

Chapter 3

Advocacy

Jabiru Protection

The jabiru was BAS' first conservation project. The first *BAS Bulletin* included the following report:

Recently reports were received from local airplane pilots of two nests containing large black and white birds located in the northern part of the country in a pine area. As a result of these reports, Dora Weyer arranged with Ford Young to fly over the areas where the nests were reported.

As a result of the flight, two nests of Jabiru Storks were located, miles apart, each on top of a large dead tree. The nests were built of sticks and twigs that formed a platform roughly 8 to 10 feet across with each nest containing two fledglings. These birds are infrequently seen in pine ridge areas. (BAS Bulletin March, 1969)

The Board of Directors of the Belize Audubon Society, the aim of which is to conserve the wildlife of our country, is seeking your help for the protection of the Jabiru Stork. The reason for this request is that the Jabiru is very uncommon; it is rare in Central and South America and may soon become extinct if left unprotected.

Emmet Blake in his book "Birds of Mexico" described the Jabiru as follows:- JABIRU - Jabiru mycteria 48 - 55 inches Adult: Head and neck featherless; mainly black, the lower third of the neck red or bright orange; plumage, immaculate white; bill notably heavy, virtually straight or slightly upturned. Immature: Mainly brownish gray.

Eugene Eisenmann, an expert on Middle American birds, as long ago as 1955, went out of his way to list this bird as "rare" in Central America, a term he applied to very few species. Stephen Russell in his "A Distributional Study of the Birds of British Honduras says in 1959 (p. 61) "The Jabiru in an UNCOMMON resident here."

The Jabiru is the largest stork known to nest here. A mature bird stands as tall as a man; one bird has been recorded at 5 feet 10 inches from beak to feet standing normally and had a wing spread of more than 8 feet; the beak was 12 inches long. Known locally both as "Turk" and "Fillymingo" they feed near marshes and ponds in the pine ridge from Manatee Lagoon to Hill Bank. They build their nests, 6 feet or so in diameter, in tall trees and usually lay only two eggs, sometimes three. Two nests were seen from the air by members of our Society, each of which had two nestlings only. The young apparently do not attain the adult plumage of white feathers until in their second year. Whether they begin to breed then or in the third year is not known. However, any species that normally lays only two eggs and of which the young take at least two years before becoming of breeding age, is considered a species of low breeding potential, i.e. they cannot reproduce themselves quickly and always stand in danger of being eliminated quickly. There is good evidence further that if the eggs or young are stolen by a predator this stork does not attempt to nest a second time in the same year. This makes matters even worse. In other words, given the best of luck, a pair of jabiru can only reproduce themselves in two years time! This means that any hunting or killing of the adults within that time will reduce the total number of jabirus in the area. It is no wonder then that market hunting, which has been practised throughout Central America and here too over the years, has brought this species to the edge of extinction.

The Belize Audubon Society respectfully request that the jabiru, Jabiru mycteria, should be put on the list of protected birds making it an offence against the law to kill or capture the bird or to rob its nest of the eggs. If protected here, this bird could be a big tourist attraction. (Letter to the Acting Chief Forest Officer and Chief Game Warden, June 12, 1969)

In 1973 the jabiru was added to the list of protected animals (Gazette 7 July S. I. No. 38/1973).



*Jabiru nest at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary
Photo by James Beveridge*

The Jabiru Stork

W. Ford Young, 1993

At the suggestion of BAS, this bird is included in the list of “protected species” in Belize, published by the Government.

Soon after the establishment of BAS, Dora Weyer and I decided to try and determine roughly how many Jabirus there were in Belize (then British Honduras) and what could be done to protect the population. The Society launched a campaign through its monthly bulletin, notes in the local newspapers and radio station, asking the general public not to molest the bird and to report any sighting to Dora or me. This resulted in dozens of reports of the birds feeding in many parts of the country.

In addition to obtaining reports of the birds feeding on the ground, it was felt important to try and ascertain the loca-

tion of nests and the nesting success. Jabirus do not nest in colonies but each pair will select a high, often dead tree, sometimes more or less in the open, and at other times in a tree which protrudes above the surrounding jungle, and construct a nest of small sticks which is added to each year until it may be 10 to 15 feet across. It is often possible to see the adult birds from the ground as they stand in the nest, but it is not possible to see eggs or young birds.

Since contents of the nests can only be seen from the air, I used my own plane and spent some 22 hours of flying time, often accompanied by other Audubon members, in search of nests and recording their contents. I also enlisted the help of the British forces and local pilots in this endeavor, after someone borrowed and crashed my private plane.

The results of these flights were reported in the monthly Audubon Bulletin. Several nests have been discovered in the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.

If a nest is disturbed by too many curious humans or by land clearing operations near the nest, abandonment is suspected. Nesting is usually from mid-November to May, after which the birds will gather in flocks in Crooked Tree and Mexico Lagoons where they can find food. As the rainy season approaches most leave for Southern Mexico where feeding conditions are better.

The first flock to be recorded was seen in the early 1970's in Mexico Lagoon where 14 birds were counted. Since that time Audubon members and employees of the Society in the Crooked Tree area have encountered increasing numbers in the Crooked Tree Lagoon (also known as Northern Lagoon). This culminated in a count in late May, 1993, of 50 birds. Based on increased numbers of bird flocks preparing to migrate, reports of feeding birds from the general public, and the number of nests located, it is suggested that the number of birds in Belize has increased from around 20-30 in the early 1970's to approximately 60-70 in 1993.

As publicity about the Jabirus grew in Belize, Carolyn Miller, Audubon member and Conservation Fellow of Wildlife Conservation International, published an article entitled, "Belize's Celebrity Stork" in the June 1991 issue of *Birder's World*. A reprint of the article was placed in the *Belize Review* issue of September 1992, specifically for Belizeans who were not subscribers to *Birder's World*.

Wildlife Protection Legislation

In 1966 a National Parks Commission was constituted to travel around Belize and identify areas to be recommended for protection as national parks. Among the members were Henry Fairweather, Albert S. Grant, Louis Lindo and James Waight. Ronald Clark was secretary to the Commission. These five men later became BAS Board members. The Commission's report was completed in 1968. After its formation, the BAS lobbied on behalf of national parks.

The Belize Audubon Society is greatly concerned about the preservation and conservation of areas of natural beauty in our country. We are aware that a Committee was appointed by Government to study and make recommendations for the establishment of National Parks and we heartily commend this action.

At a recent meeting of our Board of Directors I was directed to inform Government of our Society's willingness to assist in furthering the National Parks idea in whatever way we can. (Letter to the Minister of Tourism, 27 October 1970).

The Minister has asked me to acknowledge your letter of the 27 October 1970 written by you on behalf of Belize Audubon Society.

He has asked me to inform you that he greatly appreciates the kind offer of your society. If you have any specific proposals in mind he would be quite happy to look at these. As you are probably aware only recently it has been confirmed that this Ministry should be responsible for National Parks and the Ministry is at the stage of trying to decide on the pace and form of implementation of the Report. (Response from R. A. Fuller, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 5 November 1970)

I have been asked by our Board of Directors to state that when we know what form of implementation the National Parks Committee's Report will take, we will be in a better position to make some specific proposals in this regard.

In the meantime our Society would like to suggest, in addition to the acquisition of private lands at Half Moon Caye, that steps could be taken to create underwater reefs and bird parks in certain areas of our reefs and in the lagoons of the Crooked Tree area. If these proposals are of interest, our Society would be happy to work out and submit detailed recommendations. (Letter from President James Waight to R. A. Fuller)

At the request of Government, William O. Deshler was appointed by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization to consult on the design of a national park system for Belize. When Mr. Deshler completed his report on National Parks and Wildlife in Belize, BAS was asked to comment on the report. Mr. Deshler had included many of the areas recommended by the first Park Commission.

