

SAFFRON-COWLED BLACKBIRD PROJECT

Project Update: December 2017

SURVEYS AND ACTIVE MANAGEMENT.

The campaign started in Corrientes the 25th October 2017. Thanks to the help of the local government we could start surveys with the vehicles and park rangers of the province only for the first three weeks of the campaign. However in Entre Rios, the government has no resources. Our sponsor during 2016 was unable to lend a 4WD vehicle so part of the funding was destined to hire a vehicle that would prospect in Entre Rios and eventually help in Corrientes when the park rangers couldn't during the active protection of the colonies.

In Entre Rios the heavy rains that occurred during August, September and October destroyed the roads that we were expecting to survey. We could find however one small reproductive colony along the road (RP12) just a few km away from Gualeguay town. The colony however was predated in a few days. We covered the roads that were accessible summing up around 4000 km in 10 days. We managed to identify a large group in Ibicuy town, although we were not sure by then if they were in reproductive condition. This finding is very important because this town is a historic place for saffron-cowled blackbirds presence but with no findings in the past 5 years at least. In the first week of November 2017, our local stakeholder found a large group and part of our team recorded three active nests, two of which had chicks. This lifts our hopes for the Entre Rios population as it's the first reproductive colony recorded in this town and a new group (and active) within the province.

As roads were inaccessible and there was no sign of other active groups, besides the ones present in Gualeguay town, we concluded that the best procedure would be to send the Entre Rios team to Corrientes to strengthen the campaign in this province. In Corrientes thanks to the help of the Park Rangers we managed to find three reproductive colonies up to 10th December 2017. We put up two camps to protect the colonies and continued with the surveys for more around the departments of San Martín, Alvear and Santo Tomé.

So far in Corrientes we found eight reproductive groups and managed to protect three of them that equate to 29 protected nests and we are still working. We covered more than 10,000 km in both provinces and 3311 km was covered by the Park Rangers of Corrientes province.

We made a small trip (1 week) to Entre Rios to find colonies and we managed to find one more colony in the same site as in 2016 with six nests. However due to the lack of human resources and funding for vehicles we decided to focus the protection of nests in Corrientes.

COMMUNICATION AND LOCAL TIES

We visited local radio station broadcasts in the city of Santo Tome to talk about the species, their threats and the project's aim and to request for help in the prospectations.

Every week in the national radio, we are mentioned in daily broadcast programme which is listed mainly by workers in ranches as it's the only radio received for its reception.

In Ibicuy the children from the public school N1 created a spot out of the information published in the magazine printed during 2017. This spot is broadcast every day in the local radio narrating the species importance, its threats and work carried out by this project.

In Corrientes the team is being consolidated by a group of local people and naturalists that work actively within the project. They help in the logistics regarding contacts to the access of ranches, contacts with local schools and communication to disseminate the knowledge and problematics of the species. This group is also part of the red of Birdwatching Clubs of Aves Argentinas that work in bringing people closer to nature and promoting the protection of public and urban reserves. We are training one member to become a Colony Guardian next season to ensure the continuity of the project in the future.

FUTURE SETPS

We still have 15 active nests under monitoring and protection to follow until the end of December. We must complete the occupation surveys and vegetation surveys to assess habitat selection patterns. We identified a high need and demand to visit these sites during the winter not only to identify non-reproductive groups and wintering sites; but also to disseminate the project outcomes of the reproductive season.

We have still 2-3 more weeks of work in the reproductive colonies and are working in the design of two lines of research regarding occupation and reproductive biology to be analysed during the year with the hope to reveal useful information for the next reproductive season.



1. A banded adult in 2017 feeding a banded juvenile of approximately 20 days since hatched.



2. Nest protections against predators applied to nests with chicks. They are aimed to increase the reproductive success.



3. Nest protections against predators applied to nests with eggs.



4. Banding chicks that successfully abandoned the nest (protected by the mesh) to allow a follow up in upcoming reproductive seasons. We also extracted blood samples for future genetic studies.



5. Banded chicks inside the protected nest.



6. Nest with eggs. We monitor every stage of the reproductive behavior since the nest is identified.



7. Inside the Marsh or (bañado) in search of nests.



8. Chicks of one day old since hatched.



9. Monjita (*Xolmis dominicanus*) and female Saffron-cowled Blackbird (*Xanthopsar flavus*) working together as sentinels.