Spizaetus

Neotropical Raptor Network Newsletter

Issue 22

December 2016

Gampsonyx swainsonii in El Salvador

The American Kestrel Partnership

Raptor Research in Mexico

Aegolius ridgwayi in El Salvador

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SPIZAETUS
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Red de Rapaces Neotropicale

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The NRN is a membership-based organization. Its goal is to aid the research and conservation of Neotropical raptors by promoting communication and collaboration among biologists, raptor enthusiasts, and other conservationists working in the Neotropics. To join please e-mail the NRN coordinator, Marta Curti, at mcurti@peregrinefund.org, stating your interest in Neotropical raptor research and conservation.

First Photographic Record of Unspotted Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius ridgwayi*) en Cerro el Pital, San Ignacio, Chalatenango, El Salvador

By **Christian Aguirre Alas**[1] and **Julio Cardoza**

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Photographic record of *Aegolius ridgwayi* in Cerro El Pital, El Salvador. Photo © Christian Aguirre (khrissfox).

The Unspotted Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius ridgwayi*) is distributed from Mexico to Panama (Eduards 1989, Howell and Webb 1995). It inhabits wet forests of pine-oak and oak forests between 1,650-3,000 masl (Eduards 1989, Howell and Webb 1995). Its conservation status is Least Concern (IUCN 2016), as it is considered to be common in cloud forests.

In El Salvador, this species was first documented by J.T. Marshall, during a five-month expedition in the upper arid tropical zone next to the edge of the Los Esesmiles Forest (Marshall, 1943). The second record for the country was documented with an audio recording of the species which took place in a privately owned area known as "La Burbuja" in Miramundo, Chalatenango. The

recording was made by Álvaro Moisés at 2,200 masl (e-bird 2015). He was unable to observe the bird at that time. In this short note, we present information on the first photographic record for the Unspotted Saw-whet Owl in El Salvador.

Sighting and Photographic Record

The sighting occurred in El Cerro El Pital (2730 masl), on private land owned by the Portillo family. This area is not recognized as a protected zone. It is located in the San Ignacio Municipality in the Chalatenango Department.

On 20 July 2016, at 11:45 p.m., the night was clear and there was a full moon. The temperature was 10°C. Approximately 200m from the road to "Rio Chiquito," in the camping area on the El Salvador side, the authors, J. Cardoza and C. Aguirre Alas, heard a vocalization coming from the forest which is dominated by cypress (*Cupressus lusitanica*), pine (*Pinus sp*) and oak (*Quercus sp*).

We immediately consulted owl vocalizations on XENO CANTO, recorded by Mike Nelson in Costa Rica, which confirmed that the calls we heard were of a juvenile *Aegolius ridgwayi*. Juvenile Unspotted Saw-whet Owl vocalizations are shorter and considered incomplete as compared to adult calls. Physically, the sparse or pale ventral spots are present in young *Aegolius ridgwayi* (Marshall 1943, Rand and Traylor 1954), but not in adults. In order to try and see the owl, we used "playback" calls of the Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum)*. We played the calls repeatedly until the Saw-whet Owl appeared on the forest edge, just along the border of a plantation dominated by hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) and peach (*Prunus persica*) trees.

After multiple attempts to lure it closer, the individual perched in a cypress tree surrounded by secondary growth vegetation. This is where we were able to observe and photograph the owl. Not long after, another owl (possibly an adult) appeared. It rapidly flew right at us before flying about 20m away and perching in another cypress tree (*C. lusitanica*) within the forest. We were unable to get pictures of this individual.

At around the same time, we heard the vocalizations of a possible third individual coming from the vicinity of where the juvenile was perched. However, we were unable to see it. The juvenile bird began to vocalize again and the other owl nearby called back "returning the call" of the juvenile. The third owl once again came close, but then flew off toward the lower mountain, to the pine-oak forest in the direction of Rio Chiquito.

Discussion

There are a few records for this species for southern Mexico and Central America, with the exception of Nicaragua, where this bird has not yet been reported (e-bird 2016). In El Salvador it was first documented by J. T. Marshall in 1943, but no photographic record existed. The little infor-

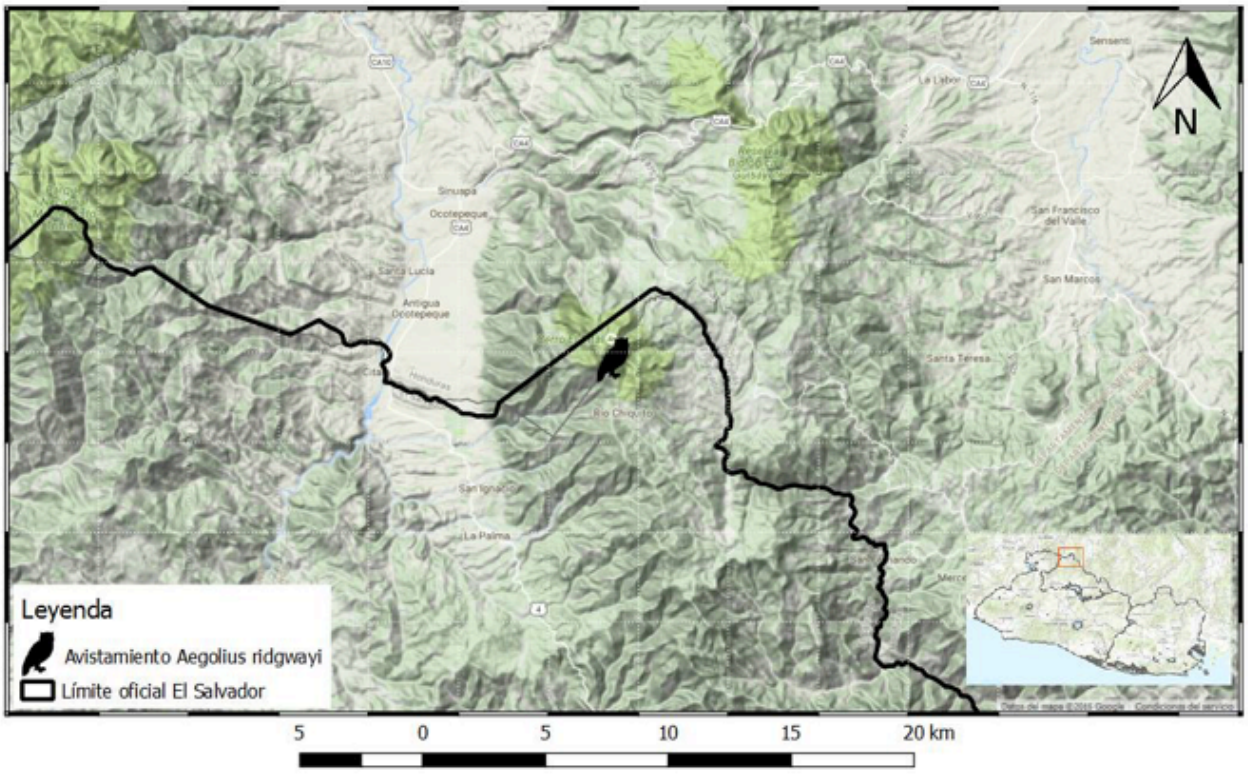
mation we have on this species calls our attention to the need to make more efforts to better document the species and to improve the protection of its natural habitat in the entire region.

