Letter from the Executive Director

Everyone reading this knows that 2020 was anything but normal. When business as usual came to a screeching halt, schools went silent and flights were grounded, I watched in shock for signs of how our conservation partners would respond. And at first it was just a jaw-dropping silence as different organizations scrambled to assess the state of our new reality while quietly planning for various scenarios and making sure their staff were safe. And when we all learned this was going to disrupt programs in many ways for many days, our partners were able to pivot and find creative solutions to keep most of their work going.

Resilience is a key word in conservation. We frequently associate it with healthy ecosystems, yet the ability of our partners to adapt to the pandemic showed how institutional resilience is just as important. Most organizations, while briefly stunned, quickly adapted to local health guidelines by using technology to work from home, adopting sanitization methods and distancing when together, and (unfortunately) spent a lot more time driving alone. Field work had an advantage in that outdoor spaces were largely considered safe. However, gathering in groups, even outside, was not permitted and this meant that outdoor education, school-based programs, and field-based workshops were badly affected. Many annual events were cancelled, but many also went virtual and in some cases became almost more successful because more people were able to attend without the need to travel. Sadly, some groups were not able to adapt, and we will miss them.

Beyond the disruptive nature of the pandemic and the toll on human lives and mental health, I could not help but remind myself and everyone else of a dreadful truth: This will not be the last pandemic! The type of wet market in Wuhan, China where COVID-19 jumped from animals to humans is yet one example of a situation where zoonotic diseases spread where both live animals and bushmeat are sold. These same practices are driving the decline of species around the world, since poachers and wildlife traffickers use these markets for business. The increased focus by March Conservation Fund on park protection, illegal wildlife trade, and education to reduce demand for wildlife products could not be more timely. These investments include support for more park guards, expansion of protected areas with Critically Endangered species, targeted efforts to curb the trade in wild-caught birds for pets, and support for re-granting programs designed to address the diverse threats to charismatic species like elephants, lions and the elusive pangolin. With these investments and our increased focus on illegal wildlife trade, MCF is helping to prevent the next pandemic.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ivan Samuels

www.marchconservationfund.org
In 2020 MCF disbursed $2,062,514 in grants, our biggest year of giving yet. Support for programs in North America and Latin America still dominated our philanthropy.

Starting this year, we divided our giving into six different program areas from three in past years. This highlights our increased focus on wildlife trafficking and park protection work, but also helps distinguish signature programs like LARSI.

Cover Page Photos (from top to bottom)
Narupa Reserve of the Jocotoco Foundation, Ecuador (Ivan Samuels)
Giant Anteater with baby, Barba Azul Reserve of Fundación Armonía, Bolivia (Teodoro Camacho)
African Lion in the Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya (Ivan Samuels)
Fire crew fighting the Dolan Fire at the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve, California (Mark Readdie)
DaMaI forest protection team deploying a camera trap, Sabah, Malaysia (SET-SFD-YS)
Ground Pangolin (Darren Pietersen)
Greater Green Leafbird (Endangered) for sale at a market in Java (Serene Chng)
Shorebirds roosting on Aramburu Island, Marin County, California (Ivan Samuels)
Queña Raymi, planting Polylepis seedlings, Dept. of Cuzco, Peru (ECOAN)

Toco Toucans at Barba Azul (Tjalle Boorsma)
In collaboration with our conservation partner American Bird Conservancy, the Latin American Reserve Stewardship Initiative (LARSI) entered its sixth year in 2020 with $341,622 in grants to 10 organizations in nine countries. LARSI was established in 2015 by MCF and ABC to measurably improve the capacity of Latin American non-profit conservation organizations to protect declining native birds and their habitats in perpetuity. Financial support helps partners improve operating systems and implement standard business practices, to develop financial self-sufficiency, and to manage reserves and educate their visitors and local communities. In 2020 we funded organizations in Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Jamaica, Chile, and Brazil. Selected highlights from the 2020 round of LARSI grants include:

**Armonía – Bolivia:** LARSI has been consistently supporting this partner, with most support directed towards a diversity of activities at their Barba Azul Nature Reserve, a site that protects the Critically Endangered Blue-throated Macaw, a Bolivian endemic. While Covid made it difficult for staff and visitors to access the reserve, Armonía was able to celebrate a major milestone that will help ensure the long-term protection of Barba Azul. On November 6th, the government agency in control of forests and land approved Armonía’s land use management plan for the reserve, officially making it a Private Natural Heritage Reserve (RPPN) after years of work. This makes it the first RPPN protecting habitat in the tropical savannahs of the Department of Beni. The RPPN covers the western half of the reserve, while the eastern half is managed under the guidelines of their eco-friendly ranching model.

