Birds and Birding in Belize

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- Junior Bird Clubs
- Interviews with BAS Birding Staff
- LightHawk report
- BAS News
- New Book about wildlife launched
Belize Audubon Society

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

Mission
The Belize Audubon Society is a non-governmental, membership-based organization dedicated to the sustainable management of our natural resources through leadership and strategic partnerships with stakeholders in order to achieve create and maintain a balance between the needs of both 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?

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Belize Audubon Society

Birding and Birds in Belize

Belize Audubon Society

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FRONT COVER
BAS members bird watching in Dangriga

Unless otherwise noted, all photos are by Dirk Francisco.

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and Dirk Francisco
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Belize Audubon Society

BAS History

Since its formation in 1969 the Belize Audubon Society (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 47 dedicated professionals and a thirteen-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.

BAS-Managed Protected Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protected Area Name</th>
<th>Size (acres)</th>
<th>Established Year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actun Tunichil Muknal Natural Monument (ATMNM)</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Hole Natural Monument (BHNM)</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS)</td>
<td>127,107</td>
<td>1986</td>
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<td>Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS)</td>
<td>41,297</td>
<td>1984, Declared Ramsar Site 1996</td>
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<td>Guanacaste National Park (GNP)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Moon Caye Natural Monument (HMCNM)</td>
<td>9,771</td>
<td>1928 as Crown Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve (TMNR)</td>
<td>6,741</td>
<td>1975 as Society Hall Nature Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Peak Natural Monument (VPNM)</td>
<td>4,487</td>
<td>1998</td>
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</table>

Birding in Belize

Birds and Birding in Belize

Forty three years ago the Belize Audubon Society was established by ten founders, all of whom were avid birders, who enjoyed Sunday birding trips in Mr. Ford Young's open back Land Rover. Over the subsequent decades the Society has grown in vision, scope and human resources to become Belize's foremost conservation organization. While our main focus has become the management and conservation of our natural resources, BAS has always had birding and birds at heart, hosting several events every year, conducting bird tours and fostering a love of this activity among young Belizeans. For BAS birding is more than just a hobby, it is a labour of love and a way of life.

The Society has maintained memberships with a myriad of local and international, social and conservation minded organizations, building valuable partnerships that have contributed to conservation work across the country. In 1998 BAS was invited to become a Partner Designate, and Belize's member of BirdLife International, the world's largest partnership of conservation organizations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity. This particular partnership resulted in the funding of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in 2008, an international project for which BAS became Belize's lead. Through this project six Important Bird Areas, sites which must be conserved in order to ensure the long-term survival of all species, were identified throughout the country and a program was developed to guide the implementation of national conservation strategies. The publication that accompanied the project has been widely circulated and used especially by BAS protected areas managers under whose mandate the IBAs fall.

Recognizing the importance of bird research, BAS continues to promote bird monitoring and data collection by investing in enhancing the capacity of our field staff and researchers. Recently two members of staff were fortunate enough to have received international training in bird banding techniques and marine bird research through the Society's partnership with National Audubon Society of the United States. BAS has also encouraged the appreciation of birds through the formation and support of Junior Naturalist Bird Clubs in the buffer communities of the Crooked Tree and Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuaries.

Please enjoy this edition of our newsletter dedicated to...birds.
In 2009, the idea of the junior bird club for the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS) resulted as an educational outreach tool for students from the Crooked Tree Government Primary School in Crooked Tree Village. The formation of such a group was identified while conducting the “Wetlands Pride Campaign for the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary” whereby to continue the outreach and education beyond the timeframe of the campaign a junior bird club members and visitors to use. As the children age and move on to high school, some drop out of the club due to more demands for school work and as such the number of members in the club has fluctuated over the years. However, although some have gotten older, their interest in the birding remain and they still participate in the birding activities on-site when they can.

Since the inception of the club, students have gathered on the last Friday of every month at the CTWS visitor’s center with their leader park warden Derick Hendy, ready to learn more about birds. The knowledge gained spans across identification, behavior and patterns, habitat preference, migration, and threats, importance of protected areas, and types of protected areas, just to name a few. They have also participated in summer camps at CTWS and other BAS protected areas and have asked to assist the “campers” who are interested in the birding activities. To the surprise and delight of the BAS staff the children have even engaged their parents in their birding interests and some have bought more birding books for the kids, some visit the staff and the group at the center from time to time and share what their children have taught them about birds.

