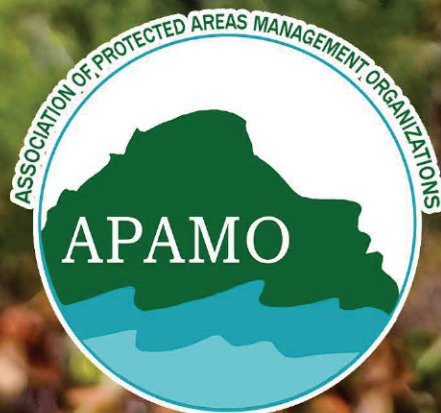


# the VOICE

OF BELIZE'S PROTECTED AREAS



The Voice of Belize's Protected Areas

PUBLISHED JANUARY 2021



This Edition of The Voice highlights some of the main successes of APAMO over the past year! For the APAMO Central Resource Center (ACRC) 2021 has been a year loaded with steadfast progress, exciting partnerships, and embracing new members.

This was a year to adapt and become creative with our undertakings- despite the Pandemic. We are proud and very pleased to share various program highlights achieved collectively through the ACRC and as individual members. In this edition of APAMO's Newsletter, The Voice, you will learn so much more about Belize's Protected Areas Co-managers and have a better understanding of the role these organizations play not only in site-level conservation and management, but in the involvement of buffer communities, youth, women, and children. While conservation remains at the forefront, Protected Areas Co-managers have come a long way and have diversified their focus from only biodiversity protection to one which includes empowering people and managing organizations through capacity building and eco-tourism development. With The Voice, we hope to present you with a holistic and diverse perspective of Belize's conservation organizations since APAMO is... The Voice of Belize's Protected Areas.





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## 3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR OF THE PACT-APAMO TRIPARTITE INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP



The APAMO/PACT tripartite investment partnership entitled “Framework to Support Effective Governance of Natural Resources”, aims to continue building on its three strategic development pillars which are: Income Generation & Product Development, Financial Management Development and Program Management and Decision Making. This investment is in support of a revitalized APAMO governance framework and progress towards its financial sustainability. Over the past

2 years of this investment partnership, one of the major outcomes has been establishing the APAMO secretariat, now known as the APAMO Central Resource Centre (ACRC). The consolidation of services allows for member organizations to adopt a joint approach to fulfilling key requirements for successful business development such as marketing and financial planning. This is supported by a protected areas database that is institutionalized at the ACRC. This comprehensive data and information system was established through a complementing project between APAMO and the Global Environment Facility entitled “Supporting the ACRC Program Management and its Governance Structures”. This serves as a system to improve public awareness of protected areas managed under the APAMO umbrella, also to promote marketing, including monitoring and reporting systems.



The tripartite investment partnership, has aimed to strengthen its viable CBOs as local institutions providing effective management of the protected areas adjacent to their buffering communities as well as to improve their overall management capacity i.e., improve their governance, transparency, and accountability. As such, APAMO has signed a Memorandum of Agreement with 3 CBOs including the Mayflower Bocawina Environmental and Development Group, Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association and the Rio Blanco Mayan Association. The MoA outlines and formalizes the working relationship between APAMO and the respective CBO in a cooperative manner with the aim of attaining financial sustainability and effective areas management. The ACRC, through this partnership with PACT, has been able to work closely with its CBOs ensuring the continued improvement of the protected areas as eco-tourism destinations contributing to their financial stability as well as strengthening partnerships with private entities including tourism businesses surrounding the protected areas.



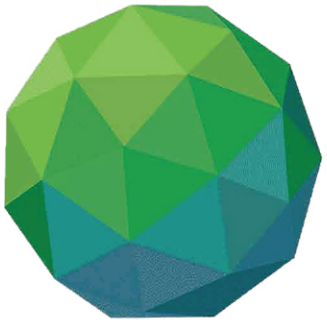


# PARTNERSHIP WITH REGIONAL ORGANIZATION, CANARI

APAMO signed on to the Regional Green Climate Fund Readiness Project entitled, "Enhancing Caribbean Civil Society's Access and Readiness for Climate Finance" as the National Project Coordinator & Civil Society Liaison in Belize. The overall objective of this collaboration focuses on coordinating and supporting the implementation of project activities in Belize, including mobilizing and convening key civil society



stakeholders. In collaboration with national designated authorities and leading national and regional CSOs from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Member States, the project seeks to address the climate-finance gap among CSOs and to promote civil society leadership. The ongoing project started in 2020 and will end in 2022.



## APAMO: UNITING RANGERS



Under the GEF/SGP-APAMO Project entitled "Supporting the ACRC Program Management and Its Governance Structures", APAMO was able to host its first annual Ranger Forum. This years' theme was "A Park Ranger- It's Not Just a Job, Its Who We Are".

Rangers were present from APAMO's Member Organizations including the Ya'axche Conservation Trust, Southern Environmental Association, Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association, Corozal

Sustainable Future Initiative, Sarteneja Alliance Conservation and Development, Mayflower Bocawina Environmental and Development Group, and Belize Audubon Society. Important partners such as PACT, Forestry Department and GEF/SGP were present.

The Ranger Forum was held to provide a platform for Rangers to voice their opinions as they are an integral component in the protection of Belize's biodiversity and are frontline workers in the field of protected areas.



This years' Ranger Forum brought forth discussions on several challenges, key strengths, weaknesses, and threats being faced by the Rangers.



