Letter from the Executive Director

As I look back over the year, one thing stands out from our efforts to achieve conservation outcomes: The Power of Partnerships. Of course, this is not unique to 2022, but it is time to take a moment to highlight something that nearly all our grantees are saying: We are stronger when we work together.

If you take the time to look at primary literature in the sciences, you will notice that single author publications have become rare. Most scientists have found that working in isolation is rarely productive, and the cutting edge innovative science they seek is achieved in collaboration with other bright minds. Likewise, conservation organizations have found they can achieve greater success in partnership not only with other organizations, but also with government agencies, academic institutions, and local communities. This approach brings more money to the table, but also more buy in from a diversity of stakeholders.

In this 2022 Impact Report, these kinds of partnerships will be visible throughout. The BirdLife Partnership, with 14 organizations funded by MCF in 2022 alone, is perhaps the largest, and provides a platform for supporting bird conservation work around the world while also allowing the partners to network and learn from each other. Our grantee Island Conservation has made partnerships a top priority, knowing that restoring island biodiversity depends on strong relationships with island communities, and the will to honor biosecurity goals into the future. The LARSI re-granting initiative we started with American Bird Conservancy is by definition a partnership, and we are funding strategies for the partners to learn from each other. And the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative has demonstrated that land trusts all across the United States are deeply rooted in partnerships, and are demonstrating greater success together. Indeed, more funding for such partnerships is needed, as explained by Jonathan Peterson in the Land Trust Alliance ‘Saving Land’ magazine. In his article, shared stories of convening collaboration to advance landscape conservation showed that working through multi-organizational partnerships allows land trusts to accelerate their work, and that collaborative capacity investments are integral to ensuring that such partnerships achieve broader environmental and social outcomes. Yet collaborative capacity funding remains an unmet national need. MCF will directly address this need in 2023 through targeted funding of conservation collaboratives.

As travel restrictions from the COVID pandemic are lifted, our partners are out and about, catching up on badly missed opportunities to network. Weary from years of virtual meetings, the renewed excitement and energy is inspiring.

Sincerely,

Ivan Samuels

www.marchconservationfund.org
In 2022 MCF disbursed $3,440,020 in grants, which is $1,009,740 above 2021 giving, reflecting a growth in assets that is increasing the ability of MCF to fulfill its mission. From a regional perspective, growth was proportional to previous years.

New in 2022 was the addition of a pilot year for a new program focused around ‘Pyrodiversity’ through the application of prescribed fire as a habitat management tool.

Cover Page Photos (from top to bottom)
- Cherry-throated Tanager at the Kaetés Reserve, Espírito Santo, Brazil. Gustavo Magnago/Instituto Marcos Daniel
- Bachman’s Sparrow, Olustee Battlefield State Park, Florida. Tedd Greenwald/Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy.
- SMART patrol team, Gunung Nyiut Nature Reserve, West Kalimantan, Indonesia/Planet Indonesia
- Prescribed burn, Sashwa Burrous/Fire Forward/Audubon Canyon Ranch
- Kfar Ruppin birding park and wetland reserve, Nadav Israeli/Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel
- The 2022 Conservation Management & Leadership Course participants in Rwanda, held for all Conservation Leadership Program award winners
Updates from the Latin American Reserve Stewardship Initiative

In collaboration with our conservation partner American Bird Conservancy, the Latin American Reserve Stewardship Initiative (LARSI) entered its eighth year in 2022 with $399,014 in grants to 10 organizations in seven 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 to 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 2022 we funded organizations in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and the Bahamas. Selected highlights from new grantees in the 2022 round of LARSI grants include:

Fundación Biodiversa Colombia

The El Silencio Reserve, owned and managed by Fundación Biodiversa Colombia (FBC), benefitted from a previous grant from MCF that helped expand this reserve located in the Middle Magdalena Valley, part of the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena biodiversity hotspot; see our 2020 Impact Report. Now with support through LARSI, the organization has started an innovative new agroforestry project that will generate income to support the reserve for years to come. The project includes a 2.5 ha Agroforestry Productive Unit and a 2.5 ha Analogous Productive Forest. The former uses *sacha inchi* as the main product, with high market value and demand, but also incorporates other crops, and is already producing income for the reserve. The latter is based on a model that FBC developed in 2016 that involves sustainable harvesting of planted native hardwood trees, with income projected several years out. Our grant provided support for a soil analysis, purchase and transportation of supplies, and labor for the implementation, maintenance, and monitoring of the agroforestry units. As FBC learns more from this pilot year, they plan to expand the model into other parts of the reserve where abandoned cattle pasture is available to support this business model.

Instituto Marcos Daniel

IMD owns and manages the Kaetés Reserve in SE Brazil, home to the only known population of the Critically Endangered Cherry-throated Tanager (*Nemosia rourei*). Shortly after creating this new reserve, IMD realized the forest was being degraded through trespassers that illegally cut and sell palm hearts. After realizing they were also involved in poaching and bird trafficking, IMD moved swiftly with LARSI support to hire a ranger, purchase an ATV and develop a patrol system, install new gates and a remote surveillance system. These tools and the continuous presence of the IMD team succeeded in shutting down illegal activity, giving them more time to monitor the flocks and nests of the Tanager. In parallel to the actions inside the reserve, they are working closely with local communities to raise awareness and grow engagement around the Cherry-throated Tanager conservation program, including the training of 26 teachers that will reach 3,000 students. They are also developing better coordination with these communities with the goal of combatting illegal extraction of natural resources, which was also affecting neighbors of the reserve.
INMACOB works in the state of Guerrero in southern Mexico where they partner with rural communities to develop sustainable management of Areas Destinadas Voluntariamente a la Conservación (ADVC), areas that are voluntarily managed for conservation purposes, with conservation of the Critically Endangered and endemic Short-crested Coquette (*Lophornis brachylophus*) being the top priority. INMACOB hosted 16 workshops in four ejidos where the ADVCs were established that covered comprehensive management of ADVCs, biological monitoring methods, management of solid waste, organic food production, and sustainable alternatives to generate economic resources for the ejidos. LARSI provided salary support, computer equipment and a projector, a 4X4 pickup truck for transportation to and from the communities, and support to develop a website for the organization, which is still under construction.

