U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wildlife Without Borders

Division of International Conservation
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Wildlife Without Borders

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Students in Latin America and the Caribbean learn about bird conservation through the West Indies Whistling-Duck education program (top photo) and the Shorebird Sister Schools Program (bottom photo).

USFWS/Brad Andres

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Research and Education Team-up on Buff-breasted Sandpiper Project

Heather Johnson

Buff-breasted Sandpipers are small shorebirds that annually trek across the Western Hemisphere from South America to northern Alaska and northern Canada. These amazing long-distance migrants are currently a species of conservation concern. The entire world's population of this species is thought to number less than 20,000 individuals.

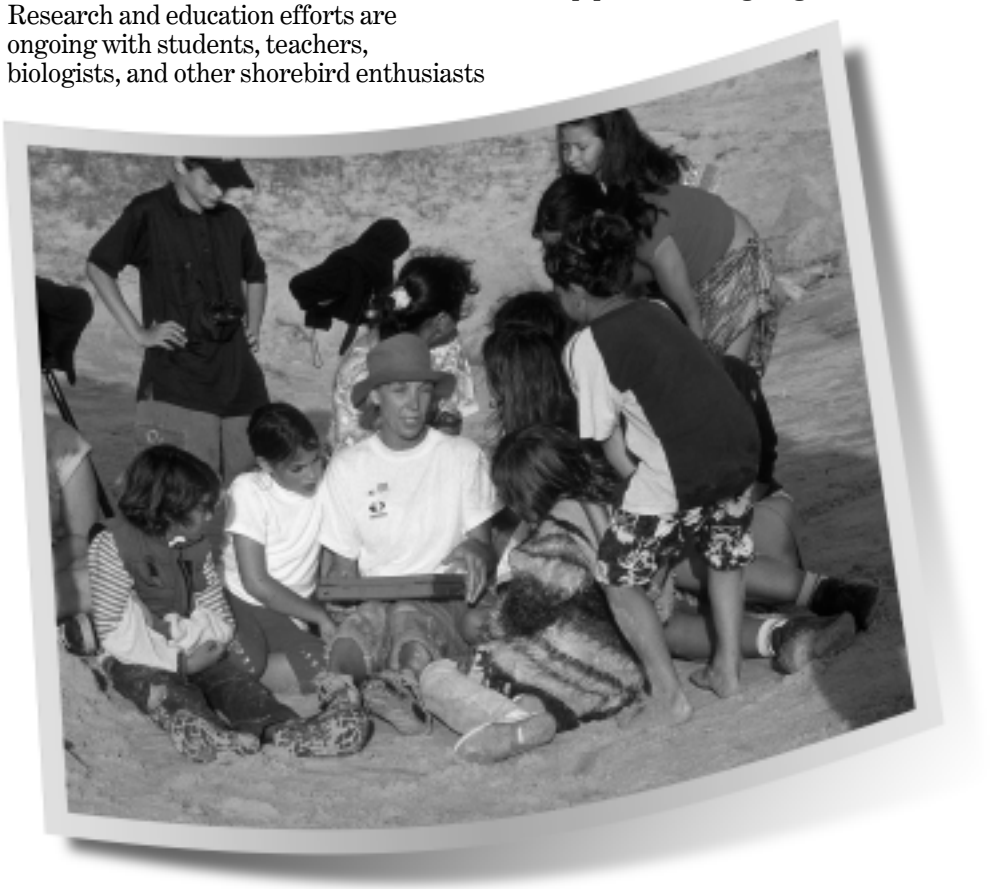
Because ideas on their decline and how to increase their population are still unknown, a research team began studying the sandpipers. In conjunction with the research efforts, students involved in the Shorebird Sister Schools Program began learning about Buff-breasted Sandpiper life history, threats, research techniques, and ways they can help.

