

Title:

Involving Q'eqchi Maya Primary School Students in Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation linking the central highlands of Guatemala to Cape Cod Massachusetts.

Project manager:

Tara Cahill, MS Environmental Science Land Resources, University of Wisconsin at Madison.
BA Biology, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.

Implementing organization:

Community Cloud Forest Conservation
Mailing address: 4216 Zenith Ave South, Minneapolis MN 55410
EIN: 27-2277140, 501(c)3 not for profit.
<https://cloudforestconservation.org/>

Purpose:

Protect forests and restore bird habitat within IBAs (Important Bird Areas) by involving Q'eqchi' Maya students in environmental education, along with their teachers and their parents, culminating in establishing bird habitat in agro-forest school gardens. Community Cloud Forest Conservation's environmental education program teaches the BirdSleuth curriculum, *Aves de Mi Mundo*, published by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and our own Conservation Biology and Agroecology curricula to inspire children to become agents of positive change for nature conservation in their communities. CCFC partners with Alta Verapaz Ministry of Education (MINEDUC DIEDUC) which authorizes participation of schools.

Participating students live in remote villages at the edge of forests in which one can see endemic birds like Pink-headed Warbler, Bearded Screech-Owl, Ocellated Quail, Guatemalan Pygmy-Owl (endemic subspecies), Resplendent Quetzal (endemic subspecies). Forests around their villages provide important non-breeding season habitat for the migratory bird species mentioned above plus species such as the Black billed Cuckoo, Yellow billed Cuckoo, Canada Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, and Swainson's Thrush, that use this region as an important stop over habitat. These birds winter in South America, spend a couple of weeks in Guatemala and migrate north to places like Massachusetts where they nest, raise their young and then return to Guatemala for several weeks on their way south.

The future of these amazing birds is in the hands of the local population of rural Guatemala. Deforestation is a huge problem growing side by side with increasing human population. There is a kind of non-point-source slow burn happening throughout Guatemala. Quality bird habitat is chopped away, replaced by unsustainable agricultural practices and degraded by firewood extraction. Local partners knowledgeable of birds and aware their habitat needs will better care for forests and restore bird habitat requirements to agro-forest landscapes

Description and Methods:

In 2012, US Fish and Wildlife granted Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act funds to CCFC for *Community Based Bird Conservation through Citizen Science in Guatemala*, a two year pilot bird conservation centered environmental education program in remote mountain village schools within Important Bird Areas in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. CCFC to began the Kids & Birds program, focus on protecting and restoring habitat for Wood Thrush, Willow Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Golden-checked Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo among other migratory, resident and endemic species.

Kids & Birds has grown numerically and expanded geographically. Since 2014, students come to CCFC's agroecology and conservation learning center for four day science and

conservation camps. In addition to *Aves de Mi Mundo* activities they investigate Ecology of forests, of living soils, and of water. They and practice Agroecology and reforestation to restore bird habitat. The last day of camp, the students accompanied by CCFC teachers plant an Agro-Forest School Garden that will provide bird habitat and nutrition, and will attract birds to the school to be continually observed by the students. Our goal for 2023 is to host bird conservation science camps at our center for 1,200 primary school and secondary students, their parents and teachers.

CCFC's *Kids & Birds* program introduces 5th and 6th grade children to birds, to ecology, to conservation and to their important role in protecting and restoring habitat. Following *Kids & Birds*, CCFC invites girls and young women to further pursue their role in conservation by participating in an intensive in depth 25 day camp for *Women in Agroecology for Conservation (WALC)* during school vacation. *WALC* participants plant agro-forest parcels in their villages to improve bird habitat and to provide crops for family nutrition and income. *WALC* participants become wiser stewards of their environment as they continue studying through middle school, high school and on to university. *WALC* participants share with their family and their neighbors newfound understanding of ecology, enthusiasm for birds, and practical Agroecology skills that benefit migratory birds while improving human well being in their villages. *WALC* participants participated in 2019-2022 in USFWS-NMBCA project *Birdscaping Guatemala's Q'eqchi' Maya Highlands II, planting 250+ hectares of agro-forest ecosystems*. *WALC* participants become leaders in conservation and teachers in the *Kids & Birds* program!

Timetable: (Give the anticipated times for meeting key stages in the project)

We plan to teach 15 weeks of *Kids & Birds* this school year between April 10 and October 10. To date, we are only two weeks into the 2023 *Kids & Birds* program.

Budget:

We are requesting \$1,000 from CCBC to provide transportation for children from remote mountain village schools to access *Kids & Birds* at CCFC. This funding will help CCFC expand the reach of this program to some of the most important villages, farther up and farther into the heart of the IBAs we are seeking to protect.

Matching funds or resources:

Kids & Birds has other costs which CCFC provides, including food, housing, teachers and support staff. *Kids & Birds* is not an expensive program. A good bit of the food we serve our students is grown on our agro-forests-gardens. *Kids & Birds* is taught and hosted by eighteen *Advanced WALC Interns* who receive a scholarship stipend from CCFC to continue their higher level education. All of our teaching team are former *WALC* students from remote villages who are now studying in university. Several of the young women first came to CCFC in the *Kids & Birds* program as primary school students in 4th, 5th or 6th grade.

Continuity:

CCFC plans on continuing the *Kids & Birds* program for years to come. As schools continue to enjoy and value our partnership we hope that program costs will slowly diminish.

Looking forward to a partnership with Cape Cod Bird Club we would also like to extend a cordial invitation to the club to visit Guatemala through **Xikanel Birding Adventures**.

