

NBC Conservation Awards Update

2014 Awards: 2nd Round

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

- **Ecology and conservation of Carrizal Seedeater *Amaurospiza carrizalensis* (CR) in the Lower Río Caroní, Bolívar State, Venezuela.** Carlos Eduardo Valeris Chacín—Venezuela. Awarded \$1,500.
- **Monitoring Grey-breasted Parakeet *Pyrrhura griseipectus* (CR) in north-east Brazil.** Thaís Moura Campos Vila Nova—Brazil. Awarded \$1,500.

The deadlines for Conservation Award applications are 30 June and 30 December. As announced in NB14, we are pleased to consider applications eligible for the Juan Mazar Barnett Award of up to \$2,000 in Juan's memory following a generous donation from his family¹. 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 the generous support of independent organisations and private individuals. If you, or your company would like to donate to the programme please contact the author.

Updates from past awards

Distribution and habitat use of grassland birds in coastal dunes of the Argentine Pampas: US\$1,100.

Project dates: January – November 2014
During October 2014 the project conducted the first stage of a field sampling programme in the dunes of Pehuén-có, Buenos Aires province.

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

The objective of the programme is to investigate bird assemblages associated with coastal-dune grasslands and evaluate the effects of urbanization on avian abundance and richness. Research was conducted in the urban area and in the dune grasslands surrounding the village. Four or five observers censused birds through direct observations during the early hours of the morning and late afternoon. A preliminary total of 65 species were recorded, including the Near Threatened Bearded Tachuri *Polystictus pectoralis*, a bird species highly dependent on the maintenance of native grassland vegetation for survival.

The results from further field study will provide a better understanding of the patterns of species distribution, the association between birds and habitat structure, and the design of future guidelines to promote the conservation of native birds. A second stage of field sampling will encompass the dunes of Coronel Dorrego and Marisol village, Buenos Aires province, sites of high conservation concern, in the Pampas Atlantic coast.

Preliminary results of research on dune-grassland bird communities and the impacts of urbanization on bird assemblages were presented at the XXVI Argentine Meeting on Ecology (Reunión Argentina de Ecología), during the first week of November 2014 in Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut province, Argentina.

As well as the recent field programme, in the first half of 2014 a series of courses, workshops and meetings under the heading "Introduction to the ecology and conservation of beach and dune ecosystems of the coast of Buenos Aires" took place within the Pampas region including the cities of Necochea, Coronel Dorrego, Monte Hermoso and the town of Gil, Buenos Aires province. Materials were designed for teachers and tertiary students. The focus on an audience of educators was so that they can act as information multipliers within their workplaces. There were a total of 150 participants in the meetings, which addressed diverse issues related to the ecology and conservation of dune and beach ecosystems of the marine coast of Buenos Aires. Topics covered included the physical processes that shape a dune coastline, biodiversity and impacts on the

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- 1: Field studies are under way in the Argentine Pampas assessing the impacts of urbanization on the region's birds. Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2014 (Cintia Celsi)
- 2: The long-term prospects of Bearded Tachuri *Polystictus pectoralis* will be determined by future encroachment of their native habitat. Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2014 (Cintia Celsi)
- 3: Inspection of nesting holes of sympatric parrots in Argentina's Atlantic Forest requires a head for heights. Misiones, Argentina, November 2013 (Eugenia Bonaparte)
- 4: Vinaceous-breasted Parrot *Amazona vinacea* relies on undisturbed Paraná Pine for nesting cavities. Misiones, Argentina, November 2013 (Eugenia Bonaparte)
- 5: The Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) are establishing a re-release programme for Yellow-headed Parrots following tightening of national laws on the keeping of wild parrots as pets (James Lord)



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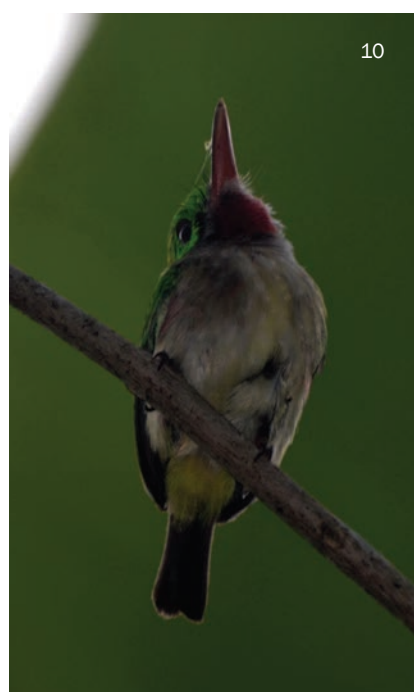
6: Six Yellow-headed Parrots *Amazona oratrix* have either been surrendered by local households or bred in captivity (James Lord)

