



# Steppingstones

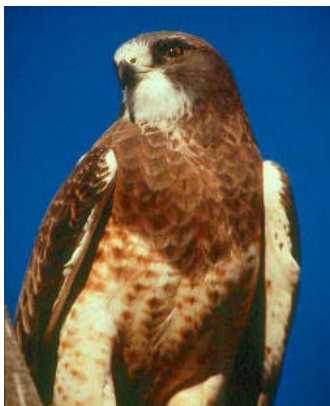


NEWSLETTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
PARTNERS IN FLIGHT PROGRAM

## Fifteen Years After Disaster: The Swainson's Hawk is Safer in Argentina

In the mid-nineties the pampas of Argentina were scene to a case that shocked the conservationist community. Thousands of Swainson's Hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*) wintering in the central region of the country during the southern summer died as a result of poisoning from improper use of agricultural chemicals.

The case became a paradigm for two reasons; it had disastrous effects on the agricultural campaign, and it triggered a joint reaction favouring the birds. This case brought together scientists, technical experts and producers, and eventually earned the support of chemical promoters to limit the improper use of chemicals. Also, various environmental and government agencies in Argentina and North America monitored, researched, and conducted policy management and education-related actions, which led to the banning of certain agrochemicals in the areas these birds visit. These agencies included: the National



Swainson's Hawk  
Photo: USFWS

Agroalimentaria [SENASA]), the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (Secretaría de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable [SAyDS]), and Aves Argentinas (Asociación Ornitológica del Plata [AOP]). Because of their actions, these chemicals are no longer in use today, providing a safer destination to these amazing summer birds.

Related to eagles and falcons, the Swainson's Hawk breeds and raises its chicks in the central western region of the United States and in southwest Canada until the fall (September-October), when it migrates as far south as the pampas in central Argentina. On its 30 to 35 day

roundtrip journey, the Swainson's Hawk covers around 20,000 km (12,000 mi).

*"This case brought together scientists, technical experts and producers, and it eventually earned the support of chemical promoters to limit the improper use of chemicals."*

The Alliance for the Grasslands interviewed two important figures of that time who took action: Ms. María Elena Zaccagnini (INTA) and Ms. Santiago Krapovickas (formerly of Aves Argentinas/AOP). Both reflected on the outcome of the episode that occurred almost fifteen years ago and that killed more than 20,000 hawks, roughly five percent of the species' total population.

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Institute of Agriculture and Livestock Technology (INTA), the National Service of Agrifood Health and Quality (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad

**Editor's note:** We are honored to have Anibal Parera, General Coordinator of the Alliance for the Grasslands ([www.pastizalesdelconosur.org/index.php?lang=en](http://www.pastizalesdelconosur.org/index.php?lang=en)), contribute this article to *Steppingstones*. I met Anibal in southern Alberta, Canada, in 2006 on a U.S. Forest Service-sponsored grasslands tour. The tour included a visit to Canadian Forces Base Suffield, which hosts nesting Swainson's Hawks. The Swainson's Hawk is one of several grassland species that nests on military lands in North America and migrates to Southern Cone grasslands in South America.



## Fifteen Years After Disaster: Swainson's Hawk (cont.)

### Would you define the Swainson's Hawk as a grassland bird?

**MEZ:** The Swainson's Hawk is typically found in open areas. This is why it is widespread in the agricultural landscape (e.g., pastures and cereal and oilseed crops), where it is also common to see large flocks. In fact, a lot of the arthropods found in these agricultural areas are an important source of food for these hawks.

**SK:** The Swainson's Hawk nests in large open areas where there are plenty of grassland and small wooded spots. When in Argentina, the hawk is mostly seen in open terrain on the pampa grasslands and farmland in the central and north-eastern parts of the country. However, as a migratory bird, it has been sighted in a variety of environments that it crosses during its journey. Its diet, consisting largely of insects foraged in open areas, is also associated with the grasslands.

### Certain birds are indicators of a sound environment. Do you believe this is the case of the Swainson's Hawk?

**MEZ:** Because of their broad food chain and use of environments, most birds are highly vulnerable to the environment. In addition, they are very sensitive to different groups of pesticides, particularly organophosphates and carbamates, which act on acetylcholinesterase, an enzyme acting in neurotransmission. In the particular case of the Swainson's Hawk, mass mortality drew attention to the risks of improperly using pesticides like monochrotophos, which was already restricted from use in grasshopper control (which means it was being unduly used at the time of the issue). Nevertheless, those responsible for administering it were unaware of the situation. The hawk was a worthy indicator.

**SK:** At the top of the food supply chain, birds of prey are highly sensitive to toxic substances. The Swainson's Hawk demonstrated this sensitivity in the notorious episodes of mortality, which were detected thanks to responsive producers and forest rangers. It was a tragic event for wildlife, which also reflected the potential risk to people.

### The episode of the 1990s must have left lessons and also a change for the better...

**SK:** Indeed. The organophosphate (monochrotophos) responsible for the mass killing of these hawks was forbidden and companies were obliged to withdraw it from the market. No further similar mortality events were reported in the succeeding seasons. Both the authorities and the pesticide manufacturers became aware of the convenience of a moderate use of these substances. The fact is that this case was an important lesson.

We worked jointly with producers and companies, as well as the legislative branch, on research, information, and extension. Dialogue, cooperation and understanding were foremost in the search for solutions. Moreover, the solution brought benefits all around – cheap outdated pesticides were changed for other more modern ones, without the need for a huge investment.

