

# BELIZE CONSERVATION FUND



NEWSLETTER

January 2014

## **New Adventures for 2014** **Ridge to Reef Expeditions in Southern Belize**



Our partners at the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) are launching a new volunteer program called Ridge to Reef Expeditions. They seek to place volunteers into the heart of conservation action and adventure in southern Belize, where they will gain hands-on experience. With a wide range of conservation programs, this is a fantastic opportunity for people beginning a career in conservation, or simply looking to get back to nature, to make a positive difference!

TIDE is one of the leading conservation organizations in the region where they work—the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor—one of the most pristine parts of Central America. It stretches from the jungle-covered peaks of the Maya Mountains, across pine savannahs and mangrove forests, to the seagrass beds and coral reefs of the Snake Cayes in the Caribbean.

Ridge to Reef Expeditions is designed to give volunteers an authentic experience that supports the research and conservation objectives of TIDE

at three national protected areas they manage. That means volunteers receive expert training from staff with a wealth of knowledge and make a real contribution to conservation efforts in southern Belize.

**Ridge to Reef Expeditions offers three kinds of experiences.**

- Volunteers can join a 6- to 10-week-long expedition as a member of a team of six to twelve international volunteers, along with support staff. Teams will be based at a field station on the banks of a lagoon in the pine savannah of Payne's Creek National Park.
- Volunteers can join as an individual volunteer working with a team of local researchers for two to eight weeks or more. The main base for these volunteers will be a host family in the town of Punta Gorda, with some overnight stays at the three field stations managed by TIDE. In addition to the Payne's Creek National Park field station, volunteers will be able to visit and stay at a base on the banks of the Rio

### TO HELP:

Please send contributions to  
**Belize Conservation Fund**  
c/o Massachusetts Audubon Society  
208 South Great Road,  
Lincoln, MA 01773  
Or call Bancroft Poor /Karen O'Neill  
at 800-289-9504

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird © Richard Johnson

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## TIDE RECEIVES GRANT FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AT PAYNE'S CREEK NATIONAL PARK

TIDE is delighted to report that they have received a US \$100,000 grant from the Belize Protected Areas Conservation Trust for Payne's Creek National Park. This grant will enable TIDE to reduce threats from fire and illegal activities and purchase an ATV to assist with fire management. The grant will also support efforts to raise awareness of all the protected areas in the communities buffering Payne's Creek National Park, develop ecotourism in the park in partnership with the Monkey River community, and renew the park management plan. A 2012-2013 grant from Mass Audubon will be extremely helpful to co-finance this project.



*Continued from cover page*

- Grande River, surrounded by broadleaf forest, and on a base at Abalone Caye, where the brilliant night sky is frequently mirrored by sparkling phospholuminescence in the sea. With either of the first two options, volunteers will first receive training in SCUBA diving and various research techniques that they will use in the field.
- A third option is for a more personalized experience, working individually on a particular topic of interest. Individual placements can be a research project working alongside park managers for in-depth training in park management or an education and outreach experience with TIDE's local school programs.

At a time when conservation and species protection are critical to the future of life on earth, TIDE is reaching out to those who want to make a difference, gain invaluable experience, and have fun. TIDE and Ridge to Reef Expeditions look forward to welcoming volunteers on programs starting in 2014 and are offering discounts to Mass Audubon members.



Volunteers will participate in activities such as:

- Monitoring
- Turtle nests
- Manatees
- Dolphins
- Coral reef health
- Amphibians Surveys
- Terrestrial birds
- Mammals
- Habitats
- Environmental Education
- Tree planting
- Creating interpretive signs
- Environmental lessons in local schools

To find out more, please visit TIDE's website [www.tidebelize.org](http://www.tidebelize.org) or contact Caroline Oliver, Ridge to Reef Expeditions manager, at [ridgetoreef@tidebelize.org](mailto:ridgetoreef@tidebelize.org).



## INSPIRING FUTURE BELIZEAN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

The ecologically diverse Maya Mountain Marine Corridor in southern Belize is at a crossroads, and the direction it goes from here will very much depend on building awareness among younger generations. With population growth there at one of its highest rates in Central America, it is important to find ways to advance the economy and provide income for residents while also preserving the region. To encourage stewardship and support for conservation, scholarships and programs to educate and inspire local youths are being provided by Belizean conservation groups. For this reason, Mass Audubon is contributing to the innovative environmental education initiatives of the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE), which is using sports, art, fashion, competition, and opportunities for personal enrichment to engage students.



The Freshwater Cup

### The Freshwater Cup

A soccer competition with a twist—to participate each team of elementary schoolchildren must complete an environmental project in their community. The competition fosters teamwork and empowers community involvement in conservation.

