The IBA Local Conservation Groups Network in Chiapas and Yucatan Peninsula- México (Pronatura Península de Yucatán and Pronatura Sur)

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January 2010
About this report

The Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme of BirdLife International aims to identify, monitor and protect a global network of IBAs for the conservation of the world's birds and other biodiversity. IBAs are key sites for conservation – small enough to be conserved in their entirety and often already part of a protected-area network.

Working in partnership with communities and other stakeholders at IBAs towards shared objectives of conservation and sustainable resource management is one of a range of different approaches being adopted by BirdLife Partners to help conserve IBAs. Working with people at IBAs helps to engage a mainly local constituency in IBA conservation. It builds on what are often strong connections – be they economic, cultural, historical – between people and the sites where they live, work and engage in recreation.

The way in which BirdLife Partners work with, coordinate and support individuals and groups involved in the IBA Local Conservation Group (IBA LCG) approach varies across the BirdLife network, reflecting the diverse contexts of the over 100 countries where BirdLife Partners are working. However, shared features include: the attachment to a particular IBA, a commitment to support the IBA’s conservation and sustainable use, a link to the national BirdLife Partner, and being compromised mainly of volunteers. In Europe these local volunteers are known as IBA-Caretakers, in Africa they are known as Site Support Groups, and other terms are used to describe them regionally and nationally within BirdLife.

Several BirdLife Partners are demonstrating success in establishing and coordinating Local Conservation Networks. This report is part of a project which aims to capture, document and disseminate these experiences and the lessons learned from them. The review is part of a project funded by the Aage V. Jensen Foundation.
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1. Background

In the early 1980s BirdLife International developed the concept of Important Bird Areas (IBAs). IBAs are priority areas for the conservation of globally threatened, range restricted and congregatory birds. They are identified from data generated locally using globally agreed scientific criteria. IBAs form a worldwide network of priority sites for conservation of biodiversity. Because birds are excellent indicators of the status of biodiversity, IBAs are important for many other wildlife groups. Additionally, IBAs provide a range of environmental services like water, forest products, non-timber products; they help to prevent floods and natural disasters, among others.

In the Americas, more than 2345 IBAs of global importance have been identified. (Fig. 1).

Local Conservation Groups (LCG) is a generic term used to describe a local group that shares the goal of conserving one or more IBAs, regardless of the participants’ age, occupation, gender or other characteristic. Members of a local conservation group are people with similar interests and a good level of understanding of the local context and natural resources being managed.

Traditionally, the BirdLife network has defined an LCG as a group of volunteers working in conjunction with local organizations to help promote conservation and sustainable development of IBAs, as key sites for biodiversity conservation. In the Americas, the reality is that the vast majority of the LCG are comprised of local organizations, communities or others, living in one or more IBA, that use the natural resources of the IBA in their daily lives, and are directly linked to the BirdLife Partner in each country, who supports the group’s initiatives in different ways.

In September 2009 in Quito there was a workshop with members of partner organizations who are working for the conservation of IBAs with the participation of local conservation groups. People attending the workshop identified the need to revisit the traditional definition of local conservation groups to include indigenous peoples, peasants, settlers or other people living in one or more IBA, who depend on the IBA’s natural resources for their livelihoods.

As part of a Small Grants Programme funded through the Jensen Foundation, visits have been carried out to the active local conservation group networks in countries like Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Ecuador and others. This report presents the results of the monitoring
visit to the projects managed by Pronatura Península de Yucatán and Pronatura Sur working with local conservation groups.

2. Introduction

Pronatura México is a non-profit organization located in Mexico with the mission of conserving flora, fauna and priority ecosystems, and promoting development in harmony with nature. The Pronatura México A.C. office started in 1981 and was the basis for establishing the regional and state representations of the Pronatura National System, with conservation and sustainable development strategies and actions in priority regions and sites, for the conservation of biodiversity in the country. The Pronatura National System is made up of Pronatura Mexico and 6 representations in the state of Veracruz and the Central-Western, Northwestern, Southern and Northeastern Regions, plus the Península de Yucatán (Fig. 2). The organization has 28 national offices: 13 dedicated to coordination/administration tasks and 15 field offices.

The strategic lines of action are:
- Conservation and Sustainable Management in priority ecosystems
- Environmental education and strategic communication
- Sustainable community development
- Environmental policies and management
- Information generation and management

Cross-cutting to all of the strategic lines of action is work with the local stakeholders in the regions where each one of these offices intervenes. ProNatura presently identifies 8 local conservation groups, with three others in the process of development/relationship building.