We also learned to cooperate with our North American peers, who, concerned about the situation of "their" species, provided funds and experts to study the case.



*Juvenile Swainson's Hawk at Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, Idaho  
Photo: Larry Ridenhour, BLM*

**MEZ:** After the Swainson's Hawk case, INTA saw the need to start monitoring these birds in the long term and to develop surveillance of the use of agrochemicals. Interdisciplinary teams were formed and a bird monitoring system was designed and launched at a regional scale. This system is currently in its tenth year of collecting scientific data on 20 key species, including the presence/absence of all birds associated to agricultural ecosystems. Today, the work goes beyond the issue of agrototoxic substances and has extended to the terrain of Climate Change or changes in the use of land.

What is interesting about this experience is that we learned to work in interdisciplinary teams, across sectors and with a high-level of inter-institutional cooperation (both nationally and internationally). Even with all the difficulties inherent in a process requiring consensus and touching on economic interests, we were able to find solutions when we teamed together. This model is applicable to other environmental issues, where we are not out to find culprits, but rather find solutions that will make the interests of production and those of conservation compatible.

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## Fifteen Years After Disaster: Swainson's Hawk (cont.)

### What is the current state of the species?

**MEZ:** In our region, mortality has declined to very low levels. We recorded the last case in year 2000, which ironically was the last year monochrotophos was available on the market.

**SK:** The worst season was the Argentinean summer of 1995-1996 when INTA reported several thousand dead Swainson's Hawks. The following season much fewer were found, several hundred, and in the ensuing season, hardly any. Regulation took much longer, and I believe monochrotophos was banned from Argentina in 1999.

*Interview by Edda Li Puma, Aves Argentinas/AOP and Aníbal Parera, General Coordinator of the Alliance for the Grasslands, which covers Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay*

*Translation: Patricia Haynes*

### About the Interviewees:

**María Elena Zaccagnini** has been a biologist and researcher for INTA since 1977. She coordinated the Project Ecotoxicologic Surveillance and Monitoring of Swainson's Hawks in Argentine Agrosystems (INTA-CWS-USFWS-NMBCA) for INTA. Ms. Zaccagnini is the current National Coordinator of INTA's Strategic Area of Environmental Management and member of the Board of the Alliance for the Grasslands.

**Santiago Krapovickas** is an Argentine ecologist and is experienced in biodiversity and non-governmental organization management. Ms. Krapovickas has participated in organizations such as Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina, Administración de Parques Nacionales, Aves Argentinas/AOP, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Fundación Patagonia Natural.

## Migratory Birds Connect DoD Installations to Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean

Emerald waters... Glimmering beaches... Sun-blistered tourists... Migrant and resident populations of almost fifty of DoD Partners in Flight's priority bird species of concern... Welcome to the Caribbean!

In May 2010, the Department of Defense (DoD) Partners In Flight (PIF) Working Group held its annual strategic planning meeting on the island of Puerto Rico. An important goal of the DoD PIF meeting was to refine the group's list of priority bird species of concern (SOC). According to Chris Eberly, DoD PIF program coordinator, the list represents the non-listed species "most likely to impact the DoD mission, and those for which DoD lands have a very high stewardship responsibility." By the end of the meeting, the group established a working list of 104 top SOC.

Other goals of the DoD PIF meeting were to learn about Caribbean birds and to

explore opportunities for research, management, or partnerships that would benefit the stewardship of bird populations on DoD lands. The opening night guest speaker was Verónica Anadón-Irizarry, Caribbean Program Coordinator for BirdLife International and co-editor of the comprehensive 2008 volume *Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean: Key Sites for Conservation*. Ms. Anadón-Irizarry's presentation highlighted the diversity

of resident and migratory birds in the Caribbean and how BirdLife's Important Bird Area (IBA) program successfully protects unique ecosystems and valuable avian habitat.

Based on the outcomes of the meeting, the next step was obvious—we needed to juxtapose the new top SOC list with species lists for the Caribbean IBAs. Chris Eberly and I provided the DoD list to Ms. Anadón-Irizarry, who extracted those species that occur at Caribbean IBAs. The results were illuminating.



*DoD PIF Representatives and José Salguero of SoPI hope for a glimpse of the Puerto Rican Parrot and other native birds at El Yunque National Forest, Puerto Rico.*

*Photo: Tim Burr*

## Migratory Birds Connect DoD Installations (cont.)

We found that of the 104 top SOC, 47 (45%) have resident and/or migratory populations that occur at Caribbean IBAs. Furthermore, of the 30 highest-ranking SOC, 14 (47%) occur at Caribbean IBAs. This includes the Gull-billed Tern; Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Cerulean, Blue-winged, and Golden-winged Warblers; and Painted Bunting. About 156 Caribbean IBAs have recorded observations of the 14 highest-ranking SOC.



*Conservation of Neotropical migrants depends on the protection of Caribbean forests, such as El Yunque National Forest, Puerto Rico, the only tropical rain forest in the U.S. National Forest system.*

*Photo: Gregory W. Fleming*

These results show that DoD's continued stewardship of many migratory SOC depends on effective habitat conservation in the Caribbean. A way to make this a reality is through meaningful partnerships with groups that have a presence across the Caribbean, such as BirdLife International, or with local (island-specific) groups, such as the Ornithological Society of Puerto Rico (Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña Inc.; SoPI).

