

FALL/WINTER 2020-2021

PASO PACÍFICO

MAKING CONNECTIONS FOR CONSERVATION





WHERE WE WORK

VOLCÁN COSIGÜINA, MACAW EPICENTER



Volcán Cosigüina is a pristine strato-volcano near the Gulf of Fonseca, and its forests have a special claim to fame. They contain the last flock of wild cyanoptera scarlet macaws (*Ara macao cyanoptera*) in western Central America. Tragically, this subspecies is nearly extinct in the wild.

Since 2016, our staff have fought poaching pressure, forest fires, and natural predators to protect these macaws. Loro Parque Fundación, the American Nicaraguan Foundation, the Brandywine Zoo, and Projets Plus Actions helped make this possible. Their support has saved three nestlings — a 20% increase in population. This season, \$50,000 is needed to save new macaws and stabilize the project long term. To join in this effort, we invite you to donate to our macaw campaign. Please make your gift today at pasopacifico.org/savemacaws.

Front cover: Two cyanoptera macaws in flight. Photo by Oswaldo Saballos.

Dear Friends,

We send you our gratitude and warmest greetings. COVID-19 has impacted nearly every corner of our world, but the work you maintain has continued. *2020 was our fifteenth year!* In addition to providing for our usual efforts, your remarkable outpouring of support has alleviated suffering through emergency food relief for communities.

Your giving during this challenging time inspires me. I am also inspired by our staff's increased commitment to their own health, the health of their communities, and our mission that is so vital to this planet. For example, our intrepid education team (led by women rangers) have organized remote Junior Ranger lessons through family cell phones, helping children remain safely engaged in learning about the natural world. Our forest ranger team moved and planted 15,000 native trees with local landowners, all while setting an example wearing protective masks in the tropical humidity and heat.

Challenges are plentiful during the pandemic. In Central America, El Salvador underwent military-enforced lockdowns, canceling our parrot projects midseason. Nicaraguans have suffered gravely under the pandemic, and we lost our regular birding consultant and dear friend Luis Díaz to the virus. Our team is remaining cautious while launching raptor monitoring efforts in Luis' memory. Like you, we are pushing through.

Your gifts have made great things possible. I hope this newsletter boosts your spirits, giving you faith in a better tomorrow. We will get through this together.

With gratitude,

Dr. Sarah Otterstrom
Founder & Executive Director



HELPING RURAL COMMUNITIES AMID COVID-19

Your generous donations to our COVID-19 aid fund turned into months of relief supplies for 270 vulnerable families in Nicaragua. Your gifts were augmented by the PRBB Foundation, which provided fresh oysters from local women's oyster cooperatives we support, and the American Nicaraguan Foundation.

Your gifts and the support of new donors Dick and Laura Thielscher have also enabled us to pass aid to hundreds of other families in vulnerable communities in El Salvador and Guatemala. In addition, you helped us deliver 200 3D-printed face shields to rural Nicaraguan clinics and hospitals. The PPE was produced by STEMbassadors, a Ventura, California high school group, and sent through an anonymous local donor. Thank you for stepping up and saving lives!



REMEMBERING A BRILLIANT BIRDER

Luis Fernando Díaz Chávez (September 12, 1988 – June 3, 2020) was a brilliant young ornithologist taken from us by COVID-19. He was an important seasonal team member for over a decade. As a consulting member of our bird monitoring teams, he spent weeks at a time in the field during the peak of the spring and fall migrations. He also regularly participated in our Christmas Bird Counts, bird-banding stations, and other special projects.

