



PROGRAMME FOR BELIZE

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR POSITIVE ACTION
Published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Programme for Belize

December
2006

Letter from the Director

September 2006

Dear Friends and Supporters:

I am happy to report on the great progress on both the conservation and management of the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area and on our progress towards financial sustainability. If you recall, in 2002 and 2003 we had to take some serious measures to ensure the sustainability of the organization, because of the drastic decrease in our tourism revenues and a reduction in grants (mostly due to the effects of the 9/11 event). I am happy to report that those measures have had great results and our organization is back on track. Tourism revenues have rebounded to pre-2002 figures. All of these have been possible thanks to your support and to that of our partners.

Our protection program continues to be effective and only a few illegal hunters were encountered, arrested and taken to court. Overall, there have been very little signs of illegal and unauthorized activities. Our dedicated and loyal rangers continue to make Rio Bravo a safer haven to wildlife, biodiversity, and migratory birds.

Together with The Belize Zoo and The Peregrine Fund, a total of nine Harpy Eagles have been re-introduced in Rio Bravo. The birds are doing well and apparently loving their new home. Harpy Eagles once inhabited Belize, but this charismatic species disappeared due to destruction of its habitat and its deliberate killing. The goal of this project is to establish a breeding population in the Rio Bravo area and to educate the neighboring communities in order to ensure its survival.

Our Sustainable Tourism Program, funded by the Rainforest Alliance/IDB is in full swing and a complementary project has been funded by GEF through Rainforest Alliance and Conservation International. The main purpose of this program is to promote best management practices among tourism enterprises in Belize and to link them with wholesalers or tour agencies that demand sustainable tourism products and services, thereby creating a niche for sustainable tourism initiatives.

Our freshwater study program is coming to an end this December 2006. By then, we would have completed the development of a baseline, a monitoring plan and the integration of freshwater into our Rio Bravo management plan. And we will be in a position to decide what actions need to be developed in the future.

Regarding our Pine Savannas, we managed to keep fires out of the savannas during the entire dry season. With the rains, the possibility of fires is practically zero but we keep watching. There is the need for prescribed burning of the "Rancho Dolores" pine savannas but this has been put to a halt until funding is secured. In the San Felipe pine savannas, however, fire has to be kept out for at least 5 years as this area has been subjected to too frequent fires that the composition of flora and fauna has been severely affected. The addition of two temporary rangers has enabled PFB to keep away parrot poachers and to monitor and ensure a successful breeding season for the Yellow-headed Parrot.

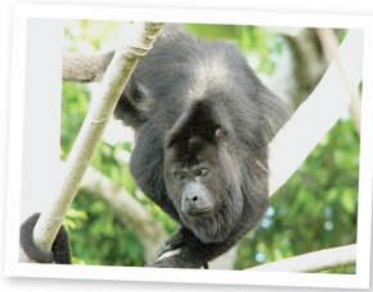
Our fifth Rio Bravo Management Plan has been drafted and is in the process of revision.



continued on page 3...

Travel to Belize and Support Conservation

You can support conservation in Belize and have a great vacation at the same time while traveling to Pfb facilities. By visiting the Rio Bravo, you contribute directly to the conservation, protection, and management of a site of tremendous environmental importance.

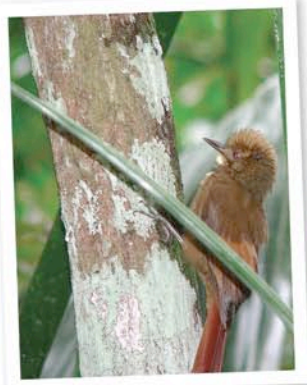


Hill Bank Field Station and La Milpa Field Station both offer unique forest experiences that weave natural history, archaeology, Belizean culture, and cutting-edge research into an unparalleled eco-adventure. The experience is brought to life by Programme for Belize's team of highly trained and dedicated Belizean naturalists, scientists, and service personnel.

