

NBC Conservation Awards Update

Compiled by Jez Bird

The Neotropical Bird Club (NBC) Conservation Awards Programme has grown significantly in recent years thanks to the support of private individuals and foundations alike. In 2016 (*Neotropical Birding* 18: 60–63) we announced an increase in both the number of awards and their value (to \$1,500, \$3,000 and \$5,000). We have been extremely pleased with the response that this has elicited, with sharp increases in the number of applicants to the programme and in the overall amount disbursed during 2016.

The deadlines for Conservation Award applications are 1 January and 1 July each year. Full details of the awards programme and application process can be found on the NBC website (www.neotropicalbirdclub.org/conservation/conservation-fund/). The NBC Conservation Awards Programme would be unable to support the projects we do without the generous support of organisations (especially the Tides Foundation) and individuals. If you or your company would like to donate to the programme please contact Chris Sharpe (NBCawards@gmail.com).

2016 awards

NBC was able to offer nine awards during 2016:

1. Conservation of Chaco Eagle *Buteogallus coronatus* in Córdoba, Argentina: identifying new areas to protect. Verónica Inés Serman, Argentina. Awarded \$1,500.
2. Assessing the illegal trade in Red Siskin *Spinus cucullatus* in Venezuela. Ada Sánchez-Mercado, Venezuela. Awarded \$2,936.
3. Investigating the conservation and habitat of Grey-backed Hawk *Pseudastur occidentalis* in northwestern Peru. Renzo Piana, Peru. Awarded \$2,810.
4. Ecology and conservation of the Wattled Curassow *Crax globulosa*: one of the Amazon's most threatened birds. Alicia Carolina Bertsch, Brazil. Awarded \$2,950.
5. Advancing the conservation of Rufous-faced Crane *Laterallus xenopterus*. Emiliano Agustín Depino – Paraguay. Awarded \$1,500.
6. In pursuit of the rarest: using sound recorders to detect endangered and possibly extinct bird species at Serra do Urubu, Pernambuco, Brazil. Thiago Vernaschi Vieira da Costa, Brazil. Awarded \$5,000.
7. New surveys for Zapata Rail *Cyanolimnus cerverai*, the elusive and poorly known Cuban endemic. Nils Navarro Pacheco, Cuba. Awarded \$3,000.
8. A second outreach campaign for the protection of the Critically Endangered White-winged Guan *Penelope albipennis* in the Tumbesian region of Peru. Fabiola Riva Melofiro, Peru. Awarded \$3,000.
9. Surveying an 'Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in Danger' for White-winged Nightjar *Eleothreptus candicans*. Joseph Sarvary, Paraguay. Awarded \$4,920.

Updates from past awards

First, congratulations to Argentina's Instituto Espaço Silvestre. Bianca Bonaparte at the institute received a NBC Conservation Award in 2013 for her project working on the Endangered Vinaceous-breasted Amazon *Amazona vinacea* (see *Neotropical Birding* 16: 66). The institute recently received its first international award for its work on Vinaceous-breasted Amazon, which was recognised as one of the top 50 social and environmental projects in Latin America in the 'biodiversity and wildlife' category of the *Premios Latin América Verde* (Latin American 'Green Awards'). And, in August 2016 the institute received the Premio Expressão de Ecologia, the highest environmental accolade given by the Brazilian Ministry of Environment. Since 2010 the project has rehabilitated more than 80 Vinaceous-breasted Amazons, and following their work on education and livelihoods there has been a 62% increase in women's income in villages around Parque Nacional Araucárias.

Community assembly under climate change: understanding and predicting bird community responses: US\$1,396.

Project dates: May 2015 to September 2016. Understanding and predicting climate change effects on biological communities has become a priority for conservation (Morn & Lechowicz 2008, Gilman *et al.* 2010, Bellard *et al.* 2012, Fordham *et al.* 2013). This project focused on a hyperdiverse area for birds in Bolivia: the humid montane forest of the tropical Andes, locally known as Yungas.

With more than 600 species recorded, the Yungas harbours almost half of Bolivia's bird species, including five of the 14 endemic species in the country (Balderrama 2009). The Yungas is also a highly threatened ecosystem that is particularly vulnerable to global climate change.

I examined factors governing the make-up of bird communities at different altitudes along two well-conserved elevational gradients in the Bolivian Andes. Through intense audiovisual censuses conducted between April and November across elevations (replicated eight times per complete gradient) I collected data on bird communities in 200 m elevational bands from 1,350–3,650 m. Bird species within each 200 m band were gathered to represent an 'assemblage' for data analyses. Overall, I recorded 349 resident species in the study gradients.

At the end of the field season, I visited the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, IL, USA) and gathered morphological information on 325 bird species detected on my censuses. Data on nine morphological traits related with foraging ecology and flight performance were gathered for 3–8 individuals per species (depending on available skins). A database of ecological traits was also developed from literature and field observations. Ecological and morphological traits were used to calculate functional diversity indices for the assemblage of each elevational band. As expected, my preliminary results show a decay of functional diversity with elevation. However, different traits show different patterns of diversity.

