



Rainforest Biodiversity Group

Protecting the Great Green Macaw to Protect Biodiversity

Happy Holidays from RBG!

The entire country has recently been blasted by Old Man Winter it seems, and the mounds of snow get higher and higher here in Madison. It's the perfect time of year to stay inside and think about the tropics! RBG is continuing to work steadily toward the official opening of the Costa Rican Bird Route in February. The Bird Route has gotten some great news coverage lately, with a very prominent article in the Travel Section of the Washington Post. The writer of the article, Carol Sottili, did an excellent job of capturing the spirit and adventure of our tour held in November of this year. See below for more information on this exciting article. We are also looking forward to an article in the April 2009 issue of the AAA Travel Magazine, to be written by Ann Kazel.

So for those of us who can only mentally be in the tropics, stay warm, and best wishes for the new year,

*Holly Robertson
President, RBG*

Costa Rican Bird Route Featured in the Washington Post!

The Washington Post

Rainforest Biodiversity Group recently ran its second tour to the Costa Rican Bird Route. 11 participants traveled to 6 of the thirteen Bird Route sites from November 2nd to the 9th on a trip that focused not only birds, but also the natural history of Costa Rica and personal contact with the local culture.

The trip began and ended at the beautiful [Hotel Bougainvillea](#) and in between the group journeyed to El Gavilan Lodge, La Selva Biological Station, Bosque Tropical del Toro/Finca Paniagua, Selva Verde, and Albergue El Socorro. The group logged a total of 191 bird species and was also treated to several sightings of sloths and monkeys. Other creatures seen along the way were crocodiles, poison dart frogs, butterflies, peccaries, iguanas, lizards and coatis.

Rainforest Biodiversity Group is very pleased to have had along on this trip a travel writer for the Washington Post newspaper. The writer, Carol Sottili, penned an entertaining account of the entire trip, titled "***Birds in Paradise – Species Rare and Common Flock Together on New Costa Rican Trail.***" Here is an excerpt from the article:

"We need to cross the river to get to our lodging, and we all opt for transport via a zip-wire basket rather than by boat. By threes, we make the exhilarating ride, then hike to the Crayola-colored huts. My only cranky moment of the trip comes as I search my bag for a head lamp I've left behind, sweating profusely as mosquitoes buzz my ears. But soon, cold beers arrive and Quesada pulls out a guitar and starts singing traditional Costa Rican love songs. We eat barbecued beef by candlelight, telling stories of our lives. Our bios of college, work and marriage pale as Poncho, one of Guido's workers, talks of fighting Contras in Nicaragua, fathering 13 children and being cured of alcoholism by a magic potion."

[Click here](#) to read the entire article that appeared in the December 14, 2008 edition of the newspaper.

In this issue

Pg 1-2: The November Trip to the Costa Rican Bird Route

**Pg 3-4: CRBR News:
New Bird Count Circle
Rainforest Alliance
Workshops**

Pg 4: Action Notice

**Pgs 5: RBG News:
New T-Shirts!**

Pg 6: Bird News

Pg 7: Membership Form

New Maquenque Christmas Bird Count Circle

Rainforest Biodiversity Group has coordinated with the Costa Rican Ornithological Society to create a new Christmas Bird Count Circle in Costa Rica called the Maquenque Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This CBC will be conducted on January 3, 2009 and is located in the northern zone of the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor; encompassing the towns of Boca Tapada, Pital, Pangola, and the Rio Toro.

The first annual Maquenque Christmas Bird Count is an opportunity for participants to count birds at some of the sites of the Costa Rican Bird Route: Laguna Lagarto Lodge, Mi Pedacito de Cielo, Maquenque Eco-lodge, Finca Pangola, Reserva Santa Elena, Reserva Quebrada Grande, and Bosque Tropical del Toro/Finca Paniagua.

All data collected from the count will be entered into [eBird](#) and stored to be compiled with subsequent years of Christmas Bird Counts. Participants of the CBC will get free lodging and a free t-shirt. For more information on how to be a part of the Christmas Bird Count, contact Raquel Gomez at Raquel@costaricanbirdroute.com or call +506-2766-6482.