Visitors to the Rio

Bravo are sure to leave with a deepened understanding of the real issues surrounding conservation of the world's tropical forests.

Activities include the following:



- Guided hikes on trails
- Morning bird walks
- Guided tours at La Milpa Maya archaeological site and/or the Lamanai Maya site
- Excursions to neighboring villages and communities
- Boat tour and/or canoeing on the New River Lagoon from Hillbank
- Night hikes and spotlighting (looking for frogs, nightjars and other wildlife)



To arrange your own group visit, contact: Kira Sabido. She designs tours and makes reservations to La Milpa as well as elsewhere in Belize. All profits from these tourism operations are redirected into conserving the Rio Bravo forest.



PfB welcomes Two New Tourism Development Staff

Jonelle Hemmans has taken up the post of Tourism Development Officer at Programme for Belize since June 2006. Her responsibilities focus primarily on the continued development of Pfb's tourism-based, revenue-producing programme of our in-house Tour Operation Unit. Jonelle holds a Bachelors of Science in Tourism Management from the University of Belize. She has an Associates Degree in Economics and General Studies from St. John's College Junior College.



Jonelle Hemmans

Jonelle considers tourism to be a primary focus of her career. With her concern for the environment of Belize, she believes in promoting ecotourism with its desirable effects and economic benefits that make Belize a beautiful tourist destination. All this makes her a welcome addition to Programme for Belize.

Kira Sabido joined the PFB staff as the new Tourism Marketing Officer in June 2006. Her responsibilities focus primarily on the marketing efforts to develop and expand the Pfb tourism Product.



Kira Sabido

She obtained her Bachelors of Science in Tourism Management from The University of Belize in June 2006. Kira has traveled extensively throughout Belize and has first-hand knowledge of the tourism products sold throughout the country. Having lived in San Pedro, Corozal, San Ignacio, and Belize City, she grew up in the midst of an ever booming tourism industry. In her new position, Kira's primary objectives includes assisting in the coordination of all guest services, ground service operations, tour guiding, and marketing. She hopes to assist Pfb in "promoting the conservation of the natural heritage of Belize and the wise use of its natural resources."

To Travel In Belize, contact:

Jonelle — tourism@pfbelize.org

Kira — marketing@pfbelize.org

BELIZE TOURISM EXPO 2006 (BETEX 2006)

In September 2006, Programme for Belize participated in the **BETEX Tourism Expo** held in Belize City. Pfb staff Herbert Haylock, Jonelle Hemmans, and Kira Sabido participated in this event to showcase the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area and the



tourism facilities and services provided by Pfb. BETEX is a Belize-based trade show that provides opportunities for travel agents and travel wholesalers to meet with local suppliers and to experience first-hand what the country of Belize has to offer to tourism visitors.

Letter from the Director

(continued from cover)

We expect to have it finalized by the end of November 2006. We are happy to report that we are making great progress towards the development of a sustainable forest management model for Belize and perhaps the region. We are in the process of reviewing the entire operation and will immediately start preparations for the 2007 season.

Our Tourism Development Unit has seen some changes in faces. Verla Medina Neal did a wonderful job at bringing back our tourism programme. After 2 years and 4 months of dedicated service to Programme for Belize, Verla moved on and Pfb wishes her well in her endeavors. Pfb now has two young and energetic ladies, Kira Sabido and Jonelle Hemmans, who come fresh from the University of Belize. Their fresh spirit has been injected into this year's summer tourism groups.

Pfb's tourism performance was great during this season and our visitors have only given great reviews of our tourism services. Un-audited accounts indicate that tourism is now covering around 40% of the 2005–2006 operational expenses, a level similar to the pre–2002 and pre–9/11 period. This tourism recovery has come at the expense of limiting maintenance and repair expenses in our facilities. We continue to ensure that there is an acceptable quality of facilities and services; however, we know that our tourism facilities need an infusion of at least

(continued on next page)

LETTER “Three Out of Five”

Three out of five! Very lucky. In baseball that average might get you a spot on the all-star team. For 18 Merrill High School students and three chaperones in the tropical forests of Belize, it was more rewarding than anything we could have hoped for.