The Climate Center scores a fundraising blowout on Climate Ride

Since 2001, The Climate Center has been working to rapidly reduce climate pollution at scale, starting in California. Their team of staff and experts are focused on an ambitious yet achievable goal of developing science-based research to drive policy, and to mobilize a coalition of climate activists across sectors to build momentum for climate-friendly policies that benefit nature and human communities. By working with businesses, local governments, labor unions, environmental justice leaders and other non-profits, the Climate Center helps Californians and our elected leaders make sense of the latest climate science and turn their concern about the climate crisis into bold yet equitable climate policy agenda.

With a mission like that, it made perfect sense for The Climate Center to become a beneficiary of long-time MCF grantee Climate Ride, which organizes bicycle events, hikes, and independent challenges to raise money for environmental organizations, especially those with a climate focus. We formed a Climate Center team for a ride near San Francisco in May 2022 that included MCF ED Ivan Samuels and several Climate Center staff. The bonus of a 1:1 match from the Algorand Foundation inspired Climate Center donors to give through Climate Ride, and the momentum continued to
build even after the ride resulting in a contribution of over $360,000 to the Climate Center! And it set a record for Climate Ride too as their biggest giving year ever, which since 2008 has raised almost $11 million for over 100 beneficiaries.

Building on success in community-led conservation in the rainforests of Indonesia

Since 2018 MCF has been a steady supporter of Planet Indonesia, an international non-profit that conserves at-risk ecosystems through village-led partnerships in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Community-led governance is key to address socio-economic challenges that drive forest loss. Their core model is focused on access and rights, effective participatory management, inclusive governance, and regenerative finance and resources. Collectively these principles place local communities that live in forest environments in the driver seat with respect to natural resource management, helping them turn the drivers of forest loss into incentives that enable effective forest conservation. The four pillars of the core model are linked through implementation of the community-led Conservation Cooperative (CC) approach. The CCs form the cornerstone of their approach, with 69 established to date. MCF has played a key role in supporting CCs in the Gunung Nyiut Nature Reserve where access to new tools, health services, and technical capacity to manage forest and food-production ecosystems has led to a 77% reduction in forest loss since 2015, along with significant climate benefits. Now MCF will help fund a new CC in the Gunung Naning landscape, a 229,000 ha area that is part of the 2 million ha Arabella-Schwaner landscape that makes up the ‘Heart of Borneo’. Beyond the CCs, MCF has been supporting ongoing monitoring and protection of hornbill nests and other biodiversity (in part through support of the Pandok Tagong Research Station in Gunung Nyiut), support for SMART patrols in Gunung Nyiut and now in Gunung Naning, and operational support for the new Wak Gatak Rescue Center, officially opened in June 2022, to support the welfare, rehabilitation, and release of confiscated songbirds; there is now an aviary named in honor of March Conservation Fund. In addition to Planet Indonesia’s in-situ programs, they have also developed four programs under their ex-situ branch Wak Gatak with an aim to reduce the impact of the illegal wildlife trade in West Kalimantan. To encourage law enforcement to clamp down on the illegal trade of protected songbird species, they need institutions and facilities where confiscated birds can be brought. The Wak Gatak Rescue Center provides this service with the mechanisms and infrastructural support for songbird confiscations, and the means for reliable rescue, repatriation, and release operations along with species-specific rehabilitation programs. MCF has specifically supported this effort through procurement of clinical equipment, development of in-house food sources, and partial support for a veterinarian salary.

Right: The Wak Gatak Rescue Center located near Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
MCF renews support to keep forests standing in the Leuser Ecosystem

Following an initial 2021 grant for Rainforest Action Network (RAN) to support their Forest Program, MCF renewed support again in 2022. This program places a special emphasis on the Leuser Ecosystem in Sumatra, Indonesia, a spectacular rainforest landscape of 2.6 million hectares that has also been supported by MCF through the organization Forum Konservasi Leuser; see 2021 Impact Report. RAN used our support to execute public campaigns on the world’s largest consumer goods manufacturing companies, and their suppliers and financiers, utilizing market pressure to push companies to honor commitments to halt the conversion of lowland forests and forested peat swamps into palm oil plantations, which represent the greatest threat to the rainforests of Indonesia. As part of their Keep Forests Standing (KFS) Campaign, the public markets campaign pushed consumer-facing brands that use palm oil to improve transparency and to suspend business relationships with companies that are furthering destruction of the Leuser Ecosystem and violating human rights in the region. At the same time, through negotiations and participation in multi-stakeholder initiatives, RAN directly engaged with 10 target brands to press for better enforcement of environmental commitments, and implementation of zero-deforestation policies. These are also verified through monthly satellite monitoring, field and supply chain investigations, and reporting on forest clearing through LeuserWatch.org. Strategic planning and coordination with local organizations and informants on the ground is coupled with media engagement to secure coverage of emerging deforestation cases, in both local and international press, with the goal of exposing illegal operations.