Figure 2. Pronatura México Regional Offices

Source: Internal document of Pronatura Península de Yucatán (PPY)
Pronatura Península de Yucatán

The moisture gradients of the Yucatan Peninsula, combined with climate variables such as precipitation, geology, topography and others, make it a region with great biodiversity. For example, the Yucatan Peninsula is the habitat of 50% of all birds known in Mexico, it is home to the largest population of jaguars in Mexico, it is a strategic region for the preservation of sea turtles globally, and the Northeast area of the Peninsula is one of the most important feeding areas in the world for whale sharks.

Pronatura Península de Yucatán, A.C. (PPY) has been working for 20 years on projects and programs focused on conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. They have implemented projects in 8 protected areas, including federal, state and private (Figure 3).

Its objectives are to:

- Contribute to including an assessment of the environmental and economic benefits of natural resources in the economic and development policies of the country.
- Have a voice in the formulation and implementation of policies that promote the conservation of biological diversity.
- Promote the sustainable use and management of natural resources while involving the different social groups in the design and operation of economic activities.
- Conserve representative ecosystems, their functions and structure in priority areas of the Yucatan Peninsula.

![Fig. 3. Sites of intervention of Pronatura Península de Yucatán](source: Internal document of Pronatura Península de Yucatán (PPY)).

Pronatura Sur

Pronatura Chiapas A.C. was established in 1989 as a chapter of Pronatura A.C. In 1993 the association was organized with its own legal status and because of the wide range of its
endeavours in 2008 changed its name to Pronatura Sur, focusing its activities on the following priorities:

- Regions with biological importance requiring a conservation effort.
- Regions with lack of institutional presence of organizations with a mission similar to that of Pronatura.
- Regions where pressure for the use of natural resources means a risk for biodiversity conservation.
- Regions where collaboration with Pronatura Sur may represent an advance on the conservation strategies.

With these in mind, Pronatura Sur defines its mission as conserving the flora, fauna and priority ecosystems, and promoting sustainable development in harmony with nature through time.

Their strategic objectives are:

- Building integral sustainable development models based on the management and conservation of natural resources;
- Strengthening the institutional, technical and organizational capacities of stakeholders in priority sites to promote conservation strategies and institutional development;
- Establishing and consolidating areas with conservation schemes at sites of strategic importance due to high biological and environmental services value
- Promoting public policies consistent with an integral vision of sustainable development;
- Promoting the creation of a citizenry with environmental and social responsibility that participates and has influence on decisions;
- Contributing to knowledge of the status of natural resources, and the development of strategies and methods for the integration of the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability;
- Strengthening the institutional capacities of Pronatura Sur.

The intervention areas of Pronatura Sur involving local conservation groups are included in the next map (fig. 4)
3. Local Conservation Groups

3.1 Local Conservation Groups working with Pronatura Península de Yucatán

3.1.1 Characteristics and Structure

Protected Natural Areas in Mexico often include human settlement areas of different sizes, with a great diversity in their culture that manifests itself in religion, language, clothing, art, social structures and types of diet, land management, natural resources use, among others. Many cultural beliefs and practices are supported and linked with elements of nature (earth, water, wind, fire, flora and fauna). People have always been part of ecosystems, therefore it is essential to have a variety of strategies to make the most of the communities' traditional knowledge and technologies, and complement these with other knowledge in order to develop production processes with good practices.

"Best practices" are strategies and / or management actions for planning and operation that guide human activities using codes, techniques and available technologies, through which they can mitigate and minimize negative environmental and social impacts, while also helping to achieve economic viability in the long term.

It is in this context that PPY has implemented as one of its objectives "To promote the use and sustainable management of natural resources, involving different social groups in the design and operation and management of economic activities". To achieve this objective, using different methodological tools for planning, training processes are promoted and
support provided to rural groups to incorporate them into different production chains; even more if we consider that most of the more valuable land in terms of biodiversity is in the hands of rural communities and ejidos. To the extent that land owners receive a tangible benefit for conserving them, ejidos are predisposed to be preserved and used in a sustainable way.

The groups that are working with PPY are very diverse in all respects. They are groups of young people, adults and old people; indigenous Maya and settlers organized in communities, ejidos, cooperatives and others who have defined their own need for training to undertake environmentally friendly economic activities that allow them to count on fixed incomes and conserve their natural resources for future generations.

Decision making within community groups and ejidos usually falls on the Assembly of the ejido, who also have the power to define the future of the common use land. In cooperatives or other such social organizations there is also an established structure on which decision-making rests.

3.1.2 Sustainable Tourism

In the last decade, tourism was the economic activity with the highest contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Yucatan Peninsula (after oil exploitation in the state of Campeche). But on the other hand, most of the largest impacts, in extent and severity, stem from the strategies and actions that support the traditional tourism, such as construction of infrastructure (roads, energy, urban growth), and result in negative impacts such as deforestation, habitat fragmentation, pollution and overexploitation of natural resources.

