

Securing a Home for the Yellow-billed Cotinga

In June of 2012 GCBO was thrilled to provide a \$30,000 Tropical Forest Forever Fund grant to Osa Conservation. With the grant, Osa Conservation was able to establish the Yellow-billed Cotinga - Prothonotary Warbler Reserve by purchasing a 29.16 acre tract of land at the mouth of the Rincon River. Please read the full report below. More help is needed – consider a donation to help!



Yellow-billed Cotinga

Photo: Glenn Bartley



Prothonotary Warbler

Photo: Greg Lavaty

Project Title and Location: Yellow-billed Cotinga - Prothonotary Warbler Reserve, Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica

Organization: Osa Conservation

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Summary: The Yellow-billed Cotinga (*Carpodectes antoniae*) (YBCO) is an endangered habitat specialist endemic to Isthmian Pacific moist forests of Mesoamerica. Relegated to its preferred habitat (mangrove forest and adjacent upland forest) from the Tarcoles River on Costa Rica's central Pacific coast south to Panama's Burica Peninsula, recent distributional surveys found widespread habitat loss and fragmentation throughout its range. In Panama, the YBCO is nearing extirpation. Remaining populations in Costa Rica are diminished, increasingly isolated and declining. Survey efforts indicate the Osa Peninsula constitutes the last remaining stronghold for this species (Jones et al 2009). The entire global population is estimated at between 300 and 800 individuals. Remaining populations are threatened by ongoing habitat destruction.

Osa Conservation (OC), working collaboratively with partners, is seeking funds to establish a YBCO reserve at Rincon to protect one of three surviving populations on the Osa Peninsula. Recognizing that the Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) (PROW), a winter-limited, US Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Conservation Concern, requires the same habitat dyad (mangrove forest-upland forest), creation of the cotinga reserve will also benefit PROW and other wintering neotropical migrants.

Establishment of the reserve will serve as the foundation for a peninsula-wide effort to secure threatened habitat for the YBCO and PROW. It will also create a model linking protection of rare tropical species with conservation of important wintering habitat for neotropical migrants. This model has widespread application for conservation of critical bird habitat throughout Latin America.

Budget: \$75,500 for 11.8 hectares (\$5,085/hectare)

Owner	Hectares	Price/Hectare	Total
Rincon Tract	11.8 hectares	\$5,085	\$60,000
Legal Fees, Taxes/Legal Costs, Other Closing Costs			\$7,000
Management (0 or up to 20%)			\$8,500
Total Funds Needed:			\$75,500

Organizational Background:

Osa Conservation (OC) is a nonprofit conservation organization (501c3 status is current) committed to the preservation of the Osa Peninsula's globally significant biodiversity by ensuring the maintenance, restoration and long-term viability of the ecosystems on and around the Osa Peninsula. OC was founded in 2003 and has offices in Washington, DC and Puerto Jiménez, Costa Rica.

OC is spearheading efforts to establish biological corridors on the peninsula to ensure long-term viability of the peninsula's biological communities and ecosystems by maintaining ecological connectivity. Specifically, OC is working to establish the Corcovado-Matapalo Biological Corridor as a buffer for Corcovado National Park and to establish a biological corridor between Corcovado National Park and Piedras Blancas National Park. OC also pursues targeted conservation of rare species habitats.

OC currently owns and manages 5,800 acres of land that has been declared part of the federally recognized Osa National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR). OC also works with private landowners to provide oversight and effective land stewardship for 1,800 acres of privately owned land enrolled as part of the ONWR.

Project Site Background:

The proposed reserve is located on the northeast coast of the Osa Peninsula at the mouth of the Rincon River (see map). Reserve boundaries include mangroves associated with the Rincon River estuary as well as adjacent upland forest. All but 600 meters of the six kilometre length of Rincon mangroves are bound by cattle pasture, rice fields, teak and African oil palm plantations. Most of the remaining 600 meters is bordered by upland forest within the government designated Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. Forests within the reserve are considered "Patrimony of the State," as are mangroves. Thus, both are afforded some level of government protection. The 600 meter upland forest-mangrove ecotone constitutes the only protected forest gradient at Rincon.

Of particular concern is an 11.8 hectare parcel falling outside of the forest reserve. Located on the south bank of the Rincon River, the parcel supports a remnant patch of tall, second growth riparian forest determined to be vitally important for the Rincon population of YBCO.

