



Punta de Palma
Photo: ABC

Punta de Palma

Project title: Punta de Palma

Location: Guatemala

Coordinates: 15°44'56.9"N 88°37'44.3"W

Size: 118 acres

Grant Amount: \$40,000

Date: 2021

Partners: American Bird Conservancy & FUNDAECO

Summary and Background:

The Caribbean coast of Guatemala is one of the most diverse ecosystems in the Western hemisphere, but this has not spared it from the many threats facing Central American ecosystems. Population growth in the area has encouraged encroachment on, and subsequent deforestation of, the unique rain forest landscape that thousands of flora and fauna call home. If we are to preserve the forest, which represents a key location for migratory and overwintering North American birds, then it is essential that we protect the remnants of these pristine ecosystems and their associated watersheds.

The Caribbean coastal region of Guatemala extends from Belize to Honduras and encompasses several unique and isolated mountains with elevations up to 1,200 meters. The landscape is dominated by rainforest vegetation that is complemented by a diverse mosaic of habitats that include lowland coastal forests, rare dwarf mangroves, wetlands, and numerous streams and rivers. The variety of ecosystems has given rise to a wealth of biodiversity in the region, and has also created important stopover and wintering habitat for at least 153 neotropical migratory birds. This area is also considered a vital link in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and the

Caribbean migratory flyway of Central America. For these reasons, ABC has defined this area as a high priority “BirdScape” called the Conservation Coast. ABC’s BirdScape initiative is geared to identifying important landscapes and scaling up habitat protection and management for migratory birds.

More than 65% of the forests in the Conservation Coast BirdScape have been cleared for cattle ranching, banana and oil palm plantations, short cycle crops such as corn, and subsistence agriculture. Population growth in local communities and the ensuing encroachment of forested areas is an important deforestation driver. ABC and our Guatemalan partner, FUNDAECO, have been working together since 2012 to create and expand five protected areas through land acquisition. In total, these lands account for 11,262 acres of core habitat for migratory birds, and include Sierra Caral, Cerro San Gil, Punta Manabique, Rio Sarstún, and Sierra Santa Cruz. ABC is requesting to use the funding granted from the Tropical Forest Forever Fund in 2021 to support FUNDAECO with the acquisition of 118 acres of coastal forest on a parcel known as “Punta de Palma.” The proposed land acquisition will effectively expand FUNDAECO’s holdings in this part of the BirdScape, specifically within the Cerro San Gil Reserve, an area under significant threat of tourism development due to its location along the coastline and scenic nature. FUNDAECO has a burgeoning ecotourism operation catering to birders, cruise ship tourists who come to the region via Port Barrios, and in-country adventure tourists. This site has the opportunity to expand their tourism offerings, providing important dollars for reserve management.

Cerro San Gil Protected Area contains almost 50% of the total biodiversity of the country, including 54% of vertebrate species, 56% of amphibian species, 48% of reptile species, and 67% of bird species. Located within Cerro San Gil, Punta de Palma is home to 142 bird species, including 27 neotropical migratory bird species, and has one of the last mangrove forests in the Guatemalan Caribbean, which makes it a hotspot for wildlife including the Tapir. Protecting Punta de Palma will secure a biological corridor for wildlife connecting this coastal area to the lowlands of the Tameja and Las Escobas watersheds.

Finally, this particular property contains the only freshwater coastal lagoon within the Bay of Amatique. In addition, by declaring this area a land reserve, we have the opportunity to declare a no-fishing zone on this part of the coast, which would involve nearly 70 fishermen to agree to stop fishing in this area. This no-fishing zone would secure an area where seven fish species such as snook (*Centropomus undecimalis*) and striped mojarra (*Eugerres plumieri*) can breed, grow, and replenish their populations.

Mission and Description of the Organization:

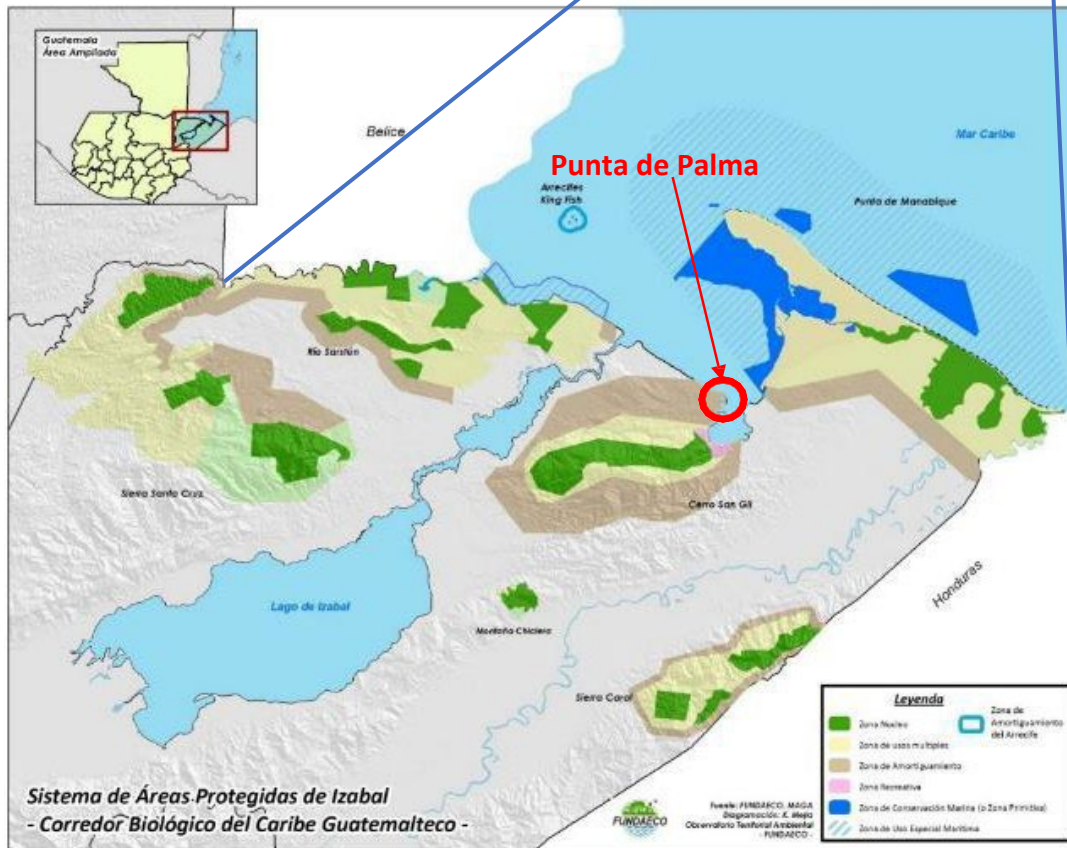
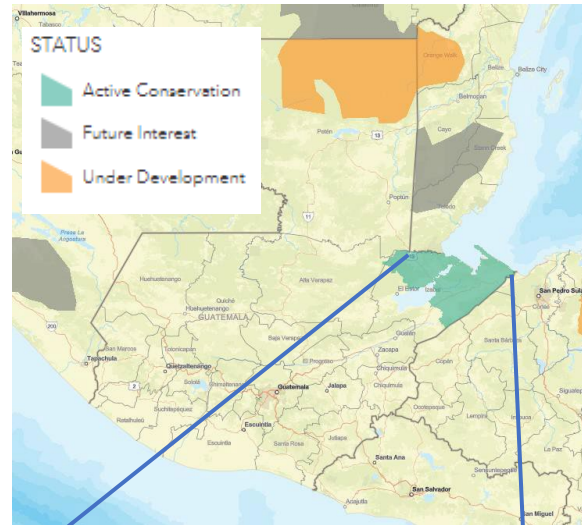
American Bird Conservancy was founded in 1994 with a mission to conserve wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. With an emphasis on achieving results and working in partnerships, we take on the greatest problems facing birds today, innovating and building on rapid advancements in science to halt extinctions, protect habitats, eliminate threats, and build capacity for bird conservation. Over the past 25 years ABC has helped to conserve and manage

7.6 million acres of habitat in the U.S., as well as protect more than one million acres of habitat in Latin America and the Caribbean for resident and migratory bird species alike. In addition, we have helped restore habitat by planting over six million trees and shrubs. ABC is headquartered in The Plains, VA, and has nearly 100 full-time employees in field locations throughout the U.S. We proudly work with local partners in our projects.

List of Neotropical Bird Species Using the Project Site:

- Tennessee Warbler
- Chestnut-sided Warbler
- American Redstart
- Magnolia Warbler
- Summer Tanager
- Black-and-white Warbler
- Swainson's Thrush
- Northern Waterthrush
- Yellow Warbler
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Philadelphia Vireo
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- White-eyed Vireo
- Western Wood-Pewee
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Eastern Kingbird
- Barn Swallow
- Baltimore Oriole
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
- Brown-crested Flycatcher
- Indigo Bunting

Maps and photos:



Maps of the Conservation Coast BirdScape and the Protected Area System in the Izabal Department of Guatemala. Dark green areas = core habitat protection areas within the reserve; yellow areas = multiple use zones; brown areas = buffer zones; pink areas = recreational zones; blue areas = marine conservation zones; cross hatched areas = areas of special maritime use.



Punta de Palma property.



Freshwater lake within Punta de Palma.





View of Punta de Palma property from the Santo Tomás Bay

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