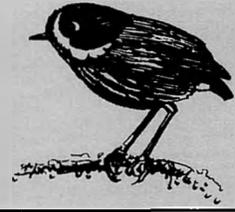


# Neotropical News



## Brazilian Merganser in Argentina: going, going ...

An expedition (Pato Serrucho '93) aimed at discovering the current status of the Brazilian Merganser *Mergus octosetaceus* in Misiones Province, northern Argentina, has just returned to the U.K. *Mergus octosetaceus* is one of the world's rarest species of wildfowl, with a population now estimated to be less than 250 individuals occurring in just three populations, one in northern Argentina, the other two in south-central Brazil.

Three conservation biologists from the U.K. and three South American counterparts surveyed c.450 km of white-water rivers and streams using an inflatable boat. Despite exhaustive searching only one bird was located in an area peripheral to the species's historical stronghold. Former core areas (and incidentally those with the most protection) for this species appear to have been adversely affected by the the Uruguaí dam, which in 1989 flooded c.80 km of the Río Urugua-í. Apart from causing direct flooding of habitat, suitable areas in the upper reaches of the rivers flowing into the dam now appear to hold higher densities of other fish-eating birds, especially Neotropic Cormorants *Phalacrocorax olivaceus*. This cormorant now breeds in large numbers in the dam basin and some appear to travel upstream to feed in the rivers Urugua-í and Uruzú, and may actively compete with *Mergus octosetaceus*. Rivers not draining into the dam, including the Piray-miní where the sole bird was recorded, exhibited a much lower density of cormorants. Additional threats include deforestation and the subsequent increase in turbidity in rivers used by *Mergus octosetaceus*, as well as human disturbance and hunting.

If the survey's results reflect the true status of *Mergus octosetaceus* in Argentina then there is grave cause for concern - local extinction, as in neighbouring Paraguay, seems inevitable.

During the expedition a number of sub-tropical forest sites were surveyed for birds - other threatened species recorded during this period included: Black-fronted Piping-guan *Pipile jacutinga*, Vinaceous Amazon *Amazona vinacea*, Helmeted Woodpecker *Dryocopus galeatus*, White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus*, and São Paulo Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes paulistus*.

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## Black-breasted Puffleg found: extant but seriously threatened.

The Black-breasted Puffleg *Eriocnemis nigrivestis* has been recorded from just two adjacent volcanoes, Volcán Pichincha and Volcán Atacazo, in north-west Ecuador, where it seems to be confined to temperate zone ridge-top vegetation: the species is poorly known and highly threatened<sup>2</sup>. Since 1950, the only confirmed records were of three birds on Cerro Pugsi (on the north slope of Pichincha) in 1980<sup>1</sup>.

From 27 February to 1 March 1993 a search for *Eriocnemis nigrivestis* was crowned with success: an adult male and two females were observed, and documentation was obtained by netting and photographing a female, from which a blood sample for DNA sequencing was obtained. This bird, which weighed 3.95 g, appeared fairly fresh-plumaged and was not moulting. All

three pufflegs were found at 3,300 m on Loma Gramalote near Hacienda Yanacocha (00°06'S 78°35-36'W), an old collecting site for the species. They were found in habitat similar to that on Cerro Pugi in 1980 as described by Bleiweiss and Olalla<sup>1</sup>, i.e. dense ericaceous ridge-crest scrub adjacent to mixed humid forest. During three feeding



**Black-breasted Puffleg** *Eriocnemis nigrivestis* Volcán Pichincha, November 1993 (M.J. Braun)

bouts the species was seen probing apical (red) shoots of *Disterigma* sp. (Ericaceae) without flowers, but whether it was fooled by the flower-like red shoots or was extracting insects is not known. Other food plants noted were *Palicourea* cf. *huigrensis* (Rubiaceae), *Psychotria* sp. (Rubiaceae), *Macleania rupestris* (Ericaceae), and *Vallea stipularis* (Elaeocarpaceae), the latter being a small pink-flowered tree not amongst the 13 food plants used during feeding bouts observed in September 1980, when the tree may not have been flowering<sup>1</sup>.

This hummingbird is seriously threatened by habitat clearance for pasture and firewood, and immediate steps for its protection should be taken. In response to this urgent cry for action, the Ecuadorean NGO CECIA has developed a proposal to study *E.*

*nigrivestis* on Pichincha, and search for the species on Atacazo (R. Phillips pers. comm.) - hopefully these studies will provide some answers to the best way of protecting the bird and its habitat.

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### Ivory-billed Woodpecker feared extinct in Cuba

A three month survey carried out in eastern Cuba, in the area where an Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis* was observed in 1987, failed to find any evidence of the species. The team, consisting of ornithologists from the Instituto de Investigaciones Forestales, Cuba and the Netherlands, also searched the only other piece of suitable habitat remaining on the island, but again found no evidence of the bird. The last confirmed sighting of *Campephilus principalis* in the United States was made in the early 1970s and it now seems certain that the species is extinct.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1993] 15(2).

### Stability in Dominica

Spring 1993 surveys in Dominica showed no significant change in the populations of the two threatened Amazon parrots endemic to the island: the Imperial Amazon *Amazona imperialis* is stable at c.80-100 birds, with c.500 Red-necked Amazons *A. arausiaca* still present. Population monitoring of other birds on the island has shown that certain rainforest species such as Forest Thrush

*Cichlherminia lherminieri*, Ruddy Quail-dove *Geotrygon montana* and Red-necked Pigeon *Columba squamosa*, badly hit during the hurricanes of 1979 and 1980, are continuing to show a healthy recovery.

Source: P. G. H. Evans *in litt.* 1993

### Re-introduction of Plain Pigeons in Puerto Rico

The Plain Pigeon *Columba inornata* is endemic to the Greater Antilles where it is threatened from hunting and habitat loss. A captive breeding programme for the Puerto Rican subspecies *C. i. wetmorei* (which numbers less than 300 in the wild) has now raised more than 100 birds. The first eight were released in April 1993 in the east-central part of the country, and two of the five still surviving appear to have found wild mates.

Source: *Re-introduction News* [1993] 6.

### Fall raptor migration in Veracruz, Mexico

Possibly the world's largest migration of diurnal raptors has recently been reported from Veracruz, Mexico. Each fall, tens of thousands of migrant raptors pass through the state, and in the fall of 1992, 2.5 million birds were seen from vantage points between Cardel inland to Jalapa. Over 1 million Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura*, 900,000 Broad-winged Hawks *Buteo platypterus* and 450,000 Swainson's Hawks *B. swainsoni* were counted, including 435,000 raptors on 30 September. Raptor counts in this area have been carried out by teams from Hawkwatch International and the Mexican conservation organization Ecosfera.

Source: *Raptor Watch* [1992] 7(1): 5.

### Sustainable use of Whistling-duck eggs in El Salvador

Villagers from Jocotal in southern El Salvador have provided more than 480 nest boxes for Black-bellied Whistling-ducks *Dendrocygna autumnalis* in response to a decline in the population following clearance of trees used for nesting and overharvesting of eggs. As a consequence the

population has increased from 500 in the mid-1970s to around 15,000. Several ducks may lay in a single nest that may contain more than 80 eggs. Eggs are removed by the villagers to supplement their diet. Villagers also recently prevented local farmers from draining the wetlands for pasture.

Source: *American Birds* [1993] 47(2).

### First Nature Reserve in French Guiana declared

At the end of 1992, the L'île du Grand Connétable, an island some 18 km off the Guiana coast was declared a nature reserve; the first gazetted in French Guiana. The island is a breeding site for several species of seabird, including 5% of the Caribbean population of the Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*.

Source: *BirdLife International Pan American Bull.* [1993] 8(2).

### Fears for survival of Grey-headed Warbler in Venezuela

A recent visit to Cerro Negro, north-eastern Venezuela, by Jon Curson and David Beadle provided evidence that the Grey-headed Warbler *Basileuterus griseiceps* is now critically endangered. Only two birds were found in a 1-2 km<sup>2</sup> patch of forest, which may be the last suitable patch of forest on Cerro Negro despite being within El Guácharo National Park. The only other known site for the species is Cerro Turumiquire, from where there is no information on its status.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1993] 15(2).

### Tourist developments threaten Ramsar site in Venezuela

The Venezuelan Ministry of Tourism is seeking a loan from the Interamerican Development Bank to build several large hotels inside the buffer zone of the country's only Ramsar site, the Cuare Wildlife Refuge. This is a very important feeding site for the only population of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* in the southern Caribbean and one of the few known sites for Plain-flanked Rail *Rallus wetmorei*.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1993] 15(2).

**Andean Condors released in Venezuela**

Five Andean Condors *Vultur gryphus* bred at San Diego and Los Angeles Zoos were released during February 1993 in the Sierra de la Culata National Park, and appear to have adapted successfully to their Andean home. Another five birds are to be shipped from the U.S.A. towards the end of 1993.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1993] 15(1).

**Canal development threatens the Orinoco**

Plans to canalize the Río Apure and three of its tributaries in Venezuela are predicted to have a devastating effect on wildlife. Two National Parks and two Wildlife Refuges will be destroyed when an estimated 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Llanos (seasonally flooded plains) are converted to intensive agriculture and the area is opened up to water transport. The World Bank refuses to fund the project but the Japanese International Cooperation Agency is carrying out studies with a view to securing loans from Japanese Banks. Important populations of Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber* will be affected if the project goes ahead.

Source: *BBC Wildlife* [1993] 11(4).

**Bogotá endemics under new threats**

The wetlands near Bogotá, Colombia, home to the Bogotá Rail *Rallus semiplumbeus* and Apolinar's Wren *Cistothorus apolinari*, are threatened by proposals to construct a hippodrome at La Florida park and a major new road along the banks of the Río Bogotá. Fundación Natura Colombia is campaigning to stop these developments.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1993] 15(1).

**Podocarpus National Park reprieved from mining**

Following international pressure from environmentalists, the threat of large-scale open-pit mining in Ecuador's Podocarpus National Park has been lifted. However, serious threats still persist since the exploratory activities of the mining company, Ecuator, have led to the development of many trails within the park. These trails have provided access to an estimated 200-500 gold miners as well as illegal loggers

and hunters. There are also proposals to open up all of Ecuador's national Parks to small-scale mining.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1993] 15(2).

**Oil threat to Cuyabeno**

The 650,000 ha Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve in Amazonian Ecuador (Napo state) is under serious and increasing threat from oil exploitation. The reserve is largely intact in the middle and eastern zones close to the Colombian and Peruvian borders, but the western zone has already been despoiled by the oil industry. A new initiative, if agreed by the government in Ecuador, will allow the state-owned company Petroecuador to extract oil from the remaining unspoiled part of the reserve with the obvious potential for widespread environmental degradation.

Source: *BBC Wildlife* [1992] 11(10).

**Blue-throated Macaws found in the wild**

Charlie Munn of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) located a small number of Blue-throated Macaws *Ara glaucogularis* in Bolivia in 1992. Four nests and other mated pairs are now being studied by a team from WCS. Although well known in captivity, this species has never been found by ornithologists in the wild before.

Source: *World Birdwatch* [1992] 14(4).

**Rediscovery of the Bolivian Recurvebill**

Ted Parker reported that, during 1989 a survey team rediscovered Bolivian Recurvebill *Simoxenops striatus* in tall montane forest within the Amboró National Park, Bolivia. This species was previously known from four specimens collected in the 1930s in Santa Ana, Dpto. La Paz and from Palmar, Dpto. Cochabamba. Parker's team observed single recurvebills at elevations of 700-800 m in impenetrable shrubby tangles, often in the vicinity of fallen trees, and a pair that was associating with a mixed bird flock and feeding at 12-20 m above the ground in vine tangles. Also of interest were observations of the little-known Ashy Antwren *Myrmotherula grisea* that were made in the National Park.

Source: *Wilson Bull.* [1992] 104: 173-177.

**Magellanic Penguin colony's fate in the balance**

Construction of a proposed pipeline through a colony of 200,000 Magellanic Penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* at Cabo Virgenes in Argentina has been temporarily halted following legal action brought about by a Buenos Aires resident and various conservationists. If the pipeline is to be built, the Argentine government must prove that there is no danger to the penguins.

Source: *American Birds* [1993] 47(2).

**Atlantic forest purchase**

The Una Federal Biological Reserve in southern Bahia state, Brazil has been enlarged by the purchase of 1,058 ha of primary Atlantic forest from a neighbouring farm. The reserve needs at least another 1,000 ha to provide a viable protected area for the threatened primates it harbours, but is already of prime importance for the threatened Red-billed Curassow *Crax blumenbachii* and White-winged Cotinga *Xipholena atropurpurea*.

Source: *Oryx* [1993] 27(4), with bird data from BirdLife International.

# Neotropical News



## Gold miners in Podocarpus National Park, Ecuador, going, going... gone?

Podocarpus National Park in southern Ecuador has recently been the focus of research which has highlighted its potential to hold over 600 bird species, many of which are rare and nine globally threatened<sup>1,2,3</sup>. However, since the mid-1980s, the park has been threatened from both large-scale gold mining by international companies and small-scale gold mining by local cooperatives. The international companies Río Tinto Zinc and Ecuator both pulled out at the exploration phase, Ecuador being last out in early 1993. However, their activities and the provision of trails and the construction of a large camp at San Luis, at the very heart of the park, attracted hundreds of small-scale miners. Their use of mercury in the gold recovery process caused alarm to biologists and was one subject of an Anglo-Ecuadorian study on the environmental impacts of gold mining in the park<sup>4</sup>. These miners used an estimated 55 kg of mercury each year, all of which was released into the environment. The study mentioned above found mercury levels (4.6-61.2 µg/g) in stream sediment at the mining sites to be between 10 and 100 times above the natural background levels. Mercury levels were also high in the rivers (1.75-4.45 µg/g) in the nearby city of Loja where much of the gold-mercury amalgam is burnt.

These data highlighted the danger of mercury poisoning from small-scale mining operations in the park to both wildlife and local human populations. Thankfully in March 1994 the military police expelled the illegal miners from San Luis. However, INEFAN and other governmental bodies are currently reviewing gold mining in all national parks and therefore this reprieve for the park may just be temporary and readers are urged to support the campaign led by Arcoiris (a small ecological NGO based in Loja). Letters of support for the withdrawal of all mining activities in Ecuador's national parks should be sent to:

- \* Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Gral. de Ejército José Gallardo Roman, La Recoleta, Quito, Ecuador
- \* Ministerio de Agricultura y Granderia, Ing. Mariano Gonzales, Av. Amazonas y Eloy Alfaro, Quito, Ecuador
- \* INEFAN, Ing. Dipl. Jorge Barba, Av. Amazonas y Eloy Alfaro, Quito, Ecuador
- \* Fundación Arcoiris, Casilla 11-01-860, Loja, Ecuador.

Fundación Arcoiris are to be congratulated, as their actions have been instrumental in achieving these successes. Readers can support such actions by becoming members of the fundación.

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### The fate of the Isla Yacyretā, Ñeembucu, Paraguay.

The largest of a number of low islands lying in the Río Paraná along the southern border of Paraguay was the Isla Yacyretā (27°27'S 56°48'W), originally covering 44,731 ha. With the completion in late 1993 of the Represa Yacyretā, Isla Yacyretā and the surrounding delta of Bosque Arary have now been flooded (see also<sup>3</sup>). The Bosque Arary was listed in CDC<sup>2</sup> as the second highest priority for conservation in eastern Paraguay due to its biological uniqueness and its scenic value - the name Yacyretā is the Guaraní indian word for the "home of the moon", a testimony to the great beauty of the island. About 20 Paraguayan families lived there in small farms, and depended on Yacyretā for their livelihoods.

The majority of the island comprised impenetrable grassy marshland: however, where the it reached its widest point (towards the eastern tip), there was an area of *terra firma* c.6,000 ha in size. This was encircled by forest, predominantly "arary" *Calophyllum brasiliense*, a species otherwise restricted to Amazonia and dependent on saturated soils. Inland of the forest lay a *cerrado* plain of grass and small palms. In some places the forest was up to 500 m wide, but in others the *cerrado* ran directly into the marsh. At the southern end of the island there was a small area of sand dunes (Cerro Ybycuí) which formed the highest point on the island and afforded a spectacular scenic vista.

The authors spent three days (28-30 September 1992) birding on the Isla Yacyretā, during which time 112 species of bird were recorded, including four species of tinamou, 11 species of raptor, seven species of pigeon, Toco Toucan *Ramphastos toco*, seven species of woodpecker, Swallow-tailed Manakin *Chiroxiphia caudata*, 22 tyrannid species and various other riverine, gallery forest and waterbird species. Bare-faced Curassow *Crax fasciolata* and Crested Oropendula *Psarocolius decumanus* were present on the island but difficult to observe, and a range of rare mammals was present including Giant Anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*, Collared Anteater *Tamandua tetradactyla*, Black Howler Monkey *Alouatta caraya*, Maned Wolf *Chrysocyon brachyurus* and Marsh Deer *Blastocerus dichotomus*. A full list of species is given in Brooks *et al.*<sup>1</sup>

The initial flooding has now taken place, and little of the island will remain by late 1994. The company Entidad Binacional Yacyretā (EBY) is providing 5 million Guaraní (c.US\$3,000) compensation to the families whose land was lost with the completion of the dam, which is seen as far too little by the islanders (V. Rios pers. comm.). Environmental compensation is being provided by the EBY in the form of helicopter and boat rescue for some of the island fauna, to then be placed in a newly created 41,650 ha reserve, Cabacera Arroyo Yabebyry (A. Madroño N. pers. comm.).

Very few people know of the fate of Isla Yacyretā, and although it is now too late to save the island, knowledge of what has been lost with the drowning of Paraguay's largest island may at least attract attention to the adjacent diverse natural grasslands of Ñeembucu, which are threatened by encroaching development. San Cosme y Damián is the nearest town to Yacyretā and the adjacent grasslands, and is easily accessible for a birding trip direct by bus from Asunción. Put it on your itinerary for the Neotropical Ornithological Congress in August 1995.

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### The rediscovery of Pelzeln's Tody-tyrant *Hemitriccus inornatus* after 161 years!

Until recently Pelzeln's Tody-tyrant *Hemitriccus inornatus* was known only from the single nineteenth century museum specimen, collected in June 1831 by Natterer on the Rio Içana, a right bank tributary of the upper Rio Negro in north-western Brazil. With just this lone specimen as evidence (placed in a bank vault in Vienna, Austria, and relatively inaccessible to most Neotropical ornithologists), the taxonomic status of this taxon has been questioned during the intervening years. At 14h45 on the afternoon of 10 October 1992, whilst walking a trail through *campina* forest on the east bank of the Rio Negro, c.45 km north of Manaus, I heard an unfamiliar bird call - an insect-like series of high *picks*, reminiscent of the genus *Hemitriccus*. Kevin Zimmer and I approached the area from where the calls originated, and made tape-recordings of the bird. When played back, these calls lured out a small, unfamiliar *Hemitriccus* with a pale abdomen. After reading the available literature<sup>(1,2)</sup>, we came to the conclusion that this bird was probably *Hemitriccus inornatus*. On 9 February 1993 I returned to the same site with Mario Cohn-Haft and collected a specimen (another was collected later in 1993). When compared to the type-specimen in Vienna early in 1994, their identity was confirmed as Pelzeln's Tody-tyrant *Hemitriccus inornatus*, rediscovered after 161 years.

This record from north of Manaus extends the species's range approximately 1,000 km east-south-east of the Rio Içana type-locality. However, since acquiring knowledge of its vocalization, I have located several other areas harbouring populations of *Hemitriccus inornatus*. These lie further up the Rio Negro on two right bank tributaries, the Rio Apuaú and the Rio Cuieras, respectively c.80 km north-west, and c.60 km west of our original *campina* site: further details about *Hemitriccus inornatus*, its rediscovery, habitat and behaviour are being documented by A. Whittaker and K. J. Zimmer (in prep.).

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#### Kirtland's Warbler still increasing

Breeding surveys of Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*, which winters in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands, located 485 singing males in Michigan, U.S.A. in 1993, the largest number since 1961.

**Source:** *Orn. Newsletter* 98: 3, 1994.

#### Arctic Peregrine Falcon on the increase

The Arctic Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus tundrinus* which breeds in arctic areas of Alaska, Canada and Greenland, but winters as far south as Argentina has been proposed for removal from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service list of threatened species. The population of Arctic Peregrines was decimated between 1940 and 1970 due to the effects DDT pesticides had on their reproductive success. Populations began to recover after the 1972 ban of DDT in the U.S.A., and their present level is deemed to be high enough to warrant down-listing.

**Source:** *Endangered Species Techn. Bull.* 18(4): 1, 1993.

#### California Condor update

At the end of 1993, there were 75 California Condors, up from 27 in 1987. Sixty-six of these are held in three captive breeding centres in the U.S.A. In 1992, eight captive-produced condors were released in Los Padres National Forest, but half of these died in the first year: three collided with power lines and a fourth ingested leaked radiator fluid. The remaining four birds were captured and released together with another five captive-produced birds in a remoter location, Lion Canyon. Clearly, whilst the species seems to be reproducing well in captivity, its future as a wild-flying species must still be in serious doubt. [Eds. The California Condor was previously distributed throughout northern Mexico, with the last confirmed Mexican sighting in Baja California during 1937].

**Source:** *Endangered Species Techn. Bull.* 18(4): 18, 1993.

**U.S.A.-Mexico trans-border reserve**

Mexico and the U.S.A. have designated a 17,000 km<sup>2</sup> trans-boundary protected area that extends from the Sonora desert, up the Gulf of California to the Arizona border from where it becomes contiguous with Organ Pipe, New Mexico and Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Refuge.

**Source:** *Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas Newsletter* 60: 10, 1993.

**New threats to Three-wattled Bellbird identified**

A study by RARE Center of the seasonal movements of Three-wattled Bellbirds *Procnias tricarunculata* in Costa Rica and Nicaragua has highlighted the vulnerability of intratropical migrants that depend on more than one ecosystem during their annual cycle. Provisional monitoring of the movements of 19 radio-tagged Three-wattled Bellbirds has shown that they move from montane sites in north-central Costa Rica to lowland sites in south-eastern Nicaragua and then to sites along the Pacific coast in south-west Costa Rica. This highly complex seasonal movement involves usage of at least four different ecosystems, some of which are virtually unprotected. Hence the future viability of this species is in seriously doubt, unless major initiatives are taken to provide protection of its critical habitats.

**Source:** *Intratropical Migrations of Three-wattled Bellbirds: Identifying Habitat Linkages to Protect Biodiversity*. Progress Report, November 1993. RARE Center for Tropical Conservation.

**1993 raptor migration in Veracruz, Mexico**

Details of the 1992 raptor migration though Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico were reported on in *Cotinga* 1: 10, 1994, but observations during the fall 1993 migration have provided additional information. During September and October 1993 c.1 million raptors were seen travelling along this migratory highway. These included more than 30,000 Mississippi Kites *Ictinia mississippiensis*, at least 40 Hook-billed Kites *Chondrohierax uncinatus* and 35 Swallow-tailed Kites *Elanoides forficatus*. Thousands of non-raptors were also counted on migration at the watchpoints, including thousands of White Pelicans *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*, Wood Storks *Mycteria*

*americana*, White-winged Doves *Zenaida asiatica* and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers *Tyrannus forficatus*.

**Source:** *Hawk Mountain Flyer* 2(2), 1993.

**Guyana's forest under seige**

Guyana still boasts some of the most intact and inaccessible lowland rain forest in the neotropics, but it seems that this is unlikely to last. Of the country's 16 million ha of forest, the Guyanese Government has already leased out 9.1 million ha to logging companies. Reports suggest that some of these companies, in particular Barama, part-owned by Samling Timbers of Malaysia, have broken promises on logging practices and are having a devastating effect on the forests, which grow on very poor soils. A new road, from Brazil to Georgetown, is under construction and likely to exacerbate present problems as increasing numbers of Brazilian migrants, settlers, trappers, miners, loggers and drug traders move into the country.

**Source:** *BBC Wildlife* February: 64, 1994.

**Private land gift extends Venezuelan park**

A private donation of a 74,285 ha parcel of land to the U.S.A. Nature Conservancy (TNC) has been signed over to the Venezuelan park service (INPARQUES). The land will be incorporated into the adjacent Aguaro-Guariquito National Park, and represents one of the few remnants of upper savanna grasslands (upper llanos) in the country. This park is home to a number of endangered species, and has a high bird species diversity.

**Source:** *Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas Newsletter* 60: 9, 1993.

**Gentoo Penguins doing well on the Falklands**

Surveys of the 24 Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* colonies throughout the Falkland Islands/ Las Malvinas found a total of 23,500 pairs during the 1992/1993 breeding season, a similar number to the previous year. However, results of comparable surveys undertaken between 1932 and 1994 show that there has been a decline averaging 3% per year since 1987.

**Source:** *Penguin News* 5(32): 7-8, 1993; and *The Warrah* 5: 5, 1994.

**Stronghold for Jabiru discovered in Nicaragua**

In March 1992, aerial surveys in the Miskito Coast Protected Area on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua revealed that the area was one of the few remaining strongholds for Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* and other large waterbirds north of Venezuela. During the surveys, 74 individual Jabiru and six active nests were observed, as well as an active colony of Wood Storks *Mycteria americana* and Roseate Spoonbills *Ajaja ajaja*.

**Source:** IWRB/IUCN/BirdLife Specialist Group on Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills Newsletter 6 (1/2): 5, 1993.

**Status of the West Indies' only nuthatch**

Recent field and museum studies of the endemic race of Brown-headed Nuthatch *Sitta pusilla insularis*, confined to Grand Bahama Island, has found that it differs visually, vocally and behaviourally compared to mainland south Florida populations. The frequency with which P. W. Smith and S. A. Smith encountered the species when compared to densities determined 25 years ago, suggest that the West Indies' only nuthatch has declined precipitously and may be heading for extinction, due in-part to the rapid clearcutting of its habitat.

**Source:** *El Pitirre* 7(1): 5, 1994. Abstracts from the Caribbean Soc. of Ornith. meeting, 1993.

# Neotropical News



## The conservation status of the Cordillera de Colán, northern Peru.

A team of Cambridge University students and other British and Peruvian ornithologists spent seven weeks in July-September 1994 surveying the birds and mammals of cloud and elfin forest on the Cordillera de Colán, Amazonas department, northern Peru. This survey work was centred on the southern end of the western slope of the Colán, c.60 km east of Bagua Grande.

The Cordillera de Colán is a semi-isolated mountain range lying to the east of the main Andean chain. It is bordered to the south by the Río Utcubamba, to the north by the Río Chiriaco and to the west by the Río Marañón. This area supports a number of endemic birds and mammals.

Originally the Cordillera de Colán was covered in an intricate mosaic of habitats including Marañón dry forest, humid forest, montane cloud-forest, humid ridgetop forest, pajonal and elfin forest extending down to the unusually low altitude of 1,600 m. Sixteen restricted-range species from six Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs)<sup>4</sup> were recorded by the project on the Colán.

The project found healthy populations of several threatened birds and mammals with the scant remaining elfin forest supporting specialist species such as Russet-mantled Softtail *Thripophaga berlepschii* (near-threatened) and Royal Sunangel *Heliangelus regalis* (threatened: see photo, p40)<sup>1</sup>. This is only the third locality from which *H. regalis* is known<sup>2</sup>. The surveyed areas of cloud-forest held an extremely high concentration and diversity of frugivores, most notably two threatened species of monkey including the poorly known and highly threatened Yellow-tailed Woolly Monkey *Lagothrix flavicauda* (which has an extremely small distributional range), Military Macaw *Ara militaris* and Golden-plumed Conure *Leptosittaca branickii* (both threatened) and the near-threatened Scaled Fruiteater *Ampelioides tshudii* (see photo, p40), Black-chested Fruiteater *Pipreola lubomirskii* (see

photo, p40) and Grey-breasted Mountain-toucan *Andigena hypoglauca*<sup>1</sup>.

Other notable project records included an apparently healthy population of Spectacled Bear *Tremarctos ornatus* (currently surviving despite severe hunting pressure), the threatened Peruvian Pigeon *Columba oenops* and Yellow-faced Parrotlet *Forpus xanthops*, and near-threatened Black-and-chestnut Eagle *Oroaetus isidori*<sup>1</sup>. The enigmatic Long-whiskered Owllet *Xenoglaux loweryi* was not recorded.

The fauna and flora of the Colán is, however, under great threat. The area visited by the project has an alarmingly high deforestation rate. An ornithological survey of the cordillera led by Tom Schulenberg in 1978 found large tracts of virgin forest (T. S. Schulenberg verbally 1990). Most of this forest has now gone and what is left is rapidly being cleared to grow cash-crops, particularly marijuana and coffee. In addition much of the land around villages is under unofficial tenure to families for the logging of valuable mahogany *Cedrella* trees. Even the forest at high altitude is affected by selective logging and grazing. Locals estimate that within 10 years the whole Cordillera de Colán will be completely deforested. Urgent conservation action to protect what remains of the forest in this important area is strongly recommended. Details of the project's results, conclusions and recommendations are presented in a report *The conservation status of the Cordillera de Colán*<sup>3</sup> available on request from Charles Davies (at the address below).

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#### Kirtland's Warbler: a record year

Surveys of Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*, which winters in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands, found 633 singing males on the breeding grounds in Michigan, U.S.A. during 1994, representing a 30% increase over the last year, and surpassing the previous record of 502 males heard in 1961.

**Source:** *National Audubon Society Field Notes* 48: 170, 1994.



Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*  
(David D. Beadle)

#### Raptor records in Veracruz, Mexico

The third fall count of the Veracruz Migration Project, which is managed by Pronatura-Veracruz under the capable direction of Ernesto Ruelas Inzunza, has broken a number of its own records including a 900,000 plus single-day count of raptors during the first week of October 1994. By mid-October, the Fall

count stood at over 3 million raptors, with Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura*, Broad-winged Hawks *Buteo platypterus* and Swainson's Hawks *B. swainsoni* comprising most of the birds seen. This now famous raptor flyway has led ecotours to visit the area, including one run by Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (U.S.A.) to the town of Cardel.

**Source:** *Hawk Mountain Flyer* 3(2): 2, 1994.

#### Scarlet Macaws in Belize

Recent studies in Belize have estimated the country's population of Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao* to be 30-60 birds, located within two basins in the remote Raspaculo watershed which is threatened by a dam. The studies suggest that the birds of the two basins may actually be one population, crossing through one or two passes in the Maya Mountain divide. If this is the case then this single population needs a large area and secure long-distance flight routes for survival.

**Source:** *Conserv. Sci. Quarterly Spring/Summer*: 3, 1994., also; Mallory, E. P. (1994) *BAS Newsletter* 26(3): 11.

#### Jabiru in Belize: a poor year

1994 saw the Belize population of Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* reduced to just one successful nest (with two healthy chicks), located in the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. A new nest spotted in March was abandoned, evidently disturbed by logging and two other nests kept under observation were also unsuccessful.

**Source:** *Belize Audubon Soc. Newsletter* 26(2): 15, 1994.

#### Glow-throated Hummingbird found on the Azuero Peninsula

The threatened Glow-throated Hummingbird *Selasphorus ardens*, previously thought to be restricted to the Serranía de Tabasará in western and central Panama, has just been found 175 km south on the Azuero Peninsula. This poorly known endemic was discovered in March 1994 during fieldwork in the Cerro Hoya National Park in the south of the peninsula when a single individual was mist-netted. However, further investigations are needed to determine if this isolated population is taxonomically distinct.

**Source:** Engleman, D. (1994) *The Toucan* 20(7): 4-5.

**Puerto Rican Parrots on the increase**

The Puerto Rican Parrot *Amazona vittata*, which reached an all-time low wild population of 13 birds in 1975, recovered during the following 14 years to 47 wild individuals. However, in September 1989 Hurricane Hugo reduced this population to 22 birds when it passed over north-eastern Puerto Rico. In 1994 a (post-hurricane) record 14 chicks fledged from wild nests. DNA fingerprinting is being used to help reduce inbreeding and therefore increase the fledgling success rate of the captive population which produced seven chicks in 1994.

**Source:** Vélez-Valentín, J. (1994) *El Pitirre* 7(3): 4-5.

**Cayman Islands' first RAMSAR site designated**

The Cayman Islands has designated its first RAMSAR wetland site of international importance. Using money raised by the Governor's Fund for Nature (and a grant from the British Government), 80 ha of swamp, fringed by mangroves and surrounded by dry evergreen thickets, has been set aside on Little Cayman, primarily for the important breeding colony of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*. An estimated 5,000 pairs of boobys breed in the sanctuary, which is known locally as the "Booby Pond and Rookery". The wetland is also important for a number of other birds including migrant waders and wintering herons.

**Source:** Michael Gore *in litt.* (1994).

**National park created in the Bahamas**

The Prime Minister of the Bahamas officially declared a national park in southern Abaco which protects most of the nesting habitat for the endangered subspecies "Bahamas" Parrot *Amazona leucocephala bahamensis*. A national and international education campaign led by the Bahamas National Trust, RARE Center for Tropical Conservation and the Bahama Parrot Conservation Committee helped increase conservation awareness for the plight of this parrot and played a major part in the creation of the park.

**Source:** Gnam, R. (1994) *El Pitirre* 7(3): 13.

**Shiny Cowbirds reach the Bahamas**

The Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* has just been recorded for the first time in the Bahamas with up to five individuals seen on

North Andros Island during July 1994. *M. bonariensis* is a brood parasite and has had a detrimental effect on the populations of a number of island endemics such as Martinique Oriole *Icterus bonana* so this most recent range expansion may well have a significant biological impact.

**Source:** Baltz, M. E. (1994) *El Pitirre* 7(3): 4. [also Eds.]

**Seabirds threatened on Aruba**

The government of Aruba, Netherlands Antilles, intends to develop for watersports an area near sensitive coral reefs and seabird nesting colonies. The plan seriously endangers 10,000 pairs of nine species of nesting seabirds, including Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* and Roseate Terns *S. dougallii* and is a subject of great concern for conservationists on the island.

**Source:** *El Pitirre* 7(3): 13, 1994.

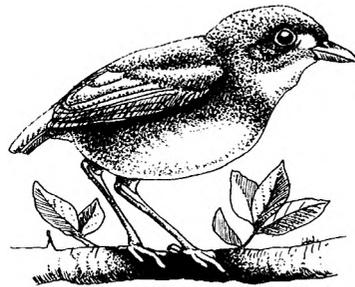
**Flamingo census in the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador**

A survey in early 1994 of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber glyphorhynchus* populations on Floreana, Isabela, Jervis, Santa Cruz and Santiago Islands in the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador, found 366 birds comprising 247 adults, 96 of undetermined age, 22 juveniles and only one chick. The largest concentration on the islands was of 100 adults and 26 of unknown age in Quinta Playa, Isabela.