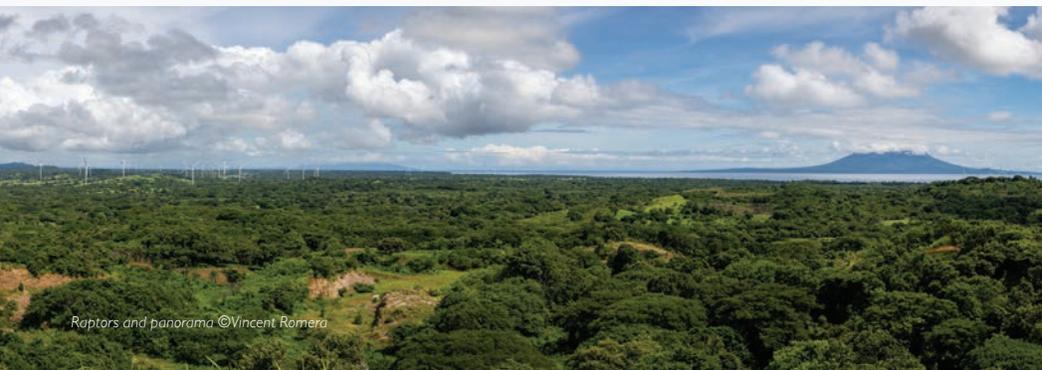
Paso Pacífico staff admired Luis as one of the best birders in the country. They were always impressed by his passion. Even after long days in the field, this brilliant young ornithologist would retire to his hammock to review bird calls and select his favorite birding photos. Coming from humble circumstances, he scrimped to buy birding guides and equipment, taking special care of them, and diligently supported his mother. Luis was also very kindhearted and gentle. His teammates say he was always willing to share his time with students interested in birds. Over the years, he helped train over 500 children in bird-watching. We will never forget him.

Many of you sent gifts to support his widowed mother. She has used the funds to start a business that she hopes will sustain her far into the future. We send you our sincerest gratitude.

STUDYING RAPTORS TO CEMENT A LEGACY

Each fall, millions of raptors — hawks, eagles, condors, falcons, etc. — migrate south. They face numerous threats and many parts of their routes are unknown to science. Last year, Luis Díaz and the rest of our team found a major migratory pathway and documented an estimated 1.29 million raptors in just 3 weeks. The average number of raptors counted per hour was 6,117!

This study laid the foundation for future Nicaraguan raptor monitoring research. We are honoring Luis' memory by monitoring again this year, and our team dreams of naming a permanent monitoring station after him. We are also helping finish Luis' work-in-progress, the first-ever birding guide to Nicaraguan raptors. You can participate in these meaningful efforts by giving at pasopacifico.org/raptors2020.



Raptors and panorama ©Vincent Romera

THANK YOU, NEW DONORS!

These donors supported our work for the first time from September 2019–September 2020.

Sophie Alfonso
Kristen Allison
Laurie Ashton & Lynn Sarko
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Sandra Vasquez
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Holly White
Jamie White
Tom White
Kevyn Wightman
Breelyn Young
David Younkman
Oscar Zavala
Verena Zydek

DONOR SPOTLIGHT



FRANCIE RUTHERFORD & JIM GOETZ

Francie Rutherford and Jim Goetz believe in supporting their community and protecting the environment. They put these values in action through extensive volunteering, staying close with family, and giving generously to Paso Pacífico and other nonprofits. Together, they enjoy supporting our Junior Rangers and women's oyster cooperatives. Their gifts have changed many lives, and on a donor trip they enjoyed meeting the hardworking women and youth who are striving to nurture their natural resources.

Jim is a retired civil engineer who specialized in designing wastewater management systems. He enjoys boating and woodworking, but is most passionate about supporting a new generation of global citizens. A retired psychoanalyst, Francie spent her career helping people overcome personal challenges and now works tirelessly as an activist. Her wide-ranging interests include environmental spirituality, women's empowerment, and environmental justice in urban areas. We are deeply grateful to Jim and Francie for their support.



Our Nicaragua staff gathers for the first time in two years.

FROM THE FIELD



Dr. Sarah Otterstrom
Founder & Executive Director

While completing a doctorate degree in fire ecology in Central America, Sarah met the communities of the Paso del Istmo and dedicated her life to working alongside them to restore their natural ecosystems. She has led our work for almost fifteen years.

Here in February 2020, she holds her newest birthday twin: Gema, the daughter of ranger Yorlin Vargas and his wife Isaura.

February 2020 was a joyful month for me. It began with travel in El Salvador, working on exciting bird projects there, and ended with my first visit to Nicaragua in two years. This trip was much anticipated. Since 1999, I have been either living in Nicaragua or traveling there several times a year in connection with developing and leading Paso Pacífico. The separation was hard on all of us.

The 2018 Upheaval

Why didn't I visit Nicaragua for two years? In April 2018, civil unrest exploded in the country. The Paso del Istmo was relatively calm. Our inland staff minimized travel. However, that July our longtime country director, Liza González, and family began receiving serious death threats. We have not shared this story publicly until now.