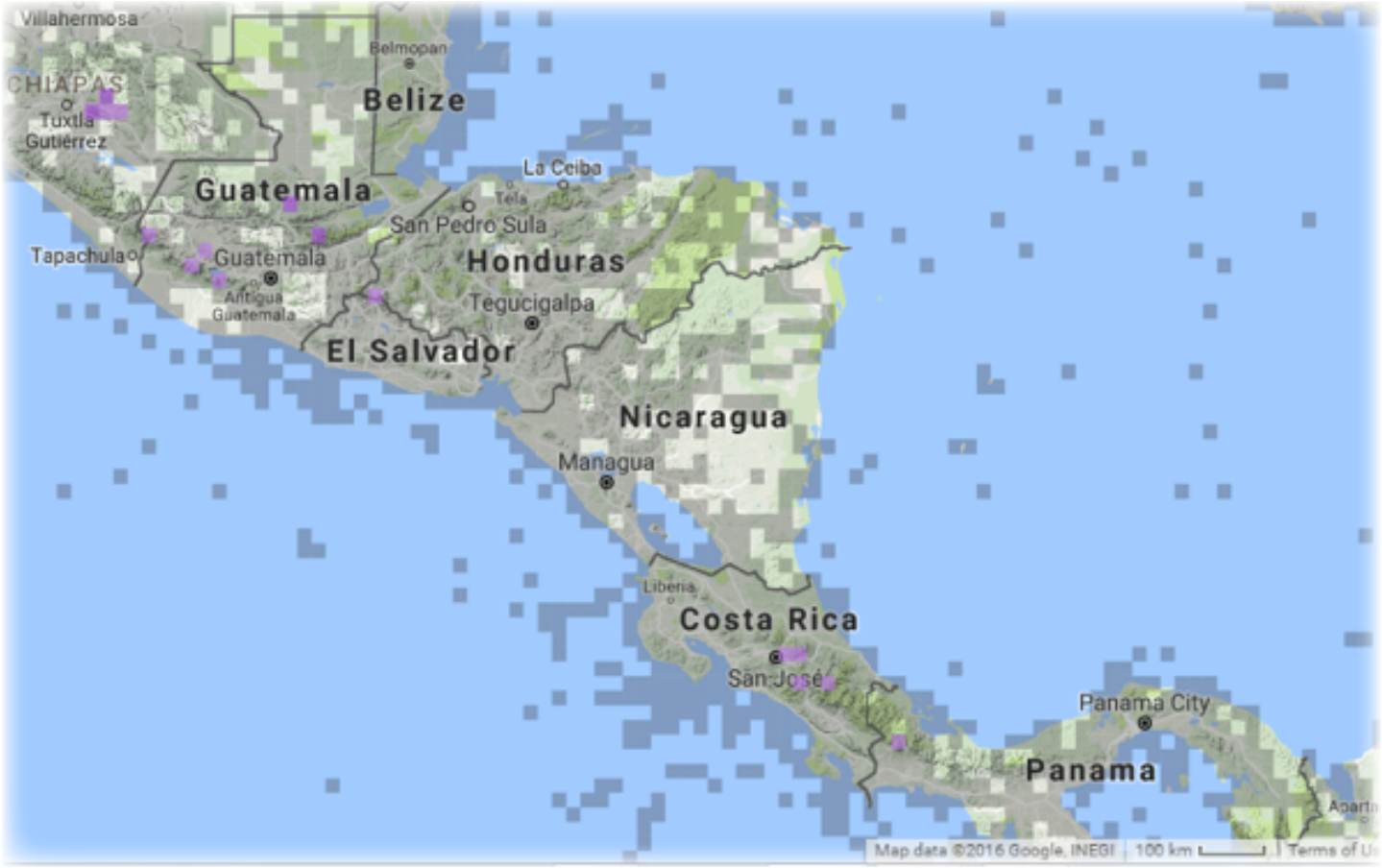
This note provides some very valuable information about the possible breeding of this species in El Salvador. Additionally, the fact that the juvenile was accompanied by both adults who acted defensively also shows that this species may be very protective of their young.

Acknowledgements

We thank our colleagues Abizai Chinchilla, Ricardo Pérez, Iselda Vega, Eliseo Martínez, Guillermo Funes, Tito Alas, Carlos Funes, Eliseo Martínez, specialist in the development of scientific applications from Gerencia de Sistemas de Información Geoambiental del MARN, for the creation of the map, Lic. Carlos Elías, Luis Pineda and and Susana Vásquez, for the identification of the plant species for corroborating the identification of the owl and for your contributions to the manuscript.

