

## Chapter 2

### Growth of the Society

Our membership was a bit complicated at first because we were members of Florida Audubon Society as well. Membership fees were paid in U.S. dollars and sent to Florida Audubon who would remit part to BAS. This lasted only until we became an independent society.

We had to adopt the charter of Florida Audubon as our constitution because we were a chapter, but could make our own Belizean bye-laws. On June 25, 1969, the BAS Board met in the Forest Department Belize City office to consider the proposed bye-laws. By August 18 the bye-laws were completed and sent to Russ Mason in Florida with the comment,

*We trust we have made a good job of it.*

Russell answered

*Your by-laws are mighty well done, quite thorough and comprehensive. . . We are glad matters are going so well for you. We are all anxious to get back to British Honduras to enjoy the cordial hospitality and to see some interesting birds.*

BAS members who had left the country and wished to continue their membership and persons who had come here on tours and were interested in the work of the Society could become Foreign Associates. Such a membership had no voting rights, but our Foreign Associates helped the BAS in many ways.

### First Annual General Meeting

The first BAS Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday, February 12, 1970, in St. Catherine Convent Auditorium. The following quote from the *BAS Bulletin* of February, 1970, gives the flavour of the discussions that occurred at that meeting:

*The meeting then went on to discuss projects for the coming year which had been presented on the agenda as follows:*

1. *A vigorous membership drive. We feel that our impact would be greater in proportion to a larger membership. Requests to Government will have a greater influence and*

*our influence on the attitude of the people of this country towards their wildlife and natural resources will increase with a larger membership.*

2. *A study of the pesticides problem as it is already developing here, with the hope that recommendations to Government, based on solid information, might be helpful.*
3. *Education programme on the game laws particularly aimed at inviting Government to train police personnel to act as game wardens, enforcing the game laws as they already do the other laws.*
4. *Further efforts to protect the Jabiru, jaguars, ocelots and Morelet's crocodile. These animals are under severe pressure and badly need help in order to survive.*
5. *Coral Reef Reserve project, which is already well on its way (Half Moon Caye)*
6. *Further efforts towards setting aside of Cayo Rosario and Cayos Pajaros for a breeding reserve for Roseate Spoonbills, Reddish Egrets and White Ibis.*
7. *Increased efforts in youth education.*
8. *Programme of requesting private landowners to set their land aside as "Wildlife Reserves" in cooperation with our Society. Many large owners have already indicated their interest in joining with us on such a project. This not only gives some of our species protected range, but is of considerable educational value.*
9. *Crooked Tree Lagoon Water Bird Reserve. This area, during the two months of severe dry, harbours almost our entire population of certain water birds. As more and more hunting and fishing camps for tourist trade develop in that region, it behooves us to protect these species at this time of year.*

*After some discussion, it was decided to work on all the above projects during the coming year; all members joining with the various committees and combining their efforts on each particular problem as it is dealt with.*

### Becoming Independent

Florida Audubon initiated the severance of the chapter relationship. Russ Mason had started several foreign chapters, but it was dif-

ficult for them to handle all these chapters. He had the idea to form a Pan-American society and several organizational meetings were held. The name Audubon was a difficult one for many of the peoples of our region, so the new organization was given a name that everyone could recognize, *Amigos de la Naturaleza* (Friends of Nature). It was decided that all *Amigos* chapters had to be independent societies. *Amigos de la Naturaleza* only lasted a couple of years, but it did facilitate the process of BAS becoming an independent Society.

*During the conference on Latin American conservation, the delegates of various chapters asked for a meeting to discuss administrative problems. As a result of that meeting, it was decided that the chapters' best interests would be best served by terminating their relationships with the Florida Audubon Society. . . . I wanted to let you know the Board did approve the new relationship. . . . I naturally regret the need to sever our long and happy relationship, but want to remind you that we are ready, willing and anxious to assist you in any way possible in the years ahead. (letter from Hal Scott, Executive Director of Florida Audubon Society, April 23, 1973)*

## BAS Logo

Diane Weyer designed the BAS logo, which records a common occurrence at Half Moon Caye. A magnificent frigatebird, locally known as “man-o-war,” in hot pursuit of a red-footed booby returning from a long day of fishing far out at sea, seeks to make the booby drop its catch. The frigate will then skillfully seize the falling morsel, leaving the hapless booby to fly home with nothing to feed its chick. However, frigates and boobies have coexisted at HMC for a very long time.

## Christmas Bird Counts W. Ford Young

Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) are controlled by the National Audubon Society in the United States and the results of individual counts are published each year in the journal *American Birds*. At present, CBCs are organized and reported by local Audubon Societies in Canada, the USA,



Mexico, Central America, Northern South America and the Caribbean.

A local CBC covers a 24-hour day in an area consisting of a circle 15 miles in diameter and is held annually during a period of about two weeks designated by the National Audubon Society and including the Christmas Holidays.

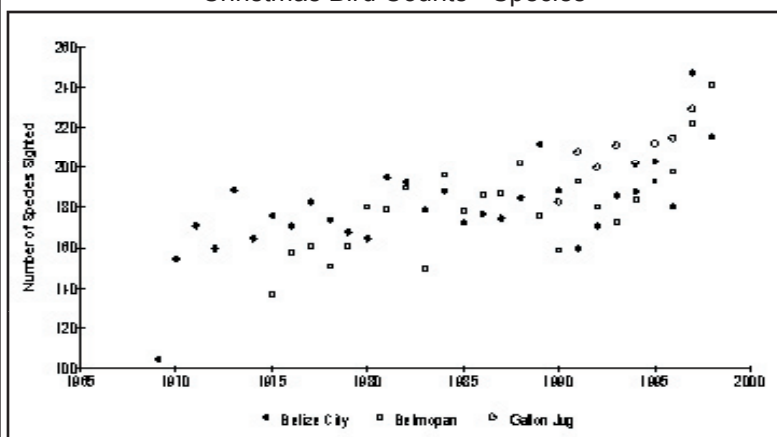
The local Society appoints a compiler who organizes the various parties to participate in the count, assigning them to certain parts of the count area. Then the compiler finishes a tally of species and the number of birds in each species for submission to the National Audubon Society. Also included is a list of species seen in the count area during the count period, but not on count day.

This report also gives a description of the count area including location, type of terrain, any body of water, the weather condition, the number of parties and names of participants, as well as the total party hours and miles broken down into those spent on foot, in vehicles and in boats. Ford Young was appointed compiler and sent the first reports for 1969 and 1970 to the Florida Audubon Society. Subsequent reports were sent directly to the National Audubon Society.