In 2011 and 2012, the bird club was invited by the Hilton Pond researchers studying the Ruby-throated hummingbird in CTWS to observe capturing using mist nets and recording of the data, bird banding and to learn about their ongoing bird monitoring programme which started in 2004 in Costa Rica and expanded in 2010 to Belize. In order to build the knowledge about birds, the club members were given short assignments to monitor and record birds that visit their bird feeders which they built and decorated themselves out of coconut shells.

When the bird club started the National Audubon Society and RARE provided the funds to purchase the birding equipment, and upon the return of NAS representatives in 2012 to Belize, they were excited that the bird club was still very active. They had the chance to interact with the students and donated 10 more binoculars to the club! The students from the Crooked Tree Bird Club currently stands at 16 members and all have always expressed their appreciation for the knowledge gained and the time BAS staff has taken to impart their knowledge about birds and other wonders of nature.

Having a successful programme...
On Thursday July 26th, 2012, I sat with Mr. Israel Manzanero Sr. (Mr. Manza), Park Director for the St. Herman’s Blue Hole National Park. He has been employed with the Belize Audubon Society for seventeen years. He is one of the Society’s foremost birders and I took some time to learn what makes him such an avian lover.

Arreini: “How and when did you get into birding?”

Mr. Manza: “I started working with BAS in 1995 and that year I went to a training to deal with birds at Hill Bank in Rio Bravo for three weeks. During that training we visited the Belize Zoo and we did birding in the St. Margaret’s Village and South Water Caye.

After the training I did not know many birds’ names but I thought it was very interesting and I continued to bird watch. Whenever I heard a bird call I would pick up my binoculars, look up the bird in our bird book and keep a record. The names are hard to remember but after writing it down several times, I started to know the birds by call, sight and name.

Over the years I have collected several birding books that I keep at home and look through all the time. I look through so much, the pages are worn but I love them and keep them for my children and grandchildren.

I also notice the bird behavior and found that to be very interesting as well. I once saw a very small Red Capped Manakin dance on a branch while puffing its chest to attract the female. Like with everything else, the males are better looking than the females….Very Interesting!”

Arreini: “Has birding changed your life in any way?”

Mr. Manza: “A lot, a lot, a lot. I have met many birders and I have learned a lot. Anywhere and everywhere I go, I take my binoculars with me. When I am not busy at home I take out my binoculars and look for birds and last year for the one and...”

Belize Audubon Society and its staff are committed to continue imparting knowledge about birds and the importance of protected areas in Belize for Belize and the world.

Junior Bird Clubs of BAS Protected Areas cont’d

running for 2 years at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, the staff inquired about starting up a similar club in the south with the buffer communities of Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS). Based on previous environmental education outreach in the schools buffering CBWS, the students were eager to start up a birding club. With approval of the monthly planned activities and donation of birding equipment from National Audubon Society, the bird club was established in 2011. Due to several schools in the south and thus more students, the four main schools were targeted and a bird club was formed for each. Staff spent each month of the year 2011 rotating between schools doing presentations and imparting knowledge about birds. Due to the fact that CBWS is relatively far from each school, students have been encourage to observe birds in their school surroundings and at home and share those experiences with BAS staff and fellow classmates. The students have also had the opportunity to visit CBWS at least once to gain a better understanding of the protected area and its importance as well as gaining firsthand experience in birding within the protected area.

Logistically, the southern bird clubs have posed challenges for staff, but as time pass those will be addressed to strengthen the programme to ensure students continue to learn.

Belize Audubon Society and its staff are committed to continue imparting knowledge about birds and the importance of protected areas in Belize for Belize and the world.
An Interview with Israel Manzanero Sr. (SHBHNP staff with a heavy birdwatching enthusiasim) cont’d

only time I saw a Blue Bunting in my yard...a beautiful bird...I have never seen that bird ever again."

Arreini Palacio Morgan: “Do you consider birding to be a job or a hobby?”

Mr. Manza: “I consider it a hobby but I have a friend that lives in Cayo and makes $10,000.00 a year from just bird tours.”

