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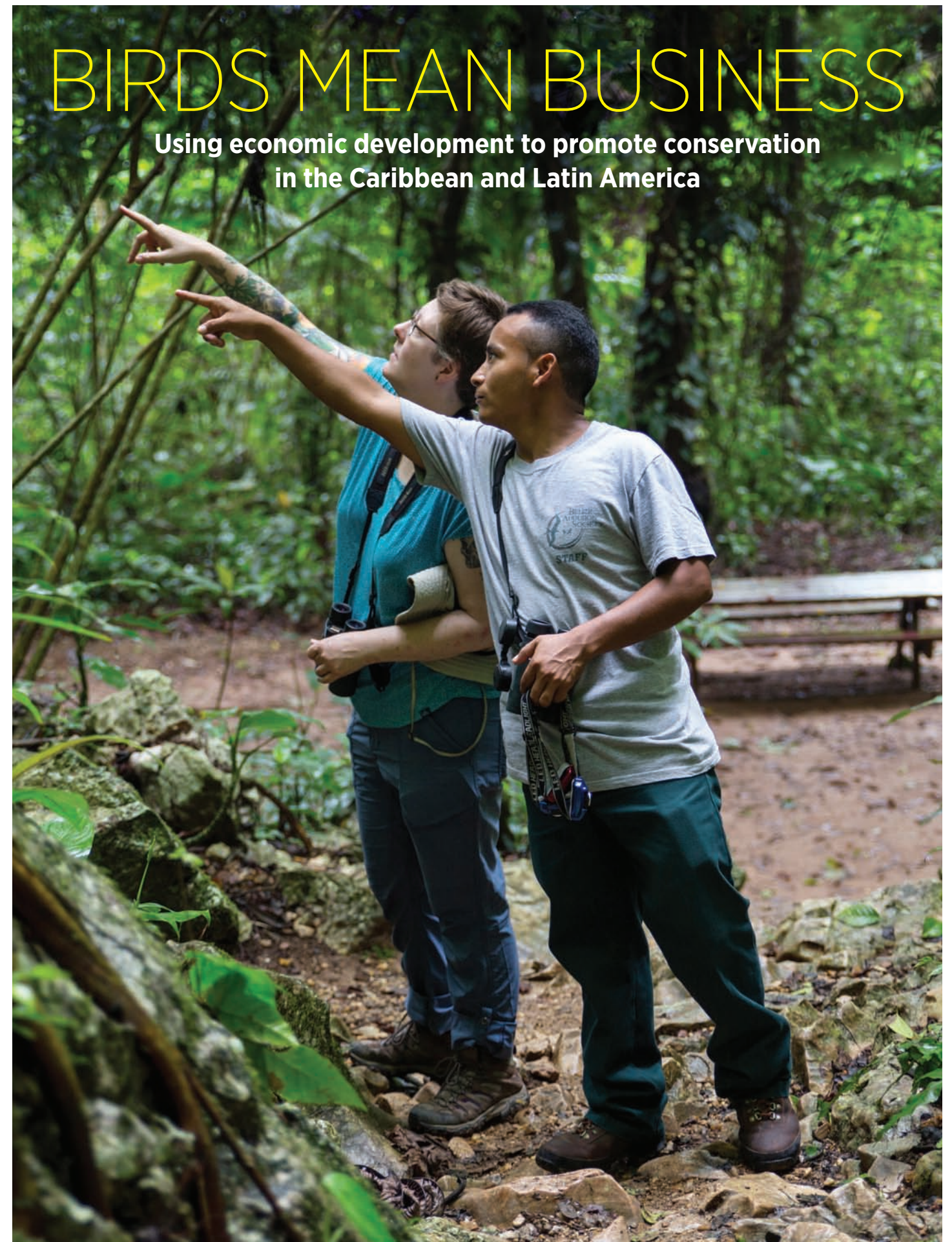
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# BIRDS MEAN BUSINESS

Using economic development to promote conservation  
in the Caribbean and Latin America



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# An Economic Incentive for Conservation

In developing countries around the world, a lack of economic opportunities often drives people to engage in activities that degrade natural resources. Unsustainable timber extraction, poaching, and land clearing for agriculture diminish the long-term value of these ecosystems for biodiversity—and for the local people who rely on them for resources and ecosystem services.