And, support for their Community Action Grants

From palm oil plantations to industrial agricultural development, gold mining and land-grabbing to the ever-increasing impact of climate change, there is one consistent but unfortunate truth: Indigenous and frontline communities suffer a disproportionate impact to their health, livelihood, and cultures. Dependent on the ecosystems where they live for survival, they are also the first to rise up to push back against these injustices, and are often the most effective. This is why RAN created the Community Action Grants program over 30 years ago. “Frontline Communities: Where small grants have a huge impact” clearly defines the objective of this re-granting initiative, which MCF supported for the first time in 2022. Small grants, typically in the $5,000-$15,000 range, provide direct support to grassroots leadership on the frontlines through two small grant vehicles that share the same goal but operate slightly differently. The Protect and Acre Program focuses on supporting grassroots leadership and local organizations in tropical forest regions (especially Indonesia and the Amazon), helping them secure land title, survey and protect their territories, and to mobilize against ongoing threats to communities and the forests they depend on. The Climate Action Fund supports local groups tackling the impacts caused by fossil fuel extractive industries such as coal, oil, gas, and tar sands. These communities are protecting their livelihoods against polluting industries and fighting to stop new carbon-emitting projects and shut down old ones, especially in cases where the industry failed to consult communities prior to development, and refuse to be accountable for the toxic legacies they try to leave behind. Re-granting through the Climate Action Fund is more focused on initiatives in the USA and Canada. The past year marked a record high in RAN’s Community Action Grants program, with $775,000 distributed through 87 separate grants - read more [here](http://www.ran.org).
2022 Awardees from the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative

The Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative was started by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in 2013 and in 2019 March Conservation Fund partnered with the Lab to scale up their Small Grant Program to support land management and habitat restoration goals. Growing yearly, our support funded eight land trusts in 2022 with $25,000 grants, many of which were matched by other funds to achieve meaningful conservation outcomes on properties that are protected with conservation easements. An overview of the projects funded in 2022 are shown below, text courtesy of Sara Barker, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (Washington)

The Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT) is continuing their partnership with the National Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Central Washington and Spokane Audubon Societies, and Washington Native Plant Society to restore CDLT’s 1,396-acre Spiva Butte Nature Preserve (SBNP). These partnerships were forged after devastating wildfires swept through the region in September 2020 and burned much of the remaining Greater Sage-Grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse shrub-steppe habitats in Washington state, including CDLT’s SBNP. Greater Sage-Grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse occupied only 8% and 3%, respectively, of their historic range within the state of Washington prior to the 2020 fires. The Cornell land trust initiative grant will fund the planting of 19, two-acre plots of big sagebrush, critical to the survival of Greater Sage-Grouse. These new plots will provide a wind-dispersed seed source on the property and for the surrounding landscape providing varying densities of sagebrush in the future. Sharp-tailed Grouse rely on associated riparian habitats within the shrub-steppe and will benefit directly from planting 12 riparian species of native trees and shrubs within 28 acres of the Deep Creek drainage. Restoration will provide important food sources, cover, and habitat connectivity. CDLT will also begin a bird monitoring program at eight sites on SBNP by training volunteers from the North Central Washington Audubon Society to conduct surveys and collect and enter data into eBird.

Great Peninsula Conservancy (Washington)

Great Peninsula Conservancy (GPC) is collaborating with OrnithoLogistics, The Evergreen State College, and Northwest Natural Resource Group to address an important information gap by initiating a monitoring study of bird responses to conservation practices on five GPC forestlands. A goal of GPC’s stewardship program is to maintain and/or improve the ecological integrity of GPC’s forestlands by increasing forest structure and species diversity. Historically managed for timber production, the five preserves identified in this study have little diversity in terms of tree species and tree age. The project identified 54 bird species that could benefit from the conservation practices and will use remote acoustic recording devices to understand how these birds respond to management activities. With support from the Cornell land trust initiative, Audio-Moth acoustic devices will capture avian community response to three interventions: 1) creation of snags, den trees, and coarse woody debris, 2) creating structural diversity with patch openings, and 3) replanting with a diversity of conifers and shrubs. These acoustic data will be ground truthed with point counts and area search data both pre and post-management.

Habitat pile created by GPC. Photo: Petrini Wymer
The avian response to the conservation practices collected via acoustic recorders will be analyzed using Arbimon software and then lessons learned will be shared with project partners and other land trusts. Understanding the efficacy and utility of the remote acoustic monitoring technique has important implications for guiding future restoration actions for GPC and building capacity for the greater land trust community.

**Kennebec Estuary Land Trust** *(Maine)*

The Kennebec Estuary Land Trust (KELT) is expanding their existing partnership with Ag Allies to build collaborative relationships throughout Maine. After two years of this dynamic partnership, and six years since the creation of Ag Allies, this effort has protected and improved thousands of grassland acres habitat for breeding birds throughout the state. Laura Lecker, founder and manager of Ag Allies, and Maeve McGowan, grassland bird conservation specialist, work closely with Maine farmers, land trusts, municipalities, and other landowners to improve the breeding success of Bobolinks and other grassland birds. Project staff will help landowners navigate harvesting hay, improving soil quality, managing invasive species, monitoring for grassland birds, and maintaining public access to open space while protecting breeding populations of Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrows, and other grassland specialists. The program will provide incentive payments to farmers to help offset the economic loss associated with delayed harvesting and work to make these practices sustainable in the future for each landowner. They will continue partnering with Maine land trusts, municipalities, and other organizations, and will develop and deepen strategic partnerships in surrounding states. The team will also offer outreach and educational events to organizations and visits to individuals who own, manage, or are simply interested in grasslands.

**Piedmont Environmental Council** *(Virginia)*

The Piedmont Environmental Council, Smithsonian’s Virginia Working Landscapes, American Farmland Trust, and Quail Forever continue to address the ongoing decline of grassland bird populations in northern Virginia through the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative (PGBI). By working with landowners and producers PGBI is implementing a suite of best management practices on working landscapes with the following goals: (1) stem the tide of grassland bird declines in VA on private lands, (2) improve the resiliency of working landscapes, (3) and positively impact the livelihoods that depend upon those lands. With support from the Cornell land trust initiative, PGBI will amplify the reach of PGBI’s delayed haying and summer pasture stockpiling incentives program—currently underway across nine counties in the Piedmont—into five new counties within the Shenandoah Valley. These include the top four agricultural income-producing counties in the state, where demand for conservation resources and technical assistance exceeds availability. The delayed haying option excludes haying from a portion of hayfields during spring and early summer, while the summer pasture stockpiling option excludes livestock grazing from select pastures during spring and summer in order to store forage for late-summer and early-fall. These best management practices result in grass fields being left completely untouched from mid-April through mid-July during the nesting season for grassland birds. PGBI will work with producers on the ground to implement these practices on the landscape, recruit and train citizen scientists to conduct breeding bird surveys using eBird, and attract new landowners and land trusts into the program through a diverse suite of outreach events. PGBI will be engaging with new partners, including the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative and Shenandoah Valley representatives from VA Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, in order to connect this incentives program with applicable producers in the Shenandoah Valley and tailor the program to best meet their needs.

