

Habitat Conservation

Tropical Forest Forever Fund Heats Up Chile Rain Forest Project
By Cecilia M. Riley

In September of 2013 we were honored to make a grant in the amount of \$20,000 for payment of debt on 128 acres of The Nature Conservancy's Valdivian Coastal Reserve, Chile, purchased via loan in 2003. The funds originated from the GCBO's Tropical Forest Forever Fund that is supported by our members and generous donors who are dedicated to the permanent protection of tropical forests in the Americas.

Chile's Valdivian temperate forest, the second-largest temperate rain forest in the world, forms a narrow strip of habitat between the western slope of the Andes and the Pacific Ocean, running from 35° to 48° south latitude. Historically, the temperate forest of the Valdivian Coastal Range extended 250 miles along the Chile's southern coast. Today, only about 275,000 acres of the original one million acres of the Coastal Range remain intact, some of which is protected at sites such as The Nature Conservancy's Valdivian Coastal Reserve.

Isolated from other South American forests since the mid-Tertiary Period, the Valdivian temperate forest has become a hot spot for endemic species. Among the endemic birds found in this forest are the Chilean Pigeon, Slender-billed Parakeet, Black-throated Huet-huet, Chucao Tapaculo and Ochre-flanked Tapaculo. The iconic Magellanic Woodpecker, the largest woodpecker in the world, is another endemic of the Valdivian temperate forest. Conservation of this ancient forest, characterized by the dominance of deciduous species of *Nothofagus*, is not only essential for the diverse plants and endemic animals that live there, but also for the human communities that depend on the freshwater lakes and rivers that the forest protects. However, much of this forest is considered vulnerable to habitat destruction. BirdLife International has categorized the Valdivian temperate forest as an Endemic Bird Area of "urgent" priority, threatened by "major" habitat loss, and for which there is



The Magellanic Woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in the world. TNC contributed photo.



Neartic-Neotropical migrants like this Sanderling stopover at the Valdivian Coastal Reserve during long journeys between the Americas. Photo by Michael L. Gray

incomplete knowledge to guide conservation efforts. Additionally, given its long coastline, system of large estuaries, and the influence of the highly productive Humboldt Current, Chile is important for migratory shorebirds and seabirds. Significant proportions of the global populations of species that include the Sanderling, Whimbrel, and Franklin's Gull, among others, can be found along the Chilean coast, including the coastline bordering the Valdivian forest. The most numerous colonies of the Red-legged Cormorant (listed as Near Threatened) on the planet also occur along the Chilean coast.

Because of the Reserve's size, it is an area of high conservation value because it protects a functional landscape and is home to an important representation of coastal temperate forest biodiversity. It is a model of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, based on scientific and community support ensuring effective protection of its rich diversity of ecosystems, species, and biological processes.