**Source:** *Galápagos Bull.* 3, 1994.

**Brown-banded Antpitta rediscovered**

The Brown-banded Antpitta *Grallaria milleri*, a threatened endemic of the Colombian Central Andes which had gone unrecorded since



Brown-banded Antpitta *Grallaria milleri* (Lyn Wells)

1942, has been rediscovered in Ucumarí Regional Park, Risaralda department. An individual was captured (and released) during routine mist-netting in May 1994, at 2,300 m near the La Pastora station in a 20 year old secondary forest with abundant *Chusquea* bamboo. Ucumarí (which is important for a number of threatened birds) is within the Río Otún watershed immediately north of the Salento area whence most of this species' previous records originate.

**Source:** Gustavo Kattan *in litt.* 1994.

### Planting trees for Lear's Macaw



Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari* (Lyn Wells)

Plans have been made to plant 20,000-30,000 licuri palm trees in Bahia, eastern Brazil. The nuts of this palm are the main food of the threatened Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari*, of which only c.65 remain in the wild. At present birds have to fly considerable distances to their feeding grounds and in doing so are easy targets for hunters.

**Source:** *Avicult. Mag.* 100(1): 54, 1994.

### Hooded Grebe wintering grounds discovered

The Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi* was discovered as recently as 1974 and has been found to breed on c.130 ponds scattered throughout c.700 km of pre-Andean foothills in southern Argentina, with a population estimated at 3,000-5,000 birds. With the onset of winter these ponds freeze over and *P. gallardoi* disappears, its' wintering grounds remaining a mystery until their discovery in 1994. Field biologists from Fundación Vida Silvestre Ar-



Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi* (FVSA)

gentina (FVSA) found 462 *P. gallardoi* feeding amongst sea lions, porpoises and Magellanic Penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* at the Coyle estuary on Atlantic coast of Santa Cruz province, southernmost Argentina. However, despite searches in similar bays and estuaries along 250 km of this coast these were the only birds found (except one individual near San Julián bay). It is hoped that more detailed surveys will discover the remainder of the population.

**Source:** Andrés Johnson and Alejandro Serret *in litt.* 1994

### Hope for Helmeted Woodpecker in Misiones, Argentina

A series of recent records of the threatened Helmeted Woodpecker *Dryocopus galeatus* from Misiones province, Argentina, suggest that its' conservation status is more favourable than previously thought. A pair of this species (which is confined to primary tracts of Atlantic forest in southern south-east Brazil, eastern Paraguay and northernmost Argentina) were observed on numerous occasions during October 1994 within Iguazú National Park in the vicinity of the television receiver. At the same time B. L. Lanus and J. Mazar found a pair breeding at Puerto Peninsula, Iguazú department, Misiones. In recent years, M. Castelino has located four pairs of *D. galeatus* in Iguazú National Park and has also found the species to the south in modified woodlands at Puerto Rico, L. G. San Martin department, Misiones.

**Source:** Esteban I. Abadie *in litt.* 1994.

**Chronic oil pollution affects Magellanic Penguins in Chubut, Argentina**

An analysis of Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* carcasses along the Chubut coast of Argentina suggests that birds found oiled in February and March each year represent 1.1% of the adult and 6.0% of the fledgling penguin population. Since penguins migrate twice a year more than 20,000 adults and 22,000 juveniles may be killed along 3,000 km of Argentine coast each year due to oil pollution, suggesting that chronic oil pollution is a significant mortality factor for the species and may be depressing the population.

**Source:** Gandini, P. *et al.* (1994) *Auk* 111: 20-27.

**New nature reserves purchased off East Falkland**

Motley Island (330 ha) and Middle Island (150 ha), together with their associated islets, were purchased by Falklands Conservation during October 1994. The islands, which appear to be rat free, lie close to Lively Island off the south-east coast of East Falkland and comprise various habitats including heathland, sand-dune, grassland, marsh and open ponds. Whilst the islands lack any large seabird colonies they appear to support an exceptional diversity of wildlife although their full importance will not be known until detailed ecological surveys can be carried out.

**Source:** *The Warrah* 6: 1, 1994.

# Neotropical News



## A stronghold for Long-wattled Umbrellabird discovered in Ecuador

The Long-wattled Umbrellabird *Cephalopterus penduliger* is a rare and local inhabitant of humid and wet forest on the Pacific slope of the Andes in south-west Colombia and western Ecuador. The species is poorly known, very rarely encountered and considered at risk of global extinction<sup>2</sup>. Threats to the bird include habitat destruction (less than 0.8% of western Ecuador's tropical wet forest remain<sup>3</sup>), trapping for trade, and hunting for food<sup>2</sup>.

From 12 February to 2 March 1994, *Project Esmeraldas* conducted the first ornithological fieldwork at the proposed Jatun Sacha Bilsa Biological Reserve in Esmeraldas province, north-west Ecuador. In this area was found a healthy and easily observable population of Long-wattled Umbrellabird, with a minimum of 14 birds recorded (at an encounter rate of 13 birds per 100 field-hours). This is the first time the bird has been recorded in such numbers with such regularity.

The Bilsa reserve (0°22'N 79°45'W) is located between Muisne on the coast and Quinende, in the Mache mountains which form part of the coastal cordillera. The site covers an elevational range of 400 to 700 m. The Mache mountains support the last remaining extensive tract of wet tropical forest in western Ecuador<sup>4</sup>, and perhaps the most significant remaining umbrellabird population. The project's records of this species are the first evidence of a resident population away from the Andes (all previous records have been ascribed to altitudinal migration: R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1994) and along with other first records of species away from the Andes (Clay *et. al.* *in prep.*), highlight the biogeographical importance of the remaining forest on the coastal cordillera.

Project Esmeraldas also recorded two other globally threatened species, namely Grey-backed Hawk *Leucopternis occidentalis* and Brown Wood-rail *Aramides wolfi*, and seven

near-threatened birds<sup>1</sup>. The threatened Rufous-headed Chachalaca *Ortalis erythroptera* was also reported to occur, and both this species and the threatened Esmeraldas Woodstar *Acestrura berlepschi*, Ochraceous Attila *Attila torridus* and Scarlet-breasted Dacnis *Dacnis berlepschi* were seen nearby in 1993 (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1994).



Long-wattled Umbrellabird *Cephalopterus penduliger*

Since March 1994, 800 ha of the proposed reserve have been purchased by Fundación Jatun Sacha, but unless immediate action is taken this reserve will soon become an isolated fragment of forest, as deforestation is proceeding at an alarmingly rapid rate in the area, encroaching upon the remaining forest from all directions. In 1991, a Conservation International Rapid Assessment Program team, noted that the forest at a nearby site, Cabeceras de Bilsa, was being felled faster than they could study it and considered that this last remaining extensive tract of forest would, within five years, deteriorate into numerous tiny fragments or be lost altogether<sup>4</sup>. Three years on, and this loss was already well under way, but at least the establishment of one small reserve gives some hope. The pro-

tection of a large block of this last extensive tract of forest must be amongst the highest conservation priorities in the Neotropics, and it can only be hoped that this is achieved before the opportunity to fully investigate this important area is lost forever.

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### White-tailed Sabrewing population recovering on Tobago

The globally threatened White-tailed Sabrewing *Campylopterus ensipennis* is known only from three disjunct populations, two in northern Venezuela (the Paria Peninsula and Cordillera de Caripe) and one on Tobago<sup>1</sup>. The Tobago population was thought to be extinct following Hurricane Flora in 1963, but was "rediscovered" by Richard French in 1974<sup>2</sup>, and has since been regarded as very small but gradually recovering<sup>3</sup>.

During 20-24 March 1995, a team of 11 faculty members and students from Caribbean Union College conducted a preliminary study on the status, distribution and behaviour of the White-tailed Sabrewing on Tobago.

The study found 32 sabrewings along c.17.5 km of trails in the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, suggesting that the population is recovering well. Most of the birds were found in tall, dense forest which is recovering from the hurricane of 1963. Some sabrewings were seen at the edge of clearings, in forest patches within

abandoned plantations, and in secondary-growth less than 10 m tall, potentially indicating some flexibility in ecological requirements.

Future fieldwork will concentrate on locating additional sabrewings along other trails and obtaining behavioural and ecological data. Any recent information (especially on nesting) from birders seeing the species on Tobago would be greatly appreciated.

T-shirts with a painting of sabrewings by John P. O'Neill are being sold to raise further funds: if interested in purchasing a T-shirt, please contact either of the first two authors at the address below.

The initial study was funded by the Center for the Study of Tropical Birds and Trinidad & Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Ltd. Binoculars were donated by the Manomet Bird Observatory Birders' Exchange. Subsequent support for the project came from the BP Conservation Expedition Competition of BirdLife International and Fauna & Flora International.

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### Canadian "Eskimo Curlew" nest now thought to be Whimbrel's

A nest, reported as being that of an Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis*, discovered in the Northwest Territories of Canada in 1992 is now, after lengthy research, thought to have been that of a Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. This rather disappointing conclusion was

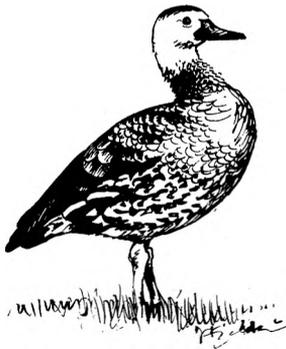
reached after a thorough survey of the area revealed a high population of Whimbrels but no sign of any curlews. Additionally, photographs taken of the nests and eggs of Whimbrels during the survey resembled the photographs of a nest with eggs on which the original, tentative identification had primarily been based. The search continues for the enigmatic Eskimo Curlew, both on its (historic) breeding grounds, its migration routes and its Neotropical winter quarters but this latest setback, coming after the erroneous reporting of the species in Argentina (see *Cotinga* 3: 69) suggests that the future is extremely bleak for this bird.

**Source:** *Ontario Field Ornithologists Newsletter*, January 1995.

#### West Indian Whistling-duck now increasing on the Caymans

Numbers of the globally threatened West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea* on Grand Cayman were recently estimated at 100 pairs, representing an increase of at least 90 pairs in the last five years. Numbers on Little Cayman have also increased to about 30 pairs and in 1994 breeding was reported from Cayman Brac for the first time in many years.

**Source:** *Pan American News* 10(1): 4, 1995.



West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea*  
(Jon Fjelds )

#### New reserve on Grand Cayman

A mountain reserve of dry evergreen woodland has been established on Grand Cayman, funded by a grant from the British Government and from donations to a newly-established Governor's Fund for Nature, which was set up by Governor Michael Gore in 1993.

**Source:** *Pan American News* 10(1): 4, 1995.

#### Parrots in Dominica

A survey of the endemic parrots of Dominica in March–May 1994 as part of the Dominican Multiple Landuse Project located nine active Red-necked Parrot *Amazona arausiaca* nests. No nests of Imperial Parrot *Amazona imperialis* were found, but two birds were observed, apparently holding territory. The survey was concentrated on the forested areas of the north-east and, as well as searching for nests and other evidence of breeding activity, systematic watches were undertaken at 25 sites as part of a long term population monitoring programme. Comparing results from the previous year, the team estimated a 10% increase in Red-necked Parrot numbers as well as an expansion in range, but the population of Imperial Parrot was not judged to have increased or expanded. Most of the Red-necked Parrot nests were on private land and were considered to be vulnerable to disturbance or destruction from agricultural practices.

**Source:** Peter G. H. Evans *in litt.* 1994.

#### Waterfowl catastrophe on Mexican reservoir

An estimated 40,000 waterbirds of 22 species died last winter at a reservoir near León, Mexico. Many were migrants from North America, including Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Cinnamon *Anas cyanoptera* and Green-winged *A. crecca* teals, Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* and American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*. Local residents who used the water to irrigate crops and water their livestock, and hunted the ducks for food, also reported symptoms consistent with poisoning. Mexico's National Water Commission suggested that an agricultural pesticide was responsible, but autopsies of some of the birds revealed that many of them suffered heavy metal poisoning from waste water released by chemical plants and tanneries. The National Audubon Society, its Mexican chapters and two other Mexican non-government organisations have filed a petition with the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation asking them to investigate the incident.

**Source:** *Audubon Field Notes* 49(1): 6, 1995.

### Mexican Scarlet Macaw population still in decline

Recent censuses have shown that the Mexican population of Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao* is now no more than 424 individuals, all of them in the Selva Lacandona region of south-eastern Chiapas. Moreover, it is estimated that only 50% of them are in good breeding condition and that up to 50 birds a year may be captured, presumably for the cagebird trade.

Source: *Pan American News* 10(2): 2, 1995.



Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao* (Charles Gambill)

### Orange-breasted Falcon census in Central America

Aerial and ground surveys of selected areas in Belize and Guatemala in 1994, by the Peregrine Fund's "Maya Project" and Lighthawk, discovered four Orange-breasted Falcon *Falco deiroleucus* nests. These finds bring to 15 the total number of known eyries in Belize and Guatemala, making this the largest documented population of this rare and little-known falcon.

Source: *Peregrine Fund Annual Report*, 1994.

### Crested Eagle nest discovered in Guatemala

In October 1994 biologists from the Maya Project (see above) announced that a Crested Eagle *Morphnus guianensis* nest had been found in northern Guatemala by a local farmer. It is only the second ever Crested Eagle nest to be found (the first was in Brazil)

and is in forest just outside Tikal National Park. Unfortunately the single egg was taken by a predator, but the area is being monitored in the hope that the birds will make another attempt in the near future. Although on unprotected land, the local farmers are interested in the eagle's welfare and have agreed not to conduct any further deforestation in the vicinity of the nest.

Source: *Birds of the Wild* 3(4): 9, 1995 & *Audubon Field Notes* 48: 910, 1994.

### Snail Kites colonise lake in Panama

Snail Kites *Rostrhamus sociabilis* have been recorded, apparently for the first time, at Gigante Bay in the canal area of Panama. The birds (14-20 of them) have been in the area since May or June 1994, according to the STRI gamewarden, and at least four nests were found in February 1995. Surveys of the area in 1991-92 failed to locate the species and the sudden appearance is thought to be linked to the introduction of apple snails *Pomacea* (the kite's main food) into the area between 1986 and 1988.

Source: *Toucan* 21(3): 8-9, 1995.

### Radio tracking helping Harpy Eagles

In 1992 the Harpy Eagle field programme started attaching radio transmitters to fledgling Harpy Eagles *Harpia harpyja* in Venezuela and Panama to learn more about the dispersal of the young birds and the ecology of the species in general. The fledgling birds are ringed (banded) and released after being fitted with the transmitters. With assistance from NASA, eight birds have been tracked in this way. Results so far indicate that young birds remain at or near the nest site for over two years after fledging. A captive breeding programme has also been established at the World Center for Birds of Prey with the long term aim of reintroducing captive-bred birds to areas where the species has been extirpated but where suitable habitat remains.

Source: *Peregrine Fund Annual Report*, 1994.

### More Andean Condors released in Venezuela

Five more Andean Condors *Vultur gryphus*, reared at San Francisco Zoo and San Diego Wild Animal Park, have been released in the Sierra de la Culata National Park in Mérida,



Andean Condors in the Sierra de la Culata National Park (David Wege)

Venezuela. This brings the total number of condors released in the past six years to 39, 34 of which are known to survive. Of related interest, in January 1994, after several birds (all juveniles) had been released, an adult male was seen in the area, with an adult female seen there in January 1995. This raises the possibility that this magnificent raptor may not have been completely extirpated in Venezuela after all (recent observations of condors have also been reported from the nearby Sierra de Perijá).

**Source:** *Pan American News* 10(2): 4, 1995 & *World Birdwatch* 16(3): 5, 1994.

#### Globally threatened parrot on the increase

Numbers of the globally threatened Yellow-shouldered Amazon *Amazona barbadensis* on Margarita Island increased from 700 birds in 1989 to 1,580 in 1994, according to the private Venezuelan conservation organisation PROVITA. This increase, of more than 100% in five years, represents a significant recovery. Unfortunately, PROVITA also reported that numbers of the Margarita Island race of Blue-crowned Conure *Aratinga acuticaudata neoxena*, which numbered only 180 individuals in 1991, are still decreasing because of human pressure and environmental degradation.

Anyone wishing for more information should contact PROVITA, Programas Islas del Caribe, Apartado Postal 47552, Caracas 1014-A, Venezuela. Fax: 576 28 28.

**Source:** *Pan American News* 10(2): 4, 1995.

#### New cloud-forest reserve in north-west Ecuador

A new reserve covering 1,400 ha has been created near Ibarra in north-west Ecuador. Called Cerro Golondrinas, it is situated along a tributary of the Río Mira and is run by FUNDEAL (Foundation for Alternative Development), a non-government organisation. Two good trails offer accessible birding in the reserve and an old farm building has been converted into a visitor's lodge to provide accommodation. The reserve covers páramo, temperate and sub-tropical forest, and horses can be hired from the local villages to provide a novel means of transport in the area. FUNDEAL also organise five-day treks through the area, from the páramo at 4,100 m down to the village of Gallupe at 900 m, and covering all the major habitats.

The forests of western Ecuador are one of the most threatened ecosystems in the Neotropical region, and the creation of this reserve is a vital step in the conservation of what is left of them. The Cerro Golondrinas area is situated within both the north Andean and the Chocó Endemic Bird Areas and contains species such as Red-ruffed Fruitcrow *Pyroderus scutatus*, Toucan Barbet *Semnornis ramphastinus*, Plate-billed Mountain-toucan *Andigena laminirostris* and the globally threatened Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis*. Visiting birders who include this reserve on their itinerary will not only get the chance to see some of Ecuador's most spectacular birds in a comparatively unknown part of the country, but will also be supporting a vitally important conservation venture and helping to support the local economy.

For more information contact: Piet Sabbe, FUNDEAL Apartado Postal 1786, Suc 17-21, Quito, Ecuador.

**Source:** Paul Greenfield *in litt.* 1993 & Jan Wendeby *in litt.* 1994.

#### Last wild Spix's Macaw gets mate

In March 1994 a female Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* was released from captivity in the hope that it would join the last remaining wild bird (a male!) in Brazil. The female chosen was the last adult bird known to have been taken from the wild and seems to have re-adapted well to its freedom. Better still, a few months later she did indeed team up with the male and a strong pair-bond has been

formed with the birds spending virtually all their time together. The female Blue-winged Macaw *Ara maracana*, with which the male Spix's had previously been pursuing a less than fruitful relationship, still accompanies the pair during the day but does not roost with them. Hopes are now high that the pair will soon breed and they are being guarded round-the-clock with every aspect of their behaviour noted. The release is part of the ongoing programme to save Spix's Macaw by an International Committee headed by IBAMA, the Brazilian wildlife authority.

**Source:** International Committee for the recovery of Spix's Macaw and Birdlife International.

#### Waterways warning for Brazil

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has warned that a 3,442 km waterway, designed to cross the Pantanal wetlands in Brazil and Paraguay to link the rivers Paraguay and Paraná will have a devastating effect on the environment and is economically unsound. The WWF report *Hidrovia Paraguay-Paraná: who pays the bill?* which analysed the project, has stated that it is totally unfeasible and will be very costly in both social and economic terms. Supporters of the project claim it will allow farmers and businessmen in the interiors of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia to export their products more effectively.

Apart from the huge costs of construction, maintenance and operation, it is estimated that in the first five years of operation, the Pantanal wetlands (the world's largest wetland) will lose 17 million m<sup>3</sup> of water; enough fresh water to meet the needs of nearly 155 million people (approximately the population of Brazil). This loss will obviously have a disastrous effect on local ecosystems and will also cause climatic changes in the region, which contains about 150,000 known species of plants and animals. An English summary of the report is available; for this and for more information contact Paula Lyra at +55 61 248 2899 or Javier Arreaza at +41 22 364 9575.

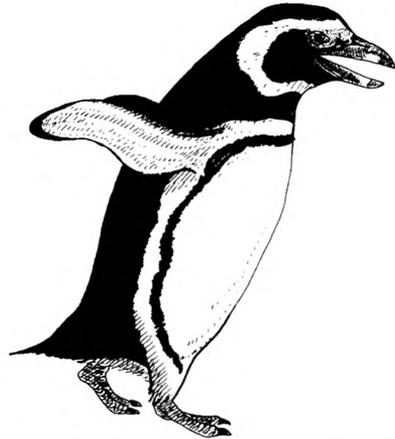
**Source:** *People & The Planet* 4(2), 1995.

#### First survey of Motley Island completed

A brief ecological survey of Motley Island, recently acquired as a nature reserve by Falklands Conservation (see *Cotinga* 3: 10) has

indicated that the island is indeed of significant ecological interest and conservation value. The group, assisted by military personnel, saw a total of 38 bird species, with breeding confirmed for 24 of them (and strongly suspected for a further five). Breeding species included good numbers of Magellanic Penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus*, six small colonies of Rock Shag *Phalacrocorax magellanicus*, and a colony of 75 King Shags *Phalacrocorax albiventer*, but of special significance were large numbers of both Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus* and the globally threatened Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi*. The presence of these two songbirds in such good numbers seems to confirm that the island is free from introduced predators, particularly rats. In addition to the birds, the surveyors found a small colony of southern sea-lions, several elephant seals (but no adult males) and 66 species of plant, including several uncommon species endemic to the Falklands.

**Source:** *The Warrah* 7: 8-9, 1995.



Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*  
(Charles Gambill)

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN

### Kirtland's Warblers still increasing

The population of the endangered Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*, which breeds in Michigan, U.S.A., and winters in the Bahamas, is still recovering well from the recent low of 167 singing males in 1987. In June 1995 a record 765 singing males were recorded, 132 more than the previous year. Also in 1995, the number of nesting birds using the specially planted and managed Jack Pine plantations increased dramatically to 57%.

- *Endangered Species Bulletin* 20(4): 21, 1995.



Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* (D. Beadle)

## MEXICO

### Stork surveys in Mexico

The Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* and the American Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* were both added to the list of Mexican endangered species in 1991. The Usumacinta and Grijalva Deltas, in the states of Tabasco and Campeche, are important wetland areas for these two species and, within this area, Laguna de Terminos in Campeche supports the most important breeding colonies (and is also the northern limit of the Jabiru's



Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* (D. Beadle)

breeding range). The largest number of adult Jabirus recorded during surveys in the Laguna de Terminos area in 1989 and 1990 was 16. This was similar to numbers recorded by other observers in Tabasco and Campeche in 1971-1987 (a count of 83 adults in 1978 was considered exceptional and has not been repeated). The surveys in 1989 and 1990 suggest that numbers of storks in this area, particularly of American Wood Storks, are on the decline. Four mixed-species colonies were found, containing total counts of 3,500 and 3,000 pairs respectively, most of which were American Wood Storks. These numbers show a considerable decline from 1971-1979, when surveys by the Audubon Society revealed a total of 10,000-15,000 pairs of storks in the area, including one colony which contained 8,000 pairs of American Wood Stork (the largest colony known in North and Central America at the time). Laguna de Terminos is a huge wetland area and thorough surveys are required

on a regular basis, to monitor the populations of the two locally endangered storks and the other waterbird species in this important wetland.

- *Specialist Group on Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills Newsletter* 7(1/2), 1995.

## GUATEMALA

### Crested Eagle update

The finders of the Crested Eagle *Morphnus guianensis* nest in Guatemala in 1994 (see *Cotinga* 4: 9) discovered another nest of the species in Tikal National Park during May 1995. This nest contained a single chick which had hatched earlier in the month. Studies showed that the eagle's diet during this nesting period consisted of 65% mammals, 25% birds and 10% snakes; most of the mammals identified were squirrels, opossums and porcupines. Small radio transmitters have been attached to the (now fledged) chick and the adult female to help study their home range and habitat use.

- *The Peregrine Fund Newsletter* 25: 6, 1995.



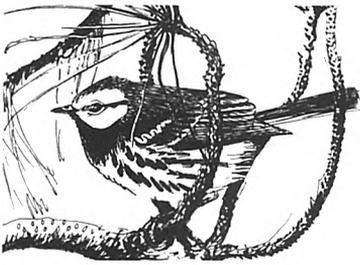
D. BEADLE 95

Crested Eagle *Morphnus guianensis* (D. Beadle)

### Logging threat averted in cloud-forest reserve

Logging has long been a problem in the Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala, but 1,535 ha in the core of the reserve now has additional protection having been bought by the Defensores de la Naturaleza (the Nature Conservancy's partner organisation in Guatemala) for \$170,000; the money was raised through TNC's popular "Adopt an Acre" programme. Sierra de las Minas contains 60% of Guatemala's remaining cloud-forest, but this has been reduced from its original 30,400 ha to just 1,000 ha. At least 885 species of mammals, reptiles and birds have been recorded in the area, the avifauna including Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* and the globally threatened Horned Guan *Oreophasis derbianus* and Golden-cheeked Warbler *Dendroica chrysoparia*.

- *Nature Conservancy* 45(6): 33, 1995.



Golden-cheeked Warbler *Dendroica chrysoparia* (Jon Fjeldså)

### GUYANA

#### Wildlife exploitation resumes

Following the reopening of the wildlife trade in Guyana after a closure of over two years, animal trappers in the interior of the country are reportedly heavily exploiting the animal populations that had started to recover during the two-year ban. From Santa Rosa, which is just one of many shipping points in the north-west, it is estimated that at least 12 macaws, 100 monkeys and 150

parrots are shipped out each month. Trappers are paid G\$3,000 for macaws, G\$1,000 for monkeys and between G\$200 and G\$1,000 for parrots. Some of the macaws are then sold to overseas buyers for as much as US\$7,000.

- *The Catholic Standard* 3 December 1995.

### VENEZUELA

#### More Grey-headed Warbler sightings on Cerro Negro

The endangered Grey-headed Warbler *Basileuterus griseiceps* is currently known to occur at only two sites in north-eastern Venezuela. An article in *Cotinga* (3: 35-39, 1995) detailed all recent records, but information has now come to light of sightings on Cerro Negro which pre-date the earliest sightings in that article by a year. On 4 March 1992, Jan Pierson and Dave Stejskal saw a total of nine *B. griseiceps* in two different areas of Cerro Negro. One pair was seen briefly on the eastern slope of the mountain at c.1,470 m. They were foraging by flitting from branch to branch and perch-gleaning, 1-2 m above the ground within rather dense understorey at the forest edge.

Three pairs and a single bird were seen later in the same day on the southern slope of the mountain, closer to the famous Cueva de los Guácharos (Oilbird Cave). They were found along a 600 m section of the main trail

leading up the mountain from the cave, at 1,175-1,210 m. The habitat was humid montane forest, the birds favouring areas where a dense understorey had formed due to breaks in the canopy. The birds' behaviour was similar to that of the first pair, foraging 0.5-2.5 m off the ground. JP was able to make tape-recordings of call notes and part of the song of one bird. Similar habitat at lower altitudes (below 1,175 m) on the southern slope failed to produce additional records, despite the use of tape-playback, and it seems probable that the birds are restricted to forest remnants above 1,200 m on the mountain.

These sightings, especially of seven birds in one small area, raise hopes that the total population of *B. griseiceps* on Cerro Negro could be higher than previous estimates. More surveys are required however, and the Neotropical Bird Club would like to hear of proposals for such fieldwork or of additional sightings.

- Jan E. Pierson *in litt.* 1995.

### ECUADOR

#### Observations from Chilla forest, south-west Ecuador

Between 3 July and 14 August 1995, an expedition from Manchester Metropolitan University, U.K., carried out a preliminary survey of Chilla forest, on the west slope of the Andes, El Oro province. The forest is located in a valley c.3.5 km west of the town of Chilla, covers an area of 200-250 ha at an altitudinal range of 2,000 to 3,000 m. The forest types within the valley are transitional subtropical to humid montane cloud-forest, with montane cloud-forest higher up. Some areas of grassland and regenerating forest are also present. The species composition in the forest is interesting, as the local climate is directly influenced by the Pacific, resulting in some tree species being found at unusually high altitudes. The main threats to the forest are clearance



Grey-headed Warbler *Basileuterus griseiceps* (D. Beadle)



Bearded Guan *Penelope barbata* (Jon Fjeldsã)

for pasture and the subsequent grazing by cattle, although only one family appears to work the valley at present.

Hampered by lack of time, the preliminary survey recorded few bird species, but importantly a flock of 28 globally threatened Golden-plumed Parakeets *Leptosittaca branickii* were regularly seen in the forest during the survey. Other birds recorded included notable species such as Bearded Guan *Penelope barbata* (a threatened species), Sickie-winged Guan *Chamaepetes goudotii*, Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis*, Scaly-naped Amazon *Amazona mercenaria*, Red-billed Pionus *sordidus* and White-capped *P. seniloides* Parrots, and Grey-breasted Mountain-toucan *Andigena hypoglauca*. Two Spectacled Bears and a Tayra were also seen.

• J. Walker and M. Jacobs *in litt.* 1995

## PERU Lakes threatened

The Huacarpay lakes near Cusco are seriously threatened by a dam constructed to provide water to surrounding communities. This dam was built as part of the Potable Water Master Plan without any environmental impact assessment, the lack of which constitutes a crime under Peruvian law.

The Huacarpay lakes are not included in any type of environmental protection, even though, despite their small size (less than 400 ha) they support a large number of migratory and resident waterbirds, in quantities comparable to those recorded for larger Peruvian lakes (e.g. Junín, Titicaca). Environmental alteration has apparently already caused a reduction in the presence of some species.

For further information, please contact: Jorge Luis Hurtado or Daniel Blanco, Asociacion de Conservación para la Selva Sur, Apartado Postal 1200, Cusco, Peru. Tel/fax: 51 084 240911.

• *Pan American News* 10(4): 4, 1995.

## Urban reserve under threat

The Pantonas de Villa nature reserve, 19 km from downtown Lima, is a 270 ha freshwater marsh next to the Pacific Ocean, and provides a refuge for many bird species, both local residents and Nearctic–Neotropical migrants. Species to be seen here include Great Grebe *Podiceps major*, Puna Ibis *Plegadis ridgwayi*, Wren-like Rushbird *Phleocryptes melanops* and Many-coloured Rush-tyrant *Tachuris rubigastra*. Although considered an important local nature reserve, the site may be under threat from development. During the 1980s the

reserve received little government attention and builders and squatters began claiming land; 25% of the wetland area is now in litigation, with ownership being contested by conservationists and residents/ developers. There have been other problems on this reserve, including poaching and pollution (from bleach and detergents): the former is apparently now under control but the latter is still giving cause for concern. However, there is some good news. There is now the possibility of a formal agreement between Peruvian and Florida's Everglades National Park officials, which could provide training for the reserve staff. Also, a decrease in poaching has resulted in an increase in numbers of some bird species. The area is being regularly surveyed by Peruvian ornithologists, which is helping to prove the area's importance, and local conservationists say that environmental education is helping to reduce the pressure from the local population.

• *National Audubon Society Field Notes* 49(2): 115, 1995.

## BRAZIL Bad news for the Atlantic Forest

The Atlantic Forests of Brazil once covered 1 million km<sup>2</sup> but today only 5% remains, resulting in many of the numerous endemic birds and mammals being on the verge of extinction. In the past few years, many parks and reserves have been established in this area, but there are still problems. In July 1995 the new government of São Paulo sacked half of the forest guards of the important Fazenda Intervaes reserve. The reason was to save money, but most of the guards receive less than \$200 a month and play a vital role in the protection of the reserve. The government also increased the park from 380 km<sup>2</sup> to 500 km<sup>2</sup> as a demagogic act. The few remaining guards are poorly equipped to cover such a huge area. Just after the

sackings, hundreds of palms were illegally harvested for palm heart extraction; the fruits of the palm *Euterpe edulis* are the main food source of birds such as toucans, guans and cotingas.

The Fazenda Intervalles is managed by a competent foundation, the Fundação Florestal, which is promoting many important research projects in the area, including a study of Muriquis, a long-term study of palm management, plant phenology and the ecology of many of the endangered birds. However, the foundation has also had half of its staff sacked, and many environmental, educational and ecotourism programmes have been stopped.

Every month, palm-heart poachers invade the reserve and the few guards cannot control the situation. National and international pressure is required to re-establish the protection of Intervalles. If you want to help, please write to Fundação Florestal, Av. Miguel Stefano 3900, 04301-903 São Paulo, SP., Brazil. Also, letters to the governor of São Paulo may pressure him to review the dismissal of guards in the park: Governador Mário Covas, Palácio dos Bandeirantes, Av. Morumbi 4500, 05698-900 São Paulo, SP., Brazil.

• Mauro Galetti *in litt.* 1995, also *Oryx* 29: 225-226, 1995.

#### **Lear's Macaw: a second population confirmed**

In late 1994 a team of biologists from the World Parrot Trust, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the CETREL corporation repeatedly observed a flock of at least 20 Lear's Macaws *Anodorhynchus leari* in an area several hundred kilometres away from the only previously known population of 117 birds. In June 1995, two members of this team located the cliff that this second population uses for roosting and presumably nesting. This group of 22 birds occurs in an area without



Lear's Macaws *Anodorhynchus leari*  
(Lyn Wells)

droughts or goats, and which thus supports an excellent population of healthy palms of every age and size class. This is of great importance, as the available evidence suggests that the first population is limited by a shortage of their main natural food, the endosperm of the licuri palm *Syagrus coronatus*.

It was interviews with former bird trappers and smugglers that led to the discovery of this second population. These interviews also indicated that present-day trappers are aware of the existence of this population. However, small marijuana plantations are rumoured to be hidden in the wildlife-rich dry valleys that the population inhabits, and it is only the fear of being shot by the marijuana growers that has so far kept the trappers away from the site. For this reason, all the trappers consider the first population to be the only birds that they can trap with relative impunity. Reliable information indicates that over the past 2-3 years trappers have caught and sold to bird smugglers approximately 20 of the 117 birds of the first, well-known population. Interestingly, the team of biologists has received as yet unconfirmed reports about several other isolated, widely scattered populations of this macaw.

• *PsittaScene* 7(4) 1-3, 1995.

#### **Seabird wreck**

Between June and August 1994, a wreck of seabirds occurred on the east coast of Brazil. An average of 30 bodies were found per km, suggesting a total mortality in the tens of thousands. Of 3,489 birds examined, 2,380 (68%) were the North Atlantic race of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectes diomedea borealis*, 740 (21%) Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis*, 144 White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, 110 Antarctic Prions *Pachyptila desolata*, 40 Narrow-billed Prions *P. belcheri*, 31 Atlantic Petrels *Pterodroma incerta*, 11 Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* and six large *Catharacta* sp. skuas. About 10% of the birds were oiled, and over 40% of the shearwater bodies contained plastic.

• *Sea Swallow* 44: 77-78, 1995.

#### **CHILE**

##### **Ramsar site threatened**

The only Chilean Ramsar site, the Río Cruces Sanctuary, is threatened by the planned construction of a cellulose processing plant. The Chilean company Celulosa Arauco y Constitución has decided to build the processing plant only 15 km from the sanctuary. The plant would take water from the Río Cruces for use in processing cellulose and cooling machinery. This water would then be released back into the Río Cruces at elevated temperatures (30-32°C) and would probably be carrying chemicals used in the plant such as chlorides, phosphates and pesticides as well as residual organic matter. Also, the use of 1.2 m<sup>3</sup> of water could seriously reduce the flow of the river.