**Fundación para la Conservación de los Andes Tropicales – Ecuador:** FCAT is a new LARSI partner working to study and conserve the highly threatened Chocó rainforest in NW Ecuador through a combination of scientific research, land purchase, sustainable development, and environmental education. In 2018 they purchased 164 ha of forest and built a research station, with plans to further expand the size of their reserve. In 2020 LARSI enabled FCAT to hire a full-time station manager, Luis Carrasco, who is responsible for designing and implementing a marketing campaign to promote the station and coordinate the visits of researchers and collaborators. Mr. Carrasco had worked with FCAT in the past and was able to hit the ground running based on his knowledge of the site, the organization, and the community. While the pandemic restricted visitation for much of the year, numbers are creeping back up and new agreements are in place with universities and researchers that will bring revenue to the organization and their field operations. Welcome to the team Luis!
SAVE Brasil – Brazil: This long-time LARSI partner has received past support from us for their Serra do Urubu Reserve in NE Brazil, as well as membership and fieldtrip development in São Paulo. But in 2020 we shifted tactics once again and funded a diversity of steps to protect the Critically Endangered Blue-eyed Ground-dove at their new 593 ha Rolinha-do-plateau Nature Reserve and the adjacent Botumirim State Park. The dove had not been seen in 75 years until rediscovered at this site, and SAVE Brasil was able to establish a reserve to protect them. Our support paid for core salaries to operate the reserve, transportation costs, and educational materials. Regional Covid lockdowns put a hold on the educational outreach and limited travel from outside the region. But the local staff were able to continue working, and the field assistant even found a new nest with two eggs being incubated (see photos). These data will help define the nesting and foraging requirements of this species for which only about a dozen individuals are known to exist.

Fundación Loma Quita Espuela – Dominican Republic: This was also a new partner for LARSI. FLQE is tasked with the long-term protection of the Loma Quita Espuela Scientific Reserve, a 7,579 ha area that is challenging to manage in part due to existing human settlements within the greater reserve area. Our grant to FLQE represented core LARSI capacity-building support: 1) An independent financial audit, which allowed them to adopt new protocols to improve administrative procedures; 2) Installation of remote-access security cameras at the organization headquarters, which provides safety to staff and equipment; and 3) Funds to hire a new park guard, which has increased patrolling to more remote parts of the reserve.

The Blue-eyed Ground-Dove and an active nest at the Rolinha-do-plateau Nature Reserve. This Brazilian endemic had gone undetected for 75 years! Marcelo Lisita/SAVE Brasil.

Transformation of Aramburu Island provides sanctuary for birds and experience for early career biologist

Created from the dumping of dredge spoils and fill from nearby development, Aramburu Island is located in Richardson Bay, just north of the Golden Gate. Covered in weeds, the island provided little habitat; yet when its shores filled up with oil-slathered birds following the Cosco Busan oil spill in 2007, Audubon California began envisioning a new future for this 17-acre barrier island. Through a partnership with Marin County Parks and the help of thousands of volunteers, Audubon transformed the island by stabilizing the eastern shoreline to better withstand the impacts of sea level rise and improving its aquatic, wetland, and upland habitats to benefit multiple species. The restoration has been a success supporting terns, cormorants, sandpipers, plovers, songbirds, stilts, killdeer - and since 2014, a nesting pair of Black Oystercatchers.

Aramburu with the San Francisco skyline in the background/Ivan Samuels

The island as viewed from above/Ivan Samuels
A promising young biologist, Paige Fernandez started with Audubon in its Early Career Conservationist Program, first in a seasonal position and now as year-round Assistant Biologist. With the support of the March Conservation Fund, Paige is now leading monitoring and restoration work on Aramburu. In addition to monitoring the island’s birds and plant communities, this year she drafted a long-range management plan aimed at sustaining bird conservation success. “It is an important piece of habitat left in the bay,” Paige shared on a recent boat tour around the island, “we’re trying to restore this island specifically for birds and make it the best as it can be and support the largest number of birds that we can.” Paige hopes to launch an experimental project soon to encourage Caspian Terns to nest here: “They are social nesters, so we’re hoping that by placing decoys shaped like terns and broadcasting their calls, they will think Aramburu is a good place for a new colony.” Photo above: Paige on the boat she uses for work on the island/Ivan Samuels. Text courtesy of Audubon California.