7, 8, 9: The confiscated birds are being held in a pre-release facility before they are returned to the wild (James Lord)

10: Broad-billed Tody *Todus subulatus* is one of a number of Hispaniolan endemics that could be attracted to cacao plantations in the Dominican Republic with more wildlife-friendly farming (Andrea Thomen)



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Pampas coast, aspects of urban development and restoration and management tools that are applied to these environments, highlighting the role of protected areas in the conservation of coastal ecosystems. Much of the content was focused on describing the animal and plant communities of the coastal dune environments. A special section was dedicated to presentation of the organizers own project on dune-grassland birds and the influence of urbanization.

Cintia CELSI

Use and cavity availability for nesting Vinaceous-breasted Amazon *Amazona vinacea* (EN) in Argentina's Atlantic forest: \$US 1,000

Project dates: August 2013 – March 2014

The general objective of this work was to continue a long-term study to determine the use and availability of tree cavities for nesting by the Endangered Vinaceous-breasted Parrot *Amazona vinacea*, and other sympatric species of parrots: White-eyed Parakeet *Psittacara leucophthalmus* (LC), Maroon-bellied Parakeet *Pyrrhura frontalis* (LC), Pileated Parrot *Pionopsitta pileata* (LC) and Scaly-headed Parrot *Pionus maximiliani* (LC). The study assessed niche partitioning by the different species, comparing attributes of the cavities used by each (depth, entrance diameter, height from the ground). In addition, the investigators determined whether the holes used by Vinaceous-breasted Parrot are also used by one or more of the other parrot species in different years. A final part of the study estimated the number of holes available to parrot species in primary and degraded forest. The study took place in Paraná Pine forests of Misiones province, Argentina. Study plots were visited in Cruce Caballero, Araucaria and Yari Caá Provincial Parks.

From August to December 2013, the principal investigator and field assistants searched 1 ha plots for cavities. Plots were selected that had different human interventions. The team found two Vinaceous-breasted Parrot nests, two White-eyed Parakeet nests, six Maroon-bellied Parakeet nests, and two Scaly-headed parrot nests. All nest-containing cavities were measured. These data were added to data collected during the 2006–2012 breeding seasons by project supervisor Kristina Cockle. The results formed part of a thesis and are under review in the journal *Biotropica*.

Differences between cavity depth, diameter and height of the entrance hole suggested low niche overlap between the nesting sites of the

sympatric study species. Vinaceous-breasted Parrot uses larger holes than the other species. For all species the number of suitable cavities decreased with increasing levels of human impact in the study plots. Vinaceous-breasted Parrot appeared to be most susceptible to disturbance. In the study to date only one out of nine nesting holes used by the species was in disturbed forest.

During August and September 2014 the Paraná Pine Forest Project developed an environmental education campaign focused on students of primary and secondary schools in rural areas. The team visited a total of 15 schools in the department of San Pedro. Activities with students explain the importance of protecting the native forest, raise awareness and knowledge of native endangered species, and present the most important threats to those species and their habitats.

Field studies are continuing from September to December 2014 with further nest searching and following cavity-nesters in the Atlantic Forests of Argentina.

Bianca Eugenie BONAPARTE

Decreasing the demand for poached *Amazona oratrix* in Toledo District, Belize: \$US 1,500

Project dates: November 2013 – February 2014

The Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) and the Belize Forest Department co-manage one of the last strongholds for the Yellow-headed Parrot *Amazona oratrix* (EN), Payne's Creek National Park in southern Belize. As in the rest of its range, poaching for the pet trade is one of the major threats here. Poached parrot chicks are sold almost entirely on the local market and so, with a grant from NBC, TIDE sought to reduce demand by raising awareness in local communities.