**Sonoma Land Trust** *(California)*

Sonoma Land Trust, The Wildlands Conservancy, and Point Blue Conservation Science are partnering together with vital support from The Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative to assess woodland birds as an indicator of ecosystem health within forest treatment units being managed for wildfire resiliency. Sonoma County has been at the epicenter of climate driven wildfire activity in California over the past five years and groups in the region, as well as across the West, are accelerating the pace and scale of vegetation management activity to reduce accumulated fuel loads for community safety. The Monitoring Avian Community Response to Forest Fuels Management Project will assess the 2023 spring breeding season avian response to management and compare results to baseline surveys within forest treatment units on four conservation properties to determine species richness and abundance, with a focus on special-status or indicator species. Point Blue will conduct monitoring activities in the forest treatment units and enter data into eBird, generate eBird
hotspots to engage birders and citizen scientists, and use eBird species maps to determine where state wildlife action plan species have been sighted in relation to each study site. Overall project findings will help land managers monitor the health of forest ecosystems under shaded fuel break, prescribed fire, and restoration forestry management for ecological goals and wildfire re-silience. As fuel reduction treatments increase and prolifer- ate across Northern California in response to the growing threat of wildfire, there may be valuable lessons to learn from this study that can help communities manage forests and maintain healthy bird populations. Project findings will be shared in two virtual outreach presentations to engage other land managers and spotlight the approach of monitoring birds as a barometer of forest habitat health.

**Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy (Florida/ Georgia)**

In the Southeast, lightning-induced fires naturally occurred most often during the growing and bird breeding season between April and July. Natural communities, and the species found within them, adapted to these fires and even came to rely upon them. Despite this, many landowners that implement prescribed fire steer clear of this time period due to the perception that these fires will harm native birds, such as the Northern Bobwhite, a grassland nesting bird whose population is in steep decline. To counter this notion, Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy and Alachua Conservation Trust have partnered together and formed a Conservation Collaborative. Both land trusts will help landowners in their regions burn over 300 acres during the growing season. The land trusts will record site conditions pre-burn and partner with local Audubon chapters to conduct pre and post-monitoring of the burned areas using eBird to document the response of bird species such as Bachman’s Sparrow, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Meadowlark, and Eastern Towhee. Landowners that participate in the program will receive financial assistance to help offset prescribed burning costs and make burning during this time frame more appealing. Results of this project will be communicated digitally through a GIS Storymap and video to spread the message that growing season burns are helpful, rather than harmful, to our native wildlife and demonstrate the benefits of coordinated stakeholder efforts to restore private lands for native birds.

**Alachua Conservation Trust staff Joe and Rachel at a prescribed fire.**

**Three Rivers Land Trust (North Carolina)**

The Three Rivers Land Trust’s (TRLT) Creating and Improving Avian Habitat Quality along Critical Corridors in Central North Carolina restoration project will improve sensitive areas aptly situated along important waterways and contiguous units of managed land to enhance plant communities that serve as critical foraging and nesting sites for avian species. Our goal is to implement applied habitat management practices for ecosystem management and restoration that create and enhance habitat for declining populations of neotropical migrants, with special emphasis on shrubland and grassland bird species. Land management practices include prescribed fire, snag and canopy gap creation, invasive plant control, and high-quality early succession establishment and maintenance. TRLT will use eBird to conduct baseline bird surveys and post-treatment surveys to measure success of management decisions. TRLT will engage community members, partners, and stakeholders by showcasing management techniques used to support and enhance local bird populations on social media through video documentation. TRLT will also invite the community to conduct point counts in the spring to familiarize them with target bird species and how they can be used to assess management. More-
over, TRLT hopes to showcase successful management techniques that improve habitat for sensitive and declining bird species to other land trusts and partners.

**Triangle Land Conservancy** (North Carolina)

Triangle Land Conservancy’s (TLC) Brumley North Nature Preserve is a local birding hotspot in the Piedmont of North Carolina in the rapidly developing Triangle Region. As a part of the larger 673-acre Brumley Nature Preserve, this 160-acre property is one of the largest tracts of natural areas in the county. Presently, the preserve contains a variety of beneficial habitat including ponds, open fields, wetlands, and mature forest, however its land use history has resulted in expanses of invasive species and stands of machine-planted loblolly pine. TLC’s primary goal is to reverse the course of this land legacy by enhancing habitat quality to benefit breeding, migrating, and residential bird species, as well as other wildlife found on site. In particular, TLC has targeted habitat improvement efforts for the Golden-winged Warbler, a species of concern in North Carolina. TLC will incorporate a series of specific habitat management prescriptions into the preserve’s long-term management plan, including invasive plant species removal, native plant establishment, prescribed burns, and forest canopy gap openings in even-age loblolly pine stands. TLC is partnering with New Hope Audubon Society (NHAS) to conduct seasonal bird surveys that will help TLC understand the impact of management actions on local bird populations. These partners will engage the public by leading bird hikes and teaching eBird, as well as educational events highlighting the benefit of native plant species for birds, harmful invasive plant species, and TLC’s restoration activities. The project site will serve as an outdoor classroom for local schools and universities where students can learn about wildlife surveys, habitat management, and preserve management.

