

Saving the Blue-billed Curassow: El Paujil Reserve, Columbia

GCBO's Tropical Forest Forever Fund teams up with American Bird Conservancy and Fundación ProAves with a grant of \$15,000 to acquire and protect critical bird habitat in Columbia.

In the heart of the 700 mile-long Magdalena valley, a humid forest refugia called the Serranía de las Quinchas is sandwiched between the Magdalena River and the Eastern Cordilleras of Colombia. Las Quinchas contains one of the richest lowland biotas outside of the Amazon, with exceptional levels of species richness and endemism. Six global and/or National Critically Endangered species, 4 Endangered species, and 9 Vulnerable species, including the Blue-billed Curassow, Variegated Spider-Monkey, Magdalena Tapir, and the Magdalena Bocadito fish all reside here. Overall, an astounding 339 bird species have been documented at the site, including 23 species of Nearctic-Neotropical migrants that winter here.

Wintering El Paujil Nearctic-Neotropical Migrants

Broad-winged Hawk
Swainson's Hawk*
Acadian Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Great Crested
Flycatcher
Yellow-throated Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Bank Swallow
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Tennessee Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler*
Cerulean Warbler*
Black-and-white Warbler
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush
Mourning Warbler
Canada Warbler*
* = ABC Watchlist

Unfortunately, this crucial habitat is threatened. The river's wide forested flood-plains and slopes have been converted to agricultural land, largely fueled by glowing (and unrealistic) reports of the region's natural wealth. Since the 1960s a massive internationally financed colonization and infrastructure program, resulted in the elimination of nearly four million hectares of humid lowland forest in a little over a decade.

Today, infrastructure development and colonization continues unabated in the Magdalena Valley which is now almost completely deforested with only a few fragments remaining. The largest of which is around Serranía de las Quinchas where roads have only recently penetrated. With international support from the American Bird Conservancy and Conservation International, Fundación ProAves was able to acquire ~3000 acres of humid lowland forest in the Magdalena Valley to establish the El Paujil Reserve and a community outreach program. While the community fully supports the reserve and the closure of hunting in the protected areas, timber exploitation remains a serious threat.

Fundación ProAves has established a conservation plan that includes acquiring and protecting ten strategic properties totaling 9,480 acres. This includes just over 5,070 acres of pristine lowland forests that are unclaimed and will be protected by the expansion. This is a challenging but attainable goal requiring many conservation partners. GCBO is proud to assist in this exciting and important protection plan.