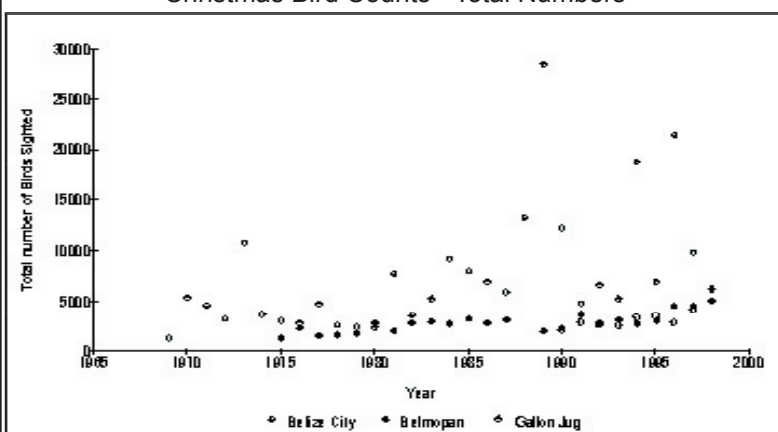
The first count area established in Belize was centered about three miles north 34 degrees east of the village of Burrell Boom and was referred to as the Belize City count area. It included the old Northern Highway from mile 8 to 24, sea coast from 3 miles NW of Belize River mouth to 3/4 of a mile beyond Potts Creek mouth, Bermudian Landing road from Burrell Boom to 3/4 of a mile beyond Sebastian Bridge, Mussel Creek from 1 3/4 miles above Sebastian Bridge to the Belize River, the Belize River from Lime Walk to 3 miles above Haulover Bridge, Salt Creek Estate, Tennessee Agriculture, Belize Offshore Growers, airport area, Ladyville, Sand Hill and the Sanatorium 2 miles north of Hattieville.

The largest number of species recorded in any Belize City count was 212 and the smallest number was 160. The maximum number of birds seen on a count was 28,512 and the lowest number was 2,418. The large number of birds was due to encountering the migration of the Tree Swallow which could be seen in the thousands along the Northern Highway. The number of species and birds seen would also depend on the number of participants and the weather.

Christmas Bird Counts - Species



Christmas Bird Counts - Total Numbers



Young remained compiler through 1986, but later due to illness could not continue the rough ride in the pickup. The job of compiler was then taken over by Lydia Waight and Meg Craig, followed by Dr. Douglas James and finally by Mick Craig who has remained compiler.

The second CBC to be established in Belize was known as the Belmopan count area and centered 2.25 miles east of mile post 49 on the Hummingbird Highway. It included Belmopan, Guanacaste Park, Caves Branch and Sibun cacao plantation, the Western Highway from Beaver Dam Creek to Camalote, parts of the More Tomorrow and Never Delay Roads, and the Hummingbird Highway from the Western Highway to Silver Creek.

The sequence of compilers was the same as for the Belize City count. The lowest number of species identified was 137 and the highest 195. The smallest number of birds seen was 1,375 and the largest, 3,795.

A third Christmas Bird count, with its center at the village of Gallon Jug, was established in 1990 by Bruce Miller, compiler. It included Laguna Seca, the south end of the Booth's River escarpment, Sylvester's camp and the north end of Chan Chich Creek. Except for a cleared area of about 2,000 acres around Gallon Jug, the balance consists of Tropical Moist Forest with access on foot along old logging trails opened by Belize Estate and Produce Co. Ltd., many years ago. This count area has the advantage of supporting many forest birds not normally found in the other two count areas.

The number of species recorded in this count area has varied, from 183 to 208, with the number of birds recorded ranging from 2,183 to 2,819, as can be seen in the graphs on the previous page.

## The First Years

This letter from Eugene Eisenmann, Vice President of the International Council for Bird Preservation – Pan-American Section, provides a nice summary of the first five years of the Belize Audubon Society.

*I peruse with interest and admiration your Bulletin, which has appeared with regularity. The President's report of 1974 is one of which you may well be proud. Not only have you issued the Bulletin*

*with regularity and held frequent field trips, organized lectures and other educational activities, but you have been exceptionally effective in persuading the government of your country to set aside national parks and reserves. You are fortunate in having a government whose leaders are aware of the importance of reserving wild habitats and fauna for aesthetic, patriotic, as well as touristic and economic reasons. Your natural history postage stamps are among the most beautiful of any issued and it is of interest to know that a new issue of bird stamps and coins containing birds will soon appear. Let me congratulate the officers and members of the Belize Audubon Society for having made this relatively small organization one of the most vigorous conservation and ornithological societies in tropical America. (Letter from Eugene Eisenmann, 3 June 1975)*

The response from President James Waight was equally elegant:

*"We are very fortunate in having an active and interested group as members of our Board and I know that your recognition of the results of their efforts will be greatly appreciated. A great deal of credit must be given to Mrs. Lydia Waight, our very capable and efficient secretary who edits the monthly Bulletin. It was very gratifying indeed to receive your letter. I will be more than happy to bring it to the attention of the Board of Directors."*

During the next ten years, from 1975 through 1984, the structure and activities of the BAS remained essentially the same. The business of the Society was carried out by monthly meetings of the Board of Directors and the Annual General Meeting of the entire Society. Lectures by visiting scholars were held whenever opportunities arose. The work of the Society – environmental education, management of protected areas, and advocacy – was done by volunteers with donated equipment and materials. The BAS remained the only environmental organization in Belize.

### A Time of Change

The end of 1984 brought many changes to the BAS. It was the beginning of grant-funded projects to support the management of protected areas. Funds were obtained to open an office and hire staff. For the first time in its history, the Government of Belize changed when the opposition party won the election in December of 1984. Two proposed development projects for Belize brought international

controversy and attention, along with conflicts within the Society. Other environmental organizations were formed. In short, everything changed.

When Government changed in 1984, concerns were raised whether the new government would support Audubon. The invitation to the sixteenth BAS AGM was issued, along with the slate of officers proposed by the nominating committee. But many members raised concerns about the slate because most of the officers nominated were supporting the Crane game ranch project, which is described in detail in Chapter 3. The AGM was held as scheduled on February 19, 1985, but was adjourned until March 12, when a new slate was presented and elected. To resolve this crisis, James Waight served as President for one more year. The next year Dr. Victor Gonzalez was elected BAS President.

Some of the American expatriate members of the BAS Board formed a new society, the Belize Heritage Society. It was to be an umbrella organization that could respond quickly to environmental crises and to fund-raising opportunities, but it only lasted a few years.