Researchers at the U.S. Geological Survey's Alaska Science Center have been studying Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Alaska for several years and recently decided to expand their research to the wintering grounds. As a collaborative effort with local South American scientists, they were able to secure funds in 1999 to conduct surveys in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. They were also successful in funding additional work in the winter of 2001 to return to Uruguay and Brazil to finish surveys and conduct vegetation sampling. Dr. Rick Lanctot and Verena Gill, biologists with the Alaska Science Center, and several local research scientists from Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, completed surveys and vegetation sampling in November and December 2001.

During the 2001 project, an environmental education component was added to the project. Adriana Cafferata, the South America Shorebird Sister Schools Program Coordinator, received a Winged Ambassadors grant through the Wildlife Without Borders-Latin America and Caribbean initiative of the Service. Environmental educators from the Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina, Asociación Ornitológica del Plata, and Centro de Investigación Alternativa en Ambiente y Educación, Brad Andres, (National Shorebird Coordinator for the Service), and Heather Johnson (Conservation Biologist from the Service's Division of International Conservation), all assisted Adriana with the project. They traveled to three different communities in Uruguay, introducing shorebird education programs to students from Montevideo, Rocha, and Cabo Polonio. Students participated in shorebird field trips, assisted with field research, and provided information to their pen pals throughout the Western Hemisphere. They observed shorebirds through spotting scopes and binoculars (provided by Birder's Exchange), conducted invertebrate studies to determine what shorebirds eat, and played migration games. Students were excited to learn that Buff-breasted Sandpipers live in their backyard in the winter and travel along the Central Flyway to the far north of Alaska and Canada every year.

Research and education efforts are ongoing with students, teachers, biologists, and other shorebird enthusiasts documenting the movements of Buff-breasted Sandpipers along the flyway and looking for ways to increase their numbers. Additional information on the Buff-breasted Sandpiper conservation project has been added to internet web pages of the Shorebird Sister Schools Program and the Centro de Investigación Alternativa en Ambiente y Educación. Students and shorebird enthusiasts along the Central Flyway are invited to share their Buff-breasted Sandpiper observations and participate in conservation efforts.

This project has been a very successful effort and provides great hope for the conservation of the Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Through collaborative research, education, and community involvement, the future of these sandpipers is looking brighter.



Adriana Cafferata assists students with an e-mail posting, to the Shorebird Sister Schools Program e-mail list server, on their recent field trip.

Brad Andres/USFWS

From the start of the hunt to the return home, walrus harvesting represents survival for many villages. Walrus' are a source of food and raw materials for traditional equipment and handicrafts.

USFWS photos

US-Russia Collaborate on a Walrus Harvest Monitor Program

Marine Mammals Management, Alaska

Pacific walrus thrive in the frigid and remote continental shelf waters of the Bering and Chukchi Seas. Freely crossing political boundaries, walrus are a wildlife species shared between the United States and Russia. An ice-edge species, walrus spend the majority of their lives lounging on ice or swimming and diving for clams and other invertebrates. They are a uniquely adapted and easily identified Arctic species important for their intrinsic wildlife value. They are also a valuable resource to coastal Natives in Alaska and Chukotka, Russia as a source of food and raw materials for traditional equipment and handicrafts.

Recognizing the shared interests in walrus, the Eskimo Walrus Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Marine Mammals Management Office (Service) sponsored a pilot Walrus Harvest Monitor Project in the villages of Lorino and Enmelen in Chukotka. Funding by the Service's Wildlife Without Borders - Russia initiative helped launch the project in 1999 and provided funding for a network of local observers to collect walrus harvest information from the two principle walrus hunting villages in Chukotka. Russian collaborators in the project included: the Chukotka Branch of the Pacific Fisheries Research Center (TINRO), Naukan Production Cooperative, and the Yupik Society of Eskimos of Chukotka. This project is a tremendous leap forward in US-Russia collaboration and it involves native groups on both sides as integral partners in data gathering.

A primary step in initiating the project required the Chukotka Native harvest coordinators to travel to Gambell, Alaska and participate in the Service's Walrus Harvest Monitor Project training. This step itself was challenging – a customs agent had to be contracted to clear Russian participants across the U.S. border. Many Chukotkans are related to the people on St. Lawrence Island, in Western Alaska, and the session was rich with cultural exchanges.

