

Birds do so much for us— *What are you willing to do in return?*

By Mary Rose

"Birds should be saved for utilitarian reasons; and, moreover, they should be saved because of reasons unconnected with dollars and cents... The extermination of the Passenger Pigeon meant that mankind was just so much poorer... And to lose the chance to see frigate-birds soaring in circles above the storm, or a file of pelicans winging their way homeward across the crimson afterglow of the sunset, or a myriad of terns flashing in the bright light of midday as they hover in a shifting maze above the beach—why, the loss is like the loss of a gallery of the masterpieces of the artists of old time."

Theodore Roosevelt, 1916

While it is our ethical and moral responsibility to save birds from extinction, the harsh reality is that today many decisions surrounding which species to focus on is directly related to dollars and cents. Engaging in work to prevent extinction costs money, but it does not have to be big money. Many projects out there looking for funding need relatively small amounts and the benefits of funding such projects can be huge.

Imagine funding a project designed to gather base information, which in turn leads to funding for a much larger conservation effort. It is entirely possible, and everyone in the bird community can participate. The plan can be very simple. It's a great public relations move for your group or organization, and the intrinsic reward the participants will get is well worth the effort.

Fundraising can be a lot of work depending on your techniques, but it does not have to be. Simple fundraisers can be

done that achieve your goals. We'll explore one such effort step by step that was completed successfully in 2011. The fundraising plan was simple, did not require a large amount of time or effort, and best of all raised international awareness of the plight of a particular species.

Why raise money for birds? And can any one person make a difference? The answer is a resounding yes to both questions! Everyone can raise funds for endangered species—all you really need is a top quality product to support your efforts and the will to go out and sell those products to benefit your chosen project.

Whether you are raising funds for your own organization or an external project or organization, your choice of product needs to be relevant. The product also needs to be of good quality and easily accessible. You need to have specific project or organization information available for all participants in your fundraising effort.

Choose a dollar target and provide a breakdown of how



PHOTO BY SUSANA CABAN

Examples of some custom orders include a male and Female Alexandrine and Resplendent Quetzal.

the funds will be spent. Offer to provide a thank you note and an update to all donors of the fundraising results after your campaign is complete. This can be as simple as a thank-you email with the total amount raised during the fundraising period.

This communication with your donors is a vital part of the process. It's well worth doing as you will receive so many positive comments back and it also helps to reinforce the fact that one person's contribution can make a huge difference overall. This will also keep the momentum going for any future fundraising efforts.

People want to know that they are a valued member of a team that made a difference. They are winners and they need to feel it.

When looking at what project or organization you are going to support, it's extremely important to do your research to ensure that funds will be spent as intended. It is also important to consider public relations and goodwill attached to your efforts.

If you are an organization providing a specific service for birds or conservation, then fundraising for your own organization makes perfect



PHOTO BY MARY ROSE

The Christmas Giving Tree, above, and donor card recognition, at right.

Helping to Secure the Future of the Tucuman Amazon in Bolivia

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sense. If, however, you are an organization such as a bird club then it could be in your best interests to split profits between your own organization and another worthy project. Why, you ask? Goodwill.

Holding a fundraiser that also benefits a separate project from your organization, draws a lot of attention. Not only are promotions carried out through your club, but your club is promoted through the project you are supporting.

If you pick a project centered on conservation, you also have the opportunity to educate. It is the perfect scenario for a bird club to gain recognition and contribute to the community at the same time. In today's era of declining bird club membership, this is particularly useful in rebuilding and engaging new members.

Now for the details of a

really simple fundraiser tested in 2011 in Arizona.

Introduction

This is something everyone could do and the details are intended as an example of what can be done relatively simply. It did not take a lot of time to put together or manage throughout the fundraising period. This is a critical point, since most clubs are operated by volunteers who have limited time.

The preparation and order placement was one month, and the sales period was only one month, for a total of two months from start to finish. This project was managed by one person.