Despite the expressed concerns, BAS worked well with the new government. Hon. Dean Lindo, the new Minister of Natural Resources, was very supportive of conservation in general. He established several reserves, including Hol Chan Marine Reserve, Guanacaste National Park, Blue Hole National Park and Tapir Mountain Nature



*Dr. Victor Gonzalez presides over the  
BAS Annual General Meeting of 1988.*



Reserve (then Society Hall Nature Reserve). The Cocks-comb Forest Reserve had already been declared as a No Hunting Area in 1984, but the people at the World Wildlife Fund wanted to support Cockscomb and they were concerned that the Forest Reserve status was not a very secure tenure because it could be dereserved. Then James Hyde, then Commissioner of Lands and Surveys found out that there was part of the Cockscomb Basin that had been leased and was not included in the Forest Reserve, so in 1986 Mr. Lindo declared that small area (3,600 acres) Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary.

### BAS Administrative Staff

By the end of 1984, BAS had received several grants to support the management of protected areas in Belize, but until the offer from the Massachusetts Audubon Society (MAS), none had included any support for general administration.

*Byron Swift has brought us the good news that MAS would be willing to provide funds for Belize Audubon Society to hire an executive staff person along with a small office and part time secretarial assistant, until we are able to provide these ourselves. As you know, this may take five or six years. This is an important step for the Belize Audubon Society, raising it above the purely volunteer stage.*

*The past two years have seen both the development of a great many environmental problems, and a number of opportunities to improve and expand conservation education, as well as to begin the work on a system of parks and wildlife reserves. This has created a real drain on our resources and your help will ease this considerably. . .*

*[Our priority objectives are:]*

*A. To establish protected areas and provide management for existing and proposed reserves, including*

- 1. Half Moon Caye ...*
- 2. Proposed Reserves. Three large reserves, Crooked Tree Reserve, Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Reserve and Bladen Rainforest Reserve, have been proposed to the Belize Government. . .*
- 3. Sites for future reserves. . . [following list].*
- 4. Manatee Reserve at Manatee Lagoon*
- 5. Mussel Creek Wildlife Reserve (for tapir, Morelet's crocodile, wood storks, boat-billed herons, and others)*
- 6. Bermudian Landing Village (black howler monkeys live here in and around the village in complete harmony)*

7. *Glovers Reef (large, and only, nesting colony of noddy terns in Belize)*
8. *Mangrove Forest Reserve at Temash River mouth*
9. *The Bald Hills (endemic palms, bromeliads and orchids in the valleys between these hills)*
10. *Gracey Rock area (cockpit karst limestone forest)*
11. *Saltwater Crocodile Reserve – two locations on Turneffe Reef and Lighthouse Reef*

*B. To expand and improve our conservation education programmes. We will be receiving help, both from WWF Norway and from RARE, Inc., during the coming year for this programme. We hope to improve our slide shows for the schools, start a poster programme for the schools, and expand our newsletter and distribute it to the primary schools, as well as to the secondary schools, which we are currently doing.” (Letter to Dr. Gerard A. Bertrand, MAS President)*

The BAS Office at 49 Southern Foreshore opened January 2, 1985, and Walter (Mickey) Craig was employed as part-time Executive Director. A year later MAS announced a five-year commitment of increased support, allowing for a full-time Executive Director.

*BAS has come a long way since the 1960's, and is still growing in its efforts to meet challenges it has accepted. With financial help from the MAS and the Audubon Alliance, it has recently hired staff and opened an office.*

*The Alliance has pledged to support the office for up to five years, while a campaign to raise an endowment to support BAS' future operations is underway. . . .*

*“It is fortunate for Belize that there is a Belize Audubon Society,” says Dr. Archie Carr III of NYZS's Wildlife Conservation Society, “but it is the responsibility of governments all over the world to support parks...”*

*In the meantime, a firm foundation is being laid through the private activities of the Belize Audubon Society and its international collaborators. (The Biosphere No. 2, Spring, 1985)*

In April of 1987 a group from MAS, including Dr. Gerard A. Bertrand and three MAS Board members, visited Belize and reiterated their support for the BAS. They said that this support was to help the BAS manage the established reserves.

But two months later MAS Vice President James Baird visited a BAS Board Meeting and expressed concern about BAS progress. By

the Fall of 1987 the level of funding from the MAS had been reduced and the Executive Director position reduced to half-time. BAS sent MAS a 19-page report that showed details on park management, 216% increase in number of members and 367% increase in income from memberships, and reported \$30,221.18 in the endowment fund.

But this was not satisfactory progress from the MAS point of view. The BAS had been proceeding on the basis of their objectives stated in the original proposal letter, but the MAS expected long-range planning. Following the January 19, 1989, BAS Board of Directors meeting, which James Baird attended, he sent a document describing MAS' long-range planning process for the BAS to use as a guide. However, the funding had already been withdrawn. A donation of \$1,000 from the Regent Insurance Company Ltd. prevented the closure of the office.

In March of the same year the MAS agreed to provide \$750 US a month to allow the BAS to keep an office open with clerical support, but without an Executive Director. In the meantime, MAS announced the formation of a new organization, Programme for Belize, which would manage the lands that MAS was prepared to purchase in Belize.



*(from left) Therese Bowman (Rath), Curtis Freese of the World Wildlife Fund-U.S., Lydia Waight, James Waight, and James Baird of the Massachusetts Audubon Society in 1987*

*[Programme for Belize] is intended to be an "umbrella" effort to help raise much greater financial and technical assistance for a variety of conservation and development work in Belize. (Letter from Bill Burley to "Friends in Belize," December 30, 1987)*