Above: **Photographic record of** *Aegolius ridgwayi* **in Cerro El Pital, El Salvador. Photo © Christian Aguirre (khrissfox).** *Below***: Map showing location of sighting of** *Aegolius ridgwayi,* **Cerro El Pital, created by Eliseo Martinez, specialist in development of scientific applications, Manager of GIS Systems, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.**





Map of sightings of *Aegolius ridgwayi* in Central America. Source:https://ebird.org/ebird/map/uswowl1?neg=true&env.minX=&env.minY=&env.maxX=&env.maxY=&zh=false&gp=false&ev=Z&mr=1-12&bmo=1&emo=12&yr=all&byr=1900&eyr=2016.

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* * *

New Locations for and First Record of Nesting Pearl Kite *(Gampsonyx swainsonii)* in El Salvador

By **Luis Pineda[1], Elba Martínez de Navas[1] & Ricardo Alas Fernández[2]**

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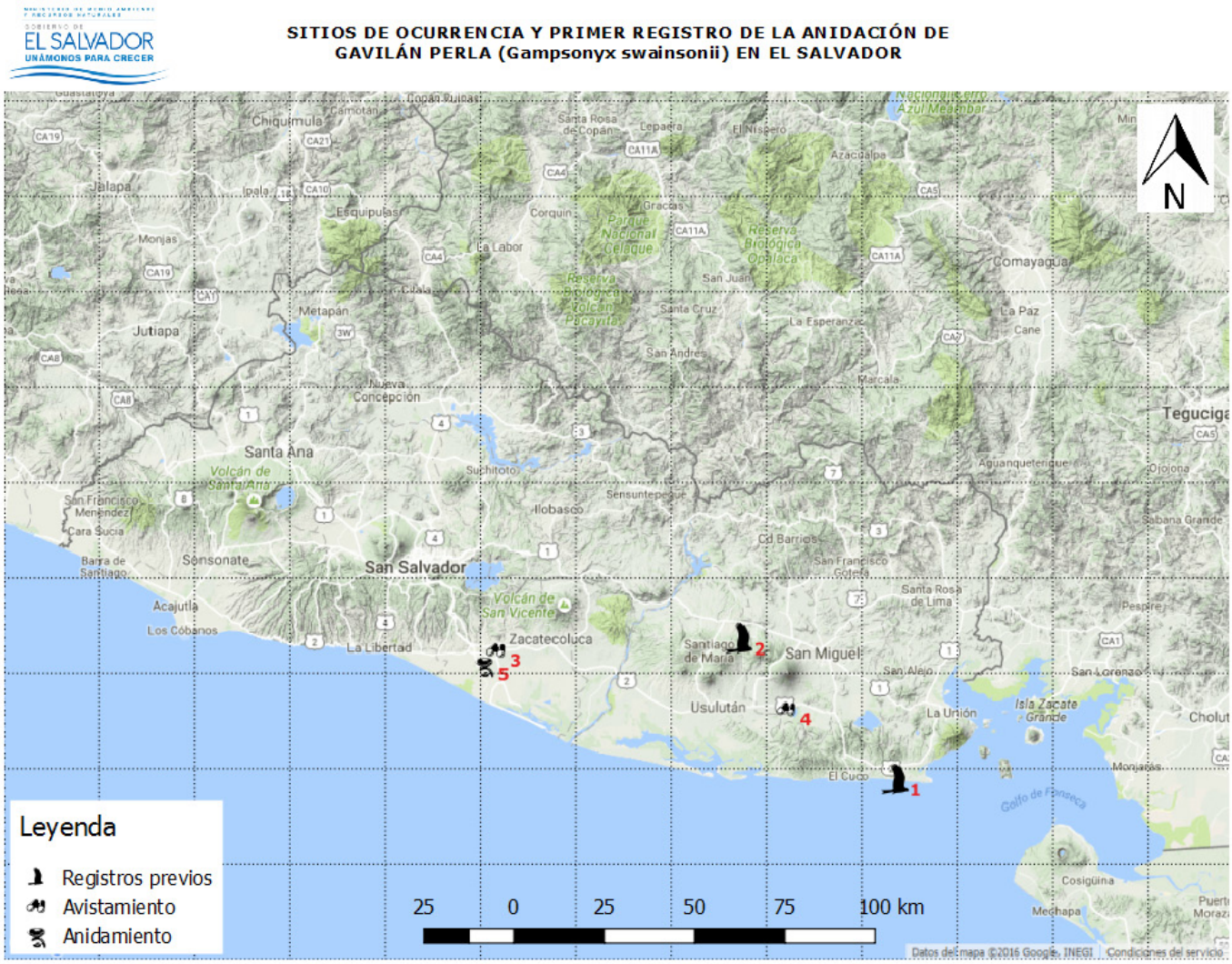
G. swainsonii **perched close to the Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero and Galdámez International Airport, El Salvador, municipality of San Luis Talpa, department of La Paz. Photo © Ricardo Alas Fernández**

In El Salvador, the distribution of diurnal raptors is a little studied subject and one that is focused within only certain Natural Protected Areas in the country. As a result, our knowledge is limited mainly to those bird species that have restricted distribution ranges in the country, including those species considered to be endangered on a national level, such as: White Hawk (*Pseudastor albicollis*), Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus chionogaster*), Black Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*) and Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*) (Pérez-León R. Com. Pers 2016). Currently, birdwatching in El Salvador has gained in popularity. Because of this, observation records

have increased in different regions of the country, including those which aren't under any type of protection.

The Pearl Kite (*Gampsonyx swainsonii* [Vigors 1825]) was first documented in El Salvador in the La Unión Department and then in the Usulután Department in 2009 and in 2012, respectively. Here, we present a scientific note on new records of occurrence and expansion of the distribution of the Pearl Kite over the last couple of years (2015 and 2016). These records occurred in the east (San Miguel Department) and para-central zones (La Paz Department). We also present the first nesting record of this species for the country.



Map showing occurrence and nesting sites of *Gampsonyx swainsonii* in El Salvador. Created by Ing. Eliseo Martínez, Especialista en desarrollo de aplicaciones científicas, Gerencia de Sistemas de Información Geoambiental, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales.