This area has been declared a Nature Sanctuary and will soon be incorporated into the National System of Protected Wild Areas under the category of Nature Reserve. The site is of great scientific value, with the population of waterbirds estimated at 20,000 individuals. One of the principal concerns is that even if

an environmental impact assessment is undertaken (which is only voluntary under Chilean law), it will be too superficial and will be conducted in the wet season, thus not taking into account the extremes of dry season fluvial fluctuation.

For further information, please contact: María Isabel Manzur, CODEFF, Casilla 3675, Santiago, Chile. Fax: 56 2 6968562; or Laura Rodríguez, CODEFF-Valdivia, Casilla 191, Valdivia, Chile.

- *Pan American News* 10(4): 3-4, 1995.

### FALKLAND ISLANDS

#### Survey of Berkeley Sound

An ecological survey of Berkeley Sound in the Falkland Islands during the austral summer of 1994/95 has confirmed the area to be of great importance for biological



Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*  
(Charles Gambill)

diversity. Over 70% of all Falklands breeding bird species were recorded, including 8,000 pairs of penguin, 2,500 pairs of shag and 289 pairs of Falkland Steamerduck *Tachyeres*

*brachypterus*. The Sound was also found to be an important feeding area for thousands of shorebirds. Sample work conducted at the same time indicated a similar wealth of invertebrate and plant species.

At present, this important site remains relatively unspoilt, but with the Sound used on a regular basis by shipping, there is a constant risk of a serious disaster occurring from fuel-oil spillage. The enclosed and sheltered nature of the Sound means that even a small spill could have serious consequences, with operational discharges already resulting in oiled penguins and seabirds.

- *The Warrak* 8: 4, 1995.

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN More reserves for the Cayman Islands

The Department of the Environment and the National Trust of the Cayman Islands are cooperating to safeguard areas of natural terrestrial and wetland habitat in the islands. The human population of the islands has increased from 18,000 in 1984 to an estimated 33,000 in 1995 and, as a result, natural habitats are under increasing threat. The Trust has therefore directed its efforts to acquiring and protecting areas of pristine terrestrial and wetland habitats. Areas recently acquired include 240 acres of dry limestone woodland in central Grand Cayman. Known as the Mastic Reserve, it provides breeding habitat for all the island's endemic birds. Further areas of this habitat will be bought as funds allow and owners are prepared to sell. An historic right of way has been re-opened as a trail through the reserve, which is increasing the ecotourism potential as well as providing young people with the opportunity to learn about the natural history of their island. The Trust has also acquired 135 acres of Crown property in the Booby Pond and Rookery on Little Cayman, a Ramsar wetland site which has one of the largest breeding colonies of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* in the Western Hemisphere and the Cayman Islands' only breeding colony of Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens*.

Nature reserves under Trust ownership have increased by 19% over the last year and now comprise 1,214 acres including woodlands and wetlands on all three islands. This brings the

total amount of land protected to 3,056 acres (4.7% of the total land area). Approximately half of this total is comprised of the Environmental Zone Mangroves on the shores of Grand Cayman's Little Sound.

- *El Pitirre* 9(1): 8, 1996 and *National Trust for the Cayman Islands Annual Report*: 23-27, 1995

## Cuban Parrot shows increase on Cayman Islands'

A spring 1995 survey indicates that the Cayman population of Cuban Parrot *Amazona leucocephala caymanensis* has risen from 1,500 birds in 1992 to 1,900. Factors contributing to the increase may include its removal from the Game Bird list in 1990, increased nest site availability due to cavity formation in trees damaged by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, and high breeding success resulting from favourable rainfall patterns leading to abundant fruiting of wild trees. However, the woodland habitat this bird relies on is still being destroyed and they are very unpopular with farmers as they damage fruit crops; they are also still illegally taken from the wild as pets. The Trust will therefore continue to monitor the parrot populations, which are an indicator of the overall ecological health of the islands.

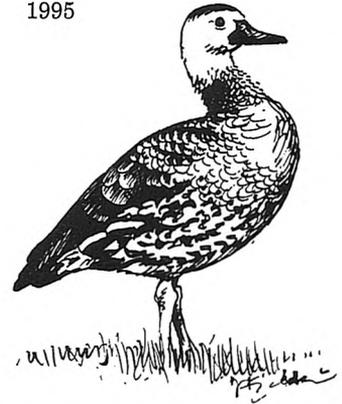
- *National Trust for the Cayman Islands Annual Report*: 36, 1995

## West Indian Whistling-ducks continue to increase

The population of the West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea* on Grand Cayman is now estimated to be at least 360 individuals. The previous

estimate was 100 pairs (*Cotinga* 4: 8). The most recent estimate was obtained by banding (ringing) ducks visiting the farm of Mr. Willie Ebanks at Malportas Pond by Fiona O'Brien, with the help of Willie and his son Jim. Radio transmitters were attached to six birds, which have indicated that the birds also rely heavily on the Central Mangrove Wetland, probably for breeding as well as feeding.

- *National Trust for the Cayman Islands Annual Report*: 37, 1995



West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea* (Jon Fieldså)

## First record of "Brewster's Warbler" in Hispaniola

A "Brewster's Warbler" (the hybrid produced by Golden-winged *Vermivora chrysoptera* x Blue-winged Warbler *V. pinus*) was observed in shade coffee plantations near Manabao, La Vega province, Dominican Republic on 2 November 1994 by Steven C. Latta. This appears to be the first record of this genotype in Hispaniola. Both parent species are rare in Hispaniola (with several records of Blue-winged

but only two of Golden-winged). The bird was searched for, but not relocated, the following day. Warbler species commonly wintering in these coffee plantations include Cape May *Dendroica tigrina*, Black-throated Blue *D. caerulescens*, Black-and-white *Mniotilta varia*, American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* and Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*. Rarer species include Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*, Northern Parula *Parula americana*, Magnolia *Dendroica magnolia*, Black-throated Green *D. virens*, Yellow-throated *D. dominica*, Prairie *D. discolor* and Palm Warblers *D. palmarum*, Louisiana Waterthrush *Seiurus motacilla* and Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*.

- *El Pitirre* 9(1): 2, 1996

#### Cuba hosts first crane count

More than 400 Cubans and a dozen Americans counted the endemic species of Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis nesiototes* and Cuban Parrot *Amazona leucocephala palmarum* from 105 watchpoints across Isla de la Juventud, Cuba's second largest island, as part of Cuba's first "Love the Sandhill Crane and Cuban Parrot festival". The count, on 17 December 1995, produced 126 Sandhills and 1,384 Cuban Parrots. Both subspecies are endemic to Cuba and are considered endangered.

The festival also promoted environmental education among local people and a celebration of the island's natural heritage. Crane calls and counting instructions were broadcast over local radio and television each night during the week prior to the count. Local hunters were especially active and provided the majority of the manpower for the count, putting their identification skills to the test. Luis Hernandez Garcia, the president of Cuba's hunting association, was positive about this, explaining that it would help to make hunters more conservation-minded.

Xiomara Galves, the festival organiser, hopes that future counts will expand onto the main island and possibly include other threatened species such as crocodiles and iguanas.

- *The ICF Bugle* 22(1): 3, 1996

## MEXICO

### New parrot reserve in Mexico

In August 1995 purchase of the El Taray Sanctuary in north-eastern Mexico was completed. The reserve, near the city of Monterrey, includes 360 ha of montane pine forest habitat as well as the most important known nesting cliff of the threatened Maroon-fronted Parrot *Rhynchopsitta terrisi*, which is endemic to the Sierra Madre Oriental in Mexico. This species has one of the smallest ranges of any continental parrot, occurring only in a 200 mile (320 km) stretch of these mountains, with all 24 breeding colonies known occur within a 60 mile (100 km) stretch. An estimated 100 pairs nested in El Taray Sanctuary in 1995 – a quarter of the nesting population (although the total population was estimated at 1,000-2,000 pairs in the 1970s).

Acquisition of the reserve was made possible by financial contributions from CONABIO (the Mexican Committee on Biodiversity), the US State Department, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Zoological Society of San Diego. Purchase of the new reserve will facilitate habitat protection, education, research and ecotourism. Title to the land will be held by CONABIO, but administration of the reserve will be the responsibility of the Museo de las Aves.

- *Psitta Scene* 8(1): 8-9, 1996

### Mexican waterfowl catastrophe update

Most of the 40,000 waterbirds that died at a reservoir in central Mexico in October-November 1994 (see *Cotinga* 4: 8) died of botulism according to the findings of a North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) inquiry. Originally it was thought that the birds had been killed by heavy metal poisoning, as the reservoir is downstream from tanneries and other industries near León. However, the panel did find that exposure to heavy metals, especially chromium, lead and mercury, played a role and could have contributed to the botulism. They suggested that explosives be detonated at the site to deter birds from using the reservoir and that a feeding programme be established at an alternative site. The National Audubon Society and two Mexican environmental organisations had filed a request for an inquiry under the terms of the NAFTA environmental accord.

- *Field Notes* 49(3): 215, 1995

## BELIZE

### Britain backs logging in Belize rainforest

The Belize government, on the advice of British officials, has approved large-scale logging operations in a remote primary rainforest reserve near the Guatemala border. The Columbia River Forest Reserve in the Toledo District of southern Belize covers 103,000 acres and Atlantic Industries, a venture financed from Hong Kong and Singapore, has been granted a 20-year licence to log an area of 10,000 hectares.

Under its licence, Atlantic Industries should implement a "sustainable forest management plan" permitting it to extract only marked trees, totalling no more than 17 cubic metres of trees per hectare on a 40-year rotation. The licence also requires it to consult with the local Maya people and avoid protected areas. However, Atlantic Industries has already apparently flouted the terms of the licence, failing to tell local people of its plans, cut trees untagged by the Forestry Department, bulldozing logging roads in prohibited areas and failing to mark stumps. It has also emerged

that the Minister for Natural Resources, Eduardo "Dito" Juan, signed Atlantic Industries' concession despite the Forestry Department having filed 11 objections. As with all logging concessions in sensitive areas, this one threatens the homes and livelihood of the local Maya people, who have hired lawyers to seek judicial reviews of the Belize government's actions and the advice by Britain's Overseas Development Administration that the rainforest was suitable for logging.

A survey of the Columbia River Forest Reserve by Conservation International estimated that it contains at least 1500 plant species, 10 species of frog (including three new to Belize and one new to science), 29 different mammals and 224 bird species. They recommended establishing a national park in the region.

- *BBC Wildlife*: 14(4), 1996

## COLOMBIA

### More on the Andean Condor reintroduction scheme

The reintroduction of Andean Condors *Vultur gryphus* in northern South America continues. This year the Peregrine Fund and its partners plan to release 4-6 birds at a new site in the Parque Nacional Los Nevados in the Department of Caldas, Colombia. Last year saw the first confirmed breeding effort by reintroduced birds when a pair laid an egg at a site in the Andes near Bogotá, Colombia. This year several more of the released birds will reach sexual maturity and further

breeding is hoped for.

- *Peregrine Fund Annual Report*: 11, 1995

## VENEZUELA

### Amazonian forests under threat in south-eastern Venezuela

Large areas of the pristine rainforests of south-eastern Venezuela are threatened by new government sponsored oil, mining and logging concessions. These concessions, if they are all taken, will have a devastating effect on the enormous forested regions of Amazonas and Bolívar states, as well as on the native people dependent on them.

These findings are presented in a new report by Survival International and the World Rainforest Movement, in which the Venezuelan government has been charged with "serious violations" of the International Labour Office's Convention on Tribal and Indigenous Populations, which was officially incorporated into Venezuelan national law in 1983. There are 315,000 native people in Venezuela but only 1% of native communities possess legally binding land titles; this recent avalanche of land concessions apparently ignores even these.

For example, in Estado Bolívar around 60 foreign mining companies, including the Canadian-owned Yellowjack Resources and Solomon Resources, have been granted concessions, which in many cases encroach on native lands and supposedly protected forests. This is a double blow to local people because they had previously been denied permission to carry out small-scale mining to protect headwater

catchments, due to the threat to the forests. They respected this and are now seeing massive mining and logging operations about to start by foreign companies which will cause far greater deforestation and water pollution and threaten to destroy their lands and their livelihoods.

The threat to the native people is the main concern voiced in the report, but the effect on the wildlife and the forest ecosystem, from the ranchers and other settlers who move in along the access roads, as well as from the direct results of logging and mining, are only too apparent. The major concern is that this pristine area could witness the same huge-scale destruction which occurred in Brazil in the 1980s – a fate which most people previously thought this unique area would be spared.

- *BBC Wildlife* 14(1): 59, January 1996

### Breeding Greater Flamingos in Venezuela

A Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* colony was discovered at the Ciénaga de Los Olivitos in the Maracaibo Basin in Zulia state, western Venezuela, in 1987. Breeding was also confirmed in 1988 and 1989. The highest numbers were in 1987 with 4,015 nests (about 8,000 adult birds) containing a total of 3,000+ pulli. A total of 5,000+ birds is estimated to have fledged from the colony over the three years.

Greater Flamingos have declined throughout the Caribbean area and this is an important discovery. Phelps and Phelps Jr. knew of only one Greater Flamingo colony in Venezuela: on La Orchila Island where a colony in 1952 contained 50 nests, all of which were abandoned due to human disturbance. This is the first record of breeding in Venezuela since 1952 and the first mainland colony to be discovered.

- *Colonial Waterbirds* 17(1): 28-34, 1994



Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* (Dave Beadle)



Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja* (Dave Beadle)

### Harpy Eagle Conservation Program

In 1995 the Harpy Eagle Conservation Program discovered seven new nesting sites in Venezuela, bringing the national total found during their surveys to an impressive 18. Three of the seven contained chicks by the year end and another had an almost fully grown fledgling still accepting food from its parents. Sadly, they also report that one of the juveniles radio-tagged 27 months previously was shot by a poacher. Their detailed study of nesting Harpy Eagles *Harpia harpyja* in Venezuela continues.

- *Peregrine Fund Annual Report*: 15, 1995

### ECUADOR

#### Flocking and feeding behaviour of Waved Albatross poses a potential threat

The world population of Waved Albatrosses *Diomedea irrorata* was estimated at about 15,000 pairs in 1994<sup>1</sup>, of which 99% breed on Española Island in the Galápagos. Using satellite transmitters, it has been demonstrated that the birds forage over the continental shelf of Peru<sup>2</sup>. However, a survey by Godfrey Merlen, David Parer and Elizabeth Parer-Cook in 1995 indicates that scavenging near the Galápagos breeding grounds may constitute an important part of their feeding behaviour and as this brings them into close contact with local tuna fishermen could pose a potential

threat to the species.

The survey was carried out between 1-14 September 1995 and involved dawn-to-dusk watches on nine full days and casual observations on the other days. It was found that flocks of Waved Albatrosses frequently associated with feeding groups of Common Dolphins *Delphinus delphis*, Blue-footed Boobies *Sula nebouxii*, Masked Boobies *S.*

*dactylatra*, Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens*, White-vented Storm Petrels *Oceanites gracilis*, Wedge-rumped Storm Petrels *Oceanodroma tethys* and Galápagos Sea Lions *Zalophus californianus* which regularly form in the vicinity of the islands. Large concentrations of albatrosses were observed on many occasions, always with feeding groups, with the largest flock recorded during the survey being 389. However, taking the survey as a whole, 1-3 together was a more typical sighting.

The feeding groups always occurred offshore in deep water and seemed to follow a fixed pattern. The dolphins would locate the food with Blue-footed Boobies following overhead. Once the food was accessible to the boobies, they would begin to dive on it. Frigatebirds, which had been keeping an eye on the proceedings, would descend to mob the boobies, forcing them to disgorge their fish. However, the albatrosses which were attracted by the activity were observed on dozens of occasions to move in and grab the disgorged food. On one occasion up to four albatrosses were seen round one "downed" booby. The albatrosses appeared to rely on the frigatebirds to initiate the attack but would then try and seize the disgorged food. Storm petrels fluttered amongst these birds and picked up whatever morsels were left over.

Similar feeding groups also

occurred close inshore, involving a different set of species, but Waved Albatrosses were not associated with these.

Waved Albatrosses were also observed scavenging in other situations. On one occasion several albatrosses, plus frigatebirds and storm-petrels, were attracted to the remains of an attack by seven Killer Whales *Orcinus orca* on a school of Common Dolphins. On another, three albatrosses were seen feeding on the remains of a large squid *Angistrocheirus leseveri*.

During the entire survey no albatrosses were seen feeding on live prey. Thus (and *contra* to most of the literature) it seems that scavenging may be an important feeding strategy for Waved Albatrosses at certain times of the year. This means that the structure of feeding groups and the well-being of all their components (fish, dolphins, boobies and frigatebirds) is perhaps of importance to the feeding success of the albatrosses.

There is a potential threat in that fishermen, as well as dolphins and seabirds, are also attracted to schools of tuna. Until very recently the fishing fleet in the area has been slow, local and primitive in its methods. However, there is enormous pressure to allow local fishermen to increase the tonnage of their fleet. The fleet is also modernising and one of the "new" techniques to be introduced is the use of longlines for the valuable Yellow Fin Tuna *Thunnus albacares* and other pelagic fish in the waters surrounding the Galápagos. The effects of longlining on albatrosses in other parts of the world has been catastrophic (the albatrosses scavenge from the baited hooks as they enter the water - with disastrous results) and there is a very real threat that the same thing may now occur around the Galápagos; especially given that Waved Albatrosses are not just scavengers, but are also heavily reliant on squid<sup>3</sup>, a popular bait

for longlining. One way of diminishing such a threat is to prohibit longlining and other potentially dangerous fishing techniques in the waters within the Marine Resource Reserve (15 nautical miles seaward from the perimeter of the archipelago).

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  2. Anderson, D. (1995) Ecological and population dynamics of Waved Albatross: Preliminary report to the Charles Darwin Research Station, June 23 1995. Unpublished report, Charles Darwin Research Station.
  3. Harris, M.P. (1973) The biology of the Waved Albatross *Diomedea irrorata* of Hood Island, Galapagos. *Ibis* 115: 483-510.
- Godfrey Merlen, *Puerto Ayora, Galápagos*.

#### Galápagos Penguin census: 1995 results

The 15th census of Galápagos Penguins *Spheniscus mendiculus* was carried out on 22-23 August and 27 September-3 October 1995 by the Charles Darwin Research Station and the Galápagos National Parks Service. The census produced a total of 844 penguins, of which 402 (47.6%) were adults, 145 (17.2%) juveniles and 297 (32.5%) of indeterminate age. 538 (63.7%) were on Isabela (with most of these on the western side), 271 (32.1%) on Fernandina, and just 35 (4.1%) on other islands. The percentage of juveniles were 16.2% for Isabela, 17.3% for Fernandina and 22.9% for the other islands. The largest flock was 21 in south-western Isabela. Two active nests were found, one with a nearly fledged chick and one with two downy young. Twelve birds were in active moult, two pairs were seen

courting and one pair was observed copulating.

The total was slightly lower than the 873 counted in 1994 but significantly higher than the 398 counted during the 1982/83 El Niño. The relatively high total and high percentage of juveniles suggest the population is slowly recovering from the 1982/83 El Niño, when it declined by an estimated 77%. However the data indicate that the population is still 50% below that prior to 1982.

The number of goats has increased recently in western Isabela, where penguins are abundant, and their nesting habitat may be being damaged through continuous soil erosion by these animals. An eradication programme is being planned to remove the goats. There is also concern that massive extraction of sea cucumbers in the area may affect other trophic levels in the Galápagos, as well as penguins.

- *Penguin Conservation* 9(1): 2-4, 1996

#### Texaco sued for damage to Ecuadorian rainforest

A group of native Ecuadorians has filed a £1 million lawsuit against Texaco in the New York courts. The oil company is accused of "large-scale disposal of inadequately treated hazardous wastes and destruction of tropical rainforest". The Rainforest Action Network estimates that Texaco may have spilled 17 million gallons of crude oil in the Amazonian region of Ecuador, which is more than half as much again as in the *Exxon Valdez* disaster of 1989.

- *BBC Wildlife* 14(1): 55, 1996

#### BRAZIL

##### Scarlet Ibis colony discovered in Brazil

In April 1991, during shorebird research, a breeding colony of about 2,500 Scarlet Ibises *Eudocimus ruber* was found on Cajual Island, Maranhão, Brazil. The nests were 8-12 m high in young mangroves (mainly of *Avicennia* sp.). All the

nests observed contained eggs or young. This is the most recent breeding record of Scarlet Ibis on the north coast of Brazil.

- *Ararajuba* 3: 67-68, 1995

#### ARGENTINA

##### Pesticides in Argentina affecting populations of Swainson's Hawks

An extremely potent organophosphate pesticide has been linked to the death of up to 20,000 Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsonii* in La Pampa region of Argentina. 700 dead Swainson's Hawks were found in 1995. This led to a more detailed survey this year, led by Brian Woodbridge of the US Forest Service, as a result of which 3,900 dead Swainson's Hawks were found in January 1996. This followed the spraying of fields in the area with monocrotophos for grasshopper control. 2,729 of these were found at a single site following a pesticide application. These hawks, which breed in northern North America, spend their austral summers in Argentina, where they feed primarily on grasshoppers. They are subject to direct mortality through skin contact with the pesticide, as well as secondary poisoning through the consumption of contaminated insects.

In recent years, much of the winter (austral summer) habitat of Swainson's Hawk has been changed from range-based livestock to intensive crop production using pesticides. There are fears that other insectivorous birds in the region are suffering the same fate as the Swainson's Hawks. Monocrotophos is highly toxic to birds and banned in the US and Canada. Despite this, it is in widespread use worldwide and is manufactured by many companies under varying brand names, including Nuvacon by Ciba-Geigy of Basel, Switzerland, one of the largest producers. This and many other incidents illustrates the pressing need to establish a global protocol dealing with persistent and bioaccumulative chemicals.

- Gerald W. Winegrad, American Bird Conservancy

# Neotropical News



## NORTH AMERICA

### Kirtland's Warbler decrease, yet spread

A survey in 1996 revealed 692 singing male Kirtland's Warblers *Dendroica kirtlandii* in Michigan, USA, a decline of 9% from the previous year's total of 765. The decline is thought to be due to large tracts of habitat becoming too mature to be suitable for the warblers. However, new stands which have either been planted by researchers or created by controlled fires are approaching the right age and are expected to be colonised in a few years. Moreover, at least 14 singing males were found in four counties on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, apparently due to appropriate management of the species' jack-pine forests. In recent decades, the breeding range has been confined to nine counties on the Lower Peninsula of the state. The population of this endangered warbler thus seems likely to increase again.

- *The Skimmer* 4(6): 7, 1996; 5(2): 1, 1997



Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*  
(David Beadle)

### Shrike silences guns

The endemic San Clemente Island subspecies of Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus mearnsi* is probably North America's most endangered

taxon. In November 1996, just 15 individuals remained on the island off the coast of California, USA. The shrike's decline is due to habitat destruction by now-eradicated goats and by fires induced by shells exploding during US Navy target practice. The American Bird Conservancy threatened to sue the US Navy under the Endangered Species Act. They reached an agreement whereby the Navy would cull cats and rats, reduce bombardment of shrike habitats and control the spread of fires. Concurrently, 40 juveniles from a San Diego Zoo captive breeding programme should be released during 1997.

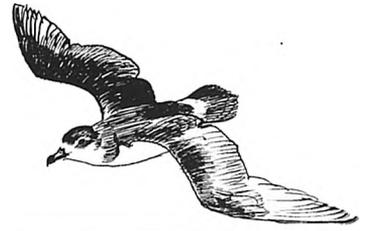
- *World Birdwatch* 19(1), 1997

### Parrot smuggler jailed

Tony Silva, a well-known writer on the plight of endangered parrots, has been jailed for nearly seven years for heading an illegal bird smuggling operation. Silva was also fined \$100,000 by the Federal Court of Chicago, USA and ordered to do 200 hours community service and three years probation. This is one of the heaviest sentences ever imposed for a federal wildlife crime. Silva was found guilty on counts of smuggling birds (including Hyacinth Macaws *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*) worth \$1.3 m into the USA and related tax violations. It has been estimated that the defendant may have been responsible for the demise of 5–10% of the world's Hyacinth Macaws. Silva was arrested in 1995 following a three-year investigation into international parrot trade by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The investigation has produced 37 other

convictions, including that of Silva's mother, Gila Daoud.

- *TRAFFIC* 15 (4), 1996; *World Birdwatch* 19(1), 1997



Bermuda Petrel *Pterodroma cahow*  
(Jon Fjeldså)

### Bermuda Petrel breeding success

Bermuda Petrels *Pterodroma cahow* enjoyed their best breeding season for years in 1996. The record population of 52 pairs raised 26 juveniles, continuing the increase noted since 1990.

- *World Birdwatch* 19(1), 1997

## CARIBBEAN

### Puerto Rican Parrot threatened by development

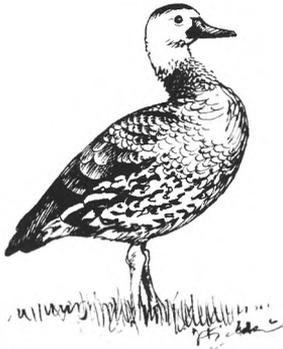
Puerto Rico's Caribbean National Forest, El Yunque, is under threat



Puerto Rican Parrot *Amazona vittata*  
(Charles Gambill)

from urban encroachment and tourism. Various developments – including hotels, roads, a golf course and a landfill site – have been built on a US government-approved buffer zone and are now spreading towards the forest boundary. Non-native predators such as cats and dogs have been introduced, and water consumption has also increased, drying up creeks within the forest. The 113 km<sup>2</sup> forest, protected since 1903, is the only remaining rainforest in the US national system and supports a number of threatened species such as the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot *Amazona vittata*.

- *Oryx* 30(4): 246, 1996



West Indian Whistling-duck  
*Dendrocygna arborea* (Jon Fjeldsa)

### More records of West Indian Whistling-duck

On 22 April 1996, Guy Kirwan, Rob Williams and Chris Bradshaw observed three West Indian Whistling-ducks *Dendrocygna arborea* at Laguna del Salodillo in north-west Dominican Republic. Local fisherman, Carlos Mari-Brilo reported that several hundred whistling-ducks *Dendrocygna* spp. regularly use the lake throughout the year. The area is relatively remote and sparsely populated, giving further hope that this globally threatened species may be more abundant than previously thought. Surveys of all suitable waterbodies throughout Hispaniola (and,

indeed, throughout the species' range) are urgently required to make an accurate assessment of its true status.

- *TWSG News* 9: 10–11, 1996

### MEXICO

#### Studies of the endangered Socorro Mockingbird

The Socorro Mockingbird *Mimodes graysoni*, endemic to Socorro Island, has declined dramatically this century, and is now considered Endangered. Surveys by Juan Martínez-Gómez and Robert Curry in 1993 and 1994 produced a population estimate of c.350 individuals in 1994. Most birds were recorded at a single high altitude site which covers less than 10% of the total island area. The study indicated that habitat degradation by sheep may be the main cause of the decline. The presence of young birds in both years implies that the species is breeding successfully. The sex ratio was found to be similar to that of other undisturbed mimid populations. The researchers used these two facts to refute the theory that cats – through predation of incubating females and their young – have been a major cause of the decline. They also noted that Northern Mockingbirds *Mimus polyglottos*, which have been present on the island since the 1970s, occur mainly in the open areas grazed by sheep and so are unlikely to displace the endemic species. Further studies will assess the conservation status of this single island endemic whose population is clearly very small.

- *Bird Conservation International* 6: 271–283, 1996

### BELIZE

#### Four Jabiru nests found in Belize

A total of four Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* nests were discovered in Belize in 1996. Three were in the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary area with the other, which had three chicks, at a newly discov-

ered site in the Calabash Pond area. One of the nests in the CTWS area was destroyed by strong winds on 20 March, resulting in the loss of both chicks.

- *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter* 28 (2–3): 10, 1996



Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* (David Beadle)

### Wood Storks have a good season

The Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* colony at Shipstern Nature Reserve on Seaman's Caye contained c.800 birds in 1996, with wardens being posted on a rotation basis to provide additional protection for the colony.

- *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter* 28 (2–3): 10, 1996

### GUYANA

#### Rainforests threatened by logging concessions

Guyana's freeze on foreign logging concessions, introduced in May 1995 for a period of three years in order to develop a forest management capacity, may be about to break. Guyana is now introducing 'exploratory licences' which effectively allow logging. Guyana attracts foreign loggers because of its large pristine rainforest and cheap timber. According to a 1995 World Bank study, royalties, taxes and forest fees are only c.10% of those in Africa and Asia. Interested companies include Solid Timbers Sendirian Berhad of Malaysia

and Buchanan Forests Products of Canada.

- *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter* 28 (2-3): 9, 1996

## ECUADOR

### Galápagos island threatened by goat damage

A feral goat population on Volcán Alcedo, Isabela, has grown to tens of thousands since the early 1990s and is now causing serious damage to vegetation. This is threatening the endemic wildlife on the island, especially the giant tortoise *Geochelone elephantopus*. An eradication campaign was started in 1995, and the vegetation and tortoise populations are being monitored. It is hoped that the goats will be removed in the near future.

- *Oryx* 30(4): 248, 1996

## PERU

### New national park declared...

In July 1996, the Peruvian government designated the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park. The park covers 325,000 ha from the Río Tambopata east to the Bolivian border and incorporates the Río Heath National Sanctuary, the only area of tropical grassland in Peru. In 1995 the Bolivian government designated the adjacent Alto Madidi National Park, which covers 1.7 million ha (see Bolivia below). These two parks create one of the largest contiguous protected areas of rainforest in the world. The Tambopata Reserve Society are now hoping to cooperate with local organisations to establish a management and research programme for Bahuaja-Sonene. The park lies just east of an area allocated to Mobil for oil and gas exploration. It had been hoped to have this area included in the park, and there is now clearly an onus on Mobil to act with sensitivity towards the environment during their exploration.

- *Tambopata Reserve Society Newsletter* 34, 1996

### ... but goldmining damages adjacent rainforest

In the past three years, goldminers have flown more than 400 earth-moving machines into Madre de Dios in southern Peru. The miners are now moving into the Tambopata Reserved Zone (see above) and it has been warned that the Madre de Dios area could suffer irreparable damage within the next five years. The huge front-loading machines destroy all trees in their path as they move a 30-metre depth of subsoil. The earth is placed on wooden sluices and washed with high-pressure hoses to separate silt and gold. Mercury is then added to attract the gold particles prior to being burned off. This causes river and air pollution as well as posing a risk to goldminers' health. Indigenous people, mainly Harakmbut Indians, are losing their lands to the miners and have also suffered assaults and death threats from miners and police.

In addition, Mobil have recently been granted permission to carry out oil and gas exploration in forests legally owned by the tribe (see above). One glimmer of hope is that a new, less detrimental goldmining technique has recently been developed, which can recover 95% of the mercury and increases gold yields by up to 40%. This hopefully provides a strong incentive for miners to switch methods.

Survival International are campaigning to protect the lands of the indigenous people in this region of Peru. If you would like to help them, write to: Survival International, 11-15 Emerald Street, London WC1N 3QL, UK. For more information on the Tambopata Reserve and Mobil activities, send an SAE to TReeS, 64 Belsize Park, London NW3 4EH, UK.

- *BBC Wildlife* 14(7): 59, 1996

## BOLIVIA

### National park to double in size

The Noel Kempff Mercado National Park in north-east Bolivia is to be doubled in size to give a total area of 8,900 km<sup>2</sup>, making it the largest area ever protected through private initiative anywhere in the world. The park contains key habitat transition zones which connect the dry Gran Chaco to the Amazon basin and thus has an especially high biodiversity. Globally threatened birds include Rufous-sided Pygmy-tyrant *Euscarthmus rufomarginatus* and Black-and-tawny Seedeater *Sporophila nigrorufa*.

- *Oryx* 30(4): 247, 1996



Rufous-sided Pygmy-tyrant *Euscarthmus rufomarginatus* (Jon Field's)

### Two giant national parks declared

The Bolivian government has recently declared two giant national parks. Firstly, Alto Madidi, on the Peruvian border (see above) covers 1.7 million ha of montane and lowland rainforest, glaciers and natural savanna. Because of this large range of altitudes and habitats, the park probably has the highest biodiversity (including the highest diversity of bird species) of any protected area in the world. At least 1,200 bird species have been recorded in the area along with similarly high numbers of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, invertebrates and plants.

The second new park is Kaa-iyá del Gran Chaco in the south-east, which covers 3.5

million ha of the last great expanse of the Chaco dry forest. This park is thought to contain possibly the highest diversity of terrestrial mammals in Latin America, including the Chacoan Peccary *Catagonus wagneri*, which was known only from subfossil remains until 1974. Local indigenous people in both parks were consulted during the designation process and will help administer management plans. The parks represent a welcome new wave of conservation initiative in Bolivia, instigated by Alejandro Sanchez de Lozada, head of Bolivia's National Biodiversity Directorate.

- *Notes from the Field*, Summer 1996 and *Oryx* 30(2): 99, 1996

#### Help for Blue-throated Macaws

Efforts to reduce trade and encourage community-based conservation are helping Blue-throated Macaws *Ara glaucogularis* in eastern Bolivia. Surveys in 1996 at a known stronghold had revealed a 50% decline on the previous year's total of 25 birds in a 20 km<sup>2</sup> area. In response, the team – from Armonía – have initiated an environmental education programme in the surrounding area. Armonía now have the permission of the regional Federation of Cattle Ranchers to conduct fieldwork on all private properties and are brokering an agreement whereby landowners assume responsibility for the conservation of the macaws and their habitat. This follows the disappearance of six *A. glaucogularis* (together with two Hyacinth Macaws *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* and seven Red-fronted Macaws *Ara rubrogenys*) from Santa Cruz Zoo. Following pressure by conservationists, the Bolivian government has ordered an inquiry. The zoo director is liable to face prosecution if unable to produce a satisfactory explanation.

- *World Birdwatch* 19(1), 1997

#### BRAZIL

##### Kinglet *Calyptura* survives in south-east Brazil!

The possibility that the Kinglet *Calyptura* *Calyptura cristata* was extinct can at last be dismissed. Ending a period of more than one hundred years without a confirmed record of this enigmatic species (see Collar *et al.* 1992, *Threatened birds of the Americas*) the Brazilian ornithologist Ricardo Parrini rediscovered it on 27 October 1996, just 60 km from Rio de Janeiro city. On that morning, while watching birds in the forested foothills of the Serra dos Orgãos, Parrini located two birds, probably a pair, of a remarkably tiny crested bird that could only be Kinglet *Calyptura*. José Fernando Pacheco was immediately informed, who mobilised Luiz Pedreira Gonzaga and a team of other ornithologists and



Kinglet *Calyptura* *Calyptura cristata*  
(Jon Fjeldsá)

friends from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the local Birdwatchers' Club who observed the birds again in following days at the same place. A note on the observations made by Parrini and this team is due in a future issue of *Cotinga*. Gonzaga and Pacheco are now coordinating a follow-up survey to obtain additional data on ecological and behavioural aspects of the species, and will hopefully find it in other localities in the Serra do Mar.