**MCF supports printing of translated bird book**

Although it may seem counterintuitive, identification field guides are often not published in the native language of the countries they represent. Not at first at least, and this year MCF helped support an effort to change that. While there are several reasons that field guides are initially published just in English, the primary factors are cost, lack of local demand, and the diversity of languages spoken in the country/countries where the guide might be used. But this is changing as the passion for nature observation grows internationally and scientific communities have grown in developing nations. One such example is the *Birds of the Indonesian Archipelago: Greater Sundas and Wallacea* by James A. Eaton, Bas van Balen, Nick W. Brickle, and Frank E. Rheindt. This impressive bird book covers 1,417 species spread across thousands of islands, yet was only available in English. Now a printing of 1,500 books in Indonesian Bahasa language by Lynx Ediciones, a publisher in Spain has changed that, thanks to a multi-organization effort spearheaded by the authors. With funding from the Indonesian BirdLife partner Burung, the Oriental Bird Club, VBN (BirdLife Netherlands), and March Conservation Fund the books have been printed, shipped to Indonesia, and are being distributed to eager ornithologists, birders, and conservationists across the region. This effort followed the major undertaking of translating the guide to begin with. To accomplish that, the authors offered free copies of the guide to keen Indonesians willing to translate their favorite families via a call for help on social media, which itself created a lot of excitement through the Indonesian birding community.
Wildlife Highlight: Return of the Peruvian Diving Petrel

Great news from the island of Chañaral in Chile, where for the first time in 40 years the Near Threatened Peruvian Diving-petrel (*Pelecanoides garnotii*) is nesting! This island formerly held one of the largest breeding colonies for this species before the introduction of invasive foxes and rabbits, which preyed upon the petrels, degraded their sensitive desert island habitat, and competed for burrows. In 2013, MCF grantee *Island Conservation* began working with CONAF (Chile’s National Forestry Corporation) to remove rabbits from the island; foxes were already absent by that time. By 2017 the island was declared ‘rabbit free’ and in 2019 Island Conservation and partners initiated a social attraction project, which included the construction of artificial nest burrows and solar-powered speakers that play petrel calls. Birds soon began arriving on the island to explore, but in 2022 the *exciting news* broke that for the first time in 40 years there was a documented Peruvian Diving-petrel chick on the island, and in a naturally dug burrow! Social attraction methods are an innovative (and at times even comical) method to entice species to re-colonize former habitats. With the right tools and a bit of patience, these uplifting stories demonstrate how humans can create, or recreate, habitat for threatened species.

Left: Equipment maintenance and cleaning. Social attraction equipment can run 24/7, allowing the technology to do the work even when humans are not physically present; Photo: Island Conservation. Right: A Peruvian Diving Petrel in flight; Photo: Daniel Teran/Island Conservation.

The BirdLife Partnership: A network for supporting bird conservation around the world

The mission of *BirdLife International* is to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people toward sustainability in their use of natural resources. To that end the network of 117 partners divided into six regions covers all continents, landscapes, and seascapes with a global office based in Cambridge, UK. March Conservation Fund has a long history of supporting BirdLife partners, with 19 partners funded within the last five years and 14 of those in 2022 alone. BirdLife just celebrated their centenary this year, so it’s worth exploring how MCF has supported the partnership, which has come through various initiatives. For example, the Latin American Reserve Stewardship Initiative, which is administered by *American Bird Conservancy* (itself a BirdLife partner) provides capacity-building grants for organizations that own or help steward critical habitat for birds. These grants have supported a number of BirdLife partners in the Americas region such as the *Bahamas National Trust*, *Armonía*, *SAVE Brasil*, *Fundación Jocotoco* (affiliate), and *ECOAN*. In 2022 specifically, support for BirdLife partners was noteworthy through the following grants.

In the SE Asia region, multiple partners will work together to address cross-border conservation challenges that would be difficult to tackle alone. A collaboration between the *Bird Conservation Society of Thailand*, *Malaysian Nature Society*, and the *Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association* (Myanmar) will develop an inter-country conservation approach for the declining Plain-pouched Hornbill (*Rhyticeros subruficollis*), a unique species for this family as it migrates in large flocks, crossing international borders. Building on satellite tracking data for the species from the Thailand Hornbill Project, this grant will address important questions like habitat use at migratory stopover sites, triggers for migration, and nesting site locations, all of which will be used to help guide conservation actions at key sites. The Malaysian Nature Society wrote: “The Plain-pouched Hornbill is a unique species which seasonally migrates across three countries in Southeast Asia – Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand. Much remains a mystery about the species, and previously,
field teams in each country worked independently to research and protect landscapes of known importance. Now with MCF’s support, the Malaysian Nature Society can engage in stronger collaboration with our counterparts across the Plain-pouched Hornbill’s flyway. This is one of the few inter-country conservation efforts for this species, through which we aim to synergize our efforts, align conservation priorities, and strengthen data-sharing and cross-learning.”

Support under this grant also funded Burung Indonesia and the Haribon Foundation (Philippines) to tackle illegal cross-border trade of parrots. Eastern Indonesia (Wallacea) is a major source of parrots traded in the region. Parrots from Halmahera in North Maluku, Indonesia are trafficked in large numbers to the Sarangani Islands in Southern Mindanao, Philippines, via fishing vessels, where they are subsequently re-exported to other countries. This project funds both partners to improve baseline data on species traded, establish trade routes and strengthen current monitoring, reporting, and law enforcement efforts. One of the partners (Haribon) stated: “With the Cross Border Parrot Trade project, Haribon hopes to promote a better understanding and awareness of illegal bird trade practices, strengthen policies and capacities on illegal wildlife and bird trade enforcement, and strengthen cross-border enforcement cooperation between countries. This project affirms Haribon’s commitment to pursuing its decades-long campaign to keep wildlife in the wild.” The urgency of this work is highlighted by a recent report published by the organization TRAFFIC that documents a thriving online trade of Indonesian birds in the Philippines.