Ecotourism is an economic alternative that can raise incomes in communities living close to biodiversity-rich areas, while helping to conserve natural capital. Among the fastest-growing segments of ecotourists are bird watchers, who tend to have a light footprint on ecosystems and biodiversity, and are willing to step outside the tourism mainstream to see exotic birds.

In 2014 the National Audubon Society's International Alliances Program partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank's Multilateral Investment Fund to develop a pilot project designed to promote bird-based tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The project's goal was to support entrepreneurs in the bird tourism sector in Belize,

Paraguay, the Bahamas, and two regions of Guatemala. Focusing on areas where a large percentage of the populace lives below the poverty line, the project intends to build niche markets that will support economic development, empower communities, and improve local lives—while preserving and creating value for natural habitats.

Project designers chose sites by layering poverty maps over maps of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) that have the potential to attract bird-based tourism. The target areas include some of the most threatened ecosystems in the region, many of which host migrating species that breed in the U.S. and Canada.

Working with local tourism authorities and other experts, Audubon developed a two-tier bird-guide training curriculum that was tailored to local cultures, languages, and other circumstances. The training didn't just focus on bird identification. It also focused on important regional conservation issues, biology, and bird migration patterns and habitat needs. Additionally, the training covered basic instruction on setting up and running a business, marketing that business to potential clients,

“Every week at least one of us is out in the schools, getting children and their teachers interested in birds and the natural world. If we can get them out there and show them, they'll have the motivation to save it.”

—Pablo Chumil

and ethical guiding practices once in the field. This comprehensive approach to guide training has been adopted by the governments of Belize, Guatemala, and The Bahamas as the official curricula and guidelines for bird guides operating in those countries.

In addition to providing basic equipment for bird guiding and trail development, project specialists provided basic business and hospitality training, and encouraged governmental tourism agencies to include such curricula in their own guide-training and certification schemes. The objective was to create a network of community-based birding destinations that offer skilled local birding guides, high-quality park interpretation and lodging, food services, and related goods and services tailored to the birding market.

Finally, Audubon reached

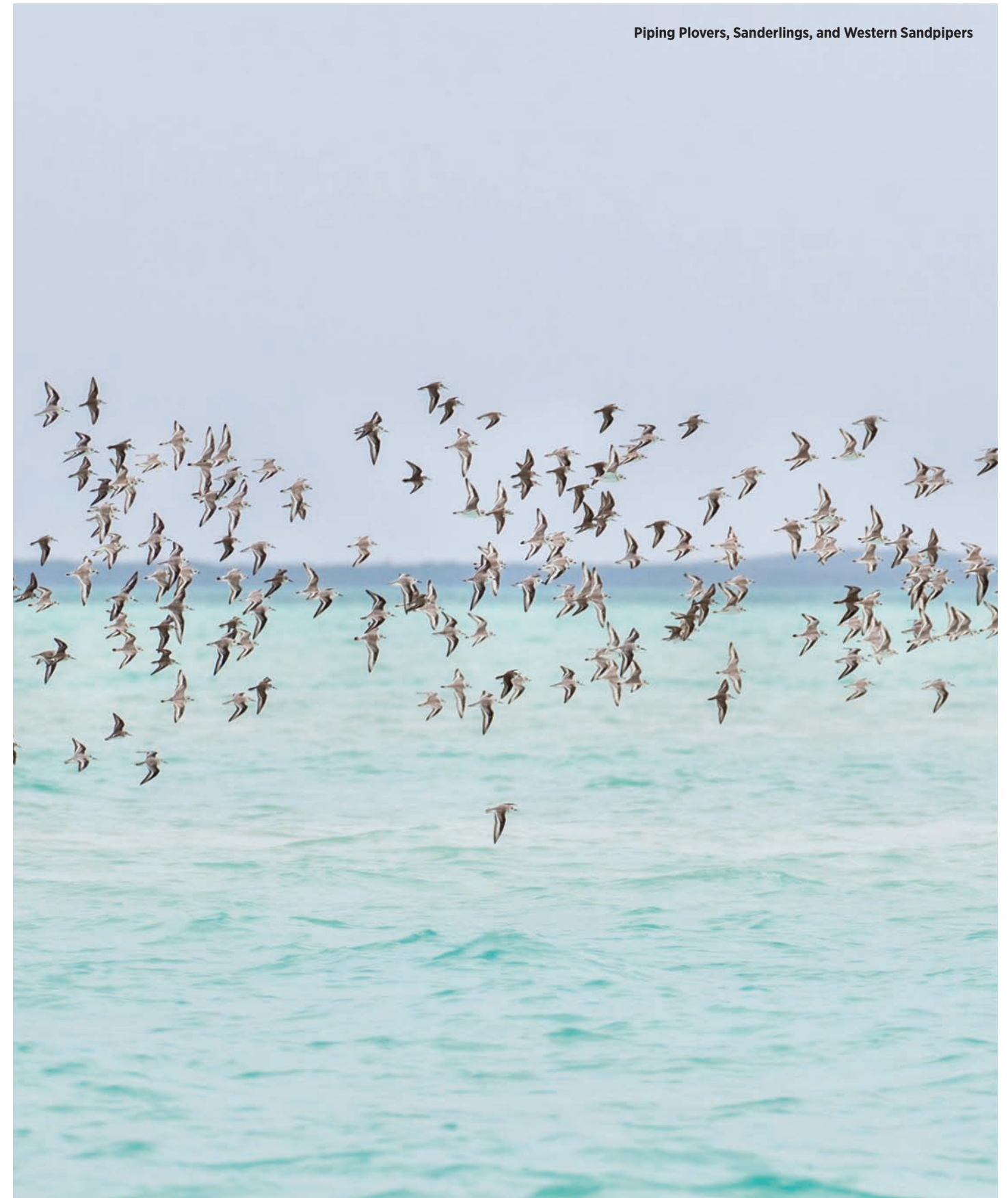
out to its members, urging bird-watchers to consider visiting destinations where a birding vacation can help to improve communities in and around protected areas.