- Luiz Pedreira Gonzaga *in litt.* 1996

##### Rio de Janeiro Antwren rediscovered

The Rio de Janeiro Antwren *Myrmotherula fluminensis* has been rediscovered in south-east Brazil. Previously known from a single male specimen collected in 1982 near Rio de Janeiro, it was rediscovered by two English ornithologists, Stephen Knapp and Andrew Foster, in the Serra dos Orgãos foothills, 60 km north-east of Rio de Janeiro. Several individuals have been observed in the same place up to March 1997.

The first field observations have already yielded much new data on the Rio de Janeiro Antwren: the as yet undescribed female plumage has been observed, contact calls tape-recorded and some basic life-history information collected. It is hoped that a complete census and ecological study of the species can be attempted in the near future.

The finders are currently preparing the results of their research as a formal paper to be submitted shortly.

The rediscovery site, the Serra do Mar Ecological Reserve, harbours a number of other threatened and near-threatened fauna, including Elegant Mourner *Laniisoma elegans*, and the highly threatened Woolly Spider Monkey *Brachyteles arachnoides*. With primary and secondary habitats occurring from 35–2,300 m, the Serra do Mar Ecological Reserve forms a vital link in a montane forest corridor between Parque Nacional da Serra dos Orgãos and Reserva Ecológica de Macae de Cima.

A management plan for the Serra do Mar Ecological Reserve is currently being produced which will encapsulate the primary objectives of conservation, research, education and community involvement. To assist the funding of these primary objectives, a small ecotourism programme catering particularly for birders and natural history groups is to be located at the



Rio de Janeiro Antwren *Myrmotherula fluminensis* (David Beadle)

forest edge just 50 m above sea-level and adjacent to primary habitats.

Subject to funding being made available, this important and exciting new reserve is scheduled to open in 1998. Anyone interested in finding out more about the project Serra do Mar Ecological Reserve should contact Stephen Knapp, Yeomans Cottage, Mill Lane, Sidlesham, West Sussex, PO20 7NA, UK. Tel. +44 (0)1243 641014; fax. +44 (0)1243 641438.

• Stephen Knapp *in litt.* 1997

#### New threats to Amazon

A new Brazilian law is threatening land formerly preserved for indigenous peoples and accords greater powers to ranchers, loggers and miners exploiting the Amazon rainforest. More than 500 official challenges have been filed against 56 native reserves under Decree 1,775, which came into force in January 1996.

However, it has been estimated that the total number may be closer to 2,000, involving more than 80 indigenous areas. Brazil's Socialist Party has brought a case to the Supreme Court arguing that this decree contravenes the Brazilian constitution which guarantees native peoples the lands that they have always occupied. The European Parliament has passed a resolution calling on Brazil to revoke the decree.

• *Oryx* 30(4): 247, 1996

#### Threat to the Pantanal wetlands continues

The first phase of the Hidrovia, the controversial industrial waterway planned for the Paraguay and Paraná rivers, has been approved by the governments of Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina, despite the fact that none of the promised public consultation has materialised. The scheme will cost \$91 million and involves straightening river bends and dredging 22.5 million cubic metres of material from the river beds. This is likely to accelerate the flow of the two rivers and drain more than 200,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Brazil's Pantanal wetlands. Brazil has recently announced plans for a port in the Pantanal at Descalvados, which is a likely prelude to further development of the area.

• *BBC Wildlife* 14 (7): 57, 1996

#### Threats to Brazilian loggers

The Brazilian environment agency IBAMA is owed more than \$422 million in unpaid fines by logging companies and has a backlog of 123,000 cases for breaches of environmental laws held up in the courts. The President of IBAMA has brought in 2,000 lawyers to call in the fines and the army has made 28,000 soldiers, 1,000 boats and 80 aircraft available for logistical support.

• *Oryx* 30(2): 100, 1996

#### ARGENTINA

##### Horned Coot stronghold discovered

In October 1995, Sandra Caziani and Enrique Derlindati counted 8,988 Horned Coots *Fulica*

*cornuta* in a survey of a little-known lagoon complex in the Vilama and Pululos area of north-west Argentina. One hundred and eighty active nests were also discovered. This is a highly significant count, given that the previous world population estimate was just 5,000 birds. The coots appear to be strongly dependent on submerged vegetation, which has been badly affected by a severe drought in the region. Proposals are underway to protect the lagoons.

• *TWSG News* 9: 34–39, 1996

##### Swainson's Hawk recovery

An historic agreement between the American Bird Conservancy and Ciba-Geigy, a major pesticides manufacturer, has curbed unintentional fatalities of Swainson's Hawks in Argentina. Up to 20,000 hawks, perhaps 5% of the world population, had died on their wintering grounds in the La Pampas region following the use of monocrotophos to kill grasshoppers, the hawks' main food item. Ciba-Geigy have agreed to remove monocrotophos from the Argentine market and to buy back stock held by farmers. They have supported a public education programme run in part by the Asociación Ornitológica del Plata. The Argentine government agreed to ban use of the pesticide on grasshoppers and alfalfa. Such efforts appear to have had immediate benefit: no dead hawks have been found so far during the winter of 1996–1997.

• *World Birdwatch* 19(1), 1997



Horned Coot *Fulica cornuta* (Jon Fjeldså)

# Neotropical News



## CANADA

### Black-capped Petrels on Great Lakes after Hurricane Fran

During September 1996 about 50 Black-capped Petrels *Pterodroma hasitata* were blown into the Great Lakes area of Ontario, Canada. Most birds reached Lake Erie, where 23 were found dead and others seen alive. The birds had been displaced by Hurricane Fran, which hit the North Carolina coast on 5 September and sent strong winds over the Appalachian mountains into Pennsylvania and then over Lake Erie. A further 15 birds were recorded in the USA, from North Carolina north to New York. This represents the largest hurricane-induced influx of this species into North America and, considering the small size of the only known breeding population on Hispaniola (see *Cotinga* 6: 29), a significant percentage of the world population of this threatened seabird may have been involved.

• *El Pitirre* 10(1): 15–16, 1997



Black-capped Petrels *Pterodroma hasitata*  
(Lyn Wells)

## CARIBBEAN

### New National Park in Dominican Republic

Lago Enrique and its adjacent wetlands, which hold a large

population of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, have been declared a National Park. Freshwater seeps in the area were being used for agriculture, and it is hoped that this declaration will prevent further encroachment. It is also intended that the park will become the nucleus of a new biosphere reserve, protecting montane and cloud forest to the north and south of the lake.

• *Oryx* 31(3): 175, 1997

### Update on West Indian Whistling-duck in Dominican Republic

Evaluation of historical and available recent data indicates that the West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea* still occurs in six populations (four of them coastal) in the lowlands of the Dominican Republic. However, it is thought to be declining in most areas, principally due to degradation of its wetland habitat. Effective conservation measures are being hampered by a lack of political support at both regional and national level. There is also insufficient data on the species' distributional limits, population density and ecology.

• *El Pitirre* 10(1): 2–10, 1997

### Census of Cuban Parrot and Sandhill Crane on Isla de la Juventud, Cuba

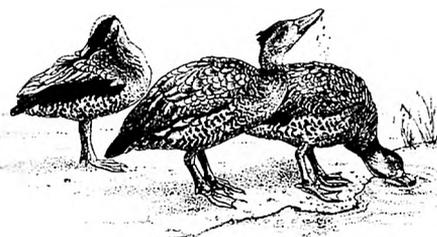
A census of Cuban Parrot *Amazona leucocephala palmarum* and Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis nesiotis* in the northern part of Isla de la Juventud, Cuba, on 17 December 1995 obtained counts of 1,320 and 115 birds respectively.

• *El Pitirre* 10(1): 25, 1997

### Puerto Rican Vireo in decline

The endemic Puerto Rican Vireo *Vireo latimeri* has been gradually declining since 1973, according to studies at the Guánica Forest. It is thought that the population decrease is due to low nesting success as a result of brood parasitism by the Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*, a recent immigrant to the forest. The vireo is not considered threatened, but action should be taken to halt the decline while the species remains fairly abundant.

• *Wilson Bulletin* 109(2): 195–202, 1997



West Indian Whistling-ducks *Dendrocygna arborea* (Lyn Wells)

### Guiana Island threatened by development

The Antigua and Barbudan government is backing a Malaysian proposal for a huge tourist development on the ecologically important 162 ha Guiana Island. The island lies in the middle of one of the largest mangrove regions in the Lesser Antilles and supports seagrass beds, coral reefs, turtle nesting beaches and the threatened West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea*.

• *BBC Wildlife* 15(5), 1997

### Study of Grenada Dove reveals recent decline

A study of the critically endangered Grenada Dove *Leptotila wellsi* indicates that the population has declined by 50% since 1987 and now numbers less than 70 birds in two small populations. In response, the Grenada government recently established the Mount Harman Estate, where three-quarters of the population occur in 480 ha of forest, as a national park. The Global Environmental Facility provided a grant of \$200,000 to set up and maintain the park. In May 1997, work began on a species recovery plan, to be discussed further at a workshop in Grenada in late 1997.

• *World Birdwatch* 19(3): 4, 1997

### Update on White-tailed Sabrewing on Tobago

The threatened White-tailed Sabrewing *Campylopterus ensipennis* is restricted to north-eastern Venezuela and Tobago. In 1963, Hurracaine Flora drove the Tobago population to the verge of extinction. It was rediscovered in 1974 and the population has made a subsequent slow recovery. Surveys in March and December 1995 by F. E. Hayes *et al.* located 45 birds along 39.2 km of trails; Hayes' team estimates that the Tobago population may now number several hundred. Most birds were in the Main Ridge Forest reserve, principally in mature montane forest, with a few records in marginal habitats such as abandoned plantations. All birds were found above 280 m altitude: low altitude records were from areas where the birds were common in March but absent in December, suggesting some seasonal movement.

• *El Pitirre* 10(1): 28, 1997

### MEXICO

#### Hope for old-growth forests

The Mexican Government has taken steps to help preserve the last significant area of remnant



Eared Trogon *Euptilotus neoxenus* (Jon Fjeldså)

montane pine forest in the Sierra Madre Occidental. On being informed that a logging road to the flat forested summit of El Carricito was under construction, the Ministry for the Environment acted speedily to halt the project. The road would have enabled a logging company to remove most of the remaining pines, which take 400 years to mature. El Carricito holds 95% of the remaining montane forests of north-western Mexico and has important populations of Eared



Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha* habitat at Pico Guacamayas, northern Sonora. (J. M. Lammertink)

Trogon *Euptilotus neoxenus* and Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*, both of which are globally threatened. Continuing work to ensure the long-term protection of El Carricito is being funded by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the Biodiversity Support Program, the Commission on Environmental Cooperation, Conservation Food and Health Foundation, the Government of the Netherlands, Chicago Zoological Society and the World Parks Endowment.

• *Bird Conservation*: 4, 1997

### Rio Bavispe update

A survey in the Río Bavispe area of northern Sonora in November–December 1996 located two previously unknown old-growth forest patches, but found no signs of the female Imperial Woodpecker *Campephilus imperialis* that had been reported in the area in 1990 and 1993. Logging roads existed in both forests. The survey revealed a new breeding site for Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*, the first for Sonora, and a single Eared Trogon *Euptilotus neoxenus*. A new conservation zone has been proposed in the northern Sonora/Chihuahua area, which encompasses Río Bavispe.

• J. M. Lammertink & R. L. Otto *in litt.* 1997

### Bearded Wood-partridge population hanging on

Jack Clinton-Eitnrear has re-discovered a population of the rare Bearded Wood-partridge *Dendrortyx barbatus* in an area of intact cloud forest at Tlanchinol in Hidalgo, at a site where the species was found in 1986 (but could not be located in 1990). The birds were discovered in an area of very rugged terrain using voice playback.

• *PQF News* 9: 6, 1997

### CUBA

#### Cuban Parakeet initiative

Surveys are being carried out to assess the status and distribution of the threatened Cuban Parakeet *Aratinga euops* in order to construct an effective programme for its conservation. Once widespread throughout Cuba, the population is now restricted to a few isolated sites. Excessive trapping and the loss of its semi-deciduous woodland and palm savanna habitat are the principal causes of its decline.

• *Psittascene* 8(2): 10, 1996

### BELIZE

#### Maya forest land threatened

Central America's largest remaining area of intact rain forest is being threatened by the construction of a new road in the Toledo district of southern Belize. The project is being coordinated by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and is funded by western governments. The IDB says that the road will bring social and economic benefits to the area, but the Maya people do not want their customary lands to be invaded by speculators and commercial farmers.

• *Oryx* 31(2): 106, 1997

#### Scarlet Macaws shot

Scarlet Macaws *Ara macao* have been shot in the Stann Creek District of Belize. Three birds of a flock of 21 were shot on 19 February 1997 near the village of

Red Bank; subsequent investigation revealed 20 kill sites in the area. Staff from the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary expressed their concern to the village chairman; the area is now to be patrolled on a regular basis.

• *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter* 29(1): 8, 1997



Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao* (Charles Gambill)

#### Yellow-headed Parrot in danger of extinction

The Yellow-headed Parrot *Amazona oratrix*, endemic to northern Central America, may be in danger of extinction due to persistent illegal trade. The population is thought to have declined by 90% in the past 20 years, and fewer than 7,000 wild birds are estimated to remain. Despite full legal protection, large numbers of parrots are being captured for trade, with the United States being the principal destination.

• *Belize Audubon Society Newsletter* 29(1): 9–11, 1997

### PANAMA

#### Big day record for Panama broken

On 23 March 1997 Dan Christian and Doug Robinson set a new record for the number of birds seen on one day in Panama, recording 300 species between midnight and 8 pm. The previous record for Panama was "something like 250", set by Robert Ridgely. The non-helicopter

assisted world record is apparently 331, seen by Scott Robinson and the late Ted Parker in just a single square mile of forest in Manu, Peru.

• *El Tucan* 23(6): 6, 1997

### VENEZUELA

#### Venezuela designates four new Ramsar sites

Venezuela has named four new Ramsar wetland sites, a designation that came into effect on 4 September 1996. Los Olivitos (Zulia) covers 26,000 ha of estuary, salt flats, mangrove swamps, brackish lagoons and sand dunes, and is one of the largest natural salt flats along the north coast of South America. Tacarigua (Miranda) covers 9,200 ha of permanent shallow saline lagoon, connected to the sea by a tidal channel. Restinga on Isla Margarita (Nueva Esparta) covers 5,248 ha of shallow saline lagoon. Los Roques (Distrito Federal) covers 213,220 ha of small islands and cays with fringing mangroves and coral reefs, and is one of the few Ramsar sites composed mainly of coral reef.

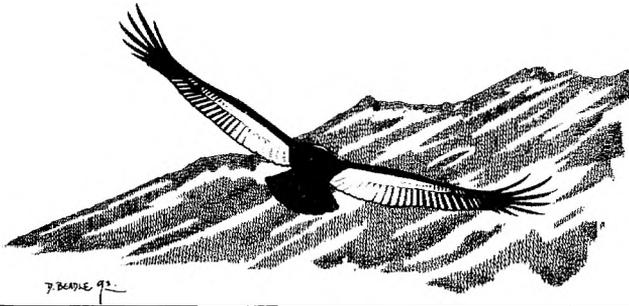
• *The Ramsar Newsletter* 24: 9–10, 1997

#### Drug traffickers threaten forests

Drug traffickers are clearing forest in the Sierra de Perijá National Park on the Colombian border at a rate of 200 ha per year, cultivating opium poppies to produce heroin. They have destroyed 2,000 ha of the park over the past six years. The Venezuelan military burned a 200 ha poppy field this February, but the size and remoteness of the area and the persistence of the traffickers makes patrolling difficult and dangerous. The park has an important population of the globally threatened Northern Helmeted Curassow *Pauxi pauxi*.

• *Oryx* 31(3): 176, 1997

• *BBC Wildlife* 15(5): 62, 1997



Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* (Dave Beadle)

### Government mining proposal sparks debate

A proposal by the Venezuelan government to mine the 3.6 million ha Imataca forest reserve has generated a heated national debate. In May 1997, the government published a presidential decree accepting a revised management plan for Imataca, having effectively omitted the required public consultation process. The management plan does not recognise the territorial rights of indigenous communities, identifies a 'mixed management area' of 1.4 million ha destined for mining activities, and even permits timber extraction in the 1.6% of the reserve which retains protected status. The combination of violation of national regulations and deliberate misleading of public opinion incited widespread resistance from political, academic, environmental and social organisations. Following nearly three months of protests, the Supreme Court of Justice has admitted the request for the annulment of the offending presidential decree on legal and constitutional grounds. Their verdict is eagerly awaited.

• J. César Centeno *in litt.* August 1997

### Condors killed in vendetta

Four reintroduced Andean Condors *Vultur gryphus* have been shot in western Venezuela. The mayor of Mucuchies has been accused of instigating the shooting as part of his vendetta

against protected areas. He believes the birds threaten his plans for large-scale development and mass tourism in the Páramo de la Culata Park and Sierra Nevada National Park. The future for the Venezuelan reintroduction programme, which commenced in 1993, looks bleak.

- *World Birdwatch* 18(4): 4, 1996
- *Oryx* 31(2): 106–107, 1997

### ECUADOR

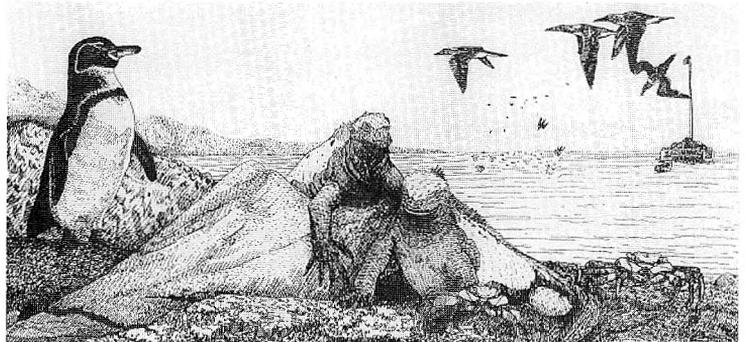
#### Extinctions on San Cristóbal, Galápagos

Fieldwork in 1996 on San Cristóbal in the Galápagos produced some alarming findings. Four species (Galápagos Rail *Laterallus spilonotus*, Galápagos Dove *Zenaida galapagoensis*, Large Tree-finch *Camarhynchus psittacula* and Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus*) could not be located, and may conceivably have joined the two species (Galápagos Hawk *Buteo galapagoensis*, Sharp-billed Ground-finch *Geospiza difficilis*) already known to have become

locally extinct. Three species were found in greatly reduced numbers: Hawaiian Petrel *Pterodroma phaeopygia* (an estimated 10–20 pairs remain), Chatham Mockingbird *Nesomimus melanotis* and Cactus Finch *Geospiza scandens* (restricted to a single 20 ha tract of cactus *Opuntia megasperma* forest). Introduced organisms appear to be the main causes of these declines. Black Rats *Rattus rattus* are thought to predate the nests of ground-breeding birds such as the *Pterodroma*, *Laterallus* and *Zenaida*. Diseases such as avian pox and crop canker are believed to have arrived with domestic pigeons and chickens. The exotic blackberry vine *Rubus niveus*, guava *Psidium guajava* and pomarosa *Eugenia jambos* are reducing native floristic diversity. The net result could be the one of the biggest losses of avian diversity yet known in the Galápagos.

#### Illegal fishing threatens Galápagos waters

Industrial fishing fleets from mainland Ecuador, the USA and the Far East are threatening the marine ecosystem of the Galápagos Islands by fishing in the Marine Reserve despite an official ban. The Ecuadorian government has taken strong measures to curb environmental degradation of the Galápagos. A new decree prohibits all



Galápagos Penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus* (Charles Gambill)

commercial and industrial fishing until new laws for the islands have been approved and asserts the status of the Galápagos Marine Reserve as a biological reserve, thereby strengthening governmental authority to enforce existing regulations. Unfortunately, however, there are insufficient resources to enforce the ban. The endemic Galápagos Penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus* and Galápagos Cormorant *Nannopterum harrisi* are particularly threatened.

- *Oryx* 31(3): 176, 1997
- *WWF News* Autumn 1997, 5

### Status of Mangrove Finch on the Galápagos Islands

The endangered Mangrove Finch *Cactospiza heliobates* is the rarest of "Darwin's Finches", being known from just six mangrove patches on two islands in the Galápagos. Surveys in 1994 and 1995 aimed to ascertain its current status at three sites: Punta Espinosa and Punta Mangle on Fernandina, and Playa Tortuga Negra on Isabela. The results were not encouraging. The species was not recorded on Fernandina and may be locally extinct. At the site on Isabela, the population is believed to be 10–20 pairs, a notable decline on previous estimates. The mangrove habitat at the two sites on Fernandina was considered to be less suitable for the species than that at the Isabela locality, with little closed canopy and dead wood. The other sites on Isabela contain three to six times the amount of habitat at Playa Tortuga Negra and thus – by extrapolation – could contain 60–180 pairs each, giving a total population estimate of 140–380 pairs. Such a population size is probably genetically viable, but any further decline would give cause for grave concern. Principal threats include mangrove destruction, collection of dead wood (which harbours much of the species' food supply), an

introduced parasitic wasp *Polistes versicolor* which predated insect larvae (a major source of food), and the introduced Black Rat *Rattus rattus* which may prey on eggs and young. Full protection of its remaining habitat and a thorough population census are considered essential to ensure the finch's survival.

- *Conservation Biology* 11(1): 119–126, 1997

### Longest-lived Swallow-tailed Gull?

A Swallow-tailed Gull *Creagurus furcatus* banded as a chick on Plaza Sur in the Galápagos in February 1970 was relocated at the same site in January 1996, a longevity record for the species. Given that the breeding cycle of this species lasts nine months (rather than 12), this individual has experienced around 35 nesting seasons.

- *Noticias de Galápagos* 57: 19–20, 1996

### Coastal forest threatened

Commercial logging will shortly commence in the threatened coastal forests of the Mache-Chindul mountains because the budget of the Ministry of Parks and Conservation (INEFAN) is too low to buy the land titles. Ecuadorian conservationists had asked INEFAN to designate 20,234 ha as a national park but the Ministry was only able to purchase a fraction of this area. This has left the way clear for loggers to buy the land rights from indigenous people and local landowners.

- *BBC Wildlife* February 1997, 55

### Manejo sostenible de una cueva de Tayos *Steatornis caripensis* en la Cordillera del Cóndor

Estudios biológicos destacaron recién a la Cordillera del Cóndor como área clave para la conservación de la biodiversidad en el neotrópico (Schulenberg y Awbery 1997). Sólo en la cuenca

del Río Nangaritza, en el suroriente de los Andes ecuatorianos, monitoreos ornitológicos han registrado casi 300 especies de aves (Schulenberg, Parker y Wust 1997, Krabbe y Sornoza 1994, Toyne y Balchin en prep.; pers. obs.). En septiembre de este año un equipo de Fundación Arcoiris, una ONG de Loja, realizó un monitoreo social y biológico rápido en el Centro Shuar de Shaime en el Alto Nangaritza, zona limítrofe con las laderas surorientales del Parque Nacional Podocarpus. Esta región se encuentra actualmente intervenida tanto por operaciones mineras y madereras como el ingreso de colonos y la construcción de carreteras. Un resultado inesperado de la estadía con el grupo jívaro Shuar fue la visita de una cueva de Tayos *Steatornis caripensis* escondida debajo una finca boscosa perteneciendo a dos miembros de la comunidad de Shaime.

La importancia de la cueva para los asentamientos Shuar del Alto Nangaritza sobresalta en el nombre que lleva la Federación de Centros Shuar en la región, 'Tayunts', palabra Jívaro cuyo significado literal es 'cueva de tayos con un río subterráneo'. La cueva se encuentra a 1.5 horas a pie de Shaime y mide unos 150 m de largo por 10–20 m de alto. Se puede ingresar por ambos lados siguiendo la corriente de agua subterránea que cae en vertientes sobre el substrato de rocas calizas.

Los Tayos nidifican en quebraduras del techo y sobre repisas en la mitad superior de las paredes de la cueva. Estimamos que hasta 400 *Steatornis caripensis* adultos nidifican en la cueva, con una reproducción anual de unos 1000 juveniles, correspondiendo a 2–3 huevos por nido. Las aves salen al crepúsculo para alimentarse, particularmente de frutos de

palmeras, cuyos remanentes se encuentran cubriendo el piso de la cueva.

La cosecha anual de juveniles se realiza en el mes de marzo o abril, cuando se cogen entre 150-400 'pichones' (juveniles). La extracción esta regulada por el síndico del Centro de Shaime, quien distribuye los productos de la cosecha entre las familias que participan. Los Tayos juveniles, considerados más ricos en aceite que los adultos, son comidos o reducidos a aceite, mayormente para purgarse uno. Sin embargo, esta operación se cerró en 1996 por una disminución de la población de Tayos en la cueva, atribuida a la cosecha ilícita de las aves por los mismos Shuar. Plumas encontradas en la cueva comprobaron que aves habían sido cogidas con escopeta en los últimos meses. Algunos nidos se encontraron también quebrados, supuestamente por la extracción de huevos con palos. Además, algunas fuentes sugieron que un uwishin (shaman) de la región habría hechizado a la cueva para que no pongan las hembras.

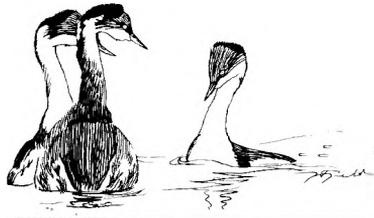
Aunque el manejo de la cueva queda en manos de la comunidad de Shaime, el desarrollo incipiente del turismo ecológico en el Río Nangaritza podría aprovechar este extraordinario fenómeno natural y apoyar su manejo en forma sostenible. En el momento, los dueños de la finca que abarca la cueva tienen planes actualmente para construir su casa familiar cerca de Tayunts, para vigilar el sitio y enseñarlo a visitantes interesados.

• Anibal Chwinda, Jeremy Flanagan, Chris Jiggins, Teresa Sukanga y Jake Willis, Octubre 1997

## PERU

### Peru identifies four new Ramsar sites

Peru has designated four new Ramsar wetland sites, with effect from 20 January 1997. The Peruvian sector of Lake Titicaca



Junin Grebes *Podiceps taczanowskii*  
(Jon Fjeldså)

covers an area of 460,000 ha and is very important for Andean waterfowl, migrating shorebirds and three species of flamingo. Reserva Nacional de Junín covers the 40,000 ha of Lake Junín and 13,000 ha of surrounding wetland. Lake Junín is, of course, home to the endemic and endangered Junín Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii*. Manglares de Tumbes covers 2,972 ha of coastal creeks, streams and mangroves and its designation is an important step forward for mangrove conservation in South America. Pantanos de Vila covers 396 ha of coastal lagoon within the city limits of Lima and is an important urban wetland supporting 17 species of migratory shorebird and many Humboldt current species.

• *The Ramsar Newsletter* 24: 8-9, 1997



Humboldt Penguin *Spheniscus humboldti*  
(Lyn Wells)

### Humboldt Penguin decline continues

Humboldt Penguins *Spheniscus humboldti* have declined sharply in Peru over the last 100 years or

so. From an estimated several hundred thousand in the mid-nineteenth century, numbers have dropped to around 10,000 birds in 1986, the most recent census. The decrease has been attributed to guano harvesting and fishing activities.

• *Penguin Conservation* 10(1): 6-8, 1997



Blue-throated Macaws *Ara glaucogularis*  
(Charles Gambill)

## BOLIVIA

### Blue-throated Macaw decline

A 1996 survey of a stronghold of the Blue-throated Macaw *Ara glaucogularis* in eastern Bolivia revealed a decline of 50% from the previous year. The total wild population now numbers no more than 100 pairs, distributed over 15,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The study site lies near a main road into Brazil and trappers are smuggling birds across the border. An education programme - coordinated by the Asociación Armonía - is underway to encourage macaw conservation; the same organisation is negotiating an agreement whereby landowners assume responsibility for the macaws on their land.

• *World Birdwatch* 19(1): 4, 1997

• *Psittascene* 9(2): 10-11, 1997

### ... and theft

Following pressure from conservationists, the Bolivian government has ordered an inquiry into the disappearance of six Blue-throated Macaws *Ara*

*glaucogularis* from Santa Cruz Zoo. Other globally threatened species missing were two Hyacinth Macaws *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* and seven Red-fronted Macaws *Ara rubrogenys*. The zoo director is liable to face prosecution if unable to provide a satisfactory explanation.

• *World Birdwatch* 19(1): 4, 1997



Southern Helmeted Curassow  
*Pauxi unicornis* (Jon Fjeldså)

### New information on Southern Helmeted Curassow

A four-year study of Southern Helmeted Curassow *Pauxi unicornis* has revealed this threatened species to be fairly common in a narrow elevational range on the eastern slopes of Andean foothills within Parque Nacional Amboró in Santa Cruz province. The species favours the interior of tall secondary growth, possibly nesting in river-edge vegetation. Two vocalisation types included a booming song, given by territorial males during the breeding season, October–December; the mean length of a booming session was 58 minutes. The concentration of booming males in a small area of the study site indicated either that the species is polygamous or that breeding occurs during aggregations of monogamous pairs. The long-term survival of the species depends primarily on the adequate management of the 450,000 ha Amboró National Park; a new management plan has been prepared by the Fundación Amigos de la Natureza and financed by The Nature Conservancy. Other sites from which the species is known – including Parque Nacional

Carrasco and Parque Nacional Pilon Lajas – lack management plans and receive little protection.

• *Bird Conservation International* 7: 199–211, 1997

### BRAZIL

#### Independent panel criticises Hidrovia

An independent panel has concluded that the current designs and evaluations for the Hidrovia Paraguay-Paraná Project – one of the largest proposed infrastructure projects in the Neotropics – are fundamentally flawed. The panel, comprising researchers from North and South America, was invited by the Environmental Defence Fund and the Fundação Centro Brasileiro de Referência Apoio Cultural to review official studies. Its role was to determine whether the current project would achieve its aim of promoting sustainable development, and to evaluate the methods, analyses and conclusions of the studies. The panel considered that the existing economic studies were inadequate, overestimating the project's benefits (e.g. iron ore exports) and underestimating its costs (e.g. loss of fisheries). Moreover, the assessments of potential ecological consequences were so seriously flawed that the judgement of 'low to moderate' impact could not be accepted as credible. The panel recommended additional studies, greater consideration of transport alternatives and improved consultation with the region's communities.

• EDF/CEBRAC press release

#### Spix's Macaw update

The attempt in 1994 to achieve wild breeding of Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* by releasing a female to join the last remaining male (see *Cotinga* 4: 10-11) failed when the female disappeared. The male has paired with a wild

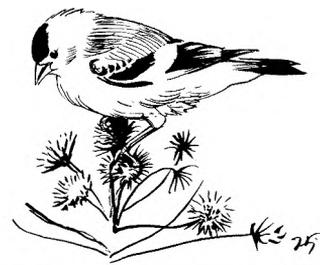
Blue-winged Macaw *Ara maracana*, and it is now hoped to introduce eggs from captive *C. spixii* into their nest, thus gradually building up the population of pure Spix's Macaws.

• *BBC Wildlife* 15(9), 1997

#### Threat to Alagoas reserve

Forest adjacent to the Murici reserve in the Alagoas region has been felled right up to the reserve border and approximately half of the protected area forest sold. Despite a fine from IBAMA, the landowners policy appears unchanged. Moreover, the reserve guard had reportedly not been paid for two months prior to January 1997, and evidence was found of illegal entry to the reserve. This area is the only known site for Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi*, Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi* (not certainly recorded for several years) and White-collared Kite *Leptodon forbesi*. It also harbours populations of the endangered Orange-bellied Antwren *Terenura sicki*, Seven-coloured Tanager *Tangara fastuosa*, Buff-throated Purple-tuft *Iodopleura pipra*, Scalloped Antbird *Myrmeciza ruficauda*, Yellow-faced Siskin *Carduelis yarrelli*, Pinto's Spinetail *Synallaxis infusca*, White-winged Cotinga *Xipholena atropurpurea* and Black-headed Berryeater *Carpornis melanocephalus*, as well as many endemic and endangered subspecies.

• A. Whittaker *in litt.*, February 1997 and October 1997



Yellow-faced Siskin *Carduelis yarrelli*  
(Jon Fjeldså)



Black-fronted Piping-guan *Pipile jacutinga* (Jon Fjeldså)

### Notes on the Jacutinga

The Black-fronted Piping-guan or Jacutinga *Pipile jacutinga* used to be one of the most abundant cracids of the Atlantic forest of south-east Brazil, north-east Argentina and eastern Paraguay. However, habitat loss and hunting have severely reduced its numbers and it is now considered endangered. Over six years, Mauro Galetti and colleagues recorded *P. jacutinga* at 14 localities in São Paulo, Brazil. The cracid was mainly observed on the slopes of the coastal mountains, being extremely rare in lowland forests. At Parque Estadual Intervales, one of the best protected areas in the state, the population density was only 1.7 birds per km<sup>2</sup>. The species' stronghold lies in the Sierra de Paranapiacaba, an area which contains several protected parks, but which is nevertheless threatened by a hydroelectric project, hunting and the extraction of *Euterpe* palms. The Brazilian population of *P. jacutinga* may be less than 1,500 birds. Birds were observed to feed mainly on the sugar-rich fruits of 41 different plant species. Interestingly, seasonal displacement following ripening *Euterpe* fruits – a common hypothesis to explain the distribution of *P. jacutinga* – was not noted.

• *Biological Conservation* 82: 31–39, 1997

few protected areas in the Atlantic forest encompassing a large altitudinal gradient still covered by pristine forest (from 20–1,095 m). Thirty-one threatened or near-threatened species occur at Intervales, most notably Black-eared Parrotlet *Touit melanonota*, Blue-bellied Parrot *Triclarina malachitacea* and Black-backed Tanager *Tangara peruviana*. However, the remaining forest is under threat from palm heart poachers ("palmiteiros"), from cattle introduced into secondary vegetation and from a possible mining and dam construction project. Moreover, the state government has reduced the number of rangers at the park: one upshot has been an increase in hunting.

• *Bird Conservation International* 7: 235–261, 1997

### Asian loggers target Brazil

Logging companies from Malaysia and China are buying small local logging enterprises in Brazil and using their forest management plans (already approved by the governmental environment agency IBAMA) to log and export timber. Regulations for sustainable forest management are being violated. Despite insufficient IBAMA staff for thorough control of illegal logging, two foreign countries have been fined for exporting

### Continuing uncertainty at Atlantic forest hotspot

A two-year survey of Parque Estadual Intervales in São Paulo state has highlighted the precarious future faced by one of Brazil's most important sites for rare Atlantic forest birds. The park is one of the

timber illegally. IBAMA is also auditing forest management plans, removing corrupt employees and using satellite technology to identify illegal logging activities.