After the training session, harvest monitors returned to their villages in Chukotka and began to document subsistence harvest in their communities. The pilot project was considered a tremendous success, by all who were involved, as 1) a workable framework was developed to collect information on the size and composition of the annual walrus harvest in the Chukotka region; 2) local subsistence hunters collected the data; and, 3) hunters in the U.S. and Russia had an opportunity to share their knowledge of walrus and how their respective cultures use these animals.

Based on the success of the pilot project, in 2000 the National Park Service's Berengia Program supported expansion of the project to the Chukotskiy and Providensky regions of Chukotka. Harvest coordinator positions established in the regional centers of Lavrentiya and Provideniya administered walrus harvest monitoring activities in their region and served as liaisons between hunters and biologists. Harvest coordinators hired and trained local harvest monitors and hunters in the villages of Inchoun, Uelen, Lorino, Novo-Chaplino, Sireniki, and Enmelen to collect harvest data and biological samples. In 2001, the project expanded to include the villages of Enurmino and Yanrakynnot.

Each year U.S. and Russian delegations meet in Nome, Alaska to exchange their reports on the size and composition of the subsistence harvest in Alaska and Chukotka from the previous year. Program objectives for the coming year are reviewed and training and logistical issues are addressed.

During the past decade these organizations have played a key role in reviving the subsistence maritime culture of their people. Involving regional Native organizations increases Native representation in walrus conservation and management issues and encourages the sustainable use of subsistence resources as a way of maintaining a traditional way of life.

This project represents the collaborative efforts of many partners. U.S. collaborators include the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the National Park Service and the Service. Scientific oversight for the project in Russia is provided by TINRO. The Naukan Production Cooperative is the Native organization representing the Chukotskiy Region, and was founded in 1987 to supply residents of rural coastal communities with their traditional food: walrus and seal meat. The Yupik Society of Eskimos of Chukotka is the Native organization representing the Providenskiy Region, and was founded in 1990 to preserve the language and way of life of the Eskimo people of Chukotka.

White nosed monkey ***(Cercopithecus nictitans)*** *harvested for the commercial bushmeat trade in the Korup National Park, Cameroon. This species is one of four species of Cercopithecine monkeys found in the Korup National Park. These monkeys often travel in large mixed groups while feeding on fruits, flowers, insects, and vegetable matter and all are hunted for bushmeat despite their relatively low reproductive capacity and low ecosystem-level biomass relative to other mammals of equal size.*

A black-fronted duiker ***(Cephalophus nigrifrons)****, just removed from a wire snare and before slaughter for the commercial bushmeat trade in the Lake Lobeke region of Cameroon. Duikers are a group of mostly-forest dwelling antelopes with compact bodies and heads. The black-fronted duiker shares the Congo Basin forests of Southeast Cameroon's Lake Lobeke region with 4 other species of duikers. All are intensely territorial animals and traverse their habitats on easily recognizable trails in making them easy prey for poacher's snares.*

Background:
Forest vegetation

A Crisis for Wildlife and People — *Bushmeat*

Heather Johnson

In West and Central Africa, the commercial bushmeat trade is a big industry and is one of the greatest threats to wildlife populations and the food security of some local people. Rural areas in Africa are called "the bush." Meat of wild animals harvested from the bush is therefore called "bushmeat." For centuries, local people have harvested bushmeat. Historically, people hunted within the regions they lived and were thought to take only what they needed for food. This is true to this day in some regions of Africa.

Today, the commercial harvest of bushmeat, along with other threats, such as deforestation, has led to the drastic decline of many African wildlife species. African elephants, for example, are currently endangered in all but four countries and have the potential to go locally extinct in some regions if the bushmeat crisis is not resolved.

