

## P10 Bird conservation in South America

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Conservation priorities for birds in South America require an extraordinarily large diversity of actions, commensurate with the continent's biological richness and heterogeneity. Large portions of the region are unsurveyed, particularly in Amazonia, the Cerrado and the eastern Andes. New taxa are regularly described throughout the continent, even in well-studied areas such as the Atlantic Forest. The largest tracts of intact tropical forest ecosystems are here, as well as globally important savannas, wetlands and montane environments. So the combination of a large endemic fauna with species richness as high or higher than anywhere else poses unique conservation challenges.

Yet of the world's twenty five biodiversity "hotspots" — areas of exceptional concentration of endemic species — five found in South America are experiencing dramatic habitat loss. While the region offers opportunities for conserving intact species assemblages on a very large scale in Amazonia, it also needs emergency habitat conservation and restoration to prevent catastrophic species losses in biomes such as the Atlantic Forest and the tropical Andes.

Comparatively low human population densities, and the absence of widespread chemical and industrial

pollution, allow for landscape-level conservation measures, such as the connecting of protected areas with substantial corridors, restoration of natural forests, and the designing of buffer zones for protected areas. Relatively few avian species are pests or disease-bearers; and people generally are predisposed towards bird protection. Although hunting for food and trading in wildlife are widespread, education and enforcement can curtail these practices substantially.

For many species, the major threat is not impending extinction but substantial population loss and range contraction as vast portions of South America are converted to agriculture, pasture-lands and plantation forestry. Recent advances in infrastructure development, planning and capital investment have unlocked access to much of Amazonia and are pushing into the eastern Andes and lowland Bolivia. Unfortunately, conservation plans for these regions are still moving at a slower pace than the agricultural frontier. Conservation of essentially all of the South American avifauna is an attainable goal today, and we must gather allies and support to do this while we can.