G. swainsonii **hunting in the area of the Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez International Airport, El Salvador. Photo © Ricardo Alas Fernández**

Distribution and Use of Habitat

The Pearl Kite is found throughout a wide variety of habitats. It prefers grassland, savanna, palm groves and open areas within tropical forests, although it also inhabits the edges of evergreen tropical lowland forest. It can be quite visible perched on tall bushes from where it dives to the ground in a short flight to capture its prey (Hilty and Brown 1986, Hilty 2003, Márquez et al. 2005, Stiles and Skutch 2007, Narosky 2010, Schulenberg et al. 2010, Neotropical Birds 2010 and Martínez-Sánchez et al. 2014).

Its distribution is widespread throughout the dry forest and arid regions of South America: Northern Colombia, Trinidad, West and Northeast Ecuador, Northwest and East Peru, Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, northwestern Argentina and Paraguay. The first record for Panama was in 1977. This species is considered a resident from central to western Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica (Hilty and Brown 1986, Ridgely and Gwyne 1989-1993, del Hoyo et al. 1994, Hilty 2003, Márquez et al. 2005, Stiles and Skutch 2007, Angehr and Dean 2010, Narosky 2010, Schulenberg et al. 2010, Neotropical Birds 2010, Sandoval et al. 2010, Martínez-Sánchez et al. 2014, and Garrigues and Dean 2014).

During March and April 2009, the first individuals of *Gampsonyx swainsonii* were registered for El Salvador and Honduras. An immature was pho-

tographed in Playa El Icacal, municipality of Intipucá, department of La Union, in El Salvador 13º10'N 88º00'W (Komar 2009, van Dort et al. 2010 and Ibarra-Portillo 2013). In Honduras, in the southern department of Choluteca near El Salvador, a Pearl Kite (of unknown age) was photographed near the city of Choluteca by Mario Espinal. These represent the first records of this species for El Salvador and Honduras, respectively (van Dort et al. 2010).

On 1 February 2013 a Pearl Kite collided with a house, and was subsequently sent to a shelter which was located in the municipality of Berlin, Usulután department. The bird came from the municipality of Juacuapa, which is within the same department. The individual was rehabilitated and subsequently released in Playa El Icacal, municipality of Intipucá, department of La Unión (Herrera 2013).

Worldwide, *G. swainsonii* is classified as a species of least concern, with an increasing population trend (IUCN 2016). In El Salvador, similarly, it is not on the official list of threatened or endangered species of wildlife (MARN 2015). Ibarra-Portillo (2013) classified the species as a "non-migratory vagrant" for the country.

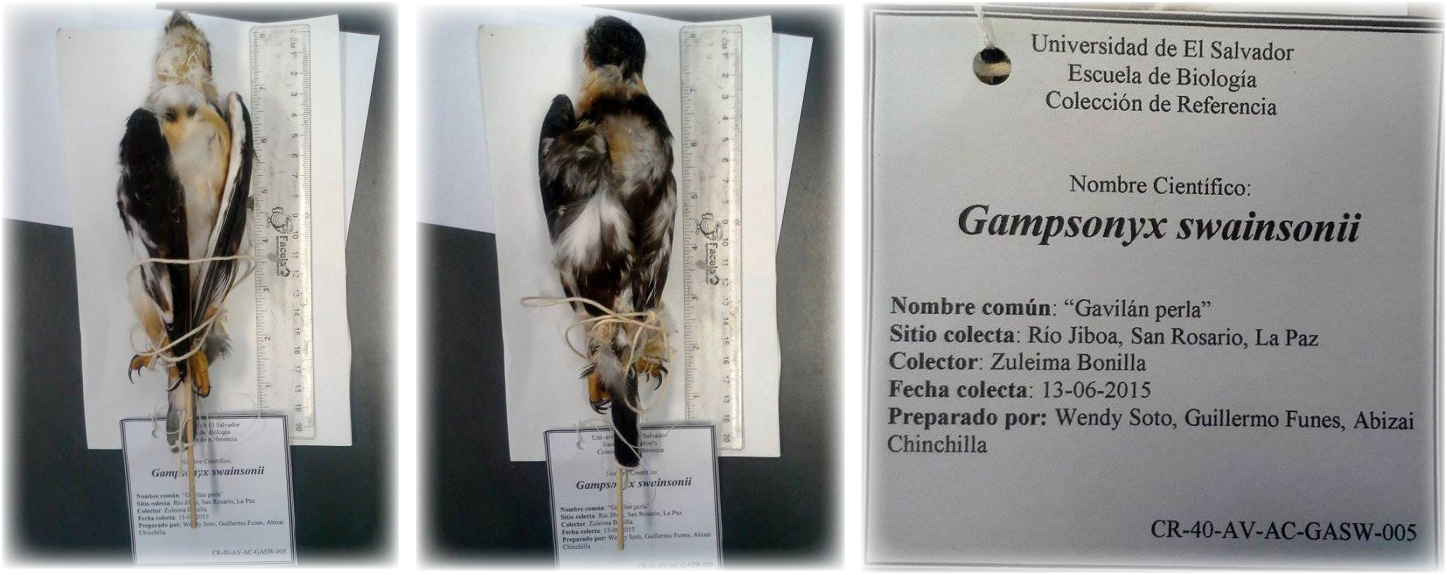
New sites for El Salvador

On 13 June 2015, an adult Pearl Kite was found dead in the area of Rio Jiboa, department of La Paz, (13.487459° N y -89.011530° W) by a biology student named Zuleima Bonilla. The specimen was collected and brought to the School of Biology, University of El Salvador (UES), for its preservation as a study skin. It was incorporated into the scientific collection of the aforementioned university, with reference file number CR-40-AV-AC-GASW-005.

On 17 May 2016, at 12:12 p.m., the biologists, Luis Pineda, Elba Martínez, Arnoldo Ramírez, Diego Arévalo and the photojournalist, Yenni Castillo, documented an individual Pearl Kite perched in a tree locally known as "mangollano" (*Pithecellobium dulce* (Roxb.) *Benth*) in an ecosystem classified as alluvial forest. They observed the kite hunting lizards in open agricultural and pasture lands, in the area known as "terrenos de Pacheco," in the El Jocotal Natural Protected Area Complex, in the municipality of El Tránsito, department of San Miguel, (13.341579 N, -88.270354 W), between 50 and 100 masl.