Project Selection

For this test year, I picked a deserving project needing relatively small amounts of funding for the year. Asociación

Armonía's Tucuman Amazon pilot project in Bolivia was selected. It needed \$1,300 to establish a project to study habitat requirements for breeding the Tucuman Amazon. The \$1,300 would cover the installation of 10 nestboxes in the habitat used by the Tucuman's and monitoring of the nestboxes for a year. It included the assessment of demand for natural nesting cavities, determination of nesting size and survival of broods at all stages of development in both artificial and natural nesting cavities.

Timeline

1. Locate a suitable project to support. Request a full proposal including financials, which details how funds will be spent, and review and validate information.
2. Decide on the dollar goal amount, pricing of

products (carved ornaments in this case), and timeline for activities for the entire project from beginning to end.

3. Identify and contact businesses that are willing to "host" a donation tree and participate in the fundraiser. Inform them of the project start and end dates and how money will be handled. No checks were collected, only cash and credit cards.
4. Decide on the bird species to be carved as ornaments. Provide specific positioning of bird ornaments (e.g. wings spread, etc.).
5. Order ornaments in accordance with target dollar amount to meet the project funding needs and projected expenses, if any.
6. Create donor cards for each ornament to recognize the donor, and place with

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ornaments on tree. (These cards will be filled out by donors when they purchase the ornaments, and hung back on the tree.)

7. Pick up inexpensive artificial Christmas trees for displaying the ornaments. I was able to purchase these at one of the big box stores for about \$20 each. I chose six foot tall, and 36" in diameter at the bottom.
8. Create signage to inform people about the project each tree supports. A sign was securely attached on top of the Christmas tree.
9. Install trees with ornaments at host businesses. One tree "traveled" and was set up at bird club meetings, and taken down and repacked at the end of the evening
10. Monitor sales and provide updates throughout the selling process. Businesses want to know how close the project is toward reaching the goal dollar amount—updates can help drive sales to reach the goal. Most will work hard to help reach a reasonable goal.
Example: Speaking to a business hosting a donation tree: "We are \$200 away from our goal. Do you think you can sell 10 more ornaments for us in the next week?" Restock trees with more ornaments in host businesses as needed.
11. When the sale period is complete, update donors as to overall results- keeping them in the loop creates good will.
12. Remit funds to the



PHOTO BY SUSANA CABAN

The full range of ornaments offered in 2011

nominated project. Issue press releases.

Products and Display

In late November 2011 I had 100 bird ornaments hand carved and took the ornaments to an avicultural conference along with project information and what funds would be used for. I placed the ornaments on a six foot artificial Christmas tree along with a tag which was to be completed by supporters of the program. The tree was called the "Christmas Giving Tree."

For a \$20 donation, donors had their choice of ornaments and completed the information card on the tree.

The information card was a way to thank the donors that provided public and visual

notice for their support of the program. The cards remained on the tree until the end of December in recognition of all donors.

In December I took the tree and ornaments to three bird club meetings and also installed a tree at one local avian vet's office. There were 10 different ornaments to choose from in 2011. Some custom orders were taken for other species.

About the Products

Each ornament was hand carved by an artisan in Puerto Rico. Because they were hand carved each piece was truly unique and had a personality all of its own. Ornaments ranged in size from 3.5 inches in length to 5.5 inches in

length excluding the cord, and of course the size of the ornament varied by the type of species. The ornaments were of very high quality—all hand carved and painted with the name of the bird engraved on the back. These ornaments were perfect for a fundraising effort as they were not something which could be found in retail stores.

Your product does not have to be ornaments, but if your product is unique and not available through regular retail stores, you create "demand," which multiplies the benefits for your chosen organization or project.

These ornaments generated a lot of demand. So much so that the donors were actually calling around to find the ornament of a particular bird they wanted, and then would drive to that other location to pick up the desired ornament.

Results

The result of this very simple fundraiser was that we achieved our target of \$1,300 and the Tucuman Amazons are getting their nest boxes and associated vital research for the entire year.

The test market for 2011 was very limited and there is a lot of opportunity for expansion, however with the simple efforts mentioned above I was still able to raise the necessary funds for the project. The biggest sellers in 2011 were the Hyacinth Macaw, Hawk-headed Parrot, African Grey, and Blue and Gold Macaw. Each of these sold out almost immediately.