The crisis has been a rapidly growing problem in Africa during the past 10 years. Wealthy people living in Africa's burgeoning cities can afford the luxury of eating the delicacies of elephant, apes, and forest antelope, harvested from bush communities. Bushmeat typically costs much more than comparable meat from domestic livestock. With the growing demand, the incentive to harvest and sell bushmeat has increased. Even though large scale commercialization of wildlife is illegal in most West and Central African countries, profits exceed the risks.

The commercial harvest of wild animals from wildlands adjoining rural communities has created human health concerns and conflict within bush villages. The industrial-scale bushmeat trade, to supply the luxury market, has reduced the availability of meat for local people who don't have alternatives. This illegal activity has infringed on the human rights of these local people, threatened many wildlife species with local extinction, disrupted the diversity and aesthetic beauty of the forest, and dwindled the integrity of local African cultures.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Multinational Species Conservation Funds have supported several projects and initiatives to develop creative solutions to the bushmeat crisis. Service staff, from the Division of International Conservation, are working closely with the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Bushmeat Working Group, and the U.S. Agency for International Development's Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) to implement a complex and multifaceted set of solutions to the problem. Some examples of these solutions include: 1) enforce laws that prohibit the commercial trade of bushmeat; 2) seek alternatives to bushmeat and encourage the sale of these substitute protein sources by making them palatable and priced competitively; 3) establish additional conservation reserves for wildlife; 4) support environmentally sound economic development; 5) provide training opportunities to wildlife managers; 6) support applied research that leads towards better understanding of forest ecosystems and sustainable ecology and economies; 7) facilitate African partnerships in addressing the crisis; and 8) work with logging companies to develop long-term management plans that reduce threats to wildlife and support ecologically viable forest practices.

The bushmeat crisis is just one of many sensitive and complicated issues that the Service's Multinational Species Conservation Funds are addressing. Solutions are possible but can be difficult and time consuming. Immediate global conservation efforts are needed in order to prevent the loss of elephants, great apes, and other threatened and endangered species. Solutions to the current bushmeat crisis require collaboration with local partners and communities in Africa, to ensure that their way of life is protected and that local people continue to have access to wild animals within their own regions.

Elephants, great apes, and monkeys are long-lived species that are very sensitive to over-harvest. These species, unfortunately, are also the most prized commercial bushmeat and the most likely to go extinct if not managed properly. They have complex social structures and when individuals are removed from family groups, it disrupts this structure and can place tremendous stress on the animals. Other animals harvested include forest duikers, antelopes, buffalo, bush pig, pangolins, rodents, palm civets, genets, mongoose, bats, dwarf crocodiles, monitor lizards, birds, and many others.

Lisa Sorenson and
Laurie Hunter

West Indian Whistling-Duck and Wetlands Conservation Project

*The West Indian Whistling-Duck (WIWD) (**Dendrocygna arborea**) is a large, graceful, brown-spotted duck (19-22 inches in length) with brown and russet coloration and a beautiful, haunting call. Once common throughout the Caribbean, the WIWD is now scarce and limited in its distribution. The combined effects of wetland habitat loss, overhunting, and predation by introduced rats and mongoose have wiped out the species from some islands and reduced its numbers drastically on others.*

Prevention of further wetland loss and greater awareness of the duck's threatened status are essential for the long-term survival of this Caribbean endemic. Wetlands, which serve as critical habitat for a great diversity of wildlife

A group of West Indian Whistling-Ducks in the Cayman Islands ready to take flight.

including migratory birds, are fast disappearing in the Caribbean. Wetland protection is needed to ensure the survival of many wildlife species, including the whistling-duck, and to safeguard the health and well-being of the local people.

Natural resource specialists from the Society of Caribbean Ornithology formed the WIWD Working Group in 1996. They launched a region-wide project to conserve the duck and prevent further loss and degradation of wetlands in the West Indies. Back From The Brink, one of six major programs in the Division of International Conservation's Wildlife Without Borders - Latin America and Caribbean initiative, provides critical support to the project. Key project activities include:

- *Public outreach:* an extensive environmental education program targets both schoolchildren and adults. A special slide show describing the life history of the duck and threats to its survival has been developed along with a puppet show, coloring book, poster, and conservation buttons. These materials have been distributed and used in 12 Caribbean countries.

