



UPDATE: NATIVE FUTURE'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



I cannot say enough about the generosity of our Native Future community! Since April 16, we have raised \$5,000 to help Indigenous communities during this global pandemic. Because of your rapid response, three communities - Rio Hondo, Platanares and Majé - have received food, health and hygiene supplies. And we're working with our Indigenous partners to help others. Thank you so very, very much for your donations! Please continue reading to learn how we're adapting our programs to best address the needs of our Indigenous partners during this global crisis.

Over the past few months we have all seen uncertainty and fear unfold in our lives and in our communities as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. This virus does not respect national or community borders and has exponentially spread in Panama. It has the potential to devastate Indigenous communities and families. All of us at Native Future want to assure you that we are committed to alleviating the impact of this pandemic on the lives of our Indigenous partners.

March 25, Panama instituted nationwide quarantine measures to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 while anticipating multiple waves of community outbreak. Most Indigenous territories also closed themselves off - blocking roads and prohibiting travel in and out of communities - to stop the contagion. The virus is still spreading; however quarantine has slowed its progress, flattening the curve. As of May 24, the Ministry of Health confirmed 10,926 cases; 306 have perished. The Ministry of Health is tracking Covid-19's spread here: <http://minsa.gob.pa/coronavirus-covid19>.

The quarantine is a wise and necessary public health measure. However, it is taking a heavy toll on community food security and family income. Many families in rural communities depend economically on relatives who were once working in the city, and urban relatives rely on their rural farms for food crops. On May 13, Panama began tentatively to re-open the economy but movement is still heavily restricted nationally. The US Embassy website has details <https://pa.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information>

In consultation with our partners on the ground, Native Future's response has been to help families with basic food supplies, as well as soaps and disinfectants, pain relievers and fever reducers, which community stores cannot restock during the quarantine. We are also supporting Indigenous leaders to send and receive messages to quarantined communities.

With your generous support, we continue to take the following steps.

1. We are working with a network of Indigenous leaders and Panamanians coordinating delivery of food, health and hygiene supplies to Indigenous communities. A bag of supplies for a family costs approximately \$30.
2. Remotely, we are finding ways to "top off" the cell phones of Indigenous leaders and community healthcare workers to ensure health, safety and food security information and messages are being sent and received. A \$5.00 top-off provides a week of unlimited data.

In this effort, Native Future is asking each of our donors to consider making an immediate emergency donation in the amount of \$100. All donations made through June 2020 will go directly to helping our partners on the ground meet the basic needs of their communities. Any amount helps!

Please visit our website at nativefuture.org and select Donate to help us take immediate action for our Indigenous partners. You can also make checks payable to: **Native Future, 34 Taylor St, Portland, ME, 04102.**

As always, I want to thank you for your commitment and concern for the future of Wounaan and Ngäbe Buglé communities. Please consider making an emergency donation today so we can help our Indigenous partners preserve their way of life beyond this crisis.



Marsha Kellogg
President, Native Future

P.S. Enjoy the new look of our newsletter! We are so appreciative of Michael Cook of mikecookcreative.com for his pro bono work!

2020 SCHOLARSHIP YEAR SPRINGS FORWARD

All of us here at Native Future want to thank you, our donors, for making possible the most successful fundraising year to date. Thanks to generous contributions from supporters like you, we were able to raise \$21,000 to meet our education grant goal for 2020. From the raised funds, multiple grants were awarded in early February to five indigenous organizations: four in the Buenos Aires area of the Comarca Ngäbé Buglé, and one in the Wounaan districts of East Panama and Darien. Since then, it's been a fast-changing scene for all of us.

Unfortunately, Native Future's education program has been impacted by the rise of the Coronavirus pandemic that has upended life across the globe. As of mid-April, there were no identified cases of the virus in the Buenos Aires area. Nonetheless, schools, businesses, and public transportation have been shut down as a necessary precaution to avoid spread. Government agencies began delivering minimal food for families and making health beds and equipment available for potential use.