# NATION-WIDE CLEANUP

World Cleanup Day is commemorated annually in September, and in 2021 APAMO invited various organizations to join Belize's nationwide cleanup which was hosted by APAMO and sponsored by the Belize Tourism Board (BTB). World Cleanup Day is a global movement led by Let's Do It World Organization and in 2021 the goal was to unite 180 countries and millions of people across the world for the 4th consecutive year to clean up the planet in just one day. The simplicity of picking up trash and the 'let's do it' attitude has become a force that unites people and groups all over the world. In 2021, APAMO ensured Belize was a part of the global movement.

Creating safe, resilient, and sustainable nations is one of the top priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all United Nations Member States. This goal can only be achieved by engaging all citizens. The World Cleanup Day is a great way to bring people together; and the joint contributions will lead to a decrease of the country's ecological footprint, reduce harmful effects of climate change, and increase responsibility of each citizen.

Happily, our 2021 World Clean Up Day activities yielded significant participation despite the pandemic; in fact, there was over 100 participants across Belize. A huge thank you to all the organizations and everyone



who participated and led clean-ups, this includes: Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development for their clean-up in Sarteneja Village; Belize Rotary Club of Belmopan, Belmopan City Council and APAMO and BTB Staff in Belmopan City; Verdes Football Club, San Ignacio & Santa Elena Town Council and APAMO Staff in San Ignacio; Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association for their clean-up in Steadfast Community; Mayflower Bocawina Environmental and Development Group in Silkgrass Village and; Southern Environmental Association in Independence. Finally, a special thank you to the Belize Tourism Board for sponsoring this event.

We eagerly look forward to hosting our 2022 World Clean Up Day events with increased participation in different locations!



## CHANGING WASTE HABITS ONE GARBAGE BIN AT A TIME

APAMO, along with the Rotary Club of Belmopan donated and installed 12 metal garbage drums to the Belmopan City Council for beautiful City of Belmopan. The installations of these drums were done in high trafficked locations throughout the city with messages encouraging citizens to properly dispose of their waste. It was a timely and necessary donation as garbage not only clogs landfill sites and threatens our marine life; it unfortunately accelerates climate change.

Our actions are important; therefore, APAMO implores citizens to dispose of trash in garbage drums; and if the drums are full or not nearby, consider bringing items home to dispose.

Now, there's 12 more reasons not to litter in Belmopan City.







## APAMO CONTINUES TO STRENGTHEN ITS NETWORK WITH TWO NEW PARTNERSHIPS

On the 2nd of December 2021, APAMO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Belize! This new partnership opens opportunities of collaboration towards building capacities, as well as sharing and promoting knowledge to strengthen the common interests and respective missions of both institutions. APAMO is confident that our member organizations and UB's faculty and student body will engage in important research and industry collaboration perspectives. This will lead to numerous advantages including integration of scientific, economic and managerial progress elements, and the involvement of students in the industry to enhance the qualitative development of education.



As part of our efforts to continue building capacities for our members, APAMO also entered a partnership agreement with the Belize Institute of Search and Rescue Training (BISART). The core pillar of the partnership is based on creating training opportunities in First Aid and Search and Rescue Training. In 2022, this exercise for APAMO member Rangers who require this training will commence. BISART is training our rangers from Level 1 to the Advance Level in Search and Rescue. This is one more step towards enhancing National Protected Areas as Eco-Tourism Destinations.





## APAMO'S ACGS: ROAD TO EFFECTIVE CO-MANAGEMENT

Considering good governance, transparency, and accountability, APAMO has established the APAMO Certificate of Good Standing (ACGS) which serves as the strategic mechanism and guide for ensuring continuous institutional growth as effective protected areas co-managers and successful operational entities in full legal compliance. This certification tool will also provide the scope for monitoring and assessing the membership's engagement and participation, essential for the successful operation and growth of the network organization.

In 2021, five of APAMO's member organizations were assessed utilizing the ACGS, namely Ya'axche Conservation Trust, Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management, Belize Audubon Society, Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association and the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development. This is one of the many steps towards the fulfilment of the National Protected Areas System Plan in which policy 10 calls for accountable and transparent management of Belize's protected areas. APAMO will continue to strengthen the governance, institutional and operational capacities of protected areas co-managers to effectively and efficiently manage their protected areas.



## BOARD GOVERNANCE & CBOS

Community-based organizations namely the Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association and the Mayflower Bocawina Environmental and Development Group have received extensive training on Board Governance by the APAMO Central Resource Center. Strong and effective governance helps to cultivate integrity within an organization's culture, leading to positive performance and a sustainable business. In any non-profit organization, a governance committee's most basic duty is to ensure that the organization is performing at its highest potential. An effective governance committee means an effective board of directors, which in turn leads to a more functional and efficient organization.



## ENHANCING THE ACRC'S CAPACITY: LOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSAL WRITING TRAINING

During the months of August, September and October 2021, staff of the ACRC along with park managers of the Billy Barquedier National Park and the Mayflower Bocawina National Park attended a Logical Framework and Proposal Writing Training facilitated by Mr. Raineldo Guerrero. Proposal writing training enables participants to master the basic skills needed for writing project proposal for research, environmental protection and development in a competitive context. The training approach adopted for the proposal writing was unique in that it combined the knowledge, skills and attitudes

needed to produce not only a regular proposal, but a successful one that would have a high chance of being funded. In doing so, many training strategies were used such as active learning strategies that use simulation, role play, case studies, problem solving, project based and other strategies that enable participants to share ideas, interact and build on one another's experiences.