Major reserve expansion protects highly threatened forest in Colombia’s Middle Magdalena Valley

The Middle Magdalena Valley belongs to the highly threatened Tumbes-Choco-Magdalena biodiversity hotspot, as well as the Magdalena-Uraba moist forest eco-region. These sites have high levels of endemism, high species diversity, and are important wintering areas for many migratory bird species from North America, especially the Prothonotary Warbler. The Middle Magdalena Valley has historically been the axis of development in Colombia. Extensive cattle farming has caused widespread deforestation and wetland degradation. The ‘Barbacoas Wetlands’, a unique matrix of forest, grassland, and wetland habitats, is one of the few remnants of the original ecosystem. In 2020 we supported a new conservation partner, Fundación Biodiversa Colombia, to help expand and support the El Silencio Natural Reserve, which was first established in 2012. Prior to this campaign, the reserve was 1,470 acres. Now, a 6,213 acre acquisition will expand the reserve to 7,683 acres. The project will protect some of the largest and best-preserved forest patches in a region that lies between four recognized Key Biodiversity Areas. This purchase will establish the largest protected refuge in the region for threatened species including the Brown Spider Monkey (CR, near-endemic), the Blue-billed Curassow (CR, endemic), the Silvery-brown Tamarin (EN, endemic), Jaguars (NT) and Lowland Tapirs (VU). It will also benefit the Magdalena River Turtles (CR, endemic) and even Caribbean Manatees (VU). Working through our long-time partner Rainforest Trust, MCF provided funds to acquire 450 acres of the project total as well as hire one new forest guard from the local community. Several other organizations have collaborated to raise funds for this important project.

Camera trap photos of the Critically Endangered male (left) and female (right) Blue-billed Curassow (*Crax alberti*) at the El Silencio Natural Reserve, Colombia/Fundación Biodiversa Colombia.
2020 Awardees from the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative

The Land Trust Initiative was started by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in 2013, and in 2019 March Conservation Fund started a partnership with the Lab to scale up their initiative to support land management and habitat restoration work (see MCF 2019 Impact Report). That trial phase was very successful, and promising proposals were funded with land trusts in Oregon, Florida, Wisconsin, and North Carolina. Building on that momentum, MCF stepped up to fund five proposals at the $20,000 level. Overviews of these projects are profiled below, text courtesy of Sara Barker, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

**Alachua Conservation Trust (Florida)**

Backed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Longleaf Stewardship Fund, Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) is leading a multi-project regional longleaf pine habitat conservation initiative in North Florida. *The North Florida Sandhills Grassland Bird Habitat Restoration Project* will focus on restoring grasses and other herbaceous groundcover to 140 acres of sandhill habitat for the benefit of Florida’s 2019 State Wildlife Action Plan Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including Bachman’s Sparrow, Northern Bobwhite, state-listed Southeastern American Kestrel, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Common Nighthawk. This project takes place within an identified Florida Strategic Habitat Conservation Area as well as supporting multiple statewide priority upland habitat objectives that seek to protect and restore threatened and endangered bird species dependent upon sandhill habitat managed with fire. ACT will work with Alachua Audubon Society to complete baseline breeding bird surveys using eBird on the proposed restoration site prior to restoration work. This will be followed by exotic plant removal and the reintroduction of seeds from native grasses and other herbaceous plants during the fall and winter of 2020. The University of Florida Audubon Student Chapter and Alachua Audubon will complete eBird outreach projects on site and at the Flatwoods Fire Festival in 2021. ACT staff will reintroduce fire to the restoration site in subsequent years to protect and promote the success of grasses and other flowering plants.