A total of 175 men and 101 women attended the basic guide training, while 63 men and 12 women completed advanced training. Many reported that the program was among the most significant experiences of their professional and personal lives. The project also boosted the capacity of citizen-science initiatives such as bird counts and censuses, and added some 120 participants to eBird, an online database of bird observations that provides researchers and amateur naturalists with real-time data about bird distribution and abundance. Finally, more than 5,000 children and nearly 1,800 adults participated in bird-related environmental education programs—many of which were led by newly trained guides.

The program produced countless friendships, business partnerships, alliances, and networks of conservationists that continue to grow in number and influence.

*\*All dollar amounts throughout this booklet are in U.S. dollars.*

Piping Plovers, Sanderlings, and Western Sandpipers



Audubon worked with partners in four countries to build an ecotourism program that creates an economic incentive to protect birds and wildlife. Guide training and, where applicable, English-language instruction provided the foundation for this goal. But the guides themselves weren't the only beneficiaries.

Supply-side development

We have improved infrastructure and capacity of bird-based tourism for communities.

124

guides improved English skills through training

276

guides trained at the basic level; **72 at the advanced level**

408

local business owners participated in trainings

Demand-side development

We have helped create marketing and stakeholder partnerships to drive ecotourism.

27

local businesses now promote bird tourism

17

events to promote bird-based tourism

5

in-country birding festivals

Conservation & community engagement

We have improved outreach and education, site planning, and citizen-science participation.

119

new eBird users; Belize now in top 3 in Central America for eBird use

95%

reduction in poaching in Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary

5,526

children received environmental/ bird education classes

Research and knowledge sharing

We have driven understanding of marketplace opportunities for partner countries.

\$17.3B

spent annually on wildlife-watching trip-related expenses (U.S.)

\$500M

spent annually on birding in the UK

20M

United States citizens took birding trips from 2005 to 2009



Great Lizard-Cuckoo

# BELIZE

A land of Scarlet  
Macaws and jaguars

Snapshot:

**\$47M**

spent by tourists on birding (2012)



**M**orning in Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Refuge comes early, and the earliest birds begin calling across the jungle canopy well before dawn. This habitat, part of the Maya Forest that extends from central-eastern Belize through parts of Guatemala, is home to a variety of birds and wildlife, including the infamously elusive jaguar.

But resting atop the bucket-list must-see mountain alongside the jaguar are Scarlet Macaws. These bright red parrots spend their winters flying around Cockscomb Basin and regularly visiting the nearby town of Red Bank, Belize. Audubon has trained a number of Red Bank residents to be bird guides for tourists who come to see the macaws. The area is rich in other birdlife, including two species of manikins, plus Boat-billed Herons, toucans, and Crested Guan. The goal: promote Scarlet Macaw conservation while reducing poaching pressure on neighboring Cockscomb Basin.