The report seems to us to be an excellent study, though a limited one, with attainable – albeit long range – goals. In particular, we agree with recommendations that a new Wildlife Protection Ordinance be passed urgently by the legislature. This is an absolutely essential first step. Provisions for enforcing the regulations should also be established. Here we would like to mention that we feel there should be clear definitions of subsistence, market and sport hunting, as well as closed seasons and bag limits in drawing up hunting regulations.

Action to establish a National Park system through legislation should be equally rapid. The inventory of possible sites for parks and reserves is excellent, though we feel that there are other areas that should be included. It seems to us that only one or two parks, etc. should be established at first, that they should be well and smoothly operating, and that there should be a genuine national interest in them before further steps are taken. With proper personnel, good picnic and camping sites, modest recreation facilities and educational programmes, people will learn to appreciate and protect their surroundings.

We endorse the recommendation that an active and continuing wildlife conservation education programme for both schools and adult groups should be developed and that emphasis be placed on getting this education into rural schools and villages.

We should be pleased to meet with you at your convenience to discuss our comments and suggestions. (Letter to H.C. Flowers, Chief Forest Officer, 31 March 1980)

On September 21, 1981, Belize became an independent country. Two of the first acts of the new country were the Wildlife Protection Act 1981 (No. 4 of 1981) and the National Parks System Act 1981 (No. 5 of 1981), which were signed on November 13 and published in the Gazette of November 28. Both were major achievements for the BAS because members had worked long and hard on these landmark pieces of legislation.

The Wildlife Protection Act came into force on January 2, 1982. The Act provides for the conservation, restoration, and development of wildlife, for the regulation of its use, and for all other matters connected thereto.

Under the Act, the term “wildlife” means all undomesticated mammals, birds and reptiles, and all parts, eggs, and nests of any of these forms. Measures to control hunting are set out in its provisions, and “to hunt” carries the meanings to kill, take captive, or molest by any method. A list of wildlife species, the handling of which is prohibited, is included with the Act. These are animals that are considered rare and/or endangered, many of them listed as needing protection in the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna, known as the CITES Convention, of which Belize is a signatory.

Among the animals protected by the Act are our monkeys, the spider monkey and howler monkey (locally known as “baboon”) which are hunted for the pet trade, and our five wild cats, which are hunted for their skins, as well as the pet trade. The Central American or Baird’s tapir (the “mountain cow,” our national animal) and the manatee are also included, as are our two crocodiles, our dolphins, and any whales that venture into our waters. Our birds, with few exceptions, are also protected, and may not be hunted or captured for sale as pets.

There are provisions, of course, for any person to take measures to defend himself or other persons from the attack of any animal, and for owners of crops or domestic animals to kill or capture on their property any wildlife threatening or causing material damage to such crops or domestic animals.

Our Wildlife Protection Act also prohibits the hunting of any immature wildlife, or any female accompanied by its young. This means it is illegal to capture young animals for the pet trade. As the mother will always defend her young, in most cases she has to be killed in order to effect the capture.

To hunt our common game animals, a traditional food source - deer, peccary, gibbon, armadillo, and the game birds, curassow, cocrico, quail, and quail - requires a valid hunting license issued by the Game Warden.

A moratorium on commercial dealing, that is, on the sale or dealing for profit in any wildlife of any species, or part or product thereof, is in effect from the day on which the Act came into force.

The Wildlife Protection Act was a big step toward preventing the destruction of our natural heritage. If we are to keep our wildlife for future generations to use and enjoy, that wildlife needs to be protected, and its use controlled. Many countries have realized too late that their wildlife has been destroyed by over-hunting and the clearing of forests. We must not let this happen here.

Oil Refinery Planned for Monkey River

In 1971 BAS became aware of a proposal to put a \$150 million oil refinery on the southern coast and expressed our concern.

While welcoming an advance of such magnitude in our economic growth, our society is apprehensive of the possible danger of pollution which an oil refinery might bring to beaches and waters with consequent loss in tourist business, loss to our fishing industry, and, more particularly, the threat to our pleasant quality of life. And mindful of the fact that prevention is better than cure, and far easier, we would therefore urge that sufficient covenants with stiff penalties should be written into any contract granting a license to build and operate the proposed oil refinery. We suggest particularly that industrial waste shall not be dumped into the sea, that the licensee clean up any oil spills and be liable for any breach. (Letter to Minister of Trade and Industry, 13 November 1971)

We wrote to conservation organizations in the U.S. for information, which was passed on to the responsible persons in Government. This went on for some time, but the project was eventually cancelled.

Billboards

It has come to the attention of our society that large advertising billboard signs are being erected along our roads and highways, mostly in the area reserved for the road. These billboards detract from the scenic beauty of our countryside and can be a hazard to traffic in more ways than one. Some of the signs obstruct motorists' view of the road ahead and of oncoming traffic and can be a source of distraction. We bring this matter to your attention with the request that your ministry should refuse permission to use our public road reserves for this purpose. We should also like to suggest that you consider setting up legislation to prevent the erection of billboards on

private property in close proximity to the roads outside the limits of all towns, including Belize City and Belmopan. Once the sign lobby gets a foothold in this country, government will encounter extreme difficulty and opposition in legislating against it and in getting it under control, as the United States and other countries are experiencing. (Letter to the Minister of Public Works 1971)

We wrote to the Florida Audubon Society for help. Their response showed our concern was well placed.

In Florida's case the sign lobby was so great, that in spite of the fact that we stand to lose \$15 million, the legislature saw fit to refuse to pass the legislation to put us in compliance with federal statutes.

Pesticides

Our Society is greatly concerned about the growing number of cases of poisoning due to the increased use of pesticides in our country. (Letter written to the Minister of Trade and Industry in 1974)

There were cases of Gramaxone (paraquat) poisoning in the cane fields in the north of Belize. It is a deadly poison that can be absorbed through the skin and ingested also. There was much careless use, including containers that were not cleaned. There was no legislation yet in Belize controlling the sale, import or use of pesticides. We wrote for information and passed it on to Government.

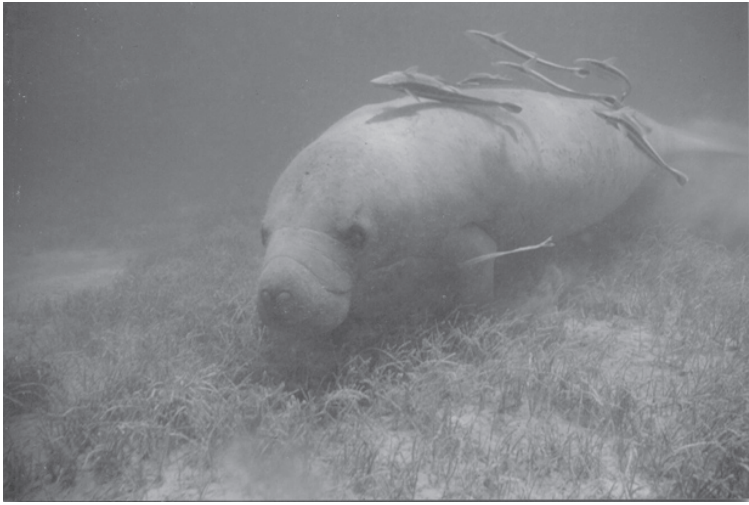
BAS was concerned with potential pesticide use when a large-scale cotton cultivation project was proposed for Belize. At the time cotton was being raised in Nicaragua and there workers were not protected. There had been cases of pesticide poisoning and workers had died. Mr. Ford Young got in touch with a man he knew through the Pan American Audubon organization to get information, which was then passed on to Government. This project was never approved.