- *Some highlights:* More than 6,000 schoolchildren and residents in 5 Bahama islands have seen the slide show and puppet show in presentations at schools, public meetings, churches, and service organizations. Most school children (and many adults) in the Cayman Islands have learned about the WIWD and the importance of wetland conservation. In Jamaica, *Wetland Rap* (rap song composed by Working Group members) was recorded by a Jamaican musician. It has been playing on local radio stations. In Cuba, a network of collaborators and institutions has taken the environmental education program to over 30,000 people in six provinces. Teachers who participate in the program hold WIWD festivals in their schools, with contests of painting, poetry, songs, ceramics, and stories related to the duck.

- *Wondrous West Indian Wetlands: Teachers' Resource Book*. A 276-page teacher's manual, written by the Working Group and financed by the Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife Without Borders - Latin America and Caribbean initiative, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and others, was published in July 2001. The workbook is full of comprehensive background information and activities for teaching all about Caribbean wetlands—their ecology, many functions and values, and conservation issues.

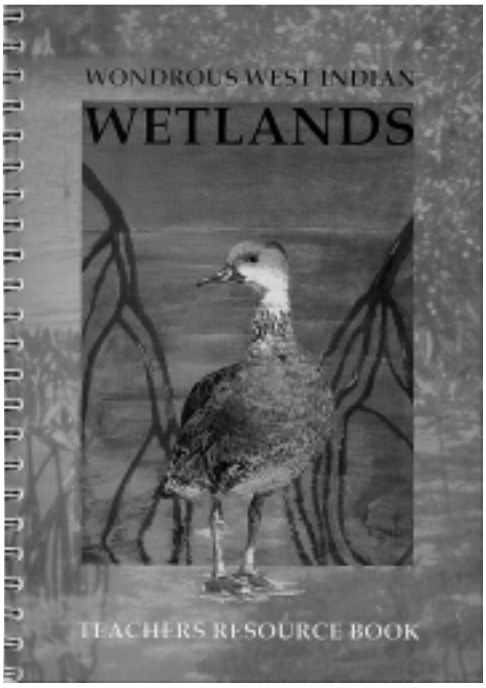
- *Watchable Wildlife Ponds:* trails, boardwalks, informational signs and observation blinds have been constructed to educate visitors about wetlands and the wildlife that depend on them. A Watchable Wildlife Pond in the Cayman Islands is nearing completion and work on ponds in Jamaica is being initiated.

- *Hunter education:* education programs are conducted for local hunters to inform them of the drastic declines in WIWD populations and the duck's protected status. A durable, plastic identification card was developed, with illustrations of the whistling-duck and other waterfowl, to reduce accidental shooting of protected species due to misidentification.

- *Duck population surveys:* local natural resource specialists are trained to conduct whistling-duck surveys on several Caribbean islands, to determine population size and trends and to evaluate the success of the program. A population survey manual is also under development. This "how-to" manual will provide a standard protocol for surveys and monitoring of WIWDs throughout the region.

The outreach and education program has been very effective in raising awareness of the WIWD, the importance of wetland habitats, and the need to conserve these valuable resources for both wildlife and people. The Working Group will continue engaging local participants throughout the Caribbean to further the education and outreach efforts. Its major objectives are to distribute the new workbook, hold workshops demonstrating its use, develop a project website, and complete and publish *A Field Guide to the Flora and Fauna of West Indian Wetlands*, a companion book to *Wondrous West Indian Wetlands*.

The Back From The Brink program has been a successful way of engaging many countries and organizations in the conservation of wildlife species in peril. Through the cooperation and support of many partners, the program has provided the resources to effectively reach thousands of people, on multiple islands, striving to conserve the WIWD and its associated wetland habitats.



The West Indian Whistling-Duck Working Group of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology developed this teachers resource guide on whistling-ducks and wetlands.