For example, working in one of the top six global hotspots for biodiversity conservation, BirdLife's Caribbean Program works to identify and document the significance of IBAs, increase local community interest and knowledge, and increase the capacity of local support groups and conservation-focused organizations. Since these goals align well with those of DoD PIF and that the conservation of many of DoD's priority birds will depend on conservation in the Caribbean, it makes sense to explore options for additional research and monitoring in the region (e.g., migratory pathways of birds that nest on DoD

lands, phenology of and threats to food sources at migrant stopover sites, Monitoreo de Supervivencia Invernal (MoSI) stations, etc.), and to explore formal partnerships.

In the end, the DoD PIF meeting served as a reminder that Puerto Rico is part of the United States. It also reminded us of the hemispherical-scale challenges facing DoD's stewardship of migratory birds. Fortunately, however, opportunities already exist in the Caribbean for expanding the scope of DoD PIF's strategy to first protect the mission and second to protect avian populations through monitoring, management, research, and partnerships.

To learn more about BirdLife International's Caribbean Program, please visit <http://www.birdlife.org/regional/caribbean/index.html>

For more about the avifauna of Puerto Rico and the Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña Inc., please visit <http://www.avesdepuertorico.org/>

*- John Arnett, Luke AFB  
DoD PIF Western Regional Representative*

## Partnership Focus: The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), founded in 1951, is the leading conservation organization that works around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, this organization has protected more than 119 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of rivers worldwide. It operates more than 100 marine conservation projects globally. TNC addresses the most pressing conservation threats at the largest scale and works in all 50 states and more than 30 countries, working on threats to biodiversity involving climate change, fresh water, oceans, and conservation lands.

TNC is an expert at building coalitions with indigenous communities, governments, businesses, and non-profits. It is also especially skilled at increasing financing for conservation, focuses on non-confrontational, pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges, and has a unique ability to specialize in both policy and landscape conservation. This enables TNC to expand projects to scales where they make a difference.

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## Partnership Focus: The Nature Conservancy (cont.)

For many years, a key part of this work has been in collaboration with the Department of Defense (DoD) on numerous joint projects, including research, endangered species, habitat management, and buffer zone issues. TNC handles its relationship with DoD through a liaison at its worldwide office, numerous staff in its state chapter offices throughout the country, and project-specific staff located on-base at many installations.

One example of a TNC-DoD collaboration is TNC's Fort Hood Project. Fort Hood, Texas, supports significant breeding populations of the Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler, both listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. TNC has been working with Fort Hood's Endangered Species Management Program since USFWS issued the 1993 Biological Opinion, which required the U.S. Army to take measures to promote the recovery of the two species on the installation. TNC currently works in eight areas under a five-year cooperative agreement with Fort Hood. Some of the specific areas of collaboration include research and monitoring of the Vireo and Warbler, Brown-headed Cowbird management, vegetation ecology, and prescribed fire and habitat management. For more information on this project, visit [www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/texas/science/art6223.html](http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/texas/science/art6223.html).

TNC has also collaborated with many DoD installations to establish compatible use buffer programs to help preserve mission readiness and protect biodiversity. Some of these installations include Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Fort Benning and Fort Stewart, Georgia; Fort Carson, Colorado; Camp Pendleton, California; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; and Camp Ripley, Minnesota. Fort Bragg, Camp Lejeune, Fort Benning, and Fort Stewart established programs to protect extensive tracts of Longleaf Pine forest and the Red-cockaded Woodpecker while Fort Carson established a program to protect the shortgrass prairie ecosystem and its numerous declining bird species. Many of these projects have proven highly successful initiators of collaborative work and conservation at much larger scales. For example, the compatible use buffer work at Fort Carson led directly to the establishment of the Central Shortgrass Prairie Partnership, in which DoD, TNC, and numerous other partners identified key areas for conservation over the entire Central Shortgrass Prairie Ecoregion. For more information on this effort, visit [www.nature.org/magazine/winter2004/features/index.html](http://www.nature.org/magazine/winter2004/features/index.html).

As a global conservation organization, TNC also has an enormous capacity to work in many areas outside the United States. This is especially important for migratory

birds, which respect no political or administrative boundaries during their annual life cycle. Spearheaded by TNC's Migratory Bird Program ([my.nature.org/birds/about/](http://my.nature.org/birds/about/)), TNC actively participates in national bird conservation initiatives, such as Partners in Flight, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council. Through its extensive network of local, in-country offices and conservation partners, TNC also develops and participates in large-scale conservation projects designed to conserve migratory birds throughout their life cycle. An example of this is the *Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forests* (see the article on pages 6-8 in this issue).



*Kirtland's Warbler*  
Photo: Chris Eberly

Another noteworthy conservation project is the Kirtland's Warbler Training and Research Project. TNC, U.S. Forest Service, Bahamas National Trust, and several other institutions worked together to dedicate themselves to improving our knowledge of this endangered species. They also provided training opportunities in biological science to Bahamians, who are responsible for most of the wintering grounds of the Kirtland's Warbler. This 10-year project, supported in part by DoD, has revealed new insights into the wintering ecology of this elusive species, established connections between the exact breeding and wintering grounds of individual birds, and increased conservation capacity in the Bahamas through research training and education. This information and increased capacity will be essential in ensuring the conservation of this bird in the future in order to complement ongoing, successful conservation work in the United States. For more information on this project, visit <http://my.nature.org/birds/about/kirtlands.html>.