During our two-week visit in June, we saw three of the five big cats that are indigenous to Belize. We saw the exalted Jaguar, the beautiful Ocelot, and the regal Puma. Many naturalists have waited years to see even one of these elusive creatures for the first time! It was amazing luck, but more of the same good fortune in the wild followed us throughout our 14-day Belizean odyssey.

We spent the first week on the mainland of Belize, experiencing La Milpa and Rio Bravo. We learned a great deal of tropical forest ecology and saw the stunning plants and animals of the area. Our students also toured Mayan temples and cities, and met the people in the small villages that dot the map of northern Belize. Attached is a photo of the youth soccer team from August Pine Ridge that our hodgepodge group played “futball” against. They beat us 7-0, but the laughter and kidding that occurred between these young athletes created memories that will last a lifetime. After the match, we presented the locals with a dozen, new, leather soccer balls, which were greatly appreciated by the residents of this town where the average wage is \$25 per week and parents must pay for the elementary students to attend school. It was a beautiful sight!

Our group finished the trip with a week in paradise. We stayed on a small island off the Belizean coast, in the Caribbean, studying the many diverse ecosystems of the ocean. The coral reefs that we snorkeled are some of the most beautiful in the world. Watching manatees from a kayak while floating in aquamarine splendor is an experience that will not soon be forgotten.

Everyone returned home safe and sound, with memories to endure and stories to share. I don't think any of the students came back the same, however. They have seen and done things that have made them much wiser about the world and how it works, ecologically and socially. And that is more than luck. It's priceless.

Mark Weddig
Biology Teacher
Merrill, Wisconsin



USA Merrill High School students and the 11/12-year-old soccer team from August Pine Ridge.

Programme for Belize's Staff Participate in Best Management Practices for Sustainable Tourism Workshop

In January 2006, Programme for Belize staff Ramon Pacheco and Gina Anderson, along with their Guatemalan and Belizean counterparts, participated in a follow-up workshop designed to train participants in “Best Management Practices for Sustainable Tourism.” This workshop provided theory and practical sessions in water conservation, recycling, and evaluation of a hotel's operation.

This workshop was held in Guatemala City and is a part of a four-year (2003-

2007) project financed by the IDB Multilateral Investment Fund and coexecuted by Programme for Belize, Green Deal (Asociación Alianza Verde), Guatemala, Ecotourism Association (Asociación Ecuatoriana de Ecoturismo), Ecuador, and Rain Forest Alliance (Asociación Alianza para el Bosque Lluvioso), Costa Rica. The goal of the project is to increase competitiveness and market access for small- and medium-sized businesses and community-based tourism operations that are developing sustainable

tourism programs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Programme for Belize's role is to implement the project here in Belize. Gina Anderson is currently heading this project. Ramon Pacheco, La Milpa field station manager, will go through the training process, which will enable him to improve the infrastructure and services provided at La Milpa, making Pfb even more environmentally and socially responsible, and we hope, more economical.

Hillbank Director Interns with the Massachusetts Audubon Society

In a reversal of roles, the director became a student this summer.

Efrain Cocom, Director of the Programme for Belize Hillbank Station, worked and studied with Massachusetts Audubon staff and volunteers for four weeks. Efrain was chosen to participate in an internship program at the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Joppa Flats Education Center in Newburyport.

The Joppa Flats International Intern Program has been in place for three years, and five interns from South and Central America have completed the program. The internships, run completely by volunteers, are offered through the Joppa Flats Education Center of the Massachusetts Audubon Society and are cosponsored by the American Birding Association. The intern program is designed to enhance the professional skills of conservation staff, educators, and naturalist guides from Latin America.



Efrain Cocom at work at Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Wildlife Sanctuary.

