

# NBC Conservation Awards Update

## 2014 Awards: 1st Round

Generously supported again by several independent donors, including **The March Foundation** (California), NBC has been able to offer three awards from the first round of applications in 2014:-

- **Designing a standardised photographic mark-recapture method for estimating population densities of Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* (NT) using feeding stations.** Diego Ricardo Méndez Mojica—Bolivia. Awarded \$1,100.
- **Current status of Apolinar's Wren *Cistothorus apolinari* (EN) in the wetlands of Bogotá.** Adriana Sua-Becerra—Colombia. Awarded \$1,200.
- **Distribution and habitat use of grassland birds in the coastal dunes of La Pampa Province.** Cintia Celsi—Argentina. Awarded \$1,100.

The deadlines for NBC Conservation Award applications are 30th June and 31st December. As announced in NB14, we are pleased to consider applications eligible for the first Juan Mazar Barnett Award of up to \$2,000 in Juan's memory, following a generous donation from his family<sup>1</sup>. The award seeks to encourage early-career Neotropical bird conservationists and researchers, and will be presented for the NBC Conservation Award proposal that best captures Juan's spirit: technical expertise combined with a passion for birds and bird conservation. The NBC Conservation Awards Programme would be unable to support the projects we do without generous donations from independent organisations and private individuals. If you, or your company would like to donate to the Programme please contact the author.

<sup>1</sup> Please use the standard NBC awards application form—the committee will automatically identify those applications that are eligible for the Juan Mazar Barnett Award.

## A spin-off publication...

The NBC aims to provide seed-funding through many of the projects we support. Conservation impacts sometimes grow beyond the lifetime of initial projects. We are extremely pleased to be able to share recent outputs resulting from projects NBC funded several years ago:

In 2007 *Kristina COCKLE* and *Alejandro BODRATI* participated in a **Survey and study of Black-capped Manakin *Piprites pileata* (VU) in Misiones, Argentina**, which was awarded US\$ 1,325 in 2006. During that survey, data were also collected on Black-fronted Piping Guan *Pipile jacutinga* (EN), resulting in a recent paper on its status in the country (Cockle & Bodrati 2011). The authors show the current distribution and identify key areas to look for this Endangered and hunted species in Argentina, while they recommend the purchase of land to create strict reserves within the multiple-use Yaboty Biosphere Reserve, in order to ensure its protection.

## Updates from past awards

### The importance of the coast of Maldonado, Uruguay, for the conservation of Olrog's Gull *Larus atlanticus* (NT): US\$ 1,290

**Project dates:** May—December 2010

Two sites in coastal Maldonado, Uruguay, held over 1% of the global Olrog's Gull population during winter surveys in 2010. Monthly counts recorded over 100 individuals at the José Ignacio Lagoon in June and July, with over 50 at the Arroyo Maldonado estuary in July. The majority of birds were juvenile and sub-adult. Numbers increased rapidly in late May and decreased steadily after July with none recorded into November. The study results support the designation of the two study sites as Important Bird Areas by BirdLife International. Numbers recorded during the survey are in line with previous counts.

Overall there has been limited study of coastal and waterbird species in Uruguay and



Above: Colombian Screech-owl *Megascops columbianus* (NT) was found at four localities, including a significant range extension south to Bolívar Province, Colombia, June 2010 (Juan Freile Ortiz)

Right: *Polylepis subtusalbida* saplings have been planted around Ch'aqui Potrero in efforts to reforest a key habitat for the Cochabamba Mountain Finch *Compsospiza garleppi* (EN), Cochabamba, Bolivia, February 2014 (Rodrigo Soria-Auza)

Facing page, top: Cochabamba Mountain Finch *Compsospiza garleppi* is an Endangered species, declining owing to the loss of preferred *Polylepis* habitat. Cochabamba, Bolivia, November 2013 (Paul Jones)

Facing page, bottom: With direct support from local people this project established a new nursery for the production of *Polylepis subtusalbida* saplings for local planting. Cochabamba, Bolivia, February 2014 (Rodrigo Soria-Auza)



little new information in the past 30 years. During this period population declines in a number of species are suspected. While it is encouraging that the Maldonado coastline remains of international importance for Olrog's Gull, significant human impacts were noted during surveys. A bridge across part of José Ignacio Lagoon is being repaired, which has reduced the use of habitat in that part of the lagoon. General human disturbance was high, with observations of artisanal fisheries, watersports (surfing, kite surfing), vehicular traffic on the dry bed of the



lagoon and the sand bar, and removal of coastal vegetation to construct new housing.

A major concern of this project is the continuing eradication of saline wetlands primarily due to the prioritisation of transport infrastructure and new housing. Loss of these wintering sites is affecting populations of numerous migratory species. In addition to survey work, the team conducted outreach with 10 teachers and over 200 school students. One purpose of this work was to explain habitat loss in a local context. Children were well aware of forest loss in the faraway Amazon, but had not thought about how similar habitat loss is occurring locally at coastal wetlands.

*Diego CABALLERO-SADI*

### **Distribution and conservation of two threatened owls, Cloud-forest Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium nubicola* (VU) and Colombian Screech Owl *Megascops colombianus* (NT) of the Chocóan Andes: US\$ 1,190**

**Project dates:** June 2010—May 2011

The project was integrated into a larger project to assess the distribution and conservation of nine species of screech owls and pygmy owls in Ecuador. A total of 110 individual records were compiled from museum data, published literature and field work, and models of current distribution under deforestation and land protection scenarios are currently being developed. A total of 10 field trips were undertaken to the Chocóan slopes of the Andes in order to search for Cloud-forest Pygmy Owls and Colombian Screech Owls. During field work, playback was the primary technique used to detect birds, by eliciting a response that would confirm the species' presence at each locality. Colombian Screech Owl was found at four localities, including a significant range extension south to Bolívar Province. Alas, Cloud-forest Pygmy Owl was found at a single locality, and did not respond at sites where previous records exist. Conservation assessments are currently under way, but preliminary data suggest that the ranges of both species have contracted by 30–60%. In total, 40% of their respective ranges fall within protected areas. It should be noted, though, that Cloud-forest Pygmy Owl has not yet been found in any area protected by the Ecuadorian state, even though part of its potential range is included within the large Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve.

