

MURICI

One of the Most Important Places on Earth for Bird Conservation



conservation profile

targets six endangered and five critically-endangered bird species, including two species known only from Murici, as well as rare and endemic orchids, bromeliads and mammals

stresses deforestation, hunting, logging, poaching for pets, land settlement

strategies land acquisition, restoration, protection, sustainable community development, reserve management, carbon sequestration, sustainable agricultural management, policy initiatives

results completed land tenure and forest cover mapping (2002); signing of Pacto Murici with local and international organizations (2003); identification of target properties for acquisition (late 2003)

ecoregion Pernambuco Coastal Forest

project size 25,000 acres

partners Sociedade Nordestina de Ecologia (SNE), BirdLife International, SOS Mata Atlântica, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Conservation International (CI), Brazilian Biodiversity Fund (Funbio)

funding need \$350,000 before July 1, 2004



The Red-necked tanager, a threatened species in Murici © B. Possiel

The American Bird Conservancy describes Murici as “probably the most important place for bird conservation in the Western Hemisphere” due to its extraordinary density of unique birds, including six endangered and five critically-endangered bird species. For BirdLife International, Murici is simply “one of the most important forests in the world.” Located in Alagoas state in northeastern Brazil, Murici is the largest remaining forest patch in its entire ecoregion. Murici has gained worldwide attention in recent years because of its status as the last remaining woodland for several globally endangered bird species. Chances of survival for these

species depend almost entirely on the protection and expansion of the Murici forest complex, and loss of these forest remnants would result in several bird extinctions.

Murici is also important for several plant species considered to be rare and close to extinction. Most of its palms, orchids, bromeliads, and monocots are not found anywhere else. Much of the flora and fauna has yet to be studied: A study looking at Murici’s reptiles recently found and described a new species of pit viper (*Bothrops muriciensis*). Thus, the destruction of Murici would lead to the permanent disappearance of a unique flora and fauna.



Murici forest remnants and pasture © Denise Levy/TNC

Deforestation has been the primary source of pressure on Murici, caused decades ago by large landowners establishing sugarcane plantations in the region. In recent years, as sugarcane productivity has declined, much of the land has been converted to low-productivity cattle pasture and agriculture. The deforestation has led to soil erosion, causing streams to dry up and water tables to drop as the protective forest cover is removed. Furthermore, Murici's forests have fallen victim to the illegal logging of hardwoods. Another threat to wildlife in Murici is hunting and poaching; some of the area's extraordinarily rare birds, in particular, are targets for the illegal pet market.

Strategies

The Conservancy and its partners seek to acquire and protect as many acres as possible of the humid forest surrounding the existing Murici Ecological Station and create a larger protected area through the connection of those fragments into a biological corridor. Bird habitats in Murici have essentially been limited to inaccessible mountaintops, which are surrounded by agricultural and grazing lands that continue to creep up the hilly slopes. The Conservancy's strategy in Murici is to acquire

these contiguous degraded lands in order to patch together islands of restored and protected valley habitat. As a first step, the Conservancy and partner organizations in Brazil recently signed the Pacto Murici to prioritize acquisitions and implement emergency actions, such as reforestation, environmental education, and community development, to safeguard the forest.

After these lands are purchased, the process of restoration will allow the Conservancy and partner organizations to replant strategic deforested property with native, fast-growing tree seedlings, which will give the forest a chance to regenerate and recuperate its natural vegetative cover. These connected swaths of land will ultimately permit greater animal migration and genetic exchange. In Murici, this will allow for a vital habitat recovery for the threatened birds.

In 2001, BirdLife International and local partner SNE helped spearhead the protected designation of the 15,000-acre Murici Ecological Station by the Brazilian government. "Ecological Station" denotes the strictest protective status that the government can declare. Nevertheless, Murici has essentially existed as a "paper park", with little real enforcement of legal protections.

Guards are unequipped and sometimes go unpaid, and sufficient resources are not available to produce simple management tools such as training, uniforms, equipment, signs and a good surveillance system. Ongoing reserve management will be a critical component in protecting Murici, and the Conservancy's two decades of experience in shoring up Latin America's "parks in peril" will be instrumental to the parks' success.

One innovative strategy that the Conservancy and its partners are considering employing in Murici is multiple-benefit carbon sequestration, which has led to the protection and restoration of more than 50,000 acres elsewhere in the Atlantic Forest in the past four years. The Conservancy hopes to replicate this model in Murici through corporate investments and highly-leveraged contributions from individuals.

For the birds

The following endangered and critically endangered birds inhabit Murici:

- Alagoas foliage gleaner
- Alagoas antwren
- Alagoas tyrannulet
- White-collared kite
- Plain spinetail
- Seven-color tanager
- Orange-bellied antwren
- Golden-tailed parrotlet
- Scalloped antbird
- Buff-throated purplelet
- White-winged cotinga

contact information

Cathy Kerkam, Director of Resources
Eastern South America Division
4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203 USA
ckerkam@tnc.org
tel [703] 841.2082
fax [703] 841.4880
nature.org