An entirely new grantee in 2022 was The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, the country’s most influential conservation organization for more than 60 years. The geographic location of Israel lies at the junction of a major migratory flyway, funnelling hundreds of millions of birds from across Europe, Asia, and Africa twice each year. Yet past decades have witnessed a loss of key migratory habitat, and in particular key wetland sites that were drained for agriculture. The answer from SPNI is ‘Start-Up Nature’, an initiative to create new wetlands within areas of human development by leasing abandoned fish ponds, flooding them with water and replanting vegetation to regenerate wetland ecosystems. The results greatly exceeded expectations! Within a few months following restoration, hundreds of thousands of birds arrived to rest and refuel during migration, including endangered species and others of conservation concern. MCF provided support for the initial 3-year setup phase of the project as SPNI begins to build an endowment for long-term stewardship costs.
Finally, MCF provided support for three ‘Future Conservationist Awards’ through the Conservation Leadership Program. This initiative is managed by BirdLife International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Fauna & Flora International to accelerate conservation leadership development around the world. The CLP network is helping to create the next generation of highly skilled, locally based conservation professionals that can deliver sustainable conservation impact for the world’s most threatened sites while exchanging experiences through dynamic international, national, and regional networks. Since inception, the program has empowered some 3,000 young conservationists from over 100 countries. The $15,000 Future Conservationist Awards fund a team of early-career scientists and advocates to conduct projects focused on the conservation of priority species and their habitats. In addition, one member of each team attends a two-week conservation management and leadership workshop, and award winners are linked into an alumni network that offers on-going professional development opportunities, peer mentoring, and support to engage with the broader conservation community. This grant follows our support in 2021 that funded the following two awards.

Ifeanyi Maxwell Ezenwa (Nigeria) - Reconciling the expansion of oil palm plantations and the conservation of endangered Grey Parrots.

“It was a life-changing experience to take part of the Conservation, Management and Leadership Training in Rwanda for future conservationists. We have been equipped with a lot of tools that will help us to work in the field of conservation professionally and are part of a network that will carry us through our career”.

- Ifeanyi Ezenwa (right in photo)

Aditya Pal (Nepal) - Conservation of Critically Endangered Bengal Florican in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.

“The CLP grant acceptance news made us really amazed. We are very excited and grateful to be a part of CLP. We have always wished to work in the field of conservation, and this project will fulfil our dreams.”

- Aditya Pal (left in photo)
Updates from the Wildlife Conservation Network Crisis & Recovery Funds

Following an initial 2019 investment in the Elephant Crisis Fund, the first and largest of the re-granting Wildlife Funds managed by the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), MCF has stepped up support to position these funds front and center in our strategy to use re-granting as a tool to maximize impact by deploying resources to beneficiaries across many countries. Grants not only fund direct protection of target species and their habitats, but also address cross-border wildlife trafficking threats and behavior change work to achieve demand reduction goals for wildlife products. In 2020 we expanded support to the Lion Recovery Fund and the Pangolin Crisis Fund, and then in 2021 we supported yet another WCN wildlife fund, the Rhino Recovery Fund. A total of $300,000 ($75K/fund) plus salary support for the Pangolin Crisis Fund director was granted by MCF in 2022, making WCN one of our top grantees. Below are some updates for the year from each of the funds:

Elephant Crisis Fund – To date: $32 million for 416 projects to 105 grantees in 44 countries. The ECF is a joint initiative of Save the Elephants and WCN. In 2022 funding was allocated to three programmatic areas: 17% towards ending the ivory crisis, 40% to promote human-elephant coexistence, and 43% to protect elephant landscapes. Of particular concern are small elephant populations at risk of being lost, especially in West Africa where tiny populations of ‘ghost elephants’ are notoriously difficult to find and monitor. Rates of poaching for ivory remain low, MUCH lower than 5-10 years ago, and under-cover investigations have succeeded in capturing key wildlife traffickers. As elephant populations have started to recover, they find themselves in direct conflict with human populations. Now, an innovative and free resource is available to help communities tackle this problem, the Human-Elephant Coexistence Toolbox, which presents more than 80 tried and tested elephant deterrent methods in three languages. Another sign of hope for elephant protection in Africa supported by the ECF has been the establishment of public-private partnerships, where private sector organizations take responsibility for managing state-owned protected areas.

Lion Recovery Fund – To date: $29.8 million for 221 projects to 77 grantees in 23 countries. The LRF has invested in 45% of the lion range and has supported 16,073 anti-poaching patrols across critical lion habitat in Africa. Like the ECF, the LRF’s investments focus on improving the management of neglected protected areas and promoting coexistence between lions and the people that live in or adjacent to these areas. Long-term investments and repeat funding for ‘lionscapes’ have helped organizations both restore operations that were grounded during Covid, and address landscape conservation goals that benefit other species. Highlights include increasing numbers of the Critically Endangered West African Lion in Senegal, new partnerships with African governments to start bringing hunting blocks (that total 140 million ha) under conservation management, and the removal of snares and treatment and release of lions injured in snares as well as translocation of lions away from areas where they come into conflict with people and livestock.

Pangolin Crisis Fund – To date: $3.2 million for 48 projects to 31 grantees in 26 countries. The PCF is managed by WCN with technical oversight by Save Pangolins. As the world’s most trafficked mammal, the eight species of pangolin are all threatened with extinction. While hunting for bushmeat is a problem for many species, the trade of pangolin scales for traditional medicine continues to be the primary driver of population declines. The PCF response to these threats focuses on demand reduction and public education, law enforcement and anti-trafficking investigations, and conservation planning combined with community engagement to improve outcomes for both Pangolins and people in and adjacent to protected areas. Specific 2022 PCF investments included the creation of a platform for the Traditional Chinese Medicine community to phase out pangolin products, high-level training of in-country partners in law enforcement to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency, support for cutting-edge computer modeling to collate, analyze and map
data to identify poaching hotspots and trafficking routes, local deter-
rence to pangolin poaching through community-led SMART patrols,
cross-border information exchange to infiltrate criminal networks and
root-out corruption, salary support for key veterinary staff tasked with
rehabilitation and release of confiscated pangolins, and post-release
monitoring using VHF and satellite telemetry. See here for an interac-
tive story map on Asia’s most threatened pangolin species.