Liza and her in-country children and grandchildren hid at home. They bolted the doors, shuttered and locked the windows, and barely spoke above whispers while we scrambled to get them out. After two weeks, they courageously left everything behind and navigated the roiling capital city. Dressed as tourists and carrying a single suitcase each, they boarded a plane and successfully entered the United States. We wept. Her grandchildren were overjoyed to safely play outside again. Since 2018, Liza's family has been able to

settle, go to school and find jobs in a new country while going through the asylum process. Our hearts are filled with gratitude to the generous donors who flew them to safety and helped them begin their new lives.

Liza continued managing our projects remotely for a time. While she remains in close contact, she stepped down as Central American Director at the close of 2019. It is the end of an era; Liza has been with Paso Pacífico since our founding. Liza, we love you and we thank you for your service and sacrifices.

In the meantime, our programs have been able to continue. While we feel that our staff there are safe, we are taking extra precautions. As a part of these, I did not travel to the country for two years.

Back to the Field at Last

This February, Nicaragua finally seemed safe enough for me to visit. I returned with my 11-year-old son. It was an incredibly moving experience. When I reunited with our staff, they expressed many words of gratitude to you donors for keeping them going. Rangers Marcos Pizarro and Hector Espinoza, who lost their homes in the 2017 hurricane, bore their hearts to me to thank those of you who helped rebuild their homes. Thank you, thank you, thank you, for all of your support.



My son and I accompanied the parrot rangers as they checked on the health of endangered young yellow-naped Amazon parrots. The team had another record-breaking year of successful nests.



This juvenile macaw is one of the three cyanoptera chicks your donations have helped save. With your support, this nearly-extinct species can continue.

At last, I stepped onto the sea turtle beaches and met with the turtle rangers again. It was thrilling to be together, and we mostly laughed and talked about the beauty and the impact of their work. I also joined our parrot team as they scaled massive trees and checked on the health of growing parrotlets. Seeing the baby parrots filled my son with wonder.

The highest point of the whole trip was a staff luncheon we held in Managua. We gathered our biologists, administrative staff, rangers, and technicians from many locations for a joyful reunion and a delicious meal funded by a kind donor. During that time, I was able to remind everyone of Paso Pacífico's awe-inspiring purpose, our strength from that purpose, and the trust and belief that each of you donors has in them and their work.

Along with this message to our team, I was able to also meet new team members, including community rangers from the remote Cosigüina peninsula. Theirs is a special purpose. In their area flies the last population of cyanoptera macaws on the Pacific Slope. The community rangers live in a zone of extreme poverty. A single macaw chick could fetch as much money as most people earn in a year, and some of the rangers had never even traveled to the capital city of Managua. Coming to this lunch helped them see that they are valued and that they are part of a caring team working for a greater cause.

The Trials of Protecting Macaws

Layers of challenge require a sophisticated, multilayered response. As I reflect on my new friendship with these community rangers, I think about how their project illustrates this. It's sad to say, but we have only

been able to return three chicks to the wild in four years of macaw conservation work. However, we have learned from each and every failure.

When a nest was destroyed by African bees, we purchased a beekeeping suit. Now, our parrot ranger team visits every potential nest and removes the fatally aggressive bees.

Wildfires destroyed at least two active macaw nests, so we provided food donations and transportation to the local volunteer fire brigade. This helped them stay engaged in firefighting throughout the dry season. We also worked with the municipal government to transport and plant 7,000 native trees in burned areas, restoring habitat.

We have also been proactive against poaching. Our educational workshops share the macaws' importance with all ages. We hire and train local rangers. We offer incentives to community members who keep the nests safe. Our camera traps help monitor active nests. This year, as the macaw chicks were growing, we even sent additional rangers from southern Nicaragua to join the Cosigüina rangers and provide 24-hour protection to the nest.

Yet heartbreak still occurred this year, right under our camera trap: A barred forest falcon fought off the parent macaws and consumed an advanced nest of three older chicks. Nature is infuriating sometimes.

These challenges are considerable, but we believe these beautiful birds are worth saving for future generations. We will continue to fight, and I invite you to join us for the 2021 season. All macaw donors will receive exclusive special reports on the season's progress — just start donating at pasopacifico.org/savemacaws.