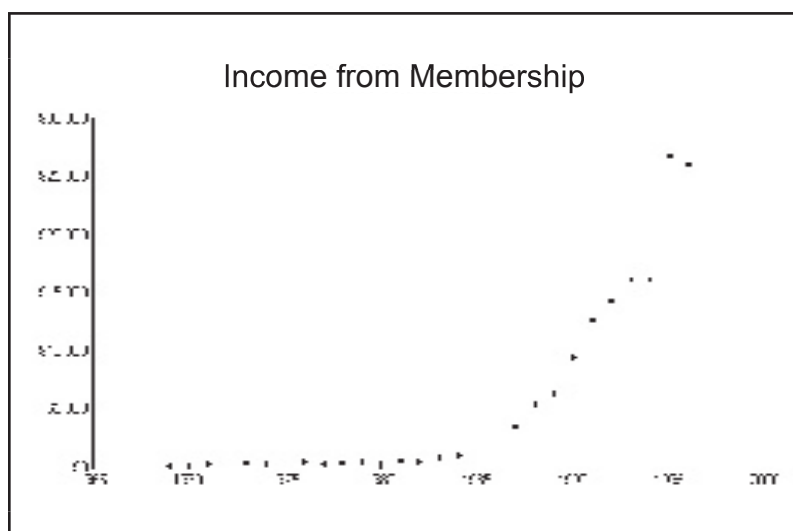
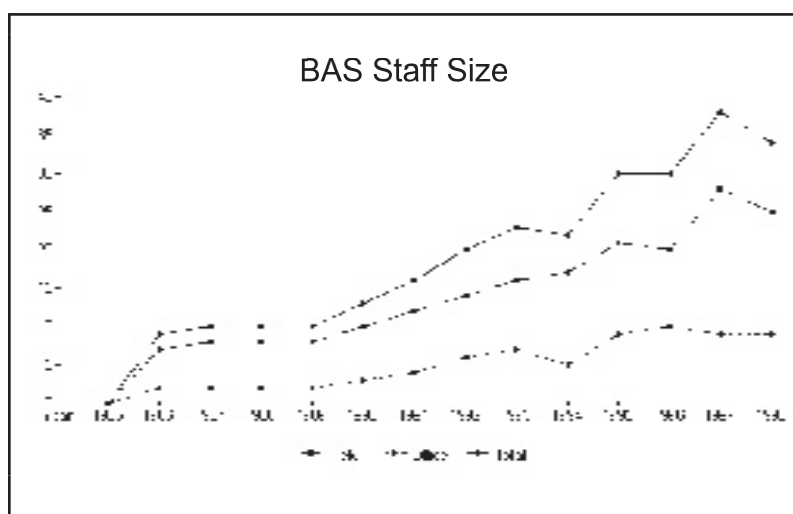
MAS made another contribution to BAS Administration. Through Programme for Belize, they provided the funds for the salary of a trainee, Mrs. Dolores Godfrey, who began on February 1, 1990, and became BAS' second Executive Director. Wild Wings Foundation provided the funds for a Protected Areas Manager, Osmany Salas, who began work in August of 1990. A joint project with the Coastal Zone Management Project (CZM) provided an Environmental Educator beginning in 1991. WWF supported the position for the first two years and then the CZM grant from the United Nations Development Programme's Global Environmental Facilities programme continued the support when it started up in 1993. In 1995 the position of Environmental Education Coordinator was created under funding from the Natural Resources Management Programme of US Agency for International Development and WWF-U.S. (NARMAP).

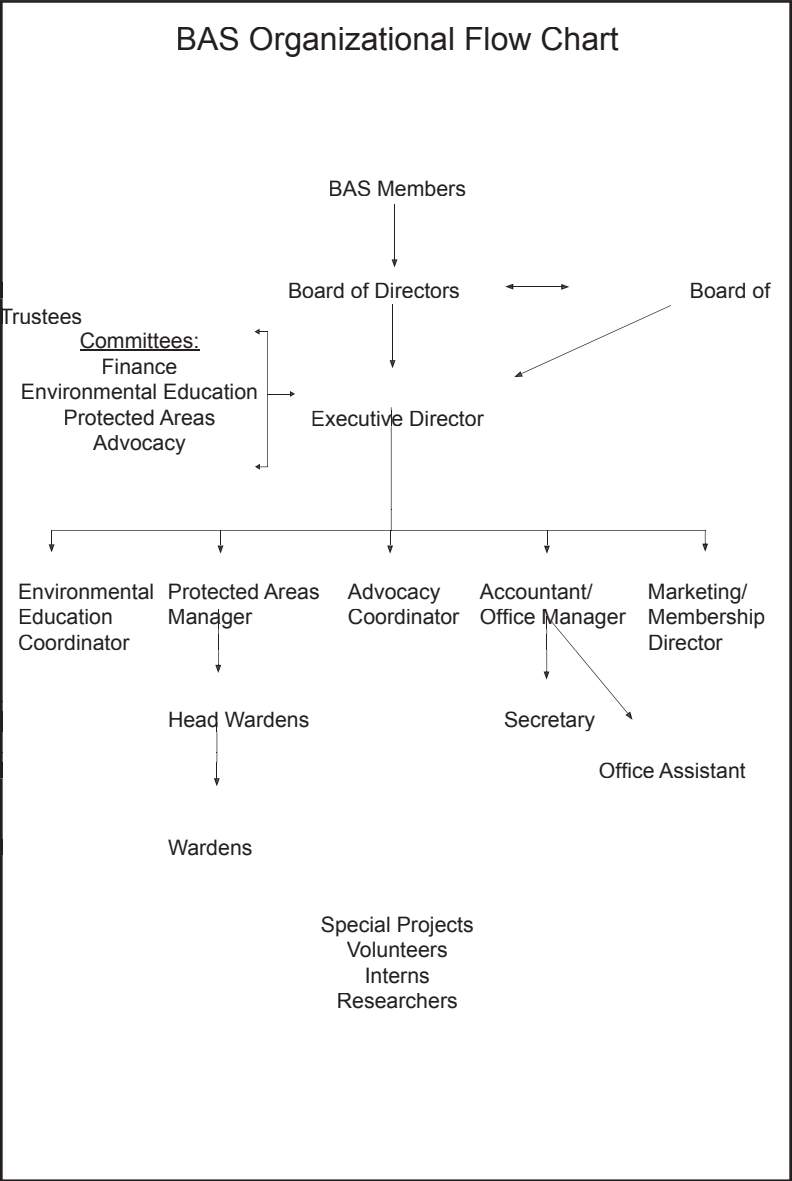
In 1993 Christine Anthony was appointed as BAS' first Accountant; Pedro Perez became the first Membership and Marketing Coordinator 1997; and Valdemar Andrade was appointed the first Advocacy Coordinator in 1998. The field and office support staff has grown proportionally, as can be seen in the graph on the next page.

### Organizational Structure of BAS

BAS Membership is open to anyone concerned with preserving our natural heritage. There are several categories of membership, including Foreign Associate for non-residents, Foreign Student, Family, Individual, Student, Supporting, Patron, Bronze, Silver, Platinum and Friends to the Parks. The first year there were 55 members and that number had doubled by 1981. Growth has been steady as can be seen by the graph of income from membership. Our present membership totals nearly 400 local members, and over 200 foreign associates.

The governing body of BAS is its Board of Directors, consisting of six officers, (president, two vice-presidents, two secretaries and treasurer), the immediate past-president and a maximum of eight other directors. The Board is elected at the annual general meeting for staggered two-year terms. In 1972, when BAS wanted to buy the area that became Guanacaste Park, their attorney told them that a membership club could not own property. So, they set up a Board of





Trustees, including Ford Young, James Waight and Meg Craig. That continued until 1990 when BAS became a limited liability company and the Board of Directors could represent the Society. Then in 1997 BAS created another Board of Trustees to manage the BAS Endowment Fund. The organizational chart of the BAS is shown on the previous page.

### BAS Chapters

The Cayo Chapter was formally established at a meeting in San Ignacio on November 26, 1990, with Dr. Victor Gongora and Mr. John Link as Co-chairpersons. The Placencia Chapter was inducted on January 8, 1994, at Placencia Village. Wade Bevier was installed as President.