It is for this reason that efforts have been focused on preventing and mitigating the impacts of this activity. PPY has worked for the past 10 years on training people that live in Natural Protected Areas and that have the potential to develop nature tourism activities to become nature guides. In 2007, PPY decided to create a new institutional Department called "Ecotourism and Biodiversity" which aims to implement strategies and actions to promote tourism under schemes of good practice.

The Ecotourism and Biodiversity Department has been set to work in 4 lines of action:
- Training
- Planning, development and operation of sustainable products
- Research and Monitoring for tourism activities
- Environmental interpretation and dissemination

In this context, PPY has been working in the villages of Celestun, located in the Biosphere Reserve Ria Celestun; Conhuas, located in the Biosphere Reserve of Calakmul, Campamento Hidalgo y Punta Laguna (we won’t describe activities developed in this site), located in the

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1 In Mexico, village lands held in the traditional Indigenous system of land tenure, were blessed by Mexican law in the 1920s, that combines communal ownership with individual use. The ejido consists of cultivated land, pastureland, other uncultivated lands, and the fundo legal, or town site. The cultivated land is generally apportioned in family holdings, which until recently could not be sold but could be passed down to heirs. Though the land reform of the mid 18th century was aimed at breaking up the large church holdings, it also forced the Indigenous people to give up their ejidos. The village lands were restored by the 1917 constitution. In 1992 the Carlos Salinas government revoked the ban on the sale of ejido land.
Area of Protection of Flora and Fauna Otoch. Each site has its peculiarities, which are described below:

3.1.2.1 Celestún

The community of Celestún, is one of two communities located within the Biosphere Reserve Ria Celestun, which contains large areas of the best-preserved coastal wetlands in the western region of the Yucatan Peninsula. The biological significance of this Reserve resides, among others, in the variety of birds with over 300 resident and migratory species, consisting of marsh birds and shorebirds such as herons, ducks, gulls and a great variety of migratory passerine and shorebirds coming from the north of the United States and Canada during the winter.

The community of Celestún, is located 98 km from the city of Merida, on the west coast of the state of Yucatan. It has a population of 6,269 inhabitants (INEGI 2005). The main industries are fisheries, tourism and salt extraction, under traditional schemes. People come from various villages within the state of Yucatan, so there is diversity in culture and customs. The area is experiencing important urban growth and over 60% of the houses are built on flood plains. Tourism activities are focused on the lagoon where you can see flocks of flamingos and other waterfowl. 94% of visitors go to Celestun to watch flamingos and other waterfowl. Every year Cenestún receives more than 40,000 tourists.

In that context, in the late 80s groups of fishermen, especially from the community of Celestún, began offering tours in the lagoon to see flamingos. In 1998 there were 7 groups created to offer tourist services, they were organized into a federation. Old fishermen became tour guides without any preparation, so the vast majority of them lacked the skills to sustain their business, especially considering they were working within a protected natural area and that the objective of their tours was to observe wildlife.

During 1997, PPY develop a description and diagnosis of tourist activity in the Ria Celestun BR, which included a visitor profile. This study identified that the main purpose of visitation was birdwatching, in particular, flocks of flamingos. The study also recognizes the demand for bilingual naturalist guides, among others. To address those demands, PPY has worked in three major phases:

a) Establishment and development of technical skills in PPY

The teaching methodology defined as "English with a specific purpose" is used to train bilingual naturalist guides specializing in Birdwatching and wildlife observation. Students live and study together for two or three months in a secluded environment, where they acquire...
a basic level of conversational English. Teaching techniques consisted of observation; first hand demonstrations, imitation and interaction so that students acquire new knowledge while they put it into practice.

The courses consist of between 500 and 700 hours of practical experience in conversations in English, local natural history, elements of nature interpretation and environmental education. All contents are designed for rural adults with a basic education level. The course includes: a) planning phase of the training program, b) reviewing and developing training materials, c) selection and recruitment of students, d) training for teachers and e) implementation and evaluation of the course. This methodology was first developed by RARE Center in Celestun. RARE Center in collaboration with PPY developed two courses with 40% theory and 60% practice.

b) Adoption and adaptation of a methodical process

The methodology and course structure implemented by RARE Center was very effective in training guides. However, two key issues were identified as difficulties. The first was the high cost of the courses compared to other strategies used to train guides and also the time spent by students who are not always used to spending long periods of time in training. PPY made adjustments to the methodology and conducted two more courses in Celestun.

