



Unique partnership formed south of the border in effort to protect migrating birds

Five years ago, staff members of the Princeton-based D&R Greenway Land Trust took a bird's eye view of the Western hemisphere to recognize the positive local and global environmental impact of establishing an international sister land trust relationship with Amigos de Calakmul, a Mexican land preservation organization in the buffer zone around the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve.

While attending the national Land Trust Rally in Austin, Texas, D&R Greenway Executive Director Linda Mead and Director of Land Preservation and naturalist William Rawlyk, among others, were looking to share their financial and technical resources with Latin American organizations blessed with a wealth of biodiversity.

Recognizing that the Atlantic Migratory Flyway — a route traveled by over 100 species of birds between their southern winter haunts and northern breeding grounds — links the deciduous forests of central New Jersey and the rainforests of Central and South America, they found a perfect partner in the Amigos de Calakmul.

"We immediately saw that we had this joined resource," Mr. Rawlyk said. "(The bird species) need the forests of Calakmul to winter and survive, but they only breed in the Northern Hemisphere. They need their northern range in the summer. We saw this linkage being the migrating birds."

While the Amigos de Calakmul was founded to protect jaguars, the preservation of prime jaguar habitat directly benefits bird species, like scarlet tanagers, that travel from the rainforest to D&R Greenway Land Trust-protected areas in the Sourland Mountains this time of year.

In Xaxha, Guatemala, William Rawlyk, left, director of land preservation for the Delaware & Raritan Greenway Land Trust, presents a bird identification book to Federico Fashen, president of the Asociación de Reservas Naturales Privadas de Guatemala.

Both organizations are actively involved in establishing biological corridors — swaths of protected, undeveloped land linking larger preserved properties. In establishing the partnership, D&R Greenway Land Trust moved beyond creating local corridors to establishing international corridors with large-scale benefits.

"We're not just preserving land in your backyard in Princeton," Mr. Rawlyk said. "We're thinking bigger than that. We're preserving this ecological corridor in the Sourlands and looking further beyond that to the migration corridors in our hemispheres. The Sourlands are critical to global biodiversity — they're not just some nondescript wood lot in your backyard."

The partnership itself is similarly crucial to the future of conservation, according to Ms. Mead. "If we can show that these two land trusts can be successful, on the ground preserving habitat in our own backyard while having a global impact, this is a project that can have a significant impact on the conservation movement and on global conservation of species," she said.

In addition to the \$30,000 D&R Greenway Land Trust has raised for the Amigos de Calakmul to establish a biological research station, another \$10,000 has been given to Asociación de Reservas Naturales Privadas de Guatemala. The Guatemalan organization is also working around the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, which encompasses land in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize.

On the northern front, D&R Greenway is also in the primary stages of establishing a partnership with the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, initiated by D&R Greenway Land Trust board member Rosemary Blair.

While national and international environmental organizations, like World Wildlife Fund, have established partnerships in the past, Ms. Mead said this is the first time regional land trusts have made a connection.

While the partner groups in Mexico and Guatemala are benefiting from the sister relationship and accompanying funds, D&R Greenway Land Trust is likewise reaping the rewards of the collaboration.

"People don't always know about or understand the resources in their own backyard," Ms. Mead said. "The sister land trust project is something people become very interested in very quickly; it helps them learn about their own backyard. From our local perspective, this is a way that we can bring about much greater awareness of the importance of the Sourland Mountains."

The organization recently opened the Johnson Education Center. "Celebrate Open Space 2006," its first community celebration of land preservation, will take place 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday at the Rosedale Road facility. It is planned to be an annual event.

Since its foundation in 1989, D&R Greenway Land Trust has preserved 8,456 acres, including 779 in Princeton Township, and 90 properties in six central New Jersey counties are under active negotiation.

The opening of the Johnson Education Center highlights the land trust's commitment to education. In keeping with that mission, members of Amigos de Calakmul will visit the center in the fall to offer workshops and information on neotropical bird migrations, and work with elementary and secondary school teachers on ways to include avian ecology in the curriculum.