I also had orders for other

species such as a male and female Alexandrine and a Resplendent Quetzal. As an indicator, a majority of the sales were from the bird club meetings and the tree in the local avian vet's office. Most people purchased two ornaments each with one person purchasing 10 at once. They were extremely popular.

Distributing the Money

Make sure at the outset that you have agreed how funds will be remitted to your supported project. Would they like cash sent or prefer a donation of specific goods? If you are arranging for the delivery of specific goods then make sure you factor shipping into your calculations.

For cash payments made overseas have full details on hand ready for a wire transfer and be sure to factor in any bank fees. For U.S.-based payments have full contact details and the appropriate address to send a check. Ask the supported project for a receipt indicating that funds or goods were received. This is particularly important if at a later date you are questioned on where funds went.

Promotions

News regarding fundraising efforts will only help to maximize funds raised. Look at all avenues for promoting your fundraiser and do not be afraid to ask for assistance in advertising. You may be surprised who will help you promote your efforts for little or no cost.

Several avenues of promotion are available. Take full advantage of opportunities

when ever possible. Suggested outlets for promotions include:

- Facebook, Twitter
- Your organization's website
- Supported project website
- Avian magazines
- Message boards and groups
- Newspapers, other news media—submit information about your fundraising efforts
- Conferences and bird marts

Sales Tips

Throughout the one month sales period in 2011, several sources to sell avian related fundraising products became apparent. Here is a suggested list of ways to sell your products for your chosen fundraiser:

- Local bird club meetings
- Avian veterinarian offices
- Online on your website
- Local bird stores
- Local feed suppliers
- Conferences and bird marts
- Birding festivals
- Tell all your friends—non-bird people purchased the ornaments, too.

Summary

It can be very easy to help raise funds for endangered birds in the wild as this example shows. Anyone can do this! In fact if we all made an effort to do a simple fundraiser like this each year, imagine the impact we could have overall!

Many small amounts can add up to large amounts supporting a worthy cause. As an organization running the fundraiser, there are also many other benefits for your

About Chirping Central

The idea for Chirping Central probably started in 2009, but it was not until August of 2010 when the idea became an obsession and I was convinced it had to be done. Many, many



hours later the website was actually launched in January 2011 and I hope that you like the results.

So how did this all come about? Basically I wanted to do more. Over the years I have read about many avian conservation projects, sought them out online, attended conferences, and met a couple of researchers

along the way. Back in 2006 I started sponsoring speakers to present at events in the U.S. to generate interest in avian conservation and educate at the same time.

I thought this was the most effective use of the funds I had available to help spread the word and educate the maximum number of people—and it has worked well. But still I wanted to do more.

I look at these amazing creatures and their struggles to survive and I know there is more I can do. Combined, we do have the power to help achieve a successful outcome for these creatures, but we have to care. We have to know what is happening and remain aware, remain informed and part of the conversation.

Chirping Central LLC was formed to provide a venue for the conversation and also provide information about avian conservation projects, items of concern etc. This site is meant to be an information source, and I encourage all of you to actively participate in both providing information and being a reader of the information.

Chirping Central is all about the birds. This is the place where like minded “bird people” can network, make new friends, find old friends, and stay up to date on what is happening in the avian world. We endeavor to inform and raise awareness on a number of levels, but most of all we are about avian conservation—whether it be a Southwestern Willow Flycatcher or a Lear's Macaw, we are here to provide information, educate, raise awareness, and, I hope, make a difference in achieving a successful outcome for these species.

We hope that you will also come along on the journey as the only people who can make a difference for the birds are the ones who want to.

Happy chirping, from Mary Rose!

membership in terms of educational opportunities and recognition for your fundraising efforts. I strongly encourage all groups to get involved in raising funds.

Each of us really does have the power to make a

difference in the world. It's not that hard to do. You just need a plan and then follow through. Be creative, or pick products that have a universal appeal and just get out there and do it! Now, how far will you go to raise the funds?



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