The Pesticide Control Act was gazetted on 28 December 1985. Later on there were Statutory Instruments setting out regulations for the use of controlled pesticides.

Wildlife Protection

Manatees

BAS got a report that fishermen from Ambergris Caye and other places were killing manatees. So, we wrote to the Chief Game Warden.



*West Indian manatee (Trichechus manatus)
Photo by James Beveridge*

Our society requests that the police officers of San Pedro, Caye Caulker, and Sarteneja, who are deemed game rangers under the Wildlife Protection Ordinance, be reminded that the manatee is a protected animal and it is prohibited by law to kill these animals. (Letter to Chief Game Warden, Forest Department, Ministry of Trade and Industry on March 12, 1973)

Export of Hides

The BAS had representation on the committees controlling the export of hides and other wildlife products. Hides of cats were the first to be prohibited from exportation. The Florida Audubon Society (FAS) formally recognized our advocacy efforts by passing the following resolutions:

Be it resolved that the Florida Audubon Society expresses its extreme admiration and appreciation to the Government of British Honduras for passing new regulations concerning the purchase, sale, and export of wild animal skins and hides.

Be it further resolved that the Society takes pride in the work of the Belize Audubon Society who helped to get the regulations adopted.

Be it further resolved that the Society expresses special thanks to Louis Lindo, the first national of Belize to hold the post of Chief Game Warden, who was greatly responsible for the passage of the regulations. (FAS Annual Meeting, April 5, 1972)

Parrots

The BAS kept alert to any threat to Belizean wildlife, as is shown in the following letter.

We would like to call your attention to the fact that in a recent radio programme (Opportunities Unlimited) parrots were being advertised for sale.

Parrots offered for sale are usually young birds taken from the nest, an act which is illegal. Besides, our Society is very concerned about the fact that the Yellow-headed Parrot, the species most in demand because of its ability to talk, is becoming quite rare. The taking of the young of this species may eventually cause it to disappear altogether.

Our Society would like to suggest that advertising of this nature should not be broadcast over Radio Belize. (Letter to the Chief Forest Officer with a copy to the Chief Broadcasting Officer, 8 November 1976)

This is to say thanks for your letter in respect of parrots dated November 8, 1976.

We are indeed very grateful to the Audubon Society for the efforts made in informing the Chief Broadcasting Officer of this illegal practice.

By a copy of this letter, we are requesting that no announcement be made for the sale of birds and/or animals except domestic animals, i.e. dogs, horses, etc, in any radio programme. This is because it is in contravention of the Wildlife Protection Ordinance. (Response from the Chief Forest Officer, 1 December 1976)

The Society wrote not only to complain, but also to commend officials for their positive actions.

We understand that an officer of your department was recently instrumental in stopping the export of a large number of Yellow-headed and other parrots.

Our Society is greatly concerned at the fact that the Yellow-headed Parrot is becoming quite rare in Belize.

We wish to commend your officer for his prompt action to prevent these parrots leaving the country. (Letter to Chief Forest Officer, 27 September 1977)

In May of 1987 the BAS was informed that 5,070 live birds in 55 wooden boxes had left Belize on their way to Amsterdam, Holland,

via Costa Rica. After investigations and discussions with Government authorities, the Society was able to establish that the birds had not been taken from Belize. The documents were shown to be false.

The Society views this fabrication as a malicious and deceitful act that damages the good name of the Government and people of Belize. (BAS Newsletter March, 1981)

Duck Hunting

Concern was raised over the hunting of ducks at Big Falls, as is seen by this letter written by W. Ford Young.

Following the recent conversation which I have had with you and Mr. John Searle regarding the Belize Audubon Society's concern over large groups of hunters shooting ducks at Big Falls Ranch, I list below the ducks and geese which are known to occur in Belize and which are now becoming quite rare and which the Belize Audubon Society feels should not be shot and also those known to occur in Belize and which, while some may not be common in Belize because this country is at the edge of their range, occur in large numbers elsewhere and are in no danger of extinction and could be allowed to be shot.

1. *Resident ducks which should not be shot:*
Black-bellied Tree-Duck, Dendrocygna autumnalis
Muscovy, Cairina moschata
2. *Ducks and geese which could be allowed to be shot:*
White-fronted Goose, Anser albifrons
Blue Goose, Chen caerulescens
Mallard, Anas platyrhynchos
Green-winged Teal, Anas carolinensis
American Wigeon, Anas americana
Northern Pintail, Anas acuta
Blue-winged Teal, Anas discors
Cinnamon Teal, Anas cyanoptera
Northern Shoveler, Anas clypeata
Ring-necked Duck, Aythya collaris
Lesser Scaup, Aythya affinis
Masked Duck, Oxyura dominica

The Belize Audubon Society feels that shooting should be confined to ducks and geese only and that no other birds should be shot. (Letter from W. Ford Young to Ms. Beth LeCroix of Belize Global Travel Service, Ltd., September 7, 1977)

Five years later the BAS was still concerned with hunters. This radio spot was broadcast on July 14, 1981.

A favourite stop on the Belize Audubon birding trips to the Burrell Boom/Bermudian Landing area is the bridge over Mussel Creek. Named Sebastian Bridge after a long-time resident of Burrell Boom village, it is here that Christmas Bird Count participants gather in the early dawn to start their count. They can usually record some 25 species without moving from the bridge.

Just as it begins to grow light, flights of herons and egrets start moving to their favourite feeding grounds. The call of the mottled wood owl can be heard. Among the water lettuce growing in quiet pools of the river, "diving doppers," as we Belizeans call those primitive aquatic birds, the grebes, float quietly, occasionally diving after small fish. A close watch of the overhanging vegetation by the river bank may be rewarded by a glimpse of the sungrebe, or finfoot, a rare resident of our rivers, and one of only three species worldwide.

Chattering parrots fly overhead and the harsh croak of the "barking gaulin" (the bare-throated tiger-heron) reveals its presence. The jacana (our "georgie bull"), the gray-necked wood-rail (we call it "top-na-chick"), snail kites, kingfishers, the limpkin (which we call "clucking hen"), and many more will be added to the count list. With luck, the muscovy, one of our two species of resident ducks, can be sighted.

Howler monkeys, our "baboons," that could usually be found in the fig trees by the river bank at Bermudian Landing, and heard from a long way off, have been seen near Sebastian Bridge.

Unfortunately, this wealth of bird life also attracts hunters, young and old, with shotguns at the ready to aim at everything in sight, the common as well as the rare. One recent Sunday afternoon, Audubon Society members, returning from a field trip, met up with a party of shooters who had been killing "shegs" (our local name for cormorants). It does not take a great marksman to hit these unwary birds! Like other fish-eating birds, shegs are not very palatable, so the dead birds are just left lying around.

Not only cormorants are targets for these shooters. A reliable report tells of a farmer fishing out dozens of dead wood storks from Mussel Creek, left there by Sunday shooters. To make use of them, he fed them to his pigs! The wood stork (our "john crow curlew" or "culu") is a protected bird and its nesting rookeries have been declared bird sanctuaries.

Should this wanton and indiscriminate shooting be allowed to continue, the birds will soon be gone. Those that are not killed, or

wounded and left to die, will be scared away by the noise of the guns, and a favourite spot for bird watching will be lost. Not only the Belize Audubon Society, but other citizens as well, would never like this to happen. In an attempt to prevent this disaster, an earnest appeal is made to all hunters. Please stop shooting at Sebastian Bridge, so that the bird life of that area may be left undisturbed.