For more information about The Nature Conservancy, visit [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).

- David Mehlman, *The Nature Conservancy*  
Director, Migratory Bird Program

## Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forests

The Central American Pine-Oak (*Pinus-Quercus* spp.) Forest Region extends through the highlands of southern Mexico, Guatemala, central Honduras, northern El Salvador, and northwestern Nicaragua. The region covers 103,842.71 km<sup>2</sup> (10,384,271 ha), but only 26,728.35 km<sup>2</sup>, or 26% of the total area, remains forested (Harcourt and Sayer 1996). Threats to its continued existence include unsustainable forestry and agricultural practices, such as commercial logging, extraction of timber for firewood, slash and burn agriculture, cattle ranching, and forest fires. The World Wildlife Fund considers the region critically endangered and, at the current rate of deforestation, predicts it will be destroyed by 2045, if this trend is not reversed.

### Importance to Bird Conservation

As its name implies, the diversity of pine and oak species in the region is high; at least 36 oak and 11 pine species occur in mature pine-oak forests throughout Mesoamerica (González-Espinoza et al. 2005). However, the number of bird species that occur in the region is equally impressive. Conservation International considers this region to be an "Endemic Bird Area" and a High Priority Terrestrial Ecoregion, or "Hotspot," because of the 21 endemic species that occur there. At least 55 migratory bird species overwinter in the region. At least six of those species – Golden-cheeked, Golden-winged, Canada, Worm-eating, Red-faced, and Hermit Warblers – are known to breed on military installations located across the United States and have been identified by Partners in Flight, the National Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as species of conservation concern. Additionally, the region is a critical trans-regional migratory route for at least 225 Nearctic-Neotropical migratory bird species.

### Establishment of the Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forests

The importance of the region to bird conservation has not gone unrecognized by the conservation community. With support from the

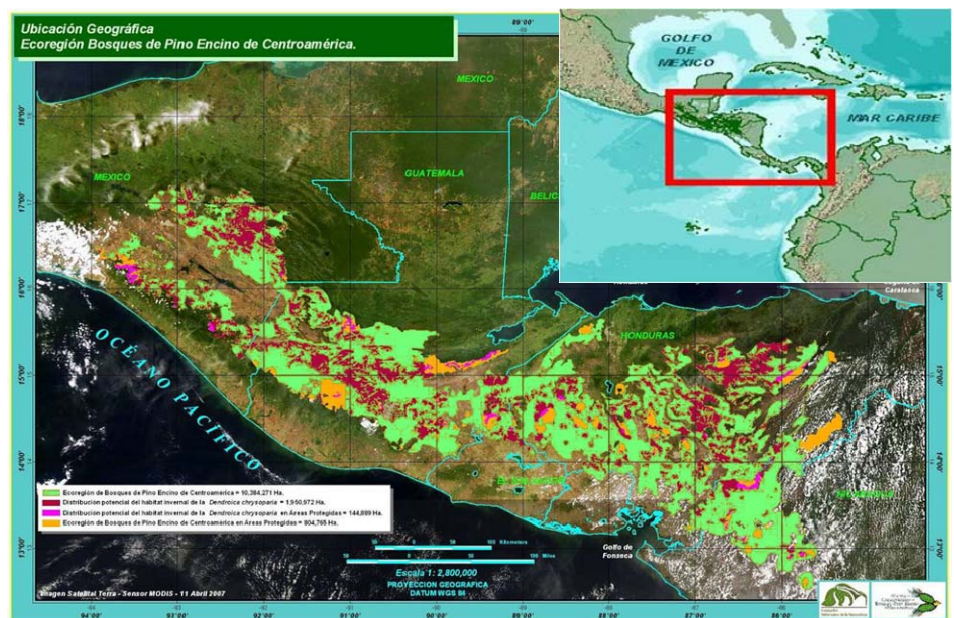


USFWS's Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, SalvaNATURA (El Salvador), Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza (Guatemala), Pronatura Sur (Mexico), and the American Bird Conservancy implemented the "Quercus and Birds" Project in 2002.

The main objective of this project was to establish multi-national collaboration for the conservation of temperate forests in Mesoamerica, using migratory birds as a symbol for conservation. This collaboration laid the foundation to establish the "Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forests" in 2003. One of few regional conservation initiatives that exist in the Neotropics, this voluntary, international partnership consists of 12 institutions in the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua working cooperatively to conserve the Central American pine-oak forest region and its avifauna. The federally endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler serves as an umbrella species for the Alliance's conservation efforts.

### Bird Conservation Initiatives

Through the hard work and dedication of its members, the Alliance is proving to be a model for regional conservation efforts to protect habitat in Mexico and Central America. Conservation professionals working in cooperation with



Only 7.4% of potential winter habitat of Golden-cheeked Warbler is currently protected:

- ▶ Pine-Oak Forest Ecoregion (light green): 103,843 km<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Potential habitat in the Ecoregion (red): 19,510 km<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Potential habitat in protected areas (pink): 1,449 km<sup>2</sup>

Photo/Map Courtesy of: Rebecca Peak and David King

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## Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forests (cont.)