### Financial Trials

The road has not been completely smooth for the BAS. Three losses occurred within one year. On February 18, 1989, Ford Young's office was burglarized and, since his secretary was BAS' Treasurer, some \$800 of BAS money was stolen. The next November a messenger forged \$3,000 worth of BAS checks and left the country before it was discovered. Then on February 8, 1990, the upstairs flat had a plumbing leak which flooded the BAS Office, destroying many files. Considerable damage was done to posters and publications.

In 1995 BAS met with a financial crisis, the resolution of which instigated a series of measures to put the Society on a more solid financial footing. The President's Report at the AGM explained the crisis and its resolution.

*In February of 1995 the four parks of GNP, CTWS, CBWS, and BHNP were in a critical financial position. As you are aware, the BAS has borne the full financial responsibility for the financing and management of these four areas and these funds were at an end. We approached the tourism industry as well as the Ministries of Natural Resources and Tourism and the Environment and appraised them of the seriousness and urgency of the situation. After a series of meetings the USAID pledged to temporarily assist with maintenance costs for six months. In order to ensure that we are not faced with this situation in the future, it was agreed that the following be established by May 31 (tonight) – entrance fees (to be used directly in funding the*

*parks); a more clearly defined management agreement between the BAS and the GOB with specific responsibilities for each; the establishment of the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, an in-country mechanism designed to fund the management of the natural and cultural resources of Belize. . . . Where are we on this? I understand the Statutory Instrument on the entrance fees has been signed; a draft of the management agreement is being put into legal language; and PACT legislation is ready for the Cabinet. (BAS President Therese Rath, 26th BAS Annual General Meeting, May 31, 1995)*

### Cooperation with the Government of Belize

BAS has had excellent cooperation from the Government of Belize throughout its history. Gift subscriptions to wildlife and conservation magazines were sent to the Chief Forest Officer and other Government officials. This provided the conservation point of view to those in the highest positions.

BAS lobbied the Government for the creation of the position of Conservation Officer. Lucilo Sosa Briceño was appointed the first Conservation Officer in June of 1971. We wrote to Mr. Sosa assuring him of our full cooperation and invited him to attend our meetings. We also requested that the Minister of Trade and Industry appoint a liaison officer, preferably someone living in Belize City, who would attend BAS Board Meetings. Lionel Gentle of the Forest Service, Belize City Division, was appointed Liaison Officer.

Government consulted us on matters relating to the environment, wildlife protection and developmental proposals. From the beginning BAS had an important role in the management of protected areas. As our requests for particular reserves were granted, our involvement in the management was expected. This arrangement was first formalized in 1984.

*In order to foster better management and control of the designated areas under the 1981 Acts the Minister of Natural Resources has directed as follows:-*

- 1) The Belize Audubon Society is authorized to work along with the Forestry Department of the Government of Belize in the protection and management of areas designated under the Forestry Act and the National Parks and Refuges Acts;*
- 2) The Belize Audubon Society may draft (or draw-up) management plans for government's approval and may implement such plans including the building of*



*structures and other works on land and may with the approval of the Minister appoint Wardens in this regard;*

- 3) *The Belize Audubon Society may not collect fees on behalf of Government. However, contributions including monetary contributions may be accepted and payment for any services such as the rental of facilities may be received;*
- 4) *The Government at any time may itself assume the duties of managing these protected areas.*

*(Letter from James V. Hyde, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, December 7, 1984)*

Responsibilities were further delineated in 1987.

*1. The Belize Audubon Society as a body, is authorized to work along with the Forest Department of the Government of Belize in the management and protection of any of the designated areas specified by the Minister until further notice;*

*2. After consultation with the Chief Forest Officer, the Belize Audubon Society may draft management plans which may be implemented after the Minister's approval has been granted. The said management plans shall make provision for the building of structures, construction of roads and trails and any other form of alternation to the land or environment;*

*3. The Belize Audubon Society may, with the approval of the Minister, hire caretakers to effect the needs of protection and management;*

*4. The Belize Audubon Society may not collect fees on behalf of Government. However, contributions including monetary contributions may be accepted and payment for any services such as the rental of facilities may be received;*

*5. Conferences, seminars, personnel training programmes and releases to the news media should be cleared with the Ministry of Agriculture before they materialize;*

*6. The Minister responsible for National Parks retains the right to terminate this agreement at any time.*

*(Letter from R. H. Neal, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 16 April 1987)*

By 1995 the BAS had considerable experience in the management of protected areas and realized the need for further agreements with the Government of Belize. The Government of Belize (GOB), Forest

Department and the BAS signed a five-year agreement on November 15, 1995, which defined the responsibilities for management of six protected areas, Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, Crooked Tree and Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuaries, Guanacaste and Blue Hole National Parks and Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve.

In keeping with the provisions of the National Parks System Act, it was agreed that Government, the Forest Department and the Society shall jointly manage and develop the six protected areas for a period of five years and such management shall be renewable for a similar period. The parties shall jointly formulate and implement management plans with goals, objectives, standards, methods of implementation, priorities, budget, personnel requirements, target dates, and assessment methods for monitoring. Provisions for transition periods and mechanisms for resolving conflicts are included.

The GOB is responsible for legal Statutory Instruments, infrastructure and security. The GOB handles applications for scientific research permits in consultation with the BAS. The GOB assists the BAS with tax exemptions and authorizes them to collect entrance fees.

The BAS is authorized to obtain grants, loans, subsidies, endowment and trust funds to finance the management of these protected areas. The BAS has responsibility for day-to-day management, implementation of all aspects of visitor usage and daily maintenance, and public education campaigns. The BAS has first right of refusal for all recreation-related concessions with the profits for use by the BAS.

### **Protected Areas Conservation Trust**

For several years the Belize Audubon Society had been working along with the Government of Belize, other conservation NGOs and international conservation organizations, to develop a Protected Areas Conservation Trust, an innovative organism for sustainable support of the protected areas of Belize.

The Act to establish a trust for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural resources of Belize, to establish a Trust Fund for the Trust and to establish a Board of Directors, was gazetted on September 30, 1995. Each visitor to Belize is charged a PACT fee of \$7.50.



*The agreement with the GOB is signed by Hon. Eduardo Juan, Minister of Natural Resources (left), and Jose (Pepe) Garcia, President of BAS (right).*

### **Entrance Fees for National Parks**

The Statutory Instrument for the charging of entrance fees for national parks and wildlife sanctuaries managed by the Belize Audubon Society was signed on May 20, 1995. Specific entry fees for Guanacaste and Blue Hole National Parks and for Crooked Tree and Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuaries for Belizean nationals and non-Belizeans were prescribed. Children under twelve years old are exempt from paying entry fees. Government authorizes the Society to collect fees and all fees collected shall be apportioned as follows:

PACT	20% for purposes of the trust
BAS	70% for management of the protected areas
Government	10% for park infrastructure and security

An updated agreement between the BAS and the GOB was signed on February 6, 1999. Two new areas were added to those managed by the BAS - Blue Hole and Victoria Peak Natural Monuments. The distribution of entrance fees was changed to 20% for PACT and 80% for BAS.

