



Golden-cheeked Warbler
Photo: Mike Williams

Finca Forestal Rubel Chaim

Project title: Finca Forestal Rubel Chaim

Location: Guatemala

Coordinates: 15°22'35.4036"N 90°21'2.5776"W

Size: 335 acres

Grant Amount: \$40,000

Date: 2022

Partners: Community Cloud Forest Conservation

Summary and Background:

Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC) requests \$40,000 from Tropical Forests Forever Fund (TFFF) to help purchase Finca Forestal Rubel Chaim, 335 acres of critical habitat for neotropical migratory birds of special conservation concern, including Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA), Golden-winged Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Wood Thrush, as well as an impressive list of species endemic to the region.

Mission and Description of CCFC: Nature Conservation:

CCFC works to protect tropical forests throughout central and northern Guatemala, through environmental education, reforestation and agroecology projects to promote sustainable ecological well being of birds and people. In more than twelve years of grass-roots direct community engagement, CCFC's work expanded to over 150 villages located within Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of high conservation priority.

Environmental Education:

To empower and equip local leaders in conservation, CCFC engages students in two flagship environmental education programs: Kids & Birds and WALC (Women in Agroecology Leadership for Conservation). Kids & Birds began in 2011 thanks to the generous support of US Fish and Wildlife NMBCA grant. Since 2007, the WALC program equips young women for conservation leadership and inspires them to continue studying in schooling. CCFC environmental education programs are authorized by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and partner with National Institute for Forest Administration (INAB), National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), Ministry of Agriculture (MAGA), as well as local universities. CCFC conservation education programs inspire and equip professionals of these governmental organizations as well as professors and students of local universities, colleges and schools with the scientific basis, skills and experience for nature conservation and restoration.

Partners in Conservation:

CCFC has partnered with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and with eBird since CCFC began in 2008. CCFC Director, Rob Cahill, was the first eBird regional reviewer for Guatemala and today John Cahill leads the eBird team of five reviewers (including his father) for Guatemala. CCFC partners with USFWS-NMBCA in Neotropical Migratory Bird conservation and habitat restoration in non-breeding season ranges in Guatemala. Locally CCFC partners with the above mentioned organizations. CCFC also partners with TFFF, Travis Audubon, Virginia Society of Ornithology and others to restore bird habitat.

Not-for-profit Legal Status:

CCFC is a nongovernmental organization with 501(c)3 legal status as a not-for-profit corporation in the USA. CCFC was founded in 2008 and first received its not-for-profit status in June of 2010 (See attached IRS Determination Letter). CCFC's decennial report and its 10 year renewal of not-for-profit status was accepted by the IRS in December of 2021. Therefore, CCFC's legal status is up to date, having been recently renewed with the IRS. CCFC has Silver Seal status with GuideStar and is awaiting its confirmation for Gold Seal. CCFC is also registered as Comunidad de Conservación Colibrí as a non-lucrative association with Guatemala's SAT (Superintendencia de Administración Tributaria de Guatemala). CCFC holds property in Guatemala in a corporation with Soceidad Anónima (S.A.) status within Guatemala's SAT. Having Guatemalan S.A. status protects CCFC's land acquisitions against any potential shifts in local or national politics.

Purchase:

The purchase of the Rubel Chaim property has been a deal long in the making. CCFC needs to come up with \$433,000 to complete its part of the purchase. CCFC has already raised \$115,000 from major donors. Our goal is to come up with the remaining \$318,000 during our fiscal year 2022. With this current request, CCFC asks TFFF to provide \$40,000 for the Rubel Chaim land purchase.

Protection:

Once the money has been raised, CCFC will register both Finca Rubel Chaim and adjacent Sanctuary for Flora and Fauna (SFF) Setonq as protected areas with CONAP and the agroforest and natural forest sections with INAB. This protected status will permanently protect the lands and insure registered conservation management plans will be followed in perpetuity. With the help of TFFF, CCFC has already improved the habitat of SFF Setonq with a strategic reforestation aimed at improving GCWA habitat.

The protection-in-perpetuity of Rubel Chaim will create the nucleus of a greater Chichén area biological corridor. In collaboration with neighboring farms and villages, adjacent natural forests will be connected by Rubel Chaim natural forests with CCFC reforestation and agroforest parcels to create proposed Corridor Biológico Chichén. Rubel Chaim is key in the creation of a contiguous 9 mile long biological corridor, with Rubel Chaim in the middle of Sanctuary de Flora y Fauna Setonq to the north; Finca Forestal Saramilcho and Finca Chilax to the east; INAB Forest Reserves of Finca Chichén; and forested areas of Chijou and Santa Cruz to the west. Two recent records of a Resplendent Quetzal, one west of Rubel Chaim (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S64164101>) and the other to the east (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S71370922>) demonstrate that the biological corridor should be protected. The protection of Rubel Chaim consolidates a substantial forest area with sufficient range necessary for the survival of neotropical migratory birds and many other threatened flora and fauna.