On 5 March 2016, an active nest of *G. swainsonii* was recorded by R. Alas Fernández, at coordinates 13,453,351 ° N and -89,041496 ° W, at the Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero and Galdámez El Salvador International Airport, Municipality of San Luis Talpa, department of La Paz.

The nest was located approximately 8 meters high in a "guaje" tree *Acaciella angustissima* (Mill.) in a dry forest in secondary succession in an open area with some trees, between 300 - 400 masl.



Ventral view, dorsal view and study skin vignette of adult *G. swainsonii*, reference School of Biology, UES. Photos © Abizai Chinchilla.

The nest structure was a basket built with twigs, and contained three chicks. They were guarded by one of the parents, who was feeding the young a whiptail lizard (*Aspidoscelis deppeii*).

Conclusions

The three new records for El Salvador represent an extension of the distribution range of Pearl Kites in the country, from the department of La Unión (where it was first observed in 2009) to the eastern and paracentral areas of the country, and to the departments of San Miguel and La Paz. This indicates a dispersion of the species in the southern paracentral and southeastern part of the country.

The discovery of a nesting pair of *G. swainsonii* constitutes the first nesting record of this species for El Salvador, which demonstrates that breeding adults have established themselves in the country. This fact changes the species' status from non-migratory Vagrant to Resident.

Because of the aforementioned, it is important to increase our knowledge of this and other species in northern Central America.

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We thank our colleagues Guillermo Fúnes, Dr. Oliver Komar, Arnoldo Ramírez, Diego Arévalo, Roselvy Juárez, John van Dort, Dr. Natalia Soledad Martínez Curci (Argentina), Liliana Chavarría Duriaux (Nicaragua), Yanira Cifuentes Sarmiento (Colombia), Karla Aparicio (Panama), Fundación Rapaces de Costa Rica and Abizai Chinchilla, for providing information on the species; to Yenni Castillo for support in photographing the individual in San Miguel, and to Frank Cardoza and José Linares for identifying the tree species. We thank the biologists Vladlen Henríquez, Jordi Se-

Above: **Pearl Kite photographed in Terrenos de Pacheco, ANP Complejo El Jocotal, El Transito municipality, departament of San Miguel. Photos © Yenni Castillo.**
Below: **Photographic documentation of nesting Pearl Kites at the Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, International Airport, El Salvador, San Luis Talpa, departament of La Paz. Photos © Ricardo Alas Fernández.**

gura, Eder Caceros and Celina Dueñas for the identification of the whiptail lizard, to biol. Víctor Cuchilla for assisting with the classification of the ecosystems, to Eliseo Martínez, specialist in the development of scientific applications, Geoenvironmental Information Systems Management of MARN, for creating the map, to the resource guards Miguel López and Leodan Ramírez of the ANP Complejo El Jocotal and to MSc. Ricardo Pérez León, Departamento de Sistema de Información Geográfica, EPYPSA - Costa Rica for his comments and contributions to improve this manuscript.

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* * *

Record of Depredation by *Spizaetus ornatus* on *Nyctibius grandis* in the Selva Biological Station, Sarapiquí, Heredia, Costa Rica

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The Ornate Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*) is a bird of prey from the tropics that is found from central Mexico to northern Argentina, mainly below 1,800 masl (Lyon and Kuhnigk 1985, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Iliff 2010). In Costa Rica, it is distributed in the lowlands and piedmont of the Caribbean and Pacific slopes, mainly in humid forests, although in rare cases it can be observed in dry forests, from sea level up to 1,500 meters, but it can reach up to 3,000 masl (Stiles and Skutch 1989, Iliff 2010, Garrigues and Dean 2014). This species of raptor depends on large areas of primary forest for reproduction, although it uses open areas to hunt and feed.

Their diet is composed of medium and large birds, medium-sized mammals, lizards and large snakes (Lyon and Kuhnigk 1985, Klein et al., 1988, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Clinton et al., 1991). Bird species documented in the Ornate Hawk-eagle's diet include: *Ara sp., Aramides cajaneus, Aratinga sp. Brotogeris sp., Cacicus sp., Crypturellus sp., Crax rubra, Leptotila plumbeiceps, Ortalis columbiana, Ortalis vetula, Penelope sp., Porphyrio martinicus, Psarocolius sp., Psophia leucoptera, Pteroglossus sp., Ptilogonys caudatus, Ramphastos vitellinus, Rupicola rupicola, Tinamus sp.*, vultures (Cathartidae) and other smaller birds (Lyon & Kuhnigk 1985, Klein et al. 1988, Clinton et al. 1991, Madrid et al., 1991, Robinson 1994, Iliff 2010 and Acosta-Chaves et al., 2012). However, no published records exist of an Ornate Hawk-eagle predating on a Great Potoo (*Nyctibius grandis).*

The Great Potoo is distributed from Mexico to eastern Peru, central Bolivia and southeastern Brazil. It is restricted to lowlands up to 1,000 masl depending on location (Stiles y Skutch 1989, Adams 2011). In Costa Rica it is considered uncommon to relatively common in wooded areas of the lowlands of the Caribbean slope and Gulfo Dulce up to 600 masl (Stiles and Skutch

1989, Garrigues and Dean 2014). The Great Potoo remains motionless during the day (with the vertical body and the horizontal head, similar to a branch) and closes its eyes slightly. It leaves a small slit open to be able to observe possible predators when they are near (Wetmore 1968 , Borrero 1974, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Tate 1994, Kricher and Davis 2010). Additionally, potoos have grooves on their eyelids that allow them to detect movement even when their eyes are closed (Borrero 1974).

The known predatory species of *N. grandis* include monkeys (*Cebus sp., Ateles geoffroyi* and *Alouatta palliata*), Tayra (*Eira barbara*) and Collared Forest Falcon (*Micrastur semitorquatus*) (Young and Zook 1999, Slusher 2008). The present note reports an observation of an Ornate Hawk-eagle predating on an individual Great Potoo.