**Katie Prairie Conservancy (Texas)**

The Katy Prairie Conservancy (KPC), a nationally accredited land trust, is working outside Houston to protect and restore coastal prairie. On the Katy Prairie in Harris, Ft. Bend, and Waller Counties, KPC owns nearly 13,500 acres and through conservation agreements with private landowners protects nearly 5,000 acres as well as an additional 6,005 acres in Matagorda and Jackson Counties. *The Restoration of Grasslands to Sustain Wildlife Habitat, Enhance Connectivity, and Ensure a Healthy Community*, a 363-acre grasslands restoration project located on the greater Katy Prairie Preserve, will help improve and create quality habitat for threatened grassland bird species and other wildlife in the Central Flyway through brush management, invasive species removal, and prescribed burns. In addition, this project will protect and improve landscape connectivity for wildlife migration, aid with regional flood control, better track baseline and monitoring data for species of concern, engage the community through educational programming and online resources, and complete research demonstrating the flood resiliency benefits restored grasslands bring to the watershed. Birding tools such as eBird and Merlin will be introduced through their Unplugged Adventure programming.

**Natural Lands (Pennsylvania)**

Natural Lands (NL) is partnering with Audubon Pennsylvania to determine appropriate management practices and begin implementation to improve habitat for declining Wood Thrush, Golden-winged Warbler, and Ruffed Grouse at their Bear Creek Preserve through the *Habitat Enhancement for Ruffed Grouse, Golden-winged Warbler, and Wood Thrush Project*. Bear Creek Preserve includes 3,565 acres of forests and stream valleys in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The land provides vital habitat for native wildlife, including Black Bear, Coyote, Bald Eagle, and many species of migratory songbirds. NL’s habitat improvement work will involve a prescribed burn and other silvicultural
practices such as overstory removal, shelterwood harvests, and group tree selection to create early successional habitat and a mixed-age forest. A monitoring program utilizing eBird will be established to track the success of the management actions by assessing bird diversity and monitoring for the presence and abundance of the target species. NL will host a workshop and share what is learned from this work with adjacent landowners and other partners in the region via a post-management webinar and continued use of the preserve as a demonstration site.

Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (Michigan)

Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) actively manages over 4,000 acres of diverse natural areas for ecological health, including habitat restoration for some of southwest Michigan’s most rare and threatened bird species. Grassland birds like the Henslow’s Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Bobolink are among those birds whose populations are in steepest decline throughout the Midwest, mostly due to habitat loss and fragmentation. SWMLC seeks to make the most positive possible long-term impact on these declining bird populations by understanding bird use of grassland and savanna restorations and guiding management strategies accordingly. Through the Building Capacity to Maximize Habitat Impact for Grassland and Savanna Bird Conservation Project and in partnership with the Cornell Lab, SWMLC will implement bird surveys and monitoring protocols on over 700 acres of protected SWMLC lands, and work to establish long-term monitoring capacity through volunteer outreach and training. In addition, SWMLC will conduct complementary grassland and savanna habitat management on 236 acres using prescribed burns, invasive species removal, and canopy thinning.

Vermont Land Trust (Vermont)

Vermont Land Trust (VLT) is partnering with Audubon Vermont (AVT) and Nordic Farms to demonstrate effective integration of bird conservation and diversified agriculture through the Integrating Avian Conservation and Diversified Agriculture in the Champlain Valley of Vermont Project. VLT is Vermont’s largest land trust, holding conservation easements on over 2,500 properties covering over 596,000 acres, including on the ~580-acre Nordic Farms. Historically a conventional dairy, Nordic Farms is now an innovative diversified farm growing produce and meat for local restaurants, grains for its onsite malting operation supplying regional breweries and distilleries, and shrimp in its aquaculture facility. It also includes abundant forest, wetland, and transitional shrubland identified by AVT as prime habitat for Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers. VLT and AVT will enhance the ecological function of this farm through habitat improvement on over 50 shrubland acres, removing invasive species, fostering copses of native shrubs and trees, planting in riparian areas, and installing a deer exclosure to demonstrate the impact of deer herbivory. Habitat improvement plans will incorporate the establishment of a footpath to welcome local birders to use eBird. VLT and AVT will engage the local conservation community on a technical site tour while restoration work is occurring and the public at a later outreach event. VLT’s stewardship and restoration work will incorporate ongoing monitoring in addition to bird surveys by AVT, and this project will be integrated into the Western Vermont Collaborative already operating in the Champlain Valley.