## Protected Areas and People

**Osmany Salas, 1993**

Protected areas were initially established because of their outstanding natural features and unique geological formations, or their scenic beauty. Often, decision-makers based in the capital city and unacquainted with the natural areas in question have devised protected area boundaries based on the impractical ideals of conserving areas rather than for ecological or economic reasons. This, furthermore, has often been done without prior biological studies and, worse, without consulting the local people.

Local communities next to protected area boundaries frequently bear substantial costs as a result of lost access to natural areas, while receiving little or no return. Local residents, who tend to be poor and often receive few government services, frequently perceive protected areas as restricting their ability to earn a living. Local people often see natural areas only as a source of food/nutrition, bush medicines, firewood, and raw materials for construction, and are not immediately concerned about their functions. In short, there exists a marked clash in attitudes towards protected natural areas, exploiting them for short term benefits only, or managing them for long term gain.

BAS has acknowledged that biodiversity and ecosystem conservation efforts should not take the form of "absolute protection" and the "don't touch" attitude which implies that humans are intruders on otherwise pristine environments, an attitude that leads to inadequate relations between local people and protected area managers. We have had to work from the bottom up to change public perception that conservation and resource protection are foreign ideas designed to achieve foreign goals to the detriment of Belizeans. In other words, our main thrust has been to make Belizeans grasp the concept that, "This land and its resources do not belong to us; we are simply borrowing them from our children."

To practice what we preach, and strengthen our protected area management activities, we have strived to promote activities that increase environmental awareness and that integrate conservation with local human needs. Activities that we have

promoted include: employment and training opportunities, income generation activities, increased local participation in planning and management, environmental education outreach, revolving loans, and resource management and monitoring.

We currently employ 23 permanent or rotational field employees (wardens) at the eight protected areas BAS manages. Most of these wardens have been recruited from communities near or adjacent to the protected areas where they are stationed. Their salaries are considered a sure source of income for themselves and their families. We have also facilitated other income generation initiatives. At Maya Center Village, the gateway to Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, we have assisted a local Maya women's group in setting up a crafts sales center and have provided women with book-keeping and organizational skills, as well as natural history training. The women made about \$2,000 in craft sales during their first year, and five years later, sold over \$40,000 worth of local crafts.

We have actively sought local input in our management planning activities. Cognizant that protected areas management decisions may impact local economies, we have held public consultations at the local level, and have facilitated the formation of local advisory bodies to ensure local participation and involvement. Roaring Creek villagers played an important role in the development of the Guanacaste National Park Management Plan, as did villagers of Armenia for the Blue Hole Management Plan. We have been consulting with a Crooked Tree advisory committee to resolve fishing and other sanctuary related issues. This committee and other local representative bodies will also play an important role in the development of the Crooked Tree Management Plan which is currently being prepared. At Crooked Tree, fisheries studies have been conducted in order to arrive at suitable fishing regulations and licensing measures to ensure the long term survival of the Crooked Tree fishery resource for local subsistence use and for the sustenance of the wildlife population that also depends on it for food.

We are acutely aware that public support is vital for the success of protected areas management. This can only be

achieved through public consultation to receive input on local needs and how these can be met, and through education programmes that aim to explain the benefits of conservation and the wise use of our natural resources. For BAS, the ultimate goal is to maintain a balance between people and the environment.

The National Parks System Act of 1981 provides for the preservation and protection of highly important natural and cultural features and for the regulation of the scientific, educational and recreational use of the same.

Four categories of reserves are established: National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary, Nature Reserve and Natural Monument. National Parks are established for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public. Wildlife Sanctuaries protect nationally significant species that require specific human manipulation for their perpetuation. A Natural Monument is an area reserved for the protection and preservation of a nationally significant natural feature. Nature Reserves are areas reserved strictly for scientific research.

Other types of protected areas that exist under separate legislation or arrangements include forest reserves, marine reserves, and private reserves. In total, Belize's protected areas and reserves amount to an impressive 30% of our land surface under varying levels of protection. [By 1999, 40% was under protection.]

At the request of the Government of Belize, BAS has been instrumental in the financing, development and operation of eight reserves established under the National Parks System Act, totaling over 150,000 acres. The histories of the individual protected areas, including the means of financial support, are covered in Chapter 5.

## BAS Workshops and Retreats

### Park Management Workshop

From March 30 to 31, 1989, a Peace Corps-sponsored workshop was held for BAS staff and committee chairpersons on park management. The Society was getting quite a number of requests from scientists wanting to research in our protected areas. The purpose of this workshop was to develop recommendations and policies on research priorities and guidelines, use of parks by visitors, and a training programme for park personnel.

### A Vision for the 90s

Through a grant from the World Wildlife Fund – US, a Strategic Management Workshop was held on April 29, 1990, at Bridgewater, Burrell Boom. Through a series of brainstorming sessions, the BAS officers and staff evaluated their protected areas management and made recommendations for the future institutional development of the Society.

*The Belize Audubon Society has a new vision for the decade of the '90s. Earlier this year, the Board members attended a strategic management workshop, which has helped enormously in focusing our attention on the tasks ahead.*

*The Society, which was established in 1969, has gone through a tremendous transformation over the past 20 years. Initially involved in environmental education and bird watching, the Society is now the manager of seven protected areas and in charge of all the related staff. It identifies and handles funds for these reserves and other projects.*

*Concurrent with this responsibility, the Society needs to grow institutionally. This is the immediate challenge that faces us. To evolve to meet this challenge, we need to adopt more business-like and dynamic practices.*

*Changes are already underway in our institutional arrangements. Our office is now headed by a Managing Director. We have recently hired a Wildlands Management Officer and additional secretarial help. In addition, we have recently expanded our office space to better supply the increasing demand for use of our library. We are presently preparing action plans for our major activities which include:*

*Management of reserves*

*Creation of new protected areas*

*Influencing resource use  
Environmental education  
Improving our image and public relations  
Collection and dissemination of environmental information*

*We have also recently appointed a Parks Commission which, along with the Wildlands Management Officer, should help streamline our efforts in park management. I hasten to add here that the previous sub-committees, which assisted us in the management of our various parks, will continue to be used as a source of support in particular projects. The Society is extremely grateful for this invaluable voluntary help over the past few years.*

*The Board looks forward to the continued support of local companies. To achieve our aims we will require adequate financial backing. We will also look forward to continued financial and technical support from foreign conservation organizations, which have supported us so generously in the past. At the same time, we shall explore means of becoming as self-sufficient as possible.*

*We are determined to have increased involvement from our membership, which represents a large source of talent that is largely untapped. A membership drive shall be an important aspect of our Society in the next few years.*