Arreini: “Tell me some interesting bird stories”

Mr. Manza: “One day I was at the Blue Hole around 8:30 or 9:00 in the morning sweeping the steps and I saw a small bird that I thought was a Black and White Warbler. I picked up my binoculars and it was not quite that kind of Warbler, the wings had some blue on it...I thought that was strange and so I took a look again and hurried back to the office to look it up in the book. I found out it was a Cerulean Warbler, a transient bird that flies to South America. It was probably stopping by for food. That bird is not found in Belize. That was four years ago and I have not seen that bird again. No one believes me but I know what I saw”

“There was a Scarlet-Rumped Tanager living right outside the Visitor Center in the hibiscus hedges...a whole family with chicks. There is also a small Grey Fox that came around from time to time we would see it darting here and there. One day I saw the fox come out into the clearing, jump on the hedges, knock down the nest and grab one of the birds. I chased it away but it came back and took the young ones...that is nature...that is life.”

“I went to visit my mother-in-law in Orange Walk a while ago and while I was resting I heard the call of a Central American Pygmy Owl. I looked outside and there it was, sitting on the orange tree, making its call and it did not leave. Tradition tells that when that bird comes around, someone will die and so it happened, my sick mother in law passed a little while later.”

“I can tell you a lot of stories with birds...there are too many”

Arreini: “Where else have you done birding?”

Mr. Manza: “I did a training course in Costa Rica, not about birding but about protected areas management but I took my binoculars and I saw some wonderful birds. I also did a bird banding training in Mexico and we actually got to do some bird watching. I enjoyed it.”

Arreini: “Would you encourage other people to take up that hobby?”

Mr. Manza: “Certainly. I think that the park staff should go into the buffer communities and take the projector and show pictures of birds to educate the children and encourage them to appreciate birds and become birders. It is an income earner. People think of birds when they think about Audubon and sometimes when they see the logo on our shirts they would ask questions about certain birds and we should be able to answer. I would feel bad not to have an answer to give.

I encourage the staff to take up birding. I always tell them that when there is nothing to do, get the binoculars and look for birds and record them in our book. When they record them, it helps them learn the names and colours of birds. My son, Israel Junior is a well-known birder, skills I taught him. I have even taught my eleven year old daughter birding. Now she knows all the names and the calls, she loves it.

One thing that people who want to do birding need to learn is that if you want to be a birder you have to love reading and be very observant.”

It is clear Mr. Manza’s passion goes beyond the call of duty. We encourage everyone to find a hobby they love. Pick up a binoculars, birding might just be for you.
An Interview with Derick Hendy a Birder in BAS

Derick Hendy, Park Ranger for the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary has invested many years in birding and has been involved in the establishment of a Junior Naturalist Bird Club for youths of Crooked Tree Village. We took a step back into time to learn about his birding experience.

Arreini: “How and when did you get into birding?”
Derick: “Before I came to work for the Belize Audubon Society, thirteen years ago, I was a Ranger, then I was promoted to Head Ranger and then Field Guide at Rio Bravo, Programme For Belize (PfB), and I was not really interested in birds or even wildlife, I was only interested in plants. While there I met David Tzul who had left his employment at BAS to become a Field Guide as well at PfB. I used to see David wake up early in the morning to go birding and one day he encouraged me to go see if I like it. I went out with him for a week and I instantly became interested. The colours of the birds were attractive and I fell in love with birds and nature. PfB started to give bird monitoring trainings and I took advantage of them. After I got married I realized that the two week rotation I was on was not quite what I wanted and I asked about an Office Assistant vacancy at BAS. Even though interviews were already held, I was given a chance at an interview and two weeks later I began working here. I loved birding before I came to Audubon and when I got here I encouraged other staff to take up birding and some did.”

Arreini: “Has birding changed your life in any way?”
Derick: “It completely changed my life, birding is a part of my life. I take my personal time and do birding, at home, at the farm and even while driving. With so much birding, after a while your mind gets used to it hearing calls, your senses become sharper, you hear the calls clearer and see the colours that most people do not observe. I see everything differently now.

I teach my sons and nephew. I established a local bird club four years ago at Crooked Tree. Their parents buy expensive bird books and even they are interested.

Arreini: “Do you consider birding to be a job or a hobby?”
Derick: “For tour guides and researchers it is a job but for me it is my life, even at night I hear calls.”