Photo credits, top to bottom: Northern Bobwhite (Danita Delimont), Wood Thrush (Petr Simon), Henslow’s Sparrow (Lev Frid), Golden-winged Warbler (Frode Jacobsen)/Shutterstock.
In the state of Sabah, Malaysia lies a vast rainforest complex comprised of three main protected areas, the Danum Valley, Maliau Basin, and Imbak Canyon Conservation Areas, collectively called the DaMaI (Danum-Maliau-Imbak) Rainforest Complex, with over one million hectares of tropical forest. DaMaI is one of the last intact forest refuges in Sabah, and one of the most important on the island of Borneo. It holds key populations of the Bornean subspecies of Orangutan, Elephant, and Sun Bear as well as two Important Bird Areas that include 20 endemic and more than 10 globally threatened bird species. Yet as with other large protected areas in the region, DaMaI faces a diversity of threats including illegal logging, encroachment into the conservation areas, and poaching of wildlife. To help address these threats our partner organization Global Conservation worked with the Sabah Environmental Trust to sign a 5-year MOU with the state government, namely the Sabah Forestry Department as land owner and the Sabah Foundation as concession manager of DaMaI, who in turn provided rangers that are specifically dedicated to the DaMaI Initiative under the supervision of the Sabah Environmental Trust. Global Conservation has provided steady funding to the initiative and expertise in the deployment of Global Park Defense to bring advances in technology to establish a better equipped patrol team with higher capacity rangers, and ultimately to push for the recognition of DaMaI as a World Heritage Site. Rangers are now trained to climb trees and deploy cellular networked camera traps at key hotspots where illegal activities are most common, while ground patrols report their findings through the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART). MCF support in 2020 helped fund ranger salaries, headquarter staff support, new camera traps, and the purchase of six all terrain vehicles to aid in patrols. This grant follows on continued support in 2020 through Global Conservation to protect the Mirador ecosystem in Guatemala (see MCF 2017 Impact Report).

Wildlife Highlight: MCF supported partner ‘Planet Indonesia’ documents rare primate

And speaking of camera traps in Borneo! Camera traps are the hidden eye in wildlife biology, and they are used by many MCF partners from the Redwoods of California to the rainforests of Borneo, and the latter is where our current grantee Planet Indonesia made an exciting discovery this year. Caught on camera trap for the first time at the Gunung Nyiut Nature Reserve in West Kalimantan, Indonesia was a Bornean Banded Langur (Presbytis chrysomelas) also called the Sarawak Langur. This primate species was thought to have gone extinct in Indonesia-Borneo about 30 years ago, and was only known to occur in three small populations in Sarawak, Malaysia-Borneo with a total population size around 300 individuals making it Critically Endangered. Sadly, only about 5% of its habitat remains, and the habitat in between the three known populations is badly degraded or absent altogether due to deforestation. It’s too early to say how many individuals are present at Gunung Nyiut, but Planet Indonesia’s continued work there may yet reveal new information on this primate that clings to existence on the island of Borneo.
Youth Access to Nature Fund increases equity to nature-based learning experiences for disadvantaged Bay Area communities

When the late Kathryn Riddell approached The San Francisco Foundation in 2016, she had a vision for a giving plan that would combine her three passions: children, the environment, and education. That vision would serve as the catalyst for the Youth Access to Nature Fund, which has grown each year since inception thanks to lead gifts from the Riddell family and other donors including March Conservation Fund, which has supported the Fund since 2017 and increased giving in 2020. Focused around five counties in the northern part of the San Francisco Bay Area (see figure), the Fund supported 34 organizations in 2020, many of which have a strong commitment to social justice, equity, and access to nature by communities of color that have historically been marginalized by the environmental movement. The continued growth of the fund in 2020 is thus timely and urgent as our nation struggled in the face of systemic racism in general, but also environmental racism that has served as a barrier to people of color that want to recreate in nature or seek nature-focused career choices. The Fund expands access to nature for children and even adults by eliminating barriers such as transportation, cultivating inclusiveness, and partnering with institutions such as school districts and health centers to dismantle racism in the outdoors. Ultimately, the Fund is increasing organizational stability of grassroots nonprofits that reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. The Fund has also increased the number of three-year grants, providing sponsored organizations with more financial stability. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic badly impacted many grantees. Their work is community-based at heart, and that means gathering together and experiencing nature in groups, just the kind of work that became exceedingly difficult in 2020. The San Francisco Foundation stepped up to provide emergency grants to those organizations most at risk while others adapted to virtual platforms until conditions permit larger gatherings and group transportation.