• *The Guardian*, 1 January 1997

### Roseate Tern wintering grounds located

The wintering grounds of Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* nesting in North America have finally been located. Banding recoveries indicate that birds from all known breeding colonies in the north-eastern United States winter along the Brazilian coast. It is hoped that further studies will elucidate the causes of winter mortality.

• *Endangered Species Bulletin* 22(4): 25, 1997

### Seabirds die in fire

In January 1997, a fire killed 144 Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* and 106 Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster*, and destroyed nearly all the vegetation of Redonda Island in the Abrolhos Archipelago, Bahia state. The fire was caused by fireworks, and proved impossible to control in the high winds.

• *BirdLife in the Americas* 2(1): 7, 1997



Male White-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus candicans* (Rob G. Pople)

### PARAGUAY

#### New information on White-winged Nightjar and other threatened bird species

Project Aguara Ñu is currently conducting biological and socio-economic surveys within the cerrados of Aguara Ñu, Reserva



Male Rufous-winged Antshrike *Thamnophilus torquatus*, new to Paraguay (C. P. Kennedy)

Natural del Bosque Mbaracayú (see *Cotinga* 4: 52–57), north-east Paraguay. This site holds one of only two known populations of the critically endangered White-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus candicans*. Work has focused on this species: a minimum of 12 individuals have been located with three males and two females radio-tagged in an attempt to understand the basic conservation requirements of this little-known bird. Roost sites have been located for the first time and the previously unknown adult female plumage described.

Three further threatened species have been recorded. Four Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus* were heard and tape-recorded during July–August and a further bird was seen in a different area on 14 October. Four singing male Black-masked Finch *Coryphaspiza melanotis* were on territories during October and a single male Marsh Seedeater *Sporophila palustris* was seen associating with a large mixed-species flock of *Sporophila* seedeaters on 6 October.

Eight near-threatened species have been recorded. These

include a minimum of eight Ocellated Crake *Micropygia schomburgkii* calling daily, three male Bearded Tachuri *Polystictus pectoralis* (two on 2–3 October and one on 8 October), a female (7 October) and single male Rufous-rumped Seedeater *Sporophila hypochroma* (6–8 October and 13 October), small numbers of Lesser Grass-finch *Emberizoides ypiranganus* (new for the reserve), Sharp-tailed Grass-tyrant *Culicivora caudacuta* and larger numbers of White-banded Tanager *Neothraupis fasciatus*.

Other interesting sightings include two first records for Paraguay (Cinnamon Tanager *Schistochlamys ruficapillus* and Rufous-winged Antshrike *Thamnophilus torquatus*) and four further species new for the reserve (Great Dusky Swift *Cypseloides senex*, White-naped Xenopsaris *Xenopsaris albinucha*, Helmeted Manakin *Antilophia galeata* and Grassland Yellow-finch *Sicalis luteola*).

• David Capper *in litt.* October 1997



Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* (Charles Gambill)

## ARGENTINA

**Patagonian forests to be logged** Trillium Inc., a USA company, has been given governmental approval to fell over 150,000 ha of lenga *Nothofagus pumilio* deciduous forest without carrying out an ecological impact assessment. The timber will

probably be exported to Japan as woodchips.

• *Plant Conservation News*, September 1996, 4

## Magellanic Penguin decline

An ongoing study of the Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* at Punta Tombo has revealed a decrease of 19–20% in the number of active nests between 1987 and 1995. The colony – which holds 40% of the Argentine population – is believed to have declined annually since 1982. The biggest single drop was in 1991 when an oil spill killed an estimated 17,000 penguins just prior to the breeding season. Allowing for a 5% annual decrease since 1982, the population may have declined by 50% in 15 years. Due to overfishing and inshore oil spills Magellanic Penguins have been forced to forage up to 325 km from their colonies, leading chicks to starve. So far there has been little effort to enforce international regulations against ocean dumping of oil, although Chubut province is to attempt to bar large ships from coastal waters from 1998. The Punta Tombo colony is visited by 50,000 tourists each year.

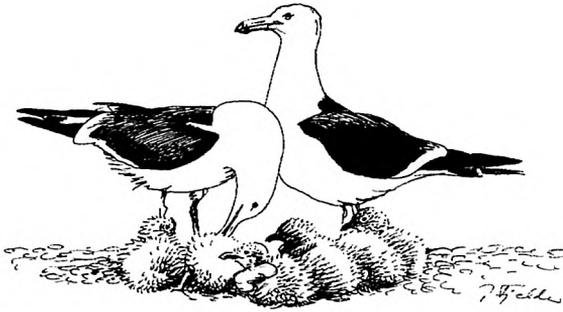
• *Penguin Conservation* 10(1): 2–4, 1997

• *New York Times*, 11 June 1997

## New colonies of Olog's Gull discovered

Seven new colonies of Olog's Gull *Larus atlanticus* have been discovered, all on islands or islets and all associated with Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus*. *L. atlanticus* is endemic to the Argentine Atlantic coast and is considered threatened. The total population is estimated at 2,300 pairs, 40% of them within the Bahía Blanca estuary which is under intense pressure from human activity.

• *Bird Conservation International* 7: 161–165, 1997



Olrog's Gulls *Larus atlanticus* (Jon Fjeldså)

### Pesticide withdrawn to save Swainson's Hawks

The potent pesticide which was being used to kill grasshoppers in La Pampas region and which is thought to have been responsible for the deaths of up to 20,000 Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsonii* which feed on the grasshoppers (see *Cotinga* 6: 11) has now been withdrawn following an agreement between the American Bird Conservancy and the manufacturer, Ciba-Geigy. The manufacturer has bought back stock from farmers and is supporting a public education programme. The Argentine government has agreed to ban use of the pesticide on grasshoppers and alfalfa. Encouragingly, no dead

Swainson's Hawks were found in the area last winter, the first following withdrawal. However, 26 birds were found dead in eastern Córdoba province in February 1997, following application of an unidentified organophosphate pesticide.

- *World Birdwatch* 19(1): 2, 1997
- *BirdLife in the Americas* 2(1): 2, 1997

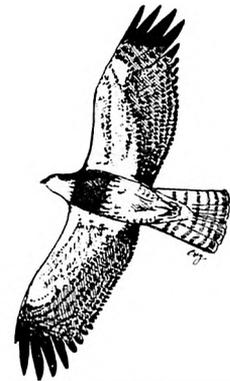
### CHILE

#### Six new Ramsar sites named

The Chilean authorities have named six new Ramsar wetland sites, effective from 2 December 1996. One is El Yali, a system of marshes and lagoons associated with the mouth of the Río Yali. El Yali holds wintering Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicoterus chilensis*,

the largest numbers of Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melanocoryphus* in central Chile and the southernmost breeding population of Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*. The other five sites are in the Puna region of the high Andes and consist of salares (high altitude salt lakes and temporary marshes), remnants of a Pleistocene sea which was isolated in a closed catchment as the Andes grew higher. One site, Salar de Tara, has an important colony of the globally threatened Puna Flamingo *Phoenicopterus jamesi*.

- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 24: 7-8, 1997



Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsonii* (Charles Gambill)

# Neotropical News



## NORTH AMERICA

### More on managing Kirtland's Warbler

The population of Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* has shown a welcome increase over the last 10 years (733 singing males were counted last year) and habitat figures suggest that the population will probably remain in the range of 600–700 singing males during the next few years. However, the continued existence of this enigmatic warbler is entirely dependent on human management of its habitat and control of the brood-parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater* in its breeding area. This is an expensive business and recent changes in politics and fiscal policy have placed the future of the Kirtland's Warbler recovery program in jeopardy. The US Fish and Wildlife Service contribution to the programme and the Forest Service wildlife budget have both been cut over the last two years, with further cuts anticipated. The public can help by lobbying these two organisations to reverse these cuts and ensure continued protection for Kirtland's Warbler.



Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*  
(David Beadle)

It has also been suggested that a private or corporately sponsored trust could reduce the warbler's dependence on public funding.

• *Bird Calls*, November 1997, 5

## CARIBBEAN

### PUERTO RICO Funding urged for acquisition of Cabo Rojo Salt Flats

US Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is being urged to support the use of \$3 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund from the 1998 Interior Appropriations Bill to acquire 1,000 acres of the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats in Puerto Rico. This would provide a welcome addition to the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge, which consists of saltwater lagoons, subtropical dry forest, mangroves and sandy beaches. The salt flats form one of the largest remaining undisturbed areas for migrating shorebirds in the Caribbean and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has described them as the most important area for migratory shorebirds in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, with more than 40,000 shorebirds passing through each year. Several uncommon species are dependent on these salt flats, including Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* and Yellow-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius xanthomus*. The area also provides a feeding ground for manatees and a nesting area for three species of sea turtle, all of which are threatened or endangered.

• *Bird Calls*, November 1997, 7

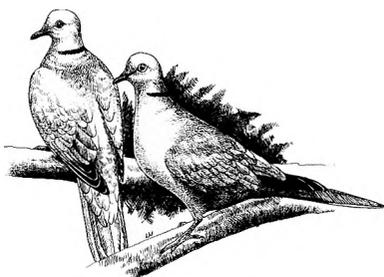
## MONTSERRAT

### Rescue plan for national bird

An emergency rescue plan has been launched to save the Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*, endemic to the small island of Montserrat. This near-threatened species faces an uncertain future following volcanic activity over the past two years. Eruptions from the Soufrière volcano have destroyed large areas of the oriole's forest habitat in addition to the island's capital, Plymouth. The main stronghold of the oriole in the Soufrière Hills in the south of the island has been largely destroyed by lava flows and ash: the forest of the Centre Hills has been covered with some ash, but surveys in October 1997 indicated that a significant population of orioles remains in this area. Prior to the eruptions, the species' population had been estimated at 1,000 birds. In November 1997, biologists from WWF-Montserrat and two UK-based organisations—the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust—drew up an action plan at the invitation of the Montserrat Government. In addition, further surveys were made by a 11-man team in December 1997: these suggested that a few thousand orioles may survive in the remaining forested areas and eight mist-netted orioles all appeared healthy. Nevertheless, the action plan recommends that there is no current need to establish a captive breeding programme although careful monitoring is essential, and that veterinary advice should be sought on the potential direct effects of volcanic ash and dust. Gerard Gray, chief forestry and

environment officer/WWF-Monserrat conservation officer, said "the oriole is our national bird and we don't want to lose it. Many Montserratians have left the island but the orioles and other wildlife have nowhere to go. If things get worse, at least we have a rescue plan for them."

- RSPB/WWF press release, November 1997
- David Gibbons *in litt.* 1998



Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto*  
(Lyn Wells)

### Introduced Collared Doves continue to spread

Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto*, introduced to the town of Saint-Claude in Guadeloupe in 1976, have undergone a substantial range expansion over the subsequent 20 years. From an original population of 20 birds, recent research has revealed that the species has spread throughout Guadeloupe, and north to the islands of Montserrat and Nevis, and south to Cominique and Martinique. The subpopulation involved is quite distinct from that released in the Bahamas in the mid-1970s which has now colonised Florida (USA) and Cuba.

- *Alauda* 65: 245–250, 1997

## CENTRAL AMERICA

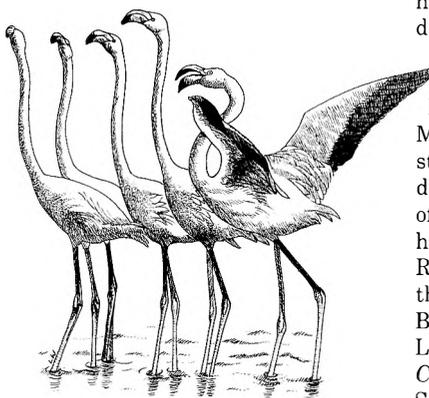
### MEXICO

#### Evidence that ecotourism disturbs Greater Flamings

Tourists taking motorised boat trips to see non-breeding Greater Flamings *Phoenicopterus ruber* in Mexico are—unwittingly or

otherwise—causing severe disturbance to the birds' feeding habits. During a three-month study at the 59,130 ha Celestún Estuary, a Special Biosphere Reserve in Yucatán, Eduardo Galicia and Guy Baldassare evaluated the effect of motor tourboats on the behaviour of the flamingos. There was an average of 13 tourboats per day, disturbing the flamingo flock for a daily average of 3.3 hours. The United States-based researchers discovered that the flamingos' 'alert behaviour' increased by 400% when boats are present and that the ensuing disturbance reduced feeding time by 40%. Such costs to the birds should be weighed against the educational and financial benefits of ecotourism: over half the tourists were Mexican nationals, and nearly 90% of these were willing to pay a reserve entrance fee to see the birds. Galicia and Baldassare recommend that conservation efforts focus on the education of tourboat operators to reduce disturbance to flamingos, education of tourists through a visitors' centre and bilingual brochures, and through expanded involvement of local people.

- *Conservation Biology* 11 (5): 1159–1165, 1997



Greater Flamings *Phoenicopterus ruber*  
(Lyn Wells)

## GUATEMALA

### Rainforest protected

In November 1996, it was announced that the Cerro San Gil area had been declared a National Protected Area. The park's total area is 48,000 ha of which 21,000 ha is very humid tropical forest, the largest such fragment remaining in the country.

- *Oryx* 32 (1): 29, 1998

## SOUTH AMERICA

### SURINAME

#### Rebuff to logging concerns

A recent presidential decree has limited timber concessions to 150,000 ha and placed a moratorium on all pending concessions until a nationwide forestry strategy has been completed. This announcement follows a two-year conservation campaign which has demonstrated the shortcomings in large-scale logging contracts and pointed out alternatives.

- *Oryx* 32 (1): 30, 1998
- *Conservation International*, August 1997

## ECUADOR

#### Local communities take action against mining operation

Direct action by disaffected local communities in Junín, north-west Ecuador, may have saved 1,500 ha of Chocó forest from being destroyed to make way for the construction of a new mine.

The mining project by Bishimetals, a subsidiary of Mitsubishi, would have constructed open pits, new roads, dams and a mining plant in part of the buffer zone of the 250,000 ha Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, which holds six threatened bird species including Baudó Guan *Penelope ortoni*, Long-wattled Umbrellabird *Cephalopterus penduliger* and Scarlet-breasted Dacnis *Dacnis berlepschi*. An environmental impact study also warned that the Mitsubishi project would

have caused the relocation of 100 families from four communities and the immigration of 5,000 mine workers to the area. Following six years of government refusals to inform local communities about the impact of the mine, villagers invited state officials to a summit in May 1997 to discuss the issue. The officials failed to attend. In response, 100 villagers burned the existing mine construct to the ground. Ecuadorian conservationist Carlos Zorilla called the case "a clear wake-up call to governments...and to big mining companies in particular, that local populations must not be ignored, and that their rights to decide their own future must never be overlooked."

• *Rainforest Review*, winter 1997

## COLOMBIA

### New private reserve for Colombian endemics

In a previous note, I reported on the creation of the 10,000 ha Guanentá Wildlife Sanctuary<sup>1</sup> as a major step towards the protection of the Gorgeted Woodquail *Odontophorus strophium* and the Black Inca *Coeligena prunellei*, among a number of globally threatened species. On 4 October 1997, Fundación Natura was able to announce, in a public meeting held at El Encino Municipality, the creation of the 740 ha Cachalú Biological Preserve. This new protected area is still covered in undisturbed Neotropical oak forest (*Quercus humboldtii*) and a narrow belt of critically endangered subandean rainforest.

This significant moment for local conservation has been possible thanks to the support of the German Oro Verde Foundation, through the active participation of its director, Manfred Niekisch; the Swiss Audemars Piguet Foundation; and the continuing generosity of Alvaro Caycedo, whose interest in nature conservation was

responsible, eight years ago, for triggering the regional conservation process.

Currently, Fundación Natura is seeking funds to expand the nature reserve to include an apparently distinctive type of forest situated along the ridge between the Virolín river and Cachalú farm. Natura is also proposing a more ambitious campaign, entitled the Tropical Andes Program, aimed to expand conservation initiatives to conserve the remaining but rapidly declining montane forests of Colombia<sup>2</sup>.

### References

1. Andrade, G. I. & Repizzo, A. (1994) Guanentá-Alto Río Fonce Fauna and Flora Sanctuary: a new protected area in the Colombian East Andes. *Cotinga* 2: 42–44.
2. Cavellier, J. & Etter, A. (1995) Deforestation of montane forests in Colombia as a result of illegal plantations of opium (*Papaver somniferum*). In Churchill, S. P., Baslev, H., Forero, E. & Luteyn, J. L. *Biodiversity and conservation of Neotropical montane forests*. New York: New York Botanical Garden.

• *Contributed by Germán I. Andrade*

## BRAZIL

### Brazil considering logging of National Forests

IBAMA, the Brazilian Environmental Protection Agency, is to consider allowing sustainable logging of Brazil's National Forests by logging companies, despite claims by environmentalists that the feasibility of sustainable logging, even on a local scale, has not been proven. The first experimental logging, in the Tapajós National Park, Pará state, not only received much criticism from environmentalists (including some within IBAMA) but was ultimately curtailed by a

Federal Court because communities living in the forest had not been consulted. IBAMA is now trying to persuade these communities to approve the plan. Some critics say that IBAMA's motives are political, centred around the aspirations of the agency's president to become Brazil's next Minister of Environment.

It is also reported that forest burning in the Brazilian Amazon increased by 28% from 1996 to 1997. The source for this figure was a new satellite which passes over the region at night (when most fires started during the day have been extinguished), rather than during the day as with the previous satellite survey, so the true increase may be considerably higher.

• *Environmental News Service*, October 1997

### Environmentalists welcome U-turn over Hidrovia project

Environmentalists have cautiously welcomed an announcement by the head of Brazil's environmental agency, IBAMA, that the country is abandoning plans to construct the Paraguay–Paraná industrial waterway, known as the "hidrovia". Instead, the government says it will restrict its interventions in the Pantanal wetlands to "minor works" which will not place the ecosystem at risk. Ecologists have expressed their concern that the project may proceed in a different form, still causing significant environmental impacts. The Hidrovia project, as designed in studies funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, plans to channel 3,400 km of the Paraguay and Paraná Rivers for industrial use, and was being promoted by the governments of Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay. However, scientists have warned that the work could

alter the hydrology of the river system, causing the Pantanal to dry out.

- Glenn Switkes *in litt.*, March 1998

### New reserves in Amazonas and Bahia

In October 1997, the state government of Amazonas announced the protection of the largest area of tropical rainforest in South America. The new Amaná Reserve covers 2,350,000 ha in the central Amazon basin between the Rios Negro and Japurá and surrounding the 75 km-long Lake Amaná, and will connect Mamirauá Flooded Forest Reserve and Jaú National Park. The combined area of these three reserves is 5,766,000 ha. The new reserve was declared under the auspices of the Pilot Programme for the Protection of the Rainforest, a G7-funded project which aims to create protected-area corridors in Brazil, and is the first area to be designated with a new legal status—Sustainable Development Reserve—which acknowledges the rights of the 2,000 inhabitants of the reserve to remain and encourages their participation in its protection.

The creation of the Serra do Conduru State Park in coastal Bahia is an important step-forward for conservation of the increasingly beleaguered pockets of Atlantic forest in the state. The new park encompasses 7,000 ha of forest and has been developed in the hope of boosting tourism in the area.

- *Oryx* 32 (1): 30, 1998
- *BBC Wildlife* 16 (1): 21, 1998
- *Conservation International*, August 1997

### *Amazona kawalli*

A paper in the most recent issue of *Ararajuba*, by Paulo Martuscelli and Carlos Yamashita, announces the rediscovery of White-faced or White-cheeked Amazon *Amazona*

*kawalli*. Initially described from a handful of specimens taken in the wild or captives from unknown localities, its taxonomic status has only recently been clarified (see *Cotinga* 7: 12–13). The authors discovered a population of this little-known species along the headwaters of the Rio Tapajós and its tributaries—a forested area in the Brazilian Amazonian lowlands bounded by massifs—in 1995–1996. White-cheeked Amazon appears to be largely restricted to seasonally flooded forests and related transitional habitats. Adjacent uplands and semideciduous forests are occupied by Mealy Parrot *Amazona farinosa*. The authors concur with others authors, notably Collar & Pittman (1996—*Amazona kawalli* is a valid name for a valid species. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 116: 256–265), in concluding that the White-cheeked Amazon is a valid species, on the basis of its distinctive voice, bare part colours and general morphology. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the parrot's future is already uncertain: hunting for food by the local human population, the pet trade, gold and tin mining, hydroelectric projects and forest clearance all pose threats to its continued survival.

- *Ararajuba* 5 (2): 97–113, 1997

### Important seabird waters found off south-east Brazil

Recent observations from bottom long-line commercial fishing boats off south-east Brazil has provided many new insights into the poorly known pelagic seabird community of the warm Brazil Current. Brazilian ornithologist Fábio Olmos found these waters to be an important feeding area for some seabird populations nesting in the Tristan da Cunha and Gough group, especially for non-breeding Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* and post-breeding

Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchus*. Olmos found that the flocks of seabirds attending the boats showed a greater species diversity during summer than winter (16 versus nine species), although the number of birds per flock tended to be greater during the cold season. During summer, Spectacled Petrel was the commonest species, followed by Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* and Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*. During winter, White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria a. aequinoctialis*, Yellow-nosed Albatross and Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophrys* were the commonest species. Marked differences in the relative abundance of species were observed between the two seasons, probably because of a combination of migratory movements, seasonal shifts in sea currents and the influence of cold fronts. The 19 species recorded included a probable Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* (recently found to breed off south-east Brazil, to which the nearest colonies are in Trinidad & Tobago) and an apparent immature Cape Gannet *Morus capensis*.

- *Ibis* 139: 685–691, 1997

### ARGENTINA

#### Monocrotophos pesticide kills over 62,000 birds in Argentina

In Entre Rios province more than 62,000 birds have been poisoned on just one farm, and the final



Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*  
(Charles Gambill)

total is likely to reach 100,000. This is thought to be due to the coating of grains of rice and corn with monocrotophos prior to planting. Apparently, local agricultural officials advised farmers to do this to avoid crop damage by birds and it is feared that this practice has also occurred on other farms. Monocrotophos is the pesticide which recently killed 20,000 Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsoni* in Argentina and is banned in most developed nations. Hopefully a worldwide ban can be agreed in the near future.

• *Bird Calls*: November 1997, 3

## CHILE

### Survey of Mocha Island

A survey of Mocha Island, off the coast of Chile, in January 1997, by Roberto Schlatter, Daniella Guicking and Susanne Mickstein, estimated that the population of Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus* is no more than 25,000 pairs. The shearwater breeds in natural forest in a national reserve on the island and the chicks have long been harvested for food in March and April. Habitat degradation has also occurred due to introduced dogs and rats (which the islanders use to extract chicks from their burrows). The fieldworkers also discovered the northernmost breeding colony of Blue-eyed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax atriceps*, and the southernmost breeding colonies of Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata* and Peruvian Pelican *Pelecanus thagus*, on two small islets just south of the main island.

The surveyors also propose that South American Tern *Sterna hirsundinacea* be classed as Vulnerable, as it is very susceptible to human disturbance on its nesting beaches and it has decreased recently in the Valdivia region of Chile.

• *BirdLife International Update* 4: 3, 1997

### A large autumn concentration of waterbirds discovered at Puerto Natales

On 28 April 1995 a huge concentration of 30,000–35,000 waterbirds of 18 species was observed by François Vuilleumier near Puerto Natales, Magallanes, in Chilean Patagonia. This appears to be the largest concentration of waterbirds ever reported from this area, which is already known as a wintering waterbird site. The numbers included 20,000 Black-necked *Cygnus melancoryphus* and 1,000–2,000 Coscoroba Swans *Coscoroba coscoroba*. Although locally common in the Magallanes region, Black-necked Swan has been classed as Vulnerable in Chile as a whole, while Coscoroba Swan has recently been classed as Endangered in Chile and Vulnerable in Magallanes. The area is also important for Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis* and is not protected at present; the author urges that the Corporación Nacional Forestal (CONAF) of Chile designates the area as a national park in view of these important findings.

• *Ornitología Neotropical* 8(1): 1–5, 1997

### Humboldt Penguins radio-tracked at sea

Recent studies of Humboldt Penguin *Spheniscus humboldti* on Pan de Azucar Island, off northern Chile, have revealed that they are not as sedentary as had been supposed. Boris Culik fitted radio-transmitters to penguins in the 1994–95 and 1995–96 breeding seasons and discovered that almost all their feeding is done within a 35-km radius of the colony. However, a radio-transmitter fitted outside the breeding season revealed that one bird travelled 640 km from the island between 24 May–26 June 1996. It is known that Humboldt Penguins suffer mortality through becoming

entangled in fishermen's nets and the author concludes that, although a 35-km protection zone around the colony might reduce such mortality in the breeding season, this would probably have little effect outside the breeding season when the birds apparently wander more widely.

• *Penguin Conservation* 10(2): 2, 1997



Humboldt Penguin *Spheniscus humboldti* (Lyn Wells)

### Large park donated by businessman

An American businessman has bought 2,500 km<sup>2</sup> of land south of Santiago in an ambitious project to establish a nature reserve. The area extends from the coast to the Argentine border and includes temperate forest. After initial suspicion from the Chilean government and military, Donald Tompkins has proceeded with his intention to donate the Pumalin Park to a special foundation. In return, the government has accorded the land protected status, although certain government-sanctioned mining activities will be permitted conditionally. The project has not been without its critics: Tompkin's approach has been accused of being culturally naïve and insensitive.

• *The Guardian* 4 August 1997, 10–11

• *Oryx* 31: 240, 1997

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN

### BAHAMAS

#### News on Kirtland's Warbler wintering habitat

A study of Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* on its wintering grounds in the Bahamas has discovered that it is perhaps reliant on Caribbean Pine *Pinus caribaea* woodland: 60% of records with habitat details mention pines or pine understorey. It was previously thought that Kirtland's Warbler principally wintered in scrub and avoided pine woodland. Two periods of apparent decline in Kirtland's Warbler numbers this century, and their recent (1990s) increase, correlate with the degradation and recovery of the fire-dependent pine ecosystem in the northern Bahamas, and a re-evaluation of the conservation priorities for this species—presently centred around the breeding area in Michigan—appears necessary.

• *Condor* 100: 201–217, 1998



Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*  
(D. Beadle)

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### BELIZE

#### Unsustainable logging in Mayan forests

Thirty-nine Mayan villages and two protected areas are being affected by unsustainable logging activities in south Belize. Logging concessions now total over 200,000 ha and the Belize government has revoked the protected status of the Maya Natural Resources Reservation, permitting a timber company access to the area. The local Audubon Society claims the logging companies are illegally felling protected sapodilla *Manilkara zapota* trees and are operating within the 20 m restricted zone beside water-courses, increasing erosion and affecting drinking water supplies. Sustainable forestry is possible in Belize. For example, the UK company Green & Black produce organic chocolate grown by the local Mayan people with a premium paid to those growing a variety of tree species as part of the shade system to improve the wildlife habitat quality of the cocoa plantations.

• *Oryx* 32 (2): 103, 1998

### HONDURAS

#### Rainforests threatened by dam

The proposed Patuca 2 dam, on the River Patuca, will flood a large area of Honduran rainforest

if it is allowed to proceed.

Associated developments, such as road building and an influx of people to the area, will further threaten this area of forest, which separates the Mosquito coast from inland Honduras, and will also destroy any chance of establishing the Mosquito Forest as a corridor reserve between the two areas. The local Tawahka people, who live along the river, plan to establish a 233,142 ha Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve to link the Platano Biosphere Reserve in the north with the Bosawas Reserve in the south, and are lobbying the Honduras government to establish this reserve, which requires legal status to protect the area and its native people.

• *Oryx* 32 (3): 188, 1998

## SOUTH AMERICA

### ECUADOR

#### Mining threat to western forests

There are plans to undertake industrial mining in the Toison range in western Ecuador, an area which includes the last remaining stands of cloud- and rainforest on the Pacific slope. The area borders the Cotachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, which will now be at risk from road construction and associated development. Only 14% of original forest cover remains in



Galápagos Penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus* (Charles Gambill)

western Ecuador and the NGO Defensa y Conservación Ecológica de Intag is appealing for support to lobby the Ecuadorian government and force a rethink.

- *Oryx* 32 (2): 105, 1998

### Galápagos Penguins may be threatened by more frequent El Niño events

A recent paper by P. Dee Boersma relating Galápagos Penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus* population dynamics to El Niño events and associated ocean warming, concludes that the species may be threatened by global climate warming and more frequent El Niño events. The current population is probably 4,250–8,500 birds, approximately half of the total in the early 1970s. The population fell sharply following the 1982–1983 El Niño and has been slowly recovering since then. The penguins' body weight is enhanced by cold water conditions (La Niña) and deteriorates during the warm water conditions of El Niño. Thus, increased warm water conditions around the Galápagos are likely to have a detrimental effect on the penguins and could threaten the population because of its small size and restricted distribution.

- *Condor* 100: 245–253, 1998

### Increased funding for Galápagos Islands

The Ecuadorian government has drafted a 'Special Law' which

enables 60% of income from tourism to fund management of the Park and Marine Reserve and to provide finances for environmental management rather than development.

- *Oryx* 32 (2): 104, 1998

### BRAZIL Shorebirds on the north-central coast of Brazil in April–May 1997

The north-central coast of Brazil is important for wintering and migrant shorebirds. A survey in January 1986 by James Wilson, Augusto Rodrigues and Doris Graham counted a total of 330,000 shorebirds on this section of coast, including 8,000 Red Knot *Calidris canutus rufa*, the only significant population of this species north of the main wintering areas in Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia. The present survey studied Red Knot on their northbound migration through this area, as it was considered that this area could be an important staging area for the species on its northward migration. At present, the northernmost major staging area in South America is at Lagoa do Peixe in southern Brazil, 8,300 km from Delaware Bay, the only known large staging area in North America. If birds flew this distance non-stop, it would be the longest non-stop flight of any landbird in the world. A total of 335 Red Knot on 30 April 1997, at Maiaú Island, were very fat and

thought to be ready to migrate. In contrast, 18 on 5 May at Panaquatira beach (with a mean weight of 140.1 g) were not considered to be ready to continue their migration. If this area is an additional staging post for Red Knot then its conservation is obviously of vital importance for the species.

- *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 85: 41–45, 1998

### Atlantic forest to gain protection

There is optimism among conservationists that Brazil's first national law protecting the Atlantic rainforest will be upheld, securing 95,000 km<sup>2</sup> of this unique habitat along the country's east coast. Logging and development have already destroyed more than 90% of original habitat and the proposed law will promote regeneration and sustainable use, while criminalising illegal logging.

- *Oryx* 32 (2): 105, 1998

### ARGENTINA Magellanic Penguin migration followed by satellite tracking

Four male Magellanic Penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* were tracked by David Stokes and P. Dee Boersma from their breeding colony at Punta Tombo, Chubut, for up to six weeks. All four moved north-east along the coast; three had travelled 800 km from the colony when signals ceased. This suggests that birds from this



Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* (Charles Gambill)

colony may perform a round-trip winter migration of up to several thousand kilometres. Initially the birds moved rapidly and made few deep dives. Later their travel rate decreased, their routes became more erratic and they made more deep dives; all indicative of foraging behaviour. This suggests that the penguins' winter migration may be determined by seasonal movement of their prey and it also confirms the importance of controlling oil pollution (currently a major contributor to Magellanic Penguin mortality) along this stretch of coast.

• *Condor* 100: 376–381, 1998

#### **Grassland birds threatened by plantations**

The native grasslands of Corrientes province in the north-east of the country are under threat from the rapidly increasing pine and *Eucalyptus* plantations established to meet increased demand for cheap paper. No reserves exist in these grasslands, which are habitat for seven globally threatened birds (including Ochre-breasted Pipit *Anthus nattereri* and Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Xanthopsar flavus*, which are both considered

endangered). The grasslands originally covered 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> but 18,000 ha were planted with pines and *Eucalyptus* in 1997 alone.

• *Oryx* 32: 188, 1998

#### **Hybrid birds discovered in Rio Negro**

Two intergeneric hybrids between Yellow Cardinal *Gubernatrix cristata* and Common Diuca Finch *Diuca diuca minor* were captured in eastern Rio Negro province, where the two species are sympatric. Other hybrids have been reported from south-east La Pampa province and it is believed that hybridisation may occur due to the capture of more male than female Yellow Cardinals for the illegal cagebird trade. The hybrids are viable, although the degree of fertility is unknown. Yellow Cardinal is a threatened species and the effect of widespread hybridisation between these two species needs to be ascertained. It is also important, of course, to try and prevent the taking of Yellow Cardinals from the wild for this illegal trade.

• *Oryx* 32: 188, 1998

#### **FALKLAND ISLANDS**

##### **Gentoo and Rockhopper Penguins decline, while King Penguins increase**

Breeding populations of these three species were censused in 1995–96 by Mike Bingham. Results indicate that Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* has declined by 43% since a similar census in 1932–33, while Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome chrysocome* has declined by 90% in the same period. More recent monitoring studies indicate that these declines continue, which is particularly significant given that the archipelago holds the world's largest breeding colonies of Rockhopper Penguin and the second largest colonies of Gentoo Penguin. It is thought that these declines have been caused by changes in the marine, rather than the terrestrial, environment, although they are not fully understood.

In contrast, the King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* colony now numbers 400 pairs, an increase of 700% over its population in 1980–81, and in line with the recent worldwide increase in numbers of this species.

• *Oryx* 32: 223–232, 1998

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN

### BAHAMAS

#### More on Kirtland's Warbler wintering habitat

Two analyses of habitat use by the threatened Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* on its Bahamian wintering grounds have come to quite different conclusions. A study by Haney *et al.* (summarised in *Cotinga* 10: 8) examined winter records from 1841–1997, concluding that Kirtland's Warbler is dependent on pine forest in the Bahamas. The authors noted that the breeding population of the species declined most rapidly during a period when breeding habitat was unaffected and the native pine forests of the Bahamas had been severely disturbed by logging. They also noted that the subsequent recovery in breeding numbers has coincided with the regeneration of pine forests in the Bahamas.

A second study, by Sykes & Clench, concentrated on detailed observations of two individual birds and concluded that Kirtland's Warblers do use scrub habitat in the Bahamas, as had been previously thought. The two individuals foraged in scrub close to the ground, rarely venturing more than 3 m up. They noted that there is plenty of unused scrub habitat in the Bahamas and that Kirtland's Warblers are widely and evenly spread through the Bahamas; therefore any current population limits are likely to be determined by conditions on the breeding grounds. Furthermore, they questioned the apparent concentration of records in pine habitat, noting that the local endemic race of Yellow-throated Warbler *Dendroica dominica flavescens* is sufficiently similar to Kirtland's Warbler to have

possibly caused confusion and biased the results.

