

# ADULT HARPY EAGLE SPOTTED IN THE BLADEN NATURE RESERVE

On the morning of February 9, 2007, Harpy Eagle a team of avian researchers working under a grant funded by The Nature Conservancy-Belize Program witnessed an extremely large raptor flying above the hills near Richardson Creek in the Bladen Nature Reserve. With the help of a spotting scope, it was determined to be an adult Harpy Eagle. The bird landed in a snag and stayed at the perch for a half hour allowing the team to capture both digital photos and a video clip through the lense of the spotting scope.

This second sighting of a Harpy Eagle is significant because it further documents Harpy Eagle presence in Belize's most highly protected area, the Bladen Nature Reserve. What does a Harpy Eagle sighting mean for conservation in the



Dan Dourson

Adult harpy eagle spotted in BNR in February 2007



Steven Brewer

Juvenile harpy eagle sighted in Dec. 2005

Maya Mountains Massif? From a scientific standpoint, potential nest sites in the BNR suggest that the region is productive enough, large enough and diverse enough to support a variety of top predators. Considered one of the largest and most powerful eagles in the world, the Harpy is capable of snatching a spider monkey from a tree while on wing.

The first sighting of a juvenile Harpy Eagle in the Bladen Nature Reserve in December of 2005 by a different team of researchers initiated a multi-organizational interest in determining the status of Harpies in BNR and the Maya Mountains as a whole. As a result of this interest, a proposal was submitted to The Nature Conservancy Belize Program. The project, "An Integrated Community-Based Harpy Eagle and Avian Conservation Program for the Maya Mountains Massif" was developed and submitted for funding consideration by Jacob Marlin of Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education

(BFREE) and Dr. James Rotenberg, University of North Carolina at Wilmington. The proposal's three main objectives were: 1) to initiate the survey and monitoring of Harpy Eagles in the Bladen Nature Reserve (BNR) as a complement to the current, on-going Belize Harpy Eagle Reintroduction Program (BHERP) in Northern Belize; 2) to initiate survey and monitoring of Neotropical migratory and resident birds in the BNR to provide base-line data contributing to regional-scale avian conservation, while providing for community-based alternative livelihood strengthening; and 3) to enhance environmental awareness of protected areas and species through an environmental education program.



Dan Dourson

**Dr. Rotenberg, UNCW, instructs the team while in the field near Quebrada De Oro**

In November of 2006, BFREE was granted funding from The Nature Conservancy Belize Program for the project. The project began by conducting interviews with individuals from the buffer communities of the Bladen Nature Reserve interested in serving as avian technicians. William Garcia and Henry Perez, both from Trio Village, were selected to become trained avian technicians. Wilfred Mutrie, birding guide from Punta Gorda, was selected as the Chief Avian Technician for the program. Dan Dourson, Resident Biologist at BFREE, was selected as project coordinator and science consultant, and Sharna Tolfree, of North Carolina, was brought on board by Dr. Rotenberg to assist with banding the birds.



Wilfred Mutrie

**Blue-Crowned Motmot**



**The Avian Team from left to right: Henry Perez (Avian Technician), Wilfred Mutrie (Chief Avian Technician), Sharna Tolfree (Bird Bander), Dan Dourson (Project Coordinator) and William Garcia (Avian Technician).**

William and Henry began their training at Birds Without Borders in December where they participated in a two-week intensive training session on birding basics. The following week, Dr. James Rotenberg and Sam Meacham presented a workshop for members of the team on netting and banding techniques as well as setting up permanent netting stations. Other NGO organizations were invited to participate and representatives from TIDE and YCT were present for the training.

In January of 2007, the Avian team spent 12 days netting, banding, and identifying birds as well as searching for the Harpy Eagle. No harpies were sighted during this session however, valuable data was collected regarding native and Neotropical migratory bird species presence in the Bladen Nature Reserve.



Dan Dourson

**Above:** Adult Harpy Eagle as seen through spotting scope in February

Angel Muela of Fundo Peregrino, arrived from Panama in March to conduct a two-day training seminar at BFREE on Harpy Eagles for the Avian team. Also present at the training were four representatives of YCT. The training consisted of a half-day workshop and a field trip into the Bladen where the most recent harpy was sighted. During the workshop, harpy eagle posters were donated by Sharon Mattola of the Belize Zoo. The posters were distributed to village representatives from five buffer zone communities to be placed as part of a public awareness and environmental awareness campaign.



Jacob Marlin

**Above:** Angel Muela (far left), of Fundo Perigrino in Panama at "Fishbone Crossing" in BNR with Avian Team



Jacob Marlin

**Left:** Angel presents workshop on Harpy Eagles in March at BFREE

In addition to the documentation of the Harpy Eagle, the Avian Conservation Project is reaching into the buffer communities that surround the Bladen with its conservation message. William and Henry received reports of a Harpy Eagle nest located in the jungle near Trio Village. The Avian Team investigated the report but unfortunately, no Harpy nests were found. All was not lost as the visit served to raise community awareness about Harpy Eagles. William and Henry report that interest in the harpy eagle continues to increase as more people in Trio learn about the project. They continue to share the conservation message in their community.



Dan Dourson

#### **Bladen Nature Reserve**

Wilfred Mutrie, Chief Technician for the project, a recognized and respected birder in the Toledo district, has also taken this opportunity to expand horizons for the technicians from Trio. Recently, Wilfred invited William to participate as an assistant on a birding tour for a group of students from the United States. This networking is an example of how a science-based conservation program with a focus on building capacity from within can be a successful model for protected area conservation and management.

*Text by: Judy & Dan Dourson*



Dan Dourson



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Above: A painted bunting, a neotropical migratory bird that was captured and banded as part of the project