# SACD PIONEERING A NEW GENERATION OF MANGROVE PROTECTORS

By: Sam Barrett, SACD

As part of our efforts to protect and conserve our mangrove ecosystems in the Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS), SACD conducted mangrove youth training with an aim to educate future leaders that one day will advocate for the protection of these important ecosystems. This was also tied to a regional initiative to protect and restore mangroves in Belize and the Mesoamerican Region. With the dedication of our team, we managed to accomplish training 70 stakeholders (mainly youths aged 12-22 years, in addition to their adult youth group leaders) from the communities of Chunox, Copperbank, Consejo, Corozal



Town, and Sarteneja - the stakeholder communities of CBWS). In the restoration trial method, we planted 80 seedlings with 70% becoming established to date. With this activity, we have passed the knowledge to the future leaders of the new generation that will continue to combat mangrove clearing in the future. This campaign commenced in 2021 and remains ongoing with hopes to scale up efforts in 2022!



Sadly, our mangrove restoration targeted areas have been affected by sea-level rise causing soil/coastal erosion. With this targeted restoration, we hope to be able to reduce the impact of wave action and demonstrate success in these key affected areas. Our mangrove restoration capacity was gained through Ocean Field Representative-Mr. Ryan Rivera who shared the method with us which he found while completing a literature review. Collaboration with SACD was then sought to implement it in the stakeholder communities of CBWS. We are still in the trial-stages, but we are building up evidence that it is a viable technique to be utilized for mangrove restoration efforts in Belize. We will continue monitoring the restored sites and document their progress in the coming months.



We want to highlight the entire Education & Outreach team who worked tirelessly, even with the risks of contracting COVID, by going the extra mile and working long weekends to be able to engage our stakeholder communities. Mr. Abisai Verde (Education Officer); Mr. Honorio Santos (Community Liaison Officer); Ms. Nazlie Verde (Education and Outreach Programme Intern - 2021).







**BAS HONORS DESERVING BELIZEAN; EXCELS IN BIRDING; AND CONTINUES TO SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGE STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITIES**

Photo By: Belize Audubon Society

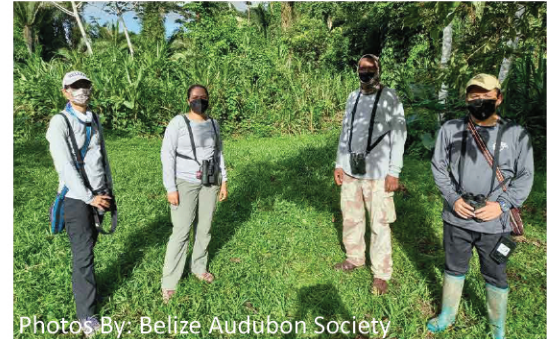
By: Dareece Chuc, BAS

This year the James A. Waight Conservation Award was given to Celso Poot of the Belize Zoo for his outstanding contribution to environmental education and Tapir research and conservation. Celso succeeds the Founding Director of the Belize Zoo, the late Sharon Matola, and will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the zoo and education center. Every year, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) honors deserving Belizeans with the James A. Waight Environmental Conservation Award in recognition of positive work in the protection and enhancement of Belize’s environment. The award is named after BAS’ first President, James A. Waight (1907 – 1999) who served in this role from 1969 until 1986.

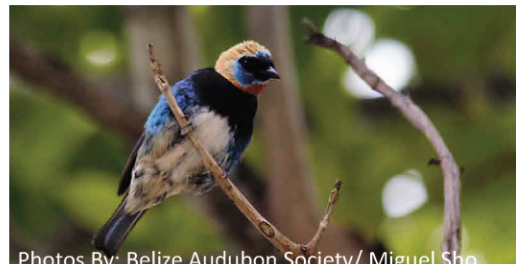


By far the biggest investment was made in bird monitoring which is a strength of BAS as an organization doing its own monitoring as well as serving as a mentor for other NGOs and community youths. This year, the PACT project afforded several staff the opportunities to enhance and gain new knowledge in bird identification, birding applications; undertaking a new monitoring methodology meant training all staff involved in data collection as well, staff who analyses the data and write reports and finally the staff involved in environmental education and bird guiding. In building our capacity in birding banding to continue monitoring over winter surviving migrant bird species, several staff are continuing to master bird banding, while others were just being introduced. The renowned Hawk Watch Program offered by the Belize Bird Conservancy has been on our “to-do” list for years now—consequently, three staff are now certified in monitoring raptors.

Other notable trainings for the marine staff included learning how to operate a fixed-wing drone, reinforcing sea turtle nest monitoring and identification, and as we expand our bird monitoring efforts for Half Moon Caye as per the Research and Monitoring Plan developed, staff are now better equipped to monitor sea birds and migrants during the winter months.



Photos By: Belize Audubon Society



Photos By: Belize Audubon Society/ Miguel Sho



The cultural and socio-economic characteristics of local people form the base on which the sustainable use of natural resources is built. Within this context, conflict between conservation and socio-economic interest is derived. Consequently, the integrity of protected areas' values continues to be at risk due to socio-economic drivers such as poverty, limited job opportunities, increased cost of living, market demand for protein, and the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in a global economic shock. Evidently, Protected Area Managers must give considerable attention to new and innovative approaches to resolving direct stresses such as the decline in game species and reduction commercial marine species. The Belize Audubon Society in consultation with key enforcement partners developed its strategic enforcement plans for four co-managed protected areas, Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Victoria Peak Natural Monument, Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monuments. The plan was derived from a range of tools to determine risk, impact, and effectiveness. Strategies developed aim to deter, control, and reduce threats to protected areas conservation values.

