



# Optics for the Tropics, Inc

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR BIRD CONSERVATION IN THE CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICA

## ANNUAL REPORT 2008 AND 2009



*Cerulean Warbler*

## Mission

Optics for the Tropics provides binoculars and spotting scopes to ornithologists in the Caribbean and Latin America to build capacity for bird conservation. We also promote partnerships that support conservation of bird species throughout their range.

## Board of Directors

Joni Ellis, Director

Joni became involved with bird conservation during her ten year tenure with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission where she was the statewide coordinator for bird education. She is still actively involved with Partners in Flight; a consortium of academia, government agencies and non-profits that support bird conservation. Joni founded Optics for the Tropics in 2001 to expand partnerships for birds and their habitats throughout their range. She currently serves on the board of Alachua Audubon and is restoring a 20 acre farm to longleaf pine.



Katie Sieving, Ph.D, Treasurer

Katie is a professor in Wildlife, Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida. Her core research program focuses on conserving and restoring forest biodiversity, especially songbirds, in disturbed, fragmented, and otherwise human-dominated landscapes in historically forested biomes. This focus on the 'matrix' (human habitat created around what remains of natural habitats) has naturally led her to integrating biodiversity conservation in both agricultural and other types of rural lands close and far from protected areas. Current work is focused in fragmented forests, organic and conventional farm / pastoral systems in Florida, Chile, and Sumatra. Conceptually, her work is rooted in community, behavioral, and landscape ecology, and conservation biology.



Joy Hill, Secretary

Joy is a regional Public Information Director for the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission where she has been employed since 1994. She is a spokesperson for the agency and is frequently quoted in the media locally, nationally and internationally. In addition to her media relations role, she coordinates and participates in information and outreach efforts in the region, including fishing derbies, conferences, meetings and speaking requests from the general public and other agencies.



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## Summary of Contributions

In 2008 Optics for the Tropics distributed 286 pairs of binoculars and 5 scopes to 37 projects in 17 countries. In addition; a grant for \$1,200 was provided to the Partners in Flight Mesoamerica Working Group to support the Bird Banding Training and Certification Workshop in El Salvador.



*Fantailed Warbler banded at workshop*



*Wayne Arendt leads a field exercise for point counts and distance sampling.*



*Training included aging birds.*



*BIRD BANDING WORKSHOP EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK, EL SALVADOR*

*NOVEMBER 2008*

Countries supported in 2008 include:

COUNTRY	# OF BINOCULARS	# OF SCOPES	OTHER SUPPORT
Brazil	15		
Bolivia	2		
Colombia	38		USFS/The Nature Conservancy
Costa Rica	12		
Cuba	4		
Dominica	2	1	
Dominican Republic	15		US Forest Service
Ecuador	3	1	
El Salvador	2	2	\$1200 training support OT
Guatemala	8		
Haiti		1	
Honduras	30		US Forest Service
Jamaica	4		The Nature Conservancy
Mexico	47		Nat'l Park Service Int'l Affairs
Nicaragua	100		US Forest Service/Paso Pacifico
Peru	2		
Uruguay	2		

**Highlights:** The Nature Conservancy has been collaborating with the Colombian National Coffee Growers Federation since 2003 to raise awareness among local coffee growing communities of the importance of their plantations for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity. A key collaborator is the US Forest Service; researching the wintering habitat requirements of the Cerulean Warbler.

Brigada Verde Bird Guides is a 10 week course to train and equip 15 youth in skills related to Bird Guiding in a high impact tourist area of the Dominican Republic. With assistance from the US Forest Service 15 pairs of binoculars were sent to support this program. The island of Hispaniola is home to 317 species of birds, 30 of which are endemics. It is a critical wintering site for Bicknell's Thrush.

Training in bird banding techniques and, especially, banding certification, is a priority need to support standardized bird monitoring in Central America. In 2008 a workshop was held in El Salvador by the Partners in Flight Mesoamerica Working Group, in cooperation with the Society for Mesoamerican Biology and Conservation, to address this priority need. Evaluations revealed that

95% of participants felt the course surpassed or met their expectations. Thanks to twelve partners this banding course became a reality.

The Mesoamerican Ecotourism Alliance partnered with the US Forest Service and Optics for the Tropics to provide local guide training for the First Mesoamerican Birding Festival in Honduras. This training was critical for expanding capacity for local guides to earn a living while increasing awareness of bird conservation to the community and tourist.