Seven villages dot the landscape around Cockscomb Basin. For a long time, the local major employer was a shrimp farm located just off the coast south of the town of Dangriga. But the shrimp farm closed a few years ago, around the same time that the Belizean government seized a banana plantation because its owner had ties to narcotraf-ficking, leaving the residents without economic opportunity. During that time, poaching and logging spiked in Cockscomb Basin, as locals tried to feed themselves and stay afloat. A mix of economic development projects, spearheaded by Belize Audubon Society, has brought the poaching in the sanctuary down 95 percent.

Dogs and chickens come out to greet us as we arrive in Red Bank, and then we're quickly introduced to a couple of the local guide-trainees. Diego Ical is 19, and has just finished the beginner's training, and is now licensed to be a local-area guide. Belize is different from many countries, in that all guides except these lo-

*"You can also see youth-education efforts by Belize Audubon. They conduct local classes, which have changed the way kids interact with birds now. Local children cannot be seen with slingshots anymore. When we were kids, we used to catapult stones at birds to see who was a better shot. Now we realize keeping those birds alive gets us healthy income."*  
—Michael Hilchey, Crooked Tree

Our Partners:



cal-area ones must go through an official certification process. Ical says that he plans to pay for the guide certification with the money he makes as a local-area guide in Red Bank. Thomas Can, 18, has also completed the beginner's training. They both have contacts with a local guesthouse, which is where they get many of their clients. Can has already begun his general guide training, but he says he would like to specialize afterward, and focus just on bird guiding.

But Red Bank is not the only birdy place in Belize. Audubon-trained guide Telma Garcia is a professional guide at Caves Branch, an area just north and west of Cockscomb Basin. She's been a certified guide for years, but decided to take the birding-guide course because so many of her clients would ask about bird IDs when they were on their way to zip-lining adventures or cave tubing. For Garcia, the training was about making her a better guide and a better spokesperson for all that Belize has to offer.

Isael Mai, another certified guide who has finished both beginning and advanced birding courses, is a legit birding fiend. When he's not leading tours, he's working with Belize Conservation in the Chiquibul Forest and in Belize's pine savannahs to protect Scarlet Macaws and Yellow-headed Parrots from disappearing into the illegal pet trade.

That passion for conservation—and finding ways for conservation to peacefully coexist with economic development—was readily apparent among all of the guides and students and guesthouse owners and tour operators we met as we traveled through Belize. With dedication and hope and work, Belize could be a model for sustainable tourism in Central America.



**Guide Spotlight:** Albert Shol

On any given day during the school year, Albert Shol can be found in the communities around Cockscomb Basin. Shol started working with Belize Audubon Society four years ago, and his work focuses mostly on education and community conservation, teaching local schoolchildren about the rich biodiversity that surrounds them. In addition to completing the beginning guide-training program, Shol was one of two staffers from Belize Audubon to participate in a work-exchange and capacity-building program with National Audubon in 2016. Both Shol and colleague Amanda Gillette gained valuable education and sanctuary-management skills while working at two Audubon properties; Shol worked at the Audubon Center in Greenwich, Connecticut, while Gillette worked at Constitution Marsh in New York state.



Slaty-tailed Trogon

While the goal of the project is to help create a new niche in ecotourism as a way to drive conservation efforts, the benefits of the project extend beyond traditional conservation and development efforts.

<b>45</b> guides trained, basic level	<b>20</b> guides trained, advanced level	<b>137</b> local business owners participated in trainings
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Where we work in Belize



**3,701**  
children educated

<b>14</b> businesses promoting bird tourism	<b>31</b> new eBird users	<b>1,428</b> adults engaged
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# GUATEMALA

Go birding  
with the Maya

Snapshot:

9%

Total Contribution  
of Travel & Tourism  
to GDP (2014)

Resplendent Quetzal

# ATITLÁN

The bow of our launch cuts through a low layer of fog as we head across Lake Atitlán just before sunrise on a Tuesday morning. Considered by many to be the most beautiful lake on Earth, the 340m-deep lake fills a caldera formed 84,000 years ago when built-up gases blew the top off a massive volcano.

Flanked by three newer volcanoes, the lake is surrounded by steep mountainsides and forests. Four of Guatemala's seven biomes meet and overlap here, making the Atitlan region a natural "gas station" for

birds heading north or south.

Guatemala's 36-year civil war ended in 1996, boosting bird tourism in the Atitlán region, where an ambitious birder can catch a glimpse of many of the 450 species that have been spotted here. Though options for tourists have blossomed over the past two decades, the disparities that led to the war persist. In the towns surrounding the lake, which are mostly populated by indigenous Tz'utujil and Kaqchikel people, more than 75 percent of residents live below the poverty line.

