



January 14, 2020, I flew back from Panama after an energizing two weeks with Wounaan partners. At the time, I did not realize it would be my only visit that year. By December 31, 2019, thanks to your generous support, we had raised a little over \$12,500 to continue forest protection and bird conservation work in Maje Mountain communities, and we were poised to partner with the International Conservation Fund of Canada. On January 5th, the community of Puerto Lara carried out their second Christmas Bird Count with new Wounaan birders from Rio Hondo and Platanares. This was the first of two community-exchange bird counts we had planned. January 7 - 13, 2020 was filled with preparing tree planting workshops, designing a Wounaan children's book about birds, exploring university partnerships for higher education scholarships, and more. The year had started off strong!

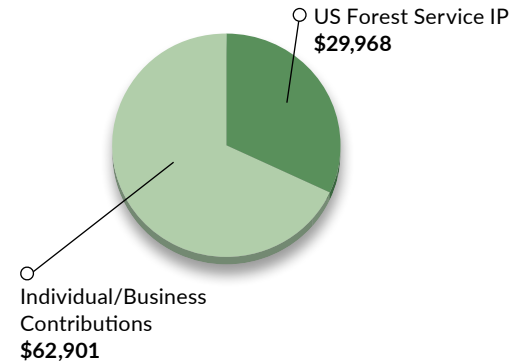
Much did not go as planned in 2020, for example, Wounaan birders from Puerto Lara never traveled to Rio Hondo and Platanares to carry out another bird count; but, with a lot of care and ingenuity, much still was accomplished. And, because of your outpouring of support, much more was done to help communities, families and students weather and adapt to the global pandemic and start preparing for life beyond it. Thank you.

This spring newsletter serves as a 2020 annual report, reflecting the uncertainties of the past year, the innovations that emerged from it and the cautious optimism of 2021. Thank you for staying with us.

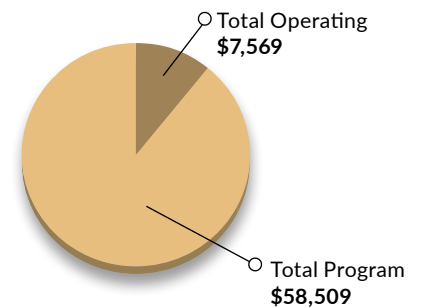


**Marsha Kellogg**  
President, Native Future

## Native Future Income, 2020



## Native Future Expenses, 2020



## Native Future Welcomes First Associate Board

Native Future's 2020 Annual Meeting was one for the record books! Not only because it was 100% virtual due to COVID-19, but we also welcomed the inaugural Associate Board to Native Future. The meeting was a global affair with participants from France, Kenya, and every time zone in the United States!

The Associate Board brings in young professionals to assist Native Future operations and fundraising. Having a bigger volunteer team, with new ideas and a renewed energy, will help us achieve our mission. Many are Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. One had been evacuated from Panama at the start of the global pandemic. Others come to us with enriching experience such as forestry policy in Kenya, climate change and agriculture in New Mexico, and community health and grant-writing in Zambia.

**The Associate Board is chaired by Mecca Luster.** The members are **Esther Baumann, Samuel Boehms, Chyna Dixon, Dj Herzog, Wagaye Mesele, Jenna O'Brien, and Kelsey Ring.** We are excited to welcome this talented and passionate team chosen by the Board of Directors to support Native Future's goals for the next two years.



### Zoom Call Photo, October 10 Annual Meeting.

The Annual Meeting brought together all of Native Future's volunteers; 25 of us, old and new. Keep an eye out for biographies of our volunteers in future newsletters!

## 2020 HIGHLIGHTS: NATIVE EDUCATION

The pandemic caused profound changes in the Native Future scholarship programs. First, our donors were more than generous: THANK YOU! Second, the Ngäbe-Buglé community organizations who manage the grants stepped up and distributed funds to help their students in critical, innovative ways:

- Misión Santa Teresita offered its boarding facilities to the Buenos Aires health center. COVID patients and their accompanying family members who needed isolation stayed there; students were not in school, so it was empty. Your donations funded a chicken project and food purchases for the housed patients. Administrator P. Ricardo Perez secured and transported school materials to elementary students and held homework sessions with them.
- El Jacinto Scholarship Committee, in its first year managing a \$6500 grant after opening the program up to the entire community, implemented an application process for secondary and university students. The funds were used for remote learning tools, such as cell phones and tablets. Eight university students received \$240 each. High School students received \$100.
- Cooperativa Irene Vasquez, working with women artisans, began 2020 sharing its \$3500 grant with 20 active members and in July requested more funds to buy a computer to be used by member students. Thanks to your donations, we sent them \$1,000 for the computer.
- APAUDeS, the farmer association, distributed their \$1500 grant among the four university students, offspring of their 10 members, all of whom study in the city.

## MOVING FORWARD

Scholarship funds are being applied to help Wounaan learn critical job skills that advance the shared objectives of their communities. We are supporting virtual English classes for Wounaan bird guides, thus preparing them for a resumption of ecotourism activities. Also, Yadira Carpio, a young woman from the community of Aruza, has received a grant to support her studies at the National University of Forest Sciences in Honduras.