This year, we continued to work with the Maya Center Women's group to build their capacity in various aspects to strengthen business operations. Trainings offered to the women included:

- Sewing- this included a donation of six sewing machines and accompanying sewing kits, and fabric.
- Customer Service
- Sales and marketing, record keeping, business plan development

Our environmental education and outreach actions are focused on and building the capacity of individuals and communities. These activities are aimed at empowering local stewards who will be able to conserve, protect, and sustain their environment so they



can continue to enjoy its benefits. Over the past eight months, with funding from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT), the environmental education and research and monitoring staff have successfully coordinated and facilitated a series of activities with three youth groups from the communities that buffer Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS) and St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park (SHBHNP). These activities include community consultations and engagement through field-based learning, and skills building.

The community consultation sessions were held with the Armenia, Maya Center and Red Bank youth groups. They focused on identifying potential opportunities for partnership and addressing concerns raised within their respective communities. These sessions ended with a community action – where the youths lead a clean-up of the bank areas of creeks and the Swasey River, which the villagers traditionally use for swimming and washing. The annual tree planting initiative for Earth Day was used to start the conversation regarding the tangible and intangible benefits of these protected areas. These concepts were later reinforced through a two-day field workshop for youths from the communities of Ring Tail and Armenia.



The workshop focused on the importance of protected areas like SHBHNP and the role they play in maintaining clean water for these communities. The participants were engaged through fun activities including cave exploration to understand hydrology and geology and practical water quality monitoring.

The buffer communities that we work with closely are rich in bird diversity, but often the residents of these communities are unable to understand its value. With the support of bird expert Roni Martinez, a bird conservation workshop was held with participants from the following buffer communities: Maya Center, Santa Rosa and Red Bank. The goal was to increase awareness of the value of protected areas for bird tourism and provide an opportunity for participants learn through exploring the ecosystems of CBWS. So far, we have observed an increased interest from the participation, which makes us hopeful that we can achieve our overall goal to inspire environmental stewards and eventually the impact of these initiatives will overflow from participants to their families and their community.





## YCT CONDUCTS FIRST EXPERIMENTAL PROPAGATION ON THREATENED & VALUABLE TREE SPECIES IN BELIZE

By: Gustavo Requena, YCT

Ya'axché Conservation Trust has pioneered the establishment of Belize's first agroforestry concession since 2015; this year the initiative expanded to more communities in southern Belize. The forest community of Aguacate established five new agroforestry plots and apiaries. Ya'axché facilitated capacity-building workshops for members of the Aguacate Conservation and Development Committee (ACDC) where farmers learnt the importance of forest conservation through climate-smart farming practices such as agroforestry and apiculture. Ya'axché's extension officers assisted farmers to properly establish adequate spacing between trees in an agroforestry plot. Furthermore, farms learnt about cacao plots management such as proper cacao tree pruning and pest management. On the other hand, the new community beekeepers had the opportunity to learn about site selection, capturing of bee swarms, beekeeping safety, gear use and beehive management. These initiatives will build climate change resiliency, secure food sovereignty, restore soil fertility and continue maintaining standing forests.

Furthermore, Ya'axché Protected Areas Management program is currently implementing innovative technology such as SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) and drones to strategically improve the monitoring and management of the Maya Golden Landscape forests. A total of 15 Ya'axché rangers and research officers were involved in a series of drone training sessions where they learnt how to use a drone, types of drones, protocols, and safety when using a drone. Today our enforcement and compliance unit can reach rugged terrains through ariel view. Therefore, expanding our presence within protected areas and collecting spatial ecological data that will allow us to monitor and respond to illegal activities effectively.



Over the last year, Ya'axché's Science team collected seed and cuttings from rare and threatened tree species to conduct the first experimental propagation of these species in Belize. The Rosewood (*Dalbergia stevensonii*), Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), (2) Prickly Yellow (*Zanthoxylum ekmanii*, *Zanthoxylum panamense*), Red Mylady (*Aspidosperma megalocarpon*), 'Tul Che tree' (*Cymbopetalum mayanum*) and Walking Lady (*Vitex gaumeri*) are some of the main tree species under this research targets to help restore threaten and valuable tree species.



On November 10 of 2021, a total of 108 Walking Lady (*Vitex gaumeri*) and 54 Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) were planted in the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve degraded land areas. This reforestation effort was possible with the assistance of a group of enthusiastic students of Round River Conservation Studies, currently carrying their program studies in the MGL. of enthusiastic students of Round River Conservation Studies, currently carrying their program studies in the MGL.





## APAMO LEADERSHIP TRANSITION: FORMER CHAIRPERSON'S HISTORIC APPOINTMENT AS GOVERNOR GENERAL

In 2021, Belize witnessed the unprecedented appointment of Her Excellency Froyla T'zalam to the distinguished role as Belize's first Indigenous Mayan Governor General in the Commonwealth. Her Excellency T'zalam, in her long trajectory of working directly with our Belizean populace, served for 2 consecutive terms as Chairperson of APAMO. Her leadership and strong belief in good governance were key factors in successfully leading APAMO and the Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM), where she served as Executive Director for 7 years. Her Excellency T'zalam has made significant contributions to the sustainability of Belize's Natural Resources, including protected areas and to the wellbeing of local communities and stakeholders.