Arreini: “Tell me some interesting bird stories”
Derick: “During the October bird count some years ago, Jonathan Urbina and I set out as a team and we came across a Lesser Goldfinch near the toll bridge at about 4:30 in the afternoon. We recorded it and we submitted it. There was a dispute; other more experienced birders thought that we could not have seen that bird. I was called into office and after I was interrogated they came to the conclusion that it was a mistake. About a year later, the Lesser Goldfinch was sighted in San Felipe (Orange Walk) and, well, they had to believe. It was recorded in the “Birds of Belize” by Lee Jones.”

“While I was studying recently in Connecticut we caught a Red-tailed Hawk in a mist net and while...
An Interview with Derrick Hendy
A Birder in BAS cont’d

you are instructed to use gloves to prevent scratches, I decided to be different. I focused on the bird and saw that it was dangerous. I quickly held it before it could hurt anyone. The supervisor was surprised that I did that because the bird was dangerous. I also jumped into a canoe to rescue a Canadian Goose from a snapping turtle in Connecticut. The turtle had bitten the bird so I beat it with a paddle and it released the bird. I took it to the Sharon Audubon Rehab Center, but unfortunately, they had to put it to sleep.

“I saw a Southern Lap Wing for the first time in Crooked Tree about six years ago. It was flying from one place to next when I saw this strange bird. I called Glen Crawford, birder and resident of Crooked Tree, he took a look at it and referred to a book and we identified it. I reported it to the office and within an hour later, avid birder, Phillip Balderamos came to there to verify. It had been around for three years and left suddenly.”

Arreini: “Where else have you done birding?”
Derick: “I have done birding in Connecticut where I did a two month birding course. I have done birding in Guatemala near Flores while there on a trip, but we saw mostly water birds. I have gone to El Salvador where I saw the national bird, the Blue Jay. It is a pretty blue with white cheeks. I have been all over Belize including Sarteneja and I almost got to Barranco once.”

Arreini: “Would you encourage other people to take up that hobby?”
Derick: “I certainly encourage people because it can be a career. We need more ornithologists in this country. We need to do more bird research and bird monitoring.”

“It is not only birding that I love, I love the environment on a whole, I believe in conservation and leaving something for the next generation and here at BAS I get to do what I love.”

We commend Derick for his dedication to birding even though “hitting a turtle with a paddle” is instinctive in helping a creature in danger, it may be extreme.

Of Note: The training in Connecticut Derick is referring to is found in “Building BAS Bird Research Capacity.”

Birding from the mountains to the sea!

It is with great enthusiasm that participants in Belize Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count 2010 were anticipating the Cockscomb Basin Bird Count Circle. Mr. Phillip, one of Belize’s more experienced birders, prepared his list and checked it twice, determined, as per usual, to sight over 100 birds in one day. Every year participants tease and chide one another with a competitive spirit and this year was no different…it was an unusual sighting in the sleepy southern village of Hopkins that sparked the embers of an argument. In reviewing the compiled list Mr Phillip, along with the most avid and experienced birders on this Christmas Bird Count Circle were puzzled, could this be? Surely the compilers were wrong… an excited argument ensued with everyone firmly standing their ground. Luckily, a picture had been taken and back at the office, Mr. Phillip verified, and/but or confirmed much to everyone’s chagrin, it was out of range. The bird, the Altamira Oriole, which is recorded to be only located in the Northern Districts of Belize, was found in the south.

The Cockscomb Basin Christmas Bird Count Circle has proven to be one with great potential to see some magnificent and diverse species of birds; which may include from the shorelines of Hopkins Village, species such as Sanderlings, Red Knots, Royal Terns, and hundreds of Pale-vented Pigeons. In contrast, the forested mountains of Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary give the participants of this Christmas Bird Circle the opportunity to see great birds such as: Montezuma oropendula, Great-crested Flycatcher, and the White Hawk, amongst others.

By: Arreini Palacio-Morgan and Amanda Acosta

Denham Chuc (Field Biologist) and Ivarr Marchand
In continuing with our flights since 1989, Belize Audubon Society and LightHawk teamed up this year to fly over the protected areas co-managed by the Belize Audubon Society. The donated flights organized by LightHawk have given staff, partners and colleagues of Belize Audubon Society the unique perspective of flight to effect change in management actions, foster conservation and create a better understanding of protected areas management. Some new staff from the protected areas were given preference to go on the flights. In addition, the flights this year served as an exchange for management staff from one protected area to fly over a different protected area giving them the opportunity to possibly see and understand the management issues of another area. As well, staff saw areas from the air that is logistically difficult and far to reach on the ground. The Community Liaison Manager also had the opportunity to fly over most of the protected areas in order to gain a better understanding of the proximity of buffer communities to the protected areas, incursion points, possible environmental impacts and the expanse of the natural resources communities continue to depend on and conservationists fight to protect!