Such opposing hypotheses may only confuse the establishment of suitable management practices for this enigmatic migrant on its wintering grounds.

- *Skimmer* 6 (5): 1 & 8, 1998;
- Condor* 100: 201–217, 1998;
- Wilson Bulletin* 110: 244–261, 1998.

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### MEXICO

#### Bearded Wood-partridge discovered in Querétaro

Bearded Wood-partridge *Dendrortyx barbatus* is a critically endangered Mexican endemic, threatened by habitat destruction and hunting, that occurs in the states of San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, Puebla and Veracruz (with recent records only from Hidalgo and Veracruz). No more than 1,000 birds are thought to remain. A survey in July 1998 by Jack Eitniear, Alvaro Aragon Tapia, Victor Gonzalez and John Baccus has determined the presence of a small population in the newly established Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda in north-east Querétaro, providing the first confirmed records for the state. At least 21 birds were recorded at three different locations (including five groups of calling birds). The authors consider that an undiscovered population may exist in a large area of virtually inaccessible habitat in adjacent San Luis Potosí. The species occurs in humid, montane pine-oak cloud forests, but has also been recorded from older second-growth forests and forest edge cultivation. Further details will appear in *Cotinga* 12.

- *PQF News* 12: 4–6, 1998

#### Parasitic cowbird threatens Yucatán endemics

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus*

*bonariensis*, a brood parasite, has reached the Yucatán peninsula.

The species has spread from South America through the West Indies, where it has had a detrimental effect on several single-island endemics. There are fears that it may pose a similar problem to the 20 bird species restricted to the Yucatán peninsula coastal scrub Endemic Bird Area.

- *Wilson Bulletin* 110: 429–430, 1998.

#### New information on Spotted Owls

Recent research in the Sierra Madre Occidental on the Mexican subspecies, *lucida*, of the Spotted Owl *Strix occidentalis* has provided new information on the species' population density and roosting habits. The mean population density (0.09 owls per square km) is approximately half that reported in Arizona and New Mexico. Seventy percent of owls roosted in medium-sized trees, although this was thought to have been a result of the paucity of mature and old growth forest in the study area. Spotted Owl roost sites had steeper slopes, more canopy layers, greater canopy closure and greater live tree basal area than random sites. The researchers concluded that management objectives should promote increasing canopy closure and understorey diversity to improve habitats for Spotted Owls.

- *Condor* 100: 732–736, 1998.

#### Sierra Madre Occidental protected

Ten thousand hectares of El Carricito, including old growth forest in the Sierra Madre Occidental, has been declared as a Conservation Area by local communities. In October 1998, more than 1,000 members of the huichola community of San

Sebastián Teponahuaxtían and the nearby village of Tuxpan de Bolaños voted unanimously to give the area protected status. This excellent initiative follows three years of community-based work by CIPAMEX, the BirdLife International representative in Mexico. The site is Mexico's first Important Bird Area, and supports threatened species such as Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha* and Tufted Jay *Cyanocorax dickeyi*.

- *BirdLife in the Americas* 3 (3): 3–4.



Imperial Woodpecker *Campephilus imperialis* (J. Fjeldså)

## COSTA RICA

### First nesting Jabiru in Alajuela province

An active nest found in March 1995 along the Río Frío represents the first Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* breeding record in the Los Guatuzos plain, Alajuela province, in the north of the country. The only previous Costa Rican breeding records were from the Tempisque basin, Guanacaste province, in the north-west. The nest lies in unprotected land outside the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge, and active lumbering is underway. The species may be spreading in Central America: breeding is now known from Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua.

- *Colonial Waterbirds* 21: 256–257.

## PANAMA

### Plans for sustainable development of Darién

A sustainable development project is planned for Panama's Darién province. The Darién National Park was declared a World Heritage Site in 1981 and a Man and Biosphere Reserve two years later, in recognition of the site where two continents (and their respective flora and fauna) first met 2.5 million years ago. Darién province has the highest level of poverty and the highest deforestation rate in Panama. Although 41% of the province is protected on paper and another 26% comprises indigenous peoples' territories, the boundaries are poorly defined and frequently ignored. The project hopes to bring order to what is currently a chaotic process of settlement and economic exploitation, and includes measures to more clearly demarcate protected areas and indigenous territories. The project will be developed in consultation with all involved local groups. Controversially, the project includes rebuilding a road through the centre of the province, which extends half way to the Colombian border. The road will inevitably accelerate the development process: most local inhabitants support the rebuilding process, although there remain concerns at the potential environmental impact.

- *IDBAMERICA*, July–August 1998



Jabiru *Jabiru mycteria* (C. Gambill)

## SOUTH AMERICA

### BOLIVIA

#### Forest habitat threatened by dams

Four proposed dam projects in Bolivia will flood large areas of forest and affect river flow downstream. The Caipipendi Project is a tri-national venture (with Paraguay and Argentina) designed to regulate the flow of the Río Pilcomayo by building a dam in the Bolivian highlands at Caipipendi. The project came to light two years ago and met fierce opposition from indigenous people. It was thought that this had resulted in the indefinite postponement of the project, but there are renewed fears that it may in fact proceed. The Río Pilcomayo already suffers from siltation (due to deforestation) and heavy metal contamination (a result of mining activities); the project aims to address these problems. However, it will also flood large areas of indigenous peoples' territories, restrict their traditional access to hunting and fishing areas, and damage forest and river ecosystems.

The Bermejo Basin project involves two dams on the Río Bermejo and one on the Río Tarija; consortia from Europe, North and South America are bidding for the construction contract. The Argentine government is planning to provide half the funding. The project aims to provide clean drinking water and 'clean' energy for one of Argentina's poorest areas. Conservation organisations, including World Wide Fund for Nature, Greenpeace and BirdLife International partners, are lobbying against construction, fearing that the project will flood a large area of Yungas forest, including that in two national parks.

- Reuters, 1998; *BirdLife in the Americas* 3 (3): 7.

### BRAZIL

#### New sites for Tall-grass Wetland Tapaculo

The recently discovered Tall-grass Wetland Tapaculo *Scytalopus*

*iraiensis* has been found at several new sites in Paraná state and one location in adjacent Santa Catarina. Although this offers hope for the species' conservation, the population still appears extremely small and confined to areas under threat from development and agriculture.

- NEOORN E-mail news group; *World Birdwatch* 20: 5.

### Release of deforestation statistics

In February 1999, the Brazilian government released the latest figures for deforestation in Amazonia, based on satellite images. In 1997, 13,277 km<sup>2</sup> were cleared, a reduction from the 1996 figure of 18,161 km<sup>2</sup>. Figures for 1998 are unavailable, but deforestation is estimated to have risen slightly to c.17,000 km<sup>2</sup>, partially as a result of the fires in Roraima state that have burnt an estimated 11,700 km<sup>2</sup> (see next item). In 1995–96, most deforestation occurred in small areas of under 50 ha, and was attributed to smallholders clearing land for settlement. In 1997–98 most removal occurred in areas larger than 200 ha. It is thought that the upturn in the Brazilian economy increased investment in logging and agricultural projects, explaining the larger size of clearances. To date, 532,000 km<sup>2</sup> have been cleared in Amazonia: an area slightly smaller than France. The Environment Minister reported that the World Bank is funding a \$1 million study of the causes of deforestation, and that IBAMA would increase efforts to curb illegal felling.

- Brazilian government statement, 10 February 1999; *The Express*, 12 February 1999; *New York Times*, 13 September 1998.

### Amazonian fires burn out of control

According to data gathered by weather satellites over Brazilian Amazonia, the number of fires detected during the period June–August 1998 was 86% higher than during the same period in 1997,

with 45,596 individual fires detected. Most of the fires are deliberately ignited by subsistence farmers and cattle ranchers with the intention of clearing old pasture and burning newly cut forest, but many spread out of control, often starting new, accidental fires. The increase is thought to be partly due to low rainfall, a continuing effect of El Niño. One of the fires threatened to engulf Xingu National Park, which is home to 5,000 people belonging to 17 different tribes, until rains extinguished it. The government has implemented emergency measures to fight the fires, with a loan from the World Bank, but environmentalists fear that these may have come too late.

- *Environmental Defence Fund*, October 1998

### Government slashes funds for forests

Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to reduce its spending, the Brazilian government has slashed funds for a £152 million project to save the Amazonian rainforest. The project had been backed by the Group of Seven leading industrial countries, with Brazil to provide 10% of the cost. Environmentalists have warned that without Brazil's participation, the contributing countries may withhold funds. The programme pays for forest surveys and delimiting 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> for indigenous peoples' reservations. Under an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, the government has reduced its environmental spending by two-thirds.

- *The Guardian*, 2 January 1999.

### Nine new protected areas designated

The previous item notwithstanding, the government of Brazil has demonstrated increasing commitment to biodiversity conservation by declaring nine new protected areas across the country. President Cardoso signed decrees declaring five new national parks, three reserves and

one environmental protection area. In total, these cover almost 2 million ha. The largest protected area covers 640,000 ha of Amazonian forest in the state of Pará. One of the other new reserves lies near the Reserva Chico Mendes, adjacent to the Bolivian border, and two national parks cover important remnants of Atlantic forest. It remains to be seen whether these will achieve more than 'paper park' status.

- *BirdLife in the Americas* 3 (3): 5.

## CHILE

### Threat to Mejillones Bay

A large-scale infrastructure project is planned at Mejillones Bay in the north of the country. Conservationists are concerned that the Environmental Impact Assessment conducted by the construction company, Megapuerto Mejillones, is inadequate. Mejillones Bay is a candidate Important Bird Area, holding a colony of Peruvian Terns *Sterna lorata*; the endangered Peruvian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides garnotii* has also been recorded.

- *BirdLife in the Americas* 3 (3): 1.



Peruvian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides garnotii* (J. Fjeldså)

## COLOMBIA

### Discovery of Yellow-eared Parrot colony

On 18 April 1999, the Proyecto *Ognorhynchus* field director Bernabé López-Lanús discovered two flocks of 31 and 30 Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* in the Cordillera Central.

During 24–28 April 1999, the two flocks were observed daily, with all 61 birds roosting together in wax palms. An active nest site was located in a dead palm trunk and contained one or more fledglings. Local campesinos provided an extensive list of tree species that the species feeds on, including palm fruits as well as various other tree fruits present in the area. Video footage, photographs and sound recordings have been taken. Long-term conservation plans are being drawn up presently. Local cooperation and enthusiasm for the project is extremely encouraging and suggests that long-term progress will be rewarding and constructive.

• Paul Salaman *in litt.* May 1999

## ECUADOR

### Second Important Bird Area for Ecuador

The Bosque Protector Cerro Blanco (Cerro Blanco Protected Forest) near Guayaquil has been designated Ecuador's second Important Bird Area (IBA). At a ceremony on 19 June 1998, Cecilia Pacheco, President of the Fundación Ornitológica del Ecuador (CECIA), and Diego Benalcazar, Executive Director of the Fundación Pro-Bosque, signed a formal agreement to manage the protected forest as an IBA. Cerro Blanco is owned by the company Cemento Nacional and managed by the Fundación Pro-Bosque. Eric Horstman, Administrative Director of Cerro Blanco, commented that the designation

would greatly boost conservation of the area's threatened birds.

Cerro Blanco's tropical dry forest is situated in the heart of the Tumbesian Endemic Bird Area, and is home to nine globally threatened species (for details see *Cotinga* 8: 59–63): Rufous-headed Chachalaca *Ortalis erythroptera*, Grey-backed Hawk *Leucopternis occidentalis*, Ochre-bellied Dove *Leptoptila ochraceiventris*, Great Green Macaw *Ara ambigua*, Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner *Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*, Blackish-headed Spinetail *Synallaxis tithys*, Grey-breasted Flycatcher *Lathrotriccus griseipectus*, Pacific Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus occidentalis* and Saffron Siskin *Carduelis siemiradzkii*.

• *World Birdwatch* 20: 4.

## VENEZUELA

### Electricity powerline to cut through protected areas

Local communities are protesting against the construction of electricity powerlines through their forest home. The Venezuelan government has agreed to supply electricity to the Brazilian state of Roraima. To do this, the government has commissioned the construction of a 1,650 km powerline costing £73 million. This will cut a 218 km swathe through the forests of Canaima National Park—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—and the Imataca Forest Reserve. Local inhabitants say they were not consulted about the project—a legal requirement

for such construction projects—yet pylons are to be sited next to their villages. In August–September 1998, more than 1,200 Indians from four different tribes blocked the road into the Canaima National Park to prevent the entry of construction workers, and called for dialogue with the government. The National Guard was dispatched to the area and reportedly used tear gas, rubber bullets and tanks to disperse the protesters. There are concerns that electricity from the powerline will help expand the already increasing open-cast gold-mining in Venezuela's forests.

• *BBC Wildlife* 16 (11): 32.



Roraiman Antwren *Herpsilochmus roraimae* (D. Beadle)

# Neotropical News



## PAN-AMERICAN

### Second Pan-American Roundtable talks planned

Following on from the first Partners in Flight Pan American Roundtable, a second meeting was due to take place on 17 June 1999 to discuss, among other matters, bird conservation strategies in Latin America and the Caribbean, information-sharing among conservation groups and conservation issues in the Caribbean.

- *Bird Calls* (The Newsletter of the American Bird Conservancy Policy Council) 3 (1), 1999

### Conservation Counterparts programme launched in US

The American Bird Conservancy has launched a new programme, entitled Conservation Counterparts, to promote collaboration between conservation groups in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.

- *Bird Calls* (The Newsletter of the American Bird Conservancy Policy Council) 3 (1), 1999

## CARIBBEAN

### LESSER ANTILLES

#### Fight against rocket launch site on Sombbrero Island

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) are seeking to prevent the development of a rocket launch site on Sombbrero Island, 56 km north-west of Anguilla in the Lesser Antilles. The island is uninhabited but for five lighthouse keepers and, more importantly, is free from mammalian predators. Among the nesting bird species are Roseate *Sterna dougallii* and Least Terns *S. antillarum*, which are classified as endangered, and Red-billed

Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, Brown *Sula leucogaster* and Masked Boobies *S. dactylatra* (species of special concern). The Texas-based developer—Beal Aerospace—has pledged to establish a seabird sanctuary within 322 km of Sombbrero and if necessary, sponsor a seabird-breeding programme, while at the same time arguing that the effects on seabirds and other wildlife would be minimal. According to environmentalists, the proposed launch site would effectively destroy all seabird nesting habitat on the island. In addition, the dock that Beal Aerospace is pressing for permission to build would render the island susceptible to the accidental introduction of mammalian predators such as rats.

- *Bird Calls* (The Newsletter of the American Bird Conservancy Policy Council) 3 (1), 1999.



Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*  
(Marcus England)

### GUADELOUPE Endemic woodpecker under threat

Recent fieldwork, by Pascal Villard and Alain Rosteau, has demonstrated that Guadeloupe Woodpecker *Melanerpes herminieri* is threatened by clear-cutting and the removal of dead

trees. The species is restricted to 1,450 km<sup>2</sup> in the Guadeloupe islands and is the only resident woodpecker in the Lesser Antilles. The estimated population is c.10,000 pairs, but it is unevenly distributed in forest habitats from sea-level to the treeline (c.1,000 m). Hurricane damage is a significant threat, but infrastructure changes, such as road construction and airport enlargement, are considered greater threats to this vulnerable bird.

- *Orn. Neotropical* 9: 121–128, 1998.

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### MEXICO

#### New protection for Mexican forests

Mexico's president has announced plans to protect fire-affected forests throughout much of Mexico. In the first half of 1998 c.2,000 km<sup>2</sup> of forest was burned, principally as a result of 'slash-and-burn' agriculture, although in some cases it is thought that fires were started simply to provoke changes in land use. The new plan identifies 85 priority forests, covering 1,880 km<sup>2</sup> in 21 states, as Sites of Ecological Restoration and makes changes in land use illegal in these areas. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Environment will develop and implement forest recovery plans for each area.

- *Oryx* 33: 105, 1999

### BELIZE

#### Belize accedes to the Ramsar Convention

Belize acceded to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on 22 August 1998. The first designated Ramsar sites were Crooked Tree Lagoon Area and Mexico and Jones Lagoon Area. Both are wetlands of international significance. The former comprises

swamp forest, humid tropical forest, and freshwater lagoons and marshes and was identified by BirdLife International as a Key Area for threatened birds. In addition to important concentrations of wildfowl, a roost of the threatened Yellow-headed Amazon *Amazona oratrix* was discovered there in 1992.

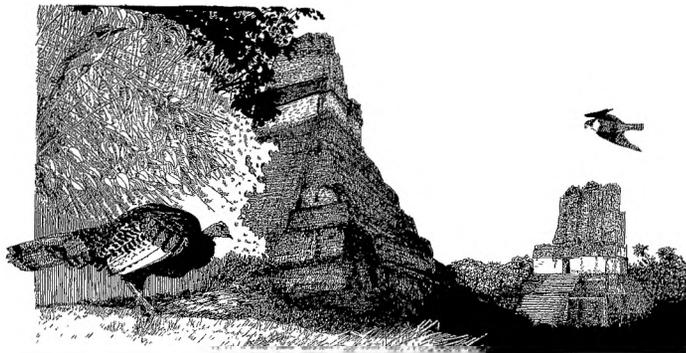
- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 28: 6, 1999.

## GUATEMALA

### New information on the Ocellated Turkey

Fieldwork in Tikal National Park, El Petén state, has revealed important information on Ocellated Turkey *Meleagris ocellata* ecology. Little was previously known about this spectacular gamebird, which is restricted to the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico, northern Belize and northern Guatemala. A team, led by Maria José Gonzalez of the Wildlife Conservation Society, used radiotelemetry to study the species' habitat use, breeding behaviour and survival. Ocellated Turkeys utilise tall forest cover to care for their poults, and forest clearings and other vegetation types during courtship and mating. Radio-collared females travelled up to 8 km (mean 2.4 km) from the point of capture in search of nesting sites. Nesting success in eight hens was 62% and poult survival rate was 15%. The largest home range recorded for a female with poults was 12.5 km<sup>2</sup>.

- *Wilson Bull.* 110: 505–510, 1998.



Ocellated Turkey *Meleagris ocellata* (Charles Gambill)

## EL SALVADOR

### Avian diversity assessed

El Salvador has been rarely studied by ornithologists, but a recent paper by Oliver Komar summarises the characteristics of the country's avifauna. Of 508 species recorded, 310 are breeding residents. Seventeen species are endemic to the highlands of northern Central America and one is endemic to its Pacific slope lowlands. Approximately 270 species are habitat specialists with highly restricted national ranges. Some 117 species are in danger of extinction at national level; three are already locally extinct. The author concludes that further fieldwork is needed in the country.

- *Wilson Bull.* 110: 511–533, 1998.

## COSTA RICA

### Global warming affecting cloud forest wildlife

New research in Costa Rica has provided one of the strongest links yet between climatic change and its effect on wildlife. Alan Pounds, Michael Fogden and John Campbell of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve and Tropical Science Centre used temperature, rainfall and wildlife survey data to establish a link between weather patterns during 1973–1998 and changes in the distribution of many cloud forest species. In particular, this includes the disappearance of 20 amphibian species in 1987 and is indicative that global climate change may be responsible for the catastrophic decline of

amphibians and reptiles on several continents since the 1980s. The study also found that 15 bird species formerly restricted to lower altitude forest, including Keel-billed Toucan *Ramphastos sulfuratus*, have recently colonised high altitude cloud forests. Within Costa Rican cloud forests, these changes are linked to a reduction in dry-season mist in the mountains since the mid-1970s. Overall, cloud cover is unchanged but the number of dry days has increased and clouds and mist now form higher in the mountains than previously. It is considered that this may particularly affect amphibians by reducing their resistance to parasites and disease, as well as by drying out their habitat.

- *BBC Wildlife* 17 (6): 57, 1999

## PANAMA

### US Department of Defence to leave Panama

Under the terms of the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977, the 32,388 ha occupied by the US army, navy and air force bases are to be returned to Panamanian control by the end of 1999. The US Department of Defence has been instrumental in protecting large areas of rainforest under its control, and has helped document the importance of these areas for resident and migratory birds through its Partners in Flight project. It is hoped that the Panamanian authorities will continue to protect these areas, but development pressure is intense and some areas have already been drained and developed.

- *Bird Calls* (The Newsletter of the American Bird Conservancy Policy Council) 3 (1), 1999

### Harpy Eagle release

Four captive-bred Harpy Eagles *Harpia harpyja* were released in 1998 into Soberania National Park. This is the first time captive birds have been released into the wild. The birds were hatched and raised in the USA, two at the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Idaho and two at

San Diego Zoo. In 1997, just nine pairs were thought to remain in Panama.

- *International Zoo News* 45: 373–374, 1999.

## SOUTH AMERICA

### VENEZUELA

#### Forests opened up to mining and logging

In defiance of its own environmental laws, the Venezuelan government is planning to open up the (previously protected) Guyana Shield region to logging and mining on a large scale. The Guyana Shield region has been identified as one of the last remaining large blocks of frontier forest and includes the Imataca Forest reserve, Canaima National Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The 36,450 km<sup>2</sup> Imataca Forest Reserve will be particularly hard hit as Canadian and Venezuelan companies are planning to build South America's largest gold-mining complex there.

- *Oryx* 33: 106, 1999

### FRENCH GUIANA

#### National park created

The French prime minister has announced plans to create a national park in French Guiana covering 1,000s of hectares by 2000. It is to be run in co-operation with Brazil and may be used to facilitate research to help preserve Amazon forest.

- *Oryx* 33: 106, 1999

### BRAZIL

#### IBAMA bans mahogany extraction in south Pará

In October 1998, IBAMA suspended permits to extract, improve, sell and transport mahogany in southern Pará. IBAMA will attempt to survey the mahogany stock in the state, investigating relevant companies' management plans and extraction concessions. This could be a significant step forward in curbing deforestation.

- *O Estado do São Paulo* Website, 29 October 1998

#### Amazon loggers under closer scrutiny

Environment Minister José Sarney Filho has promised to 'get tough' on illegal loggers in the Amazon. He raised the IBAMA budget by c.US\$4 million to increase inspection activities and has strengthened the 1998 Environmental Crimes Act to permit IBAMA to impose increased fines. Filho asserted that his government 'cannot continue to allow the devastation of our Amazon forest by individuals who only think of easy profits'.

- *O Estado do São Paulo* Website, 15 April 1999

#### Amazon increasingly degraded

Current estimates of annual deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon identify less than 50% of the forest area actually degraded each year, and even less during severe droughts. A team led by Daniel Nepstad of Wood Holes Research Center, USA, undertook ground-based surveys of wood mills and forest burning across the region. This demonstrated that logging crews severely damage 10–15,000 km<sup>2</sup> of forest per year that is not revealed by satellite deforestation mapping programmes. Satellites fail to detect human activity that reduces, but does not eliminate, tree cover.

The team also discovered that surface fires burn additional large areas of standing forests, which are more vulnerable during severe droughts. It is estimated that 270,000 km<sup>2</sup> of forest became vulnerable to fire during the 1998 El Niño-enhanced dry season. To control such forest degradation, it is recommended that logging activities be restricted or replaced with low-impact timber harvest techniques, and more effective strategies be implemented to prevent accidental forest fires.

- *Nature* 398: 505–508, 1999.

#### Forest fixed

Part of the Amazon forest destroyed by mining has been restored to dense forest in just two years due to a technique

developed by scientists from Embrapa, the government agricultural research centre near Rio de Janeiro. The team discovered that implanting nitrogen-fixing bacteria into tree seeds accelerates the growth of newly planted trees. A similar technique is used widely in Brazil to promote the growth of soya beans. The team is concentrating its efforts on encouraging small landowners from the Atlantic forest region to adopt the technology.

- *New Scientist* 1 May 1999: 14.

#### One National Park extended...

Ilha do Superagüi National Park in Paraná state has been extended from 21,400 to 34,254 ha to include the north of the island and its entire eastern coast. Superagüi is threatened by land speculators along its coastline, and the increased protected area was considered essential for the survival of the Black-faced Lion Tamarin monkey *Leontopithecus caissara*. An extension of the park boundary was previously proposed by ICBP (now BirdLife International) in its 1992 Americas Red Data Book. The park holds three threatened bird species: Red-tailed Amazon *Amazona brasiliensis*, Black-headed Berryeater *Carpornis melanocephalus* and Buffy-fronted Seedeater *Sporophila frontalis*. The principal habitat is sand-plain forest.

- *Neotropical Primates* 6: 51, 1999.

#### ... but perhaps they're all just 'paper parks' anyway

Three-quarters of Brazil's most highly protected conservation areas exist only on paper or lack the full protection established by law, according to a new report from the Worldwide Fund for Nature. Brazil has 86 national parks, biological reserves, ecological reserves and ecological research stations, but 47 are 'below the minimum level of implementation' and just seven fully comply with federal requirements. Protected areas may occupy 1.85% of Brazil's land

area, but the genuine on-the-ground figure is a dismal 0.4%.

- *BBC Wildlife*, May 1999.

## ECUADOR

### Waved Albatross increase

In 1994 a complete census of the Waved Albatross *Phoebastria irrorata* at Isla Española, Galápagos Islands, estimated the world population to be at least 18,200 breeding pairs. This represented a 52% increase over the 1971 estimate of 12,000 pairs. During the period, two coastal colonies increased by 138% and 335%, one coastal colony remained stable, and two small inland colonies disappeared. Despite the overall population increase, the spatial extent of colonies decreased as a result of vegetation regeneration following the eradication of feral goats. Wandering Albatross is the only albatross that breeds in the equatorial zone, and has the most restricted breeding and pelagic distribution of any albatross. Nearly the entire world population nests on Isla Española, with just a handful of pairs at Isla de la Plata off mainland Ecuador.

- *Condor* 100: 737–740, 1999.

## CHILE

### Megaport development threatens seabirds

An important area for seabirds is threatened by Chilean government plans to build Megapuerto Mejillones, a large-scale infrastructure project. The beaches of Mejillones Bay host large concentrations of migrant shorebirds, Grey Gull *Larus modestus* and terns. Adjacent dunes support a breeding colony of Peruvian Terns *Sterna lorata*, a Humboldt Current endemic. Offshore, large feeding flocks of species characteristic of the Humboldt Current (e.g. Humboldt Penguin *Spheniscus humboldti*,

Red-legged Cormorant *Phalacrocorax gaimardi* and Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata*) occur. Also found offshore are the poorly known Markham's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma markhami* and endangered Peruvian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides garnotii*. At the least, the development threatens to disturb the Peruvian Tern colony and feeding seabirds.

- *BirdLife in the Americas* 3 (3), November 1998.



Peruvian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides garnotii*  
by Jon Fjeldså

## ARGENTINA

### Penguins on the move

Satellite-tracking of Magellanic Spheniscus *Spheniscus magellanicus* and Rockhopper Penguins *Eudyptes chrysocome* breeding on the Falkland Islands has revealed that, after moulting, the former move c.1,800 km north-west to coastal waters off the South American continent. Rockhoppers, in contrast, are more sedentary. The study forms part of a plan to generate additional information concerning the Falklands offshore ecosystem, a priority in view of current hydrocarbon explorations. Both species may be affected by activities in the northern tranche areas licensed for exploration.

- *The Warrar* 14: 6–7, 1999

## FALKLAND ISLANDS

### Striated Caracara population reduced to 500 pairs

A two-year survey by Falklands Conservation has concluded that the population of Striated Caracara *Phalacrocorax australis* in the islands is now no more than 500 pairs and that this constitutes a significant proportion of the world population of this species, which was afforded Near-threatened status by BirdLife International in 1994. Striated Caracara was formerly very numerous in the Falklands, but has been heavily persecuted due to its perceived threat to sheep-farming. In the early part of this century bounties were paid for the bird and it was extirpated from many inhabited islands. The study discovered that on Bird Island the main prey in the breeding season was Thin-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*. Although now breeding principally on remote uninhabited islands, non-breeding immatures wander to settled islands and will take weak / sickly sheep and lambs as well as scavenging. Thus, conflict still exists between the species and sheep farmers, and some persecution continues. This is now considered to be the major threat to the survival of the species and the two-year study recently completed will provide baseline data for a long-term monitoring programme.

- *The Warrar* 15: 2–3, 1999.

# Neotropical News



## NORTH AMERICA

### UNITED STATES

#### Management helps Kirtland's Warbler reach new high

The population of Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* has reached a new high, with 905 singing males in 1999. The continued increase (see e.g. *Cotinga* 9: 8) is thought to be due to careful management practices, unanticipated early colonisation of young jack pine plantations, and the species' ability to occur at unexpectedly high densities. Managed habitat now supports 73% of singing males. Colonisation of four- and five-year-old pine stands is evident; it was previously believed that only six-year-old stands were sufficiently mature. Males occur at densities of one per 3 ha; densities of one male per 5 ha were envisaged, and recovery plans allowed for one per 15–20 ha. Habitat projections suggest further modest warbler population increases in the next three years. Meanwhile, the US Fish and Wildlife Service continues to counteract the threat of brood parasitism: in 1999, 4,400 Brown-headed Cowbirds *Molothrus ater* were removed from Kirtland's Warbler sites. Ecotourism is also taking off: the service provided free tours for 900



Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii*  
(Dave Beadle)

people out of Grayling, Michigan. Providing funds continue to flow, Kirtland's Warbler's short-term future looks healthy.

- *Bird Calls* 3 (2), 1999

## CARIBBEAN

### LESSER ANTILLES

#### Continuing fight against rocket launch on Sombrero Island

In *Cotinga* 12 (12: 7) we reported on the fight by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to prevent the development of a rocket launch site on Sombrero Island, 56 km north-west of Anguilla. If completed, the site would destroy nesting grounds of seabirds such as Roseate *Sterna dougallii* and Least Terns *S. antillarum*. Beal Aerospace of Texas, USA, has persuaded the Anguillian government that the rent and promise of jobs outweigh environmental concerns. RSPB has lobbied the UK government to reject the project. The UK has the authority to review the project as Anguilla is a British Overseas Territory, and is expected to await the result of an environmental impact assessment and a public consultation before making a decision.

- *Bird Calls* 3 (2), 1999

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### MEXICO

**Belding's Yellowthroat at risk** Fieldwork, undertaken in 1995, has led researchers to conclude that Belding's Yellowthroat *Geothlypis beldingi* is the most threatened passerine in Baja California. The species is already considered globally Vulnerable and Ricardo Rodriguez-Estrella and co-workers consider that the nominate northern race *beldingi* should be categorised as Critical,

and the southern *goldmani* either Endangered or Vulnerable.

Belding's Yellowthroat is patchily distributed and has disappeared from three historical sites. It has restricted habitat preferences, being confined to the fringe vegetation of freshwater oases. The main threats to this habitat are cutting of reed grass for rural home construction, burning vegetation, opening trails for cattle, overgrazing of reed grass and using the water for agriculture and tourism. The researchers make three recommendations for the species' conservation. They suggest prohibiting burning and cutting of water-edge vegetation; translocating birds from San Jose del Cabo to Santiago; and persuading golf course owners to fund translocation of birds to artificial waterholes on their lands.

- *Animal Conservation* 2: 77–84, 1999

## SOUTH AMERICA

### VENEZUELA

#### Attempts to stop Dickcissel decline

A mixed-sector coalition is attempting to halt the decline of the Dickcissel *Spiza americana*. This passerine has declined by 40% since the 1960s, apparently as a result of pesticide poisoning by Venezuelan farmers. With the cooperation of the rice and sorghum farmers' association, the Venezuelan Ministry of Agriculture, Eco Natura, Venezuelan Audubon (SCAV) and Venezuelan academics, the 'Ricebird Alliance' aims to reduce lethal control during the 1999–2000 wintering season. The alliance will conduct field tests on a non-toxic pest repellent, assess the suitability of habitat management techniques, monitor patterns of crop damage and

launch an information and sensitivity programme for farmers.

- *Bird Calls* 3 (2), 1999

## BRAZIL

### New tapaculo habitat to be flooded

The World Bank has given the green light for the type-locality of the Tall-grass Wetland Tapaculo *Scytalopus iraiensis*, discovered in Paraná in 1997, to be flooded. Construction work on a dam downstream of the rio Irai meadows was set to resume in November 1999. The World Bank had halted the work and commissioned surveys of additional populations. When fieldworkers located new sites, the World Bank permitted construction to continue. The Bank states that mitigation actions will include continued management of an existing protected area with 160 tapaculos, and the purchase and protection of an additional site with 14 tapaculos. An attempt will reportedly be made to translocate the 130 tapaculos from the flooded site. Other areas, apparently more significant for the species, remain unprotected.

- *Bird Calls* 3 (2), 1999

### More figures on deforestation

In *Cotinga* 12, we summarised research by the Wood Holes Research Center, USA, on the degradation of Amazonian forest. Recent work by the Brazilian Space Agency (INPE) sheds more disturbing light on the geographical patterns of deforestation in the Amazon in 1991–1996. The good news is that most of the Brazilian Amazon faces little short-term danger of losing its forest and that farmers are concentrated close to roads and in previously deforested areas. Deforestation remains limited outside the so-called 'arc of deforestation', which runs along the southern and eastern edges of the Amazon, and the area around the Trans-Amazonian Highway. However, the INPE figures also reveal that more than 9 million

ha of forest were lost during the five-year study period. Eighty-two per cent of this was in the states of Mato Grosso, Pará and Rondônia. Eighty-six per cent was less than 25 km from areas deforested by 1978 and 73% was less than 50 km from the three major road networks, so there remains genuine cause for concern.

- Internet at <http://www.dpi.inpe.br/dalves/diogenes.html>, 1999

### Spix's Macaw recovery project encouraging

Recent news from the Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* recovery project is reasonably encouraging. The sole remaining wild bird has been paired with a female Blue-winged Macaw *Ara maracana* for several years. In 1999, the pair raised their first young, albeit as foster parents. Their own eggs were replaced with wooden eggs, which were then replaced by two three-day old chicks taken from a nearby Blue-winged Macaw nest. The new foster parents immediately started to feed the young, which fledged several weeks later. That the hybrid pair is able to foster young opens up new possibilities for the recovery of Spix's Macaw, most likely the fostering of captive-bred pure Spix's Macaw chicks.

- *Cyanopsitta* 52: 8–9, 1999

### Greenpeace launches global campaign to save Amazon

Greenpeace has launched its largest ever global campaign—to slow the decline of Brazil's Amazon forest. It aims to do this through combating illegal logging by multinationals and through developing sustainable economic alternatives to logging. Recent surveys have revealed that loggers severely damage 10–15,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Amazon forest each year (see *Cotinga* 12: 9). In response, the Brazilian Environment Minister Jose Sarney Filho has promised to get tough on illegal loggers. He joined President Cardoso to back the

launch of the Greenpeace campaign in June 1999.