Ornate Hawk-eagle *(Spizaetus ornatus)* **photographed at the Selva Biological Station, Costa Rica. Photo © Albert Ureña**

Methods and Results

On 16 September 2016 at 1300h the third author observed an individual Ornate Hawk-eagle depredating on a Great Potoo at the Selva Biological Station, La Virgen de Sarapiquí, province of Heredia, Costa Rica (10 ° 25 '47, 3 "N, 84 ° 00'22.8 ° W). The incident took place on the Camino Experimental Sur trail (CES), approximately 500m from the laboratories. A security guard reported on the radio that he was listening to and watching two "hawks" fighting on the ground. Several guides from the station quickly went to the area. Upon arrival, they observed the hawk-eagle depredating on the potoo. However, upon the arrival of the guides, the hawk-eagle quickly flew up to a branch near the prey. The potoo was dead. To avoid disturbing the natural hunting process of the species and due to the rain, the guides returned to the facilities. However, an hour later they returned to the site and found the remains

The remains of Great Potoo *(Nyctibius grandis)* **after being predated and fed upon by an Ornate Hawk-eagle** *(Spizaetus ornatus)* **(pictured bottom right). Photos © Albert Ureña**

of *N. grandis* partly consumed (without eyes or viscera). The Ornate Hawk-eagle was perched on a nearby branch with the potoo's feathers in its talons.

Discussion

S. ornatus is a large raptor that specializes in the predation of medium and large birds (Lyon and Kuhnigk 1985, Klein et al. 1988, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Clinton et al. 1991, Madrid et al., 1991, Robinson 1994, Iliff 2010, Acosta-Chaves et al., 2012). The Great Potoo's body size - 51 cm according to Stiles and Skutch (1989) - is within the range of the size of the prey preferred by *S. ornatus*. However, this incident of predation could have been an opportunistic one, especially when taking into account that the predator is diurnal and the prey is nocturnal.

This idea of opportunistic hunting was also sug-

gested by Acosta-Chaves (2015), when he reported an opportunistic attack of the noctural Mottled Owl (*Ciccaba virgata*) on the diurnal White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*). Therefore, it is possible that the hawk-eagle took advantage of the fact that the Great Potoo was sleeping and captured it.

The Great Potoo is a rare species in the study area. The fact that a few individuals can be observed on occasion, though not daily (Zook et al., 2012). Kross et al. (2013) indicates that many raptors are opportunistic and choose their prey according to their availability within an area.

This report on the predation by *S. ornatus* complements the data on its natural history, as there are few studies on the diet of predators of the genus *Spizaetus* (Fam and Nijman 2011). In addition, in several studies on the diet of *S. ornatus*, most of the birds predated on could not be identified at the species level (Klein et al., 1988, Rangel and Enríquez 1993), therefore these records allow a better understanding of the habits of this predatory bird (Acosta-Chaves et al., 2012).

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Thanks to Martin Oporta Abarca (security guard at OET) for his invaluable help in the observation of this report; and to Albert Ureña, a guide from OET who shared his photos for this article.

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The American Kestrel Partnership: a Citizen Science Program of The Peregrine Fund

By **Sarah Schulwitz**[1] and **Chris McClure**[1]
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The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is one of our most widespread falcons and can been seen across the Americas. This charismatic species has been steadily declining across much of its range since at least the 1960s but there has been no rigorous scientific evidence to explain the decline. In 2012, The Peregrine Fund launched the American Kestrel Partnership (www.kestrel.peregrinefund.org) to understand the decline and conserve our smallest and most colorful falcon.

We provide educational materials and facilitate 600+ partners in the collection and sharing of high quality data from across the kestrel range. Compared to the U.S. and Canada, we have fewer partners in Latin American countries, though these areas are equally important to the conservation and biology of this beautiful falcon. Therefore, increasing participation in Latin American countries is a priority for our program and for the conservation of this species. If you are in the known range for American Kestrels, we seek your participation! What is involved in monitoring?

1. Buy or build a nest box (plans available on the website) and fill with bedding.
2. Mount the nest box 2.5–9m high near open or field habitat.
3. Clean the nest box every winter and replace the bedding.
4. Check at least twice each season: once when there are likely eggs, and again within 30 days.
5. Share observations about your kestrels on the AKP website.

If you have already been monitoring boxes for some time, please send us your data for inclusion into the largest existing database on Ameri-

can Kestrels. Data can be entered for past years! If you have LOTS of data, contact kestrelpartnership@peregrinefund.org to request our Bulk Data Excel Template.

To increase participation beyond the US and Canada, the American Kestrel Partnership is also designing a 6-lesson curriculum for initial implementation in Dominican Republic schools with which The Peregrine Fund has already established strong relationships. For this pilot-year curriculum, we are developing education material that introduces concepts of species and habitat conservation and science-based decision making to school children.

These lessons simultaneously provide guided and real-world experience in scientific data collection using the model provided by the American Kestrel Partnership. As we move forward, we seek additional participation in Central and South American schools. We hope to provide or fund the physical materials (nest box, ladder, binoculars) needed for classrooms to get on board, but

The American Kestrel Partnership team: Tate Mason, Sara Schulwitz, Delora Hilleary and Chris McClure at The Peregrine Fund's headquarters in Boise, Idaho, USA.

we need to know how many classrooms to plan for. If you know a teacher (5th-10th grade) interested in raptor science, encourage them to contact the American Kestrel Partnership (kestrelpartnership@peregrinefund.org) to get involved!

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Below: **Nestling** *Falco sparverius* **banded as part of the AKP**

Below Right: **American Kestrels nesting in a nest box**

Above Right: **Checking a nest box**

Neotropical Raptor Monitoring Program in the Selva Lacandona, Mexico

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The state of Chiapas, in southeastern Mexico, is known for its richness in avifauna. 701 species of birds have been reported in the area, out of the 1,100 found throughout the entire country (Grosselet & Gutiérrez 2007). Specifically, the Selva Lacandona, situated in the high basin of the Usumacinta River, represents the area with the highest biological diversity in the nation. And because of its still high ecological integrity, it is considered a Priority Land Region (RTP-138) for conservation (Arriaga et al. 2000).