APAMO is confident that Her Excellency Froyla T'zalam's long-established career, education, skills, and accomplishments have prepared her to fully execute this noble position. We continue to wish this admirable and fierce people-oriented leader all the best in her new capacity.







## APAMO WELCOMES 2 NEW MEMBERS

Building, retaining, and satisfying our membership has been a top priority for APAMO! We're proud to have welcomed two protected areas co-managers to the APAMO family in 2021. The first member to join was the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD), who co-manages 72,000 hectares of Marine Protected Area, with the largest estuary in the Mesoamerican Reef System, the Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. We also welcomed SACD's Executive Director, Mr. Joel Verde as APAMO's Chairman in July 2021.

SACD undertakes different objectives within its two main programme areas – the Natural Resource Management programme and the Education, Engagement, and Outreach programme. This can range from aquatic mammal necropsies to school visits and activity days for young people in the communities.



The second member to join the APAMO family in 2021 was the newly formed Belize Karst Habitat Conservation (BKHC), co-manager of the 6,286 acres Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. The BKHC is a non-governmental organization dedicated to inspiring people to sustainably develop Belize's environment through tourism, education, research, and sustainable management of its resources. The Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve is known for its rich biodiversity and provision of clean water, supporting engaged and empowered communities,

livelihood opportunities, and active research, for a sustainable future. We continue to strengthen our collective voice as conservation organizations and protected areas co-managers. This increased membership is another step towards effectively managing and safeguarding Belize's natural resources.





How has your organization and or site prepare to function during COVID-19?



Ya'axché is committed to provide a safe environment for communities, visitors and most importantly, its staff. To continue operating amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Ya'axché implemented multiple measures such as working from home, virtual meetings and becoming Gold Standard Certified by the Belize Tourism Board. As Gold Standard Certified, Ya'axché has in place a fully equipped temperature booth for staff and visitors at the Golden Stream Field station and at its main office in Punta Gorda town. Proper signage and sanitation stations are installed across its facilities. Ya'axché encourages all staff to follow its safety measures and advises the public to remain safe during these times.



Like many other eco-tourism destinations, the BBNP and the STACA team was affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Therefore, to protect the staff and visitors, various protocols were put in place including the installation of a sanitization station and numerous signs throughout the site encouraging social distancing and proper usage of masks and implementing temperature checks upon visitors' arrival. STACA has applied and is currently awaiting the approval of the BTB Gold Standard Certification.



BAS' accommodations and sites are Golds Standard Certified! This was achieved in the first part of the year. The process was fairly easy with BAS developing and improving its COVID-19 SOP and policies. Due to restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to scale back on outreach activities and limit numbers when conducting face to face outreach. Additional safety and prevention measures were applied to keep staff and participants safe--sanitizing, spacing and the use of masks. Where possible virtual meetings were used, however much of the community outreach and environmental education work had to be done in person with smaller groups. This reduced the number of persons reached, and in some instances would require more than one session to reach the target number of people.





# THE GEM OF THE EMERALD VALLEY IS MORE THAN ITS BEAUTY

By: Maria Pech

The Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association, STACA, was formed in 2001 by a group of individuals dedicated to the conservation of the Billy Barquedier National Park (BBNP), The Gem of The Emerald Valley. STACA is a Community Based Organization that steadfastly contributes to the conservation and protection of the park's natural resources by promoting biodiversity conservation, environmental education, community development, eco-tourism, and recreation. The BBNP is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including the jaguar, puma, tapir and many species of birds. It also encompasses the Billy Barquedier Sub-Watershed which provides water to three communities: Steadfast, Alta Vista and Valley Community.

In 2021, STACA continued their Climate Change Education Campaign, which targeted the youths from the buffering communities and involved several informative activities. The first being an Emerald Valley Eco Challenge, where community residents formed groups to achieve specific tasks pertaining to climate change and environmental protection. STACA also hosted various social media awareness campaigns such as weekly trivia and a series of giveaways to ramp up engagement. The Climate Change Education Campaign also included an element of outreach and despite the pandemic, STACA was able to collaborate with different schools in buffering communities in carrying out educational activities and presentations.

The team at STACA participated in training opportunities to develop their professional capacity. Some of these included Proposal Writing Training, Special Constable Training and Water Quality Monitoring Training. During this year, STACA was able to strengthen its Water Quality Monitoring Program through capacity building, partnerships and procurement of equipment. This will allow for STACA to be able to carry out its monitoring initiatives independently. Additionally, STACA was able to continue its Bird Monitoring initiatives after extensive training carried out in the previous year.