What is a Christmas Bird Count?

From December 14, 2008 through January 5, 2009, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will take part in this activity that for many has become an annual tradition. For over 100 years, citizen scientists who have an interest in birds or simply being outside in nature, have assisted with this important collection of data during a time of year when one might not think to be birding.

Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action. It is RBG's desire to start gathering similar data for the Costa Rican Bird Route.

It is up to the individual how hard they decide to bird, but whether you are just watching a feeder or if you're out there in the field from dawn till dusk, your efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation. [Click here](#) to visit the Audubon website to learn how to get involved with a Christmas Bird Count near you.

eBird - An Important Tool for Bird Conservation

eBird is a real-time, online bird checklist program that the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** and the National Audubon Society launched in 2002. eBird has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds.

Your observations from birding excursions join those of others in an **international network of eBird users**. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. In time these data will become the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution across the western hemisphere and beyond!

[eBird Costa Rica](#) has been launched and the **sites of the Costa Rican Bird Route are recognized as birding hotspots** in the province of Heredia. Any time you visit any site of the Bird Route, be sure to submit your check lists and help us with our monitoring program! To learn more on setting up your eBird account, visit www.ebird.org.



**Have an Old Pair of
Binoculars You
Never Use
Anymore?**

**Donate them to
Rainforest Biodiversity
Group!**

Not only are optics hard to find in Costa Rica, but they are also not affordable for most people that live within the Bird Route communities. RBG is accepting your old pairs of binoculars and field guides and putting them into the hands of those who are eager to put them to good use learning about birds.

Contact Holly Robertson at holly@rainforestbiodiversity.org or at 608-698-3448 to learn how you can donate a pair of binoculars or a field guide to the Costa Rican Bird Route.

Rural Tourism and Sustainable Living Fair 2008

The Costa Rican Bird Route and the Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center participated as partners in this fair held on Nov. 19-21. 9000 people visited the fair, including local tour operators, Costa Rican citizens and international visitors. There were more than 600 tourism products and services exhibited by more than 110 organizations, local artisans and farmers, and small scale business. Particularly, local tour operators and media representatives were very interested in the CRBR and we are following up with them in our attempts to promote the project.

Rainforest Alliance Workshops

One of the objectives for our second grant is to develop a workshop on **Best Practices for Sustainable Tourism** for our remote sites. We are organizing 3 workshops which will be held **during the first quarter in 2009**. The first workshop is intended to introduce remote sites owners and staff to what sustainable tourism is and why it is important. The other 2 workshops are designed to help remote sites put into practice the best practices recommended by RA, based on the activities summarized in their action plans and those which are needed for them to fulfill the Route's sustainable standards.



Ornithological Education Program

Rainforest Biodiversity Group has been working on putting together an Ornithological Education Program in Costa Rica, especially for remote sites and associated communities, which will start next January. The objective is to educate sites and local communities on the importance of bird diversity and their habitat conservation, and train them on how to monitor bird biodiversity in their communities.

The Education Department of the Costa Rican Ornithological Society

will be the primary coordinators of these presentations and workshops, and will be conducted in the communities of Colonia Virgen del Socorro (Albergue el Socorro), Pangola (Finca

Pangola), and La Unión del Toro (Bosque Tropical del Toro).

The education program will also be extended to several communities of Sarapiquí and the surrounding areas of the portal sites, which include: La Selva, Gavilan Lodge and Tirimbina. These workshops will be coordinated through the education programs of Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center, La Selva Biological Station, and Tirimbina Rainforest Center. These programs will also be in conjunction with the **Bird Sleuth** program, a curriculum that will be implemented via a pilot program in the area.

The Bird Sleuth Program

The Bird Sleuth Program is administered through the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology**. Through the Lab of Ornithology's Citizen Science Program, people across the continent help scientists by collecting data about their local birds and sending the information to scientists who study bird populations and conservation. Students are especially motivated by and engaged with helping scientists and birds!