**Rhino Recovery Fund – To date: $3.4 million for 45 projects to 35 grantees in 13 countries.** The world’s iconic rhino species are all threatened with extinction due to habitat loss and poaching for their horns. The RRF works to protect rhinos from wildlife crimes and restore their landscapes, noting that most species breed successfully when threats are removed. Like the pangolin, the rhino horn is valued for traditional medicine, so combating organized trafficking of horns and demand reduction campaigns are an important part of the fund. RRF 2022 investments included translocation of rhinos into formerly occupied parts of their range where threats have receded, evidence-based analysis of the poaching and illegal wildlife trade of rhino horn from source countries to disrupt cross-border trafficking, and a feasibility analysis to support the cre-
ation of a mega-rhino sanctuary that would link individual rhino sanc-
tuaries in a landscape context. See here for a story map of an effort to
dehorn rhinos crossing into Mozambique from South Africa

**A new re-granting initiative to conserve critically endangered species in SE Asia**

Southeast Asia is well known for its exceptional biodiversity found in tropical forests, freshwater ecosystems, and marine environments. But the unsustainable harvesting of wildlife and ongoing large-scale habitat de-
struction combined with weak governance and a large human population have put considerable stress on na-
tural habitats. Many species are now at risk of extinction, with declining and often isolated populations. The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) **Asian Species Action Partnership** (ASAP) is a partnership plat-
form with the collective aim to end species extinctions in Southeast Asia and secure wild populations across
their natural range. ‘ASAP Species’ include land and freshwater vertebrates found in Southeast Asia and listed
as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, currently 284 species. ASAP is hosted by **Mandai Nature** in
Singapore, and supports its growing network of 224 partners (mostly NGOs and Civil Society Organizations)
in 29 countries through increasing finance, strengthening regional capacity and leadership, and building skills
in project management, strategy development, and communications. The country of Indonesia has the larg-
est number of partners, currently at 60. Given the lack of funding for conservation work with poorly known,
relatively obscure yet Critically Endangered species in the region, ASAP created a re-granting program in
2020 to provide grants up to $10,000 to ASAP partners. Currently these fall into two categories, **Species Con-
servation Grants** and the **Rapid Action Fund**. Both categories are open to all ASAP partners, with the Rapid
Action Fund designed to provide rapid funding for unforeseen but important and urgent activities. ASAP staff
supported by Mandai Nature provide targeted one-on-one support to promising individual applicants, offering
feedback and advice throughout project design and proposal development. In this way, the application process
itself serves a capacity-building function. In 2022, MCF provided a grant to fund five ASAP proposals, which
were awarded to the following projects:
• In search of Critically Endangered Betta pardalotos for ex-situ and in-situ conservation, Indonesia; Kelompok Pengamat Burung Spirit of South Sumatra.

• Increasing Villager’s Awareness in Conservation of Painted Terrapin Batagur borneoensis occurring in Karang Gading Langkat Timur Laut Wildlife Reserves, Indonesia; Satucita Foundation.

• Securing a captive breeding program of Bawean Deer (Axis kuhlii) on Bawean Island as a back-up for the decreasing in-situ population and as a source of re-introduction, Indonesia; Association for Nature and Biodiversity.

• Reassessment of the population and conservation status of the Mesilau Stream Toad (Ansonia guibei) in Sabah, Malaysia; Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sabah. (with co-funding from Synchronicity Earth)

• Maintaining the Bali Starling program at Besikalung Wildlife Sanctuary during a Covid-induced down-turn in financial support, Bali, Indonesia; Friends of the National Parks Foundation.

**Bringing good fire back to the land: Restoring the ecological and cultural benefits of fire in California landscapes**

The recent megafires that have burned millions of acres in California have brought attention to the extreme fuel loading present in what used to be fire ‘adapted’ landscapes. Climate change, acting as a multiplier, also threatens to alter fire regimes. In the absence of fire due to over a century of suppression efforts, these factors have combined to produce extreme fire behavior, resulting in less resilience and even the risk that forested habitats may not recover as forests after burning. To address this issue, we started a new pilot program in 2022 to fund initiatives seeking to bring good fire back to the land, with the general goal of promoting pyrodiversity. This concept was first defined by Robert Martin and David Sapsis in 1991, where both spatial and temporal variability in fire severity led to higher biodiversity by maintaining more heterogeneity across a landscape. This fine-scale variability or ‘patchiness’ in fire behavior then led to more diverse age structures and less continuity of fuels, leading to a mosaic of burn severities that provide habitat for more species. Yet while pyrodiversity is the target, the immediate urgency is to get more good fire on the ground now, and with that in mind MCF funded three initiatives in this pilot year.

Fire Forward is a prescribed fire and ecosystem stewardship and capacity-building program founded in 2017 as a program of Audubon Canyon Ranch. They have trained more than 600 people and conducted over 180 cooperative prescribed burns with regionally tailored fuels reduction practices that restore ecosystem health. Their mission is achieved through three primary focus areas: 1) planning and implementing prescribed burns, 2) training, mentoring, and leading a skilled community of volunteers to work on burns, and 3) creating pathways to professional fire and stewardship careers. This year MCF co-funded a new Prescribed Fire Module Leader, which will be a shared position between Audubon Canyon Ranch (Fire Forward) and The Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy is the sole NGO with access to the federal training and certification program for prescribed fire courses and certifications, the two organizations have been partners since Fire Forward’s inception, and both organizations have identified the pressing need for more career-track jobs dedicated to prescribed fire stewardship. This position will lead, train and mentor a series of prescribed fire teams on assignments in California’s North Bay Area, with travel assignments to other regions. By directing prescribed fire personnel and overseeing their training and qualifications, this position helps build professional development capacity to meet the demand for a larger skilled workforce that is capable of using fire to address the compatible goals of ecological health and community safety.

