About Belize Audubon Society's Conservation Program (Biodiversity Research and Monitoring)

Our Conservation Programme is designed to provide current and pertinent information to its management team while building institutional capacity and Belize's scientific knowledge base. The staff actively coordinates and conducts monitoring activities. We have adopted an integrated resource management (IRM) approach to managing protected areas in order to build and maintain the capacity to participate in research and carry out long-term monitoring. As the Society adapts its management strategies to address increasing user demands; threats to biodiversity and constricting resources, the generation of data is key in prioritization of management activities/decisions. The Programme has both a marine and terrestrial component of which staff works across all protected areas co-managed by us, as well as key biodiversity areas in Belize.

Understanding the big picture through research and monitoring--like a photograph, scientific research and monitoring captures many details of a place and time and allows us to examine a subject from different perspectives. For example, studying frogs or the coral reef in Belize provides a better understanding of issues that affect us directly such as water quality and global climate change. Additionally, Belize Audubon Society is ensuring that research and monitoring activities are not only focused on biological aspects, but also on the socio-economic factors that have a direct influence on the viability of protected areas. Gathering data on the environmental, social and economic sectors is vital for the long-term sustainability of protected areas through adaptive management.

Institutional support for monitoring includes having technical personnel and a compliment of field staff stationed at the protected areas who are trained to provide support in data collection. The Conservation program is equipped with a GIS system and field equipment to carry out a variety of field monitoring activities. Through collaborative efforts with local academic institutions and international conservation and research organizations, the Society continues to promote research & monitoring on critical species such as the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Nassau grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*) and highly susceptible coral species to the lethal Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, among others. Staff monitors vulnerable marine spawning aggregations of Groupers (Serranidae) and Snappers (Lutjanidae) as well as Queen Conch, Caribbean Spiny Lobster and Sea turtle populations within the Lighthouse Reef Atoll. In order to fill research gaps on data deficient species, we support research and long-term monitoring on the critically endangered Central American River Turtle (*Dermatemys mawii*) (locally known as Hicatee), the endangered Yellow-headed Parrot (*Amazona oratrix*) and various species of water birds and mammals.

The Society maintains modest facilities to accommodate researchers at Half Moon Caye Natural Monument (marine), Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park (terrestrial). All research proposals involving any BAS protected area must be submitted to the relevant Government of Belize Department as well as the Belize Audubon Society for vetting and endorsement. All researchers **must** obtain a scientific research permit from the relevant Government of Belize Department to conduct research in any protected area prior to arriving in Belize. For more information, please contact info@belizeaudubon.org and for research permits additionally contact wildlife.fd@ffsd.gov.bz or fisheries_department@fisheries.gov.bz