Efrain Cocom returned to Belize at the end of September and reports that the time he spent in Massachusetts was extremely valuable. Thanks to the support of Mass Audubon staff and volunteers, he had the opportunity to learn how best to teach newcomers and students about the joys of birding and the importance of conservation. Efrain believes that his participation in the intern program has increased his knowledge

of North American birds and birdwatchers. This knowledge will improve his leadership and guiding skills at Hillbank. Efrain worked side by side with Mass Audubon staff and learned from their programs and field trips how he can develop educational programs for students and adults. He also had the opportunity to train with Mass Audubon development staff and believes he will be better able to do fundraising for the Programme for Belize and Hillbank.

Joppa Flats and other Massachusetts Audubon staff have also benefited from Efrain's participation in this program. He has given staff, volunteers, and participants a better understanding of Belize's culture and history, as well as the conservation challenges facing Belize and the Programme for Belize. Efrain has also established personal and working relationships with Mass Audubon staff that will lead to collaborative programs in the future.

Kindergarten class inspired by Belize

Mass Audubon traveler, Marsha Gette, returned from the Mass Audubon tour to Belize and shared her experience with her students, the kindergarten class at Nashoba Brooks School. They were inspired to create paintings of the wildlife of Belize as part of a month long neo-tropical rainforest study. The children also raised money for the PFB through a sale of stationary with these illustrations on the cards.



Letter from the Director

(continued from page 3)

US \$150,000 for maintenance, repairs and upgrades. We plan to make this investment in phases and as funds become available. If we make the investment as we envision, PFB will be well on its way towards achieving financial sustainability that will strengthen our ability to ensure the long-term integrity and protection of the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area.

At the regional level, PFB has been participating and providing technical assistance in the development of the Selva Maya Eco-regional Plan. This plan includes all of Belize, Peten Guatemala and southern Mexico. Our goal is to ensure that conservation efforts are in line with the regional plans and that we maintain Rio Bravo as the critical link with the northern protected areas and with the rest of Mesoamerica. Research results from the Wildlife Conservation Society are already indicating that the Rio Bravo/Gallon Jug area has the highest density of Jaguars in Belize. It is not surprising, therefore, that a higher percentage of our visitors are now spotting Jaguars, Pumas, Ocellots and the other wild cats.

(continued on back cover)

US College Students Intern at PfB

PfB hosted two interns from Warren Wilson College, in North Carolina, for ten weeks during the summer of 2006. The students stay with PfB staff and provide assistance with research activities and ongoing initiatives while learning about the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA).

Letters from 2006 Warren Wilson College Interns:

Dear Herbert,

I will never be able to thank you and the Programme for Belize enough for the wonderful opportunity afforded me by your fantastic organization this summer. The time I spent in Belize with the Programme, while not exactly what I expected, was one of the most influential and educational experiences I have had to date. My desire to learn about both our natural environment and our cultural world has been encouraged by my internship this summer. I will return to college in two weeks with fond memories of work and learning experiences in a unique environment and a rekindled enthusiasm to do great things for our global community.

This internship has strengthened my sense of responsibility for both the environment and the people so dependent upon it. Getting to know the flora and fauna of the RBCMA so intimately has opened my eyes to the fragile diversity of our earth. I made connections with the amazing people of Belize, most of whom have developed a relationship with their environment through careful protection and management programs such as yours. A better understanding of the culture and history of Belize through travel and tour opportunities has sparked my desire to learn more about Latin America.

Herbert, I am so grateful for your support, motivation, and flexibility throughout the summer. Please know that your effort to create an experiential learning program for Warren Wilson students is successful and very much appreciated. Your organization is doing fabulous work! I can only hope that I will be able to have some part of the Programme for Belize in a future visit.

With Gratitude,
Mandy Monroe



Summer interns Amanda Monroe (left) and Chelsea Rae Maier (right) doing some mahogany seedling work while at the Hill Bank Field Station.