After this interesting result, the project was extended for another long field season (May–October 2016) to enable collection of further information to better explore local changes in functional traits across these gradients and to investigate potential hypotheses that might explain these patterns. My preliminary explorations reveal, as expected, that temperature and slope are the main factors explaining changes in functional diversity across these gradients. That said, novel models will be developed as new field information is added. The first phase of the project has been successfully completed; I am now working on the second phase. Concluding in August 2017, this will model community changes under determined climate change scenarios. The results will hopefully have implications for the conservation of threatened and endemic species in the Yungas under a changing climate.

Finally, the project has also included a strong educational component. Six Bolivian biology students have participated in bird censuses and

data collection, of whom two are continuing their involvement in the project.

Flavia A. Montaña Centellas

Current status of the Endangered Apolinar's Wren *Cistothorus apolinari* in the wetlands of Bogotá: US\$1,200.

Project dates: July–November 2014. Surveys were conducted from July–November 2014 to record information on the abundance and habitat preferences of the Endangered Apolinar's Wren *Cistothorus apolinari* in key wetlands in the savanna of Bogotá, Colombia. The study also aimed to identify key threats.

We visited several wetlands: Torca–Guaymaral; La Conejera; Humedal Juan Amarillo; Jaboque; Florida; and Tibanica. Sites were selected based on historical records of the species. On average five visits were made to each site. Surveys recorded just four individuals from three locations. Despite this, there was apparently suitable vegetation at all wetlands visited (something that we determined using historical descriptions of vegetation taken when previous records of Apolinar's Wren were made).

A major threat to Apolinar's Wren identified during the study is the apparent abundance of Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*. This species has been recorded parasitising the nests of Apolinar's Wren. It may have increased owing to other human modifications to the landscape, but with the wren population now perilously low, further suppression by cowbird parasitism is a real threat to its persistence.

Other threats facing the species recorded during the study were the presence of semi-feral dogs (which potentially predate wrens), and habitat degradation related to burning, improper disposal of solid waste in wetlands, desiccation of wetlands and pollution of waterbodies. Wetlands in the region are under further pressure because the rural poor have moved into areas of marshland, fuelling further habitat clearance and drainage.

Cucarachero is the local name for Apolinar's Wren. In November 2015 the 'Cucarachero Wetland Fayre' was held to highlight to local

Visit the NBC website <http://neotropicalbirdclub.org> for more information about the NBC Conservation Fund, including guidelines for applicants and a link to download an application form. The guidelines and form are also available in Spanish.



- 1** Violet-throated Starfrontlet *Coeligena violifer* feeding on *Puya atra*, an endemic bromeliad from the Bolivian Yungas (Cesar Mayta).
- 2** The Critically Endangered Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi* is being monitored in the Pernambuco Centre of Endemism (Márcio Efe).

communities the ecology and conservation significance of the species and the deteriorating state of the region's wetlands.

Adriana Sua-Becerra

Monitoring and conservation of the endemic and endangered birds of the Pernambuco Centre of Endemism: US\$1,200.

Project dates: January 2015 to September 2016. The project aims to monitor bird populations of the Pernambuco Centre of Endemism to

increase knowledge about the life history and population of endemic and endangered species. In every month since 2010, we have conducted at least two days (20 hours) mist-netting. Birds are captured along 12 lines of mist-nets distributed in various locations within an area of 100 ha at Fazenda Bananeira, part of the Estação Ecológica Murici Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. We mark captured birds with a metal ring and a combination of coloured bands (rings), and check them for moult and brood patches. Home ranges of individual birds are informed by recaptures. Breeding and natural history data are gathered



3 Hiking into the remote Parque nacional Cerro Hoyo, Panama, to study the recently discovered hummingbird *Lampornis* sp. nov. (Ernesto Buitrago).

4 The study calculated population estimates for *Lampornis* sp. nov. from two sites within Cerro Hoya using capture-mark-recapture methods (Ernesto Buitrago).

5 Guanay Cormorant *Phalacrocorax bougainvillorum* was the most commonly recorded species during surveys of dead seabirds on Chile's strandline (Matías Toro). Understanding threats to this Near Threatened species is a priority.



during nest searches. When we find a nest, we take a description and measurements, and record eggs and chicks. We investigate nest predation with the help of camera traps.

NBC funded this monitoring programme in 2015 and 2016 during which years we completed 23 monitoring visits. The most commonly captured species were Black-cheeked Gnatcatcher *Conopophaga melanops* (endemic to Brazil), White-throated Spadebill *Platyrinchus mystaceus* and the local Pernambuco subspecies of White-shouldered Fire-eye *Pyriglena leuconata pernambucensis*. In terms of conservation

significance, Fazenda Bananeira may now be the only remaining area for the Critically Endangered Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi*. Its population here is estimated at fewer than 30 individuals; we succeeded in banding 14. In addition, we found and monitored 19 nests belonging to 11 other species. Twelve nests were predated, four abandoned and just three succeeded. The monitoring programme will continue, hopefully alongside direct conservation activities aiming to improve the status of this threatened avifauna.

