

Project Update: October 2009

In October 2009 our team was in the mountains of the east of Cuba. During our second visit we taught educational talks in local schools in two different localities, In Quivijan town, just 10 kids from primary education study in small school, we gave a talk: "Friends on the Forest" in which we talk about the importance of all birds of prey in the nature, and how kids can help to protect them for the future. And Nils Navarro taught the "First steps to draw a Bird of Prey". We brought backpacks, colour pencils and others supplies to the kids of this town. In Viento Frio town, we taught kids from different ages to identified birds of prey and use binoculars to look for birds.

The second stage of this visit was to train two "forest guards" and we did our first expedition in the forest of this area. We spent 4 days in the forest. We selected five points with good visibility and we were checking the forest from 5.30 am to 5.00 pm but without any results.

On 27th October 2009, in the elevations put in front of the pulp-removing machine of coffee in the location known as El Zapote de Mal Nombre, a Cuban kite (*Chondrohierax wilsonii*) was perching in a dry tree and it flew on the canopy of the forest; near it was a broad-wing hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) with an appreciable difference of size. This bird spread out an aggressive manner which motivated the Cuban kite to change its perch to another tree, without showing signs of a territorial answer.

A second sighting was made on 29th October at 06:30 in front of the house of the farmer Modesto Suárez in Cabezadas de Los Lirios, about 3 km from the first location. After a heavy shower, we observed a Cuban Kite perched in a dry tree. The bird showed a general bluish colour on the back that was evident when the bird cleaned up its chest. The tail was long but wide; near it a second individual was observed - it appeared to be a female or a juvenile. This has a leopard colouration on the dorsal area with ferruginous coloured areas towards the back, but was not possible to observe more details due to the distance and the bird's position in the vegetation.

The identified bird flew towards a Jaguey tree (*Ficus* sp.) 300 m away from the previous one and later it flew above the canopy. It was out of view for 40 minutes and turned while two Cuban crows (*Corvus nasicus*) and a broad-wing hawk attacked it in the air. It turned to put down near to the female or juvenile and after several minutes both flew together and they were not observed again during the day.

We collected snail shell samples left by those birds of prey. Most of these shells were collected under greater than 10 m, particularly mango (*Mangifera indica*), Santa Maria tree

(*Calophyllum utile*), cupey (*Clusia rosea*), trumpetwood (*Cecropia schreberiana* Miq.), búcaro (*Erythrina poeppigiana*) and milky (*Sapium jamaicensis*), in plantations of coffee (*Coffea arabica*) and banana (*Musa* sp.).

See:

<http://www.aba.org:80/bex/recipients/2009kite.html>

<http://birding.typepad.com:80/peeps/2009/12/cuban-kite-discovered-eastern-cuba.html>

From 13th to 17th January 2010 we carried out a second expedition. We visited Cabezadas de Los Lirios's location in Yateras, Guantánamo province, our plan was to get new photos of the Cuban kite, to study the areas where Cuban kite could survive the and to deliniate some possible areas to add at the Humboldt National Park, and to teach a training course for forest guards Modesto Suarez and Eliades Navarro about the methods of studying the Cuban kite.

Due to weather conditions it was impossible to get new photos of those birds but we did get recording calls from those birds. We covered an area about 15 km² every day and we trained Modesto Suarez and Eliades Navarro to recognize all birds of prey. I taught them to use a caliper, a tape recorder and a digital camera to get information about Cuban kite during the breeding season.