Birding guide Juan Chocoy, who had until recently been a fisherman, meets us at the wharf in San Juan. With him are guides Juan Soliz and Benjamin

"In a few months I went from knowing very little to becoming a specialized birding guide. Now tour companies are calling me, and I'm part of a community that's helping to save forests and birds."

—Rony Anibal Xep

Our Partners:



Hernandez. Chocoy, who left school after the second grade to help support his family, says he was lucky to make \$50 per week fishing. Now, he can make up to \$100 for a half-day of bird guiding.

Marlon Calderon of Asociación Vivamos Mejor, Audubon's local conservation partner, is justifiably proud of his crew of guides. Indeed, their skill and professionalism are impressive: In one mid-morning quest to spot a Resplendent Quetzal—we eventually located a family of four—the guides identified 25 species in a 10-minute period.

Of the 108 graduates of the beginner's course, 15 went on to successfully complete the advanced course. "What surprised me was that the least educated participants tended to be the highest performers," says Calderon. "Their eyes and ears and instincts seem to be sharper."

Every guide interviewed said that the single most important improvement that could be made to the training would be to extend language instruction beyond bird names and rudimentary phrases. But the overwhelming majority of participants say that the overall experience has been transformative; many have decided to invest in guiding as their life's work.

Among them is Alfredo Tol, who is transitioning to full-time guiding from driving a three-wheeled "tuk-tuk" taxi. Pablo Chumil, who had been guiding nature and archaeology tours for several years, is now guiding birders almost exclusively as a tour leader for Rockjumper Birding Tours. German Cholutío was working as a coffee roaster and considering a career in nursing when he heard about the birding course.

"I came mainly out of



## Guide Spotlight: Everilda Ruchan

Everilda Buchan was born near Guatemala's Pacific Coast and raised on the farm where her parents worked. She was forced to drop out of school after second grade to help support the family.

"I was born in nature, and that's where I want to bring people, especially children," she says. "Those who know nature are the ones who care about it. Those who don't know it don't care."

Buchan, who had the highest score in the advanced bird-guiding course, says the course's multi-day field trip to different regions of Guatemala was the highlight of her life.

"It was like a university for me," she says. "Discovering the other places in my country—the jungle, the high mountains, the seacoast—how else could a person like me ever hope to experience these things?"

curiosity," he says. "But on the second day they gave us binoculars and I focused in on a Blue-gray Tanager. At that moment I fell in love with birds. I wanted to know everything I could about them."

Maritza Puac, who lives in San Juan, was enrolled in a business education program while she was taking the

birding course. "I was thinking, 'What business is missing in my village?'"

With the support of her family, Puac spent 18 months building a bird-themed restaurant, which opened in April of 2017. "It's the new hot spot for people who love birds," says Puac. "And for people who love people who love birds!"

While the goal of the project is to help create a new niche in ecotourism as a way to drive conservation efforts, the benefits of the project extend beyond traditional conservation and development efforts.

108

guides trained, basic level

25

guides trained, advanced level

24

local business owners participated in trainings

## Where we work in Guatemala



761

children educated

5

businesses promoting bird tourism

28

new eBird users

178

adults engaged

# PETÉN

The Maya Forest is the largest tropical rainforest north of the Amazon Basin, stretching across Belize and southern Mexico and northern Guatemala’s Petén region. Though Petén contains about half of Guatemala’s forests, habitat loss is accelerating as trespassers clear land for large-scale agriculture (including palm oil and cattle) and human settlement.

In the southern region of the Maya Forest lie the ruins of Tikal, an ancient Mayan ceremonial center with magnificent temples, pyramids, palaces, and public squares. Inhabited from the 6th century BCE to the 10th century CE, Tikal now receives hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world each year.

Tikal, surrounded by lush jungle, is also a refuge for wildlife. For many visitors a close-up encounter with a howler monkey, an agouti, or a gray fox will be at least as memorable as the architecture. From temple tops or forest edges, a birder might spot a Keel-billed Toucan, any of several neotropical raptors, or a rare Orange-breasted Falcon.

Marcial Córdoba was 10 years old when his father was assassinated, a victim of Guatemala’s long Civil War. Soon afterward, the boy joined his siblings in selling soda to Tikal’s thirsty tourists, carrying cases of bottles up and down hills and pyramids. Córdoba eventually became a field coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society, Audubon’s partner in Petén.