Growth of the Youth Access to Nature Fund (by all donors) since inception, and the Bay Area counties that receive support/The San Francisco Foundation

MCF expands support for the Crisis & Recovery Funds of the Wildlife Conservation Network

In 2019, MCF provided its first grant to the Wildlife Conservation Network to support their Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF). Now in 2020, we stepped up to support two additional funds managed by WCN, the Lion Recovery Fund (LRF) and the Pangolin Crisis Fund (PCF). And this year the WCN launched yet another fund, the Rhino Recovery Fund (RRF). While MCF has not ‘yet’ supported the new RRF, stay tuned for 2021! Collectively, the impact of these funds is immense, and the table below provides a summary of the impact since inception with a total of $41,000,000 re-granted to partners by the end of 2020.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Fund Name</th>
<th>Year Started</th>
<th># of Projects</th>
<th># of Grantees</th>
<th># of Countries</th>
<th>Funds Distributed ($)</th>
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<td>ECF</td>
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<td>321</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRF</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCF</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>RRF</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: WCN 2020 Annual Report
As the oldest and largest of their funds, the ECF is a joint initiative with Kenya-based Save The Elephants, and was founded largely in response to the exploding ivory trade that reached alarming new levels a decade ago. By investing in a coalition of individuals, scientists, conservation organizations, and government agencies, the fund seeks to stop poachers in the field, reduce the demand for ivory, disrupt ivory trafficking networks, and mitigate human-elephant conflicts in communities that live with these majestic but powerful animals. Mitigating conflict is also one of the priorities of the LRF, since predators like lions often run into trouble when living in close proximity to human settlements with livestock. But the fund also works to protect lions and their prey by stopping poachers and removing snares, which kill many species. In fact, since inception grantees to the fund have removed 43,354 snares and confiscated 95,000 pounds of illegal bushmeat. Recent research suggests that that if Africa’s protected areas were optimally managed, they could support three to four times the current number of lions. For this reason, the fund also works to help grantees manage and protect currently ‘protected’ but underfunded reserves across the range state of the species. The newer PCF was founded as a joint initiative of WCN and Save Pangolins in order to address the crisis facing this unique animal family, with eight species (four from Africa, four from Asia) being the most illegally trafficked wild mammals in the world. While hard to see, these elusive animals are targeted by poachers both for their meat, and for their scales, which are falsely believed to have medicinal properties. The demand for both meat and scales in Asia is so high that pangolins are now heavily trafficked from much of Africa to Asian markets. The fund is addressing these threats by investing in grantees that are working to stop poaching, stop the trade/reduce demand, and educate the public about this unique if rarely seen (alive) animal. In 2020 MCF went beyond just supporting the PCF and made a grant to WCN to hire a new director for the PCF. Having a technical partner to help administer the other three funds has been crucial for setting strategy, vetting projects and administering re-granting. Save Pangolins has been filling this role, but this new addition to the team will significantly increase fund capacity, and we are happy to welcome Araluen (Azza) Schunmann as the new director. Azza, based in the United Kingdom, brings to the team a wealth of knowledge and experience of both pangolin trafficking and illegal wildlife trade in general. While still unproven, there is evidence that pangolins may have been directly involved in the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when the virus jumped from animal to human in the wet market of Wuhan. Thus, no other contribution in the history of MCF has done more to prevent the next pandemic.

Photos: African Elephant and calf, Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya (Ivan Samuels); Tree-dwelling lions in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda (Maribel Guevara); White-bellied Pangolin (Tim Wacher); Azza Schunmann the new director of the Pangolin Crisis Fund.