The objectives and some of the main observations this year's four flights for the environment were:

**Objectives:**

**Cayo Parks**
- To carry out the annual monitoring overflight particularly to determine any land use changes or major encroachments.
- To conduct an assessment to determine changes in forest cover since the passage of Hurricane Richard in late 2010.
- To orient staff from an aerial view that will contribute to more effective on the ground assessment and monitoring.

**Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary & Victoria Peak Natural Monument**
- To carry out the annual monitoring overflight to determine any land use changes, plant rejuvenation (in the area damaged by fire in 2008 and 2009) particularly the south western portion of the protected area.
- To provide the CLM and staff with the opportunity to become familiar with the protected area by air and gather more information that they would be able to share with the people they encounter regularly.

**Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**
- To carry out the annual monitoring overflight to determine any land use changes.
- To give staff of BAS and the Police Department the opportunity to learn more about the CTWS from the air.

**Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monuments**
- To carry out the annual monitoring overflight to determine any changes, particularly to the beach facing the east (windward side).
- To assess the damages (if any) of Hurricane Richard to the littoral forest on HMC.
- To capture images of the new warden post, camping facilities, researchers quarters and the old historic lighthouse that fell in Oct 2010 after T.S. Matthew.

**CAYO PARKS**

**Guanacaste National Park**
- Forest rejuvenation in gap areas (northern section) previously created from the passage of Hurricane Richard in Oct 2010; therefore making it secondary growth forest.
- Park boundary to the north was clearly noticeable due to developments adjacent to the PA.
- Communities and farmers ad-
CTWS Lagoon

**Flights for the environment**

**FLIGHTS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT 2012 Cont’d**

**Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve**
- No signs of illegal activities were observed on the southern boundary line as this area is densely forested and thus all that was seen is lush jungle; however just outside of the south western corner was land clearing for possible private development.
- The north-east boundary line was not visible from the air, but just outside (using GPS tracking) the PA were citrus farms.
- On the northern boundary line more citrus farms were observed, houses, and gaps in the forest which were visible after Hurricane Richard.

**St. Herman’s Blue Hole National Park**
- Minimal observations made due to inclement weather.
- No signs of illegal activities or encroachment

**Actun Tunichil Natural Monument**
- Forest rejuvenation in areas affected by Hurricane Richard were visible
- The eastern boundary line (river demarcation) of the protected area was visible
- Near the warden post, the size of the citrus farm remains the same when compared to other years
- No signs of illegal activities or encroachment

**CO-MANAGED PARKS**

**Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary & Victoria Peak Natural Monument**
- Forest rejuvenation (in the area damaged by fire in 2008 and 2009) was seen particularly the south western portion of the protected area.
- No new land clearing/development was observed in the adjacent areas.
- The shrubs atop Victoria Peak are growing back after it was illegally cleared in 2010.
- Large portions of the protected area are densely forested so not much can be seen from the air, unless it is a significant change.

**Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**
- Southern lagoon was unusually high for the time of the year (April) which is within the dry season, but generally Belize experienced a longer wet season in 2012.
- Crooked Tree lagoon was also high and several heads of cattle were seen in the water; vegetation on the northern section of the lagoon looked dead.
- In the Blackburn area near Western Lagoon, several clearings were seen possibly for farm development; a bulldozer was sighted. While this area is outside of the protected area, it is of concern if extensive clearing and leaching occurs.
- Forest fires were observed in and around the general area
- Mexico and Jones lagoon water levels were low due to a temporary dam that was created during the construction of a culvert on Northern Highway which Mexico Creek flows through coming from Mexico Lagoon.
- Of particular interest to the Police officer on the flight was the observation of the illegal airstrip on the western side of the protected area. The information gathered will be shared with his superiors and his colleagues for on-the-ground and enforcement.

