



Bicknell's Thrush
Photo: Martin Hagne

Polo, Barahona Province, Dominican Republic

Project title: Protect Critical Cloud Forests in the Dominican Republic

Location: Dominican Republic

Coordinates: 19 Q 251149.09 m E 2004074.54 m N

Size: 20-30 hectares

Grant Amount: \$40,000

Date: 2026

Partners: Sociedad Ornitológica de la Hispaniola

Summary and Background:

SOH Conservación (Sociedad Ornitológica de la Hispaniola) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of the unique biodiversity of the island of Hispaniola. Founded with the purpose of safeguarding ecosystems and species, SOH Conservación integrates scientific research, education, community development, and the strengthening of protected areas to ensure long-term conservation impact.

Over the past three decades, SOH Conservación has implemented critical projects for the conservation of threatened and endemic species such as the Bicknell's Thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*), Ricord's Iguana (*Cyclura ricordi*), the Hispaniolan Solenodon (*Solenodon paradoxus*), and the endemic tree *Magnolia hamorii*. A central focus of all these projects has been the protection and management of habitats that are vital for Neotropical migratory birds, making the organization one of the leading actors in safeguarding key wintering grounds in the Caribbean.

SOH Conservación also plays a key role in promoting sustainable livelihoods, particularly through Bird Friendly coffee agroforestry initiatives in the Bahoruco region, directly linking migratory bird conservation with community well-being. By integrating local farmers into conservation-based economies, the organization ensures that habitat protection brings tangible benefits to people while maintaining critical resources for migratory species.

The organization has extensive experience in land acquisition for conservation, reserve management, biodiversity monitoring, and environmental education. Its work is carried out in close collaboration with local communities, government institutions, and international partners such as Rainforest Trust, American Bird Conservancy, BirdLife International, and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). In addition, support from the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) has been instrumental in advancing conservation outcomes in this region, particularly in the protection of habitats used by priority migratory bird species. Through this combination of technical expertise, strong partnerships, and targeted actions, SOH Conservación has established itself as a trusted leader in protecting habitats of global importance for both migratory and resident species.

This project focuses on the purchase of 20 to 30 hectares of land in the Eastern Sierra de Bahoruco, near Polo, Barahona Province, Dominican Republic. The primary objective of the acquisition is to secure long-term protection of habitats that are essential for Neotropical migratory birds as well as endemic and globally threatened resident species of Hispaniola. The project area is located within the Bosque de las Nubes, an exceptional biodiversity hotspot recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA), a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), and an Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) site.

This site provides critical wintering habitat for a wide suite of migratory birds from North America. Among the most important is the Vulnerable Bicknell's Thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*), one of the highest conservation priorities in the Western Hemisphere, which relies heavily on the montane cloud forests of Hispaniola for its nonbreeding survival. In addition, many other Neotropical migratory species use the area, including the Prairie Warbler (*Setophaga discolor*), Kentucky Warbler (*Geothlypis formosa*), Louisiana Waterthrush (*Parkesia motacilla*), Cape May Warbler (*Setophaga tigrina*), Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Setophaga caerulescens*), Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*), Northern Parula (*Setophaga americana*), Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*), Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*), and the Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*), among many others documented through long-term monitoring programs. These species depend on intact cloud forest for food resources, shelter, and migratory stopover sites.



The ecological value of this site extends beyond biodiversity. The humid cloud forest regulates the headwaters of rivers that provide drinking water to local communities across Barahona Province. Conserving this forest ensures water security, soil stability, and climate resilience for both wildlife and people. However, these habitats face urgent and escalating threats.

Agricultural expansion, cattle grazing, illegal logging, charcoal production, poaching, and even the pressure of mining concessions are degrading the forest. Without immediate intervention through land purchase and legal protection, these pressures could cause the loss of irreplaceable migratory bird habitat. Through the acquisition of these 20 to 30 hectares, SOH Conservación will:

- Secure critical wintering habitat for a diverse group of Neotropical migratory birds, including species of continental conservation concern.
- Legally protect the land as part of the Bosque de las Nubes Private Reserve, ensuring its permanent conservation status.
- Strengthen landscape connectivity with the adjacent Miguel Domingo Fuertes Natural Monument, supporting migratory pathways and ecological resilience.
- Engage local communities in conservation through education and sustainable livelihood opportunities such as Bird Friendly coffee and ecotourism that directly highlight the value of migratory birds.
- Establish on-the-ground protection with rangers, monitoring, and infrastructure to prevent poaching, logging, and habitat disturbance.

This land purchase represents a strategic conservation action that will safeguard wintering habitat for dozens of Neotropical migratory birds of continental significance. By protecting this property, SOH Conservación will ensure that migratory species continue to find safe refuge during the nonbreeding season, while also preserving endemic wildlife and critical ecosystem services for people.