More secondary and university students are moving to cities, rooming with relatives, and working to go to night and/or remote classes. Our scholarships offer a partial but critical aid to their continued studies. Their goal is to support their families in the Comarca, where income-generating opportunities are very limited. Small family farms can't support the costs of cell phones, internet access and other educational expenses.

### A Generous Global Giving Campaign

Thank you to everyone who donated to Native Future's first Global Giving campaign, April 5 - 23, 2021. Led by the Associate Board, the Education Program's first online fundraising effort was a huge success, raising \$6,077! The donations will support educational scholarships for 29 students of the Women's Artisan Cooperative Irene Vasquez in Buenos Aires, Thank you!



Yadira Carpio, first year forestry student.



Franklin Valdes from El Jacinto is working on a degree in Medical Records and Health Statistics.

# NATIVE STEWARDSHIP 2020

Native Future carries out three mutually supporting stewardship activities with four Wounaan communities, the Wounaan National Congress, and their foundation, the FUNDEPW:

- 1) the Wounaan Bird Count, which includes bird conservation, biocultural revitalization, and ecotourism development,
- 2) forest restoration, or Jēb Jua Choog K'ap'ˆ Wēn'ˆrraag, as it is known in Wounaan meu, and
- 3) forest monitoring of Wounaan territories.

## 2020 Highlights: Wounaan Bird Count

**Bird Conservation:** On January 5, 2020 thirty-eight birders, including 11 new Wounaan birders from Rio Hondo and Platanares, counted 1,298 individual birds and 135 species over 15 hours and along 4 routes during Puerto Lara's second official Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Read about their 3rd CBC in Masked Up, Puerto Lara Perseveres.

**Biocultural revitalization:** With COVID-19, community exchanges and international travel stopped. Project partners turned their focus to the creation of the children's book, *The Adventures of Two Wounaan Children and Many Birds*. This work is beautifully illustrated by Frankie Grin and narrated by Wounaan cultural and language experts: Chenier Carpio Opuá, Doris Cheucarama Membache, hapk'ˆlln Rito Ismare Peña, Dorindo Membora Peña, Chindío Peña Ismare, and Julie Velásquez Runk. It will be available for purchase soon in English, Spanish, and Wounaan meu. **(Sign-up for advance notice on our website!)**



**Ecotourism:** In December 2020, the project concept "Digital Transformation of Indigenous-Led Ecotourism and Conservation", was approved by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Innovation Lab. With an eye to the future, the project is a partnership between Native Future, the Wounaan National Congress and Foundation (FUNDEPW), T'ashi, an ecotourism online marketing business, and micro-finance facilitator, Global Brigades. It will support Puerto Lara, Rio Hondo and Platanares to meet post-COVID-19 ecotourism demand through COVID-sensitive ecotour development, online marketing, and financial inclusion.

## 2020 Highlights: Forest Restoration (Jēb Jua Choog K'ap'ˆ Wēn'ˆrraag)

- January - March 2020, 340 Wounaan in 4 communities received training in tree nursery construction and maintenance, seed germination and seedling transplanting and care.
- A simple digital guide to Wounaan traditional tree planting practices was developed to remotely assist communities to transplant their seedlings.
- By July 2020, approximately 12,500 tree seedlings were planted in 4 Wounaan communities to replenish their farms and forests with species important to their culture, ecology, and livelihoods.
- Using WhatsApp telecommunications, the Wounaan "tele-forester" oriented community-based technicians on tree seedling care and about treatments they can make at home and bitter plants they can cultivate around their trees to fend off insects and disease. An estimated 90 Wounaan, men and women, received these trainings in their native language.



**Wounaan planted more than 12,500 seedlings in 4 communities during the pandemic.**

## 2020 HIGHLIGHTS: Forest Monitoring in Wounaan Territories

Native Future GIS and Mapping Technician, Clay Mosolino, worked with Wounaan Territorial Monitoring Coordinator, Donalds Negria and Wounaan National Congress leadership to develop a territorial alerts map. The map remotely detects deforestation and fires threatening Wounaan territories by using publicly provided satellite imagery data from the Global Land Analysis and Discovery (GLAD) alerts system from the University of Maryland, and NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS). By January 2021, the map was supporting Wounaan community-based technicians to verify forest loss and submit evidence in environmental complaints to Panama's Ministry of Environment.

## Moving Forward: 2021

Late 2019, the Maje Mountains project was launched to bring to bear resources of each of these projects in three of the most threatened Wounaan communities: Rio Hondo, Platanares and Maje. By April 2020 the pandemic affected Wounaan capacity to safely implement activities on the ground, and forest restoration and bird conservation work was not scaled out to the community of Maje. However, groundwork was laid for a post COVID-19 revitalization of Maje Mountain stewardship objectives in 2021, and partnerships renewed with the International Conservation Fund of Canada and US Forest Service International Programs.