This region is one of the last areas of tropical humid forest, and it also contains the most extensive riparian forests in the country (Berlanga et al. 2007, 2008). Because of its geographic location, the Selva Lacandona represents the northernmost range of numerous plant and animal taxa from Central and South America. It is also a biological corridor for many species from the surrounding forested areas of Guatemala and Central America (Arriaga et al. 2000).

The wealth of avifauna in the Selva Lacandona is also reflected in the number of species of diurnal raptors that make up the complex community of birds in the region. With a total of 46 species of diurnal raptors (36 Accipitridae, Falconidae 10 - 32 resident and 14 migratory), the Selva Lacandona represents the region that holds the greatest wealth of raptors in the country. It is also critical -and perhaps the last remaining- habitat for the Harpy Eagle (Berlanga et al. 2006, 2008). To add to its importance, there have been recent sightings of raptors that are as emblematic as they are unknown, such as the Crested Eagle (*Morphnus guianensis*) (Grosselet y Gutiérrez 2007, de la Maza et al. 2015) and the Orange-breasted Falcon (*Falco deiroleucus*) (René Valdés, comm. pers.).

Left: **White Hawk** *(Pseudastur albicollis).* **Photo © Silvano López G.** *Right*: **Grey-headed Kite** *(Leptodon cayanensis)* **juvenile, October 2016. Photo © Alan Monroy-Ojeda.**

Despite its high biological richness, however, the Selva Lacandona is one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world, due to the intense exploitation of its natural resources and human colonization which has provoked the loss of land and changes in land use (Berlanga et al. 2008).

Between the years 2000 and 2012, close to 6% (142,000 hectares) of tree cover losses that occurred in Mexico took place in the region of the Selva Lacandona. Apart from being alarming, these figures represent the disappearance of at least 500 million trees and 32 million tons of biomass (approximately 3,500 individuals > 3 cm of DAP per hectare (Stegen et al. 2009, Carabias et al. 2015). Because of this, the group of experts who set the conservation priorities for the Action Program for the Conservation of Species "PACE: Neotropical Eagles and King Vulture," identified the Selva Lacandona and its network of protected areas as key sites in which to establish conservation, monitoring and social awareness programs about neotropical raptors.

Monitoring and Conservation of Neotropical Raptors Program

In September 2011, the group "Siyaj Chan" - a team of ecologists and ecotourism guides - observed and photographed a Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) within the protected area of "Monu-

Left: **Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) observed along the shore of the River Usumacinta by the Siyaj Chan group. Photo © Silvano López G.**
Right: **A pair of adult King Vultures (*Sarcoramphus papa*) in the Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna Chan-Kin.**

mento Natural Yaxchilán." As a result, in 2013, The National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) through the Program for the Conservation of Species at Risk (PROCER), began to fund a project for the conservation and monitoring of neotropical eagles in the "Monumento Natural Yaxchilán."

In 2013 and 2014, transects were carried out along the River Usumacinta. Point counts were also carried out in elevated zones and in the interior of the forest. In 2015, the monitoring effort was suspended and it wasn't until August 2016 that conservation efforts were taken up again with the incorporation of Dimensión Natural S.C. and Natura Mexicana A.C. as leaders of the conservation and monitoring programs.

With the help of the local organization, Siyaj Chan, and CONANP, monitoring efforts were expanded to the Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna Chan-ki, in addition to the work already being carried out in Yaxchilán. The 2016 monitoring plan for Yaxchilán includes: 2 elevated points, 1 transect of 16 km along the Usumacinta River (south-north); and for Chan-Kin: 1 elevated point, 1 transect of 10 km along Usumacinta River, and three transects within the forest with 32 point count locations.

Each aspect of the monitoring program will be carried out at least once a month, while also increasing monitoring in those sites where rare raptors have been located. Additionally, all birds of prey observed incidentally during Siyaj Chan's

regular outings with tourists to the Yaxchilán archeological zone will also be documented.

Preliminary Results

Preliminary results obtained in 2016 include the documenting of 32 species of diurnal raptors (70% of the total present in the region), including King Vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*), Black and White Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus melanoleucus*), Black Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*), Ornate Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*), and Grey-headed Kite *(Leptodon cayanensis*).

The latter species has bred in areas adjacent to a conservation zone which has been identified by local guides and community monitors from Siyaj Chan as an environment characterized by a matrix of agricultural fields run by the community.

By the end of 2016, we hope to obtain abundance estimates for each species. However, preliminary data suggest that the most common resident species are (in descending order): Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*), Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), Bat Falcon (*Falco rufigularis*), Road-side

Monitoring activities during one of the transects along the Usumacinta River.

Hawk (*Rupornis magnirostris*), White Hawk (*Pseudastur albicollis*), and King Vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*). Additionally, the monitoring effort allowed us to identify the main areas of transit, as well as those areas that require greater vigilance for the actual protection of natural resources within protected areas.

Parallel Actions

During the monitoring project we were allowed entry into areas of the Selva Lacandona where previously there was no strong institutional presence. Our presence and work has allowed us to document illegal logging activities and to confiscate precious timber cargoes in priority areas for the conservation of raptors. It should be noted that the loggers cross from Guatemala to Chan-Kin, and carry out clandestine logging activities mainly at night. Working together in coordination with the local communal authorities and CONANP has temporarily discouraged such illicit activities, however, the institutional presence must remain constant throughout the year.

Parallel to the monitoring activities, training and environmental awareness workshops have been held for different groups within the population of Frontera Corozal. The purpose of these workshops is to provide training so that the same local actor will be able to follow up on the records of the emblematic species, as well as the unrestricted care of their natural resources. To reinforce this commitment, the first community festival on "Birds and eco-tourism" will be organized at the end of November 2016 to promote bird-watching tourism as an economic alternative to meet the conservation objectives for the site.

Acknowledgements

We thank everyone involved in Siyaj-Chan for your commitment to the conservation of Selva Lacandona: Francisco Centeno, Feliciano Centeno, Servando López, César López, Juan Arcos, Gerardo Arcos, Daniel Gómez, & Anselma Díaz. To the personnel of CONANP: Julio Romaní, Emilio Roldán, Gabriel Hernández, Angélica. And we thank Julia Carabias and Javier de la Maza. And to everyone who makes conservation and sustainable use of natural resources possible in the Selva Lacandona.