MCF supports effort to tackle the caged bird trade crisis in Java, Indonesia

The capture and trade of songbirds for pets is a longstanding tradition in Indonesia, and nowhere is the tradition more popular than on the island of Java. Some birds are kept as novelties, while others are highly prized for their singing abilities and are entered into bird singing competitions that are big business. The result has been a huge demand for wild-caught birds both domestically and internationally, with many of these species now facing catastrophic declines, and bird markets in Java and much of Indonesia are full of increasingly threatened species for sale. Indeed, it is now estimated that Javanese households keep nearly 75 million birds, and the songbird trade and associated businesses is thought to be valued at $226 million annually. Acknowledging the cultural connections to bird keeping and recognizing the economic scale and impacts of the industry, the BirdLife partner Burung Indonesia started a major campaign in 2020 to address the crisis on Java specifically, where the practice is most wide-spread. Since previous efforts by groups to shame the practice of bird keeping showed little success, Burung will deploy a positive engagement
strategy to persuade the public, including an intensive education program that will build the awareness of the younger generation about biodiversity values, since this age group is far less committed to the bird trade practice. Since abolishing bird keeping is not realistic, Burung is pushing for ‘zero wild-caught songbirds in trade’ instead. First, they will investigate the extent of wild bird trapping, locations of trapping, trade routes, and the communities that are involved along the supply chain in order to understand the drivers of the trade and increase dialog among stakeholders. This phase of the project will also attempt to register legitimate bird breeders and work with law enforcement to prosecute those that attempt to launder wild-caught birds into the system. With this foundation of knowledge in place, Burung will identify alternative sources of income in and around key habitat, and facilitate community empowerment through biodiversity and natural resource management agreements that provide sustainable livelihood alternatives. This will begin with targeted investments in 10 villages that have been identified as the bird trade sources for markets in five large Javanese cities, and culminate in Village Resource Management Agreements that are based on proven behavior-change models from their projects in Wallacea. Finally, this five-year project will culminate in greater public awareness through campaigns and educational initiatives, such as public events to promote bird and nature conservation, and visits to schools that are aligned with their programs to foster involvement and ownership around the campaign.

Left: Birds for sale at a market in Yogyakarta/
Ferry Hasudungan

Right: A birdsong competition at the Kebun Baru Bird Singing Club/Nature in Stock

Wildfire comes to the Big Creek Reserve, again

For several years, MCF has been supporting ongoing stewardship and research needs at the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve. Part of the University of California Natural Reserves, Big Creek is one of the crown jewels of the system and one of the larger reserves. With the steep Santa Lucia Mountains dropping onto the Big Sur coastline, it contains world-famous views and tremendous biodiversity, from Kelp forests to old-growth Redwoods. But it is also a fire adapted landscape. On August 18th, 2020 the Dolan Fire ignited less than one mile from Big Creek and burned through the 8,000 acre reserve. Every year, Big Creek personnel diligently prepare defensible space for a potential fire event. This year their hard work paid off as resident staff and fire crews saved the visitor center, research cabins, and staff residences. Unfortunately, the fire claimed campgrounds, water systems, phone lines, and wireless network equipment. It also claimed five out of six private cabins that were located on the reserve as historical inholdings. One type of stewardship work MCF has been supporting there is the removal of invasive exotic plants. Knowing a disturbance like this would invite new invasions of exotics, we stepped up the timing and size of our support so that the Big Creek staff could implement a campaign of early detection and rapid response in the post-fire period in addition to the critical monitoring and treatment of known sites. Staff, led by resident reserve director Dr. Mark Readdie, had already done such a good job of treating, mapping, and monitoring known sites of invasion that the fire actually helped them by burning exotics and opening up the landscape to allow access to treat resprouting plants in parts of the reserve that were hard to access before the fire. The reserve is a key resource for educating the next generation of conservation scientists and for conducting long-term research. Many studies were disrupted by the fire, but fire is also part of the natural disturbance regime here and the reserve has burned several times in recent history. Unfortunately, an atmospheric river passed over California in January 2021 and the torrential rain on top of a burned landscape caused an unprecedented mass-wasting event that scoured the Big Creek canyon, wiping out the road and changing the course of the creek. This same storm took out Highway 1 just north of the reserve. Recovery will take some time in this disturbance-prone rugged part of the state, but we are lucky to have such a capable stewardship team in place. See next page for photos.
2020 bird conservation awards around the world

Building on our re-granting model, and with the continued help of our partner the Tides Foundation in grant administration, MCF supported another round of conservation and research grants around the globe. These investments depend on the dedication of four British non-profits, each of which is committed to the understanding and protection of birds in the region they represent. Click on the links embedded within the names of the organizations below to learn more. Of note this year was the strong emphasis on the bird trade crisis in Indonesia by the Oriental Bird Club, made possible in part by their new Indonesian country representative Noni Tirtaningtyas. The proposals listed below are only a sub-set of the total funded by these four organizations, but MCF is proud to be a major contributor to each one.