- *Greenpeace Business* August/September: 2, 1999

## ECUADOR

### Jatun Sacha threatened by road

The provincial government of Napo is threatening to bulldoze a road through the Jatun Sacha biological station in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The road will traverse 4 km of the 2,000 ha reserve, aiming to service five communities along the Arajuno and Puni rivers, both tributaries of the rio Napo. The Jatun Sacha Foundation owns and manages the reserve. It acknowledges the importance of access for isolated communities but has requested that the provincial government first complete an unfinished road through Quisacocha before attempting fresh construction in a biologically important area. The Jatun Sacha reserve holds 120 mammal species, 800 butterflies and more than 2,000 plant species. The 540 bird species include Military Macaw *Ara militaris* (Vulnerable), Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata* (Near-threatened) and Upper Amazon–Napo lowlands endemics such as Brown Nunlet *Nonnula brunnea*, Ochre-striped Antpitta *Grallaria dignissima*, Golden-winged Tody-flycatcher *Todirostrum calopteryx* and Ecuadorian Cacique *Cacicus sclateri*. The Foundation asks that those who wish to protest against the building of the road should write to Dr Edison Chavez, Provincial Government of Napo, Consejo Provincial de Napo, Tena, Ecuador (fax +593 6 887495).

- Jatun Sacha Foundation press release, 2 September 1999

## BOLIVIA

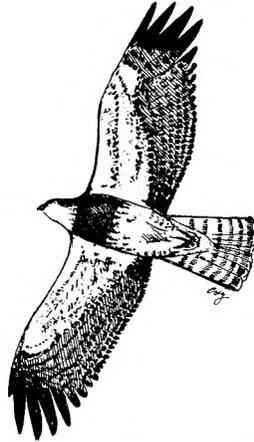
### Shell to put pipeline through tropical dry forest

The oil company, Shell, is pressing ahead with a 200 km gas pipeline that will scythe through an important large tract of primary tropical dry forest in the 4 million ha Chiquitano forest in eastern

Bolivia. Environmentalists believe that this £323 million pipeline will create a 'fire trail' opening up the forest to loggers, hunters and developers. The WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), which led calls to persuade the multinational to reconsider, accused Shell of failing to honour environmental pledges made in the wake of the company's disastrous involvement in a pipeline in Nigeria. The forest also protects the watershed of the Pantanal and holds threatened species such as Hyacinth Macaw *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*. Shell says that it has agreed a mitigation package worth £13 million and claims it is committed to working on the project 'in accordance with our strict environmental principles'.

Environmental non-governmental organisations remain unconvinced and are particularly concerned that the US government has part-financed the project in the belief that the relevant forest is secondary. WWF's own research indicates that the forest is primary and that the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) is thus contravening its own code of practice, which prohibits it from funding projects in primary forest. The OPIC funding (£129 million) was crucial to the project's advancement. The pipeline will transport natural gas from Rio San Miguel in Bolivia to Cuiaba in Brazil. It will be buried a metre deep, but will involve a construction 'corridor' 30 m wide, reduced to 15 m upon completion. An environmental impact assessment commissioned by Shell's partner in the project, the US company Enron, admitted that Chiquitano was a 'single complex ecosystem which should be preserved at all costs' and recommended that the pipeline be moved to Brazil, where it would cause 'much less damage'. WWF have accused Shell of exhibiting a 'reckless disregard for the conservation of a unique ecosystem in the name of corporate profitability'.

• *BBC Wildlife* 17 (8): 58, 1999



Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*  
(Charles Gambill)

### ARGENTINA Boost for Swainson's Hawks

In June 1999, the Argentine government passed a bill prohibiting the import, trade and domestic use of the deadly pesticide monocrotophos. Businesses that sell the chemical must declare amounts in stock and were given six months to sell them. End users were given an additional three months in which to use remaining products. The total ban takes effect from 25 March 2000. The ban is in large part due to five years of advocacy and field monitoring efforts that

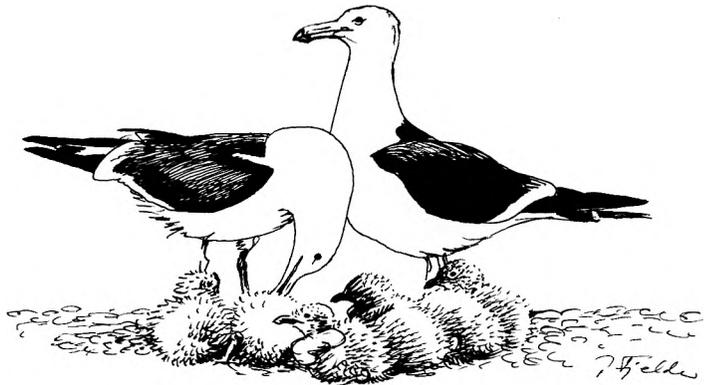
have focused on the effects of pesticides on wildlife. In 1997–1998, 500 Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsoni* were poisoned. But in 1998–1999, following widespread pressure on pesticide use, there were no reports of poisoning incidents. The Argentine government and NGO members of the partnership instigated after the first massive Swainson's Hawk kills (see *Cotinga* 9: 11–12) continue to coordinate monitoring, educational and advocacy efforts.

• *Bird Calls* 3 (2), 1999

### Oil spill in río de la Plata

A Liberian tanker carrying 30,000 tonnes of crude oil collided with a German container ship in the río de la Plata in January 1999. Attempts were made to minimise the resulting 5,000 x 100 m slick near the town of Magdalena between La Plata and Punto Piedras. There are several protected areas in the region. Species of conservation concern likely to be affected include Olog's Gull *Larus atlanticus* as well as the La Plata river dolphin *Pontoporia blainvillei*. If the spill reaches coastal marshes, other threatened species affected could include Dot-winged Crake *Porzana spiloptera* and Speckled Crake *Coturnicops notata*.

• *Oryx* 33: 107, 1999



Olog's Gull *Larus atlanticus* (Jon Fjeldså)

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN

### ANGUILLA

#### Reprieve for Sombrero island

Previous issues of *Cotinga* (12: 7, 13: 6) have related the plans, by Beal Aerospace of Texas, USA, to build a \$250 million rocket-launching facility on Sombrero. There are signs that this may no longer proceed. Beal is reassessing its proposal following an environmental review by British authorities (on behalf of Anguilla). Beal's own formal environmental assessment of the island found only two invertebrate species and one lizard on the island. An independent assessment revealed 65 species of invertebrates, including a dozen thought to be endemic, and two additional species of lizards. Jim Stevenson, of the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, commented that 'it is now clear that Sombrero is a very special place of global importance'. Another researcher likened it to 'a Galapagos in miniature'. Sombrero is an important, almost predator-free nesting site for seabirds such as Brown *Sula leucogaster* and Masked Boobies *S. dactylatra*, and various species of terns *Sterna* spp.

- *Bird Calls* 4 (2), 2000

### JAMAICA

#### New large protected area designated

The Jamaican government has designated a new 1,876 km<sup>2</sup> reserve, the Portland Bight Protected Area. Covering both land and sea, the site is Jamaica's largest protected area, and covers 4.7% of the country's land area and 47.6% of its island shelf. Several distinct natural communities are represented. Some 41% of the reserve encompasses dry limestone forests of Hellshire, Portland Ridge and

Brazillito Mountain. This habitat type holds several endemic birds and is the last known site of the endemic Jamaican iguana, an endemic skink, two endemic reptiles and an endemic frog. Another 16% of the land area comprises valuable wetlands and mangroves, which support numerous wildfowl, in addition to 25% of the country's human fishing community. The government will delegate management of the new protected area to a local NGO, probably the Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation (CCAM). CCAM has already prepared a management plan, accepted by the government, which calls for zonation of the area into 28 special management zones and empowers local communities with sustainable resource management. The managers will need to head off powerful interests—private entities are already eyeing the area for destructive and unsustainable activities such as limestone mining, caustic soda manufacture and coal-fired power generation.

- *El Pitirre* 12: 25–26, 1999

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### COSTA RICA

#### Wetland conservation receives boost

In May 1999, Costa Rica designated two Ramsar wetlands. The first is the 130 ha Manglar de Potrero Grande on the Santa Elena peninsula in Guanacaste province. This site includes intertidal forests, intertidal marshes, shallow marine waters and estuarine waters. The second site is a coastal freshwater lagoon in the same region, the 75 ha Laguna Respringue.

- *Ramsar Newsletter* 30: 4, 1999

### GUATEMALA

#### More Ramsar sites

In September 1999, Guatemala added Parque Nacional Laguna del Tigre (nearly 290,000 ha) to the Ramsar site Laguna del Tigre. This site had been designated on 26 June 1990 with an area of around 48,000 ha.

- *Ramsar Newsletter* 30: 4, 1999

### HONDURAS

#### Ramsar's 1000th site designated

In July 1999, the Honduran government designated the world's 1000th Wetland of International Importance. The new site, the Sistema de Humedales de la Zona Sur de Honduras, is a complex of seven coastal areas totalling nearly 70,000 ha of the Golfo de Fonseca. Mangrove vegetation predominates and the site's various lagoons provide migration staging posts for many waterbirds.

- *Ramsar Newsletter* 30: 1, 1999

## SOUTH AMERICA

### BOLIVIA

#### Plan to reintroduce pet macaws questioned

A new initiative to reintroduce pet macaws from the US to an area of forest near La Paz is raising concerns within the bird conservation community. The Macaw Landing Foundation is establishing the project in collaboration with the Bolivian government, which aims to build an ecotourism lodge for visitors who wish to see free-flying parrots. The reintroduced birds will apparently include four hybrids, as well as the threatened Blue-winged Macaw *Ara maracana*, which naturally inhabits palm groves in grasslands rather than closed-canopy forest. A number of conservation organisations, such as the American Bird Conservancy

and Fundación Armonía, are questioning the project.

- *Bird Calls* 4 (1), 2000

## BRAZIL

### 'New' breeding record for Sickle-winged Nightjar

The egg collection at the British Museum of Natural History, UK, has been found to contain two eggs collected from a nest of the near-threatened Sickle-winged Nightjar *Eleothreptus anomalus* in Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil, in November 1925. Previously unpublished, this provides only the third breeding record of the species, and chronologically the first record for the state.

- *Ararajuba* 7: 139, 1999

### Non-breeding tern concentration found in Bahia

Research—primarily from ringing (banding) recoveries—has revealed important information concerning the non-breeding distribution of Roseate *Sterna dougallii* and Common Terns *S.*

*hirundo* in South America.

Mangue Seco, in Bahia, is the first reported South American locality where large numbers of Roseate Terns concentrate in December–March. The concentrations include members of both the North American and Caribbean subpopulations; the only site where they are known to occur together. An individual recovered at this site sets an age record of 25.6 years for the species. As for Common Terns, recoveries suggest that there is a regular transatlantic movement between Mangue Seco and the Azores.

- *J. Field Orn.* 70: 456–464, 1999

## COLOMBIA

### Yellow-eared Parrot update

As *Cotinga* readers will know, a colony of Yellow-eared Parrots *Ognorhynchus icerotis* has been discovered in the Colombian high Andes. Work by Project *Ognorhynchus* has produced encouraging results. By late 1999, at least ten chicks had been raised

and the population now stands at 88 (including 24 pairs). It is hoped that intensive conservation activities (including palm reforestation, nest protection, local community support and environmental education) by two project staff will help the colony's population to reach 100 during 2000. Yet the species' future is far from secure, as the Quindio wax palm *Ceroxylon quindiuense* on which the parrot depends is also endangered and presently undergoing a phase of accelerating population mortality. Two research staff continuously monitor the nesting colony and undertake radio-tracking to observe foraging areas. A wax palm population study is also underway.

- *Bird Calls* 4 (2), 2000; *World Birdwatch* 22: 17–21, 2000



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**Dec-Jan 00:** Brazil programs and so forth.....

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# Neotropical News



## CARRIBEAN

### WEST INDIES

#### West Indian seabirds in serious decline

A new publication by the Society of Caribbean Ornithology (SCO), entitled *Status and conservation of West Indian seabirds* states that almost all of the region's seabirds are in serious decline. This publication directly results from concerns expressed at a 1997 International Seabird Workshop, held at the SCO annual conference in Aruba. Of a total of 21 seabird species that nest in the West Indies, six are Critically Endangered, three Endangered, four Vulnerable and two Near Threatened, i.e. more than half are of current conservation concern, including all six of the region's endemic seabirds: Black-capped *Pterodroma hasitata* and Jamaican Petrels *P. caribbaea*, Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*, White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*, Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* and Cayenne Tern *Sterna sandvicensis eurygnatha*. Major reasons for declines are habitat destruction and disturbance, human predation of eggs and adults, introduction of mammals, and chemical and solid waste/pollution. Additionally, the most recent reason for seabird declines is the region's growing tourist industry. Development of coastal habitats is increasing and isolated small islands, rocks and cays that were formerly safe nesting sites are now increasingly being developed as attractions and/or are visited by tourists seeking remote island experiences. The book notes that it is ironic that while West Indian seabird colonies have become attractions for the ecotourism industry, this is contributing to their rapid demise. Participants of the 1997 Aruba meeting agreed

that conservationists had largely ignored the plight of seabirds in the region and that research and standardised monitoring had been neglected. The new publication is the most up-to-date account of the distribution and status of West Indian seabirds, highlighting conservation issues and discussing the steps vital to the long-term survival of this rapidly disappearing heritage and resource.

- BirdLife Jamaica press release, July 2000

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### GUATEMALA

#### Significant Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* population found in an unprotected forest in Guatemala

The national bird of Guatemala, the Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno*, is considered one of the most spectacular birds in the New World. It is restricted to Central American cloud forests that are declining rapidly, in Guatemala and elsewhere, due to shifting cultivation by indigenous Maya people. Surveys, in 1998 and 2000, discovered a population of approximately 500 quetzals in a cloud forest fragment of c.1,700 ha, located on the ridges of Sierra Caquiepec (Alta Verapaz). The area is not protected, but in partnership with the Maya people a local NGO is initiating a conservation programme.

- U. Schulz & K. Eisermann *in litt.* August 2000

## SOUTH AMERICA

### BOLIVIA

#### Bolivian forest saved?

A total of 55,000 ha of Andean forest adjacent to the 290,000 ha Madidi National Park has been saved from a logging concession, and will be protected. Conserva-

tion International negotiated the deal with a private logging company and also persuaded the Bolivian government to permanently protect Madidi National Park.

- *Plant Life* 20: 13, 2000

### BRAZIL

#### NGO alliance to save Atlantic forest?

In July 1999, Brazil's largest environmental NGO, Fundão SOS Mata Atlântica, formed an alliance with Conservation International to try to save the Brazilian Atlantic forest. Less than 7% of this highly fragmented habitat remains. The aims of the 'Joint Initiative for the Atlantic forest' are 'Zero Deforestation' and 'Zero Species Lost'.

- *Neotropical Primates* 7 (3): 96, 1999

### PERU

#### New protected area

More than 6 million ha are to be added to Peru's protected areas system. The Peruvian government, the World Bank (through a grant from the Global Environment Facility) and WWF-Peru have drawn up a scheme whereby local indigenous communities co-manage lands for biodiversity conservation. The government has complemented this with a commitment to establish an ecologically representative protected areas system in the country.

- *IUCN Arbovitae* 12: 10, 1999

# Neotropical News



## GENERAL

### New Internet alliance for bird conservation in Latin America

American Bird Conservancy has launched a new Internet resource dedicated to bird conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean. The website, called 'Alianza por las Aves' ([www.alianzaves.net](http://www.alianzaves.net)), has country pages, with links to conservation projects, organisations, lists of endemic birds, birding sites and travel details. The site also includes a message board and information on 23 important bird conservation projects. ABC hopes the resource will help develop interest in bird conservation across the continent.

- NEO-ORN, 26 September 2000

### Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act clears US Congress

On 26 June, the USA House of Representatives passed the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act by a vote of 384 : 22. The act authorises (but does not appropriate) funding, by matching finances for projects to promote the conservation of Neotropical migratory birds in Latin America and the Caribbean. The programme will be managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which will be required to develop guidelines for the proposals. The House has permitted US\$5 million to be made available annually and requires that 75% of the money be spent outside the US.

- NEO-ORN, 27 June 2000

## CARIBBEAN

### Montserrat Orioles caught for captive breeding

In July 1999, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust captured eight wild Montserrat Orioles *Icterus oberi* on the island of the same name. These will be used to

develop a captive-breeding programme. The species' population is thought to have declined considerably following a volcanic eruption in the mid-1990s (see *Cotinga* 9: 8–9).

- Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust press release, 21 July 1999.

### Puerto Rican Amazons reintroduced, but others stolen

In May 2001, 16 captive-reared Puerto Rican Amazons *Amazona vittata* were released into the Caribbean National Forest, joining the remaining 40 individuals in the wild. Ten had earlier been released in June 2000, with a 50% survival rate (five were taken by a Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*). The releases were major achievements of the 32-year cooperation between several local and US organisations. However, further reintroduction efforts were jeopardised following a burglary at a US Fish and Wildlife Service aviary in the Caribbean National Forest, on 22 April 2001. An undisclosed number of birds was stolen. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has offered a US\$2,500 reward for information relating to the theft.

- *Endangered Species Bulletin* 25 (4): 27; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service news releases, 30 April 2001 and 18 May 2001

### Latest news on Montserrat Oriole

In December 1999 a team from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the UK partner of BirdLife International) worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, Trade & Environment on Montserrat to repeat a December 1997 census of Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*. The earlier census was conducted during the peak of volcanic activity, and produced a surprisingly high estimate of c.4,000 orioles. The 1999 survey

produced results that were disappointing in the light of reduced volcanic activity during the intervening two years. The number of orioles located was very substantially lower, as was the number of sites where the species was present. Quarterly monitoring of a sub-sample of plots during 1998 and 1999 also supports the idea of a continued decline. The species' status is now of considerable concern. By contrast the globally threatened Forest Thrush *Cichlherminia lherminieri* appears to be thriving on Montserrat, with numbers increasing steadily in the hill forests since 1997. Given this species' apparent scarcity in its other three range-states—Guadeloupe, St Lucia and Dominica—Montserrat may harbour the most important sub-population.

- Geoff Hilton, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, *in litt.* March 2000

### Wintering American Redstarts in Jamaica

Studies of American Redstarts *Setophaga ruticilla* wintering in Jamaica have revealed that the quality of a migratory bird's tropical wintering grounds can affect its survival and breeding success. Those wintering in high-quality wet forests reach their breeding grounds earlier, and in better condition, than birds wintering in scrub. These findings have implications for focusing conservation action for migrants on tropical forests.

- *Winging It*, April 1999

### Bermuda's Cahows in 1999

Continued conservation efforts are paying dividends for the recovery of the Cahow *Pterodroma cahow* population. The species was rediscovered in 1951 after 350 years. The programme has resulted in a slow but accelerating

increase in the Cahow population, from 18 pairs in 1961 to an all-time high of 56 pairs in 1999 (one more than the previous year). Twenty-nine chicks hatched and 27 fledged. New-pair formation increased; from four pairs in 1998 to seven pairs in 1999. This compares to a mean one new colonising pair per year until the 1980s.

- *Bermuda Audubon Society Newsletter* 10 (2): 4–5, 1999

### New national park for Imperial Amazon

In January 2000, the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation helped the island government of Dominica to create the Morne Diablotin National Park. The new park will protect nearly 5% of the country's land area and help conserve Dominica's national bird, the Imperial Amazon (or Sisserou) *Amazona imperialis*. But its creation has nearly bankrupted the Foundation. They are trying to recoup a US\$300,000 debt (including director Paul Reillo's life savings), having spent US\$750,000 to buy a crucial 650 ha of forest. Reillo asserted that there was no choice: 'We are a tiny scientific organisation that is not prone to land deals, but the Sisserou is a flagship species representing one of the last great island ecosystems in the Caribbean, and this parcel was the last stumbling block to overcome. We had to go beyond science and education and actually do something permanent.' In return, the Government dedicated an additional 3,500 ha to the park.

- Rare Species Conservatory Foundation website <http://www.rarespecies.org>, 4 January 2000

### Cuba joins Ramsar convention

On 12 April 2001, Cuba acceded to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention). Cuba's first Wetland of International Importance is the 452,000 ha Ciénaga de Zapata in Matanzas province, encompassing the Bay of Pigs and the inland and coastal regions on either side. The site is

already a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (January 2000) and includes a National Park and five other protected areas. The largest and best-preserved wetland in the Caribbean, the site is outstanding for birds including migrants and several threatened endemics. Cuba's accession brings the status of the Convention to 124 Contracting Parties, with 1,061 Wetlands of International Importance covering more than 81 million ha.

- Ramsar Convention news release, 6 May 2001

### New coastal management education programme

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is to fund a coastal management education programme. The five-year initiative will help Cuba address environmental problems related to rapid development activities along the coast.

- *The Gallon Environment Letter* 4: 33, 2000

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### MEXICO

#### EcologyFund.com to save Mexican forest

Pronatura, Mexico's largest conservation organisation has announced a partnership with EcologyFund.com ([www.EcologyFund.com](http://www.EcologyFund.com)) and the US-based The Wildlands Project to conserve Mexican forest. The consortium has established a 'click-to-donate' website, whereby site visitors pay nothing but contribute to the purchase of forest. From February to July 2000, over 700 ha was bought. The conservation partners aim to work with EcologyFund.com to conserve 3,000 ha of Sierra Madre forest, at Cebadillas de Yaguirachic, and 8,000 ha in the Cuatro Ciénegas valley, in northern Mexico. Conservation work at the former site aims to help the threatened Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*.

- Press release, 19 July 2000

### Hope for protection of Thick-billed Parrot

In January 2000, two years of delicate negotiations paid dividends when an agreement was signed to protect an important breeding area for the endangered Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*. Recent field work by organisations such as the Wildlife Preservation Trust International and Monterrey Tech revealed that the Bisaloachic (Cebadillas) area held perhaps 100 nesting pairs, 10% of the world population. The area comprises 2,000 ha of relatively undisturbed forest that had been under a logging concession, held by the Elido Tutuaca, a rural forest co-operative. The agreement calls for a 15-year moratorium on any cutting of timber in the area. In return, several organisations—notably The Wildlands Project, Pronatura (Noreste) and Naturalia—will offset community income losses. Incentives include a 'rent payment' eventually totalling 50% of the net value of timber that will not now be harvested. This will be complemented by a movement towards sustainable forest management and development of ecotourism possibilities.

- Ernesto C. Enkerlin-Hoeflich, Wildlife Preservation Trust, *in litt.* 2000

### New protection for and potential new threat to Monarch butterflies

In November 2000, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo decreed a new Monarch *Danaus plexippus* butterfly Biosphere reserve in Michoacan state, 70 km west of the capital. The move was in response to a study demonstrating that farming and illegal logging have destroyed 44% of the original forest since 1971. The widely acclaimed decree was to implement a system through which local people will be financially compensated for losing logging rights. Yet in early March 2001 local environmentalists claimed that loggers, hoping to reclaim the forest, had deliberately sprayed pesticides on the

same forest in an attempt to eradicate the 22 million butterflies that winter there.

- NEO-ORN, 13 November 2000, 9 March 2001

## BELIZE

### Scarlet Macaws at risk

The Chalillo Dam is set to flood some of the richest remaining rainforest in Belize, which harbours the country's last 250 Scarlet Macaws *Ara macao*. The dam will cover c.760 ha of forest close to the Guatemalan border. It threatens to destroy two valuable river ecosystems, both important areas for biodiversity conservation. The dam aims to store water for a downstream hydroelectric power station. The Belize Audubon Society believes that the Belize government has not reviewed alternative options for electricity generation, such as obtaining electricity from options such as wind power, solar energy, and as a by-product from citrus fruit cultivation, sugar and sawmill industries. There are also significant environmental concerns. The region is prone to flash floods; construction of a dam would affect the natural flooding regime of the area, with unknown consequences on wildlife. Furthermore, Chalillo is fringed by limestone; the likelihood of cave systems would have significant implications for dam construction.

- *World Birdwatch* 21 (4): 5, 1999

## SOUTH AMERICA

## ECUADOR

### Galápagos battle to remove alien species almost over

Alien species, considered to be the gravest threat to Galápagos native wildlife, have almost been removed from the archipelago. A 25-year programme to stop thousands of wild pigs destroying the largest island, Santiago, is nearly complete. Pigs are the most destructive of the islands' 800 alien species, being thought to have driven land iguanas *Conolophus* sp. to extinction on Santiago. The pigs were released by 19th century sailors who

wanted a ready supply of pork. Tourist donations have funded half the cost of the eradication programme.

- *BBC Wildlife*, September 2000

### Oil pipeline could decimate the Neotropics' first Important Bird Area

The Critical Black-breasted Puffleg *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*, a hummingbird on the brink of extinction has been found on the proposed route of the new oil pipeline in Ecuador. On 12 January 2000, Rob Williams and Tatiana Santander of CECIA were undertaking surveys to locate remaining breeding areas for the species, which now occurs only on the north slope of Volcán Pichincha west of Quito. The survey team was checking all previously known localities for the puffleg, most of which have now been deforested for cattle grazing and charcoal production. They found Black-breasted Puffleg on the route of the proposed OCP (Oleoducto de Crudos Pesados) oil pipeline at an altitude of 3,240 m, on a ridge called Cruz Loma. The proposed pipeline and accompanying road would destroy much of the remaining vegetation along the ridge and would probably lead to the extinction of the species at the site. Black-breasted Puffleg is very local and rare, and apparently relies on stunted ridge-top vegetation; very little habitat remains within its range. Surveys in recent months have found the species at only one other location, where a single male and female have been seen and forest clearance for cattle threatens the remaining habitat. Given current knowledge, the forest on Cruz Loma is probably an important area for the long-term survival of the species. It is hoped that the petrol companies will ensure that intensive studies of the species are undertaken to fully assess the status of the species in the area and ensure that construction of the pipeline does not prove to be the end of the Black-breasted Puffleg.

- Rob Williams *in litt.* January 2001

### Major forest corridor purchased

The Ecuadorian organisation, NYTUA, Rainforest Concern and Fauna & Flora International have purchased 5,260 ha of pristine forest linking the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve and the Awa Ethnic Reserve in north-west Ecuador. The area had been threatened by oil-palm development. In 1999, the demand for oil palms caused the destruction of 10,000 ha of Ecuadorian forest.

- *Oryx* 35 (1): 12, 2001

## PERU

### Tambopata given national reserve status

On 5 September 2000, the Peruvian government created the Tambopata National Reserve and doubled the size of the Bahuaja Sonene National Park. This followed the final withdrawal of Mobil, the international oil company, from the Candamo basin in late August. The national park now encompasses 1.1 million ha, including the Candamo basin. An area of 262,000 ha has been identified as a buffer zone.

- NEO-ORN, 23 September 2000

## BOLIVIA

### Oil spill on altiplano

On 30 January 2000, an oil pipeline traversing the altiplano, from La Paz, Bolivia, to Arica, Chile, burst, spilling crude oil into the rio Desaguadero. The accident happened when the level of the river rose rapidly during a storm. Initial reports claim that oil gushed from the pipeline for 18 hours, releasing perhaps 5,000 barrels. The oil spread over 95 miles into lakes Uru Uru and Poopo, which are important sites for three species of flamingo: James' *Phoenicopterus jamesi*, Andean *P. andinus* and Chilean *P. chilensis*. The pipeline is owned by Transredes, a consortium of Shell and Enron companies. The Wildlife Conservation Society has been working with San Andres University, La Paz, to conduct an environmental impact assessment of the spill.

- *Wildlife Conservation* 103 (3): 21, 2000

**Seismic testing threat to Amboró**

In March 2001, Argentine oil company Andina S.A. announced its intention to proceed with 105 km of seismic test lines in Bolivia's Amboró National Park. One 55 km test line falls entirely within Amboró's strict scientific reserve and would damage critical life zones at 800–1,500 m. Andina has not been deterred by vigorous local protests. Amboró holds important populations of several threatened birds.

- NEO-ORN, 9 March 2001

**BRAZIL**

**Public pressures force Brazil to shelve deforestation legislation**

On 17 May 2000, Brazil's Congress shelved proposed legislation to increase the rate and area of Amazon forest destruction.

Ranchers and large landowners had attempted to push a draft law through a joint House/Senate committee that would have relaxed restrictions on deforestation, a law considered likely to result in a 25% annual increase in clearing and burning. Massive e-mail and fax protests to Congress and the President, and broad international and national media coverage, orchestrated by Brazilian environmental groups, killed the measure before it reached the House floor. The defeat is a milestone for Brazilian NGOs.

- Environmental Defense press release, 18 May 2000

**New threat to Amazon**

A new plan by the Brazilian government to develop the Amazon by improving infrastructure is feared to cause environmental devastation that far outweighs the perceived economic advantage. The plan, *Avança Brasil (Forward Brazil)*, will see US\$40 million spent over seven years on roads, hydroelectric dams, railways and waterways, but could leave only 5% of Amazonian forest intact by 2020. The government argues that the improvements are needed to cater to the development needs of the region's 12 million inhabitants.

- *The Guardian*, 20 January 2001

**Oilrig sinking threatens Spectacled Petrel**

The sinking in March 2001 of the world's largest oilrig—P-36 off the coast of Rio de Janeiro—has raised fears that scarce seabirds may be at risk from any oil spill that results. BirdLife International is deeply concerned at the potential plight of the globally endangered Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata* and near-threatened Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos*, which winter in the area. The 40-storey oilrig has 9,500 barrels (1.5 million litres) of crude oil onboard and sank 120 km north-east of Rio de Janeiro.

- BirdLife International News Briefing, 20 March 2001, reported on NEO-ORN

**Penguins receive a warm welcome in Rio**

Increasing numbers of Magellanic Penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* are making their way from the Valdez peninsula in Patagonia to the Rio de Janeiro coast—much to the bewilderment of locals. In a typical year, 40 or so individuals make the 3,200 km swim north, but numbers rose in 1999 and reached 300 in 2000. "This is totally atypical" said Valdir Ramos, principal mammologist at the Rio de Janeiro zoo. "We can't talk about a 'penguin season' any more. It doesn't exist—they just keep coming." It is thought that the influx relates to unusually strong cold ocean currents bringing prey (anchovies)—further north. Although most of the penguins are taken to Rio's zoo to recover, some are reputedly kept as pets by fishermen who feed them sardines and even walk them on leashes. "You wouldn't believe how many people put these penguins in freezers when they rescue them," said Ramos. "Of course, they mostly die."

- *The Guardian Weekly*, 1 February 2001

**Hope for Pantanal**

In December 2000, the Inter-American Development Bank

approved a US\$82.5 million loan backing the long-term protection of the Pantanal. The initiative will increase the protected watershed area from 0.5 million ha to 2 million ha. An eight-year programme will clean the increasingly polluted and over-fished waterways.

- Reuters, 8 December 2000

**Brazilian Merganser international recovery team established**

In September 2000, the Brazilian government hosted a workshop at Serra da Canastra National Park to devise an action plan to save the globally endangered Brazilian Merganser *Mergus octosetaceus*. The workshop assembled experts from the species' three range states (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay), the US and Europe. Participants drew up recommendations for a conservation action plan, including the formation of an international recovery team to prioritise conservation needs and to raise funds for project implementation. The action plan should be ready in April 2001 and the team will meet again in August 2001.

- *Wildfowl and Wetlands* February 2001: 7

**Coffee to help Atlantic Forest?**

Coffee growing is spreading into the Atlantic Forest of Bahia state, to alternate outcry and acclaim. Some environmentalists fear that the new plantations will further reduce the dwindling Atlantic Forest, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of Conservation International's 25 most threatened ecosystems on Earth. But some local farmers claim that shade-grown organic coffee can provide an economic incentive to retain forest rather than clear-felling it. Coffee is rapidly replacing cocoa as the principal crop in the region, bringing in US\$1,800 per ha compared to US\$340 for cocoa. Ruy Rocha, who heads the Brazilian Institute for social-environmental studies argues that farmers should be encouraged to plant the kind of shade-grown

organic coffee popular in foreign markets, to help keep the forest intact. Wanderlino Medeiros Bastos, a local coffee farmer, agrees with this fundamental premise: 'As long as there are poor people, if there's a tree somewhere that will fetch them 2,000 reales, do you really think it's going to stay there?'

- CNN website, 8 September 2000

#### **Alagoas reserve threatened**

Murici reserve in Alagoas, one of the most important protected areas for bird conservation in South America, is under considerable threat. This site is critical for the conservation of several endangered Atlantic Forest endemics. Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi* and Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi* are currently known only from this site. The dozen or so other threatened species known from Murici include other Alagoas endemics such as Alagoas Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes ceciliae* and Orange-bellied Antwren *Terenura sicki*. During a visit in February 2000, Andrew Whittaker learnt of a number of very worrying activities. The reserve has apparently been reduced to 2,000 ha in area. Illegal loggers have used tractors and bulldozers to create roads into the heart of the reserve, and have extracted large trees over a period of three months. Illicit clear felling continues on the reserve borders, including removal of the secondary growth that served as the reserve buffer zone. An 'anti-logging gate' has been destroyed. Burning pasture on adjacent lands has caused forest fires. One IBAMA guard had reportedly not been paid for several months, and had been forced to resort to slash-and-burn cultivation to feed his family. Trapping of birds, including the threatened Yellow-faced Siskin *Carduelis yarrelli*, is rife. Unless action is taken urgently, this veritable 'park in peril' is doomed to extirpation, taking its endemic birds along with it.

- Andrew Whittaker *in litt.* to NEO-ORN, March 2000

#### **Implications of forest loss and fragmentation for wildlife conservation**

American and Brazilian biologists have assessed the implication of forest loss and fragmentation in the Amazon for wildlife conservation. William Laurence, Heraldo Vasconcelos and Thomas Lovejoy consider that Amazonian forests are experiencing rapid, unprecedented changes that are having major impacts on wildlife, regional hydrology and the global climate. Rates of deforestation and logging have accelerated recently, and patterns of forest loss are changing, with new highways providing conduits for settlers and loggers in the heart of Amazonia. Logging operations are becoming increasingly international. In 1996 alone, Asian companies invested over \$US500 million in the Brazilian timber industry and now own, or control, over 12 million ha of Amazonian forest. In addition, there are nearly 400 Brazilian timber companies, most with poor environmental records. The Brazilian government estimates that 80% of Amazon timber is harvested illegally, irrespective of environmental controls.

Such changes are causing widespread forest fragmentation. The total area now affected by fragmentation, clearing and edge effects could comprise as much as one third of the Brazilian Amazon. These fragmented landscapes experience diverse changes in forest dynamics, structure, composition and microclimate, and are highly vulnerable to droughts and fires. Such alterations negatively affect a broad range of animal species. Many faunal groups, including understory insectivorous birds, decline or disappear in fragmented forests. Many such species are also unwilling to cross even the small forest clearings that result from fragmentation.

The authors are sceptical about the Amazon's future. The several international and domestic programmes that exist face daunting challenges. The most likely 'saviour' is the Pilot

Program to Conserve the Brazilian Rainforest. Administered by the World Bank, the Program is attempting to channel US\$350 million from G7 governments into Amazonian conservation programmes. The best grounds for optimism may be the growing local support for conservation. There are now around 350 indigenous and environmental groups in Brazil. But, the authors conclude, they have a tough battle ahead.