Sea Turtles

Beginning in 1990 an extensive sea turtle programme has been carried out in Belize, spear-headed by BAS member Greg Smith. Volunteers patrolled the beaches where sea turtles nest in north Ambergris Caye and, later, Manatee Bar in the Gales Point area. At Manatee Bar he found one of the largest nesting sites for hawksbill turtles in the Caribbean region.

This programme was supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the Reef Preservation Committee. The Gales Point field site was established in cooperation with G. Winston Miller of the Fisheries Department under a grant from the World Wildlife Fund. The “Belize Sea Turtle Recovery Plan” was completed and published in 1993 with the assistance of Karen Eckert of Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST). Lobbying by the BAS led to passage of laws protecting sea turtles. The Turtle Regulations were further strengthened through amendments announced on April 1, 1993.



Greg Smith, Cristin Rich, Dolores Godfrey, and Walter Goff at the Gales Point sea turtle project site.

Whaling Commission

BAS was asked by the Government of Belize to select a representative to the Whaling Commission. With support from the Tinker Center for Coastal Studies in Latin America, BAS member David Craig attended the 35th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in Brighton, England, in July of 1983. Belize was one of 27 non-whaling nations represented at the meeting.

Scarlet Macaws

Reports reaching the office of the Belize Audubon Society on Wednesday evening (February 19, 1997) and this morning (Thursday, February 20) indicate that unknown persons from the village of Red Bank in the Stann Creek District are involved in the massive shooting of scores of scarlet macaw parrots (Ara macao). These parrots are classified as endangered throughout their natural range (Eastern Mexico to Brazil) due to relentless sport hunting and capture for the pet trade . . .

The Ministry of Natural Resources and the Forestry Department has started an official investigation into the incident and have visited the Red Bank Area. According to Mr. Richard Belisle, Chief Forest Officer, they estimated that 20 Scarlet macaws were killed. "Due to the number of feathers and debris we found on the site that is how we estimated the number of birds we believed were killed. On the 22nd and 23rd of February, forestry officers and two police officers from Independence Village visited Red Bank and questioned the village leaders and villagers. The officers inquired about the shootings and one name has been coming up. They are investigating this person and the person is a main suspect in the incident. The males in the communities have said that they eat the birds because they are big and easy to catch and they also claim to use their feathers for arts and crafts. It has also come up that the suspects in the case are all from one area, a new settlement that is near Red Bank called San Pablo. The Ministry, along with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, will work on educational programs to insure that other incidents like this one do not happen again. The NGOs are more equipped to carry out educational programs and the Ministry therefore works with them."

The Belize Audubon Society, in their recent newsletter, published an article on the comeback of these birds at Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. They were appalled to hear of this incident. According to Michael Somerville of Belize Audubon Society. "It is a big chunk out of the struggling and endangered scarlet macaw population. Mr.

Belisle said that the investigation is by no means closed and that it will not be closed until they have discovered the reason behind the slaughtering of the birds and those responsible have been punished for the crime. (BAS Press Release February 20, 1997)

A rapid response from the environmental NGOs and the Government of Belize turned this tragic discovery into a tourism opportunity. The killing of scarlet macaws stopped immediately, as soon as the people of the village realized that it was illegal. Through a grant from the United Nations Development Programme, Global Environmental Facilities, Programme for Belize helped the people of Red Bank village to develop a guest house and trails. Tour guides were trained and tourists now go there to see scarlet macaws.

Game Ranch Project

In the midst of the elections of 1984, a project was proposed for Belize that caused considerable controversy and conflict within the BAS. Kent B. Crane proposed to develop 20,000 acres of marginal land near Crooked Tree as a game ranch where foreign hunters would come to shoot exotic animals from Africa and other places, along with native wildlife. He also proposed a captive breeding programme for endangered species using embryonic transfer in association with the National Zoo and Smithsonian of the USA. An Environmental Impact Assessment was being done. Crane came to a BAS Board meeting and brought Jan Oelofse, who had such a game ranch in Namibia, Africa. He showed pictures and a copy of a picture of himself in National Geographic magazine.

BAS raised concerns about the introduction of exotic animals to Belize and sought advice from friends in the US, but the BAS Board was divided on the issue. Some were in favour because of the breeding programme for endangered species. Others urged caution. The GOB was said to be agreeable with the approval of the Chief Veterinary Officer and the BAS sent a letter to the Minister of Natural Resources expressing cautious support of the two projects.

But then the BAS saw the Crane Game Ranch proposal and received replies from experts at the New York Zoological Society, who expressed grave concerns about Mr. Crane's project. At this same time BAS had just received the first grant from the World Wildlife Fund to support the new Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. It was suggested that if BAS supported the game ranch, they might lose the WWF funding. The BAS Board then reversed its position and so

informed the Minister of Natural Resources. The Chief Veterinary Officer wrote the BAS asking why they had supported the proposal originally and what made them withdraw that support. Their response tells the history of this issue.

At a meeting of our Executive Committee held on 27 May, 1985, I was directed to acknowledge and thank you for your letter No. F1/2//85(5) of 17 May 1985, regarding the Belize Audubon Society's position on Mr. Kent Crane's proposals.

In November of last year, Mr. Crane verbally informed a few of our Board members that he proposed to establish a wild game reserve with native animals and five species of imported deer and antelope, which he named. He planned to later establish an endangered species breeding program. He would use up to 20,000 acres of marginal and not good agricultural land. He informed us he had elaborate plans for quarantining imported animals and to prevent the introduction of disease. He assured us his animals would be so well confined and trained that there would be very little chance of their escaping and not being recovered. He was asking the Belize Audubon Society to support his proposals. The subject being entirely new to us, we sought advice from our scientist friends here and abroad.

Around the 12th of January, 1985, we were informed, erroneously as it turned out, that Mr. Crane did not need our support any more as the Minister of Natural Resources had already approved his application to establish his game ranch and breeding programme. Anxious that safeguards should be taken to protect our wildlife and our promising cattle industry, we agreed that our letter dated 12 January, 1985, to the Minister should be written, not so much in support of Mr. Crane's proposals, but more to highlight our concern that safeguards be written into any concession granted to him.

Later, our Board was able to see Mr. Crane's written proposals, and after studying them and taking into account the advice received from wildlife biologists here and in the United States, we decided to write to the Minister stating that we did not endorse Mr. Crane's proposals.

*We do not support Mr. Crane's proposals because we are not convinced that he has satisfactorily dealt with the question of disease potential. He does not state that he will provide proper quarantine facilities to assure that the animals imported are free of disease and parasites. We read in the March 1985 issue of Audubon magazine that one of five black rhinos imported into Texas from South Africa died two months after arrival. The rhino was found to be host to a strange tick which after extensive tests turned out to be *Amblyomma hebraeum*, a species that can transmit various unhealthy fevers. The*

rhinos had supposedly passed as pest free by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Crane has not dealt satisfactorily with the problem of preventing his imported animals from escaping and competing with native wildlife, or with the problem of keeping jaguars out of his enclosed game ranch. Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, who made a two-year study of the jaguar in the Cockscomb Basin, informs us that it is unlikely "8-foot game proof fences" (which Mr. Crane proposes to install) will keep jaguars out. The big cat will scale almost any type of fence to get to its prey – the various species of deer and other animals which Mr. Crane proposes to import. At one stage Mr. Crane proposed to electrify his fencing. This would mean a minimum of 22 miles of fencing in order to enclose his proposed 20,000 acre ranch. At another stage, we were informed that he would tranquilize and remove any jaguar which found its way into his enclosure. Dr. Rabinowitz, who used this method during his jaguar study, assures us that this is not so easy. The jaguar must first be cornered and the amount of tranquilizer needed must be assessed before it is administered in the right place. At yet another stage, Mr. Crane is reported to have said that any jaguar found in his game ranch will be shot.