Under this scheme, PPY helped train 40% of all the guides (98 people registered in 2000) that serve as guides in the BR Celestun estuary during 1998-2005.

c) Integration of a new format for long-term training

Currently PPY has built a didactic and practical format to train bilingual naturalist guides specializing in Birdwatching and Wildlife observation, which has been replicated in two other Protected Areas. The training format includes three phases: 1) Basic course of two to three months; 2) support and advice in specialized courses to achieve certification from the government; 3) inclusion of guidelines on research projects and bird monitoring.

The guides trained by PPY that have continued with long-term support from the program can participate in: a) bird monitoring projects, b) as a guide specializing in events such as
the bird Festival, that has been performed in Yucatan for 7 years, c) as instructors for new courses that PPY implements, among other activities.

3.1.2.2 Calakmul Region

In the municipality of Calakmul in southern Campeche state, lies Calakmul Biosphere Reserve and Balamkú State Reserve, together totalling more than 1,200,000 hectares of forests in very good conservation conditions. Because of Calakmul’s geographic location, it is a priority area for north-south connectivity with other protected areas of southern Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. Calakmul maintains the largest population of jaguars in Mexico, it is the most important area for land birds in southeastern Mexico, it is critical habitat for mammals like tapir and white-lipped percari, and is one of the most important areas in terms of hydrology for the entire Peninsula. The area’s rainforest is one of the largest reservoirs of natural carbon in Mexico.

The municipality of Calakmul has approximately 23,000 inhabitants, distributed in 114 communities. One-fifth (3,901) live within the boundaries of the polygon of the reserve and more than half live in the vicinity of the buffer zone. The region has Mayan roots with a mosaic of ethnic groups including the Chol and Tzeztal, plus mixed groups from 23 states of Mexico.

The mix of ethnicities and cultures makes the appropriation of natural resources very complex. The main problems are deforestation, habitat fragmentation and overexploitation of some species of flora and fauna.

The main economic activities in the region are:
- Forestry
- Agriculture
- Livestock
- Honey production
- Chicle gum extraction
- Subsistence hunting
- Tourism and ecotourism

As a result of two processes (Maya Forest Ecoregional Plan and Olmec and Zoque Conservation Plan) poorly planned tourism activities in the region was identified as having negative impacts on natural resources, especially deforestation and habitat fragmentation.

To address this problem PPY, together with partner organizations such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR), have begun a process of integrated natural resources planning at the community level in priority areas for biodiversity conservation. These processes are intended to guide the planning and development processes of economic activities under different schemes of good practices.

Furthermore, studies have been conducted in 2005 and 2007 based on tourism activities, which include characterization and diagnosis of the activity, and market research (as well as visitor profiles). A training programme for local guides was established to respond to one of the needs identified by tourists. In 2006 14 people were trained in 8 communities. In 2008, the second course included 17 young people (men and women) from the community of Conhuas. The methodology used in Celestun was replicated in both courses. Instructors
were bird guides trained by PPY in 2001 in Celestun.

Currently at least 40% of the trainees have started their work as guides and are working in a specialized training program for guides which aims to certify at least 10 of them during 2010.

In parallel to training guides, PPY has been working on the design and implementation of a trail called “Elegant Eagle” that is operated by a community group in Conhuas called “Oaks”. This was made possible by the ejido assembly, who approved the use of 2,000 hectares for nature tourism activities. PPY is also currently working on a process to obtain guide certifications for all people trained, in collaboration with the Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT).

Photographs: Alejandra Silveira, PPY

3.1.3 Networking

3.1.3.1 The BirdLife Partner’s role in the process

PPY defines its role with local conservation groups as the organization that must incorporate best practices in tourism management in natural areas, promoting recreation and learning activities to drive the protection of priority areas for conservation.

3.1.3.2 Lessons learned during the process

The most relevant lessons learned, according to the person who currently coordinates the Ecotourism and Biodiversity Programme, are:

1. Working with rural groups living within and/or outside Protected Areas (or IBAs) requires long-term commitments from PPY. In their experiences with groups in the Yucatan Peninsula, it requires at least 3 years of continuous work to achieve clear conservation and development objectives.

2. To the extent that owners of land and/or natural resources receive a tangible benefit from natural resources to improve their quality of life (health, education, economy), conservation of priority areas for conservation is more viable.

3. The “voluntary” involvement of local communities in conservation and monitoring will be more viable and robust by linking their economic activities with conservation activities so they can benefit and see the value of their conservation actions.

4. The continuity of local participation is critical to the economic viability of any project.
5. LCG networks are not always the best strategy to strengthen the work of local groups, it depends of the level of organization and interests of local communities.