Photo by: Steadfast Tourism and Conservation Association



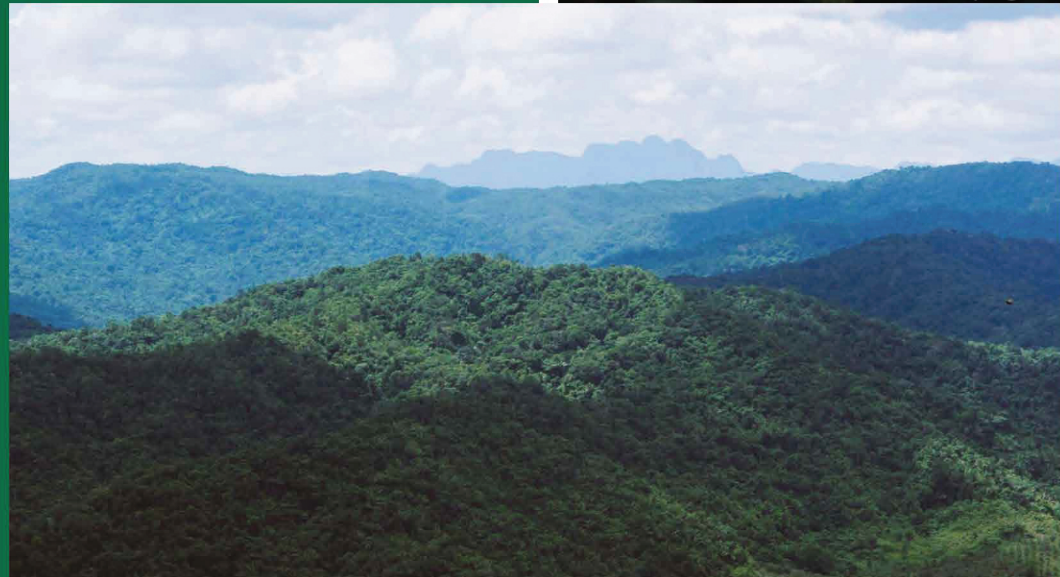
# BUDGET TRAVEL: WHERE TO SEE BELIZE FOR LESS

While eco-tourism has been heavily linked to beautiful sandy beaches and aquamarine seas, APAMO partnered with Tik Tok influencers, Benjamin Garcia and Wani Arzu to showcase the beauty of exploring the wild jungles of in land Belize for just \$10 BZD.

The first stop in the green paradise was the Billy Barquedier National Park, located in the Community of Steadfast where the entrance fee is simply \$2 BZD for locals. You heard it right! Just 2 Belizean Dollars and the fee for foreigners to enter the park is \$10 BZD. Documenting their personal experience, the Tik Tok influencers take their audience on the first hike through a steep trail that leads to a rewarding view from the observational tower. The platform is over 1000 feet in elevation and overlooks the entire Valley Community with views of the grand Victoria Peak National Park and the mountains within the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. In fact, on sunny days, the Caribbean Sea can even be seen.

Their adventure continued as they hiked towards the park's waterfall for a quick dip. While the Tik Tok influencers ensured to capture their outdoors adventure,

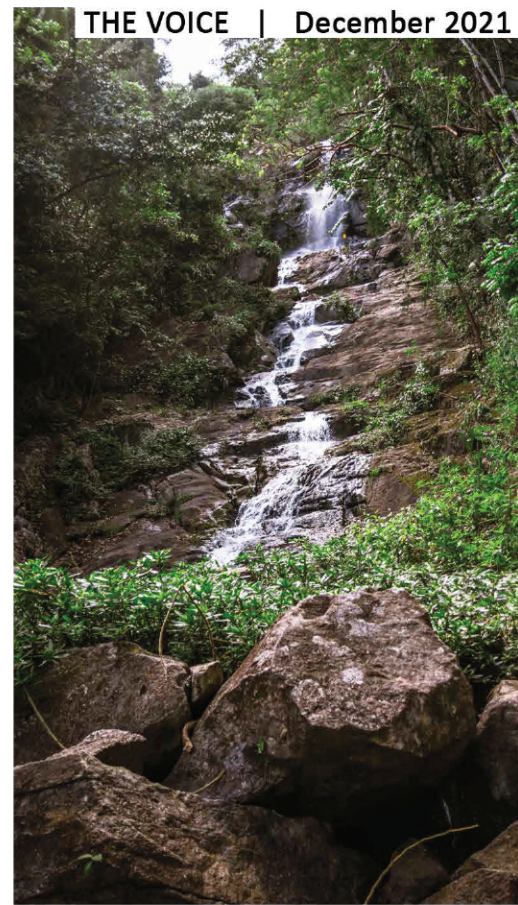
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There's no denying that trekking these trails is a workout, but the rush and freedom one feels when witnessing such beautiful green paradise completes the entire experience. This worthwhile collaboration provided APAMO the opportunity to reach an entirely new audience and to share unique content from Belizean Influencers.



it was essential to document an educational segment to explain to their audience the importance of the Billy Barquedier National Park and the role of the co-managing entity. Maria Pech, Park Manager, provided an excellent overview of both.

After a long day's escapade and a good night's rest, the Tik Tok influencers made their way to the Mayflower Bocawina National Park in Silkgrass Village which is co-managed by the Mayflower Bocawina Environmental and Development Group (MBEDG). The duo was greeted by Israel Pau, Park Ranger, and was provided a synopsis of the park where they learnt the general layout of the hiking trails, natural pools and waterfall and also discovered that the standard entrance fee for protected areas in Belize is \$2 BZD for locals; and \$10 BZD for foreigners.

Their audience tagged along on the 1-hour hike to the Antelope Falls and was able to see the lush, dense forest and steep climbs the duo endured. After about 40 minutes of hiking, the first sign of splendor was at the base of the Antelope Fall, an impressive 1000-foot fall; they knew that they were close. A flight of stairs, and a skip and a hop led them to the highest viewpoint, one that looks over miles of land and the Caribbean Sea in a distance. Impressively, influencers Benjamin & Wani achieved their goal of experiencing the most popular waterfall at the end of the Antelope Trail.



## TRAVEL & MAKE AN IMPACT

### Why should you make protected areas your next travel destination?

Protected areas are the perfect way to explore and be adventurous while contributing to the conservation of Belize's natural resources and to local communities! APAMO currently boasts 15 members and a collective of 28 protected areas across Belize.

