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AUDUBON-TRAINED GUIDES PARTICIPATING IN CBCS

Audubon's Hemispheric Work in Citizen Science

Flores, Guatemala, January 6, 2016— Audubon-trained guides participated in several Christmas Bird Counts throughout the hemisphere.

Audubon's international partners in Belize, Guatemala and Paraguay organized Christmas Bird Counts in which 3 dozen newly-trained bird guides participated. For many participants, this was not their first bird count, but this year's CBC took on new meaning for some in the context of envisioning birding as a tool to improve their economic livelihood and also contribute in a more meaningful way to hemispheric conservation. Over the past year, Audubon has been implementing a bird-based tourism initiative funded by the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), including a strong focus on training community members living in and around important bird areas to be bird guides, using a curriculum created by National Audubon together with local partners.

Belize has been participating in CBCs since 1973. This year, 26 participants, including 10 recently trained bird guides and one of their instructors-- Roni Martinez, a professional guide who is finishing up his own "Big Year in Belize" with over 500 species-- counted a total of 220 species in the "Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary" circle organized by the Belize Audubon Society. This total was among the highest counts for any CBC in Belize!



Cockscomb CBC participants during a short lunch break, gearing up for the afternoon portion.



One group, including 2 Maya-Mopan park guards for the Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary managed by the Belize Audubon Society, all 4 of whom took the basic bird guide training course, ended the long morning portion of the Cockscomb CBC spotting a small group of Willets under a dock at the Kanantik resort. Federico (3rd from left) is participating in his 14th CBC!

Interesting species seen by the 4 groups in the Cockscomb CBC included: American White Pelican, Striped Owl, Yucatan Vireo, Clapper Rail, Peregrine Falcon, Reddish Egret, Least Bittern, and the critically endangered Yellow-headed Parrot. The Cockscomb CBC was not short on wildlife; distracting attention from the birds were Red Brocket deer, Northern Tamandua (Lesser Anteater), and a Neotropical River Otter.

Participating in my first ever Audubon Christmas Bird Count as an employee of Audubon and manager of Audubon's bird based tourism project, took on great meaning. I was able to participate in a century's old tradition and see the impact our hemispheric efforts—in citizen science, through the dedication of local staff and park rangers to the process, as a witness to the skills acquired by newly trained guides, and the demonstration of high quality bird knowledge by the bird guide course instructors. I woke up to the call of a Mottled Owl and finished the afternoon with a King Vulture overhead and in between met great people who are passionate about birds. For many participants, birding and conservation are not a weekend hobby— it represents a means to put children through high school, a way to educate others, a way to travel, and a way to promote tourism for their country. The areas where Audubon works in Belize are so rich in biodiversity and are now poised to receive more birders. Maybe you will consider doing your next Christmas Bird Count in an area where some of "your birds" go in the winter. But we encourage you to visit any time of the year and hire a local bird guide! -- Sarah Stewart, Bird-Based Tourism Project Administrator



Hopkins Wetlands. Wood storks, Roseate Spoonbills and Egrets. Photo credit: Kevin Quischan.

The CBC circle “Tarrales”-- in the foothills of the Santiago Atitlan volcano near Lake Atitlan, in the western Guatemala highlands, and in a spectacular area of regional endemism--now in its 9th year, yielded a whopping 235 species! 22 people participated, half of whom took the basic guide course offered by Audubon’s local conservation partner Vivamos Mejor, as well as their instructor, Maynor Ovando, one of the best bird guides for the Guatemalan highlands.



Rey Tepepul Municipal Park, Santiago Atitlan, part of the Tarrales CBC circle, covers a large altitudinal area, including cloud forest.

Some of the highlights in the Tarrales circle were: Horned Guan, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Great Horned Owl, Azure-Rumped Tanager, Blue-crowned Chlorophonia and Pink-headed Warbler. Of the neotropical migrants, some notable and familiar birds included Wilson's, Townsends, and Black-throated Green warblers, the familiar Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, and Summer Tanagers.