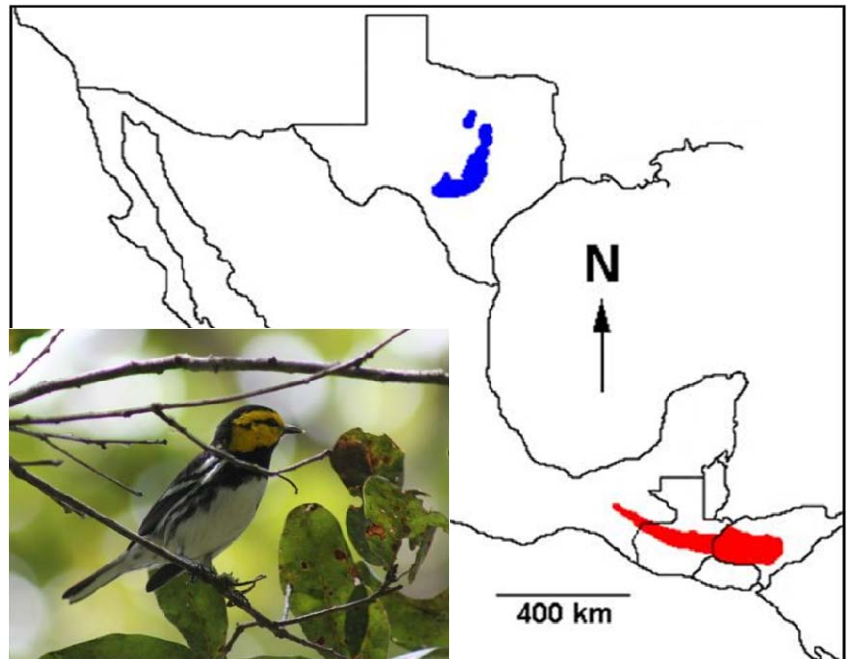


*Pine-Oak forest in Celaque National Park, Honduras  
Photo: David King*

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the U.S. Army at Fort Hood have hosted members of the Alliance during the breeding season to promote an exchange among professionals working with the Golden-cheeked Warbler across its range. These Alliance members, who study the species at wintering sites, learn about the breeding biology of the warbler. Members of the Alliance have developed a standardized methodology for studying the distribution, relative abundance, and use of habitat by the Golden-cheeked Warbler across its wintering range. In 2006, Oliver Komar, a member of the Alliance and Director of SalvaNATURA's conservation science program, received funding through the Endangered Species Act to implement the standardized methodology. For three field seasons, observers monitored mixed-species foraging flocks, containing at least 217 individual Golden-cheeked Warblers at 34 sites distributed throughout the Central American pine-oak forest region. Cooperators working with other organizations across the region and in cooperation with Fort Hood and TNC helped to provide equipment for the fieldwork, train field technicians for the project, and analyze the data. The results of this study have expanded our knowledge about where Golden-cheeked Warblers and other migrants overwinter in the region, as well as the distribution of resident bird species. These results were used to examine Golden-cheeked Warbler relative abundance among these sites, as well as correlations between warbler detections and several habitat characteristics. Based in part on the results of this study, the Alliance has developed a conservation plan for the region (Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak

Forests 2007). The plan identifies strategic actions to promote conservation and sustainable management of priority areas in the long term.

Members of the Alliance working with TNC in Honduras and Nicaragua partnered with the U. S. Forest Service's Office of International Programs and Northern Research Station to further our knowledge about Golden-cheeked Warbler winter ecology in these countries. In 2006 and 2008, observers revisited sites originally surveyed in the 1990s to establish the winter distribution and habitat preferences of the Golden-cheeked Warbler in Honduras. They surveyed 19 transects and detected Golden-cheeked Warblers on 13 of them, which was 4 more transects than the original survey. Habitat conditions appeared to improve at these sites, as indicated by an increase in the basal area of encino oaks, which are the preferred foraging substrate for Golden-cheeked Warblers. Also in 2007, observers surveyed habitat in Nicaragua to determine the extent to which the winter range of the Golden-cheeked Warbler extended into this country and whether or not the patterns of habitat selection there were similar to those reported in other parts of its wintering range. Observers detected 36 Golden-cheeked Warblers, and habitat characteristics of these sites were similar to those across the rest of the range. The results of these studies also were used in the development of the regional conservation plan, and Morales et al. (2008) published them into an article formally documenting the re-discovery of the Golden-cheeked Warbler in Nicaragua.



*Breeding (blue) and wintering (red) ranges of the Golden-cheeked Warbler  
Photo: Carlos Funes, SalvaNATURA*

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## Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forests (cont.)

### *What's on the Horizon*

This fall, members of the Alliance received additional Endangered Species Act funding to initiate two more projects that will further our knowledge about the avifauna in this region and increase public awareness about the need to protect birds and their habitat. First, Pronatura Sur will establish two banding stations in Central American pine-oak forest located in Chiapas, Mexico. This will help develop a protocol to increase capture probability of Golden-cheeked Warblers at winter sites in order to examine their overwinter survival and site fidelity. Researchers working on the project also will band other Neotropical migratory and resident bird species, which will further our knowledge about their distribution, natural history, molt and plumage patterns, and habitat needs. Second, educational professionals from Bluestem Environmental Consultants will cooperate with members of the Alliance to develop an educational curriculum to accompany a children's story about Golden-cheeked Warbler natural history. The story was originally printed in Spanish. With permission from the authors, the story has been adapted for English translation. This funding also will be used to print the English version of the book and design and host a website to access all these resources.

