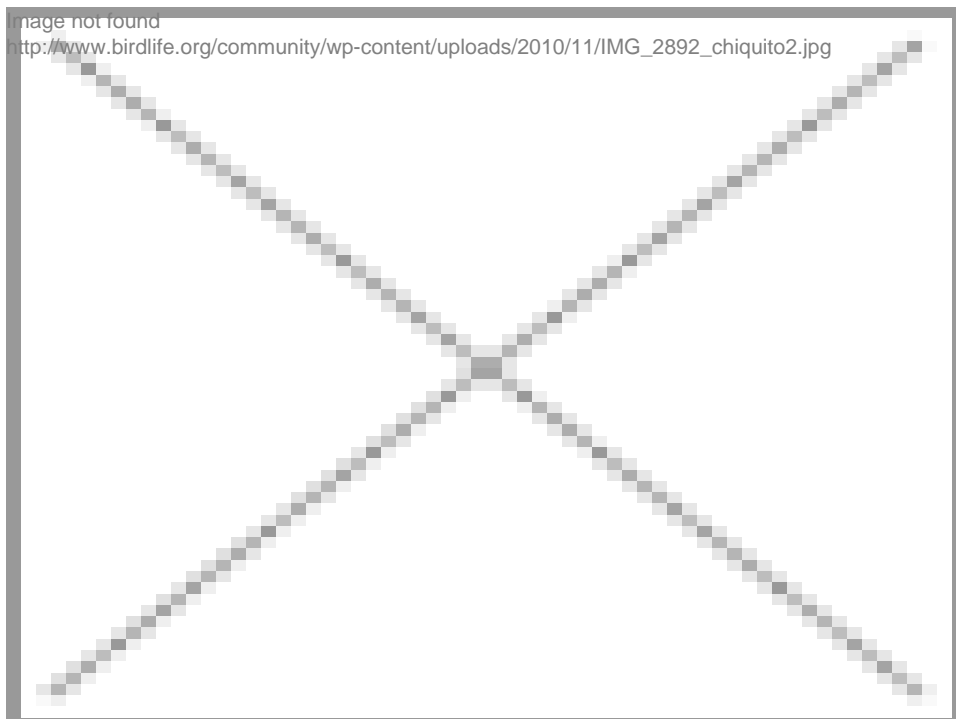


Haitian children celebrate biodiversity during World Bird Festival

In the far south-east corner of Haiti, children in the town of Anse-a-Pitres are showing their appreciation of the avian gifts that nature offers. In celebration of World Bird Festival 2010, some of the children at the AMSAI Chemen Lajwa Kindergarten participated in endemic bird identification activities at the end of October. Using bird posters, these kindergarteners identified birds such as the *Hispaniolan Amazon* (*Amazona ventralis*), the *kolibri* or hummingbird, and the *malfini* or the Critically Endangered *Ridgway's Hawk* (*Buteo ridgwayi*). The children excitedly flapped their wings, drew brightly-coloured pictures of birds, and chanted traditional songs describing the beauty and wonder of birds. The importance of Haiti's native and endemic birds was discussed. In a country that has known a difficult past, and where there is little protection for wildlife, pressure is high on the biodiversity that remains. Local activities such as these reinforce the importance of nature to people, and these messages will eventually go from the school, to the children's homes and, hopefully, to the rest of the community. At the AMSAI school, the children now know they are an important link in the survival of their local birds.



A Haitian school child points out the Critically Endangered "Malfini" or Ridgway's Hawk from a colorful poster of Hispaniola's threatened birds

The World Bird Festival activity was conducted by Dr. Masani Accimé, a Haitian-American veterinarian coordinating a conservation program for the Critically Endangered Ricord's iguana (*Cyclura ricordi*) in the local community of Anse-a-Pitres, Haiti. Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic), who implement a similar iguana conservation program in the Dominican Republic, contributed to Dr. Accimé's efforts by sharing their experiences of biodiversity conservation and habitat management within the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve. Currently, Grupo Jaragua also support conservation initiatives in Anse-a-Pitres through technical assistance and mentoring of Dr. Accimé's field-based species and habitat monitoring activities. Even though Dr. Accimé's main work is iguana conservation, the 2010 World Bird Festival theme - "Biodiversity is life, biodiversity is our life" - provided an opportunity to raise local awareness on the importance of all types of biodiversity. "Haiti has an incredible ecological history and is home to some of the world's most threatened wildlife. Our ecological memory and ecosystem health must be recovered, for the sake of our youth. If we are successful, they will be the living oracles who recount the stories of habitat and species recovery", Dr. Accimé recalls. Ricord's iguana conservation initiatives in Anse-a-Pitres receive funding aid from the International Iguana Foundation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund and the International Reptile Conservation Fund. Find out more about Haiti's biodiversity [here](#). Original news story and photos: Dr. Masani Accimé