*Diego CASTRO & Juan FREILE*

### **Threat assessment and conservation of birds in proposed Cerro Montezuma IBA, Colombia: US\$ 1,500**

**Project dates:** June 2011—April 2012

Surveys in the Reserva Mesenia, Jardín, Antioquia, Colombia, recorded nine restricted-range species, amongst them the Critically Endangered Dusky Starfrontlet *Coeligena orina* and Munchique Wood Wren *Henicorhina negreti*. This appears to be a new locality for Dusky Starfrontlet.

The purpose of surveys was to increase baseline information for a poorly-studied cloud forest to inform conservation planning in the region. In all, 186 species were recorded during the survey. Most significant were the two Critically Endangered species, and particularly the discovery of a nest of the Munchique Wood Wren. Other notable finds were Golden-ringed Tanager *Bangsia aureocincta* (EN), Black-and-gold Tanager *B. melanochlamys* (VU), Tanager Finch *Oreothraupis arremonops* (VU), Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* (EN) and Turquoise Dacnis *Dacnis hartlaubi* (VU).

*Oswaldo CORTES*

### **Contribution to the natural history of Turquoise Dacnis *Dacnis hartlaubi* (VU): US\$ 500**

**Project dates:** November 2012—December 2013

Turquoise Dacnis was observed 66 times during four survey visits to the Cerro de Quinini Protected Forest Reserve, Cundinamarca department, Colombia. This area is part of the Eastern Cordillera cloud forest. 37 males and 29 females were recorded, all between 1,465 and 1,787 m in wooded grasslands.

The study aimed to understand the basic biology of this species, many details of which were poorly understood. It was observed foraging mainly on fruits, with insects making up a small part of the diet. The bird foraged predominantly in foliage and along small branches at heights of 4–25 m, but especially in the canopy, above 20 m. Important plant species noted were *Viburnum* sp., *Myrsine coriacea* and *Mauraya heterophylla*. The species was found to be highly social, with individuals foraging in close proximity to one another and as many as ten individuals encountered in one tree.

The range of Turquoise Dacnis is poorly known but believed to be small. This study has contributed to an improved understanding of

its range and ecology that will hopefully lead to improved conservation action for the species.

*Sergio CHAPARRO-HERRERA*

## Preventing habitat loss for the Endangered Cochabamba Mountain Finch *Compsospiza garleppi*: US\$ 1,500

**Project dates:** October—December 2012

Over 1,800 *Polylepis subtusalbida* saplings were collected and nurtured in a community tree-nursery for replanting around Ch'aqui Potrero in the Cordillera Cochabamba, Bolivia. Also 15 fuel-efficient stoves were provided to local people. These two conservation actions were aimed at arresting declines of suitable *Polylepis* forest which is vital for the survival of the Endangered Cochabamba Mountain Finch. *P. subtusalbida* is declining (it is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List) as forest is cleared to expand fields for crops and grasslands to feed livestock. Forest patches are now restricted to areas not suitable for cultivation. However, remaining forest patches are still threatened by the continual introduction of exotic plants like *Eucalyptus* and pine, that are gradually replacing the surviving patches of native forests. Deliberate burning to maintain grasslands to feed livestock prevent *Polylepis* regeneration.

Twenty school children, supported by parents and teachers, participated in two campaigns to collect *P. subtusalbida* saplings and establish the tree nursery. The success and popularity of this initiative also led to the establishment of medicinal plants within the nursery with the aim of promoting traditional uses of these native species.

The community has agreed to provide saplings to a reforestation project designed to offset the destruction of *Polylepis* habitat during the Misticuni Dam project to provide water and hydroelectric power to the cities of Cochabamba, Quillacollo, Sacaba and Tiquipaya. As part of

this project a water pipeline will be constructed between the communities of Caluyo (3,750 m) and Molle Molle (3,300 m), in the cordillera del Tunari. This construction will affect one of the largest *P. subtusalbida* forest patches where several individuals of the Cochabamba Mountain Finch have been reported.

Future aims of the project are: 1) to monitor the impact of fuel-efficient stoves on firewood consumption, and, if effective, to encourage the use of these stoves among families who do not have them yet; 2) to monitor forest cover around Ch'aqui Potrero; 3) to prepare a photographic guide of medicinal plants to distribute among school children; and 4) to construct another nursery at the community of San Miguel. This will also produce saplings of *P. subtusalbida* to reforest the community area of San Miguel. San Miguel attracts birdwatchers seeking Cochabamba Mountain Finch and other *Polylepis*-specialist bird species. Even though specialised tour agencies take birdwatchers to San Miguel, local people have not been involved in this activity nor have they derived community benefits. Consequently they have little motivation to conserve *Polylepis* woodland. Future work aims to integrate local people into eco-tourism activities as tour guides and in the maintenance of trails and tourist infrastructure. This work has been implemented jointly by Asociación Armonía and Universidad Simón I. Patiño.

*José BALDERRAMA TORRICO and  
Rodrigo SORIA-AUZA*

### REFERENCES

- Cockle, C. & Bodrati, A. (2011) Situación de la Yacutinga (*Aburria jacutinga*) en Argentina. *Bull. Cracid Specialist Group* 31: 10-31.

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### JEZ BIRD

E-mail: jezbird@gmail.com