For more information about the Alliance's efforts to protect the Central American pine-oak forest region and its avifauna, contact Claudia Macías-Caballero, coordinator for the Alliance for the Conservation of Mesoamerican Pine-Oak Forest, [cmacias@pronatura-sur.org](mailto:cmacias@pronatura-sur.org).

-Rebecca Peak, Fort Hood and  
David King, USFS Northern Research Station

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## Announcement Corner

- ✦ Don't forget to register for the **National Military Fish and Wildlife Association Annual Training Workshop**, March 14-18, 2011, in Kansas City, Missouri. For more information, visit: <http://nmfwa.org/>. Bird-specific sessions include:



- ✦ *Avian Protection on Powerlines Workshop*
- ✦ *Special Session: USFWS New Golden Eagle Guidance Technical Session*
- ✦ *Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard Success Stories Technical Session*
- ✦ *DoD PIF Working Group meeting*
- ✦ *Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard Working Group meeting*

- ✦ Be on the lookout for the new **DoD Natural Resources Program Natural Selections** newsletter, coming spring 2011!



*Great Horned Owl*

*Photo courtesy of: Brent Husung and Steven Selser*



## Policy Perch

I've been talking about the new draft DoD Natural Resources Conservation Program Instruction (DoDI) for so long that it must seem like old hat. Even now, I hesitate to mention that final approval seems imminent after a long and occasionally tortuous two-and-a-half years. Yet, this action is sufficiently important to the long-term management of all DoD's natural resources to risk a slightly premature notice.

What does the DoDI do?

- ✦ Provides updated guidance on all relevant natural resources-related legislation and Executive Orders enacted in the past 15 years.
- ✦ Updates management responsibilities and provides procedures for the preparation, review and implementation of INRMPs.
- ✦ Updates programming and budgeting priorities, and establishes new performance metrics.
- ✦ Enables the establishment of cost-saving conservation partnerships.



*Silver-throated Tanager in Ecuador*  
Photo: Peter Boice

Among the key provisions that should benefit bird conservation, perhaps the most important is the requirement to prioritize management of species at risk (SAR) that could adversely impact military readiness. The DoDI identifies habitat conservation, planning level surveys, and monitoring as key to protecting these species and considers funding for SAR protection a high priority.

Specific to bird conservation, the DoDI institutionalizes requirements to:

- ✦ develop and implement appropriate conservation measures if a proposed action may have a significant adverse effect on a migratory bird population;
- ✦ assess the effects of non-military-readiness activities on migratory birds; and
- ✦ confer and cooperate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for military-readiness activities if a proposed action may have a significant adverse effect on a migratory bird population.

In the bird world, I represented DoD at the second meeting of the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds in mid-December. For most land managers, probably the most significant presentation was by our very own DoD PIF Program Coordinator, Chris Eberly. Chris heads a committee that compiled existing conservation measures currently being implemented by Council agencies and currently is developing a spreadsheet that will identify which agencies implement these measures. A next step will be to identify gaps.

Unfortunately, another Council priority – permitting procedures for incidental take related to the Executive Order-driven Migratory Bird Memorandum of Understanding – has been slow in coming.

This ongoing gap has led DoD to work separately with USFWS to identify a permitting process for Bald and Golden Eagles. The goal is to continue ongoing mission and training activities, and to clarify permitting processes for new activities (e.g., vertical training).

As a first step, USFWS developed a document to help DoD comply with the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the new regulations for non-purposeful eagle take, which is posted on the DoD PIF website ([www.dodpif.org](http://www.dodpif.org)).

During our most recent meeting, USFWS stated that reducing take from other mortality causes (e.g., power line strikes) would offset any potential takes/strikes from routine/existing training flights. As a result of these ongoing discussions, we are considering developing policy to require each installation with a flight mission to develop an avian and bat protection plan.

- Peter Boice,  
Deputy Director, Natural Resources



## View From the Eyrie

The past few months have been especially busy for me. Over a six-week period I attended three conferences and helped teach a training course. In the midst of all this travel, there were Legacy proposals to review, State of the Birds 2011 meetings, and preparations for the second meeting of the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds (Read the Policy Perch, page 9 to learn more).



*Emerald Tanager in Panama*  
Photo: Chris Eberly

### Meeting and Conference Updates

After the national PIF annual fall steering committee meeting in Michigan, I attended the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of The Wildlife Society (TWS) in Snowbird, Utah. I convened a meeting to discuss the formation of a Military Lands Working Group within TWS. During that meeting we gathered 17 signatures, more than the 15 needed to submit our paperwork to the TWS Council for approval of Working Group status. The TWS Council will vote in March, and should approve this new Working Group. If you are a TWS member, watch for your renewal notice for 2012 to join this Military Lands Working Group, which will provide a more significant presence within TWS for DoD biologists.

A week later I traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts, for the *Power of Partnerships – Bird Conservation in the Northeast* conference. This was the largest bird conservation gathering in the northeast since the 1989 *Ecology and Conservation of Neotropical Migrant Landbirds* symposium hosted by Manomet Bird Observatory (now the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences). It created the momentum for what we now call Partners in Flight (PIF). It is amazing to see how bird conservation has advanced since PIF began 20 years ago.