**Grassland burn at the ACR Bouverie Preserve. Photo: Sashwa Burrous**
Taking a deeper look at how California ended up in this situation to begin with, it is important to look at how fire exclusion policies deprived indigenous people from using fire, a tool they used for millennia to steward the landscapes that colonists ‘discovered’ as settlers poured into the region during the gold rush. Fire exclusion policies not only resulted in excessive fuels, but also served as a form of cultural genocide. Cultural burning, as defined in California’s strategic plan for expanding the use of beneficial fire, is the intentional application of fire to land by California Native American Tribes, tribal organizations, or cultural fire practitioners to achieve cultural goals or objectives, including for subsistence, ceremonial activities, biodiversity, or other benefits. Thus with cultural burning, fuels reduction may be a lower priority than cultural objectives, but it’s important to note the process can achieve both. Despite attempts to extinguish these practices, California Native Tribes still retain their traditional ecological knowledge related to cultural burning. Coming full circle, the state and other non-tribal partners now also show interest in revitalizing the use of cultural burning, including tribes and tribal knowledge in the planning of prescribed burns, and improved co-management of public lands. In 2022, MCF supported the Cultural Fire Management Council with the mission to facilitate the practice of cultural burning on the Yurok Reservation and Ancestral lands, which will lead to a healthier ecosystem for all plants and animals, long-term fire protection for residents, and provide a platform that will in turn support the traditional hunting and gathering activities of Yurok, located in northern California. Besides operating an ongoing cultural burn fire program, the CFMC is working to strengthen state and federal support of cultural burning, conduct public outreach about good fire, promote intergenerational transfer of knowledge through a family burn program, host cultural burn training exchanges, and collaborate with the neighboring Karuk and Hoopa Tribes when burning on Ancestral lands.

Finally, our third grant in this pilot year was to our long-time grantee Point Blue Conservation Science. Following over five decades of research at their Palomarin Field Station, Point Blue is proposing a new era of land management that would include the application of mechanical treatments and prescribed fire as a means of managing the encroachment of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), reducing wildfire risk, and restoring a mosaic of coastal scrub and prairie in their 36 ha study area located at the south end of the Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County, California. When Point Blue (then Point Reyes Bird Observatory) first started studying birds at Palomarin in 1966, the coastal scrub and prairie habitat was very open. In the absence of disturbance, Douglas-fir started to encroach onto the study area, replacing the scrub-prairie habitat with a dense, young coniferous forest. The project has three primary goals: 1) Reduce fuel loading and restore mixed coastal scrub, prairie, and forest vegetation in the Palomarin area; 2) Conduct high-quality collaborative research on multiple dimensions of ecosystem change; and 3) Inform and inspire coastal vegetation management and the introduction of ecological disturbance. MCF support has so far funded the first phase of planning and preparation while final permitting is obtained to proceed with any prescribed burn. And following a burn, Point Blue will be in a very unique position to compare bird and plant communities pre and post-disturbance, with over half a century of data from the site in hand – learn more through The Palomarin Field Station Data Explorer.

Above left, the Palomarin Field Station in the early 1970s, and above right the same view in 2006 showing the encroachment of Douglas-fir into the study area. The photo at right is already out of date, but the trees have now obscured the view, making the direct comparison from this photo point impossible! Photos by Point Blue Conservation Science.
Cracking down on the illegal bird trade in Indonesia

As MCF has been expanding support to counter illegal wildlife trafficking, one of our focal areas has been the pet bird trade in SE Asia, but especially in Indonesia. Keeping birds as pets, especially songbirds, has long been a tradition in Indonesia. But in recent years, the practice has exploded in scale and is now unsustainable, with populations of many species rapidly declining and entire forests going silent. Nowhere has this issue been more worrisome than the island of Java where millions of wild-caught birds are kept as pets. Previous MCF support to the BirdLife partner Burung Indonesia is working to address this (see our 2020 Impact Report), but while trapping is rampant on Java, birds are also being sourced from forests on Sumatra, Borneo, the Moluccas, and even Papua. Many individuals die during transport after being restrained in cruel conditions. Working hard to use existing laws to intercept bird shipments, the organization FLIGHT is focused on investigating and reporting poachers in the forest, documenting illegal trade of birds in markets, and assisting law enforcement to stop smugglers and traders. After a first grant in 2021, MCF increased support in 2022 to help FLIGHT expand their efforts in counter wildlife trafficking, which has also yielded benefits for other trafficked animals such as primates, pangolins, and the casques of Helmeted Hornbills. Since inception in 2018, FLIGHT has rescued over 190,000 birds. Just between April 2021 and July 2022, the smuggling of 63,000 songbirds from Sumatra, Bali, and Lombok to Java was stopped. In many cases birds are intercepted so soon after capture that they can be returned to their site of origin, and following a health check by quarantine officials, released back into the wild. As the organization grows, MCF support has helped increase the number of confiscations and arrests related to bird smuggling, increased public awareness that smuggling birds is illegal, and reduced the illegal trade in wild birds.

Above photos by FLIGHT showing parrots confiscated during transport, boxes of birds being prepared for release, and cages full of birds that were intercepted at a shipping port.

Bird Conservation Awards Update

This final section of the MCF Impact Report is usually devoted to the re-granting initiatives of the Oriental Bird Club, African Bird Club, Neotropical Birding and Conservation, and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Support for these groups continues, but our grant timing has changed, so please check back later for conservation awards by these organizations in our 2023 Impact Report.
The Jenner Headlands Preserve, a spectacular 5,630-acre coastal preserve acquired by Sonoma Land Trust (California) in 2009 and transferred to The Wildlands Conservancy in 2013 for long term stewardship and public recreation. MCF is supporting stewardship work around the country through the CLTBCI, including here. Photo: Ivan Samuels