Objectives:

The nature conservation merits of this 335 acre land acquisition are enhanced by the consideration that CCFC's Ecology Education center for conservation programs is based in Rubel Chaim. The purchase of Rubel Chaim will help CCFC to: 1) Establish a wildlife sanctuary and biological corridor, 2) Restore habitat for birds of special conservation concern, 3) Expand its campus for environmental education and research, 4) Sequester atmospheric CO2 through reforestation, 5) Research bird friendly agro ecology production systems.

Golden-cheeked Warbler:

The GCWA was first described to science just 10 miles from Rubel Chaim. On November 4, 1859 Osbert Salvin collected two GCWA specimen along the Pantin road in Baja Verapaz. This was

the same expedition on which Salvin described the Great Swallow-tailed Swift, another important species resident in Rubel Chaim.

The USFW lists GCWA as an endangered species. According to studies since the 1990s, the GCWA is threatened by habitat loss on its breeding grounds in central Texas and on its wintering grounds in Chiapas, Mexico, central Guatemala, Honduras and northern Nicaragua. On its winter range, GCWA forage mainly in oak trees. Unfortunately, oak trees are the first to be removed as forest ecosystems are degraded by human impact. Across central Guatemala, habitat critical to the GCWA is under threat as incursions of invasive agricultural practices clear extensions of forested lands. Subsistence corn fields and the recent extensions of commercial export broccoli plantations convert quality GCWA habitat into bare open land useless to the GCWA. Worse yet, even within forested lands, unprotected GCWA habitat is degraded by the prevalence of wood cutters extracting oak and other hardwoods. Because of these threats, IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists GCWA population as declining.

The protection and continued restoration of Rubel Chaim and SFF Setonq will enhance GCWA non breeding season habitat. Over the years, CCFC has harvested acorns from a variety of oak trees in Rubel Chaim and SFF Setonq, where GCWA have been observed foraging. CCFC's tree nurseries are grown from 100% locally collected seeds. GCWAs have already been observed foraging in CCFC's reforestation parcels in oaks planted just 5 or 6 years ago.

Lists of Neotropical Migratory Birds and Other Fauna Using Rubel Chaim:

There are 23 species of neotropical migratory birds of special conservation concern that are either winter residents at Rubel Chaim or use Rubel Chaim as a stop-over site. Of these 23 species, six are listed on the IUCN Red List as either Near Threatened (NT), Vulnerable (VU) or Endangered (EN).

BirdLife International's global mapping project of Important Bird Areas and Endemic Bird Areas helps illustrate the importance of CCFC's focus region and specifically the importance of protecting Rubel Chaim.

Rubel Chaim is located within IBA GT010 (BirdLife International 2006). To be designated as an IBA, an area has to meet one of four criteria established by BirdLife International. GT010 meets all four criteria making it a super IBA. GT010 is home to 1) multiple globally threatened species, 2) multiple restricted-range species and 3) multiple biome-restricted species. GT010 is also the winter home of over 2% of the world's Wilson's Warbler population, exceeding the congregation's criteria (A4) by 1%.

CCFC's work area includes 150 villages found within ten IBAs across central and northern Guatemala. IBAs: GT010 Yalijux, GT007 Sacranix, GT008 Lachua-Ikbolay, GT006 Cerro El Amay, GT009 Candelaria-Campur, GT012 Sierra de Las Minas, GT011 Sierra Santa Cruz, GT001 Maya Lacandón, GT002 Rio La Pasión, GT003 Chiquibul.

Rubel Chaim is located at the heart of Endemic Bird Area EBA018. EBA 018 is a fairly narrow corridor stretching from northern Nicaragua, across the highlands of Honduras and Guatemala, to the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. BirdLife International lists 23 species of endemic birds restricted in range within EBA018. Of these 23 species, 14 species have been recorded at Rubel Chaim and 17 have been recorded within a radius of 10 miles of Rubel Chaim. The long term stewardship of Rubel Chaim as a protected area will also help vulnerable endemic species such as the Highland Guan (VU) and Ocellated Quail (VU), as well as other locally common endemics such as Black-capped Swallow, Blue-throated Motmot, Green-throated Mountain Gem, Bush-crested Jay and Blue-and-white Mockingbird. Two species of austro-migratory birds that breed at Rubel Chaim are Swallow-tailed Kite and Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher.

Rubel Chaim is also home many endemic and endangered amphibians and reptiles. Recently a vocalizing Guatemala Treefrog (*Ecnomiohyla minera*, VU) was discovered on the Rubel Chaim property. This is the 11th species of amphibian believed to be resident at Rubel Chaim, all of these 11 species of amphibians are both endemic and Red Listed as either Near Threatened, Vulnerable or Endangered. CCFC has also observed an impressive list of mammals dependent on Rubel Chaim and the greater Chichén Biological Corridor.

Concluding Summary:

Finca Rubel Chaim is a pearl of great price in so many respects. Home to endangered and endemic species of biota the conservation priority of this region can not be overstated. CCFC is requesting \$40,000 from TFFF to secure the protection of this property and the survival of its flora and fauna in perpetuity.

