

Project Update: April 2009

Gibara is a village located on the north coast of the eastern Cuba archipelago; it belongs to Holguin province and is known for its tradition (for more than 100 years) of trapping birds and have in cages as pets. After the so called "*special period*" when the economic situation of the island went down very fast, many people of this town have turned the tradition into a lucrative business resulting in declines in many wild bird populations.

The first efforts of this project were to find out about the local tradition and assess the problem relating to bird conservation and illegal trafficking of wild birds. This phase consisted of several trips to interview "pajareros" (the local name for people who trap birds) and field trips to characterize the area and make a list of the birds that they have in cages.

Our research has shown that more than 7000 birds per year have been in cages in the main city alone; the more common birds trapped are Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, Rose-throated Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Baltimore Oriole, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Grassquit, Northern Mockingbird and Yellow-face Grassquit, but around 38 species are involved (see list attached) and 66% are migratory, 29% perennial residents and 5.3% exotics.

Our investigation shown that the prices of birds vary from 50.00 to 2500 Cuban pesos (equivalent to \$100 that is in Cuba is a large amount of money), the price increases as the birds change their colour pattern during breeding season or are taught to sing by their owners. For example, the local people take fledglings of Northern Mockingbird and teach them to sing several melodies including the national hymn or any kind of Cuban traditional songs - these birds will be expensive.

Although the young people trap birds all year, this behaviour increases in the period 15th October-15th November, coinciding with the high migratory period, when thousands of birds come from North America and arrive throughout Gibara's coast. This area is considered one of the three most important bird corridors on the main island and also is recognised as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International and is it in the process of being approved as a Protected Area by the Cuban Government.

During this period many adults and young people leave early in the morning (4:00 am) from the village and travel to the previous selected area (as named by the owner of each "pajareros") located several kilometres away to set traps that consist on cages with double side traps. Inside they set a "decoy" to attract the birds and attach several "lirias" traps, consisting on a series of sticks with glue that is extracted from a special tree; many times the birds are injured. The tradition is very ingrained such that many people leave on vacation during the migration period to go to trapping birds.

Trapped birds are set inside "amansaderos" (tame cages). During each day they could trap 15-20 birds per "pajarero".

These birds are carried to the village and put inside "pajareras" (big cages) all together and sold later to local or foreign people that use them for trafficking. It has been turned into a

way of life. The interviews show that many young answered that “with five Indigo Bunting I can buy a pair of shoes...” or another one “with 10 birds my father could make the wedding of my sister...” There is a local way to say “if you don’t have a bird in cage on your home, you are not a Gibara citizen”

We found other problems related to the biodiversity use: extensive and illegal fishing of shrimps, illegal trafficking of sea turtles on black market, extensive trapping of crabs to use the eggs during the breeding season (called as Caro), illegal capturing of Brown Pelican using fishhook to sell the flesh as food.

The knowledge of local tradition is the base to promote the action carried during the festival and design a good strategy to avoid the illegal trafficking. That is the outcome of this first part.

Table 1: Bird species founded in cages in the Gibara community. Winter Resident: WR; Perennial Resident: PR; Transient: TR; recently established: E; Endemic*

Common Name	Scientific name	Status
High Frequency in cages		
Rose-breasted Grossbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>	WR
Blue Grossbeak	<i>Guiraca caerulea</i>	WR
Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>	WR
Painted Bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>	WR
Cuban Bulfinch	<i>Melopyrrha nigra</i>	PR
Cuban Grassquit	<i>Tiaris canora</i>	PR*
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	PR
Western Tanager	<i>Spindalis zena</i>	PR
Yellow faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris olivacea</i>	PR
Nutmeg Mannikin	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	E
Chesnut Mannikin	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	E
Subtotal: 11		
Medium Frequency in cages		
Cape May Warbler	<i>Dendroica tigrina</i>	WR
Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>	WR
Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>	WR
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx orizyvorus</i>	TR
Red legged Honeycreeper	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>	PR
Grasshopper Sparrow	<i>Anmodramus savannarum</i>	WR
Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>	TR
Scarlet Tanager	<i>Piranga olivacea</i>	WR
Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>	PR
Subtotal: 9		
Low frequency in cages		
Prothonotary Warbler	<i>Protonotaria citrea</i>	WR
Cuban Trogon	<i>Priotelus temnurus</i>	PR*
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	TR

European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	TR
Blue-headed Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>	WR
Yellow-throated Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	WR
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	WR
Palm Warbler	<i>Dendroica tigrina</i>	WR
Hooded Warbler	<i>Wilsonia citrina</i>	WR
Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>	WR
Yellow-breasted Chat	<i>Icteria virens</i>	TR
Black throated Blue Warbler	<i>Dendroica caerulea</i>	WR
Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>	TR
Tawny-shouldered Blackbird	<i>Agelaius humeralis</i>	PR
Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>	PR
Clay-colored Sparrow	<i>Spizella pallida</i>	TR
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	TR
Cuban Oriole	<i>Icterus melanopsis</i>	PR*
Subtotal: 18		
TOTAL: 38		