First, TIDE surveyed 100 households buffering Payne's Creek National Park to gauge awareness. The results confirmed that ownership of pet parrots was high, with 11% of respondents saying they owned one and 50% saying they knew someone with one. Awareness of the law was high, as was awareness of threats: 78% know that it is illegal to catch wild parrots and 50% correctly identify fire and poaching as the main threats to the species. Yet, only 31% of respondents could correctly explain the meaning of "endangered". After each survey, the interviewers discussed environmental issues with respondents to raise awareness.

TIDE's education coordinator attended a "Bird Sleuth" training session run by neighbouring

Ya'axché Conservation Trust, where he picked up some creative methods to teach children about bird conservation. He then delivered lessons to almost 300 primary school students at four schools and TIDE's Summer Camp. One activity that worked well was a game in which pupils pretending to be parrots have a time limit to collect cards that represent food, water and nesting sites in order to survive. Each round, humans remove some of the parrots' requirements and the challenge to survive becomes harder, threatening extinction. TIDE also created an information leaflet and distributed 100 copies to students and community leaders.

One of the project objectives was to build willingness among pet owners to surrender captive Yellow-headed Parrots for rehabilitation and release. TIDE managed to exceed this target by teaming up with Belize Bird Rescue to actually rehabilitate two surrendered parrots. The birds are currently in a soft-release enclosure in Payne's Creek National Park, along with four more yellow-heads that were raised in captivity, either because they were the third chick in a nest, or because their nest was highly exposed to predation or the elements. All six birds are very healthy and two of them are pair-bonding.

Earlier this year, the Belize Forest Department declared an amnesty on captive Yellow-headed Parrots, giving all owners until 31 December to register birds, after which all unregistered birds will be subject to confiscation. TIDE and Belize Bird Rescue are now well positioned to assist the Forest Department to rehabilitate and reintroduce confiscated and surrendered yellow-heads. The future is bright, the future is yellow!

James LORD

Read more at: <https://www.facebook.com/belizebirdrescue/photos/pcb.512539288848917/512529135516599/?type=1&theater>
<https://www.facebook.com/TIDEBZE/photos/pcb.739231172810175/739227902810502/?type=1&theater>

Evaluating avian communities in Dominican cacao farms: implications for management and conservation: \$US 1,500.

Project dates: September 2013 – November 2014
The primary research objective of this study was to assess summer and winter avian assemblages in Duarte, Dominican Republic. As a secondary objective, farmer attitudes and shade-tree preferences were examined to identify challenges

for avian conservation and opportunities for bird-friendly management.

The Dominican Republic is the world's largest cacao producer. The study region was chosen due to its proximity to the Loma Quita Espuela Scientific Reserve (LQE), an Important Bird Area. LQE contains both broadleaved forests and cloud forests; and active environmental education campaigns are maintained in the surrounding area. Throughout the project, the team helped coordinate two environmental education campaigns for children in the community of Loma de la Joya: *Campamento Barrancoli* and *Nidos de mi Finca*. These initiatives were aimed at reducing illegal hunting and increasing environmental awareness in cacao-growing communities.

To study avian assemblages fixed-radius point counts and vegetation assessments were used to compare commercial farms, independent farms and forest fragments. Bayesian abundance models indicated that the forest fragments had most resident birds. Commercial farms, which supported a greater number of migratory generalists, had fewer forest specialists and more *matorral* birds throughout the year (relative to forests). In this region, wildlife-friendly farming initiatives should encourage smallholder farmers to plant fruit-producing shade trees, such as *Guarea guidonia* and *Cecropia* spp., to improve habitat for fruit-eating birds.

Despite the known benefits of wildlife-friendly farming, 'bird-friendly' cocoa certifications do not yet exist. Data from interviews with 108 cacao growers were used to evaluate management practices and review the acceptability of 'bird-friendly' management recommendations. Overall, farmers had positive attitudes towards birds and conservation, acknowledging insect control and seed dispersal services that birds provide; which may be used as a tool to encourage farmers to plant bird-attracting shade trees. The team recommended that conservationists and organic certifiers in this region work to promote the retention of native forest trees in farms.

This study's findings will be incorporated into a regional management plan in 2015 in order to assist small-scale community groups with environmental education. The team hope that their efforts help promote wildlife-friendly farming and bird-watching in this region.

Andrea THOMEN

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