A few days after returning from Plymouth, I headed to Hawaii. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) teaches a training course titled, *Migratory Bird Conservation – A Trust Responsibility* at their National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. In 2006 and 2008, DoD PIF worked with USFWS to teach a modified version of the course to a DoD audience at Fort Carson, Colorado. Due to requests from both DoD and USFWS employees in Hawaii, the course was held at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay. It was the largest offering of the class yet. The 40 students were a mix of USFWS (22), State of Hawaii (6), Navy (4), Army (3), Air Force (2), Marine Corps (2), and Army Corps (1). The group mixture benefited discussions by providing insight from several agencies rather than a single-agency audience.

### Legacy Proposals

The annual Legacy proposal review process continues to generate high quality bird proposals. This year DoD PIF Representatives reviewed 30 pre-proposals and 23 full bird proposals. As DoD PARC (Partnership in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation) comes online in 2011, DoD PIF will work with the DoD PARC group to develop a similar review process to improve the quality of proposals submitted for herpetofauna.

### State of the Birds

The theme of State of the Birds 2011 is public lands. I am participating in the State of the Birds team and writing the DoD chapter. Each agency has a non-agency writing partner, and David Pashley of American Bird Conservancy is working with me on the DoD chapter. The anticipated release of the State of the Birds 2011 report is in March.

### Building Connections

Back in 2006, I met the coordinator of the Alliance for the Grasslands, Anibal Parera, in southern Alberta on a USFS-sponsored grasslands tour. Participants from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and beyond visited private farms and public grasslands, including Canadian Forces Base Suffield. It has been 15 years since the Swainson's Hawk deaths in Argentina, and I was pleased when Anibal agreed to submit an article, from an Argentine perspective, on this situation and the progress made since then. I hope you enjoy his lead article as much as I do.

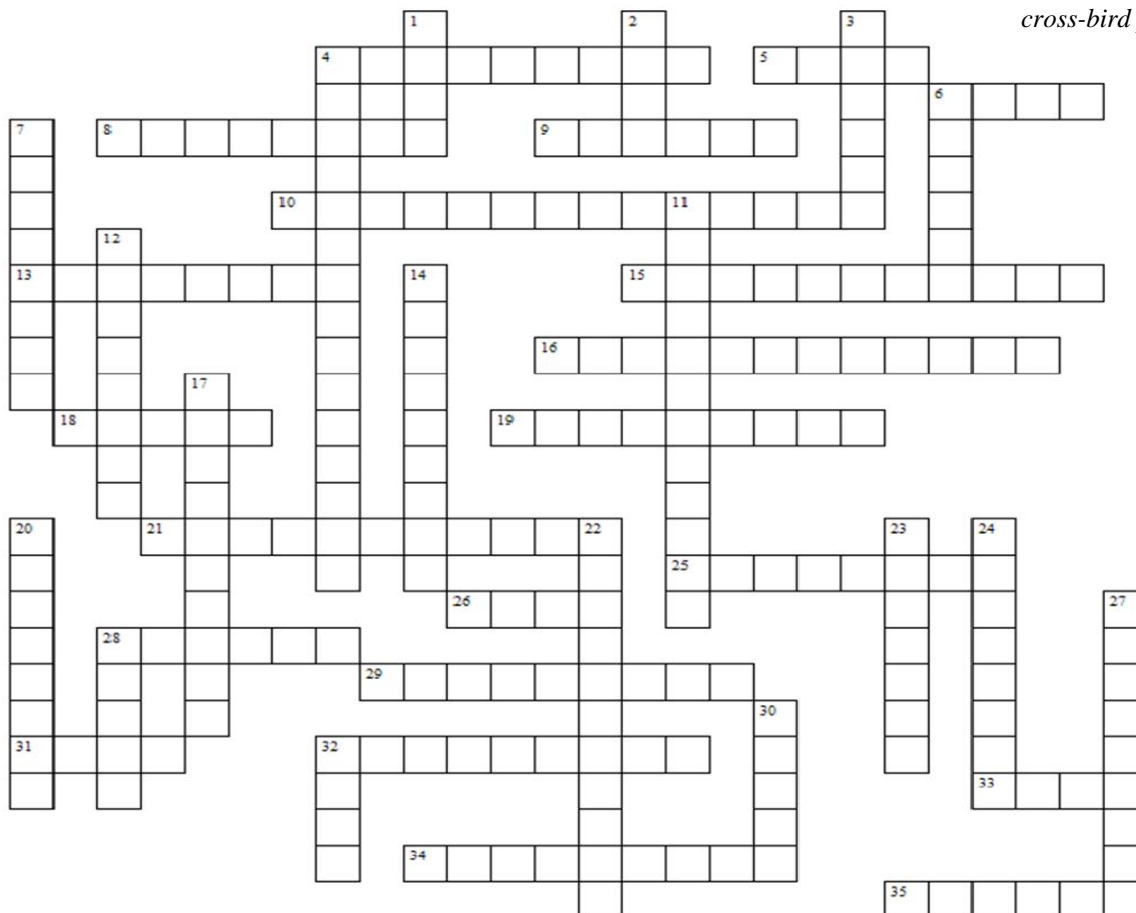
- Chris Eberly,  
DoD PIF Program Coordinator



