubon Society  
2009 40th Anniversary Calendar\****

***Theme: 40 Years of Creating a Balance between  
People and the Environment***

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
Entire Year	Roving BAS Exhibition
February 2	World Wetlands Day (Celebration in CTWS)
February 6	Radio 40th Anniversary: Opening Exhibition Video magazines, Newspaper Inserts
February 16	James A. Waight Award
March	Victoria Peak Adventure (women only) Victoria Peak Adventure (everyone)
April 18	40th Annual General Meeting at CBWS
April 22	Earth Day –Walk to Guanacaste –Greening Initiative –Media Tour and Journalist Award
May	Children Summit
May	Membership Day and Radiothon at BTL Park 40 Years Book and Video Launch
June 20	40th Anniversary Gala “Dancing with Nature”
July	BAS Trivia
July	Board Summer Camp
July	Summer Camp
July	Field trip for members
August	BAS Tour
September 4-5-6	Bliss Performance Environmental Drama
September 19	National EXPO Fair
September 21	Diplomatic Field day
October	Volunteer Appreciation Day
October 15-30	Bird Training and Birdathon
October	Mesoamerican meeting with University of Belize
December 11-12	Musical on Environment Theme

\*Events are tentative, depending upon funding.

Look for the next issue of the *BAS Newsletter*, a special issue on BAS’ 40th Anniversary, and join us for these enticing activities!

# Rudibird's December Report

December 26, 2008

Hi Everyone,

Here are some of the things I have seen recently. In the recent Christmas Bird Count I was assigned to the Ladyville area. While I know that Yellow-billed Caciques would not be out of range these were seen and this was nice. Also expected and enjoyed by the group were Yucatan Jays and Mangrove Cuckoos.

Here in Belize City we are getting some of the usual visitors: American Redstarts, Yellow warblers, Black and White Warblers, Scissors-tailed Flycatchers, Willets, Whimbrels and the always interesting Herring Gulls. Also in Belize City if you look carefully on the lawns and ground areas you will see Killdeer.



I was in the Haulover Creek a few days ago and there were at least a half dozen American Redstarts, Green Kingfishers and a few Pygmy Kingfishers. White Ibis, both adults and juveniles, showed up here and there. There was one bird which at first look I identified it as a juvenile Little Blue Heron, but studying the image later on I noticed that the bill had a more Reddish Egret look and the feet were not really grayish like the Little Blue's. I think it was an immature or juvenile Reddish Egret. If it is such it will be a first for me. (photo)

I also had the pleasure of visiting San Pedro, Amberis Caye. Along the southern main thoroughfare I saw a whole bunch of American Redstarts and Yellow Warblers. At the edge of the swampy area at the edge of the DFC area I saw about a half dozen Black-necked Stilts, 20 or so Blue-winged Teals, about 10 Willets, and three Killdeer. For the very short time I managed to squeeze in some bird watching there I realized that there more to see there right in town and the immediate outskirts. Of course the San Pedro birders must know this. I plan to go back out there and do less socializing and more birding some time soon!

Jabiru Storks are back at Lamanai and seem to be building a nest!

Best Regards to All!

Rudibird

**Mark your Calendars!  
BAS 40th AGM  
18 April 2009  
Cockscomb Basin  
Wildlife Sanctuary**

## *Belize Audubon Society*

# *Thanks from the Belize Audubon Society!!!*

**BAS is grateful for support from our Donors:**

*AVINA Foundation*

*Darwin Initiative Programme (U.K.)*

*Debt for Nature Swap*

*(Governments of Belize and the United States)*

*Ford Motor Company*

*Friends of World Heritage*

*Jaguar Conservation Trust*

*Oak Foundation*

*National Audubon Society (U.S.)*

*Protected Areas Conservation Trust*

*The Nature Conservancy*

*United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization*

*Wildlife Conservation Society*

**and our Partners:**

*Belize Defense Force*

*Forest Department*

*National Coast Guard*

*University of Belize*

Know someone who wants to join BAS?  
Tell them to contact us <[membersbas@belizeaudubon.org](mailto:membersbas@belizeaudubon.org)>

### BAS Membership Categories

Category	<u>Level</u>	<u>Annual Fee (BZ\$)</u>
<b>Butterfly</b>	Kids Under 13	\$10-14
<b>Sea Turtle</b>	Junior Protector	\$15-19
<b>Nassau Grouper</b>	Protector	\$ 20-49
<b>Kinkajou</b>	Family	\$ 50-99
<b>Ocelot</b>	Patron*	\$ 100-349
<b>Jaguar</b>	Guardian	\$ 350-599
<b>Red-Footed Booby</b>	Bronze	\$ 600-999
<b>Scarlet Macaw</b>	Silver	\$ 1000-3999
<b>Golden Showers Orchid</b>	Gold	\$ 4000-9999
<b>Jabiru</b>	Platinum	\$ 10,000+

*\*Foreign memberships are at the Patron or higher levels.*

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## Protected Areas Managed by BAS