Taking the lead in preparing Buenos Aires for the virus has been Padre Ricardo Canto Perez, one of NF's largest educational grant recipients in the area. In early February 2020, we delivered our annual \$6,000 scholarship grant to his Catholic mission. Padre Ricardo's mission has traditionally been used for internados - students who walk for hours across the hilly region and crossing rivers, to attend school in Buenos Aires. Beyond room and board, the grant has covered expenses such as raising chickens, a vegetable garden, and a stipend for parental workers over the years. Following the regional shutdown in March, the local health center asked Padre Ricardo if they could use the Mission's dormitory and kitchen for possible future patients. He quickly agreed, and Native Future has approved that he can use all scholarship funds for 2020 in service to the area residents during this crisis.

The other program that was scheduled to receive a grant in February was the Wounaan Foundation. Since their grant of \$4,000 was directed toward trainings and higher education for the coming year, we agreed that most of it will go toward aiding Wounaan through this crisis.

The public school year in Panama starts in late Feb/early March. In three of our programs, pictured right, scholarship funds were distributed directly to Senior High and University students in February to help students pay school fees and other expenses for 2020. While we wish the students could have the full education experience they deserve, we expect funds will be used for transportation home and other basic needs during the developing crisis.



Boarding students at **Buenos Aires Catholic Mission** painting their kitchen, 2019

Cooperative Artesania Irene Vasquez



Irene Vasquez (in glasses), former mayor of Buenos Aires, distributes scholarship aid to her active artisan members, all of whom have family members studying at distant schools. Coming from many villages in the area, their craft fair coincides with a volleyball game! Their grant of \$3,500 will be divided between the participants

APAUDeS

Asociacion Panama
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Rey Vasquez, co-founder of the agriculture group APAUDeS, pictured here on 2/20, delivering a 2019 report of scholarship students. Two of his sons have studied with the help of the grant program since 2004; one is a university graduate. Their active 7-member regional association received a NF \$1,500 grant for youth studies in 2020.

El Jacinto (Basilio Perez) Scholarship Program



Pictured here is Melixa Perez, who next year will join her elder sister, Melisa, in Chorrera (suburb of Pan City) to study in High School. Started as an El Jacinto farm co-op scholarship in 2000, 2020 marks a major change to the program. Now open to the entire village of El Jacinto, a committee directed by the local pastor, will distribute the same \$6,000 to qualified students in High School and University. Their 2020 grant was divided among 16 students.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

We're excited to introduce Mecca Luster, one of Native Future's newest volunteers. Mecca is a Panama Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) who lived in Puerto Lara, in the Darien. Mecca is helping Native Future expand our social media presence, to share the work of our indigenous partners in new, modern ways.

Below is a message from Mecca:

"In Puerto Lara, lots of tourists and outside organizations come to implement projects because of its proximity to Panama City. In the busy season, there will be at least 1-2 groups of foreigners per month. As a volunteer, I remember the community reacting differently when Native Future came.

“(NATIVE FUTURE) TRAININGS WERE IMPLEMENTED IN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE AND RECEIVED SO MUCH PRAISE AND ACTIVE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT LIKE I'D NEVER SEEN IN MY TWO YEARS LIVING THERE.”



It was clear this was one of the few non-partisan efforts that the entire community rallied around. Their trainings were implemented in the local language and received so much praise and active community involvement like I'd never seen in my two years living there. Their close relationship with the Wounaan National Congress was integral to the success of their projects and it was clear they were well respected. That's when I knew I wanted to work with them during my service and after I left Panama. I felt that Native Future was offering a sustainable approach in a way that many other organizations hadn't. That's when I fell in love with the work that Native Future does."

WOUNAAN CAN'T STOP BIRDING

Before Panama and Indigenous communities went into quarantine to contain the spread of the coronavirus, a lot of great stewardship work was done in Wounaan communities. And, it continues! Here's the roundup.

They call themselves Los Pelicanos – The Pelicans. They are the newest group of Wounaan birders. Eleven men and women from Rio Hondo and Platanares, ages 16 – 60+, are learning to spot and identify birds in their **Maje Mountain communities** in three languages – English, Spanish and Wounaan meo. In July 2019 the Foundation for the Development of the Wounaan People (the FUNDEPW, as it is known by its acronym in Spanish) was awarded a second grant from the UNDP Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program to continue the work of the Wounaan Bird Count in these east Panama communities. The project builds off the bird identification, conservation and language and cultural documentation learning that started in Puerto Lara in 2017.