- *Oryx* 34: 39–45, 1999

#### **Obituary: Spix's Macaw extinct in the wild**

It appears certain that Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* is now extinct in the wild. *Folha de São Paulo*, a major Brazilian newspaper, broke the news to the world on 29 November 2000, reporting that the famous last surviving male had not been seen for 55 days. Searches until mid-February 2001 subsequently failed to locate it. Another species lost; another tragedy for global biodiversity. The Club's condolences go, in particular, to all those who have strived to bring this avian figurehead back from the brink.

- *World Birdwatch* 23: 9–11, 2001

#### **Oil pollutes Rio bay**

In January 2000, an oil slick spanning nearly 30 km<sup>2</sup> of the Rio de Janeiro coastline began to wash up on Copacabana and Ipanema beaches. This was the worst environmental disaster to affect the city in 25 years. Authorities blamed Petrobras, the state oil company, for the spill, which was caused when 500 tonnes of crude oil leaked from pipes at a refinery in Guanabara Bay. The impact on the coast's shorebirds and seabirds is uncertain.

- *The Times*, 22 January 2000

#### **PARAGUAY**

##### **Mbaracayú declared a Biosphere reserve**

In November 2000, the Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve was officially declared a Biosphere reserve. The 64,000 ha private

reserve, managed by Fundación Moisés Bertoni, is the country's most important site for bird conservation. It holds populations of threatened cerrado species such as Rufous-faced Crake *Laterallus xenopterus* and White-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus candicans*, as well as Atlantic Forest endemics such as Black-fronted Piping-guan *Pipile jacutinga*.

- *World Birdwatch* 23: 3, 2001

## ARGENTINA

### Wetland reserve threatened by petroleum exploration

A Ramsar-listed wetland, Llancañelo in Mendoza province, is threatened by petroleum exploration. YPF-Repsol, an international oil company, is interested in exploiting oil reserves within the 42,000 ha Laguna Llancañelo provincial faunal reserve, which supports up to 150,000 waterbirds during the summer. Twenty-four species breed, including 10,000 pairs of Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis* and 1,500 pairs of Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melanocoryphus*. Up to 24,000 Black-necked Swan and 8,000 Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba* use the wetland as a post-breeding moult refuge.

- NEO-ORN, 23 September 2000

### Military blunder sets Falklands on fire

In January 2001, at the height of the seabird breeding season, a fire started accidentally by British troops trying to remove ordnance burned 40% of South Jason Island in the Falklands. The fire destroyed 90% of the tussock grass forming the nesting grounds of 1,750 pairs of the near-threatened Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys* and 900 pairs of the Vulnerable Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*. Recent surveys by Falklands Conservation had earlier revealed that the total Falklands population of Black-browed Albatross had declined from 458,000 in 1995 to 382,000 in November 2000. Fortunately, however, the main colony was only burned around the edges, and the birds escaped death. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife UK Partner), which is involved in seabird censuses on the islands, has requested the UK government mount an enquiry.

- *World Birdwatch* 23: 4, 2001
- *Falklands Conserv. Newsletter* 2: 1, 2001

### Update on Cobb's Wren

Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi* is globally threatened and endemic

to the Falkland Islands. Following a 10-year survey, in 1983–1993, just 2,000 pairs were thought to remain, all on 12 offshore islands c.40 km distant from each other. During 1997/8, further surveys revealed that the population was higher than previously considered, c.6,000 pairs on 29 islands. Cobb's Wren did not occur on any of the 23 islands where there was evidence of introduced rats. Interestingly, Grass Wren *Cistothorus platensis* was found to occur on 21 of these 23 islands. Populations of Cobb's Wren remain isolated; it is feared that the species will be threatened should rats colonise any new islands. Funding is now being sought to eradicate the rats.

- *The Warrack* 17: 11 (2000)

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN

### Montserrat Oriole ups and downs

A major volcanic eruption that began in 1996 has destroyed c.60% of Montserrat's hill forests, which comprise the entire range of the threatened endemic Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*. Worryingly, monitoring since 1997 has also shown a population decline within the remaining 14 km<sup>2</sup> of intact forest in the Centre Hills. A new research project, aiming to uncover the cause of this decline, began in the 2001 breeding season. The project, which is funded by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, is a joint initiative of the Montserrat Ministry of Agriculture Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK). Initial field work centred on measuring reproductive success and determining causes of reproductive failure. Automated micro nest cameras indicate a high rate of nest predation by rats. Research on adult survivorship and the health of insect food supply has also commenced. In July a remnant population of orioles was discovered by researchers in a small forest patch only 1 km from the summit of the volcano, and entirely surrounded by pyroclastic flows. This astonishing and encouraging discovery was rapidly followed by another major volcanic eruption on Montserrat, in which heavy ash falls were recorded on large areas of the Centre Hills, destroying several oriole nests.

- Geoff M. Hilton, Gerard A. L. Gray, Stephen MacNamara and Chris Bowden *in litt.* October 2001

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### MEXICO

#### Another new RAMSAR site

The 61,707 ha Dzilam coastal and marine reserve has been declared a Ramsar site. It lies adjacent to the ria Lagartos Ramsar site, in the north Yucatán Peninsula. More than 20,000 waterbirds are thought to occur.

- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 32: 9 (2001)

#### Locusts continue to swarm on Socorro Island

Conservationists are expressing increasing concern at the growing locust *Schistocerca* sp. swarm on Socorro. The island is important for its population of the endemic (and critically endangered) Socorro Mockingbird *Mimodes graysoni*. The locust population has apparently grown significantly since 1996, when it was identified as a problem (with one swarm estimated at 50 million). The insects apparently originated from a population in Sinaloa. One observer commented: 'they fly all over the island and practically are destroying the foliage of all trees they touch'. One solution proposed has been spraying with pesticides once the locusts move into degraded habitat thus avoiding affecting endemic fauna). The locusts have apparently developed resistance to one pathogen that has been introduced.

- H. Walter and J. Martinez-Gomez *in litt.* 29 May 2001

## SOUTH AMERICA

### VENEZUELA

#### Venezuelan Ornithology Network

The Venezuelan Ornithology Network (OVUM—Ornitólogos Venezolanos Unidos Milagrosamente) was conceived at the VI Neotropical Ornithology Congress in Monterrey in October 1999. The founding members were 13 professional biologists with a keen interest in Venezuelan ornithology. By June 2001, the Network had 85 members, comprising biologists, veterinarians, bird tour guides and enthusiastic amateurs. Interests range from ecology and natural history to conservation and taxonomy. Regular meetings are held in the Colección Ornitológica Phelps. The first Ornithology Symposium was held in November 2000. Its two major topics were the role of birdwatchers in generating information on threatened species and the creation of a Society of Venezuelan Ornithologists. One of the key roles of the Network is coordination of information on Venezuelan birds and to effect this a Venezuelan Rarities Committee has been set up (see below). Funding is being sought for an annual Venezuelan ornithological bulletin. Birdwatchers and ornithologists who would like to subscribe to the OVUM Network are invited to contact Prof. Sandra Giner of the Instituto de Zoología Tropical at the Universidad Central de Venezuela (sginer@strix.ciens.ucv.ve).

- Chris Sharpe *in litt.* June 2001

### Venezuelan Rare Birds Committee

The Venezuelan Rare Birds Committee was formed during the First Annual Ornithology Symposium in November 2000. The committee aims to act as a repository of information on rare birds in Venezuela, to evaluate potential new and unusual records and to publicise this information via e-mail, by means of the Venezuelan Ornithology Network (OVUM) and through an annual publication within an existing national journal. The Committee consists of four experts in Venezuelan ornithology, who meet on a regular basis to discuss and evaluate recent records. Species covered by the committee include potential first records; species for which fewer than five records exist for the country; and nationally and globally threatened species. In addition, the Committee gratefully accepts other interesting information, such as early and late dates for migrants, range extensions and unusual behavioural observations. The Committee hopes to improve dialogue between national and visiting ornithologists. Birdwatchers are encouraged to submit records for committee evaluation by e-mail to [mlentino@reacciun.ve](mailto:mlentino@reacciun.ve). A records submission form is available.

- Chris Sharpe *in litt.* June 2001

### COLOMBIA

#### New Ramsar site

The 39,000 ha Laguna de la Cocha has been declared a Ramsar site. The site comprises a volcanic lake surrounded by high-Andean peatlands, and holds a diverse fauna including the threatened Mountain Tapir *Tapir pinchaque* and Spectacled Bear *Tremarctos ornatus*.

- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 32: 8 (2001)

### ECUADOR

#### Mangroves protected

The purchase and destruction of mangroves has been declared illegal in the country. The shrimp aquaculture industry has destroyed half of Ecuador's mangroves since 1960. Of the 207,000 ha of shrimp ponds in the country, some 75% are thought to be illegal. The ruling by the President of Ecuador's Constitutional Tribunal is a landmark for coastal conservationists.

- *Marine Pollution Bull.* 422: 84 (2001)

#### Another new Ramsar site

The 4,705 ha Isla Santay has been designated a Ramsar site. The island contains intertidal forested wetlands, including mangrove swamps, and is located in the Guayas river delta on the outskirts of the city of Guayaquil.

- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 32: 9 (2001)

#### Galápagos escapes oil spill

In January 2001, the Galápagos escaped disaster after the tanker *Jessica* ran aground off San Cristobal, spilling 900 tonnes of oil. Fortunately, winds and currents carried the oil away from shore. There was no evidence of the island's endemic fauna having been affected.

- *Marine Pollution Bull.* 423: 165 (2001)

### PERU

#### Candamo Valley protected

In September 2000, the Candamo Valley was declared a national park. Home to 600 species of birds and 14 species of primates, the 142,000 ha site was part of a presidential decree doubling the size of the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park in south-west Peru. The decision came a fortnight after oil giant Exxon-Mobil withdrew from oil exploration in the general area.

- *Wildlife Conserv.* Jan/Feb 2001: 16

### Short-winged Grebes surveyed around Lake Titicaca

A group of ornithologists (Gunnar Engblom, David Geale, Diógenes Chahuanca and Gregorio Ferro) recently conducted field work to assess the distribution of Short-winged Grebe *Rollandia microptera*. Study sites comprised the complex of lakes immediately west of Huancane between Lago de Arapa and Lago Titicaca; Lago Umayo and the small lakes immediately to the north; and most of Lago de Arapa. The key site was Lago de Arapa (holding 212 birds, including juveniles), with small numbers (less than 11) found at Chucuito, and Lagunas Umayo, Sunuco, Cuisco, Yanaoco, Huinahui and Titihui. Grebes are threatened by becoming entangled in fishing nets. The nets used are 80–100 m in length, and have been widely used since around 1990. Laguna Cupisco is free of nets and was found to hold a high density of grebes. Local people also harvest grebe eggs for food. Overall, the population is thought to have declined significantly since 1987. A few drought years is thought to be sufficient to create local extinction.

- G. Engblom *in litt.* to BirdLife International, July 2001

### BOLIVIA

#### New Ramsar site

Cuenca de Tajzara has been declared a Ramsar site. It encompasses 5,500 ha of semi-permanent and permanent lakes, high-altitude streams, marshes and high-Andean pastures in the Tajzara basin at 3,700 m. Forty species of birds characteristic of high-Andean aquatic systems occur.

- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 32: 8 (2001)

#### Last site for Wattled Curassow

Wattled Curassow *Crax globulosa* is still extant in Bolivia. The last official record in Bolivia was from 1937. In August 2001, an

Armonia/BirdLife International team, supported by the Swedish Embassy, conducted Important Bird Area (IBA) field work in the lower tropical *várzea* forest of the lower rio Beni. The team investigated reports from local hunters that curassows persisted in the area. Seven individuals were discovered along the rio Negro, in a remote area with very poor accessibility. Conservation of the area is thought likely to be dependent on creation of a private reserve.

- Bennett Hennessey *in litt.* 25 September 2001

## BRAZIL

### Oil giant partners with The Nature Conservancy to help restore Brazilian Atlantic forest

In September 2001, Texaco, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Sociedade de Pesquisa em Vida Selvagem e Educação Ambiental (Society for Wildlife Research and Environmental Education or SPVS, a Brazilian NGO) announced a joint project to restore and protect c.1,000 ha of Atlantic forest on the coast of southern Brazil. A US\$3 million investment by Texaco facilitated the 'Antonina Pilot Reforestation Project'. Located in Paraná, the land will be owned and managed by SPVS. TNC will provide technical assistance. The land surrounds an existing 2,800 ha reserve (Morro da Mina), also managed by SPVS. This reserve includes a native plant nursery that produces 100,000 seedlings per year, which will be used to restore degraded areas of the new land area. The project is expected to bring several key benefits. It will help protect the primary source of drinking water for Antonina's population of c.20,000 inhabitants. It will contribute to biodiversity conservation; the site is thought to hold six globally threatened bird species. Finally, the project hopes to create a scientific model to better understand the role that reforestation can play in mitigating climate change. The

project could even qualify for 'carbon credits' under the Kyoto Protocol's 'Clean Development Mechanism'. 'The Antonina Reforestation Pilot Project will help protect one of the most important and ecologically significant places on Earth', said Steve McCormick, TNC President. 'Moreover, it will provide a replicable model for how rainforest conservation and restoration can help combat climate change. We appreciate Texaco's involvement in this innovative effort'.

- Texaco press release, 4 September 2001

### Murici protected

The Ecological Station of Murici was created on 29 May 2001, through a federal decree signed by President Cardoso. Lying in Alagoas, the remnant Atlantic forest fragments at Murici are one of the continent's most important areas for the conservation of biodiversity. BirdLife Brasil, together with Sociedade Nordestina de Ecologia, collaborated with IBAMA and the Ministry of the Environment to create the reserve. Thirteen globally threatened bird species occur at Murici, two of which are currently known only from this locality: Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi* and Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi*. The others are: Orange-bellied Antwren *Terenura sicki*, Alagoas Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes ceciliae*, Golden-tailed Parrotlet *Touit surda*, Plain Spinetail *Synallaxis infuscata*, Scalloped Antbird *Myrmeciza ruficauda*, Black-headed Berryeater *Carpornis melanocephala*, Buff-throated Purpletuft *Iodopleura pipra*, White-winged Cotinga *Xipholena atropurpurea*, Seven-coloured Tanager *Tangara factuosa*, Forbes's Blackbird *Curaeus forbesi* and Yellow-faced Siskin *Carduelis yarrellii*.

- Jacqueline M. Goerck, BirdLife International—Brazil Programme, *in litt.* June 2001, September 2001

### Lear's Macaw census tallies 246 birds

An article in *O Estado de São Paulo*, a Brazilian newspaper, in June 2001, reported that a new census of Lear's Macaws *Anodorynchus leari* in May recorded 246 birds, up from 170 found in a 1999 census.

- <http://www.estadao.com.br/ciencia/noticias/2001/jun/07/280.htm>, courtesy of J. Wall *in litt.* to NEO-ORN, June 2001

### Amazon still shrinking—and fast

Deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon was greater in 2000 than at any time since 1995, according to new satellite data released by the government in May 2001. Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE), which monitors deforestation by satellite, issued a provisional estimate for the period August 1999–August 2000, based on a sampling scheme. The mean annual rate of gross deforestation in 1999–2000 was 19,836 km<sup>2</sup>. From August 1998 to August 1999, the mean annual rate of deforestation was 17,259 km<sup>2</sup>. Environment Minister José Sarney Filho said: 'The federal government has done its homework and is doing everything it can to stop deforestation in Brazil.' An environment ministry official added that the government would introduce an environmental licensing system for private properties. The satellite TM-Landsat, used by INPE, does not reveal deforestation of areas smaller than 6.4 ha, thus excluding from its results the impact of hundreds of thousands of small-scale farmers and selective logging of lucrative species. 'The new figures clearly show that efforts by the Brazilian government have failed to stop, or even to slow, deforestation of the Amazon', Greenpeace Amazon campaigner Paulo Adário said. 'This loss of forest cover in the Amazon is unacceptable and unsustainable.' Greenpeace is calling on the Brazilian govern-

ment to reduce deforestation to zero by the year 2010.

- Reported on BIOPLAN list server, 16 May 2001

### Developers win first round in Brazil Amazon battle

In early September 2001, a Brazilian congressional commission approved a bill that environmentalists say could accelerate destruction of the Amazon, should it become law. The bill calls for local environmental and land-use studies to form the basis for permitting current limits on logging on private land in the Amazon to be relaxed. Its opponents, however, vowed the bill would not gain approval on the floor of both chambers of Congress, which is required for it to become law. Even if approved, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso has said he would veto it. Moacir Micheletto, from Paraná, who is a supporter of the farming industry, drew up the bill. It advocates the introduction of 'zoning' studies of Amazon forest to determine how much forest can be cut. It seeks to replace a three-year old 'provisional' measure that requires 80% of all private property in the Amazon to be protected, opening the way to reduce that percentage if local studies recommend such changes. 'With the current provisional measure, 20 million Brazilians are unable to produce and take their goods to market', said lawmaker Marcio Bittar,

defending the bill. Environmentalists favour the existing measure and want it to be made permanent. They fear that local governments with inadequate technical expertise may undertake the zoning studies.

- Marco Sibaja, Reuters news service (<http://www.planetark.org>), 7 September 2001

## ARGENTINA

### Results of Falklands Seabirds Census 2000

Falklands Conservation has advanced its seabird censuses, with several significant results. Detailed surveys by three teams in October–December 2000 targeted all colonies in the archipelago. Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua* was found to have increased from 65,000 pairs in 1995–96 to 113,000 pairs. However, breeding success was lower than normal, at 0.4 chicks per pair. The Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* population was thought to be stable around 272,000 pairs, with the previous estimate of 297,000 pairs in 1995–96 now considered to be an overestimate, due to inaccurate survey methodologies. The species remains a cause for concern, having not recovered its previous high numbers and continues to decline elsewhere in the world. King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* is thought to have increased from 38 pairs in the 1980s to 344–516 pairs in 2000.

Numbers of chicks are thought to have declined slightly, from 229 in 1995–96 to 175 in 2000. A suitable method of assessing Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* has still not been found. The population of Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris* is thought to have crashed from 468,000 pairs in 1995–96 to 382,000 pairs in 2000. The authors of the study—Becky Ingham, Andrea Clausen and Nic Huin—calculate that 'this represents a decline of 17,000 per year, or 48 per day, or two per hour'. The worryingly sharp decline is considered due to longline fishing operations over the Patagonian Shelf. As a result, the Falklands Government is expected to introduce a law that requires every longliner in Falkland waters to have an observer on board—to improve the reliability of bycatch figures and increase the use of mitigation measures to reduce mortality.

- *The Warrah* 19: 2–4 (2001)

### New Ramsar site

Laguna de Vilama has been declared Argentina's eighth Ramsar site. The area covers 157,000 ha of Andean highland lagoons in Jujuy province, at 4,500 m above sea level. The lagoons support a rich aquatic avifauna, while the surrounding plains hold scarce species such as Greater Rhea *Rhea americana*.

- *The Ramsar Newsletter* 32: 8 (2001)

# Neotropical News



## SOUTH AMERICA

### COLOMBIA

#### Assisting bird conservation in Colombia: ProAves

Colombia has the distinct privilege of harbouring the greatest diversity of birds in the world. With this honour comes great responsibility for their survival, but unfortunately the state of the environment in Colombia is rapidly deteriorating, which is reflected in the increasing number of bird species being classified as threatened. With the principal interest of protecting birds and promoting conservation, young ornithologists and conservationists from across the country have together formed Fundación ProAves—Colombia. ProAves is a charitable NGO with the urgent charter of conducting research to formulate and, importantly, implement conservation action plans to protect the nation's threatened and endemic birds and their habitats. Presently, ProAves members are working across the country undertaking a diverse array of projects. These include, for example, a programme of environmental education focusing on birds, rediscovering and assessing the population of Azure-winged Parrot *Hapalopsittaca fuertesi*, protecting the last two known colonies of Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis*, and managing protected areas, such as Pangan Nature Reserve in the Chocó region, where over 21 threatened and near-threatened species together with over 40 endemics occur. ProAves works with various partners, including other ornithological groups, national conservation NGOs, and the regional National Parks administrative body. ProAves invites you to join forces in

support of its mission. ProAves also seeks to support initiatives you may have for enacting research or conservation of birds in Colombia. Please visit their web page ([www.proaves.org](http://www.proaves.org)) where you can find further information and ways to lend your expertise and help.

- Paul Salaman *in litt.* 2002

### ECUADOR

#### New fishing plan aims to save Galápagos wildlife

The Ecuadorian government is attempting to coax the island's 400 fishing boats into fishing near the fringe of the Galápagos marine reserve's 64-km perimeter, with promises of support to help them sell their catches to bigger tuna fleets. 'The best thing that could happen to Galápagos is to get fisherman out...as far as possible from the two-mile radius', Environment Minister Lourdes Luque told reporters. Fishing is an age-old source of controversy in the pristine Galápagos, as industrial tuna fisherman from the coastal port of Manta are seeking permits to fish within the reserve, 1,000 km west of mainland Ecuador, while every few weeks marine authorities catch illegal boats loaded with shark fins inside the park's limits. Environmental organisations oppose letting industrial fleets fish in the Galápagos, fearing rare birds and marine life will get caught in tuna nets. Tuna was Ecuador's fifth biggest export last year. Luque said the plan to entice local fishermen away from the coastline would aid conservation efforts and keep the peace with Manta's tuna industry.

- Reuters, 7 May 2002

#### New gnatcatcher in danger of disappearing before being described

A new species of gnatcatcher, known at present only from a small area of white-sand forest in the Allpahuayo-Mishana Reserve, close to the city of Iquitos in Peru's Amazon basin, is in danger of becoming extinct prior to it being formally described. Three other species of birds have recently been discovered and described from the same area: the Ancient Antwren *Herpsilochmus gentryi*, Mishana Tyrannulet *Zimmerius villarejoi* and Allpahuayo Antbird *Percnostola arenarum*, and the description of a new subspecies of an antbird of the genus *Myrmeciza* will appear soon. All of these species, together with many other rare plants and animals are threatened by a recent land invasion precipitated by a group of land speculators. The economic limitations of the Peruvian institutions responsible for the protection of this reserve are preventing the enforcement of the law, and therefore the necessary expulsion of the invaders.

The Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve was created in March 1999 by the Peruvian government. It encompasses 57,600 ha, approximately 25 km south of Iquitos in the Amazon basin. The rainforests near Iquitos are famous for their habitat heterogeneity. A combination of historical and geological events has given the area a mosaic of diverse soil types—ranging from pure white quartz sands to red clays. In addition, the reserve harbours swamp forests as well as seasonally inundated forests. Each of these distinct formations supports a unique community of plants and animals, the result being that Allpahuayo-Mishana contains one of the highest biodiversities known in the Amazon basin.

Allpahuayo-Mishana is the only *terra firme* primary forest that is easily accessible from Iquitos. The nearest national park, Pacaya-Samiria is a three-day journey by boat from the city. In contrast, Allpahuayo-Mishana can be reached in half an hour by car. There is a field station available for biology students and tourists in the reserve, and many Peruvian and international investigators, have conducted research there, adding to its fame as Peru's hotspot of biodiversity. Indeed, the species counts from Allpahuayo-Mishana rank among the world's highest. For example, 143 species of reptiles have been recorded around Iquitos—the most ever registered at one locality. In addition, 71 species of amphibians, 460 species of birds, and close to 2,000 species of plants have been recorded in this small reserve. Many of these are white-sand specialists and are therefore exceedingly rare, due to the scarcity of white-sand forests in Peru. For example, about a dozen bird species have been found to be associated with white-sand forests in this area, and for several of them, these forests near Iquitos are their only known distribution in Peru. At least four new species of birds have been discovered within the last five years in Allpahuayo-Mishana (see above). Three species of endangered primates are found within the reserve, and for two of them, Yellow-handed Titi Monkey *Callicebus torquatus* and Equatorial Saki Monkey *Pithecia aequatorialis*. Allpahuayo-Mishana is the only place where these monkeys' habitat has been officially protected in Peru. However, biologists have only scratched the surface in their efforts to describe the flora and fauna of Allpahuayo-Mishana. It is probable that many of the white-sand endemics could disappear before being discovered, as thousands of hectares of forest have already been destroyed. The Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve is the only white-sand forest that has legal protection in Peru and protects the largest concentration

of this type of forest in the country. But, today this vital reserve is in grave danger of being effectively wiped off the face of the map. (For more details about the Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve, visit [http://www.peruecologico.com.pe/areas\\_alpahuayomishana.htm](http://www.peruecologico.com.pe/areas_alpahuayomishana.htm) or alternatively go to <http://www.nwf.org/internationalwildlife/2001/alvarez.html>).

Due to its proximity to the city of Iquitos, the continued conservation of the reserve is a challenging problem. Although the formal creation of the reserve gives the area legal protection for perpetuity, this does not guarantee actual preservation for the land, due to the enormous demographic pressures on the area, combined with the limited availability of resources in Peru for park maintenance and protection. The participation of the private sector and international organisations is urgently needed, now more than ever. In December 2001, a group of land speculators encouraged 200 persons to enter the reserve and begin to carve out homesteads. While this action is illegal, the authorities in Iquitos have a limited budget to enforce existing laws, and recently many illegal roads have been created, trees felled, and animals hunted by the colonists. White-sand forests are extremely fragile and are in no way suitable for agriculture. Once the trees are felled, available nutrients quickly leach away through the sand, and the ground becomes a degraded wasteland. Recovery times for cleared white-sand forests are estimated to be well over 1,000 years! Although unsuitable for agriculture, the land value has increased in recent years due to its proximity to the city of Iquitos and the recent construction of a paved highway. Indeed, open lands are available which are much more fertile and therefore more suitable for agriculture, but further away from the city. There are already six traditional communities within the borders of the reserve. These support the reserve and are protesting against the invasion. The new colonists are threatening

their traditional way of life and disrupting the delicate balance of sustainable use and long-term preservation of the forest that these local communities are trying to implement.

Fortunately a leading group of Peruvian and North American ornithologists and conservationists are now working with the Rainforest Conservation Fund in the USA, BirdLife International in Europe, and Amigos de Allpahuayo-Mishana in Iquitos, to ensure the continued preservation of Allpahuayo-Mishana, but requires help. Immediate needs are funds for protective services (personnel, vehicles for park guards, fences and signs). Longer term requirements are funds for research, promotion of ecotourism, environmental education, and help with sustainable economic alternatives for the local communities to continue to live inside the reserve, especially use of non-timber forest products and community-based ecotourism. Any economic help is welcome, as well as suggestions for cooperative projects or research for the short- and long-term health of the reserve. Please send your tax-deductible donations to: Rainforest Conservation Fund, 2038 North Clark Street, Suite 233, Chicago, Illinois 60614-4713, USA. Please write 'Allpahuayo-Mishana Fund' on your cheque.

- José Alvarez Alonso *in litt.* to NEO-ORN, 8 March 2002

## BRAZIL

### Mayor of Itaituba caught logging Amazônia National Park

In April 2001, IBAMA was notified of logging activity within the limits of the Amazônia National Park. In May, a small team of IBAMA inspectors visited the region and discovered an illegal clear-cut of 706 ha and further preparation of 3,000 ha for clear-cutting within the park. According to the inspectors, the men working in the park confessed to be working for the mayor of the local town of Itaituba, Wirland Freire, who had recently purchased a farm near the park, and was

preparing the park to be burned in order to expand his cattle-ranching operation. Norberto Neves de Souza, the IBAMA agent in charge of the operation, informed Greenpeace that at least 70 chainsaws were operating within the park, and during the inspection, IBAMA confiscated 14 chains for chainsaws, two axes, 234 sharpening files, 89 scythes and four tents. A team of Greenpeace activists accompanied a second IBAMA inspection of Amazônia National Park and of the mayor's farm later in May. During the inspection a chainsaw, two shotguns and various chainsaw belts were confiscated. Mayor Freire has subsequently received two fines, totalling US\$20,000.

- [http://www.greenpeace.org/~forests/forests\\_new/html/content/reports/Amazon\\_Park.PDF](http://www.greenpeace.org/~forests/forests_new/html/content/reports/Amazon_Park.PDF)

## CHILE

### **Fires ravage native forests in southern Chile**

Fires raging uncontrolled in early 2002 had, by late February, destroyed at least 53,000 ha of land, one-third of which had native tree species found only in Chile, about 800 km south of the capital, Santiago. 'Frankly, it's an environmental tragedy because there are many separate fires. They had been stabilised but unfortunately the meteorological conditions...made them spread beyond the barriers that we had set up initially', said government

spokesman Heraldo Munoz. The fires, which started in late January, reached state-protected nature reserves, destroying forests of *Araucaria* and other species. Some small farms and commercial tree plantations were also destroyed, the state forestry agency admitted, but populated areas were not affected. 'Fortunately, the fires are not affecting important urban centres. However, some farmers have lost houses and resources', Munoz said, while pledging government support to the victims. It was predicted likely to take fire fighters one month in order to bring the blazes under control.

- Reuters, 27 February 2002

# Neotropical News



## CARIBBEAN

### BAHAMAS

#### Protected areas system to double

Ten new protected areas have been created in the Bahamas, doubling the size of the country's national park system. The announcement was made by former Prime Minister, Hubert Ingraham, in the course of an address to the AGM of the Bahamas National Trust in April 2002. The initiative results from commitments made by the Bahamas under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The new protected areas cover wetlands, coral reefs, and forests.

- *Newsletter of the Bahamas Natl. Trust* 8 (1): 1–2 (2002)

#### First IBA workshop in the Bahamas

The Bahamas held its first Important Bird Area (IBA) National Workshop in April 2002. Hosted by the Bahamas National Trust, participants included government officials, local ornithologists and NGOs. Ninety key areas were identified throughout the archipelago, with 45 considered 'vital' to maintaining bird populations and habitat diversity.

- *Newsletter of the Bahamas Natl. Trust* 8 (1): 7–8 (2002)

## MIDDLE AMERICA

### MEXICO

#### Gateway to Biosphere Reserve protected

In January 2002, The Nature Conservancy and a Cancún-based conservation organisation, Amigos de Sian Ka'an, purchased a critical coastal area on the Yucatán peninsula. Although only covering 25.6-ha, the new protected area at Pez Maya will form a barrier

between expected coastal development of up to 10,000 hotel rooms and the 640,000-ha Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Mexico's first UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- *Plant Talk* 28 (April 2002)

### NICARAGUA

#### Seven new wetlands added to the list of Ramsar sites for Nicaragua

Since February 2002, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, Nicaragua, has added the following areas to the list of important international wetlands: Cayos Miskitos Marine Biological Reserve and its immediate surroundings, the coastal fringe north-east of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (total area 85,000 ha); deltas of the Royal Estuarine and Apacunca Plains (81,700 ha) which is a key ecosystem for a diverse number of marine and estuarine species; Lake Apanas-Asturias, in Jinotega (5,226 ha) which holds many migrant ducks, including up to 3,000 Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*; Río San Juan Wildlife Refuge, in the south-east of the country (43,000 ha); Bluefields Bay Wetland System (86,501 ha) which is the largest natural resource site in the southern Caribbean region of Nicaragua; San Miguelito Wetland System (43,475 ha) which holds up to 5,000 Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*; and Tisma Lagoon System (16,850 ha) which harbours up to 20,000 Blue-winged Teal. For further information contact Martín Lezama-Lopez, Departamento de Ciencias Ambientales, Facultad de Ciencias, Tecnología y Ambiente, Universidad Centroamericana, Managua, Apdo. 69, Nicaragua, or by e-mail: mlezama@ns.uca.edu.ni.

- *La Tangara* 40 (May/June, 2002)

## SOUTH AMERICA

### BRAZIL

#### Expansion of National Forests system

Brazil's government is currently implementing a policy for sustainable forest production within an expanded system of National Forests ('Flonas'). By 2010, 50 million ha of new Flonas will have been created. The scale of this initiative is equivalent to the 1908 establishment of the US National Forest system, and is unprecedented in the tropics. The resultant mosaic of conservation areas, combining Flonas with fully protected parks and indigenous reservations, is expected to enhance biodiversity conservation and economic stability throughout the Amazon. Establishment of these Flonas is expected to foster development of large-scale sustainable forestry and make Brazil a world leader in conserving natural resources.

- *Science* 297: 1478 (2002)

### CHILE

#### Latest on the Ruddy-headed Goose

Studies of the distribution and abundance of Ruddy-headed Geese *Chloephaga rubidiceps* were undertaken in its southern Chilean breeding range in December 1999 and March 2000. During December 1999, 737 individuals were counted, including 134 chicks, while the March 2000 count totalled 750 individuals. San Gregorio, in continental Chile, proved to be a key site, with 78% of breeding pairs. This species, with a stable and numerous population in the Falklands, is dwindling on the continent. Breeding sites were characterised by the presence of wet fields, offering protection from predators. These sites have been

heavily overgrazed in Tierra del Fuego, where foxes were also introduced. Breeding success is highly susceptible to disturbance, and it is suggested that action be taken to protect the main sites.

- *Bol. Chileno Orn.* 7 (2000)

## COLOMBIA

### Indigo-winged Parrot rediscovered

In July 2002, Jorge Velasquez and Alonso Quevedo photographed a flock of 14 Indigo-winged Parrots *Hapalopsittaca fuertesi* in the Colombian Central Andes. This constitutes the first documented record for 91 years, following an unconfirmed report in 1989. The researchers were funded by the BP Conservation Programme, administered jointly by BirdLife International and Flora & Fauna International.

- *The Guardian*, 21 August 2002

## PARAGUAY

### First cross-border conservation area in South America

In July 2002, the Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental (Paraguay) acquired an additional c.4,000 ha in the Infante Rivarola area, at Canada del Carmen, in the Paraguayan Chaco. This protected area will be, together with the Bolivian private reserve El Corbalán, the first cross-border conservation area in South America. The international community has long realised the trans-boundary nature of most environmental problems, and the inefficacy of unilateral efforts. Nevertheless, this event transcends the natural resources conservation spectrum: cross-border conservation areas provide a mechanism to promote sound ecological management of such cross-border ecosystems and opportunities for political, economic and cultural cooperation. Boundaries should be retained,

but their functions as lines of division should be reduced to permit them to assume more welcome functions as lines of positive and productive contact.

- S. Abed-Zavala, Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental (IDEA) *in litt.* August 2002

## URUGUAY

### Important Bird Areas project in Uruguay

Aves Uruguay has identified 11 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in its first analysis, which includes sites throughout the country. A proposed National IBAs workshop was due to take place in August 2002 involving technicians and government authorities in order to reach a national agreement and achieve support from government organisations for the research. For further information contact Gabriel Roche, Coordinador Programa AIAs, Aves Uruguay, or by e-mail, [gupeca@adinet.com.uy](mailto:gupeca@adinet.com.uy).

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