

Local people are key to biodiversity conservation

The BirdLife Partnership has published a report which examines the success of BirdLife's Local Conservation Group (LCG) approach in conserving biodiversity and supporting sustainable livelihoods at Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Americas. The report, *Local communities and biodiversity conservation*, presents the results of the first BirdLife International network workshop in the Americas to exchange experiences on LCGs, livelihoods and IBA conservation. The workshop took place in Quito in September 2009. Participants included representatives from BirdLife Partners in Belize, Bolivia, Canada, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. BirdLife International and its network of partner organisations and collaborators have jointly identified over 2,345 globally important high biodiversity sites in the Americas, using birds as indicators. The majority of these IBAs are in rural areas, and the natural resources they provide are critical to the livelihoods of the local communities that live in and around them. Through BirdLife's Local Conservation Group initiative, national BirdLife Partners engage with local volunteers in a long-term collaboration at IBAs, to ensure the sustainable provision of environmental goods and services, while at the same time conserving the rich biodiversity for which the IBAs were identified. "People everywhere depend for their survival on the biodiversity and services provided by healthy ecosystems", said David Thomas, BirdLife's Head of Environment and Sustainable Development. "But the environment is even more important for the poor living in rural areas. The links between the environment and the livelihoods of the rural poor have been demonstrated by many, including BirdLife International." According to the United Nations, 40% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean live in rural areas, and about 64% of the inhabitants in these areas live below the poverty line. Indigenous people, who constitute the largest group within the rural population of these countries, are the most vulnerable, and have less access to basic services such as education, health care and housing. "Conservation and management of natural resources provides opportunities to support sustainable livelihoods, lift people out of poverty, and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change", explained Itala Yepez, BirdLife Americas Conservation Projects Officer. "Local people are therefore key to the sites' conservation." *Local communities and biodiversity conservation* presents fifteen case studies involving Local Conservation Groups across Latin America and the Caribbean, all of which will participate in the 2010 Biodiversity Conservation and Development prize in Latin America, supported by Fundación Biodiversidad. The report can be downloaded by [clicking here](#). *This report was made possible with support from Aage V. Jensen Foundation, Fundación Biodiversidad and SEO/BirdLife.*