

Josh Nichols

American Bird Conservancy

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This summer I worked for the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) in The Plains, Virginia. ABC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to conserve native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. ABC is the only organization in the U.S. that solely focuses on bird conservation throughout the entire Americas. ABC works through a wide spectrum of threats to birds to safeguard the rarest bird species, restore habitats, and reduce threats. To do so, they have developed a unique strategy to preserve bird diversity and maintain or increase wild bird populations. The primary focus of their strategic framework for bird conservation is halting extinctions by safeguarding the rarest species. To do so, ABC works with partner organizations in Latin America to create a network of sustainable reserves that protect the last remaining habitats for the most endangered species, and strengthening domestic legislation and regulations.

The next aspect of their conservation strategy emphasizes improving site and habitat management for Watchlist bird species and priority bird species. By definition, these are species that are declining or have limited ranges but are not yet on the threatened or endangered species list. ABC works domestically and internationally to improve habitat conditions across a wide system of landscapes for birds identified on this list. Conservation actions range from creating new reserves

to providing landowners with technical advice and incentive assistance to conserve birds.

The third aspect of their conservation strategy aims to eliminate threats by influencing policy, laws, regulations and harmful practices to ensure that major threats to birds are reduced or eliminated. These threats include climate change, energy development, pesticide poisoning, tower and building collisions, invasive species, and development.

The basis of ABC's conservation strategy emphasizes building a capacity for bird conservation. All projects are designed to strengthen scientific knowledge to further bird conservation goals, build effective partnerships, and increase understanding of and engagement in bird conservation issues. ABC accomplishes these goals by securing public funding for government agencies and private entities.

While at ABC, I worked for the Migratory Birds Program with Andrew Rothman. Though relatively new, the Migratory Bird Program has been very successful in identifying and protecting wintering and breeding habitats in an effort to resolve the greatest threats to migratory birds. Our work focused on managing projects for priority wintering grounds in Latin America. Having just returned from a semester in Spain, I was excited by the opportunity to continue practicing my Spanish while learning the structure of international organizations. To do so, I assisted Andrew with reporting, communicating, and project development. This required daily communication over Skype, phone, or email with our partners to discuss the progress of the project according to the contracted agreement.

I was also responsible for interpreting project reports and looking for irregularities between the agreement and their progress. If recent activities passed inspection, I updated the conservation database with the completed activities. The conservation database is an internal system that allows the members of ABC to track and update project activities. In many cases however, reports contained project specific information that required a database tracking system specific to that project. In these cases, I created project specific tracking systems using excel. For example, I created an acreage-tracking database for a reforestation project in the Dominican Republic and a migratory bird budget matrix for the migratory bird program.

Other aspects of my work emphasized on the process of developing and implementing new projects. After a project proposal was approved, Andrew and I would work the proposal into an agreement. This required writing sections of the agreement such as the scope of work, where I described project activities and how they would affect the key wintering habitat. In doing so, I developed the formal writing style that is required to write a convincing proposal and official agreement between partners. This also allowed me to understand how to develop an idea or research into a well-organized project. Agreements that I developed included projects to identify priority focal wintering areas for Golden-Winged Warblers in Honduras, Nicaragua, and Colombia, and a USAID forest regeneration project in the Dominican Republic.

Throughout my internship, I assisted the communications department by providing updates for the migratory bird pages on the ABC website and creating a

Golden-Winged Warbler Griffin Group. Other duties included translating documents for our Spanish partners, writing letters to government representatives, creating flyers for the Cuba symposium, and reporting to donors.

Working with ABC, I developed an understanding of the structure of international NGO's and how to develop and manage projects. Good communication between partners, donors, and your own team are imperative to meeting the project goals. We also forget that organizations like ABC are competitive businesses and have to run like competitive businesses if they want to be successful. Just like businesses compete for investors, non-profit NGOs are competing for donors.

My internship with ABC has inspired me to continue working in the NGO sector after college. I could not have asked to work for a better organization, with a more gracious family. The support I received from ABC has replaced any apprehensions about joining the real world with excitement and I look forward to applying my experience to a career in the international community.