Bird Sleuth offers the opportunity for students to:

- Ask and answer their own questions about birds
- Go outdoors to study their local environment
- Get involved in birding, perhaps even develop a life-long interest
- Become citizen scientists and collect data for online databases; use real data in a meaningful and motivating way
- Learn to think more critically and become better equipped to make scientifically sound decisions



To learn more, visit <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdsleuth>

October Trade Show in La Quinta, Sarapiquí: Rainforest Biodiversity Group was invited to this tradeshow by Tirimbina, one of the Bird Route portal sites, held on October 15th. This gave RBG the opportunity to introduce the Costa Rican Bird Route to representatives of tourism wholesalers from Canada, Germany, Spain, UK, Italy and Russia. Hopefully this will help eventually establish a client base for the Bird Route in these countries. The success of the Bird Route project depends on visitation, which will generate income for our local landowners, helping to ensure long-term participation in the project.

Gold Mine Project Threatens the Territory of the Great Green Macaw

RBG has joined other environmental organizations in the fight against the proposed gold mine project in northern Costa Rica. The President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, and the Minister of Environment and Energy, Roberto Dobles have endorsed the project, granting concession to the Industrias Infinito Company, a subsidiary of the Canada-based Infinito Gold. This permit allows for the cutting of 191 hectares of forest to be cut in Las Crucitas, in the northern province of Alajuela. Trees have already been cut in preparation, many of them being the Almendro tree (*Dipteryx panamensis*), a tree that provides vital habitat to the endangered Great Green Macaw.

This open-pit gold mine is considered worldwide to be the most environmentally destructive type of mine, and it would be the largest in Central America. Mines of this caliber use heavy chemicals such as cyanide to separate the gold from the ore, endangering the quality of the nearby San Juan River. The needed deforestation for the project also undermines the protection recently granted to the Almendro by Costa Rican law, which prohibits the cutting and exploitation of the Almendro for any reason, due to its importance to the macaw.

On Oct. 20, the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber ordered a halt to

the logging in response to an appeal for protection against the executive decree filed by citizen Edgardo Araya and the local association Norte por la Vida (North for Life). Both President Arias and Minister Dobles assert that the project is one of national interest. Dobles has stated that he thinks the socio-economic benefits of the mine are greater than the environmental costs. He also states that the destruction of almost 200 trees by the mining company does not threaten the population of the Great

Green Macaw, because the trees were young, and the macaw favors older growth trees. This short-term thinking of the government concerns many.

By and large, Costa Ricans are in an uproar over this rationale and what they feel to be a breach of duty by their country's highest officers. Already there have been protests in the streets of San Jose, demonstrators carrying placards calling for the resignation of Oscar Arias for destroying the country's forest and their institution. bands, calling for an end to the destruction.

At the time of this newsletter, the project is still being stalled, but the government should make a decision soon. See the box for how you can take action against this project.

(The image below is an example of a Costa Rican campaign against the mine).

Take Action Against the Project!

Please use [this letter](#) as a sample letter to send the CEO of Infinito Gold, John Morgan, a letter expressing your concern for the risk their gold-mining project poses to biodiversity to:

Infinito Gold
1010-1st Street, SW, Suite 220
Calgary, Alberta
CANADA T2R 1K4

Personalized, signed letters sent via the normal mail system have the most impact, but you may opt to send an email as well to info@infinitogold.com.

You can also contact President Oscar Arias and Roberto Dobles and protest the gold mine project. **Send letters and/or emails to:**

Sr. Oscar Arias Sanchez **Presidente de Costa Rica.** (Fax # 2253-9078)

mfernandez@casapres.go.cr

Sr. Roberto Dobles **Ministro del Ambiente.** (Fax # 2257-0697)

ministrominae@minae.go.cr

Join almost 2,000 others and sign a petition. Go to www.fueradecrucitas.com and follow instructions on how to sign the petition.