**Half Moon Caye & Blue Hole Natural Monuments**
- Signs of regeneration of the littoral forest/nesting grounds for the Booby birds after the passage of Hurricane Richard in Oct 2010.
- Continued marked beach erosion on the south/southwest beach; this has affected the turtle nesting grounds as portion of the beach has eroded due to wave action and in another section, the beach has been pushed back and up creating a steep slope making it difficult for the turtles to crawl.
- The facilities onsite were intact and the areas cleared/maintained for campgrounds and staff quarters were visible from the air.

**MARINE PARKS**
- Several illegal access roads were seen leading to the edge of the various lagoons presumably used by villagers to go fishing and hunting.
On September 2nd I arrived in my new place for the upcoming six months. I found myself in a steaming hot and busy Belize City. There I headed to the BAS head office. I was welcomed to Belize by Ms. Dominique, shown around in the office and I already got to know the people and to get to know the park. A big part of the work was the trail maintenance, hard but nice work and the trip to Victoria Peak was an outstanding experience. I participated in the bird and mammal monitoring and did the data analysis for the previously collected data. When necessary I helped out at the front desk or in the facility maintenance. Furthermore I was able to participate in the BAS staff retreat in Cayo and on a staff training on bird monitoring in Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. For these experiences I am really thankful because they allowed me to get a good insight into BAS and especially to get to know the staff from other protected areas. As a final project, with the help of the park staff, I developed a birding corner at CBWS. The created trails and planted fruit trees that hopefully will attract a lot of birds in the future.

So far from the working part of my six month Belize adventure, but working was not the only thing I was busy with. A lot of my time here I spent with enjoying the rich and fascinating nature, I visited Mayan Ruins that took my breath away, I got to know many interesting people, I adapted a new culture to my life or better said, I adapted myself to a new culture. Before I came to Belize I didn’t know much about this wonderfull place and it was difficult for me to imagine what comes on to me. To be honest, my first month in Belize hit me like a hammer. I was struggling everywhere, with my first ever try to understand and speak Creole when I arrived in Belize City and later when I had to learn that most things are working completely different to the way I was used to. When I just started realizing that I’m not at home anymore I found myself deep in the jungle. In the first moment I felt a little bit lost because my new family was mostly speaking Mopan Maya and I often had problems with understanding what is going on. But soon I became familiar with the processes. I became used to the staff at CBWS and even when they spoke Maya I was able to figure out what’s going on. While working with the guys from Cockscomb I learned a lot about the area, I got to know the animals, the plants, I got to call a feeling for the nature. There are so many things I experienced during my stay that made me got a true feeling for Belize. I got to know many people that just made me feel good, Mayans, Creoles, Garifuna, Mestizo people and much more from all around the world. Sometimes I was very lucky, once somebody took me on a speedboat ride in Placencia, another time I caught a free helicopter ride from Cockscomb to Belize City. Many people made me feel welcome either by helping me in a difficult situation or just by being like most people are in Belize – cool, relaxed and very friendly. Now my time is coming to an end and I can say six months Belize changed my life completely. I’m going home as a new person. In my heart I’m at least half Belizian now. And Belize is in my heart. I will miss this beautiful country and its beautiful people. I have to come back as soon as I can. I just like to thank everybody I got to know for making my six months an unbelievable time. Special thanks go to the Belize Audubon Society for providing me an internship position in Cockscomb, the place I fall in love with. I really appreciate the dedicating work of Ms. Dominique, who organised nearly everthing for me, she was my entrance to Belize and I always will be very thankful for that. Last but not least I want to send my biggest thanks to all the Cockscomb staff: Nicacio, Marcelo, Bon, Bri, Mario, Federico, Mango, you guys made my time absolutely awesome. It was a great experience for me to stay amongst Mayan people for so long time, you widened my horizon, you taught me so many things of the simple life. You will be in my heart forever and I never will forget you. Thanks to everybody who made my Belize trip the best time in my life so far.

I don’t say goodbye, I say see you soon…

By: Marius Konzack
Building BAS’ Bird Research Capacity

By: Arreini Palacio Morgan

The name Belize Audubon Society (BAS) is synonymous with birding in Belize. BAS is the first option and one-stop shop for tourists, researchers, tour guides and the like, exploring bird data and bird watching hotspots. Admittedly, while birds and birding are not the only business of the Society, they are part of our history and important to conservation.