### Youth Conservation Competition

- High school seniors compete for partial university scholarships by writing and performing theatrical presentations to showcase Belize's natural heritage. University scholarships are an attractive incentive because the cost of tuition is an insurmountable barrier to education for many young Belizeans.

### Community Researcher Program

TIDE trains young people to SCUBA dive and conduct marine biodiversity monitoring. This builds understanding and appreciation of marine biodiversity. Additionally, TIDE's research is validated to local fishermen through the involvement of their own sons and daughters who are collecting the data.

### High School Scholarships

With the support of Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Wildlife Sanctuary supporters, TIDE has been able to provide high school scholarships to talented underprivileged youth within the region, supporting empowerment through education.

Name	High School Form	Community
Darey Choco	Promoted to 4th form (last year of high school)	Big Falls Village
Josel Gibson	Promoted to 4th form	Punta Gorda Town
Hope Hines	Promoted to 4th form	Punta Gorda Town
Faith Foster	Promoted to 4th form	Punta Gorda Town
Rodman Martinez	First Form	Punta Gorda Town

### School Field Visits

When it comes to fostering a love of biodiversity, there really is no substitute for taking kids outdoors. TIDE provides field trips to the rainforest and coral reef. When children from the inland communities discover the majesty of the coral reef for the first time, they gasp in amazement through their snorkels and their faces come up wide-eyed and smiling.

Similarly, Mass Audubon's partner in northern Belize has provided opportunities to engage children through educational visits to their field stations and critical scholarship funds for youth of nearby communities. In May 2013, children from the Trinidad Primary School had the opportunity to benefit from the same experience international visitors enjoy when they travel to Programme for Belize's ecolodges. The children, along with their teachers and accompanying parents, were able to participate in captivating tours and exciting activities, as well as see the conservation efforts firsthand.

**You can follow TIDE's ongoing activities on Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/TIDEBZE](http://www.facebook.com/TIDEBZE)



Youth Conservation Competition



Community Researcher Program



School Field Visits



Trio School pond restoration project

## FREEING ENDANGERED POLLY

By James Lord

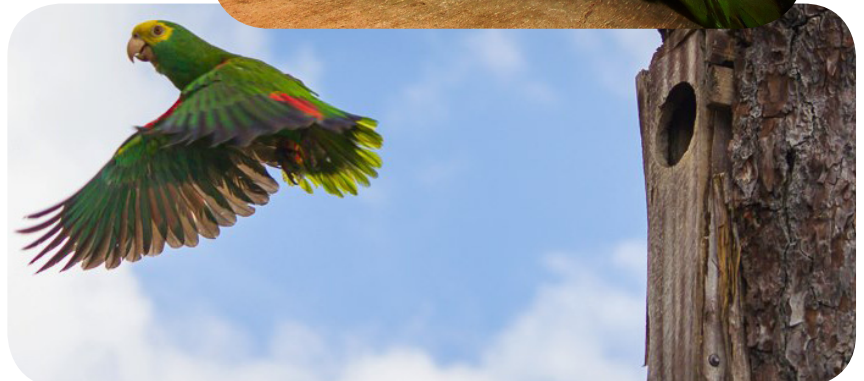
The yellow-headed parrot is not only beautiful but also one of the best imitators of human speech in the world. The species is listed as globally endangered mainly resulting from habitat loss and poaching of chicks for the illegal pet trade. Two of the last strongholds for the yellow-head are the Rio Bravo Conservation Area and Payne's Creek National Park in Belize, where the parrots still thrive in tropical pine savannas.

To build on its conservation efforts with this species, TIDE has managed to successfully reintroduce a captive yellow-head. When one family found out that their pet parrot was actually an endangered species, they agreed to give it to TIDE for reintroduction. For several weeks, Polly (yes, "Polly"! ) sat in a cage at the Payne's Creek National Park ranger station, gradually growing back his wings and becoming accustomed to his new environment. Park Manager Mario Muschamp recalls that one day he pointed out a pair of wild yellow-heads to Polly, saying "look pon dem palli deh" ("look at those parrots" in Belizean Creole). The bird replied "only one palli here!" ("only one parrot here!").

After Polly spent another few weeks of flying around near the field station and being fed by the rangers, the time came for him to fend for himself. Several weeks passed without a trace and then one day the rangers encountered Polly live and well. How did they know it was him without any band or distinguishing features? He was heard "laughing" in the trees, still imitating his former owner's voice!

