

# Belize Audubon Society: The First Thirty Years

Lydia Waight  
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The Belize Audubon Society is a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of the sustainable use and preservation of our natural resources in order to maintain a balance between people and the environment.



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*Producciones de la Hamaca* is dedicated to:

- Celebration and documentation of Belize's rich, diverse cultural heritage,
- Protection and sustainable use of Belize's remarkable natural resources,
- Inspired, creative expression of Belize's spiritual depth.

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## **A Greeting from the Governor General H. E. Sir Colville N. Young**

Fellow Belizeans,

I extend my warmest congratulations to the Belize Audubon Society on the publication of the history of its activities in Belize.

From its humble beginning in the 1960's, the Society has become known, and even renowned, worldwide for its tireless work in promoting environmental awareness and action, and actively participating in setting up nature preserves, parks and conservation areas in our land and sea.

Our Earth's first and, so far as I know, only jaguar reserve is here in our beautiful country to be enjoyed and studied by Belizeans, tourists, and the international scholarly community and that is only one of the many examples illustrating our resolve that our flora and fauna should persist relatively undisturbed. In fact, we in Belize are a model that even larger and richer countries might follow.

In a world that sees increasing destruction or pollution of the natural habitat we share with all living things, we must continue to preserve and protect our wonderful coral reefs, our rainforests, our pinneridges, and our mangroves and wetlands. An important part of that preservation and protection is the effort of the Belize Audubon Society to have our teachers instill in our children, from the primary school level up to the University College of Belize, the importance of our lovely environment - an environment we must pass unspoilt to our children along with the education that will enable them in turn to pass the heritage to their children.

I know all Belizeans will join me in saying, "Well done, Belize Audubon."

God Bless Belize.



**A Greeting from the  
Prime Minister  
Hon. Said W. Musa**

Dear Reader,

For the past 30 years, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) has been actively participating in Belize's growth and promoting the preservation of Belize's natural resources. It is fitting that the Society should mark its 30th Anniversary and the close of the century with a commemorative work documenting its evolution and achievement over the years.

In its early days, BAS was primarily a bird-watching society and has since developed into Belize's leading environmental promotion and protection agency, whilst still managing to continue its initial task of documenting and monitoring the over 400 species of birds in Belize. By devotedly and passionately pursuing its mission of preserving and promoting Belize's flora and fauna, BAS positively contributes to the economic development of Belize. The Society helped establish, manages, and promotes such nature parks as the Blue Hole National Park, Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, Guanacaste National Park, and the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. This work has not only educated thousands of Belizeans about Belize's natural treasures, but also countless international visitors who come to our shores each year.

In tourism, Belize has marketed itself as one of the leading

eco-tourism destinations and there is no doubt that BAS provides indispensable support in helping us to both develop and preserve the various facets of our eco-heritage from the coral reserves to the rainforest to the mangroves.

It is my sincere hope that this book will serve as an education tool for young Belizeans to understand that their future and that of Belize is inextricably bound up with the preservation of a healthy and vibrant environment. We must, therefore, do our best to ensure that this book is widely disseminated and readily available country-wide, especially in our schools.

Congratulations to Mrs. Lydia Waight, who has been with the Society from its inception, and to Ms. Judy Lumb who co-authored this book.

Congratulations to the Belize Audubon Society on 30 years of invaluable service to the people and nation of Belize.

Hon. Said W. Musa  
Prime Minister of Belize

## Preface

For the past thirty years, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) has made Belize a model of a developing country with an environmental consciousness. For the first fifteen years the BAS was Belize's only environmental organization. Through a close working relationship with the Government of Belize, the BAS worked to preserve the country's precious natural resources for the generations to come. They were consulted on all proposed development projects and warned against those that would be damaging to the environment. They facilitated the early passage of legislation for the protection of wildlife and establishment of protected areas. They proposed areas that should be protected and lobbied until wildlife sanctuaries, natural monuments, nature reserves, and national parks were declared. They led the management of these protected areas. Indeed, Belize's current enviable position as a premier ecotourism destination is largely due to the early work of the BAS.

The BAS was formed by a group of enthusiastic and energetic conservationists on February 6, 1969. The story of how that came about, and who the founders were, is told in Chapter 1, "Formation of the Society."

The BAS has developed in three phases. During the first fifteen years the work of the Society was done solely by volunteers using donated materials. By the end of 1984 some funds were obtained to support management of protected areas and establish an office with professional staff. The next five years were a volatile time with inconsistent funding, changes in the Government of Belize and enormous developmental issues for the country. By 1990 the situation had stabilized and the professional phase began in earnest. The BAS staff has continued to increase in number and professional skill ever since. The story of this "Growth of the Society" is told in Chapter 2 of this book.

Since the very beginning the Society has sat upon the same three-legged programmatic stool, the legs of which are:

- (1) Advocacy for Conservation of Belize's Natural Resources (Chapter 3)
- (2) Environmental Education (Chapter 4), and
- (3) Management of Protected Areas (Chapter 5).

Each conservation issue, each environmental education project, and each protected area is a story in itself. Rather than tell the whole history of the BAS chronologically, each story is told individually in the respective chapters.

Over the past 20 years the BAS has received and given a number of Awards (Chapter 6). The James A. Waight Award for Conservation has been given in honour of the Society's first President since 1987.

BAS has accomplished all this with the help of its partners who have provided financial support and joined with us in the work of preserving Belize for a bright future. Belize's other environmental organizations, international and local funding agencies, volunteer organizations, and corporate sponsors have all been our partners in conservation (Chapter 7).

This documentation of BAS' remarkable history would not have been possible without the untiring work of Lydia Waight. Her meticulous maintenance of records and sharp, insightful memory of the events of these thirty years are the basis for this book. She was the Society's first Secretary and continued in that position for 27 years when she became Honorary Secretary for Life. She was the one who wrote all the letters for the early lobbying efforts of the BAS and kept the minutes of Board Meetings. She is in large part responsible for the BAS' many accomplishments. It has been my great privilege to work with her in the production of this history of the BAS.

Judy Lumb  
20 February 1999

***Belize Audubon Society:  
The First Thirty Years***



Florida Audubon Society  
Chapter Charter

This is to certify that

BELIZE AUDUBON SOCIETY  
was voted a  
Chapter of the Florida Audubon Society

6th February 1969

with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities  
as provided in the By-laws of the Society

*Charles Monte*  
President