6. Community groups involved in training should be familiar with the benefits associated with training and ecotourism in general (both personal and environmental).

3.2 Local Conservation Groups working with Pronatura Sur

3.2.1 Characteristics and Structure

Unlike other BirdLife Partner organizations, for Pronatura Sur working with local conservation groups is not a branch of their work but the cross-cutting axis of most of the activities developed by the organization in all its fields of conservation action. Their slogan is: "Our priority is the people who have nature as a priority."

If we think globally, biodiversity loss is mainly due to the rapid progress of habitat destruction by the expansion of agricultural frontiers and extreme poverty, overexploitation of natural resources, climate change and pollution. It becomes obvious then, that conservation cannot be done without the people who own land and natural resources within priority areas for conservation.

Nevertheless, taking into account the objective of our visit, Pronatura identified 3 areas where they have worked with local conservation groups in different ways:

a) Subdivision of Social Organization and Sustainable Production: This work includes experiences with the palma camedor ii (Chamaedorea quezalteca) and the harvest of pine-oak forests.

b) Voluntary land conservation program, with an emphasis on work for the establishment of Easements.

c) Environmental education and training

3.2.1.1 Social Organization and Sustainable Production

This analysis will take into account two lines of work of Pronatura Sur: the use of non-timber forest products like palma camedor and the timber harvest of pine-oak forests.

Regarding non-timber products use, Pronatura Sur is working in Sierra Madre de Chiapas Biosphere Reserve and El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve and IBAs.

Sierra Madre de Chiapas runs almost parallel to the Pacific Ocean and increases its height from about 1,000 meters at the border with Oaxaca to 2,000 m at the border with Guatemala. Features include medium forest ecosystems, high forest, cloudy forest, pine-oak forests and pine-oak-sweetgum, which is primarily a transitional forest (spatial not temporal) towards the cloud forest.

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*Palma camedor* is an ornamental plant that has been collected in tropical regions of Mexico and currently is grown in several states in that country, it is an umbrófila plant that can be integrated into production systems that have tropical forest.
Mexico is one of the most important countries in terms of diversity of cycads. Nearly 185 species of cycads have been reported worldwide and in Mexico about 40 species have been reported, of which 80% are endemic to Mexico and about 40% grow in Chiapas. The Sierra Madre de Chiapas is a centre of diversity and speciation for cycads; about 50% of the 16 species reported for Chiapas grow in this geographic region.

Over a long period of time, palma camedor (Chamaedorea spp.) played an important role in the local economy due to the business value that this resource has in the international market as an ornamental plant. However, the natural population of this plant has fallen in several places in Chiapas due to over-exploitation and mismanagement. This problem is compounded because the plant’s habitat has been destroyed for the establishment of coffee plantations.

The palma camedor grows in cloud forest and medium forest, particularly in the shade. It grows from shoots and tillers which facilitates ex situ reproduction and its survival in natural forests. It also promotes the establishment of production nurseries of plants to repopulate the species in areas where harvesting pressure disappeared.

Chiapas was the first exporter of this palm in the 50s - 60s, but overexploitation and decrease in the wild population have produced a negative impact on palma camedor in recent years.

Pronatura Sur is working with 5 Ejidos on the management and conservation of this palm, as well as the ecosystem that hosts important populations of the species: two in the El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve, one with an area of 4,000 ha and the other with an area of 11,000 ha; and in 3 Ejidos within the Sepultura Biosphere Reserve, one of 3,300 ha, another of 1,800 ha and the last one of 200 ha.

Work sites were identified based on the knowledge Pronatura had on their natural capital, the presence of priority ecosystems in good conservation conditions, in addition to the historical presence of the species, the presence of suitable land to repopulate the palm, human capital, and of course, the interest of the community members in managing palma camedor.

In this context, Pronatura started a process of continuous work with the Tierra y Libertad community, and particularly a group of ejidatariosii who wished to pursue the management of the palm. A participatory management plan for the species was developed, including the initial exploration, the monitoring system, the definition of management proposals, among others.

All technical aspects are covered by the same people, Pronatura trained brigade leaders, to collect the data; Pronatura technicians check the quality of data and contribute ideas on the management process itself and marketing strategies.

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Land ownership and management
This has led to Pronatura’s involvement in other organizational processes within the Ejidos, such as land management. It is important to clarify that the legal right to use the territory lies with the General Assembly of the Ejido, which is why they have been involved in decision making from the beginning. The General Assembly is the legal institution that grants the right to use Ejidal land to the group of people that are managing palms. That group is responsible for the implementation of the management plan for the species.