Near the park’s pedestrian entrance, Córdoba spots Melvin Herlindo García, Kevin Reyes, and José Pinelo—three graduates of the birding courses who are waiting for clients. Whereas the going rate for a half-day architecture tour in Tikal is \$60, specialized bird guides command \$100.

But there’s never any jostling for clients or any pressure to hire a guide.

“To protect the visitor experience, we have a system to determine who is next,” says García. “This is a sacred site.”

García is one of 10 Petén guides who finished the advanced course; a total of 54 students from five communities completed the basic course.

At Tikal, the work is steady. But at Uaxactun, a village 12 km north of Tikal with smaller Mayan ruins, birding clients

are harder to find.

“We have many high-quality birds, and we charge half of what people pay at Tikal,” says guide José Barrientos. “We even have a woman who will cook food for visitors. But most people arrive on buses with box lunches and their own guide. When that happens we are not earning anything.”

In their all-too-ample free time, guides have taken it upon themselves to fight littering; they built recycling bins, organized village cleanup days, and put up anti-littering signs.

Córdoba hopes a soon-to-be-live website and new trail signs (courtesy of the Audubon/IDB project) will help attract more visitors to Uaxactun. “The ruins aren’t enough,” says Córdoba. “We need to market this as a place where people can see birds and have adventures.” Córdoba believes that it’s going to take some time—perhaps five years—to see *aviturismo* pick up in Uaxactun. The late afternoon sunlight at Tikal is just as enchanting as the first morning rays—and it seems to bring out just as many birds. As Córdoba walks through the exit gate, he checks his tally of bird species.

“Sixty-six species,” he says. “That’s not a bad day of birding.”



Yucatan Jay



## Guide Spotlight: Marlo García

“It’s understandable if someone is hunting a bird to feed his family,” says guide Marlo García. “But it’s such a shame to see a kid shooting a bird just to knock it out of a tree.”

Like other members of the Petén Birders Club, García visits local schools to teach children about birds. If he sees a boy shooting at birds with a slingshot (a common pastime in Central America), he’ll invite the child to look through his binoculars.

“Once they see how beautiful birds are, their mentality starts to change. Then I tell him, ‘I am a *parajero* too,’ using the Spanish word that can mean ‘bird hunter,’” says García.

Snapshot:  
**\$39M**  
spent by tourists on birding (2014)

A different  
kind of island  
paradise

# THE BAHAMAS

In the 30 minutes that Samuel Nelson has spent walking through Nicholls Town at the north end of Andros Island, he’s seen 17 species of birds. But his most-desired quarry has, thus far, eluded him.

Following his ear, Nelson enters the unpaved parking lot behind the Pineville Hotel. He cocks an ear toward an adjacent thicket, then turns and comes to a halt under a coconut palm tree, a grin spreading across his face.

“There you are,” Nelson says, squinting up at the broad leaves. “I’ve got you now!”

The most endangered bird in the Caribbean, the Bahama Oriole, has set up housekeeping under a palm leaf, protected from rain and all but the most tenacious predators.

Nelson is one of nine graduates of the Bahamas advanced course, which was conducted on Andros Island as well as Inagua Island, some 600 km to the southeast. (The basic class had 49 graduates.)

Andros and Inagua are what Bahamians call “family islands.” This is not the Bahamas that most tourists imagine. On these less-developed islands unemployment is high, poverty is increasing, and ambitious young adults are leaving for better opportunities elsewhere.

With its stark, scrubby landscapes and long, straight roads, Andros often seems more like western Texas than the Caribbean. For birders, though, Andros is a paradise. Depending on the time of year, a visitor can see world-traveling shorebirds such as the Piping Plover or inland residents like the Great Lizard-Cuckoo. Other uncommon birds that spend at least a part of the year on Andros include the Bahama



Bahama Oriole

Yellowthroat, Bahama Swallow, Key West Quail Dove, and West Indian Whistling Duck.

Inagua Island’s relative isolation and unusual habitats make it an attractive environment for the more than 200 species that winter on the island, including the world’s largest breeding colony of American Flamingos. The comeback of the flamingo, which was hunted almost to extinction, is one of the Caribbean’s greatest conservation success stories.

