

ECOSTUDIES INSTITUTE

2015 Annual Report

Understand



Restore



Conserve



Advancing bird conservation through science, restoration, and outreach



Understand

Knowledge is the building block of conservation. Our studies yield important information necessary to manage and conserve avian populations and their habitats.

Restore

With declining populations of many wildlife species, restoration of degraded habitats will be critical for maintaining viable populations into the future.

Conserve

We share our findings with land managers, policy makers, the general public, and youth so that together we can work to conserve and protect our environment.

OUR CORE BELIEFS

- Biodiversity and intact habitats and ecosystems are important to the well-being of humans.
- Sound science should guide the conservation, management, and restoration of birds and wildlife.
- Disseminating results of scientific research promotes informed decision making and public involvement in conservation.

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

This has been another great year for Ecostudies Institute. Once again we have successfully accomplished our mission goals both in South Florida and in the Pacific Northwest. This report outlines some of our major accomplishments in 2015 and gives you a look ahead to the work we have planned for 2016.

Ecostudies is thrilled to be involved in two new projects in the coming year. The first aims to identify conservation needs and restoration strategies for the federally endangered Florida grasshopper sparrow subspecies, and is led by Research Ecologist Dr. Tom Virzi. The groundwork for Ecostudies' second newest project, investigating the effects of estuary restoration on birds, began in late 2015, and surveys are underway to monitor the effects of dike removal in agriculture fields in north Puget Sound.

One of our long-term projects, which started in 2012, won't be continuing this year. I want to take a moment to thank the Mangrove Cuckoo team and all those involved in the Cuckoo sponsorship program and general outreach for their excellent and professional efforts over the past few years. These activities and the individuals who made them happen have been of great value to Cuckoo research and have yielded a better understanding of the life history dynamics and habitat needs for this elusive species. We are looking to find new sources of funding to continue our work with the Mangrove Cuckoo in South Florida

With exceptional gratitude for upholding our core principles—conserving birds and their habitats together with the help of the public and citizen scientists—we thank all the Ecostudies staff and volunteers for their hard work, dedication, and invaluable contributions to the organization and the communities in which they work.

We are also happy to welcome our esteemed Administrative Director, Suzanne Malakoff, to the Ecostudies team. She brings thirteen years of nonprofit experience as an administrative director and communications specialist to Ecostudies.

This upcoming year promises to be another exciting and productive one for Ecostudies. Thank you all so much for being a part of it!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Legrande".

Christa Legrande
Board President

Ecostudies Institute's mission is to understand and conserve native populations of birds and other wildlife and their habitats.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



Recovery of the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow

In Florida, our effort to monitor the Cape Sable seaside sparrow continues. This bird is a federally-endangered subspecies with a distribution restricted to the seasonally-flooded marl prairies of the Florida Everglades. Our goal is to provide information vital to aid recovery efforts and to contribute recommendations for the ongoing restoration of the Everglades ecosystem.

In 2015, we observed 22 breeding pairs of sparrows at our study sites in the Everglades and monitored 46 nests. It was a very dry year in south Florida which helped make it a relatively successful breeding season for the sparrow. In total, 31 nestlings survived to fledge this year. We also continued our long-term demographic study of the sparrow by banding 51 new birds, and we resighted 47 previously color-banded birds during our fieldwork. We are excited that we were able to successfully implement a new sampling technique to help us better estimate population density for this cryptic species that is so difficult to detect in the grassland habitat where it breeds.

In 2016, we will continue our demographic monitoring of the sparrow and refine methods to more precisely estimate range-wide population size.



Effect of Estuary Restoration on Birds

In the Puget Sound region, many estuarine wetland sites were diked to create farmland in the 1800s. Loss of these tidal wetlands was an important factor in the decline of many wildlife species, including birds.

We are currently monitoring the effects of estuary restoration on birds at two locations: Fir Island Farm and Leque Island in the Skagit and Stillaguamish River deltas. Our comprehensive approach is focusing on several bird taxonomic groups that use these areas from ducks to shorebirds to landbirds. With the amount of estuary restoration taking place in the region, the data collected from this project and in our annual shorebird count will be extremely valuable in evaluating the long term effects of those conservation actions on birds.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



In 2015, we began studying another federally-endangered subspecies, the Florida grasshopper sparrow. Like the Cape Sable seaside sparrow, this subspecies has a very restricted distribution inhabiting the dry prairies of central Florida. This subspecies, however, is critically endangered with perhaps fewer than 150 individuals remaining in the wild. We are excited to be contributing towards the ongoing conservation efforts to keep this subspecies from extinction.

Our efforts included an attempt to reestablish populations at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park through the use of song playback to attract sparrows to formerly occupied habitat. We also tested the use of remote recorders as a monitoring method to detect singing male sparrows. While our song playback study was not successful as of yet, we did successfully use the recorders to detect sparrows.

In 2016, we will follow-up with additional surveys to see if any sparrows settle in our study sites, perhaps in response to our song playback from the year before.



In November 2015, Ecostudies Institute coordinated its 4th annual citizen science shorebird monitoring effort in Puget Sound. The goal of this program is to develop a monitoring program for wintering shorebirds. The program also contributes to the Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey, a large-scale, flyway-wide shorebird monitoring effort.

With the help of 28 volunteers, we surveyed 22 sites, most of which were in North Puget Sound. We expanded our count to include a new area near the Canadian Border and hope to continue to increase the number of monitoring sites in the coming years. Tremendous thanks goes to the citizen scientists that volunteer their time to this project. Together, we have built a solid foundation of shorebird monitoring in Puget Sound that we plan to continue in the future.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



Since 2007, Ecostudies Institute has worked to reestablish breeding populations of the migratory Western Bluebird in the Pacific Northwest using a combined program of reintroduction, population monitoring, and outreach. Our goal is to ensure this iconic species can inspire future generations of children and adults and serve as an emblem for oak-prairie conservation.

During the 2015 field season, we translocated 12 adult Western Bluebirds and 29 nestlings to San Juan and Vancouver Islands. Those birds went on to breed and fledge successfully. We think most of these birds are now wintering somewhere in the Willamette Valley in Oregon or perhaps further south.

We intend to continue evaluating the success of this restoration program in 2016 through additional translocations and population monitoring.



For the past few years, we have been studying Mangrove Cuckoos in an effort to better understand this secretive and rare bird's habitat requirements and seasonal movements. We found that cuckoos require nearly 80 acres of mangrove habitat for their home ranges during the breeding season. Almost all of the locations where we detected Mangrove Cuckoos were on conserved land, highlighting the importance of land protection for the preservation of this species. We are especially proud of our educational outreach program centered on cuckoos that helped kids learn about about mangrove ecosystems and why scientists band and radio-tag birds and how information from these techniques helps us to advance conservation.

We want to thank all of the wonderful supporters of this project, both through the cuckoo sponsorship program and general outreach. The lessons learned and the connections made during this project have benefited cuckoos and their habitat. It is our hope that we can revitalize this program in the coming years with new sources of funding.

DONORS, VOLUNTEERS, AND PARTNERS

The board and staff of Ecostudies Institute wish to express their gratitude for the continued support of individuals and organizations who share our vision and make our work possible.

Donors



Mangrove Cuckoo Sponsors

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Whidbey Audubon Society
Wildlife Foundation of Florida

2015 FINANCIAL REPORT

Revenue

Government grants	\$ 211,659
Public-supported organizations	\$ 35,985
Individual donations	\$ 4,775
Total	\$ 252,419

Expenses

Project expenses	\$ 209,793
Operating costs	\$ 24,461
Total	\$ 234,254

Net assets as of 31 December 2015: \$40,182

Ecostudies Institute receives funding from individual donations, government agencies, foundations, and other nonprofit organizations. By using funds efficiently, we are able to direct most of our resources to our research and conservation efforts.



ECOSTUDIES INSTITUTE

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