

NEWS RELEASE



Released: October 22, 2012

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**ADIRONDACK CONSERVATION PROGRAM MAKES FIRST DONATION
TO CARIBBEAN EFFORT PROTECT GLOBALLY RARE SONGBIRD
Grant to Protect Winter Range for Bicknell's Thrush on the Island of Hispanola
Marks New Approach to Protect a Rare Songbird**

Images available at: <http://www.bicknellsthrush.org/news.html>

LAKE PLACID, NY – Launching a new effort to protect the rare Bicknell's Thrush, an alliance of North American scientists and conservationists is taking the unusual step of funding a team of Dominican biologists to work in the migratory songbird's Caribbean wintering habitat.

The Bicknell's Thrush Habitat Protection Fund at the Adirondack Community Trust has awarded a \$5,000 grant to Grupo Jaragua, whose biologists will study the thrush in forested mountains on the Dominican Republic's border with Haiti. The grant recognizes a need to protect this songbird across its entire range, particularly in its threatened winter destinations.

"The Adirondack Council is thrilled to be part of the important conservation effort and we congratulate Grupo Jaragua for its successful grant proposal," said Diane Fish, Acting Executive Director of the Adirondack Council. "We are proud to be among the partners who helped to establish this innovative fund."

The Caribbean effort sprung from a disagreement that started at Whiteface Mountain over the state's plan to expand and improve the Whiteface Mountain Ski Center. The Adirondack Council and other conservation groups objected to a portion of the plan that would have altered the bird's habitat on the slopes. Bicknell's Thrush has a very limited summer breeding range. The best-protected portions of it are on the tops of mountains inside the "forever wild" Adirondack Forest Preserve.

While a constitutional amendment allowed for the expansion of the ski center into adjacent Forest Preserve, the conservation groups persuaded the state to redraw its plans to avoid places where Bicknell's Thrush habitat exists. At the same time, the state's Olympic Regional

Development Authority and the conservation groups created a fundraising effort to help preserve habitat in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

“The Bicknell’s Thrush has two homes – one here in North America and the other in the Caribbean Basin,” said Chris Rimmer, executive director of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, a research group working to conserve the thrush. “Our efforts to protect this vulnerable songbird can’t stop at the water’s edge. We need to concentrate our work where the threats are most severe and imminent.”

Brown, speckled, and reclusive, Bicknell’s Thrush is one of North America’s rarest nesting songbirds. Each spring it makes a 1,200-mile journey north from only four Caribbean islands to breed in restricted high mountains and coastal forest sites in the northeastern United States and Canada. In early fall, the thrush begins a demanding return trip to the Caribbean region.

The songbird’s small population and fragmented distribution may compound its ability to withstand cumulative threats from charcoal production and unsustainable agriculture and forestry practices in the Caribbean, as well as climate change, mercury contamination and habitat loss in North America. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering listing Bicknell’s Thrush as a federally endangered species.

Grupo Jaragua, a non-profit conservation group based in the Dominican Republic, will use the grant to search for Bicknell’s Thrushes, map their habitat, and assess conservation threats in the southern Sierra de Bahoruco, a crucial wintering area for the songbird. Results from the work, which is planned to include volunteers from communities in and around the thrush’s habitat, will inform the effective conservation of dwindling forests in this region on the Haitian border.

During the past two decades, biologists have focused most of their research on Bicknell’s Thrush breeding grounds in the United States and Canada. The grant to Grupo Jaragua embraces a “full life-cycle” approach to conservation, a strategy researchers use for other migratory wildlife, such as Monarch butterflies and Atlantic salmon.

“Bicknell’s Thrush benefits when we work directly with partners on the ground in Hispaniola,” said Michael Burger, director of conservation and science for Audubon New York. “We hope this first grant inspires more donations to the fund so that we can continue innovative efforts to protect this remarkable songbird.”

Sixto Inchaustegui, a senior scientist with Grupo Jaragua, said the grant would allow his team to establish an essential local presence in a forest under heavy pressure from illegal agricultural expansion and charcoal production. “By better understanding Bicknell’s Thrush and its conservation needs,” he said, “Jaragua and our partners will more effectively tackle pressing issues that threaten all biodiversity in this sensitive region.”

“The grant was made possible by many donations to the Fund from corporations, organizations, and individuals who recognize that conserving local biodiversity may require supporting conservation efforts far from the northern forests,” said Burger.

With a world population estimated at 100,000 or fewer individuals, which is low for a songbird and troubling to researchers, Bicknell's Thrush has a corps of scientists and conservation organizations working on its behalf:

- **The International Bicknell's Thrush Conservation Group (IBTCG)** is an alliance of scientists, natural resource managers, and conservation planners advancing the study and conservation of Bicknell's Thrush through science and international cooperation. In 2007, IBTCG issued a conservation plan for the songbird that recognizes the need to work across its entire range. The report is available at:
<http://www.bicknellsthrush.org/conservation.html>
- **The Bicknell's Thrush Habitat Protection Fund** is a joint project of the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Audubon New York, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The Adirondack Community Trust (ACT) administers the fund and accepts donations at
<http://www.generousact.org/donate>