Although in his verbal proposal, Mr. Crane mentioned the importation of only five species of deer and antelope, his written proposal listed many more deer and other animals.

Mr. Crane has implied that he was associated with the National Zoological Park/Smithsonian Institution. This was denied by Michael H. Robinson, Director.

For the past several years, the Belize Audubon Society has tried to teach the Belizean people to appreciate and protect our wildlife. We wonder what effect allowing strangers to come to our country to hunt and kill wild animals will have.

We have sought and received advice from various persons in the U.S., some of whom have worked here and are therefore familiar with our need for development as well as the importance of protecting our wildlife. Some of the letters received have already been copied to your Ministry, and we now enclose further copies of these. Some other letters were received under confidential cover and are being treated as such. . .

We believe that any advantages we may gain from Mr. Crane's projects would be far outweighed by the risks involved.

We trust that this information will be of help to the Minister, and we extend our best wishes. (Letter to the Chief Veterinary Officer, May 30, 1985)

Coca Cola

On October 3, 1985, a News Release from Coca-Cola Foods of Houston, Texas, announced their plans to invest in Belize, buying large portions of the vast property owned by the Belize Estate and Produce Co. Ltd..

Negotiations have been concluded for the purchase of approximately 700,000 acres of land in northwestern Belize by a group of business interests as part of a programme to assist in the economic development of that Central American country.

The business interests who will participate in the project include Barry M. Bowen, a Belize businessman; Paul Howell and Walter Mischer, Sr., Houston businessmen; and Coca-Cola Foods, a Houston-based division of the Coca-Cola Company...

The agreement among the interests provides for Bowen, the Howell-Mischer group, and Coca-Cola Foods to each own 50,000 acres of land individually. The remaining acreage will be held jointly with Bowen holding a 40 percent interest, and the Howell-Mischer group and Coca-Cola Foods holding 30 percent each.

Coca-Cola Foods announced that it plans to utilize its individually owned acreage for a citrus project. Approximately 25,000 acres of citrus could be planted over the next seven years. Initially, the fruit would be processed by local processors or it could be shipped to Florida for processing. Later a processing plant could be built in Belize if the project warrants it, and the concentrate processed there would be shipped to Florida for remanufacturing and packaging.

The reason given for their interest is that the loss of 200,000 acres of groves in Florida to freezes has caused Minutemaide (22% share of US market) to depend upon concentrate from Brazil."

This announcement prompted a strong response among environmentalists and international funding agencies that had been investing in various projects to insure that Belize's development could proceed in a sustainable, environmentally-friendly manner. This letter from BAS Vice President Ford Young shows the role of the BAS in the process.

Members of the Board of Directors have had a meeting with representatives of the Coca-Cola group and Coca-Cola is aware of the environmental implications of their project and will do everything reasonably possible to minimize adverse effects.

The Mischer/Howell group has not made any announcement as to their development plans. They have recently formed a corporation known as "Yalbac Ranch and Cattle Corporation" to handle their interest in the area.

Before the Coca-Cola group came into the picture, Barry Bowen (then owner of Belize Estate and Produce Co. Ltd) and his associates had a meeting with members of the Board of Directors of the Belize Audubon Society and expressed their willingness to work with the Society in setting aside a protected area and to minimize habitat destruction as far as possible. I understand that Barry intends to utilize some of the better quality land for agricultural purposes, but he also is hoping to be able to set aside a considerable acreage which contains numerous Mayan ruins and which he hopes to develop into a carefully controlled tourist attraction and wildlife reserve – something on the order of Tikal. . . (Letter to Francis Spivy-Weber of the U.S. National Audubon Society November 27, 1986)

The controversy really heated up when Friends of the Earth reported in a BBC programme that Coca-Cola Foods claimed to be working closely with the BAS and implied that the BAS would be doing the Environmental Impact Assessment for the project.

Coca-Cola Foods has not worked closely with BAS to determine how best to protect the environment and critical habitats as Coca-Cola Foods implements its development plan and, other than a preliminary meeting that took place on May 22, 1986, there has been no formal contact between Coca-Cola Foods and BAS.

The Belize Audubon Society agrees that there is a need for the preparation of an environmental impact assessment before any large-scale development project is undertaken in Belize. However, at this time, BAS has neither the human nor financial resources to carry out such a survey on behalf of Coca-Cola Foods (and has not agreed to do so). (Statement released by the BAS Board of Directors on January 8, 1987)

The BAS consulted Mark Halle of the IUCN for help with the environmental impact assessment of the Coca-Cola Foods Project. By this time, however, the international attention to this project seemed to have had its effect upon Coca-Cola Foods.

Coca-Cola realizes that there are environmental implications to any project that might be conducted on the land and we have no intention of beginning development activities without an environmental plan. We have conferred with several consultants on how best to pursue the environmental management plan and we will consider such ideas as commissioning the Belize Audubon Society to conduct the assessment, or in some other way integrate their ideas into the final plan.

There has been some question raised that Coca-Cola Foods has misled the public by stating that we have worked closely with the Belize Audubon Society in the past. We have met with the BAS Board and communicated to individual members. There has not yet been a close working relationship because the project has been on hold pending resolution of the business factors mentioned above. It was certainly not CCF's intention to mislead anyone, and it is our intention to work with the Belize Audubon Society in the future.

The Belize Audubon Society already has indicated to CCF an interest in setting aside a portion of the former Belize Estate and Produce Company land as a nature or wildlife preserve. We will continue these discussions although we cannot make any commitments at this time. We are willing, however, to initiate discussions with the other purchasers of the Belize Estate land, but we, of course, cannot make commitments on their behalf. (Coca-Cola Foods, February 18, 1987)

In the meantime the Government of Belize, in Statutory Instrument No. 116 of 1986 (December 20, 1986), had granted a development concession to Mischer of Houston. The concession refers to "an integrated agricultural enterprise," but the name "Yalbac Ranch and Cattle (Belize) Limited" suggested cattle ranching. It included a fifteen-year (income) tax holiday through 2001 and provided relief from customs and import duties on items to be brought into the country. In return the company was required to have at least 30 permanent employees by the end of 1988.

On March 18, 1987, BAS members Philip Balderamos and Walter Craig toured the Yalbac portion of the former Belize Estate land with John Loskot. Loskot had been engaged by Yalbac Ranch and Cattle (Belize) Ltd to oversee the establishment of an integrated agricultural enterprise in the Yalbac area of the Orange Walk and Cayo Districts. The area they saw is in the southern portion of the former Belize Estate land in northwest Belize. Access to the project site is from Burrell Boom through Bermudian Landing and Rancho Dolores. The BAS representatives found that 125 acres had already been cleared and some conservation measures had been taken. They suggested that more trees be left and that 50-meter strips of forest be left undisturbed at intervals leading to the lagoon.

The Yalbac Ranch and Cattle Corporation, owned by US entrepreneurs Howard Mischer and Paul Howell, looks likely to become the next target for environmental groups concerned about damage

to Belize's forest ecology, following publication of details of their plans for their portion of the former Belize Estate and Produce Co. Ltd. land . . .

Lands suitable for agriculture will be cleared of all but the larger trees to make way for a 50,000 acre cattle ranch and smaller farming units for production of foodstuffs and protein concentrate crops. The rest will be left for nature study and limited hunting. The Belize Audubon Society commented that as well as being twice as large as Coca-Cola Foods' proposed development, it will be ecologically "far more destructive than permanent citrus orchards." (Caribbean Insight, September, 1987)

On March 19 Coca-Cola invited the BAS Board to a meeting where the Coca-Cola Foods plans were presented. BAS learned that Coca-Cola Foods had employed an ecologist, that up to then Coca-Cola's only activity was a nursery of citrus trees and no trees were felled, and that the initial planting was planned for a fairly open area of pine ridge. The BAS Board prepared the following policy statement.