Rainforest Biodiversity Group has joined the blogosphere with its official blog called [The Macaw](#). Visit the blog for up to the minute news and notes on RBG as well as other conservation news.



Easy Ways to Support RBG

Start using [Good Search](#) as your search engine and online shopping mall. Every time you search the Internet or make an online purchase at



one of their partner merchants, GoodSearch makes a donation to Rainforest Biodiversity Group and it's powered by Yahoo! so you get great search results. Designate Rainforest Biodiversity Group in the box that asks "Who do you GoodSearch for?" Make it easier by **adding the GoodSearch search box to your IE, Firefox, or Mac toolbar**; or make GoodSearch your home page.

If you sell items on eBay you can support us by donating a % of your profits to RBG. It's a tax-deductible donation, and it also **doubles your online selling exposure**, as your item will appear on eBay *and* its sister site, eBay Giving Works. eBay Giving Works is the program that facilitates nonprofit listings on eBay. Create your listing in the "form with more options" and under "Donate percentage of sale," choose "Give a percentage of the final sale price to a non-profit organization" & follow the instructions on how to find Rainforest Biodiversity Group in the list.



Linking Websites - Involved with an organization that has similar objectives as RBG? [Email Holly Robertson](#) to discuss cross linking your website with the RBG website.

New RBG T-Shirts Are Now In!

These brand new RBG t-shirts are made of 100% organic pre-shrunk jersey knit cotton, and the logo was printed with water-based ink. Shirts come in the Adult Unisex sizes of S, M, L, and XL.

Price of the shirt is \$12 plus Shipping and Handling.

Until January 31, for a [donation](#) of \$35, you will receive a **one-year membership, a subscription to the RBG electronic newsletter, and a free RBG t-shirt!** *Be sure to indicate t-shirt size in the notes section of the paypal form.*

[Click here to visit RBG's online store.](#)



Rainforest Biodiversity Group Looking for Volunteers Year-Round

RBG is continuing to place volunteers in Costa Rica to assist with the development of the sites of the Costa Rican Bird Route. Since the fall of 2007, RBG has placed a total of **12 volunteers at five different sites**. These volunteers have created and improved trail systems; mapped trails; constructed signs; created brochures; and taught English. These accomplishments along with the energy and the positive attitude that our volunteers bring to the local communities have advanced our sites for tourism.

RBG is looking to continue placing volunteers in Costa Rica for 2009. Work will vary depending on the site but will center around three main themes:

- * **Interpretation work: trails, maps, site brochures, species identification**
- * **Environmental education: recycling, composting, reforestation, conservation**
- * **English lessons for members of the community**

We are looking for individuals who are able to commit to a minimum of three months to a given site. Ideally we would like to place two volunteers at each site, and couples are welcome to apply. Volunteers must have Spanish speaking

skills, some experience in any of the areas mentioned above, a spirit of adventure and a serious interest in having an effect on rainforest conservation and sustainable tourism development.



Volunteers teaching English at the site Finca Pangola

For more information about volunteering with the Costa Rican Bird Route, contact Raquel Gomez at raquel@costaricanbirdroute.com.

RBG is also in need of volunteers in the US to assist with:

- * **Fundraising/Grant writing**
- * **Developing bird monitoring programs**
- * **Developing relations with existing conservation organizations**

Contact Holly Robertson at holly@rainforestbiodiversity.org for more information.

New rules establish market for saving rainforests through carbon trading - [from mongabay.com](http://from.mongabay.com)

A new carbon accounting standard will bolster efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions resulting from deforestation, thereby creating a financial incentive for saving rainforests, say backers of the initiative, known as the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS).

Land use projects including forestry and agriculture can be validated and verified against VCS, qualifying them for credits tradable in voluntary carbon markets.

"For the first time ever investors can rely on robust rules for crediting agriculture, agriculture and other land use projects," said David Antonioli, CEO of the London-based VCS Association, said in a statement. "This is a watershed moment and a shot in the arm for the world's forests, the world's climate, and the global carbon market. The new VCS rules will drive much needed investment into protecting the world's threatened forests as a means to stabilize our global climate."

