

ABA Birders' Exchange

Providing tools to save the world's most endangered birds

BY PAUL SALAMAN

Colombia possesses more bird species than any other country in the world—1,885 species, representing 20% of the entire planet's avifauna packed into an area smaller than the state of Alaska. This “megadiversity” has great implications for global bird conservation. Yet, sadly, Colombia faces great conservation challenges, with 10% of its bird species at imminent risk of extinction in coming decades.

With the urgent need for conservation action, Fundación ProAves Colombia was formed in 1998 and moved rapidly and decisively to implement projects at key sites across the country to protect some of the world's rarest species. Today, ProAves has 65 fieldworkers acting to conserve birds through research, environmental education, and direct actions, such as establishing protected areas in 19 of Colombia's 31 departments.

ProAves also provides support to a growing number of school groups all across Colombia, called “Amigos de las Aves,” who assist us in the field and are clearly the country's future conservationists. Our “Parrot Bus” has been hugely successful, and educates 1800 children a week across the Andes about threatened birds. However, our greatest success has been the establishment of 4 strategic bird preserves and the recovery of several of the world's most endangered bird species.

For example, the Blue-billed Curassow, restricted to lowland forest of the Magdalena Valley, is critically endangered—and unprotected. Our team of researchers and educators conducting a search for the species were recipients of ABA Birders' Exchange binoculars and books. We succeeded in finding the species' last viable population, and are proud to have protected it by establishing the Blue-billed Curassow Bird Reserve in 2004.

In 1998, the Yellow-eared Parrot was on the verge of extinction, with just 81 individuals known to survive. ProAves worked closely with rural residents and students, many of them also the recipients of binoculars and books from Birders' Exchange, to stop hunting and to protect the majestic wax palms that the species depends on for nesting. Today, ProAves is delighted to have helped the

species attain a population of over 600 birds—one of the most successful species recovery programs ever in the Americas.

Lost to the world for over 90 years, the enigmatic Fuertes's Parrot was rediscovered by ProAves fieldworkers in the high Andean cloud forest of the Central Cordillera in 2002. Just sixty birds survived in fragmented forest on the highest peaks; few mature trees remained as breeding sites, but the birds took to the nest boxes we provided like ducks to water. Today, 21 nest boxes are active, with each box producing 3 chicks twice a year... making up for lost time, we suspect! ABA Birders' Exchange binoculars and telescopes are helping researchers monitor these boxes and show local school groups the beauty of this rare parrot.



Fuertes's Parrot, lost for 90 years, is now making up for lost time in nest boxes provided by ProAves.

These are just some of the examples of the work carried out by ProAves. ProAves also

manages the most comprehensive network of Neotropical migratory monitoring and conservation sites in South America, with 27 stations across the country engaged in daily observation and banding of migrants and resident birds. The organization also promotes migrant-friendly coffee, and welcomes the assistance of local school groups that join in to help, often using ABA Birders' Exchange binoculars and field guides.

Birds are inspirational, symbolizing freedom and wisdom. They are the objects of great public interest in Colombia, making them powerful flagships for conservation and the ideal tool for raising public awareness of the environment. Together with ABA Birders' Exchange, we have helped stimulate this interest by providing the essential tools for coming closer to birds—binoculars and field guides—so that many more Colombians can appreciate their most marvelous treasure and further their understanding of their rich heritage.

Don't be envious that your donated binoculars have probably rediscovered some of the world's most endangered birds—be proud that they have helped to conserve species that will be seen and cherished by future generations!

For more information on ProAves, visit our website, www.proaves.org, or email the Executive Director, Sara Lara, at slara@proaves.org.



Some members of the ProAves team responsible for the rediscovery of the Blue-billed Curassow.