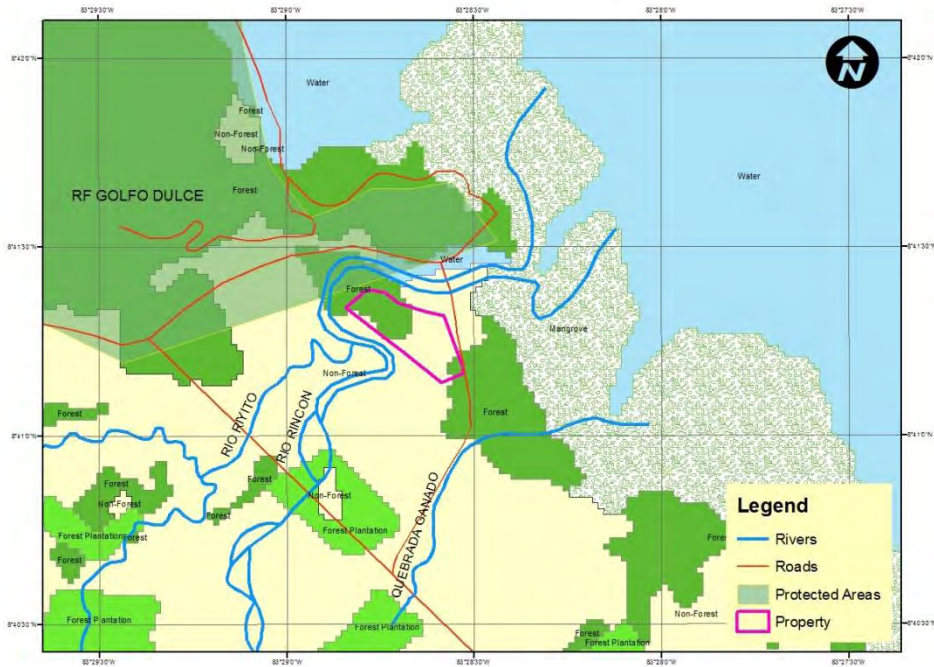
YBCO radio telemetry studies by Leavelle (2011) indicate the subject parcel constitutes critical habitat within core range for the Rincon population of this endangered bird. Leavelle noted a single radio-tagged female used this parcel every day during a 10 month observation period. Additional 'untagged' birds were also seen using the parcel daily throughout the study period. In January 2011, 18 individual YBCO were observed using the parcel over a 1.5 hour period.

The parcel has no formal protection and is threatened by conversion to African oil palm expansion, a widespread and rapidly growing land use on the Golfo Dulce side of the peninsula. Parcel protection via acquisition is necessary to ensure the long-term survival of the YBCO population at Rincon.

Additional conservation concern species (and IUCN status) found within the proposed reserve include Mangrove Hummingbird (Endangered), Great Curassow (Near Threatened), Baird’s Trogon (Near Threatened), Turquoise Cotinga (Vulnerable) and Three-wattled Bellbird (Vulnerable). Neotropical migrants documented within the proposed reserve include Prothonotary Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow-throated Vireo.

The proposed reserve is part of the Costa Rican Important Bird Area “Humedales de Sierpe y Peninsula de Osa” (Birdlife 2009), falls within the South Central America Pacific Slope Endemic Bird Area (Birdlife 1998) and is located within a Global Biodiversity Hotspot – Mesoamerica - as defined by Conservation International (1999).

GPS Coordinates: 8°41’16”N/83°28’40”W



Elevation: Sea Level

Regional Threats to Biodiversity: African oil palm plantation establishment, expansion of rice cultivation and forest clearing for cattle grazing constitute major threats to remaining habitats. While protected by law, mangrove forests continue to be degraded by illegal timber extraction and cattle grazing.

Reserve Management and Protection: Osa Conservation will own and manage the reserve. Boundaries will be posted and active reforestation of the existing pasture (approximately one-half of the parcel) will be undertaken. Osa Conservation staff will monitor the property.

A reserve sign and informational kiosk will be constructed near the parking lot of a small restaurant located on the highway adjacent to the reserve. Because the highway serves as the major thoroughfare to the mainland, the potential to increase public awareness of and support for conservation of these species and associated habitats is significant.

Project Time Frame:
May 1, 2012 – May 1, 2013

Osa Conservation plans to immediately buy a purchase option for the property, with final purchase subject to completing all legal due diligence and obtaining a clean and formally registered title. OC plans to complete the purchase of the property within a one year timeframe (May 2012) and will provide a full report including the purchase documents and copies of the new registration and deed in the name of Osa Conservation.

Institutional Partners: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, American Bird Conservancy

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