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The NRN Celebrates the IV Neotropical Raptor Conference in Costa Rica

By **Marta Curti**

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Approximately every 4 years, the Neotropical Raptor Network (NRN) hosts a neotropical raptor conference with the goal of bringing together students, falconers, biologists, educators and others working in the field of raptor conservation in the neotropics. By creating a meeting point for these individuals we hope to facilitate ease of communication and increased collaboration to help continue to move raptor conservation forward in this region.

This year, the IV Neotropical Raptor Conference and II Symposium on Neotropical Owls was held in La Fortuna, Costa Rica from 10-13 October. The NRN and The Peregrine Fund partnered with Fundacion Rapaces de Costa Rica and the Grupo de Especialistas en Buhos Neotropicales to create a very memorable event.

The conference kicked off with a skills course on the Ecology, Monitoring and Identification of Migratory Raptors. On the 8th of October, course leaders from Fundacion Rapaces de Costa Rica and 14 participants headed to the Kekoldi Hawkwatch site on the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica. Kekoldi is one of the best places to observe raptor migration in the Americas. Indeed, course participants were treated to an amazing display of thousands of birds of prey migrating overhead during their two-day stay in the region.

Arenal Volcano, La Fortuna, Costa Rica
© Marta Curti

Courses continued on 10 October, where participants were able to gain some very valuable skills and hands-on experience. Dr. Miguel Saggese

Left and Right Top **Participants in the "Accessing Raptor Nests in Trees" raptor skills course © David Anderson.** *Right Below*: **Participants in the "Raptor Trapping" raptor skills courses © Marta Curti**

taught a course on Handling, Management and Taking Biomedical Samples in Raptors; David Anderson, Tyler Zúñiga, Hannah Prather and Jamz Luce led a day-long class in Accessing Raptor Nests in Trees; Chris McClure and Julio Gallardo spent a day giving participants an in-depth Introduction to Data Analysis, and Thomas Hayes, Hernan Vargas, Jose Vargas and Russell Thorstrom taught courses on Raptor Trapping and Marking and Radio Tagging of raptors.

The scientific sessions started off strong on 11 October with a presentation on "Osprey migration and wintering in Central and South America – A satellite's eye view," by our keynote speaker, Rob Bierregard. Over the following three days, more than 65 presentations were given during seven distinct sessions: Raptor Ecology, Raptor Behavior, Ridgway's Hawk Conservation, II Neotropical Owl Symposium, Harpy Eagle Ecology, Andean Condors and Other Vultures, and Raptor

Conservation and Management. Five participants also presented posters at the conference covering such topics as *Philornis* infestation in raptors and human-caused threats to Harpy Eagles.

The conference finished with a closing banquet and a wonderful, traditional Costa Rican "mascarada." Thanks to the talented artist, Luis Enrique Jimenez Villalobos of Eutoxeres Arte Naturalista, who spent almost a year creating the individual masks which represented both diurnal and nocturnal raptors of the neotropics, this event was one of the highlights of the conference.

We had wonderful sponsors who helped support the conference, including Raptor Research Foundation, e-obs GmbH, Milsar, Fundacion Propagas, TreeStuff, Pacific Northwest ISA, WeSpur, the Global Raptor Information Network, and the Costa Rican Ornithological Association. Conference participants also donated items to our silent auction. We raised over $600 for conservation of

The artist, Luis Enrique Jiménez Villalobos of Eutoxeres Arte Naturalista, and the beautiful masks he created for "La Mascarada" which took place during the closing banquet © Enrique Jiménez

Left: **Martin Quiroga presenting his poster on the infestation of** *Philornis* **in birds.** *Right*: **A few of the IV Neotropical Raptor participants, gathering around the Raptor Research Foundation sponsor table © Marta Curti**

the critically endangered Ridgway's Hawk in Dominican Republic. We also awarded cash prizes and a certificate to the three best presentations given by students.

Before, during and after the conference, we also offered birding excursions in and around La Fortuna. Many conference participants took advantage of these tours to get a chance to see some of Costa Rica's amazing wildlife. Some of the highlights included seeing Spectacled and Crested Owls on the night tour, and an Ornate Hawk-eagle being fed by its parents on a post-conference tour.

Close to 100 people from over 15 different countries participated in the conference. Most came from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean. However, we did have participants from as far away as Germany, Austria, South Africa and New Zealand.

All in all, it was a great success and we look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones at the next Neotropical Raptor Conference in four years.

* * *

Of Interest...

Grants

British Ecological Society

http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/funding/research-grants/

They offer grants in three distinct categories: Research, Travel & Training, and Dissemination. To apply, you must be a member of the BES. They will begin receiving proposals in **January 2017.** Grants are awarded in amounts ranging from $1,000 to $5,000 generally.

Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant

http://www.gos.org/bt_conservationgrants

Grant money will be used for "projects designed to benefit the conservation of bird species, particularly those that reside in Georgia on a seasonal or annual basis, or those that visit stopover habitats in Georgia during migration. Applications should request a minimum of $15,000 and program should pertain to actual implementation of bird conservation projects "on the ground," not research projects. Examples include conducting prescribed burns, implementing exotic species control efforts, relocating or restocking rare species, installing habitat such as nest boxes for non-game species, etc."

Holohil Grant Program

http://www.holohil.com/grant-program/

The Holohil Grant Program wishes to support projects that meet the following criteria: 1) the project makes significant use of Holohil transmitters for data collection; 2) the project aims to advance scientific knowledge; 3) the project contributes to conservation; 4) the project engages/educates the public; 5) the project involves underrepresented study species of high research or conservation value.

Neotropical Bird Club Conservation Award

www.neotropicalbirdclub.org/conservation/conservation-fund/

Research grants of $1,500, $3,000 and $5,000 are available subject to certain conditions. Grants are available for conservation work or research that has an intended conservation benefit. Applications are assessed twice yearly, with deadlines on 1 January and 1 July.