*We also wish to work in cooperation with the other local non-governmental organizations to achieve our common goal of sustainable development for Belize.*

*The Belize Audubon Society has built up an enviable reputation in the national and international conservation community. Based on our reputation, and with a willingness to change and adapt to meet the new challenges, I am sure we will be ready to enter the 21st century as a vibrant society with a strong sense of purpose and commitment. (Janet Gibson, BAS President, BAS Newsletter January - June, 1990)*

## **BAS Board/Staff Retreats**

The first joint BAS Board/Staff Retreat in 1991 was held at Trinidad Farm and facilitated by Belize Enterprise for Sustained Technology (BEST). The purpose was to review BAS' current status and programmes in the light of the environmental issues of the '90s. One product of this retreat was the BAS Mission Statement:

*The Belize Audubon Society is a non-profit, non-government organization dedicated to the promotion of the sustainable use and preservation of our natural resources in order to maintain a balance*



*between people and the environment. (BAS Mission Statement, September 8, 1991)*

A follow-up Strategic Planning Workshop was held October 26 and 27, facilitated by Johannah Barry of the IUCN with Byron Swift, also of the IUCN, attending.

The third BAS Retreat was held at Spanish Bay Resort in August of 1992. For the first time the park personnel were included. After two days of hard work, President Therese Rath said,

*"What we have done here is to focus on one area in more detail as to what our programme should be and to discuss what other areas we should be focussing on."*

At the 1993 Board retreat, it was decided to re-focus the Society's activities from protected areas management to environmental education as the main vehicle to "promote the sustainable use of our natural resources" in keeping with our Mission Statement.

Then at the 1994 BAS Retreat it was decided to add a third objective, advocacy, to the other main activities of protected areas management and environmental education.

Additional BAS Retreats were held in 1997 at Crooked Tree and in 1999 in Corozal Town.

## **BAS Programme Review and Assessment**

The British Executive Service Overseas (BESO) provided a volunteer consultant, John Bishop, to review and assess BAS programmes. Bishop worked with BAS Executive Director and Programme Managers from July 20 to 23, 1998, and made the following recommendations:

- Petition the GOB to increase park entrance fees for foreign visitors
- Promote BAS membership in the National Parks and provide training for wardens in recruitment techniques
- Improve signposts and quality of interpretive literature in the parks
- Ascertain accurate membership recruitment and retention costs, review all subscription categories, and closely monitor retention rates
- Identify and train a network of regional volunteers
- Take advantage of the Society's 30th anniversary to organize fund-raising and public awareness events.



*Participants around this table in 1991 are BEST Facilitator Carlos Santos, James Waight, an unidentified BEST Facilitator, John Link, Rudi Burgos, Shelley McCrary, Therese Rath, Osmany Salas, Bardi Riverol, David Craig, Lydia Waight, Luz Hunter, Magda Avery, Janet Gibson, Victor Gonzalez, Dolores Godfrey, and Philip Balderamos*





*Participants in the same September, 1991, retreat at Trinidad Farm include (above from left front) John Link, Bardi Riverol, Rudi Burgos (standing), Magda Avery, Dolores Godfrey, (below from left) Rudi Burgos, David Craig, Shelley McCrary, Osmany Salas, Pepe García, Magda Avery, and Carlos Santos*



## BAS Office

The first BAS Office, opened December 1, 1984, was located on the Southern Foreshore. Eventually that space became too small for the growing Society's activities, especially the library, and the owners wanted to reclaim the space. The BAS Office moved to 29 Regent Street on March 1, 1990.

In 1993 we were given the property at 12 Fort Street by the GOB, in appreciation of past and support of future BAS management of Belize's protected areas. At the 24th AGM Lindsay Belisle presented the title to the BAS.

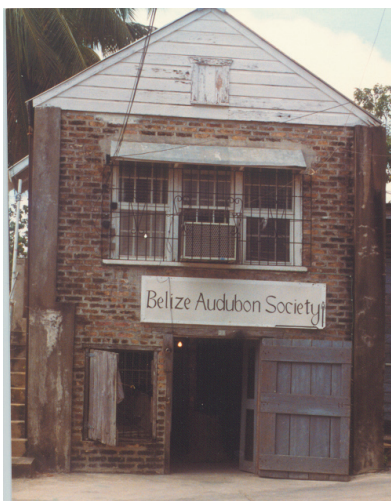
*It now gives me much pleasure to hand over to the Audubon Society, title for a building and property formerly occupied by the Comptroller of Customs, as our government's contribution to help Audubon consolidate and expand its work programme. This spacious building will enable Audubon to have sufficient room in which to mount lectures, educational exhibits and other public education activities. After 25 years of operating out of borrowed or rented quarters, Audubon will finally have a home. (BAS Newsletter, April - September, 1993)*

But then in late 1997 there were rumours that the BAS' property at 12 Fort Street was to be acquired for a major Belize Port Authority development. In fact the Grant Fiat and Property Plan issued to the Belize Port Authority included BAS' present property. But this Grant Fiat was erroneously issued.

*... the grant to the Belize Port Authority was issued in error and [the Commissioner of Lands and Surveys] is in the process of rectifying said Grant to omit Grant No. 306 of 1993 issued to the Belize Audubon Society. It is estimated that it will take about two (2) weeks to prepare and register the new Grant." (Letter from Lindsay Belisle, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, 21 January 1998)*

*As far as we are concerned, our title is free from all encumbrances and has not been cancelled. We have in our possession a true copy from the Registry Department dated January 29, 1998, that proves this. So, in effect, the 12 Fort Street property is included in two separate land titles. Obviously, there can only be one owner ... and that owner is BAS. This has been assured in writing by the Permanent Secretary and the Lands Commissioner of the Ministry of Natural Resources.*





*The second BAS Office at 29 Regent Street (above) and the third at 12 Fort Street (below). BAS President Therese Rath presents a gift to Lindsay Belisle after he presented the first title to the Fort Street property in 1993 (top right) and Pepe Garcia receives the second title from Hon. John Briceño, Minister of Natural Resources at the Opening of the 30th Anniversary Celebrations at*





*Office scenes at 12 Fort Street: (top) Karen Vernon, (middle) Karen Vernon and Valdemar Andrade with visitors, (bottom) Michael Somerville and Derric Chan*

*However, we have persistently asked Government over the past several months to rectify the Port Authority Grant Fiat and Property Plan and this has not been done to date. We now feel that we have exhausted all our options to rectify this at the Ministerial level and are preparing to take legal action. (Osmany Salas, BAS Newsletter January - April, 1998)*

On April 14, 1998, an injunction order was issued from the Chief Justice which stopped the Minister from granting the Fort Street property to the Belize Port Authority until further notice. The situation was finally resolved on February 6, 1999, at the Opening of the BAS 30th Anniversary Celebrations, when Hon. John Briceño, Minister of Natural Resources, announced a resolution to the property dispute, granting BAS title to the Fort Street property.

