

Ecotourism taking roots in Turquino-Bayamesa, Cuba

Title

Communities around Turquino-Bayamesa Important Bird Area (IBA), with support of Empresa Nacional para la Protección de la Flora y la Fauna (ENPFF) and Centro Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (CNAP), are establishing management measures to conserve the watershed, forest and improve living conditions. They are developing agroforestry farms and tree nurseries, assisting with ecosystem restoration and creating the bases for alternative livelihoods through ecotourism.

In 2008, CNAP (BirdLife in Cuba) identified the Turquino-Bayamesa watershed in easternmost Cuba as one of the priority IBAs for conservation due to its populations of threatened and endemic birds. The IBA is of critical importance for Neotropical migratory birds, for example, it is the only known wintering area in Cuba for the Vulnerable Bicknell's Thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*), a rare songbird that breeds in eastern United States and Canada - noted Ted Cheskey, Nature Canada. The watershed and forest habitat are in good conditions but illegal hunting and wood cutting, inappropriate agricultural practices, pollution and human disturbance are impacting the IBA. The community and ENPFF's enthusiasm and commitment were fundamental for CNAP to facilitate training, management and alternative livelihoods to address these threats.

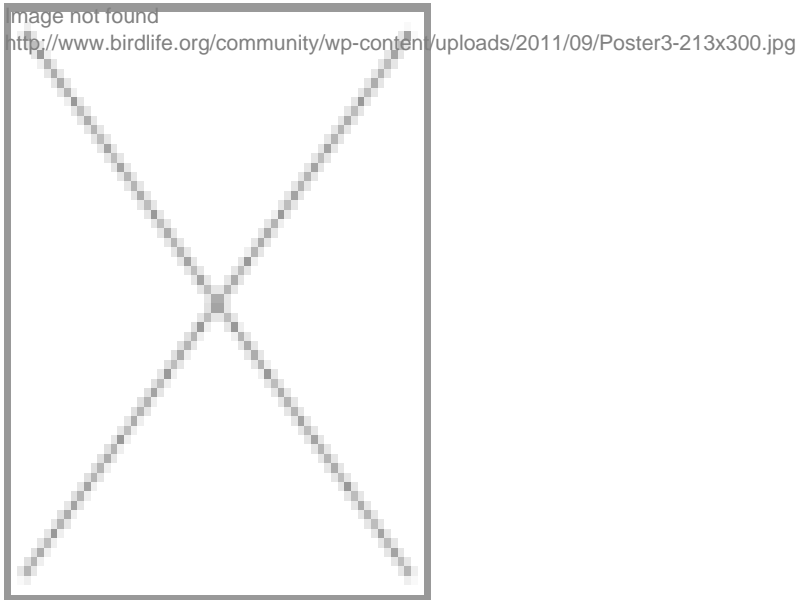


Community members creating the signage for the forest.

The Turquino-Bayamesa IBA is located within the Sierra Maestra in eastern Cuba, an area of difficult access and historically well-known as one of the main locations of the Cuban Revolution. Its fascinating history, astonishing landscape and biodiversity provide an

incredible ecotourism destination. In order to develop its ecotourism potential, CNAP and ENPFF evaluated the area and trained the community creating bases for ecotourism.

For the first time, after tool usage training, the community created the necessary signage for the forest and established it in the trails. They have been implementing forest fire prevention and soil erosion control measures, tree nurseries holding native seedling that have been used for forest restoration and an agroforestry farm. ?It has been difficult to acquire materials and equipment within Cuba but that has not been a barrier for the communities to implement the activities practically without resources? ? Susana Aguilar, CNAP.



?Great results are tangible and in place to date for biodiversity management, improvements in community living conditions and the bases for ecotourism.? ? Verónica Anadón Irizarry ? Caribbean Program Coordinator. BirdLife will continue supporting the conservation program in Cuba to fully achieve the conservation and sustainable biodiversity-based livelihoods in this priority Turquino-Bayamesa IBA.

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