Of special note is the importance of this property for Golden-cheeked Warbler non breeding season habitat in central Guatemala. GCWA connects CCFC and TFFF. CCFC's work area is central to GCWA's winter range. Conservation efforts in Texas have repeatedly highlighted the need to work internationally to protect this endangered species. The protection and reforestation of Rubel Chaim will increase Golden-cheeked Warbler winter survival by providing excellent forage in its massive oaks as well thousands of native tree seedlings planted by CCFC.

The Rubel Chaim property is in the Important Bird Area IBA GT010 and the Endemic Bird Area EBA 018 as defined by BirdLife International (2008). Not only will the protection and restoration of Rubel Chaim benefit the Golden-cheeked Warbler, it will also benefit other neotropical migratory birds of special concern such as the Golden-winged Warbler (NT), Cerulean Warbler (NT), Wood Thrush (Population Trend: sharply decreasing), and Olive-sided Flycatcher (NT) and critical endemic species of birds and other flora and fauna.

The purchase of Rubel Chaim will help CCFC to: 1) Establish a wildlife sanctuary and biological corridor, 2) Restore habitat for birds of special conservation concern, 3) Expand its campus for environmental education and research, 4) Sequester atmospheric CO₂ through reforestation, 5) Research bird friendly agro ecology production systems.

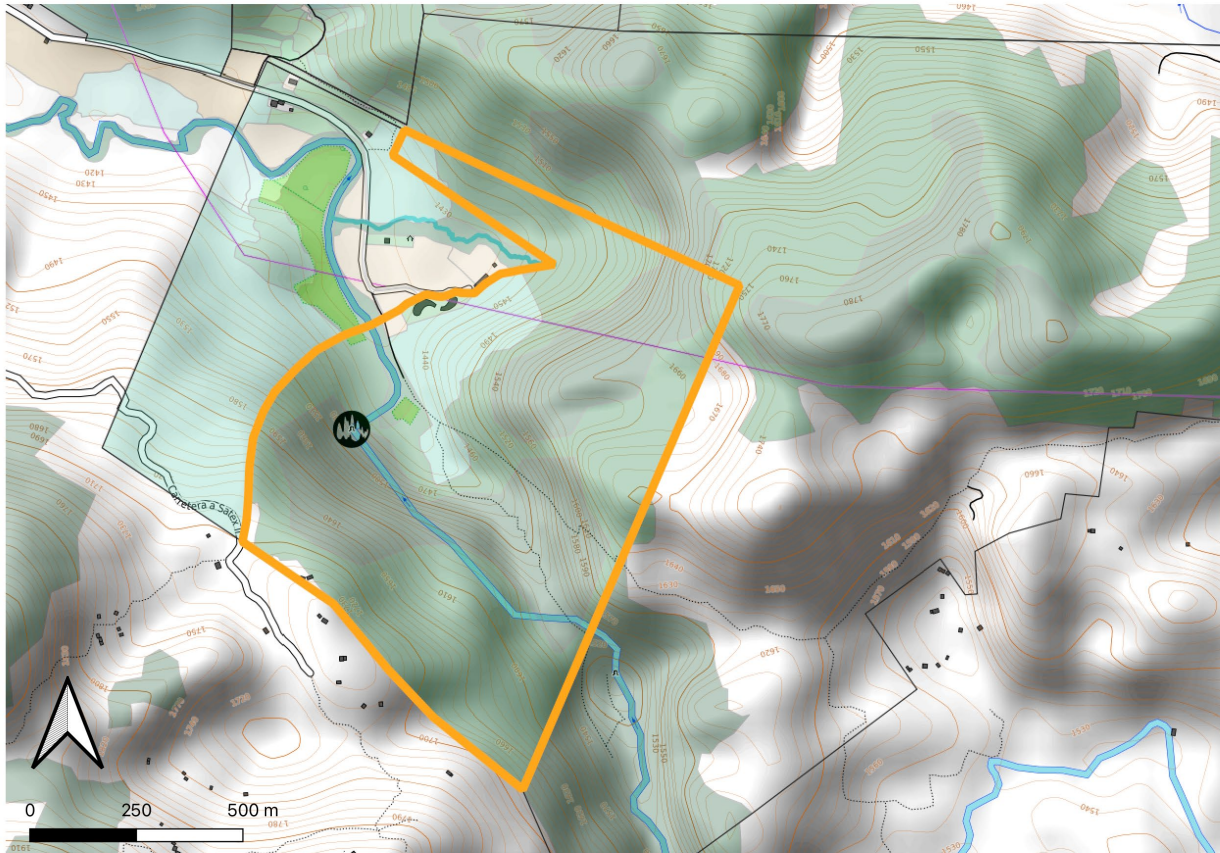
Budget:

\$433,000 (total needed for land purchase)

\$115,000 (amount raised by CCFC to date)

\$318,000 (amount still needed)

\$40,000 (amount requested from TFFF)

Maps and photos:

Topomap of Rubel Chaim and Rio Mestela



Photo of Rubel Chaim property



Community Cloud Forest Conservation Ecology Education Center