The National Park Service (NPS) Office of International Affairs (OIA), which has a Sister Parks program in Mexico, partners with the NPS Park Flight Migratory Bird Program for international bird conservation efforts. Thanks to funding from OIA, Park Flight was able to provide 10 field guides, 20 pairs of binoculars, and partnership funding for a Sonoran Joint Venture bird monitoring workshop in Mexico for CONANP biologists.

Children in rural Nicaragua have a long tradition of using slingshots to kill birds. In 2007 Paso Pacifico carried out education programs with 100 students in Paso del Istmo to raise awareness. In 2008 ornithologists intensely worked with children to teach them about the life history of birds in their forests, how to identify birds and how to develop a bird list. This month long effort culminated in a community celebration of birds where students could turn in their slingshots in exchange for binoculars. The finale included a bonfire to burn slingshots.

**In 2009** Optics for the Tropics provided 300 pairs of binoculars and 7 scopes with tripods to 55 programs in 28 countries. We also supported a Monitoring Workshop in Nassau, Bahamas by providing 30 pairs of binoculars, travel funds (\$581), and Rite-in-the-Rain pocket notebooks.



*John Alexander (Klamath Bird Observatory) explains the releve method of habitat assessment to the participants.*

In 2009 we were invited to support the expansion of International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) educational materials. Our contribution of \$3,000 supported educational materials for Nicaragua and Mexico; supporting the international aspect of IMBD.

A nine year summary at the end of this report reveals that 1058 pairs of binoculars and 20 scopes were provided to 36 countries. The table is broken down to show the amount of equipment received by each country and the partners involved in providing matching funds, technical support and training in each country. For the most part; countries with partners supporting capacity building received substantially more equipment. Please feel free to contact me if you have a special interest in a specific country and would like more detailed information.

Our success in distributing equipment has been due to our partnerships with other organizations. USFS Wings Across the Americas, The Nature Conservancy, SE Partners in Flight, the National Park Service Park Flight Migratory Bird Program,, and Paso Pacifico have helped to increase the abundance of equipment distributed by providing matching funds for focused programs. Eagle Optics is our corporate sponsor who graciously matches all funds we raise to double the assistance available.

### **Highlights:**

Twenty-six participants from eighteen West Indian islands and two Caribbean rim countries took part in the SCSCB's five-day Bird Monitoring Training Workshop at the Bahamas National Trust in Nassau, Bahamas, 19-23 February. The participants included Executive Directors of NGOs in charge of protected areas, ornithologists, and conservation biologists employed to governments and NGOs, protected area wardens and volunteers. All shared a common interest in learning monitoring methodologies and how to use the results from monitoring to more effectively conserve and manage migratory and resident bird species.

In Ecuador the USFS and TNC are collaborating with Aves & Conservacion to provide site support groups in key areas of the country critical for long term sustainability and conservation of habitat. New information on bird distribution and ecology is being gathered while enhanced skills are being developed for bird monitoring.

Yanayacu Biological Station is documenting nesting habitats of poorly known Ecuadorian birds; they have discovered the first nests of more than 40 species. In addition, the Natural History of Ecuador project has published more than 100 scientific papers including data on more than 40 species of birds. In recent years they have expanded the team from ornithologists to a growing number of locals, students, and land owners around Ecuador. Involving local people has allowed the program to expand while educating and involving people on the forefront of conservation efforts.

The SE Partners in Flight working group provided matching funds to supply 30 binoculars and 5 scopes to a variety of programs through the Chiapas Regional Alliance (Joint Venture). This was a show of goodwill as the tri-national agreement was being negotiated between Canada, U.S. and Mexico for bird conservation. SE PIF members providing match included Tennessee Wildlife Agency, Tennessee Ornithological Society, and the American Bird Conservancy.

The Nature Conservancy and the US Forest Service are implementing a MOSI (Monitoring of Overwinter Survival in Spanish initials) station in Panama's Lagunas de Volcan Wetlands. It is part of the much larger La Amistad Biosphere Reserve shared between Panama and Costa Rica and known

for numerous neotropical migrants. Monitoring with standardized protocol will allow the sharing of data from this site with others in Latin America; contributing to a larger data set.