Community Nursery at Ejido Tierra y Libertad: Training course for Regional Organization of palm managers given by the Ejido Tierra y Libertad
Photo: Guillermo Dahringer

The 5 organizations with which Pronatura works, plus two others interested in palm management, created a regional organization to have greater weight in negotiating land concessions, laws adapted to farmers needs, marketing, etc. In addition to this, they have also created a space for exchanging experiences between all groups dedicated to managing palma camador.

Another interesting experience is the creation of a technical diploma program for palm managers. Notably, the courses on nurseries, administration, commercialization and monitoring were given by the palm manager of communities involved in this work with
Pronatura. In preparation for this, the palm managers attended a “training for trainers” workshop.

As for the logging of pine-oak forest, we reviewed the example of Ejido Tierra y Libertad. Tierra y Libertad is located at the top of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas, belongs administratively to the municipality of Villaflores and is part of the buffer zone of the La Sepultura Biosphere Reserve, with an area of 3,309 hectares.

In the late 90s, the ejido assembly decided to apply to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAP) for a permit to develop a Forest Management Program, as a "requirement" for a logging permit.

The Forest Management Program was authorized in 1999 and it allowed Tierra y Libertad Ejidatarios to carry out forestry activities for ten years. These activities were carried out only during one year, because the licence was suspended as a result of several control visits that SEMARNAP carried out in 2001, which revealed 'irregularities' in compliance with the applicable management constraints.

Despite the temporary suspension of the forest exploitation, a process of self-regulation began within the Ejido as a result of discussions among groups of ejidatarios interested in continuing to use community-owned forests. This later led to a process of collective reflection on the role to be played by the Ejido’s general assembly to ensure control of access and use of forest and biodiversity in general.

This process was accompanied by Pronatura Sur. That allowed Ejido Tierra y Libertad to get a new authorization for forest use.

The extraction quotas have been delimited by Pronatrau technicians and local technicians. As part of the process a specific group in side of the Ejido have prepared a management plan and installed infrastructure for the processing of wood.

Pronatura Sur set out a strategy together with the community and directors of the Biosphere Reserve to develop a forest management scheme for low-impact logging in areas of high biodiversity and ecological value. They first designed a new planning system for logging based on systematic monitoring of harvestable trees in harvesting areas. It was the first time this system was implemented in temperate forests, because it was developed for tropical forests of the Yucatan Peninsula. This system led to a rethinking of the system to reduce environmental impacts and production costs.

The technical training to the community was the basis for the creation of an Ejido Technical Office, which will enable ownership and control of the whole process of forest management and use by the community itself. This Technical Office integrated the management processes for timber, palma camador management and the handling of organic shade-grown coffee.

Based on this process, Pronatura Sur has also been involved in supporting other community
processes such as development of territorial planning. We had the opportunity to participate in a meeting of the Advisory Council, a new body appointed by the General Assembly of the Ejido Tierra y Libertad, which groups the ejido authorities and presidents of producers’ groups and committees such as health, water, schools, temples and churches, with the aim of analyzing the problems of the Ejido before submitting proposals to the General Assembly for decision making. We noted the interest and high level of commitment from members, besides the knowledge they have acquired throughout the process regarding environmental services, conservation needs for watersheds, etc..

3.2.1.2 Voluntary land conservation program, with an emphasis on working for the establishment of easements.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between two or more owners, with a dominant tenant and a servant tenant, which restricts the amount and type of development that can be carried out in the servant land.

The easement has some advantages. Mainly, it allows the property to remain in private hands, it is a flexible instrument and it can be established for a period of 10, 20, 30 years or in perpetuity. Finally, easements are indivisible, even with the sale of a portion of the property. In Mexico, conservation easements are agreements of at least 10 years and maximum 99 years.

Conservation easements are based on local management and depend only on the will of the owner of the land and natural resources in each property. They provide legal tools to owners to formalize conservation actions that they develop on their properties, and allow them to generate information for decision making, especially in areas where it is important to do both conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

In this context, Pronatura has established 22 easements with an equal number of beneficiaries. The contract area is 4,856 ha in habitats that include cloud forest, evergreen and subperenifolias Middle Jungle, mangrove swamps and pine-oak forests.

The areas included in this program were chosen based on their ecological importance and the presence of threatened birds.

The process with people has included:
• Creating the space for discussions on the easement management approach, which in the case of the Ejidos has been the Ejido Assembly.
• In situ visits that have allowed the Pronatura team to characterize the area with the active participation of the ejido.
• Discussion of the information obtained in the field with the Ejido Assembly
• Making decisions on land use and management
• Making arrangements with the Ejido Assembly for the establishment of a conservation easement agreement for a set time
• Definition of agreements as internal documents of the Ejido.