In 2020, MCF helped fund or entirely funded 27 projects in 21 countries totaling $79,001 in grants. These include:

**Oriental Bird Club**

Philip Godfrey and C. Jakosalem (Philippines) – Community-based monitoring of the Critically Endangered Sulu Hornbill (*Anthracoceros montani*)

Kiran Thapa Magar (Nepal) – Public awareness campaign to enhance the conservation of avifauna and their habitat at Gadi-Siraichuli Forest Area

Ivan Sarenas/Balete Conservancy (Philippines) – Targeted surveys to determine the status of the Critically Endangered Cebu Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum quadricolor*)

Irfan Rosyadi (Indonesia) – Bird and habitat conservation through sustainable community empowerment in the Menoreh landscape, Jatimulyo Village, Kulonprogo, Yogyakarta (Java)

Bertie Ferns/Cikananga Integrated Conservation Society (Indonesia) – Saving Bankaru Island’s Critically Endangered bird species

Ecosystem Impact Foundation (Indonesia) – Continuing the breeding program at Cikananga Conservation Breeding Center focused on Black-winged Myna, Javan Green Magpie, and Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush.

I Gede Nyoman Bayu Wirayudha (Indonesia) – Continuation of community conservation of Bali Starling on Nusa Penida
Harlyawan Agung Wahyudi (Indonesia) – Action towards saving the Critically Endangered Javan Green Magpie in Central Java

Neotropical Bird Club

Crystal Vance Guerra (Honduras) – Yellow-naped Parrot population stabilization project

Ivo Tejeda Millet (Chile) – In search of two threatened rails in Chile, *Laterallus jamaicensis* and *Porzana spiloptera*

Alejandro Pietrek (Argentina) - Conserving threatened Andean peatbogs using the rare Diademed Plover (*Phegornis mitchelli*) as an indicator species

Tulio Dornas de Oliveira (Brazil) - Geographic extent, area of occurrence and current threats of the Goias Parakeet (*Pyrrhura pfrimeri*)

Yoleydi Grisel Mejía Gaeda (Nicaragua) – Conserving the Yellow-naped Parrot (*Amazona auropalliata*) through research and community awareness

From left to right: Yellow-naped Parrot (Ondrej Prosicky), Egyptian Vultures (Iliuta Goean), Black-winged Myna (Reezky Pradata), Diademed Plover (Agami Photo Agency)/Shutterstock

African Bird Club

Vikash Tatayah/Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (Mauritius) – Using audiomoths to confirm the presence and distribution of focal species in the Bambou Mountains

Guëtse Francis (Cameroon) – Researching the population density and distribution of Grey Parrot (*Psittacus timneh*) in the buffer zone of Lobéké National Park

Nature Tanzania (Tanzania) – Monitoring Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in north-eastern Tanzania

Shadia Ibrahim Kilwanila (Tanzania) – Bridging knowledge gaps about the illegal bird trade in north-central Tanzania

Abigail Karimanzira/BirdLife Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe) – Determining the population status and distribution of Lilian’s Lovebird (*Agapornis lilianae*) in Mana Pools National Park

Jombela Salmah/Nature Uganda (Uganda) – A survey of the Karamoja Apalis (*Apalis karamojae*) in north-eastern Uganda

Callixte Gatali (Rwanda) – Instating regular waterbird counts in Rwanda

Eunice Kamau (Kenya) – Establishing the status of diurnal raptors in north-central Kenya

Ornithological Society of the Middle East, The Caucasus and Central Asia

Anna Ten (Uzbekistan) – Identifying migration routes and wintering sites of Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) in the country
Luba Balyan (Armenia) – Gap filling survey of the mid reaches of the Araks River Valley
Meidad Goren (Israel) – Monitoring the globally Vulnerable Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) breeding population
Triin Kaasiku (Georgia) – Ensuring the continuation of the Batumi raptor count and associated conservation activity
Fares Khoury (Jordan) – Determining and updating the status of owls in the country
Doğa Derneği (BirdLife Turkey) – Improving the conservation status of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)

The following non-profit conservation organizations were also supported by MCF in 2020

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Perazzo Meadow, Sierra Nevada, California. The hydrologic and ecological functions of meadows are vital to watershed health. MCF grantees like the Institute for Bird Populations and Point Blue Conservation Science work with the Sierra Meadows Partnership to increase the pace, scale, and efficacy of Sierra meadow restoration and protection. Photo by Ivan Samuels.