The Service's Division of International Conservation implements the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in the U.S., in partnership with the Department of State, the U.S. Ramsar National Committee, and the organizations and agencies at each individual Ramsar site in the U.S. The Convention promotes wetland conservation throughout the world and local partners contribute through site-specific wetland conservation projects and programs.

American avocet, Egret, and Black-necked stilt, Big Salt Marsh, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

USFWS/Dave Hilley

Shorebirds and waterfowl on Big Salt Marsh, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

USFWS/Dave Hilley

Quivira Refuge Designated as a New Ramsar Site

Heather Johnson

On February 12, 2002, the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge was designated as the 18th Ramsar site, or "Wetland of International Importance", in the United States. Quivira, located in Stafford, Kansas, is now part of an international network of wetland sites in more than 130 countries.

The Quivira area was previously designated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site and a Globally Important Bird Area. These previous designations and the new Ramsar designation show the importance of this site for thousands of migratory birds.

The Quivira NWR is a freshwater and inland salt marsh complex that provides feeding, nesting, and migration stop-over habitat for thousands of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other waterbirds. It is also critical habitat for the endangered interior Least Tern and Whooping Crane.

Ramsar is not regulatory, but offers a designated site global recognition as an important wetland habitat. Local communities have the potential to benefit by increased tourism and property values, and the opportunity to receive funds through the U.S. Ramsar National Committee's small grants program. Several communities near Ramsar sites have developed International Migratory Bird Day celebrations and bird festivals to link families and neighboring communities to the site. Larger international networks are also taking place, with the sharing of wetland management guidelines, biological data on migratory bird species, and international education programs like the Shorebird Sister Schools Program.

Wetlands, according to the Convention, include fresh and salt water marshes, estuaries, rivers, bogs, fens, and even coral reefs. These areas can be natural, artificial, permanent, or temporary, making the network of Ramsar sites very diverse. Anyone, from individuals to government agencies, may nominate a Ramsar site, with support letters from the natural resource agencies, land owners, and a U.S. Congressional member for the State in which the site is located. Currently, there are more than 1,030 Ramsar sites throughout the world, covering more than 193 million acres, and new sites are added regularly.

The Service congratulates and welcomes Quivira as a new Ramsar site in the global network of important wetlands. Through this designation, the Service looks forward to working with local partners to develop future projects and programs that strengthen this area as a nesting, feeding, and stopover area for thousands of migratory birds.

Marsh scene, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge
USFWS/Dave Hilley

Reflections

The Division of International Conservation, through its Wildlife Without Borders initiatives and Multinational Species Conservation Funds, supports the conservation of shared migratory species, threatened and endangered species, and species of global importance. Many national and international partners have teamed up with the Service to develop conservation strategies. Beginning with a hand shake, many of these partnerships have gone on to develop strategic plans and implementation of action items. During this process, these partnerships have led to many close friendships.

The depth of these international partnerships and, more importantly, friendships, became evident when the U.S. was attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001. After the terrorist attacks, 129 organizations, agencies and individuals sent their condolences and inquired about the safety for Service employees. Through touching personal notes our partners let us know they were holding prayer services for all those who died or who lost loved ones in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, or in hijacked airplanes.

The Director of the Bombay Natural History Society in India, one of our major cooperators, wrote "On behalf of the BNHS please accept our deepest sympathy and condolence. I do not know how to convey this message to the families of unfortunate victims. Considering you being our strongest link to America, I thought I should write to you. I hope all our American friends are okay." The Chairman of the Dolphin Conservation Society in India wrote "We have been working with the co-operation of the Government of the U.S. (Fish and Wildlife Service) to protect the wonderful nature and its creatures and I assure that we also stand by the U.S. Government in this time of crisis."

These touching letters remind us of the human connection to wildlife and wild lands, and confirm the importance of international partnerships and collaboration. We often hear that science is the backbone of conservation—perhaps it is. But then where do people fit in? Well, people are its heart—a rather crucial element indeed.

Herb Raffaele, Chief
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