The regions where Pronatura is working with this program include: cloud forest, a region of great importance as large-scale water sources and as the area where 60% of energy for the country is generated; Pacific Coastal Plain in the Biosphere Reserve Encrucijada, where there is a mangrove forest of great importance to Mexico; Connectivity corridors between
wetlands that connect Guajaca - Chiapas and the Encrucijada: and areas that promote connectivity between mangroves, specific areas like Conquista Campesina, La Selva Zoque; among others

The benefits to communities include:

a) The communities or private owners who have their land under Easements can make arrangements to reduce their tax payments.

b) They have access to projects with Pronatura

c) Small owners learn to manage financial resources for projects on their lands.

d) Owners can certify the resources that occur on their land.

e) Pronatura supports them in developing their management plans

In that context, Pronatura works with several community groups in which there have been very similar processes of reflection and internal strengthening to establish contracts for easements. Ejido Assemblies and stakeholders that start this process are trained and acquire a high level of awareness on the management and use of natural resources and have reflected this in their internal regulations and other internal organizational instruments.

3.2.1.3 Training and Environmental Education

For Environmental Education and Training, we identified as an interesting case the activities developed by Pronatrua Sur at the Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve, where they have developed a series of activities promoting involvement of local people in the processes of conservation and natural resources management.

The Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve covers an area of 144,868 hectares and is considered one of the richest areas in biodiversity in Mexico, especially because of its estuaries that interconnect with the Pacific Ocean. The well-preserved resources of Encrucijada Reserve provide shelter to abundant wildlife including 73 species of mammals, 11 amphibians, 34 reptiles and 294 species of birds.

Pronatura Sur has focused its strategy on the generation of alternative livelihoods to integrate social and economic development of communities with conservation of biodiversity.

Through an educational program using a public education methodology, they have trained 15 local promoters, who were selected by the Ejido Assembly and for whom the Assembly has signed agreements of support. The workshops consisted of 3 modules of training given at 3 different months that allows them to have the necessary knowledge to formulate their own projects for the sustainable management of natural resources.
Additionally, they have been working with people on projects related to water use and storage directed to all women of the communities living in the reserve. Pronatura has taken advantage of the local spaces created through other objectives to talk with people about important issues like health, biodiversity conservation, preservation of traditions, conservation of water sources, establishment of nurseries with native plants, etc.

In addition, Pronatura has been working on several communications activities on local radio and working with teachers in schools to train them in different aspects of Environmental Education.

The table below shows the level of activity of the Education and Training programme:

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Networking

3.2.2.1 The BirdLife Partner’s role in the process

According to people involved in working with local conservation groups in Pronatura Sur, the institutional role over time has been to guide local processes, to advise local communities on technical aspects and, as required, be promoter of ideas, projects, proposals and actions involving issues related to conservation, management and sustainable use of natural resources, easements, etc.; and eventually, be trainers for local people in specific subjects.

3.2.2.2 Lessons learned during the process

- Working with local conservation groups involves the long term commitment of the BirdLife Partner (10 years minimum).
- It is important to know the relationships of spaces and use of natural resources in areas with conservation potential.
- Local actors are the "owners" of resources, it is important to make them aware of this and of their responsibility to future generations to preserve them and use them properly.
- Access and power over natural resources and biodiversity empowers local stakeholders on conservation.
- Working with local conservation groups is a matter of respect, trust and humility.
- Relationships of trust and transparency among conservation actors in the long term guarantee rights and obligations on natural resources and biodiversity.
- Poverty and proposals for other less-sustainable types of development reveal a need for integrating economic alternatives for local groups in economic activities to continue defending sites and their biodiversity.
- Local people are generating excellent partnerships with other local actors for conservation and they are bringing decision makers to understand local problems.
4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Communication

Pronatura normally communicates with local people by phone; at least one or two of the authorities in each Ejido have access to a cell phone or satellite phone. Also the person in charge of working with each Ejido visits them at least once every 15 days. For the organization of meetings with specific groups like the Palm Group or logging Group in each Ejido, or to work with the Ejido General Assembly, communities are visited in advance to agree and prepare meetings.

Generally speaking Pronatura’s policy states that each technician is required to create an atmosphere of trust with local people and particularly with local authorities, therefore regular communication between authorities and Pronatura technicians is encouraged.

Despite all these mechanisms communication remains a problem. Pronatura has considered the possibility of installing radio systems in the communities where they work, but the costs of this equipment and its installation are very high and they cannot yet finance it. Recently, people in some communities and regional organizations have obtained access to e-mail; however this method is still very limited.