Marcio Amorim Efe

Population density and dietary niche of a new species of mountaingem hummingbird (*Lampornis* sp. nov.) from Parque Nacional Cerro Hoya, Azuero Peninsula, Panama: US\$1,300.

Project dates: February–May 2016. Parque Nacional Cerro Hoya (PNCH) represents one of the most important yet neglected protected areas in Panama. Its remoteness has prevented deforestation but also has limited scientific exploration. The main objective of this project was to gather important data to inform the conservation status of a recently discovered but as-yet undescribed hummingbird of the genus *Lampornis* by estimating the population size via capture–mark–recapture, and exploring aspects of its natural history such as dietary niche.

We conducted four surveys, each lasting six days, at two different sites in PNCH—namely El Águila and La Baja—between February and May 2016. At each site we erected 12 mist-nets (each 12 m x 3 m) to capture and mark hummingbirds, prior to a single recapture session one month later. We opportunistically recorded feeding behaviours. Finally, we estimated the diversity and abundances of flowering trees and collected samples of plants on which the hummingbirds were feeding or from which they were defending territories.

During the capture–mark session in El Águila we banded 15 individuals of the new hummingbird, and during the recapture session we trapped 14. In La Baja we banded 22 individuals during capture–mark session, and 17 were trapped during the recapture session. Two banded birds were recaptured at both El Águila and La Bahía. In both places males were more abundant than females.

Using the Lincoln–Petersen Index general equation $R/S = M/N$ (where M represents the number of animals marked and released; N, the population size; R, the number of animals recaptured; and S, the total individuals captured in the recapture sessions), we calculated population sizes of 105 and 187 individuals at El Águila and La Baja, respectively. Using an alternative calculation, the Chapman Index, we calculated populations of 79 and 137 individuals.

The dominant plant species in La Baja was *Oreomunnea* sp., representing around 80% of the abundance of tree species in three 20 m x 20 m transects, followed by *Inga* sp. and *Quercus* sp., at around 8–10% per transect. Similar observations have been made in other locations in Cerro Hoya.

Surprisingly, we did not observe *Lampornis* sp. nov. feeding at flowers of these plants. Instead individuals were drinking from honeydew excreted by currently unidentified scale insects (Hemiptera: Coccoidea). The insects were found primarily on saplings of *Oreomunnea* sp. and *Inga* sp.

Daniel Ernesto Buitrago Rosas

Beached seabirds as indicator of ecosystem health in four important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) in Chile: US\$1,400.

Project dates: March 2016 to February 2017. This project is part of a long-term project in Chile called Red de Varamientos de Aves Marinas (REVAM, Network for Seabird Strandings; see revamchile.weebly.com/) that aims to establish a database on seabird mortality and factors related to mortality events. We seek to determine the causes of seabirds found dead on beaches, which may comprise bycatch, oil pollution or interaction with marine debris. This provides a valuable indicator of the state of the marine ecosystem and key threats to seabirds.

We conducted surveys in four coastal areas of Chile: Coquimbo Bay (29°55'S 71°16'W), two locations in Valparaíso namely Algarrobo (33°23'S 71°41'W) and El Tabo (33°47'S 71°64'W), and Iloca (34°57'S 72°11'W). Two of these sites—Coquimbo and Algarrobo—are designated Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas. Surveys consisted of at least two observers walking transects of at least 1 km parallel to the shoreline. By September 2016, we had completed 14 surveys and found 166 specimens corresponding to 14 species grouped in five seabird orders: Suliformes, Charadriiformes, Pelecaniformes, Sphenisciformes and Procellariiformes.

The most abundant species was (the Near Threatened) Guanay Cormorant *Phalacrocorax bougainvilliorum* (34%), followed by Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* (24%), Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata* (16%) and (the Near Threatened) Peruvian Pelican *Pelecanus thagus* (8%). The abundance of dead birds (expressed as birds/km of strandline) was 1.44 birds/km in Coquimbo, 1.86 birds/km across the two locations in Valparaíso and 2.36 birds/km in Iloca. Although there remain, at the time of writing, four months of the survey, results so far show that the dead seabirds are mostly diving species. Due to the rapid action of scavengers on the beaches, it is difficult to find intact seabirds on which to conduct a post-mortem to determine cause of death. However, worldwide

studies suggest that diving birds are susceptible to bycatch in fishing nets. To date we have not found any oiled birds.

We will continue our strandline surveys to compare different IBAs and to determine which species of seabirds are found dead on the beaches and, if possible, the most likely causes. This could feed into future policy and advocacy work to better protect key sites.

Matias Portflitt Toro & Diego Miranda Urbina

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