## Cross-Bird Puzzle

### Coming to (Bird) Terms II

*Thanks to Peter Boice for  
this edition's  
cross-bird puzzle!*



#### ACROSS

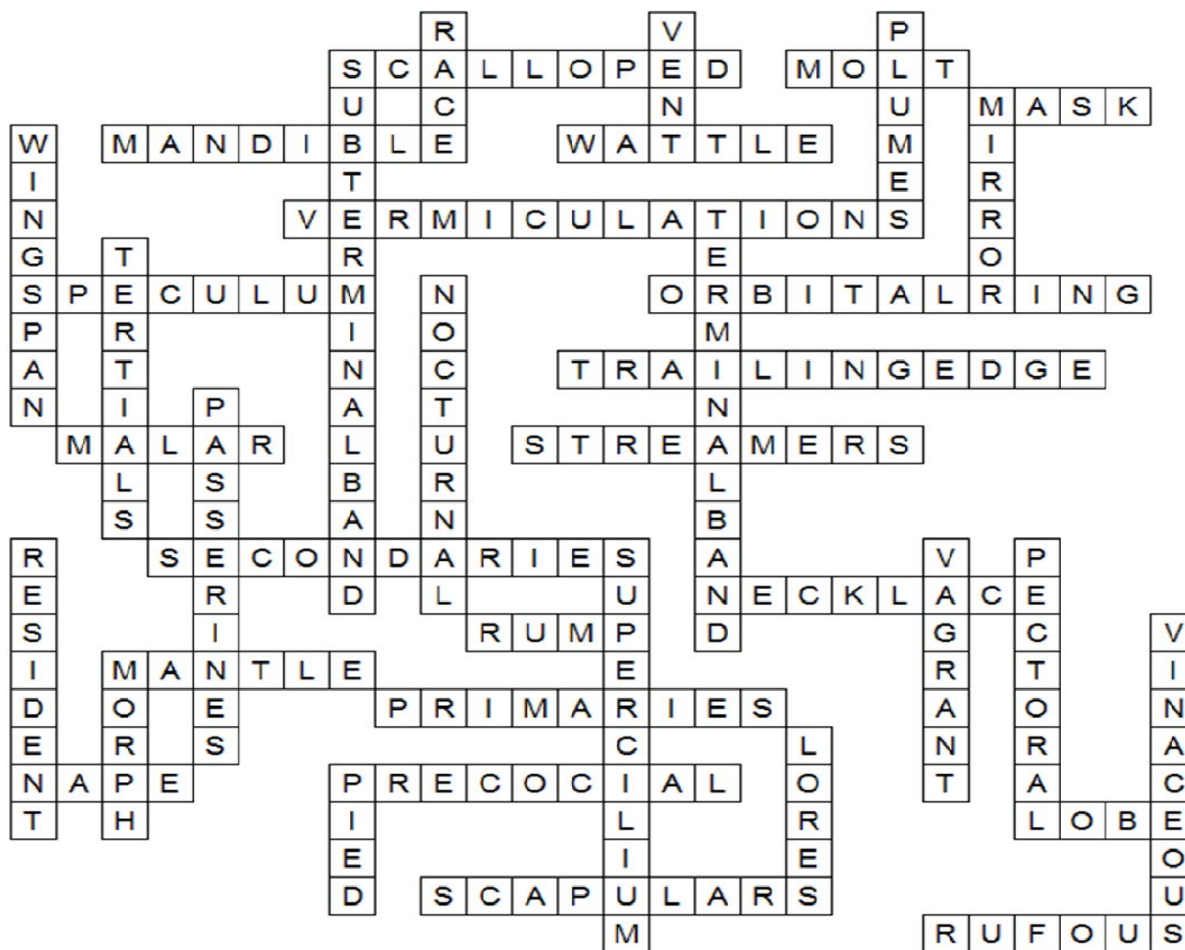
- 4 Curved markings on edges of feathers
- 5 Seasonal shedding of plumage
- 6 Dark plumage round eye and ear-coverts
- 8 Each of the two parts of bill
- 9 Bare skin, often colored, on part of the head.
- 10 Wavy, worm-like markings
- 13 Area of color on secondary feathers of wings
- 15 Narrow ring of skin or feathers round the eye (two words)
- 16 Rear edge of wing (two words)
- 18 Stripe on side of throat
- 19 Long extensions to feathers, usually of the tail
- 21 Inner wing feathers
- 25 Narrow line around the neck
- 26 Lower back
- 28 Back, between the wings
- 29 Outer flight feathers on the wing
- 31 Back of the neck
- 32 Young hatched sighted and down-covered
- 33 Fleshy extensions to side edges of toes of some birds
- 34 Feathers along edge of the mantle
- 35 Reddish-brown

#### DOWN

- 1 Subspecies
- 2 Undertail area
- 3 Long showy feathers acquired during the breeding season
- 4 Broad band on outer part of a feather (two words)
- 6 White spots in wing-tips, mainly on gulls
- 7 Length from one wing tip to the other when fully extended (two words)
- 11 Broad band on the tip of a feather or tail (two words)
- 12 Innermost wing coverts often covering secondaries
- 14 Active at night
- 17 Perching and song birds
- 20 Non-migratory and breeding in same place
- 22 Streak above the eye
- 23 Accidental
- 24 Breast area
- 27 Red wine colored
- 28 One of several distinct types of plumage in the same species
- 30 Area between eye and bill base
- 32 Black and white

## Cross-Bird Puzzle Answer Key

### Coming to (Bird) Terms II



### CONTRIBUTING TO THE DoD PIF NEWSLETTER IS EASY!

*Want to highlight bird conservation efforts on your installation?  
Have a great bird image you just have to share?  
Send your ideas and images to Chris, Alison, or Erica.*



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