“In the 1950s, my grandfather and his cousin Jimmy went from being the best flamingo hunters on Inagua to being some of the first wardens that helped bring flamingos back from the brink,” says Randolph “Casper” Burrows, one of three Inagua islanders to complete both the basic and advanced courses.

Burrows specializes in showing visiting sailors and other visitors the reclusive flamingos in their natural habitat.

“We had 15,000 to 20,000

“We know it’s not an overnight thing that’s going to radically change the island economy right away. But we know that it’s viable.”

—Carlene Woods

hatchlings this year, which means the total population is getting up close to 100,000 birds,” he says.

In January, the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism made it a national priority to promote Andros and Inagua islands to birders. On both islands, bird lovers are beginning to show up more often, booking hotel rooms and hiring guides. Birding seems to be on the verge of becoming a significant alternative for local economic development.

“I’ll admit I was skeptical about whether this project could make a real difference,” says Scott Johnson, a science officer with the Bahamas National Trust who taught the advanced course. “But I think the sustained effort has started to pay off. Instead of conservationists using people to get what they want and then leaving, they are building relationships in the community. People don’t feel used; they feel that they’re benefitting from the work that’s being done.”

Our Partners:



Guide Spotlight: Lebron “Roni” Rolle

“I didn’t notice birds much before,” says Lebron “Roni” Rolle. “But now I see and hear them everywhere.”

Rolle, a student at the Bahamas Agriculture & Marine Science Institute (BAMSI), did so well in the Audubon guide-training course that University of Maryland ornithologist Kevin Omland invited him (as well as trainee Latia Smith) to join the Bahama Oriole Project as a field assistant.

The project had been launched with the goal of reversing the Bahama Oriole’s decline through research, conservation, and education. On the first day of fieldwork in 2016, Rolle discovered an active nest with two adult Bahama Orioles and several fledglings. The nest was not in a coconut tree, as expected, but in a Caribbean pine. On following days, Rolle’s team found another nest in a thatch palm, and several more pairs of birds with territories in the pine forest. The discovery of pine-forest nesting overturned previous assumptions about Bahama Oriole breeding ecology.

“With the finding we realized that there was more habitat and potentially more birds than anyone thought before,” says Rolle. “That was very good news for the bird.”



While the goal of the project is to help create a new niche in ecotourism as a way to drive conservation efforts, the benefits of the project extend beyond traditional conservation and development efforts.

49  
guides trained,  
basic level

9  
guides trained,  
advanced level

5  
businesses  
promoting bird  
tourism

Where we work in The Bahamas



29  
new ebird users

91  
adults  
engaged

716  
children educated

Snapshot:

4.1%

Total Contribution of Travel  
& Tourism to GDP (2014)

Swallow-tailed Hummingbird

A next-level  
tourism  
destination

PARAGUAY



Paraguay currently attracts so few birders that participants in the country's guide-training program say it's difficult to imagine guiding as a full-time career. That may be about to change, as word gets out about Paraguay's avian riches. The compact and easily traveled country hosts some 700 bird species, including many sought-after birds that are easier to see here than anywhere else.

Even within the city limits of the capital, Asunción, birders have spotted more than 260 species, including the near-threatened Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Beyond the city, the country's habitats include parts of the world's largest dry forest (the Grand Chaco Americano) as well as the world's most extensive wetlands (the Pantanal).

And the sooner bird lovers can get to Paraguay, the better. The country's future hangs in the balance between unsustainable exploitation and deforestation, and conservation of natural habitats and the people and animals that depend on them.

Among the increasingly

disconnected remnants of Atlantic forest is San Rafael National Park, which was declared Paraguay's first IBA in 2005. The park's headquarters crown a stunningly scenic knoll situated at the transition zone between natural southern grassland and Atlantic forest. With its comfortable guesthouses, Audubon-trained guides, and the opportunity to see many of the 436 woodland and grassland birds recorded here, San Rafael is the one of the best places in the country to research or enjoy birds.

The park is surrounded by small-scale farms and indigenous villages. In an effort to limit deforestation on these private lands, Audubon's partner organization Guyra Paraguay has been working with farmers to experiment with tourism and alternative crops or growing methods. In two villages, farmers have planted organic yerba mate, which requires shade trees overhead.

"We can already see the difference," says farmer Egner Arnalod Beis, who planted his

"The guide training came at the perfect time, just as we were starting to get calls from international tour operators. Now we can confidently say that Paraguay has the people who can take your people birding."  
—Oscar Rodriguez

Our Partners:



first yerba mate last year. "We're seeing more birds, especially the toucans and tinamous. Most people don't know that you can make money off a crop and conserve the birds and trees also."