Because of its relatively untouched natural environment, the Government and people of Belize have the unique opportunity to design and implement a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development that integrates concepts of environmental conservation in the planning process. The Belize Audubon Society is cognizant of the need for economic development of the country so as to ensure the wellbeing of the people. The urgency of the need for development, however, may threaten to encourage measures that produce solely short-term financial gains rather than policies designed to achieve long-term, environmentally sustainable development. Thus, to ensure that the development of Belize results in long lasting, positive change, the Belize Audubon Society urges those engaged in activities relating to the further development of the country to keep the value of natural areas in the forefront of their thinking and fully integrate environmental protection measures into development policies.

At a meeting held on 19 March 1987, between personnel of Coca-Cola Foods and the Belize Audubon Society, Coca-Cola Foods personnel explained as best they could their present position in the development of citrus groves in the northwestern sector of the country of Belize.

Coca-Cola Foods is prepared to fund the development of an environmental impact assessment of the area to be cultivated and has agreed to have the involvement of the Belize Audubon Society at all phases of development of the said impact statement.

Consideration will also be given to the possibility of setting aside a parcel of land which would be left undisturbed so as to ensure the preservation of the flora and fauna native to the area.

The need for continued dialogue between Coca-Cola Foods and the Belize Audubon Society was recognized and assurances were given the Society that efforts would be made to see that this is done.

The Belize Audubon Society appreciates the interest of Coca-Cola Foods in addressing the environmental issues associated with the citrus project and looks forward to a fruitful and meaningful working relationship. (BAS Press Release, 10 April 1987)

BAS then learned that the partnership that had originally purchased the Belize Estate land had dissolved. Coca-Cola Foods ended up with some 195,000 acres. They intended to develop only 50,000 acres for citrus and were unsure about what to do with the rest. Since Massachusetts Audubon Society intended to buy land in Belize, BAS hoped that they might buy land adjacent to the land that Coca-Cola Foods would reserve, creating a large reserve.

By August Coca-Cola announced that the citrus development was delayed for at least three years and perhaps indefinitely, so the environmental impact assessment was never done. They agreed to reserve 40,000 acres and to spend \$50,000 developing this parcel. Another 10,000 acres was donated to the Government of Belize to be given to Belizean farmers for agriculture. Coca-Cola intended to sell the remaining 93,000 acres at the price they paid. Belizeans were encouraged to purchase this land. A 1,725-acre parcel adjacent to the Belize Zoo was officially donated for expansion of the Zoo.

The Massachusetts Audubon Society and “Friends of Belize” carried on a media campaign to purchase the land that Coca-Cola was selling. The issue was covered on “60 Minutes,” a popular television programme in the United States, and there was extensive coverage in Europe. The media exposure brought considerable international attention to environmental issues in Belize and to the Belize Audubon Society.

Fortunately, the conservation movement in Belize is now a powerful force, thanks to the naturalists’ organisation, the Belize Audubon Society, and its extraordinary influence on a sympathetic government. The separate initiatives of the Belize Audubon and other organisations and the government have consolidated this achievement.

In 1981, the government passed the National Parks System Act.

Under the act, the Audubon Society has a mandate from the government to help it to develop and run the parks. Since 1981, five parks have been established, and more are planned. . . . Dean Lindo, the agriculture and conservation minister, says, "We're going at conservation hell's bells. This is the uniqueness of Belize that we can make decisions now to preserve and protect what we have." (New Scientist, 29 October 1988)

In the end Coca Cola pulled out altogether. The Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area was established with land donated by Coca Cola and adjacent land purchased with funds collected in the international media campaign. It is now owned and managed by Programme for Belize. The 255,000-acre area is used for research, ecotourism, horticulture, sustainable forestry, carbon sequestration, community outreach and environmental education.

National Conservation Strategy

When Belize became independent, the new nation received international help in developing plans for conservation.

Dr. Bernardo Zentilli, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), was in Belize for a short visit, September 4 to 8.

Accompanied by Mrs. Weyer and Mr. and Mrs. Waight, he met with Mr. J. Hyde, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, and Mr. Henry Flowers, Chief Forest Officer, in Belmopan. As a first step in the development of an overall plan for conservation in Belize, Dr. Zentilli proposed that two consultants from IUCN meet with the Belize Planning Committee, and he suggested a two-week period in early December. (BAS Bulletin, September 1982)

A mission from the IUCN was in Belize from November 29 to December 11. The mission consisted of three members of the IUCN Commission for Environmental Planning – Dr. Pierre Hunkeler (head of mission), Dr. Cyrille de Klemm, and Mr. Merilio Morell – who were later joined by Dr. Archie Carr III of the New York Zoological Society, Mr. Bruce Rich of the Natural Resources Defence Council, Washington, D.C., and Mr. R. Dubois of the USAID.

The mission was here at the request of the Belize government and met with various departments to gather information that will assist in the development of a National Conservation Strategy. They also participated in a workshop with representatives of several ministries, departments and other organizations, including the Belize Audubon



Illegal logging down to the river's edge in the Toledo District documented by BAS in June, 1996

Society. Before leaving, the visiting experts met with the BAS Board of Directors. (BAS Bulletin November-December 1982)

The mission was followed by a visit in October of 1984 from Mark Halle, Manager of the Conservation Development Centre of IUCN, Dr. James Barborak and Dr. Craig MacFarland of CATIE.

The purpose of Mr. Halle's visit was to review the priorities for the next stage of work in the Belize National Conservation Strategy and to develop project proposals covering the provision of necessary technical assistance. The report of the first IUCN mission, "Conservation for Sustainable Development in Belize: Towards a National Conservation Strategy," was presented to Government in May of last year.

Dr. Barborak and Dr. MacFarland came to identify specific conservation projects in which CATIE could help with providing technical assistance, training and funding. Mr. David Lovell, CATIE intern, who arrived October 5, will remain in Belize until the end of November. He will be preparing funding proposals and planning documents for several conservation projects." (BAS Bulletin October 1984)

David Lovell prepared draft management plans, operation manuals and funding proposals for Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, and Half Moon Caye Natural Monument.

Logging in Toledo District

The first logging controversy to arise in regard to the Columbia Forest Reserve in the Toledo District involved a Mexican company in 1992. The environmental NGOs joined forces in a successful lobbying effort against this plan.

Then in 1994 a logging concession for 24,000 acres of the Toledo District was given to Atlantic Industries Corporation, a Malaysian firm. There was such an outcry raised by the Belizean environmental organizations with support from international organizations that the project was stopped, but not for long. In 1996 the project was back again, this time with a modern forest management plan revolving around selective logging of small blocks of forest and then allowing that block to recover for several years. There was to be no cutting within 60 feet of rivers or streams. The permit covered 18% of the Columbia Forest Reserve and areas along the boundary of the Sarstoon-Temash National Park.

Again there was an outcry from environmental organizations and also from the local indigenous people, the Mopan and Kekchi Maya, who organized massive protests. BAS conducted a fact-finding mission to the area in June of 1996 and found that the loggers were violating the terms of the approved plan by taking too many trees from too large an area and by cutting along riverbanks.

In September of 1998 the GOB declared a halt to the logging until adequate consultation with the local population had occurred. A committee chaired by BAS President Pepe Garcia was appointed to review the Malaysian logging licenses. The report submitted to the GOB in March, 1999, made the following recommendations.