Dear Herbert Haylock,

Thank you so much for this past summer. Working for Programme of Belize was truly one of the most amazing experiences of my life, and it is hard to believe that it is over. I learned so much about the program and what great things it is doing for Belize. I also learned about the lush flora and fauna down there, which encouraged my dream to become a herpetologist. Some day I can see myself coming back to Belize to do research of some sort, and now that I know a little about the areas I believe I would feel very comfortable returning.

Not many people my age get an opportunity like this, and I am so grateful that I received it. I came back to the USA with so much more respect and knowledge for other cultures and what people, in general, have to offer as far as conversation. All it takes is understanding and an open ear.

I loved working at La Milpa and hanging out with the staff there; I felt like I was a part of the family, and it was so sad to say good-bye to them. I hope that I will be able to keep in touch. Thank you for accommodating me and being so generous with your time and patience. I know that you are a busy man and it took extra work to keep up with Mandy and I, but we really could not have done it without you. You made the experience flow so smoothly.

Thank you so much for being there for us while we were traveling and for the entire experience! It was marvelous and helped me to know that I am capable of anything. I know I will not be able to thank you enough, but I will again anyway. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Rae Maier



PROGRAMME FOR BELIZE

The Programme for Belize (PFB) is a Belizean nonprofit organization, established in 1988, to promote the conservation of the natural heritage of Belize and to promote wise use of its natural resources. The Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA) is its flagship project. With 260,000 acres, Rio Bravo is Belize's largest private reserve and second largest single protected area. It is home to a rich sample of biodiversity, which includes 400 species of birds, 200 species of trees, 70 species of mammals, and 12 endangered animal species. The Programme for Belize staff conduct research, conservation education, and professional training, and promote environmental awareness among visitors.

If you would like to support the Programme for Belize and its many conservation projects, please contact Programme for Belize or Massachusetts Audubon Society at:

Programme for Belize

#1 Eyre Street, P.O. Box 749
Belize City, Belize, C.A.
Tel: 011-501-227-5616
Fax: 011-501-227-5635
Email: pfbel@btl.net

Programme for Belize (United States contact)

c/o Massachusetts Audubon Society
208 South Great Road
Lincoln, MA 01773
Liaison for PFB: Bancroft Poor
781-259-2110
email: bpoor@massaudubon.org

Photo credits:

Our thanks to Herbert Haylock of PFB, Rene Laubach and David Larson of Mass Audubon, Mark Wedding and Lynette Leka for the photos contributed.

Letter from the Director *(continued from page 4)*

At the national level, Programme for Belize has participated in the development of the National Protected Areas Policy and System Plan for Belize. Our efforts contributed to the development of a national policy and a national protected areas plan that was accepted by the Cabinet of the Government of Belize earlier this year. The actual implementation, however, depends on the strength and will of the Ministry of Natural Resources. At the same time, the rate of development pressures, including oil exploration and production, on protected areas has been increasing at a rapid rate.

In response to the above, and with the leadership of PFB, organizations managing protected areas have established an umbrella organization, the Association of Protected Areas Management Organization, (APAMO) to strengthen the capacity of protected areas management organizations and, with a unified voice, to put additional pressures on the Government of Belize to ensure the implementation of the National Policy and System Plan and the long-term integrity of current protected areas. We hope to address the challenges and problems affecting protected areas management. Failure to do this will continue to make the conservation of vulnerable protected areas of Belize challenging, and at risk of losing important conservation gains.

Many thanks to those of you who have contributed to the PFB endowment. We are in a stable position thanks to your continued support. Your financial contribution helps secure the long-term protection of this tropical forest ecosystem. If you haven't had a chance to contribute recently and you are able to make a further donation, please use the attached form.

With thanks,
Edilberto Romero
Director

I WOULD LIKE TO HELP SUPPORT THE PROTECTION OF TROPICAL FOREST IN BELIZE WITH A CONTRIBUTION

I have enclosed a check (made payable to "Programme for Belize – MAS") for \$ _____

Credit card: _____ Exp: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Send Payments to:

Programme for Belize, c/o Massachusetts Audubon Society
208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773

All Donations are tax-deductible
Thank you for your support!