Though Paraguay doesn't have a history of robust environmental activism, "environmental consciousness is growing," says Alberto Esquivel, who instructed the basic guiding course. "The other day my father-in-law was talking about saving the jaguars. That was a first!"

Esquivel's students were a diverse group—students, educators, attorneys, economists, even a nuclear physicist—whose motivations for participating were as varied as their careers.

"Suddenly everyone's interested in birding," says Tatiana Galluppi of Guyra Paraguay, whose schedule has, of late, become packed with radio and television appearances.

So far this year, bird guide Oscar Rodriguez has fielded calls from specialized operators like BirdQuest and Sunbird Tours. The seven tours that are scheduled for 2017 are more than he's had in the previous three years combined.

But bird-specific tourism in Paraguay, and tourism in general, are still perched on the starting block. The country's tourist infrastructure is limited, accommodations are rustic, and culinary traditions are indistinct. Few of the trained guides speak English well, and even fewer have vehicles that are suitable for ferrying passengers around.

"The word is getting out that we've got great birding here," Rodriguez adds. "It's going to take some time to build momentum, but eventually they will come. The trick now is to make sure that when they arrive we'll be ready."



Guide Spotlight: Evelyn Britiz

The interest in birding and nature may seem new to Paraguayans, says Evelyn Britiz, "but it also reflects a longing to reconnect with older, deeper rhythms that remind people of how they fit into the community of life on Earth."

With landscapes and society changing so rapidly, Paraguayans sometimes forget that many of the country's traditional songs and stories feature birds, says Britiz, who leads informal weekend bird-watching tours.

"If we can use birdwatching as a way to make nature more accessible, we'll be able to connect more people to an environment that they'll have an interest in saving."

While the goal of the project is to help create a new niche in ecotourism as a way to drive conservation efforts, the benefits of the project extend beyond traditional conservation and development efforts.

74	18	162
guides trained, basic level	guides trained, advanced level	local business owners participated in trainings

Where we work in Paraguay



348  
children educated

3	31	83
businesses promoting bird tourism	new eBird users	adults engaged

# Strengthening Bird-based Tourism



Reddish Egret

**T**he Bahamas receives millions of visitors each year. These visitors are travelling to The Bahamas to experience our natural beauty. Traditionally, natural beauty was referred to as the island's sun, sand, and sea assets. However, the current trend and the demand from the more environmentally conscious visitor is for a more modern type of vacation that goes beyond the sun, sand, and sea model. This type of traveler desires to experience the true natural beauty of our Islands through Nature Tourism.

By participating in the Strengthening of Bird-based Tourism as a Conservation and Sustainable Development Tool Program, with our partners the National Audubon Society and The Bahamas National Trust, we are now able to brand islands such as Inagua and Andros as the birding paradise with professionally trained birding guides. These guides are now capable of capitalizing on this lucrative field of nature tourism becoming entrepreneurs in their own right.

We are very proud of the product which was produced from this program and are now investing in this niche market to further assist this venture into a sustainable product offering for The Bahamas.

We wish to thank the National Audubon Society for choosing The Bahamas as one of the destinations to participate in this pilot program and for molding The Bahamas' Birding Tourism product. We look forward to future collaborations as we build upon this solid foundation.

**Ellison 'Tommy' Thompson**

Deputy Director General  
Bahamas Ministry Of Tourism

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# How Birds Can Lead to Business



**G**iving real economic value to birds and habitats is an essential component for creating local and regional conditions to save birds, other wildlife, and their habitats in partnership with local people.

This pilot initiative represents the beginning of a more robust niche bird ecotourism sector that can help build and sustain bird and wildlife conservation efforts, and also align those efforts with socioeconomic development to support and build more resilient local economies. The local leadership by the five nonprofit organizations engaged across the Americas has been essential to the success of this program. Their support for this initiative and their work with local communities has

helped secure long-term sustainability of the project.

For the success of bird-based tourism initiatives, both in the short term and in the long term, the tactics deployed during this initial pilot phase must be integrated thoroughly with a systematic approach to addressing sustainable development issues for communities near priority bird and animal habitats. We hope that this document helps to provide examples and can serve as a base model for this type of approach to conservation.

A key purpose of this booklet is to provide guidance for those who want to invest energy, funds, and other resources in bird-based tourism efforts.

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