1) The license should be cancelled, redefined to address existing concerns and renegotiated with the present operator if they express interest in doing so. . .

2) If negotiations cannot be concluded with the present operator, . . . local industry should be given priority in obtaining the license over other foreign or new investment. . .

3) The license area should be redefined with the following provisions included:

a) A buffer zone established around each community . . . for traditional uses. Timber rights for commercial exploitation in these zones must be negotiated with community involvement in the process.

b) Protected forest and other areas of national heritage . . . must be delineated and removed from areas open to harvesting.

c) The remaining productive forest must be placed on an area control basis as developed by the technical staff in the Forest Department with not only technical sustainability, but also economical viability duly considered.

4) The operator of the license should be required, if the modified license is reissued to them, to truly effect some new technological advances in the industry and greater positive economic impact on the region as was promised and used to justify the initial issuance of the license to them.

5) The then Principal Forest Officer, Conservation, who officiated the license did so in a "clandestine manner" and without utilization of expertise in the department, projects and other relevant government offices, creating a very embarrassing situation for the government and the country of Belize. . . Appropriate disciplinary measures must be taken . . . and measures taken in the department to avoid such abuse in the future.

6) The supervision by the Forest Department . . . seems to have been very inadequate . . . The Forest Department presence in Toledo must be upgraded to a full territorial division with the necessary allocation of resources. . .

7) A more general recommendation for this type of license is to incorporate larger annual compartments so as to increase economic viability of the licensee in carrying out the demanding conditions of such a sustainable yield license.

8) Prior to the issuance of a forest license, relevant issues, such as the impact on the surrounding communities and the environment, should be properly addressed and incorporated in a management plan for the license area.

BAS' 24-Hour Hotline

For a time in 1996 the BAS conducted an experiment with a 24-hour Hotline, a phone number that was publicized for anyone to call to report environmental problems. After working hours, the calls were rerouted to staff members' homes and all reports were investigated. There were a number of calls reporting such issues as problems with crocodiles, dead dolphins and manatees, illegal logging, and fish

kills from pollution. There were also some unusual requests, such as someone asking BAS to carry her chicken with a skin infection to the veterinarian. A reported “rare cat” turned out to be a raccoon. While it was publicized, the hotline generated good public response, but it became an imposition on the family life of the BAS staff. The idea is under revision.

Lamanai Room Declaration

The year 1997 was known internationally “The Year of the Reef,” but in Belize it brought a number of threats to our beautiful, fragile reefs. Two diving boats dragged their anchors over the reef at Lighthouse Reef in July, a captive dolphin theme park was approved, exceptions to the lobster fishing laws were approved to allow for lobster ranching, and there were rumors of live rock exportation. These threats to Belize’s most precious and unique natural resource prompted the BAS to hold an unprecedented joint Board of Directors meeting with the Belize Tourism Industry Association. They invited other environmental organizations as well to the Lamanai Room at the Radisson Fort George Hotel. The resulting Lamanai Room Declaration, was signed by 26 organizations on August 7, 1997.

Whereas, in a joint meeting, the BTIA and the BAS, with the support of numerous non-governmental organizations, after due deliberations, have concluded in preliminary analysis that actions taken by the Government of Belize on the following issues:

- 1) Dolphin Park - Cangrejo Caye*
- 2) Cruise ship damage to the reef*
- 3) Live rock exportation*
- 4) Lobster ranching and*
- 5) Logging in the Toledo District*

Are indicating disregard for principles of sustainable development, community consultation, conservation and environment, and are indicating a possible violation of Belizean environmental legislation in regard to the 1990 Environmental Protection Act, the 1994 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, the Wildlife Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Fisheries Act, the Constitutional Rights of Belizeans and terms of international agreements and other conventions relating to the environment: Agenda 21, UNCED, 1992; Cartagena Convention; Declaration of Tulum, June 1997; UN Law of the Sea and the International Year of the Reef, 1997.

Therefore, BTIA and BAS and the undersigned urge that the Government of the day, in its decision-making process, immediately suspend the licenses of (1), (3), (4) and (5) and revisit (2); respect the technical expertise afforded them during their period of office and respect the wishes of the Belizean people for full participation, disclosure, transparency and consultation in this process and in current and future development proposals such as the Northern Ambergris Caye Development; and establish a national agency to coordinate coastal and marine affairs by immediately presenting the proposed Coastal Zone Management Agency bill to the House of Representatives.

Be it resolved that we the undersigned shall:

- 1) jointly retain legal counsel to represent the multi-sectoral interest, and the interest of all Belizeans;*
- 2) support the position of the fishing cooperatives of Belize on lobster ranching and other reef-related issues;*
- 3) advise the international environmental community in respect of the above;*
- 4) not discount the possibility of dialogue with international funding agencies.*

A second meeting between the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) and the Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) was held on October 21, 1997, at the Radisson Fort George Hotel in Belize City and the following update was issued:

1) **Live Rock Exportation:** It was reported that the Government of Belize (GOB) has not received any application nor granted any concession for the exportation of live rock.

2) **Reef Damage:** The Ministry of Tourism and the Environment has received a fine of BZ\$75,000 from each of the two vessels that caused the recent damage to the reef. The Statutory Instrument relating to environment protection is currently being amended to increase the fines for reckless damage to the reef.

3) **Logging in the Toledo District:** It was agreed that a closed meeting will be held between the BTIA and BAS to study all the parameters surrounding the issue and that all stakeholders will be invited.

4) **Lobster Ranching:** Two licenses were granted for lobster ranching, one to A&J Lobster near Cosiga Creek (James Wang Company), and a second to Dangriga Taiwan Initiative Ltd. near Bread and Butter Caye in the Stann Creek District. A team of fisher-

ies experts reviewed the applications made for these projects and the licenses granted.

5) **Dolphin Theme Park at Cangrejo Caye:** BTIA/BAS officials met with the Minister of Tourism and the Environment, the Permanent Secretary, the Chief Environmental Officer, and the Director of Tourism. The Chief Environmental Officer stated that the Cangrejo Caye investors were given the terms of reference for a required Environmental Impact Assessment Study. Once the investors have identified the company or persons to conduct their study, this should be forwarded to the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) for approval. The DOE agreed to consult with BTIA/BAS on these matters.

Tilapia in Crooked Tree Lagoon

In May of 1996 it was reported that strange fish had invaded the Crooked Tree Lagoon and were taking over the lagoon, out-competing the native fish. BAS, under the direction of Clara Cuellar, took members of the Fisheries Department on two occasions to collect samples from the Crooked Tree Lagoon. They confirmed that these strange fish were an exotic African species of fish of the genus *Tilapia*. BAS learned that *Tilapia* were being farmed at Cherak's Farm at Big Creek. The BAS began to collect information on *Tilapia* and released weekly press releases. BAS Members Bruce and Carolyn Miller warned of the dangers of *Tilapia* in a Letter to the Editor published in the *Reporter* (June 2, 1996). They explained that *Tilapia* are very aggressive fish that reproduce large numbers of offspring rapidly. They can have a devastating effect upon ecosystems and native freshwater fish. They may even affect the supply of lobster and shrimp in the sea by eating larvae at the shoreline.

This media attention resulted in an invitation by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Honourable Russell Garcia, for the BAS to attend a Press Conference at Cherak's Farm. Following that field trip several concerns were raised. No Environmental Impact Assessment was done until May of 1996, one year after the farm was in operation. There were no monitoring reports at that time. There was a conflict of interest because those responsible for monitoring were personnel hired and paid by the Cherak's Farm. Although the personnel at Cherak's Farm assured the visitors that *Tilapia* would not survive even one hour in salt water, the demonstration failed for

the fish were still alive three hours later. The BAS also found that the screens in the catchment system were collapsed, resulting in water from the ponds flowing freely into the environment.