While in Nicaragua, I met our Cosigüina macaw rangers for the first time. Their work is essential to protecting the critically endangered cyanoptera macaw.



I am in awe whenever I see rangers climb so high to check nests and protect endangered birds. Thank you to all of you who give to power their critical work — you make it happen!

In Conclusion

COVID-19 was accelerating worldwide as my trip concluded. I savored each last moment, knowing this then-epidemic would change all our lives and keep me out of Nicaragua for another unknown length of time. The visit renewed me and energized our team for the coming challenges. It reminded me of our mission's value and our incredible team's reliance and strength. Our team wholly committed to the cause, despite difficult times and physical separation from top leadership. They have grown stronger and have taken unprecedented initiative. We are well placed to continue conservation in Nicaragua, even after most other conservation organizations have halted their work. At the same time, we

have begun programs in El Salvador, a country where international conservation organizations have been nearly absent for over a decade. Your donations have made a difference for nature and communities in these incredible regions and will continue to do so.

Our renewed morale was matched by the support that friends and donors like you gave this year. COVID-19 is creating tremendous hardship everywhere due to loss of life and livelihoods, but your gifts have buoyed our team as we have confronted this next big challenge. You give us the hope and strength to know that together, we will get through this global pandemic. The vital work of community-focused conservation continues on. Thank you.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Cyanoptera macaws (*Ara macao cyanoptera*) are distinctive due to their large size and lack of a green band between their yellow and blue feathers.
- Cosigüina's flock is the last in Nicaragua and all of western Central America. The macaws' decline is due to incredibly high poaching for the pet trade in addition to deforestation and natural predation.
- Their eyes are dark when young and lighten to a pale yellow when they reach adulthood.
- Their regional name is the "lapa roja." They were once so common that locals viewed them as pests.





RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Thanks to Patagonia's environmental internship program, Patagonia employees Pasha Whitmire and Natasha Woodward visited El Salvador on our behalf in late 2019. They spent their days hiking, interviewing landowners, and meeting with partners from the government, NGO, and tourism sectors. We deeply appreciated their contributions. [D](#) [F](#)
- Together with our in-country partner FUNZEL, we marshaled a national alliance to protect the yellow-naped Amazon parrot in El Salvador. Several major media outlets covered the one-day alliance workshop led by Paso Pacifico biologists and attended by executive director Sarah Otterstrom. This important conservation story reached millions of Salvadorans in 2019.
- Our bird monitoring team captured an endangered southwest willow flycatcher that was banded in San Diego County, California. This finding reinforces knowledge of the migratory connections between southern California and Nicaragua and underlines the wide-ranging impact of conserving habitat in Nicaragua.
- Our biologist attended Central America's first cetacean congress in March 2020 and presented just before the conference went virtual due to coronavirus concerns. The historic meeting brought scientists together to collaborate in studying and protect whales and dolphins.

- In 2019, El Salvador participated in the International Coastal Cleanup under our leadership for the first time, with 64 volunteers removing 3400 pounds of trash from the beaches. Nicaragua's 2019 cleanups extended for several months and included an underwater cleanup, where fishermen helped recover 48 large net fragments from the ocean floor. A total of 1335 people participated and collected 12,300 pounds of garbage. Two graduated Junior Rangers interned with our team to assist with this effort. The 2020 cleanup saw high participation across Nicaragua and the results are forthcoming. [A](#)
- The 2020 nesting season was another record year for Nicaragua's yellow-naped Amazon parrots! 39 endangered parrot chicks hatched and are now flying free.
- In the spring, our longtime turtle ranger Felix Reyes trained with the Guanacaste Conservation Area firefighters to bring their firefighting techniques to our next season fighting wildfires in the dry tropical forest. [C](#)
- The Junior Rangers received hygiene lessons in early March before we went virtual. The Junior Rangers enjoyed local art contests we hosted, sending in masterpieces like [E](#). Many kids were newly able to participate remotely because of a recent gift of art kits from children in Provo, Utah. For families in need, we also provided phone credits to enable lessons over the phone.