4.2 Monitoring

Several LCGs are involve in monitoring of one kind or another. Some examples include the following:

Monitoring of camedor palm. In the case of the camedor palm there is a program to monitor the impact of use on the palm community and the forest in general. Pronatura has trained one or more local technicians who record technical information related to palm extraction. This information is collected on recording sheets that go to the regional organization of palm users and are then processed by Pronatura to generate statistical information, maps, etc. Pronatura delivers the processed information to the communities who use it to submit their reports to the environmental authority. These reports are part of their contractual obligations to the environmental authorities for logging permits. It is hoped in future to create an online database that promotes the standardization of monitoring methods throughout the region and possibly nationwide.

Farm Monitoring. This program is located along the Sierra Madre de Chiapas. In this region coffee plantations have been a way of life since the nineteenth century. However in recent years, coffee production has become one of the major human activities with important impacts on biodiversity in this region, particularly above 1000 m where there are found medium forests, forests of transition and mesophile mountain forests. Pronatura in conjunction with other organizations has worked on strengthening the various coffee producing organizations throughout the Sierra Madre de Chiapas. Of these organizations they have chosen those interested in monitoring the environmental, social and biological situation in the places where they are planting their coffee. This is also a way of supporting people to build the technical information they need to enter into processes for the certification of their products. Pronatura is responsible for training people to record environmental, social and biological information (with an emphasis on birds), plus the use of GPSs that allows them to have georeferenced information. Regional organizations collect
and systematize information in excel sheets and then deliver information to communities for their internal use. In the future it is expected to create a regional database online to enable them to carry this information and keep track of data for decision making.

4.3 Networking

Various forms of exchange have been established or are planned to support exchange between different LCG members, mainly focused on those with shared interests:

Palma camedor producers. A Diploma course was organized by Pronatura under the Regional Organization of palm users. The instructors were members of Pronatura and members of the ejidos that are working with Palma camedor. Pronatura has managed to share this knowledge among the communities working with the palm and has managed to create synergies that allow them to work together.

Voluntary Land Conservation. There is interest in creating a network of property owners or persons who have entered into the voluntary land conservation schemes. It has not materialized yet.

Timber. There are exchanges between people involved in timber harvesting for specific issues such as the purchase or rental of extraction equipment, training and others.

4.4 Policy

Various LCGs have been engaged in policy work. Eduardo, one of the Pronatura technical staff, helped to form a state-wide organization of forest users (42 ejidos) with 10-15 private landowners. There was a threat by the state of Chiapas and in particular of an environmental group in the Congress who wanted to promote a forestry ban in the state. The group was organized and ensured that the ban was not made effective, by proving that forest management engaged in by the Ejidos is sustainable and technically well-managed. Unfortunately this regional group was never legally constituted and eventually disappeared after this successful policy intervention.

Pronatura recently organized a forum on the Standardization of Sustainable Management of Non Timber Resources involving the authorities of SEMARNAT and members of the Regional organization of palm producers. The objectives of the forum were, among others, to discuss the current regulations and procedures for logging permits. Some things were achieved: the simplification of some paperwork for management permits was one of them.

4.5 Conclusions

a) Neither Pronatura Sur nor Pronaturua Península de Yucatán have a formal network of local conservation group, but all their activities are based on the conservation of biodiversity with the active participation of local people who own or manage natural resources in their ejidos, communities or private lands.

b) Many projects don’t have long-term funds, but Pronatura develops programs to maintain their activities for at least 3 years in the case of Pronatura Península de Yucatán and at least 10 years in the case of Pronatua Sur. This allows them to follow
up the processes and empower local people in the Ejido to continue with conservation and sustainable use activities by themselves.

c) In the sites visited, local people have appropriate processes of conservation and development operations, keeping in mind they are largely dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods.

d) All Ejidos working in IBA conservation are working for the sustainable management of their natural resources. Management activities have enabled them to generate income for their people and simultaneously they have entered into a reflective process that has allowed them to consider other issues of conservation like the protection of water sources, identifying areas for strict conservation, etc.

e) In general, LCGs in Mexico don’t work with Pronatura with the objective of biodiversity conservation - instead Pronatura aims to raise awareness that conservation helps to secure the life and livelihoods of ejido/LCG members in the present and for subsequent generations, and that it is their responsibility therefore to manage resources sustainably.

4.6 Acknowledgments

The collection of information contained in this report was made possible through the collaboration of Pronatrua Sur and Pronatura Península de Yucatán offices and in particular Maria Andrade and Alexandra Silveira at Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatan and Rosa Maria Vidal, Guillaume Dahringer, Eduardo Ramirez, Patrocionados Alba, Jessica Domínguez and Patricia Perez Gonzalez Amueza.