These sites are either co-managed by Non-Governmental Organizations or Community Based Organizations along with the Government of Belize. However, the day-to-day tasks, patrols, maintenance, and overall management is carried out by these organizations, our members. Over the years, protected areas have evolved from solely focusing on conservation and have embraced becoming eco-tourism destinations. While it has been a challenge, with continued efforts—many of the larger organizations have been successful. Still, there are a few hidden gems throughout Belize, which we encourage you to discover.

### Are you really making a positive impact when visiting these sites?

Yes! Yes, you are making a positive impact in many ways. Firstly, by supporting these organizations you are also supporting the community. Majority of our protected areas are situated within local communities therefore, you aid in job retention and creation. For instance, the Community Baboon Sanctuary located in Bermuda Landing is co-managed by the Community Baboon Sanctuary Women's Conservation Group. This group is comprised of individuals from surrounding villages, and they provide job opportunities for locals in the area. Whether it be outsourcing a tour guide, attracting visitors that will purchase from shops along the way or those who are employed during an ongoing project—either way, you are contributing by keeping the wheel turning. In addition to that, revenues generated from the park are re-invested in the form of renovations, maintenance, and other necessities to sustain the site's operations.

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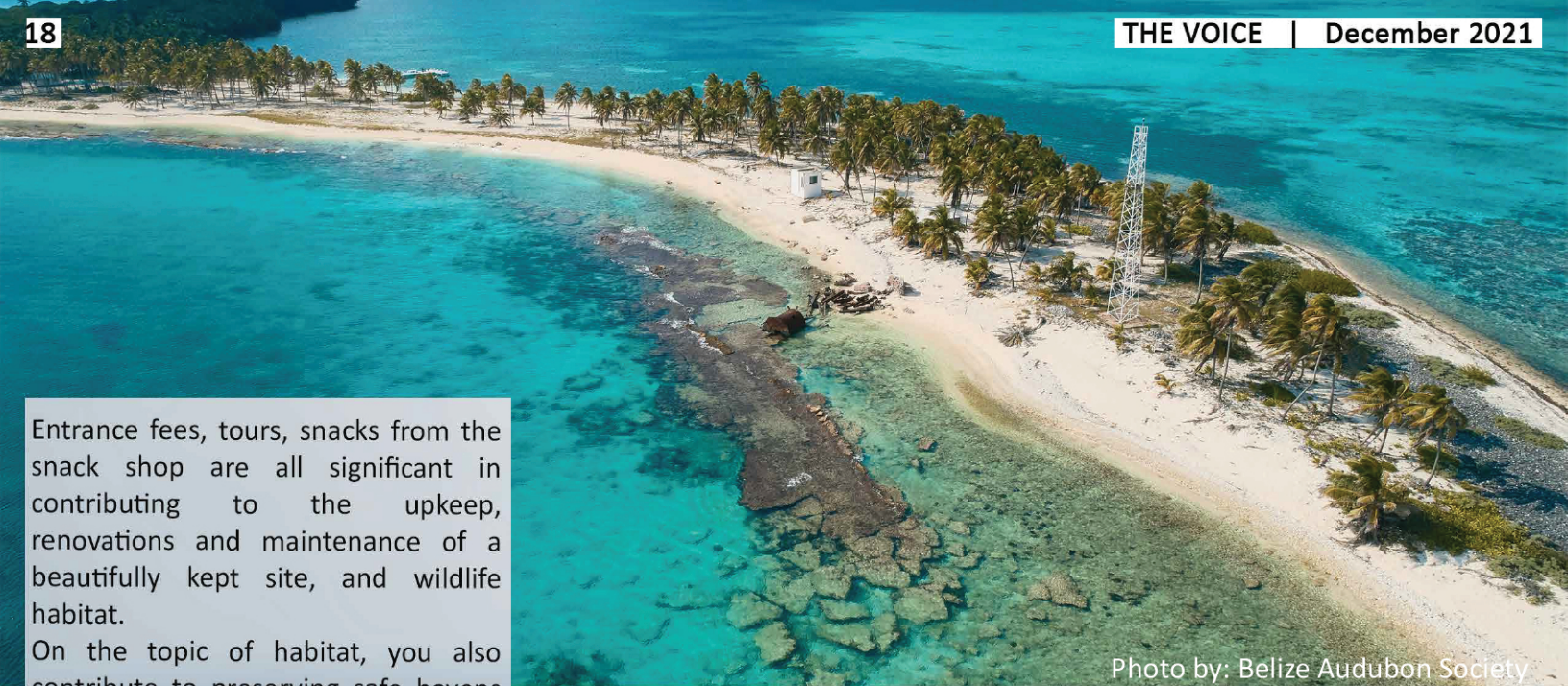


Photo by: Belize Audubon Society

Entrance fees, tours, snacks from the snack shop are all significant in contributing to the upkeep, renovations and maintenance of a beautifully kept site, and wildlife habitat.

On the topic of habitat, you also contribute to preserving safe havens for wild plants and animals. Protected areas were established to preserve and to conserve biodiversity with the goal of managing and sustaining our natural resources. By visiting protected areas, you are furthering this vision by allowing these organizations to fulfil their mandate. Some sites may be protecting endangered species such as the Black Howler Monkeys, Yucatan Spider Monkeys, Baird's Tapir and the majestic Jaguar to name a few. In the case of the Sustainable Tourism and Conservation Association (STACA), the Billy Barquedier National Park, was established to protect the watershed that provides potable water to 3 communities! How cool is that?