To our knowledge, this is the first time that a yellow-headed parrot has been successfully reintroduced into the wild. TIDE plans to expand its nest box program and its work with local communities. We hope that, with greater awareness, more pet owners will join the challenge to save the yellow-headed parrots of Belize and let them fly free.

Nest monitoring



## MAKE A DONATION

To make a donation to the *Programme for Belize* (PfB) or to the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE), please complete this form and return to:

**Massachusetts Audubon Society  
Belize Conservation Fund  
208 South Great Road  
Lincoln, MA 01773**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City

\_\_\_\_\_  
State ZIP

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail

Yes, I would like to make a donation

### Donation Information

Enclosed check \_\_\_\_\_

*Checks should be made payable to  
Mass Audubon –Belize Conservation Fund*

or please charge my credit card for the amount of \_\_\_\_\_

VISA \_\_\_ MC \_\_\_ Card Exp: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature



## VISIT LA MILPA: REVIEWS FROM TRIP ADVISOR

### “Highlight of wild Belize”

‘Our 5-night stay at La Milpa was the highlight of our trip to Belize. It’s a birder’s and naturalist’s paradise, and you get as much or as little guiding as you want. Thanks to La Milpa manager, Vladimir, we had some incredible opportunities (like participating in a bird species count, visiting a site of the small-scale, impressively thought-out sustainable logging operation, and a night bird watch) and some incredible luck (seeing a rare tayra and even rarer crested eagle). Food was simple, ample and delicious and the lodgings spacious and comfortable. Truly marvellous.”

- Kohny, Toronto



### “Great eco lodge”

“It’s not 5 star in the classic way, but it’s everything you’d want in an eco-lodge. Comfortable, clean, safe, great food and excellent staff and guides. Just back from a week in Belize with two nights at La Milpa. Would go back in a flash. Programme for Belize is a wonderful organization and is doing so much for environmental education. I’m proud to be part of the Massachusetts Audubon which helped found La Milpa.”

- Donna C, Andover, Massachusetts



### “Perfect rainforest experience that supports conservation”

“La Milpa is a peaceful haven for wildlife lovers. I spent about five days here and another five at Hill Bank. I couldn’t believe how much wildlife we saw; spider monkeys, a herd of white-lipped peccaries, a grey fox, a paca (or royal rat), and over a 100 species of bird...including a pair of Jabiru - the tallest flying bird in Latin America. The naturalist guides were lovely and had great wildlife knowledge and were superb at bird spotting. The eco-lodges are comfy and the food was brilliant. This is the perfect place for anyone who loves nature and wants to support conservation.”

- Bethan J, Latin America





## Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)

The Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) was founded in 1997 to meet the growing environmental and development needs of the Toledo District, the southernmost district of Belize. TIDE was conceived as a grassroots initiative in response to the negative environmental effects from activities such as manatee poaching, illegal fishing, illegal logging, destructive farming methods, and other types of unsustainable development. Initially started by volunteers, TIDE has now grown to include 20 paid staff.

TIDE's mission is to research, monitor, and help manage Toledo's natural resources. The Maya Mountain Marine Area Corridor stretches from the lush pristine forests of the Maya Mountains to the white sand beaches and spectacular array of colors of

the Belize Barrier Reef System World Heritage Site. In addition, TIDE assists with planning responsible tourism and other environmentally sustainable economic alternatives by providing training and support to local residents.

Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) also leads ecotourism expeditions throughout Belize, in addition to other wildlife conservation and monitoring activities.

### Contact Information:

Celia Mahung, Executive Director  
Toledo Institute for  
Development and Environment,  
Punta Gorda Town, Belize  
[www.tidebelize.org](http://www.tidebelize.org)



## PROGRAMME FOR BELIZE

The *Programme for Belize* (PfB) is a Belizean, nonprofit organization, established in 1988, to conserve the natural heritage of Belize and to promote wise use of its natural resources. The Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA) is its flagship project where *Programme for Belize* demonstrates the practical application of its principles.

Since its inception, PfB has secured 260,000 acres of forest in northwestern Belize that was otherwise destined for clearance. The RBCMA represents approximately 4 percent of Belize's total land area and is home to a rich sample of biodiversity including: 400 species of birds, 200 species of trees, 70 species of mammals and 12 endangered animal species. On

the RBCMA, PfB conducts research, conservation education, professional training, and promotes environmental awareness among visitors. In addition, the forests of the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area are important sites for a carbon sequestration project. Here, four million tons of carbon will be sequestered for generations to come.

### Contact Information:

Edilberto Romero, Executive Director  
Programme for Belize, Belize City, Belize  
[www.pfbelize.org](http://www.pfbelize.org)