THANK YOU to everyone who contributed to the 2020 year-end Native Stewardship matching funds campaign! You helped us more than meet our match of \$6,000 and enter 2021 on solid footing.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE, 2020

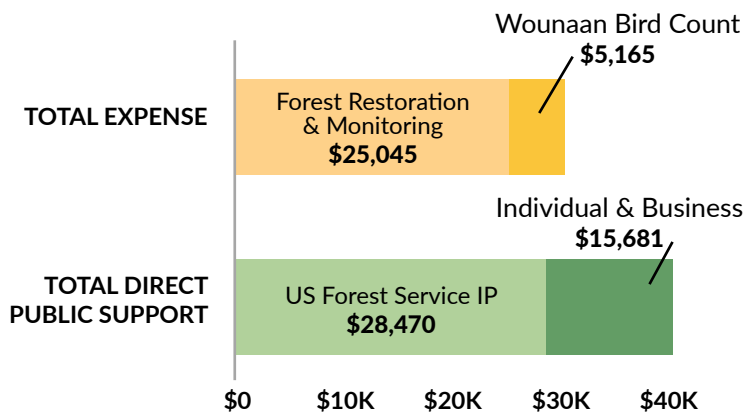
Your generous donations have supported many families and students during this global crisis.

- 104 Ngäbe-Buglé families received direct financial assistance to help them weather the initial "lock-down" months of the pandemic.
- 900 meals were provided to Ngäbe-Buglé COVID-19 patients and family members who needed to quarantine in the Buenos Aires Catholic Mission.
- 550 Wounaan families in four communities periodically received food, masks, health & hygiene supplies while under stay-at-home orders between May and September.
- COVID-19 educational materials were developed and delivered to Indigenous communities and partners.
- Wounaan leadership cell phones were topped off for the first four months of the pandemic to support their communication and coordination during national lock-down.

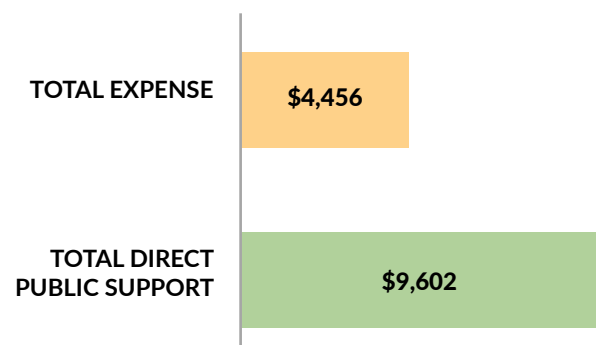
## Moving Forward: 2021

As Panama opened back up the Ministry of Health began preparing to deliver vaccines. Our attention turned to a safe recovery. The Inter-American Development Bank Innovation Lab is matching the remaining COVID-19 funds to develop and train safe COVID-19 sensitive ecotourism in Puerto Lara, Rio Hondo and Platanares.

### NATIVE STEWARDSHIP, 2020



### COVID-19 RESPONSE, 2020



Native Stewardship activities are supported by grants from the **US Forest Service International Programs, International Conservation Fund of Canada, and the generous contributions of donors like you! Thank you!**

# MASKED UP, PUERTO LARA PERSEVERES

The third official Wounaan Christmas Bird Count took place in Puerto Lara, Darien January 5, 2021.

This year it was held with face masks, social distancing, reduced group sizes, and included only local participants. However, Puerto Lara's enthusiasm and love for birds led to a successful count of **921 birds representing 116 species!** Four groups ventured out for six hours each to observe the birds in the area. Overall, they traveled 12 kilometers by foot and boat and saw 10 species not seen on previous Wounaan Bird Counts!

Highlights of the day were: a rufescent tiger heron, black oropendolas, five blue cotingas, keel-billed toucans, and whooping motmots. The most exciting observation? A boat-billed heron rookery complete with many nests, parents, and chicks!



**Boat billed heron**  
Photo by **Jairo Cheucarama**

Today, Puerto Lara's conservation is on the map of this century-old citizen science tradition.

One of six Christmas Bird Counts to take place in Panama, it is the only one in Darien Province, so far. The Wounaan bird group, Oropendolas Negras, began observing and counting birdlife in July 2017. In 2018, they were joined by the all-women Wounaan bird group, the Tangaras Azules. Together, they have identified more than 275 species in Puerto Lara and have carried out six internationally recognized counts. They look forward to the next Wounaan Christmas Bird Count, January 5, 2022!

*The 2021 count was completed entirely by Wounaan birders in Puerto Lara. Visitors from outside the community for the 2022 count are pending the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations in Panama. Be on the lookout for updates.*



**Tangaras Azules and Oropendolas Negras on the morning of the count.**



**Oropendola Negras counting birds on the river route.**

Photo by **Rolando Cheucarama**





# NATIVE FUTURE

NATIVE CULTURES | CONSERVING THREATENED LANDS

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE TODAY!

Indigenous cultures are at risk. Protecting native lands, educating Wounaan and Ngäbe Buglé are critical to their survival.

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Where should we direct your donation:

\_\_\_ \$50

Land Rights

\_\_\_ \$100

Education

\_\_\_ \$250

Wounaan Bird Count

\_\_\_ \$500

Where Needed

\_\_\_ Other

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Please consider **recurring donations** as they help us plan projects and increase your positive impact.

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