Blue-Crowned Chlorophonia (left). Photo: Juan Chocoy. Elegant Euphonia (right). Photo: Rolando Tol Gonzales

Several participants of the basic bird guide course from the Atitlan area also participated in an inaugural CBC in central Guatemala in the cloud forest, near the famous Biotopo el Quetzal protected area. Despite rainy conditions, they counted 110 species including forest-dependent threatened species like the Resplendent Quetzal, Golden-winged Warbler and Golden-cheeked Warbler.



The CBCs in Guatemala may not suffer from low temperatures like those in the US, but due to the timing of the count (end of the rainy season) and location (many unpaved roads), conditions are unpredictable. One of the counts suffered from rainy conditions, another required high water rubber boots, and most required several bottles of bug repellent. One of the longer routes on foot was an 18 km round trip muddy trail through subtropical rain forest in the Peten.

Wildlife Conservation Society-Guatemala organized their 6th CBC in the “Estación Biológica Las Guacamayas” circle [Scarlet Macaw Biological Research Station] in the Peten region of northern Guatemala; however, this was the first year they registered as an official Audubon CBC. Located in the western part of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, this circle is inside the Laguna del Tigre National Park, home to critical breeding habitat for the Scarlet Macaw and around 275 other bird species. The CBC includes areas threatened by agricultural encroachment and conversion of forests to pasturelands and palm oil plantations.



Scarlet Macaw Biological Research Station CBC, Peten, Guatemala, organized by Wildlife Conservation Society-Guatemala.

35 people participated, including 12 newly-trained bird guides and 2 of their instructors, Marcial Cordova, a local amateur ornithologist and specialist in protection and breeding of the Scarlet Macaw; and John Cahill, a young but prolific birder and guide from the central highlands, as well as the instructor for the Advanced Bird Guide training course offered by WCS-Guatemala for the Peten. Between 7 different routes, the group spotted or heard an impressive 242 species! Highlights included three separate detections of Scarlet Macaws, six King Vultures, an adult Peregrine Falcon, an immature Northern Harrier, and three Agami Herons.



Mottled Owl (left) Photo credit: Cornelio Chable. Vermilion Flycatcher (right), photo credit: Renato Fernandez

Newly trained community bird guides appreciated the opportunity to put into practice their skills in identifying birds, to communicate bird names in English, and to share the day with more experienced birders.

I participated for the first time in the Scarlet Macaw Biological Research Station CBC. Many people participated and now we realize the value that birds bring to our communities and the country.—Kenny Ramos, recently trained community bird guide, Uaxactún community, Peten, Guatemala

This is my third time participating in the Scarlet Macaw Biological Research Station CBC. During my first count, I didn't have a lot of experience. When we went out, I looked at colors and different beak types, like differences between seedeaters and hawks. And now for my 3rd CBC, I have more experience and knowledge. I see the diversity and I enjoy the freedom to explore and enjoy the tropical forest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. —Juan Cuz Coc, recently trained community bird guide, Paso Caballos community, Peten, Guatemala.

In both Belize and Guatemala, park rangers participated, many of whom are local experts in avifauna and who live in the immediate area. The CBCs represent a chance for them to share with experts from the region and also display their skills in spotting and identifying birds.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar (left). Black-collared hawk (right). Photo credit: Renato Fernandez

Further afield in Asunción, Paraguay, 14 people including Arne Lesterhuis- one of Paraguay's best bird guides- and 7 individuals taking the basic bird guide course given by Audubon's local implementing partner, Guyra Paraguay, spotted 68 species in a 62 acre urban green space called Parque Guasu Metropolitano over a short 3 hour period in the long-standing Asunción CBC. Highlights included: Black-capped Warbling Finch, Wedge-tailed Grass-finch, and the ever elusive Striped Cuckoo.





Roadside Hawk (left). White-barred Piculet (right). Photo credit: Oscar Bordon



Many participants of the CBCs in Guatemala, Belize and Paraguay enjoyed the use of Vortex binoculars, purchased with funds from the IDB, as part of Audubon's bird-based tourism project to train local guides. The equipment is kept by the local implementing partner organizations for future training and citizen science activities.

Audubon is working throughout the hemisphere to strengthen connections between birds and people, educate, promote citizen science, protect important bird areas, and improve economic conditions.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Sarah Stewart at 202-600-7988 or email at International@audubon.org.