In addition to being great pollinators and consumers of insects both in the forests and in the urban areas, birds are the greatest indicators of climate change. Their behavior and disappearance can help us in evaluating the dangers to the environment. As such, National Audubon Society (NAS) of the United States, in their 2012 Strategic Plan, identified the assessment of priority bird species of greatest conservation needs, and prioritized the identification of projects that will foster a healthy and sustainable future for them.

The close ties between BAS and the National Audubon Society has proven to be beneficial as NAS has assisted with funding for community projects, environmental education books and donating communication and birding equipment for staff and community birding clubs.

Through continued partnership with NAS three staff members have benefitted from capacity building in bird research. Denham Chuc, Field Biologist and Derrick Hendy, Assistant Park Director at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, have gained training and experience in a wide range of bird monitoring field techniques through two-month courses in Sharon, Connecticut in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The training included bird banding, point counts and other conservation initiatives. Celso Sho, Marine Research Assistant travelled to Portland Maine this summer, to work with researchers on Project Puffin. In addition to learning about the restoration of the marine bird colonies, Celso also participated in bird banding.

These capacity building opportunities will help BAS build on present knowledge, establish and improve our bird monitoring program.

By: Arreini Palacio Morgan

The last thing a child wants is to be stuck at home for summer vacation. The Belize Audubon Society offers a perfect antidote for boredom... have a blast while getting the best in environmental education.

For six years BAS has provided young people with exciting learning experiences in the natural environment through its Summer Camps. Campers experience a balance of environmental education and outdoor fun while playing games and learning arts and craft that teach kids about our cave ecosystem, rain forests and wetlands. Our campers come away with a passion for nature and a dedication to the conservation of our natural resources.

This year, six camps offered junior explorers the opportunity to experience a variety of activities, ranging from non-tradition crafting and photography to outdoor adventures.

Inclement weather did not deter prospective birders from the first camp. Birds of a Feather Flock Together Dollar Camp kicked off the summer camp season on July 8th, 2012. Participants were treated to breakfast and a birding tour around Belize City. This was followed by the much anticipated and full-to-capacity Jungle and Cave Adventure Camp on July 14th, 2012 at St. Herman’s Blue Hole National Park. Campers spent a day hiking through nature trails and touring the caving system before making wooden keepsakes with Japanese volunteer Fukutaro Furusawa and taking dips in the cool waters of the Blue Hole.

Through the Nature Photography Camp held on July 18th and 19th, 2012, children learned digital camera operation, terminology, posing and lighting while gaining guided hands-on experience touring the Guanacaste National Park. Adults also got a chance to learn photography technique at the Photography, Jungle and Cave Adventure Camp. The mature campers connected with nature through the use of their cameras to capture the great outdoors and finished off the day with a cave tubing tour at the St. Herman’s Blue Hole National Park.

This was another successful year that proved that truly, Belize Audubon Society’s summer camps are “where learning about nature is fun!”

Camper at SHBHNP
The Society held its semi-annual general Staff Meeting on June 7th, 2012 in our new Conference Room. Field staff had the opportunity to tour the new building and become familiar with our new home.

This year’s meeting featured a presentation on the Methods of Transmission of HIV/AIDS by staff peer educators, who had recently become certified through a workshop hosted by the Labour Department (through their HIV and AIDS workplace education programme). The Membership Coordinator gave a brief presentation and the Executive Director lead the staff through an overview of the Hurricane Preparedness Plan.

The staff looks forward to the end of year meeting where all Managers will review the year’s accomplishments and plan for the coming year.
Basic Bird Monitoring Training Report

By: Dominique Lizama

The Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS) is well known and protected for its wetland areas. It is ranked the 9th most important protected area in the country of Belize and provides critical habitat for wildlife, particularly migratory, local shore birds and water birds. Today, 317 bird species are known to use CTWS, along with 17% of Belize’s mammal species and 39 species of amphibians and reptiles. As an important location for birds, it is imperative that bird monitoring activities are conducted to understand bird behavior and patterns as they relate to the environment and environmental changes in the CTWS. In the past, bird monitoring was done in an inconsistent manner and without using an established methodology.

As a result on Feb 28, 2012, the Belize Audubon Society provided the opportunity for staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of its management by visiting the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. This basic training will ensure that the staff of CTWS begin to monitor birds in a consistent manner throughout the seasons which will result in the development of a monitoring database for CTWS.