### **Silver Anniversary Celebration - February, 1994**

*The BAS has much to be proud of in the past 25 years ... staying in focus, garnering the support of allies, never compromising integrity, taking on things gradually, and building a solid reputation based on hard work, focused effort and consistency in applying goals. (Mark Nolan, BAS Newsletter April - June, 1994)*

*The BAS during the past 25 years has evolved from a bird watching society to a Conservation/Parks Management Society. After our retreat in late August, it was decided that the Society must play a more active advocacy role, especially as the Earth's population continues to grow and put an escalating demand on our natural resources.*

*The triple interaction between individuals, the Society and Nature is becoming more and more complex and disconnected. We all know very well the consequences: deterioration of human health, a menace to the human species, and a menace to life on Earth. Because of the above, the BAS is committed to a sustainable dynamic equilibrium between individuals, the Society, and Nature.*

*This commitment has given the Society 25 years of financial support from various organizations and persons, who trust and believe in us. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the Belize Audubon Society I want to extend our sincere gratitude to our donors, International, Regional, and National, who have sponsored the Society so generously for the past 25 years. (BAS Executive Director Virginia Vasquez, 1994)*



*At the BAS 25th Anniversary Celebration Dora Weyer receives an award from Belize First Lady Kathy Esquivel with BAS President Therese Rath looking on.*

### **Opening Ceremony**

An opening and award ceremony at the Bliss Institute on February 5 was the first event in celebrating the 25th anniversary. This was attended by the Governor General, Sir Colville Young, and Prime Minister and Mrs. Esquivel. The Governor General was the guest speaker and BAS president, Therese Rath, reviewed the highlights of the past 25 years.

Mrs. Esquivel presented certificates of recognition to the 17 BAS founding members and special certificates to BAS presidents (past and present). International organizations that have supported the work of BAS received plaques and the Cayo and Placencia chapters were honoured with framed certificates. A dance entitled "WHEN," especially choreographed for the occasion, was performed by the Belize Dance Company.

Guests then moved to the Holy Redeemer Parish Hall to view "Eco-Fest," an environmental exhibit mounted by NGOs and others involved in the environmental movement, which was opened by the Governor General and the Prime Minister. The final activity was a cruise and cocktail aboard the M.V. "Wave Dancer" on February 11.



Publicity leading up to the anniversary included press releases and advertisements in the local newspapers. Several donated banners were displayed in Belize City streets. Great Belize Productions Ltd. interviewed founding member Ford Young. On January 31, David Craig and Jean Shaw participated in a morning television show on Channel 5.

### **Essay Contest**

An essay competition open to secondary and tertiary institutions was held with the “Mission Statement” as the topic. The winner in category A (secondary schools) was Andrea McSweeney of Belmopan Comprehensive School. Francis Marin of the University College of Belize was the winner in category B. The essays were displayed at Eco-Fest.

### **Eco-Fest**

From February 6 to 8, conservation groups, environmental organizations, and others were represented through exhibits at the Holy Redeemer Parish Hall in Belize City. The Eco-Fest was intended to be educational and attracted over 2,000 viewers, the majority coming from primary and secondary schools.

### **Bird Walks**

Leading up to the anniversary, a committee under the leadership of former BAS Board member, Rudi Burgos, conducted some early morning bird walks around Belize City.

The first took place on August 29, with 14 participants birding along the Fort George/Marine Parade area and identifying 22 species. Staff from Great Belize Productions joined the exercise and followed up the activity with TV coverage.

On October 3, fifteen enthusiastic birders explored along the Southern Foreshore/Regent Street area. They counted 28 species, including two migrant warblers (American Redstart and Yellow Warbler).

The 19 participants in the November 7 walk included six youngsters. They birded over the St. John’s College Landivar campus and sighted 33 species, nearly half of which were migrants.



*The BAS 25th Anniversary dance entitled "When," which was choreographed and produced by the Belize Dance Company.*



*Eco-Fest, an environmental exhibition, was one of the highlights of the BAS 25th anniversary celebration. All of the environmental organizations in Belize exhibited, along with the Post Office, banks and many others.*

## **Silver Anniversary Calendars**

Atlantic Bank Ltd. and Shell Belize Ltd. dedicated their 1994 calendars to the BAS. The Atlantic Bank calendar illustration was a reddish egret photograph taken by Tony Rath. Shell Belize carried an environmental message from BAS each month.

## **30th Anniversary Celebration**

### **Walkathon**

The BAS 30th anniversary celebration was launched in grand style on February 6, 1999. One hundred and twenty-five sponsored individuals walked in three groups from the BAS Office in Belize City to Guanacaste National Park. One group started from the BAS Office, one from Hattieville, and the last from the Belize Zoo. The Opening Ceremonies were held at Guanacaste National Park with Hon. John Briceño, Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, who was also one of the walkers, giving the main address.

At the Launching Ceremony two more protected areas were added to those managed by BAS. An agreement was signed by Minister Briceño and the BAS for the BAS to manage the Blue Hole Natural Monument and the Victoria Peak Natural Monument.

Carlos Santos was the Master of Ceremonies, BAS Executive Director Osmany Salas gave the welcome address, Walter (Mickey) Craig gave a summary of BAS history, and both BAS President Jose (Pepe) Garcia and Trustee Barry Bowen greeted the assembled group.

### **Green Art and Flower Show**

As part of the BAS 30th Anniversary Celebration, the BAS held a Green Art Show along with the Belize City Garden Club's annual Flower Show. Michael Somerville was the Master of Ceremonies for the Opening of the Green Art/Flower Show. Jean Shaw gave the welcome address and John Masson, of the Belize City Garden Club, officially opened the Show. Artists exhibited their paintings and quilts and donated a portion of the sales to the BAS. Artist Terryl Godoy demonstrated his painting techniques by painting an arrangement of orchids in the Flower Show. Michael Somerville



*Participants in the BAS 30th Anniversary Walkathon get cooled off.*



*The crowd assembled to launch the BAS 30th Anniversary Celebrations at Guanacaste National Park. (front row from left) BAS Trustee Barry Bowen; Hon. John Briceño, Minister of Natural Resources; Valerie Woods, Belize Tourist Board Director; BAS member Svea Dietrich-Ward; BAS Executive Director Osmany Salas ; Walter Craig, the first BAS Executive Director (far right)*



*BAS staff members (above from left) Karen Vernon, Nancy Tillett, and Julie Robinson collect tickets for the Green Art and Flower Show. Paintings and quilts are visible behind them. (below) Terryl Godoy, Man at Work, demonstrates painting techniques, using orchids as subjects.*