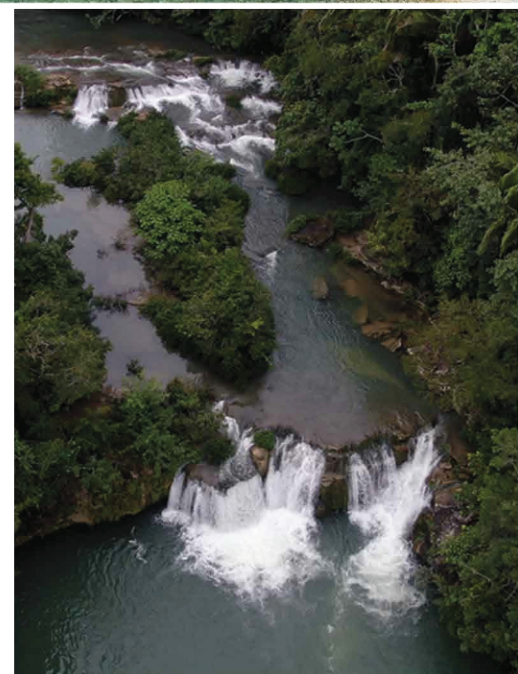
### Need more reasons to visit protected areas?

Here's a few more- when you visit protected areas you leave an impact by:

- Assisting with strengthening our resilience to climate change
- Helping secure the maintenance of functioning ecosystem and the benefits they provide
- Celebrating our natural and cultural heritage
- Gaining knowledge and understanding the importance of conservation that can be passed on to friends and family

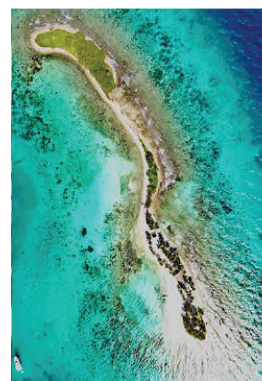
### Is that a road trip I hear?

With over 25 protected areas under the APAMO umbrella, the possibilities for adventure and education are endless. So many combinations to an epic cross-country adventure as most of our protected areas are easily accessible. You and your family could challenge yourselves to visit at least five of the seven waterfalls at Mayflower Bocawina National Park. Go swimming at Laughing Bird Marine Reserve or Halfmoon Natural Monument where different fish species are in abundance, corals are flourishing, and the beaches remain pristine. Considering spelunking?



Then visit Actun Tunichil Maknal Cave (Cave of the Stone Sepulcher or ATM cave) Cave at Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve or St. Herman's, located on the Hummingbird Highway. You could even spend a night in Belize's wilderness in comfortable accommodation at the Shipstern Nature Reserve or at the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area. There's camping in the wild jungle for the brave at several sites including Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary or near the coast at the Laughing Bird Caye National Park.

You choose where to start, just make an impact.





How have you been preparing your organization and or site for eco-tourism visitation?



Ecotourism Belize (ETB), a component of Ya'axché Institute of Conservation Education (YICE), Ya'axché's business arm is supporting conservation efforts in the Maya Golden Landscape! Ecotourism Belize provides eco tours, experiential learning programs, accommodations, transportation, and catering services at the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve. With the support of the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Program (BIOPAMA), ETB was able to enhance its capacity to provide improved services to its visitors. Accomplishments include renovation of accommodation facilities, constructing new sanitary facilities, installation of self-guided trail signage, and the procurement of a new fully equipped 16-seater tour van. ETB will now offer enhanced experiences in its tours and guest facilities through its Gold Standard certification. ETB prides itself in providing a safe and unique experience for all.



We commenced our third and final year of the PACT Targeted Investment Program, which has assisted us in making significant progress towards enhancing the Billy Barquedier National Park as a tourism destination. This involved the upgrading of our office and snack shop facilities, development of camping areas, visitor center, improved signage and other forms of infrastructure.



During 2021, several infrastructural and trail upgrades were done at the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS) under 2 projects 1, funded by PACT and by Panthera. The new kitchen and conference room facility at CBWS began in June and is scheduled to be completed by December 2021. With this new spacious Kitchen, CBWS will be able to comfortably host large groups throughout the year. The Plane Wreck trail, Nature Center and the newly designated "Balum" trail at CBWS were all upgraded with new attractive signs and information on the importance of CBWS for jaguar conservation. The Balum trail tells the amazing story of the jaguar research and its resulting designation of CBWS as the world's First Jaguar Preserve. The signs place along the trail will give hikers that once in a life-time experience, to walk in the footsteps of the late Dr. Alan Robinowitz to discover how the Jaguar preserve was established. The trail is to be opened in the new year.

At St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park, significant investment was made to improve visitor experience on site through the improvement of signage. 74 new signs covering educational, visitor





Thank you to our partners and members! Our achievements have been possible because of all of you together; our work has contributed to the resilience and security of Belize's natural resources, and by extension, that of our people.

As we close 2021, we take this opportunity to thank you for everything you have done to make it a successful year for all of us. We appreciate your dedication, hard work, and innovative ideas. Despite all the challenges, we remained focused and excelled in achieving our mandate.

There is still plenty of work to do next year, and we are sure that we will keep up with our fruitful performance.

**OUR PARTNERS:**



**OUR MEMBERS:**







The Voice of Belize's Protected Areas



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