Countries supported in 2009 include:

COUNTRY	# OF BINOCULARS	# OF SCOPES	PARTNER SUPPORT
Antigua	3		
Argentina	14		
Bahamas	4		\$581 workshop support OT
Brazil	11		
Cayman Islands	1		
Chile	4		
Colombia	52		
Cuba	7		
Donimica	4		
Dominican Republic	8		
Ecuador	19		USFS/ The Nature Conservancy
Grenada	1		
Guadeloupe	2		
Guatemala	10		
Guayana	8		
Haiti	1		
Jamaica	21		
Mexico	100	5	SE Partners in Flight
Monsterrat	1		
Netherlands Antilles	2		
Panama	2		The Nature Conservancy
Peru	12		
Puerto Rico	1		
St. Vincent	3	2	
Suriname	2		
Turks Caicos Islands	2		
US Virgin Islands	3		
Venezuela	2		

## Goals for Next Year

**Continue to develop partnerships for specific geographic areas and species range.** There are interest groups that would support a specific country for a variety of reasons; their country of origin, spent time there, friends there, cultural affiliation, development of international agreements, etc. There are also those who would support a bird throughout its range to see the conservation of the bird succeed; Cerulean Warbler, Bicknell's Thrush, etc. We should identify these possibilities and pursue partnerships and alliances for bird conservation with them.



**Continue to support capacity building in the Caribbean and Latin America.** In 2008 we supported a training workshop for Partners in Flight Mesoamerica Working Group. In 2009 we supported training offered by the Society of Caribbean Study and Conservation of Birds (SCSCB). I propose that we include a line item for these events in our annual budget to become a consistent supporter of training that will build capacity for bird conservation and also provide name recognition for our organization.



**Continue to support bird education events in the Caribbean and Latin America.** In 2009 Optics for the Tropics was a supporter of International Migratory Bird Day. Our contribution provided educational materials to Mexico and Nicaragua. I propose we include a line item each year to continue this support.

**Begin a publicity campaign to garner support for our mission.** One thing we have been lacking is publicizing the good work we do. If more people knew what we did; it is possible we would garner support from a larger audience.

**Hold one fundraising event each year.** Many charitable organizations hold annual fundraising events that provide income as well as name recognition. This would also provide an opportunity to promote our accomplishments.

<b>9 YEAR SUMMARY</b>	<b>Bins</b>	<b>Scopes</b>	<b>Yrs appl rec'd</b>	<b>Partners; Notations</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	238	5	8 yr	SE PIF, NPS, Houston Aud, Nature Canada, Amigos de Sian Ka'an, Martina
<b>Colombia</b>	145		4 yr	USFS, TNC
<b>Nicaragua</b>	114		3 yr	USFS, Paso Pacifico
<b>Cuba</b>	82	1	8 yr	
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	56	5	7 yr	USFS
<b>Argentina</b>	41		5 yr	
<b>Ecuador</b>	36	2	5 yr	USFS, TNC
<b>Honduras</b>	35		2 yr	
<b>Jamaica</b>	35		3 yr	
<b>Costa Rica</b>	27		3 yr	
<b>Brazil</b>	27		3 yr	
<b>Chile</b>	26		4 yr	
<b>Guatemala</b>	24		4 yr	
<b>Uruguay</b>	21		4 yr	
<b>Bahamas</b>	19	1	3 yr	
<b>Peru</b>	18		3 yr	
<b>Venezuela</b>	18		5 yr	
<b>Panama</b>	15		3 yr	
<b>Bolivia</b>	12		4 yr	
<b>Haiti</b>	11	1	4 yr	
<b>Guayana</b>	8		1 yr	
<b>Antigua</b>	8		2 yr	
<b>El Salvador</b>	7	2	2 yr	\$1200 OT grant for PIF MESO Training/bird monitoring workshop 2007
<b>Domicica</b>	6	1	2 yr	
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	5		3 yr	
<b>Belize</b>	4		1 yr	
<b>St. Vincent</b>	3	2	1 yr	
<b>Trinidad/Tobago</b>	3		2 yr	
<b>US Virgin Islands</b>	3			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Guadeloupe</b>	2			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Turks Caicos</b>	2			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Suriname</b>	2			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Netherlands Antilles</b>	2			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Monsterrat</b>	1			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Grenada</b>	1			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008
<b>Cayman Islands</b>	1			received via attendance at SCSCB Training/bird monitoring workshop 2008

1061 pairs of binoculars and 20 scopes have been distributed to 36 countries since the inception of Optics for the Tropics, Inc.