The standard may help usher in a new era of "avoided deforestation" projects which capitalize on the carbon sequestration capacity of forests. Deforestation presently accounts for 15-20 percent of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions — more than the global transportation sector. Inclusion of agriculture bring the tally from land-use change to roughly one-third of global emissions.

"Now that the leading voluntary carbon standard has incorporated agriculture, agriculture and other land use projects we expect to see the rapid development of a large-scale market for activities that reduce deforestation and degradation," said Toby Janson-Smith of Conservation International, an NGO that already has several forest carbon projects under development in tropical nations. "Today's launch of the VCS rules will not only boost market confidence in forest carbon activities but also, for the first time,

enable projects that benefit local communities and biodiversity to access significant new global investment."

Forestry was excluded from the Kyoto Protocol over fears that it would undermine efforts to cut emissions from industrial sources, but support for forest carbon schemes has been growing in recent years led by a coalition of rainforest nations and some environmentalists who see it as a way to make forest conservation pay for itself while funding sustainable development and anti-poverty initiatives. Avoided deforestation is now expected to be a critical component in the next climate agreement, which will be determined a year from now in Copenhagen at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"Developing forested nations now have a credible standard through which to assess and monetize their forest carbon activities on the international market," added Pedro Moura Costa, President of EcoSecurities, a carbon-trading firm. "As policymakers around the world work to incorporate reduced emissions from deforestation, degradation and other land-based activities into emerging US and UNFCCC policy frameworks, they should look to the VCS as a model."

VCS — which is the most widely adopted standard for voluntary offset projects — was developed by The Climate Group, the International Emissions Trading Association (IETA), and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) as well as a range of business, government and non-government organizations.

For more information, view The VCS Rulebook:

[Voluntary Carbon Standard Guidance for Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use Projects](#)

West Nile Takes a Toll on Yellow-Billed Magpies

A study published in the *Auk* has revealed that the recent population crash of Yellow-billed Magpies may be due to West Nile virus. The magpie is found only in California, where populations slumped from an estimated 180,000 in 2003 to little more than half of that by 2006. The decrease correlates with the appearance of West Nile in the state in 2004. Between 2004 and 2006, more than 12,200 magpie carcasses were brought in to the California Department of Health Services. Of those that were in good enough condition to be tested, 78% were positive for West Nile.

The Yellow-billed Magpie has a very limited range that primarily includes the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, but stretches as far south as Santa Barbara County.

Agency Initiates Process to Delist Threatened Marbled Murrelet

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced it is initiating a 90-day review to determine whether the threatened Marbled Murrelet should be delisted under the Endangered Species Act. The agency's proposal is based on the assumption, discredited by a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) report, that the murrelet's population in Washington, Oregon and northern California is not distinct from other murrelet populations in British Columbia and Alaska.

"This species should be listed range-wide, rather than removed from the list," said Steve Holmer, spokesperson for American Bird Conservancy. "We hope that when the agency reviews the science showing a drastic population decline in all its distinct population segments, they will come to the same conclusion."

Sunday's move, published in the [Federal Register](#), was prompted by a petition from the American Forest Resource Council and the Carpenters Industrial Council which represent companies and workers in the forest products industry. The primary threat facing the Marbled Murrelet continues to be the loss of its old growth forest nesting areas.

RAINFOREST BIODIVERSITY GROUP

MEMBERSHIP FORM

DONATE A MINIMUM OF \$25 AND GET A FREE MEMBERSHIP!

**UNTIL JANUARY 31, A DONATION OF \$35 GETS YOU A FREE MEMBERSHIP AND AN RBG
T-SHIRT WITH THE NEW DESIGN!**

Please complete the following information and send this form and your check or money order to:

*Rainforest Biodiversity Group
7 North Pinckney Street
Suite 220
Madison, WI 53703*

Or visit www.rainforestbiodiversity.org/membership.htm to become a member online.

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email:

Donation Amount:

Comments: