

# FINCA CÁNTAROS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION

environmental education is at the core of everything we do



2025  
Annual Report



Finca Cántaros  
Environmental Association

Dear friends, family, supporters, and allies,

As I reflect on Finca Cántaros's year, I can only say, what an incredible year of achievements it has been and how much I want to thank you for your generous support and interest in all the work we have done here. Our small but mighty team was able to grow our youth and community programs as well as increase conservation activities that support both wildlife and people.



As you will read in this report, in 2025, we expanded our Detectives de Aves program by reaching 184 students at 5 local elementary schools and 1 high school, fostering a deep appreciation of birds and their habitats, sowing the seeds for the next generation of local stewards. We banded birds and monitored bats, adding to the network of scientists studying them to improve conservation efforts across the Americas. And we reached more women through our Women Committed to the Earth program. I am proud to report on our new initiatives, such as a sustainable silvopastoral system showcasing trees and bird diversity in the agricultural landscape, and outreach to indigenous communities.

As you will read in the ensuing pages, our staff has worked tirelessly to plant and grow trees, improve banding skills, work with students, teachers, and members of the community to create spaces where people, especially women and youth, build capacity to restore and protect habitat biodiversity through hands-on environmental education initiatives.

I am proud of all we have achieved this year and I am sure you will be too as you read this report. For 2026, we look ahead with an eye towards deepening the work of our birds pillar. They will be a focus of our attention in 2026 and a way to energize all our stakeholders on long-term environmental sustainability. I am so grateful for your ongoing support and consideration.

With deep appreciation and gratitude,  
Lilly

## KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THIS SYMBOL

Through out this report you will see the symbol to your right. This tree represents our organization and the pillars that we focus our work on: forest landscape restoration, birds, and gender. While it's impossible to work on one pillar without overlapping with another, we have tried to group our accomplishments so you can distinguish our work and recognize that each pillar stands firmly on our foundation of environmental education.



# BIRDS

## Long-term Investment in the Youth of Coto Brus County

Finca Cántaros Environmental Association (FCEA) administers the BirdSleuth (*Detectives de Aves*) program, an environmental education program developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that aims to engage students in learning about birds, habitat, citizen science, and conservation projects that protect and/or create habitat for birds. This 10-lesson program is implemented in elementary and secondary schools, and this year it was conducted at 5 local elementary schools and 1 high school through bi-weekly visits.

We reached 184 students: 81 primary students and 103 secondary students bi-weekly visits to schools, and through a pilot collaboration with the Sabalito Natural Reserve, which generously funded visits of several high school classrooms to their site for a morning of “mini-modules” and birding. This model was a success and we hope to continue it next year.

Another exciting component of our BirdSleuth outreach this year was the extensive field-testing of new material focused on the Motus Wildlife Tracking System (of Birds Canada), as Finca Cántaros became the site of the second Motus tower in all of Costa Rica in 2020. We wrapped up the BirdSleuth season as always with visits to Finca Cántaros to facilitate tree GROWING activities, to give students the opportunity to help create and protect critical bird habitat.

This year was not without its challenges. Transportation and other logistics related to bringing students to Finca Cántaros is always difficult, and schools traditionally need financial support to make these activities happen. FCEA has been funding transportation as we believe in these important, meaningful experiences. As our organization and efforts grow, it is important that we find more sustainable ways to fill the gap of bringing students to FCEA for their hands-on experiences. Moving forward we aim to emphasize to teachers and schools alike that the classes our organization offers are not free. They represent an investment of time, energy and resources in terms of staff, material and more. Improved communication, coordination, and funding are imperative for continued success of this program.

Funding for this program comes in part from our supportive local partner, the San Vito Bird Club. Further, in collaboration with Swarovski Optik, part of the team of *Detectives* instructors worked with the children of the Los Mogos community school, where the Swarovski Optik Rainforest property is based.

*Students participating in the Detectives de Aves outreach conducted in local schools by Finca Cántaros instructors learn about migratory species such as the Red-eyed Vireo (photo by David Rodríguez), the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, and how to use binoculars!*



## More MoSI Bird Banding with Osa Birds and Holly Garrod

In February 2025, with the support Finca Cántaros, Osa Birds and the San Vito Bird Club, María Sandí and Yolanda Rodríguez traveled to the Dominican Republic to participate in a bird banding training led by Holly Garrod, NABC-certified bander and ornithologist. During our MoSI bird banding pulses they applied all the amazing knowledge gained.

In March we held our first three bird banding pulses for 2025. With confidence and skill, María and Yolanda carefully extracted birds from mist nets, took key measurements, and recorded valuable data, contributing to vital monitoring efforts. Their training in the DR has strengthened their expertise, and we're thrilled to see them putting it into practice here in Coto Brus.

On behalf of Finca Cántaros Environmental Association, Osa Birds and Holly Garrod, we encourage you to check out the new page on our website dedicated to data sharing and collaboration: <https://fincacantaros.org/bird-banding-data/>



Holly Garrod delights future bird banders.



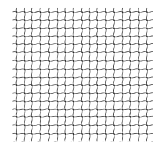
**16 DAYS**



**89 HOURS**



**3 MONTHS**  
(March, June, November)



**88 METERS OF NET**

### Birds By the Numbers

Bird counts are crucial because birds are key indicators of the ecosystem health. This information also helps scientists understand their population trends, habitat needs, and what threats they might be facing along at home and on some of their migratory pathways. Finca Cántaros integrates the community in this effort to foster appreciation of birds, conduct citizen science projects, and contribute to a world-wide effort to better understand birds.

This year we conducted 6 bird counts in Bosque Mágico as part of our forest restoration research projects in collaboration with Dr. Rebecca Cole of ETH Zurich.

Additionally, for the fifth consecutive year, AAFC has joined forces with local organizations and institutions, including the Organization for Tropical Studies, the San Vito Bird Club, and Turibrus, to organize the fifth Christmas Bird Count in Coto Brus. This year, the event took place on December 20 and brought together birdwatchers from all over the country. Ten strategic birdwatching routes were conducted covering different areas and habitats within the county.

## TOP FOUR BANDED SPECIES



### IN THE FIELD

207 Banded Birds

389 Total Captures

91 Total Recaptures

74 Total Species

## In the Spotlight of the Swarovski Optik Ad Campaign

Binoculars offer a window into a world that is hard to see close up. Having amazing tools that we can share with the community builds a love and appreciation of nature. Finca Cántaros and Swarovski Optik's share a commitment to sustainability and community making this a true partnership. Swarovski Optik's purchased 115 hectares of rainforest in the Osa Peninsula—about two hours from San Vito, Costa Rica, where FCEA is based—to engage in hands-on conservation. Our team has had the pleasure of leading environmental education programs with local children who live near the Swarovski Optik Rainforest. We are excited to grow this collaboration and expand our community outreach with Swarovski Optik along with other local organizations in the years ahead.



Check out the Swarovski Optik ad Campaign [here!](#)



Top: Attaching a nanotag transmitter on Swainson's Thrush  
Bottom: Lesson's Motmot (*Momotus lessonii*), by David Rodríguez

## Bridging Birds and Countries with Motus

In 2025, we were grateful for two generous donations that will allow us to advance our work with the Motus Wildlife Tracking System and with our long-term bird banding program. The Menunkatuck Audubon Society generously supported the purchase of Lotek nanotags that we will deploy during our first bird banding pulse of 2026 on Chestnut-sided Warblers along with other Neotropical migrant warblers. This effort will engage the young women on our bird banding team in hands-on conservation science research. Further, we were grateful to our donor Jon Snipper for purchasing three new mist nets for our bird banding efforts, without which we could not effectively and safely catch and band the great diversity of resident and migrant species.

In 2026, FCEA aims to recruit and train more young local women in taking on the dual roles of bird banders who are also capable of deploying Motus tags, as well as Detectives instructors who can explain the importance of long-term monitoring through banding and Motus to local youth.

### MOTUS IN NOT JUST FOR BIRDS

We are on the cutting edge of Motus technology, becoming among the first to deploy nanotags on bats in Costa Rica.



This year we hosted our very first virtual bird banding session with members of the Menunkatuck Audubon Society.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION  
& COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
CORE TO EVERYTHING WE DO

# FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

## **Finca Cántaros Grows**

In 2025, the Finca Cántaros property expanded by acquiring 55 hectares with a land purchase from the Sansonetti family, and later an additional 10 hectares from the Rojas family.

The first acquisition, through the Sansonetti family, connects to the original Finca Cántaros property. The acquisition was made possible thanks to the family's much-reduced asking price, in a demonstration of their sincere commitment to conservation in Coto Brus.

"I have always wanted our original property to return to its natural state", said Cecilia Sansonetti. "Our family looks forward to seeing the results of the Asociación's restoration work", she added.

Further, this acquisition is an important link in the AmistOsa Biological Corridor as the Asociación will be engaging with the Coto Brus community to restore the existing degraded cattle pasture back to premontane wet forest. This kind of project helps restore flora and fauna, fight climate change, and will help create a green lung for Coto Brus that will be enjoyed by all. We are grateful to the Sansonetti family, and particularly Cecilia Sansonetti, for their commitment to protecting the environment by agreeing to preserve this important piece of land in perpetuity, and we look forward to working with the community to preserve the land and provide the community with additional environmental education initiatives.

In July 2025, we celebrated another land acquisition of 10 hectares that connects an existing Finca Cántaros project called "Bosque Mágico" (Magic Forest) with a neighboring family's conservation project "Bosque Micelio" (Mycelium Forest). With numerous sectors of the community, including the Bosque Micelio's owners, the Women Committed to the Earth, and staff from the local Bank of Costa Rica branch, we planted 500 trees to create a contiguous strip of land for greater biological connectivity!



*Two families committed to growing our land, our community, and our restoration efforts.*

## Forging New Partnerships to Complement Forest Landscape Restoration Work

As much as we are passionate about adding as many trees to the landscape as possible with the engagement of community members, we believe it is just as critical to include agroforestry in our portfolio of Forest Landscape Restoration projects. This doesn't mean we are turning away from trees, since by definition, agroforestry simply refers to trees in agricultural landscapes. That's why we have established a sustainable silvopastoral system to showcase how cattle and biodiversity can coexist on the landscape.

This past year, we brought together a focus group of local ranchers interested in implementing sustainable ranching practices, and in connecting to carbon finance projects that will eventually allow them to earn income as a result of environmentally friendly cattle management.

This effort was a success because of the collaborations of two FCEA members: Ricardo "Beto" Calderon, our foreman, local rancher who is now managing his head of cattle on one of our properties. Karla Esquivel, our resident artist who painted our educational signage about the five key components of the sustainable silvopastoral system: 1) rotational grazing, 2) water access in each pasture, 3) a creek or other water source fenced off from cattle, 4) forage banks (in our case we have cultivated *Tithonia latifolia*), and 5) living fences of tree species that attract birds. Staff efforts like these not only strengthen the efforts to restore the forest at and around FCEA, it brings together the community and blends conservation, agriculture, art, and community in building a sustainable landscape and livelihood.



*Director Lilly Briggs, her son Kai José, and Beto stand in front of Beto's cows in our sustainable silvopastoral system.*

### Planting (And Growing!) Hundreds Of Trees

In 2025, we planted over 600 trees with diverse sectors of the community, from BirdSleuth students to the Women Committed to the Earth, to neighbors in our community of Linda Vista, to employees at local businesses.

University students participating in Organization for Tropical Studies courses also planted trees at Finca Cántaros while learning about the importance of community in forest landscape restoration.

WE DON'T JUST PLANT TREES. WE GROW A FOREST



# MORE THAN BIRDS

## Sustainable Livelihoods That Support Biodiversity and Engage Regional Ngäbere Indigenous Communities

In 2023, FCEA hosted a series of 12 workshops in collaboration with local organic farmer, Randy López, owner of Finca Orgánica Tinamastes. These workshops focused on organic agriculture techniques that are also highly beneficial and effective in forest landscape restoration projects, given that cultivating trees in a tree nursery is indeed the same as the cultivation of any crop. This year, we were able to continue working with Randy on a series of 4 workshops focused on a burgeoning theme in agroforestry: the use of bamboo for sustainable family livelihoods. We collaborated with Cultura Kare, which aims to honour and preserve Ngäbere indigenous cultural and agricultural practices. These workshops engaged 15 individuals from Ngäbere communities.



Randy López teaching a workshop on sustainable livelihoods with the use of bamboo (Randy in the center with bamboo).

Things that go bump in the night are cool, not scary!

## Night Walks

Our environmental education program “Night Walks” is another opportunity for the whole community to explore flora and fauna, but the focus is on nocturnal diversity. Nocturnal wildlife often goes unnoticed or unappreciated, or even feared or hated in the case of animals such as bats and snakes.

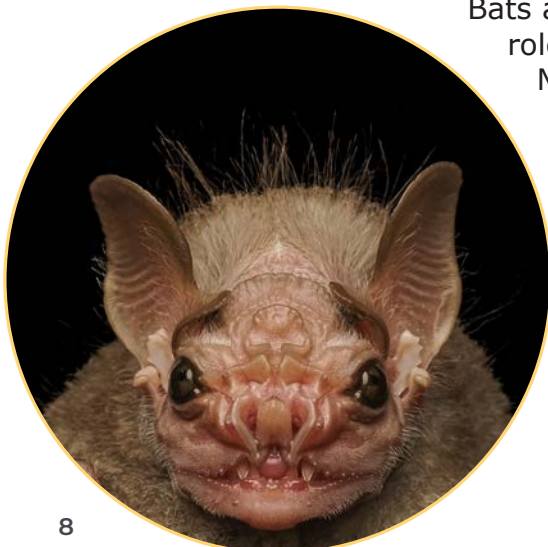
We held 12 free walks and hosted over 80 participants to observe special nocturnal species like ocelots and Common Potoos.



## Reactivating Bat Monitoring With Our Monteverde Bat Jungle Collaborators

This year, we have held a special Night Walks to highlight bats. We were joined by bat experts Wim (“Vino”) de Backer and Mauricio Valverde of the Monteverde Bat Jungle, who monitored bat populations at Finca Cántaros by setting up several mist-nets and taking data on each individual bat caught before releasing them safely back into the night.

Bats are incredibly important to forest ecosystems, playing key roles as pollinators, seed dispersers, and natural pest controllers. Many tropical plants rely on bats for regeneration, while insect-eating species help control mosquitoes and agricultural pests. We captured 12 individuals, representing 7 species (*nectarivorous*, *frugivorous*, and *insectivorous*). Since 2021 we have detected 56 different species of bats at Finca Cántaros, compared to 19 species in all of Canada.



Wrinkle-faced bat (*Centurio senex*). David Rodríguez

# GENDER EQUALITY

## Engaging the Women Committed to the Earth Group in the Photovoice Research Process of Conserva Aves

Conserva Aves is an initiative led by American Bird Conservancy, Audubon Americas, BirdLife International, Birds Canada, and RedLAC, with support from the Government of Canada. This past year we conducted a collaborative “photovoice” research process, a participatory method that uses photography and storytelling to highlight the voices of those involved, with Birds Canada and the Conserva Aves Initiative, which included a special visit by Felipe Del Castañeda (Birds Canada) and Noémie Ducos (Audubon Americas).

The collaboration began with a virtual workshop, during which Felipe explained how photovoice works and why it is so powerful as a research tool. It gives people a medium through which to open up about their perspectives and experiences related to the research question. Next, two focus groups met in-person at Finca Cántaros on four occasions (two per group) to share photographs, stories, and reflections aimed at deepening the research topic: women’s experiences in conservation. The women in the focus groups formulated their own questions about the subject. These testimonials provide a framework for developing new plans and strategies to address the interconnected challenges of environmental degradation and the need to achieve gender equality.

## Creating a Safe Space for Woman

The Women Committed to the Earth program at Finca Cántaros creates a safe space for women to connect, support one another and learn about biodiversity, forest landscape restoration and environmental art. The group meets every Saturday morning, and two sessions a month, we are honored to have Mónica Guerrero, a psychologist who works with the National Institute for Women, lead gender-focused roundtable discussions.



*Women Committed to the Earth participants engaged in the photovoice process. Above: Birding at FCEA Photos by Lilly Briggs*



## COLLABORATION CORNER!

### Partnering with Cornell University

It was such a pleasure to have Dr. Amanda Rodewald of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and her PhD student, Jenna Brewer, at Finca Cántaros in January 2024, setting up Jenna's research on Finca Cántaros sites such as "Bosque Mágico" or the Magic Forest. Jenna was here until March, researching birds and forest restoration efforts, including the influence of pest control and microclimates. She will return for two more field seasons to complete this project.



### We Have Upgraded! Check Out Our Improved Website

We are always honoured to work with the talented videographer Jenn Lee, who was with us this past July to film the full breadth of Finca Cántaros Environmental Association's projects. Jen worked with FCEA Communications Director Robin Pascoe to create this wonderful feature video. A special shout-out to Debra Reynolds of the science communication consulting firm Chirp & Tell Communications for creating the fabulous tree analogy and graphic.



### Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Workshops

This past year, FCEA hosted 3 macroinvertebrate workshops for nearly 100 participants that received training on how to correctly collect, identify and handle individuals and how to determine the health of a body of water.



*Woman Committed to the Earth participants attending macroinvertebrate workshops. Adults and children alike delight in discovering who is in the water. Photos by Lilly Briggs*

# STAFF



Lilly Briggs, PhD, Founder & Director



David Rodríguez, MSc, Co-Director and Resident Biologist



Karla (Lita) Esquivel, Head of Environmental Art and Women Committed to the Earth

## New Degrees Lead To New Ideas And Projects!

Congratulations to Co-Director and Resident Biologist, David Rodríguez, for his hard work earning a Masters in the Conservation of Wildlife and Biodiversity from UNA (Costa Rica's National University) in May 2024. Also in May, FCEA Founder & Director Lilly Briggs completed the online Tropical Forest Landscapes (TFL) certificate program through Yale University's Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative. It was an incredibly fruitful experience, connecting with the experts teaching the course, as well as practitioners and students from across the tropical forest landscapes of the world. The most impactful aspect of the course was the Strategies Module, particularly learning about establishing and creating training landscapes around agroforestry and silvopastoral systems. The practices learned are already being applied to the work of the organization.



María Sandí, Bird Bander and BirdSleuth Instructor



Magaly Quesada, Bird Bander and BirdSleuth Instructor



*Charming Hummingbird. David Rodríguez*



Maribel Contrera, Head: Women Committed to the Earth Tree Nursery



Jeffrey Torres, Head of Security and Night Walks



Eugenia Arias, Head of Cleaning



Maintenance crew from left to right: Adrián Zamora, Maintenance Team; Alexis Zamora, Maintenance Team; and Ricardo "Beto" Calderón, Head of Property Maintenance



Infrastructure crew from left to right: Reynaldo Obregón, Infrastructure Team; Jordan Leon, Infrastructure Team; and Roberto Chaves, Head of Infrastructure



Yenny Céspedes, Head of Organic Compost Production



Jeisson Figueroa, BirdSleuth instructor, with student



Peter Wendell, BirdSleuth instructor, with students



Roció Seisdedos, MSc and Biologist, Founder of the Network of Community Tree Nurseries (close collaborator)



Our amazing interns from left to right: Ameya Shivakumar, from India; Bianca Tenconi, from Italy, and Hanedy Vergara, from Mexico

**THANKS FOR  
FOLLOWING OUR  
JOURNEY IN 2025.  
SEE YOU IN 2026!**



*The entire Finca Cántaros team*