D



E



- El Salvador's government has been welcoming. In recent months, we have worked closely with the ministry of the environment on national-level planning for cetaceans, yellow-naped Amazon parrots, and black-handed spider monkeys.
- Salvadoran community members like [B](#) are regularly patrolling to document shy Salvadoran spider monkeys on our behalf. It has been exciting to see their pictures of these rediscovered primates, of which science has much to learn.
- Due to increased poaching pressure, our turtle rangers are focusing their efforts to protect the most important nesting beaches. Their concerns were highlighted in an article from respected environmental news source Mongabay.

- Local rangers, Junior Rangers, and community members enjoyed participating in several international bird counts in Nicaragua. In late 2019, they recorded 3 species new to their country's Global Big Day count. At the start of 2020, our participants counted 149 species in the Christmas Bird Count — 12 more than last year.
- The InvestEGGator decoy turtle egg and our sea turtle conservation work appeared on Good Morning America in March. In addition, BBC, The Economist, CNN, NPR, and over 120 other international news outlets just published stories about a new peer-reviewed study by Dr. Helen Pheasey, who conducted field trials with the egg in Costa Rica.

F



2020 CANOPY MEMBERS

Chris Ayotte
Felice Berenson
Nan Busse & Tobey Kaplan
Lynn Crew & Aaron Miller
Kate & Matt Dolkas
Sherry & Richard Dorfman
Kai Ewert &
Belinda Abelson
Josephine & Ross Falvo
Jill Forman & David Young
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Patricia Wells-Turnage*
Michael Whitaker
Susan Wolstencroft
Eliza Woolley*
Ginger Woolley*

Thank you! Your monthly gifts support us all year and make it possible to plan for a better future saving endangered wildlife.

* Gives multiple monthly donations



JOIN THE CANOPY

Canopy members joyfully “subscribe” to our cause. Most send a donation each month. Their thoughtful and consistent gifts stabilize and strengthen our life-changing daily operations.

To join this incredible group of donors, please visit pasopacifico.org/canopy or start giving monthly to any campaign. You may also virtually “round up your change” for any card transaction by signing up at pasopacifico.org/roundup.





WHO PARTNERS WITH US?

Since 1998, nonprofit Fundación Uno has supported education, culture, conservation, and health in Nicaragua. Highlights of their environmental activities in the Paso del Istmo wildlife corridor, where we work, include a massive reforestation effort along the Pan-American highway and a botanical garden that hosts hundreds of land-race varieties (local strains) of food crops.

We have joined forces with them to expand protected areas in the Paso del Istmo. In January 2020, conservation pioneer Dr. Jaime Incer Barquero (above left) and other Fundación Uno leaders spoke with our environmental education staff and toured a beach protected by our sea turtle rangers. We are grateful for this new partnership. Together, we will protect southwestern Nicaragua's most precious resources.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Earth's climate is changing, and no corner of our planet goes unaffected. At press time, Hurricane Eta is striking Nicaragua's northwestern coast. This Category 4 hurricane is the second strongest of the 2020 Atlantic season and one of the latest ever. The human and environmental toll of such storms is staggering. Paso Pacifico is responding by connecting humanitarian relief organizations, including the California-based organization Direct Relief, with partners on the ground in Central America that can mobilize emergency relief.

One of the best ways you can fight climate change and its effects is to reduce personal carbon emissions. You can also "fix" the greenhouse gas CO₂ back into natural resources such as trees, soil microbes, and ocean plankton. Carbon offsets take advantage of this mechanism by funding reforestation that removes carbon from the atmosphere. We know these work. Our 2007 offset program, called 'Return to Forest', has restored forest and over time will absorb over 250,000 tons of CO₂.

Offsets are not the only strategy to stop climate change, but they are one. This year, Paso Pacifico has committed to audit emissions created through our operations and purchase credits to offset those emissions. We will do this through our new partnership with Offset Alliance. This company makes monthly offsets possible. **We invite you to research carbon offsetting and consider what you can do today to help conserve Earth as we know it.**

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FEATURED STAFF

Coordination in Nicaragua

These conservation managers play a vital role in facilitating our projects and managing our field staff.

Nohémi Velásquez

Administrative Coordinator, Nicaragua

Marcos Calero

Jaguar and Bee Programs Coordinator

Julio Collado

Community Relations Coordinator

Jairo Coronado

Sea Turtle Program Coordinator

Jarinton García

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