A joint press release from the BAS and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries stated that they agreed to form a joint team to address the concerns of the fishermen about *Tilapia* in the Crooked Tree Lagoon, to review the policies and regulations governing aquaculture in Belize, to ensure that all aquaculture project proposals go through an environmental impact assessment process prior to implementation, and to promote public awareness on the real economic, social and environmental effects of aquaculture in Belize.

Caye Chapel Development

BAS expressed concern about the development proposed by Caye Chapel Ventures Ltd. A golf course was in the process of being developed. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was submitted to the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) for the expansion and relocation of the airstrip to the southwest of the island, an area that would have to be filled. The NEAC rejected the project on the grounds of technical unsoundness, but Caye Chapel Ventures appealed and the assembled Appeals Tribunal granted clearance for the project on 3 July 1998.

Investigation by the BAS showed a number of illegal activities. No shields were used when dredging was carried out and the BAS got photographic documentation of a plume of sediments going out towards the reef. The golf course was built without an EIA. The north end of the island was reclaimed in contravention of the EIA and dredging permit. In the general election of 1998, the victorious People's United Party used the Caye Chapel development as a campaign issue on neighboring Caye Caulker and San Pedro. Along with the other organizations in BACONGO, the BAS lobbied the new government to revisit the entire Caye Chapel development.

The resolution was to allow the dredging of 200,000 cubic yards to fill the the area for the new airstrip, but in 50,000 increments with monitoring by the Fisheries Department, Petroleum and Geology Department, Lands and Survey Department, Department of the Environment, Civil Aviation, Forest Department, Coastal Zone Management Authority, and the Belize Audubon Society before approval of the next increment is granted.

An Environmental Agenda for the 21st Century

Under its Advocacy initiative, BAS has launched a document entitled "An Environmental Agenda for the 21st Century." This document outlines BAS' position on the main issues affecting our natural environment, some of which are:

- *People and the Environment*
- *Tourism*
- *Environmental Education*
- *Fisheries and the Coastal Zone*
- *Waste Management*
- *Forestry and Protected Areas*
- *Water Resources*
- *Land Ownership and Development*
- *Agriculture*

The document gives the current status, points out the challenges/concerns and offers proposals for action. This document involved several months of preparation and consultation with Belize professionals in their relevant fields. The Agenda was officially launched on 23 June 1998 to the media, politicians, NGO's, development organizations, government departments, and the general public. (Valdemar Andrade, BAS Newsletter, May-July 1998)

As a result of this effort and for the first time in Belize electoral history, both the People's United Party and the United Democratic Party Manifestos had whole sections relating to the environment, ecotourism, and management of our natural resources.

Preface

Jose "Pepe" Garcia, BAS President

The strengthened advocacy arm of the BAS also embarked on the second phase of the programme in which the Advocacy Coordinator and the Executive Director met with political parties in Belize to deliver copies of the environmental agenda for key party officials.

The current trend toward an equitable stewardship of the natural environment is converging on Belize from two primary directions - a traditional social value and a growing awareness by the population at large of the importance of proper environmental management practices in the interest of future generations.

A traditional and prolonged respect for the natural environment has been an underlying ethic of Belizean peoples. The best example of this has been the coexistence of the Maya with the tropical marine, coastal, and rainforest ecosystems for the past three thousand years. We are all beneficiaries of this in the cumulative awareness and use of food, medicine, shelter and all the prerequisites of daily life originating from what nature provides.

On the other hand, the growing environmental awareness partially influenced by the experiences of the developed countries has led to greater conservation efforts by developing countries to ensure greater viability in an increasingly more fragile global environment. The unique capability of Belize to tip the balance toward a renewed environmental morality - despite the overwhelming demands of migration, industrialization, and urbanization - places it far ahead of other developing countries and in the path of realizing the need for prudently linking development with the dictates of the environment.

Within this seemingly contradictory path toward development which we are faced with on the eve of the 21st Century, we have prepared the following document entitled "An Environmental Agenda for the 21st Century." This document reflects our position on the status of the natural environment, the concerns, and proposals for action.

While it is hoped that the political parties fielding candidates for the upcoming general elections will pay close attention to this document, we emphasize that it is also directed to members of the private sector, the civil society, NGOs and, indeed, all Belizeans.

We feel proud that our mission of promoting "the sustainable use and preservation of our natural resources in order to maintain a balance between people and the environment, " is consistent with the unending efforts to find this delicate balance between development and the environment.

As the oldest and one of the leading environmental organizations in this country, we hereby pledge to work closely with the private sector, civil society and the Government of Belize to ensure that the proposals for action herein presented are taken into serious consideration and acted upon.

HIVOS Grant

The goal of the BAS Advocacy Programme is to take action to ensure that policies set forth by the Government of Belize, especially with regard to land and water, are environmentally sound and take the best interest of the Belizean people into consideration. This programme was funded by a one-year grant from a Dutch NGO, the Humanitarian Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS), beginning in September, 1998.

Major objectives of the programme were:

- To establish an expanded grassroots base for the BAS,
- To advocate for policies and enforceable regulations that take into account sound environmental behaviours amongst specific targeted groups,
- To establish an information and research system to complement and add to the Conservation and Environmental Data System,
- To take a leading role in steering the Belize Alliance of Conservation Non-Governmental Organizations (BA-CONGO) and participate actively in the Association of National Development Agencies (ANDA), and
- To demonstrate successful approaches to sound environmental behaviour.

Chalillo Hydroelectric Dam

In 1998 the GOB and Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) proposed to build a second hydroelectric dam to generate electricity. The BAS, realizing that it has been nine years since the last analysis, began an initial consideration of options for Belize's future energy needs. Discussions held with a number of knowledgeable people and a literature survey provided the background for a working paper. Alternative energy sources considered include co-generation with the sugar, citrus, and sawmill industries, along with wind, solar and diesel-generated energy. As a result of this study, the following statement was released on March 11, 1999.

The Government of Belize (GOB) and the Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) have embarked on preparatory work for the building of the second phase of a hydroelectric dam to generate energy. The Belize Audubon Society notes that the last analysis of options

for the generation of electricity was conducted approximately nine years ago. In addition to hydroelectric energy, these options include co-generation of electricity from sugar cane bagasse, citrus peel and others.

In keeping with its mission of promoting the sustainable use of our natural resources for the development of our nation, and after research and consultations with key people in industry, the business sector and the environmental community, the Society proposes the following:

- 1) The formulation of a long-term, comprehensive **Energy Policy** for Belize, which will aim to reduce its dependence on the importation of fossil fuels and energy. This policy must take into consideration the proper and responsible use of the natural resources of Belize and weigh all the options available for generating power.*
- 2) The GOB should conduct a vigorous and comprehensive review of **ALL** the options for generating energy from renewable sources.*
- 3) A complete **Environmental Impact Assessment**, in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act of 1992, must be conducted for whichever option is deemed viable before the option is undertaken.*

The Belize Audubon Society stands ready to collaborate with the public and private sector, and civil society in organizing a National Forum on Renewable Energy Sources. We invite the general public to review our “Working Document on the Renewable Energy Generation Options for Belize.”

Land Policy Reform

An Advocacy Technical Committee was appointed by the BAS Board of Directors in early 1999. The focus of this committee for the period 1999 to 2001 is on land policy reform. The initial campaign was the gathering of alliances with all the stakeholders, including SPEAR and Belize Agro-producers Organization. The goal is to facilitate a complete reform of land policy in Belize.