The established purpose of monitoring at CTWS was to ensure that staff consistently monitors the migrants and resident birds of CTWS. The three major objectives of the training were accomplished in an effective and efficient manner over the three days. These were to establish bird monitoring in CTWS using the point count methodology; to identify and mark off the trail(s) to be used for the monitoring; and to understand and participate in data entry and basic analysis of the bird data collected. The series of presentations and activities covered are listed below. To reinforce the theory of the information covered, practical exercises of actual bird monitoring and data entry and analysis were conducted.

As it relates to monitoring specifically for CTWS, the trails chosen were the Jacana and Limpkin trails which were marked off with ten points, five points on each trail.

Ad hoc monitoring prior to training:
- Limkin trail
- 5 points
- 200m intervals
- 25m radius
- 8-10:30am (2.5 hrs)—Inconsistent monitoring

Proposed after training:
- Jacana & Limpkin trails
- 100m intervals
- 10 points
- 50m radius
- 8-10:30am (2.5 hrs)—possibility of starting earlier
- 3x/ week (monthly)

The point count methodology was chosen because it’s low cost, simple (a uniform way to count birds over time across locations), uses the least amount of people (2 persons—one recorder/time taker and one observer), and it can be used in both seasons (in this case (early dry season—to monitor migrants still on wintering grounds in Belize, late dry season—to monitor residents on breeding territories and wet season—residents and water birds)).

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- 8-10:30am (2.5 hrs)—possibility of starting earlier
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Reasons for choosing these trails include:
- Diversity in vegetation cover (goes from open to closed canopy)
- Both located on the water’s edge and forested area
- Methods of collecting data in different seasons: dry season (walk/wet seasons (walk/canoe)
- Both trails are easily accessible
- Both trails are commonly used by visitors

In conclusion, more than gaining knowledge about a new methodology, the staff who participated also had the opportunity to foster a greater appreciation for bird conservation and to get exposed to another protected area that BAS co-manages, while gaining a better understanding of its management and interacting with other field staff. The staff looks forward to the point count methodology for water birds later in 2012 in preparation for the annual international 2013 Waterbird Census which is conducted in January of each year.
**BAS News**

**Introducing a new book**

“Wildlife and Wild Places” by a BAS Member

“Wildlife and Wild Places” by James Beveridge is an autobiography, an adventure that reveals the author’s deep love of nature. Beveridge, who was born in Scotland, first recounts his experiences travelling through the desert of Baja California during the early 1960’s. This is followed by details of his trip to the contrasting environment of Amazonas in South America that he visited a few years later. But the focus of the book is his in-depth description of the fascinating and diverse natural wonders of Belize, where Beveridge has made his home on the island of Caye Caulker for more than 40 years. Here he has indulged his particular interest in birds, reptiles and the marine underworld. He is a keen diver and was the youngest First Class Diver in Britain in 1962.

The book is aptly illustrated with the author’s photographs, depicting both the terrestrial and marine life of Belize. The story reads well and is imbued with the author’s sense of humour and resilience in times of misfortune. It is also exciting, as he relates his potentially dangerous encounters with crocodiles and fer-de-lances, jaguars and sharks. A constant theme running throughout the book is the need to conserve our wildlife and wild places.

This first-person portrayal of the biodiversity of Belize is a must-have for local nature lovers as well as eco-tourist visitors, especially bird enthusiasts. Its details and anecdotes give one a real feel for the flora and fauna described which is bound to enrich any visitor’s experience.

For me, the book also brought back many happy memories of my early work in marine conservation with the Belize Audubon Society.

By: Janet Gibson

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**Belize Audubon Society**

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

BAS is grateful for support from:

- Debt for Nature Swap
  (Governments of Belize and the United States)
- Global Environmental Facilities Small Grants Programme - COMPACT
- LightHawk
- Oak Foundation
- Protected Areas Conservation Trust
- National Audubon Society (U.S.)
- World Conservation Union (IUCN)

and our Partners:

- Belize Defense Force
- Belize National Coast Guard
- Belize Tourism Police
- Fisheries Department
- Forest Department
- University of Belize - ERI

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**Cockscomb Basin Christmas Birdcount** - December 14th  (this day will now be standard for this count)

**Belize City Christmas Birdcount** - December 16th

**Belmopan Christmas Bird** - December 23rd
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Protected Areas Managed by BAS