Prior to coronavirus quarantine, **Oropendola Negra guide, Jairo Cheucarama**, was leading monthly trainings with Los Pelicanos with support from professional guides, such as Nando Quiroz, and Native Future trainers, Janice Jorgensen and Robert Mesta. The three Wounaan birding groups – Oropendolas Negras, Tangaras Azules and Pelicanos - came together in **Puerto Lara** to carry out this year's Christmas Bird Count on January 5. (See story inset.) The Pelicans were looking forward to carrying out the International Migratory Bird Count with Oropendolas Negras and Tangaras Azules in early May; sadly, the coronavirus intervened. (Put it on your calendar for 2021!)

In early March, Jairo carried out the last official practice in Rio Hondo with the Pelicans before quarantine measures were put into place. In fact, he's still there! (He's required to remain there due to the quarantine.) He reports they are out birding daily identifying new birds to the list – it is getting long!

38 BIRDERS
135 SPECIES IDENTIFIED
1,298 INDIVIDUAL BIRDS

15-HOUR TIME SPAN
FOUR ROUTES

**WOUNAAN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
2020**

Details to the right in the green bar



January 5, 2020 marked the second Wounaan Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in Puerto Lara.

Led by the Puerto Lara birding groups, the Oropendola Negras and Tangaras Azules and the Count Coordinator, Jairo Cheucarama, 38 birders identified 135 species and counted 1,298 individual birds over a 15-hour period along four routes. This year, eleven members of the new birding group from the communities of Rio Hondo and Platanares – Los Pelicanos - joined the count. And Peace Corps volunteers, Kyle Antony, Clay Mosolino, Patrick Yoon, Nicolas Cremona and Nathan Duerr joined the fun! Fourteen new birds for the CBC were spotted, one of the best being the uncommon Darien specialty the Golden-green Woodpecker.

The day before the count, Native Future volunteers Janice Jorgensen and Irma Hernandez worked with the women's bird group, the Tangaras Azules, on developing educational activities for the whole family. And Native Future volunteer, Robert Mesta, continued bird identification training with the Pelicanos and Oropendolas Negras. Rolando Cheucarama, President of the Oropendolas Negras, was deeply impressed with how well the Pelicanos know their birds. "They are very advanced for how long they have been practicing", he said.



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PRACTICING

— Rolando Cheucarama
President | Oropendolas Negras

WOUNAAN ARE RESTORING THEIR FORESTS

More than 100 Wounaan in four communities— Puerto Lara, Aruza, Rio Hondo and Platanares – were hard at work developing tree nurseries, collecting and planting seeds and getting ready to restore their degraded forests. The US Forest Service International Programs–funded project, Strengthen Wounaan Forest-based Livelihoods, or Jëb Jua Choog K'Ap'Λ Wën'Arraag, as it is known in the Wounaan native language, hired Wounaan nursery technician, Rito Obispo, to guide Wounaan men and women, old and young, in the design, construction and maintenance of tree nurseries in their communities. In January, they learned how to prepare germination beds in which to plant seeds, and in just a few weeks the germinated seeds were ready for transplant to bags. The trainings also worked with the participants to prepare their land for planting. More than 20,000 seedlings in the four

communities are being cared for and a-waiting their day to be planted in Wounaan forests, come June. Due to the coronavirus, the project team is not expecting to be able to carry out this training in person. However, the communities have previous experience with tree seedling care. In 2018, Native Future volunteer, Julian Dendy carried out tree-planting workshops and in November 2019 Mr. Obispo carried out seedling care and monitoring workshops. This year, we will reinforce the learning gained the previous two years with existing Wounaan traditional knowledge. We'll be creating audiovisual digital materials in their native language that communicate traditional forest restoration practices “that we've been practicing for generations”, says Project Coordinator, Hector Osorio, This work is being carried out in collaboration with Dr. Julie Velasquez Runk, from the University of Georgia.





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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NativeFuture.org

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in your donation using
the form below.

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

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