

# LIGHT HAWK

Championing environmental protection through the unique perspective of flight.

WINTER 2006-2007

LightHawk works primarily in western and northeastern North America and Latin America

## VOLUNTEER PILOTS AWARDS

At the annual fly-in and convention in Monterey, Calif. in September, several volunteer pilots were recognized for their dedication and service. Awards presented ranged from the humorous *Velcro Award* to the *Platinum Flyer Award* in recognition of 15 years of service.

### *Good Roots Award*

**David Downey** of Kalispell, Mont. and **Merry Schroeder** of Santa Fe, N.M. were recognized for their efforts to promote LightHawk in their own communities and bring new partners, contacts, and issues to LightHawk.

### *Velcro Award*

**Will Worthington** of Carefree, Ariz. flew nine missions for the Tucson Audubon Society and the Friends of the Santa Cruz River. For his wonderful "sticktoativeness", Will was presented with our first annual *Velcro Award*.

### *Went the Extra Mile Award*

**Jerry Hoogerwerf** of Socorro, N.M. and his wife **Sandra** drove from New Mexico to Costa Rica to fly in support of LightHawk's work. (They then drove all the way back.) Muchas gracias Jerry por su ayuda en Costa Rica este ano!

### *Great White North Ambassador Awards*

**Michael McBride** and **Kirk Johnson** of Anchorage, Alaska were honored for their work as LightHawk ambassadors, and for showing dozens of passengers the beauty of and threats to their remarkable home state during the 8th World Wilderness Congress.

### *Rockwell Award*

The Rockwell Award is given annually for exceptional service to LightHawk and to other organizations. **Steve Paul** of Grand Lake, Colo. donates flights frequently for Angel Flight as well as for LightHawk.

*continued on back cover*

## Finding the Elusive Manatees of Honduras

By Daniel Gonzalez-Socoloske

*In March and April 2006, LightHawk completed flights for researchers conducting manatee surveys along the north coast of Honduras. The flights enabled researchers to obtain current data on population and distribution in an area that had not been extensively surveyed since 1980. Data gathered through LightHawk will help in understanding the factors contributing to the decline of this population and assess what will be needed to support further protections.*

*Manatees and their Dugong cousin are the only strictly plant and algae eating marine mammals. This dependency on vegetation makes them vulnerable to coastal development and other forms of habitat destruction. Other threats to the species include agricultural pollution, which impacts their food source, a very slow reproduction rate, watercraft collisions, and in central and south America, hunting.*

*Although manatees range from Florida through Central America to South America, most of what is known about the species stems from studies of populations in Florida. Honduras is an important area for manatees in Central America, linking the relatively small populations from the southern region (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama) and the larger populations of the northern region (Belize, Mexico). The take of manatees or trade of their products is prohibited by Honduran law, but enforcement is lacking in part due to the difficulty in accessing remote areas.*

*Manatees are in danger of becoming locally extinct throughout most of their range. By identifying remaining populations for protection, the manatee stands a greater chance at survival. Aerial surveys provide the best way to locate and monitor, covering large stretches of coast in a single day allowing information about relative abundance and distribution to be collected.*

The first time I heard about LightHawk providing free flights to conservationists and scientists I was incredulous. As a master's student at Loma Linda University, I had never dreamed of doing aerial surveys because of the high costs. It was simply not an option because we did not have the budget. Instead, I had to settle for boat surveys during my first summer in the field.

I am studying the population of manatees on the north coast of Honduras. Manatees in Honduras are the same species as found in Florida but they are classified as a separate sub-species known as the Antillean manatee. Very little is known about Antillean manatees and even less is known about them in Honduras. The last and only other time that there have been aerial surveys conducted in search of them in Honduras was in 1979 and 1980 by a team of scientists from Florida.

I contacted LightHawk about conducting aerial

surveys for manatees in Honduras, and from the beginning they were very receptive to the idea. I assembled a team of biologists including Saul Flores, a local biologist at the National University in Honduras, and Cynthia Taylor, a marine mammal aerial survey specialist from Wildlife Trust based in Florida. In March and April of 2006, after many months of planning, we finally received the permits and permissions to do the aerial surveys.

For statistical strength and for comparative value with the flights conducted in 1979-80, I needed to complete six replications of the flight path. The survey covers about 230 kilometers of coast and took us about four hours each day to complete.

Little did we know about the adventures that lay ahead of us. To be conservative I scheduled nine days to have the plane and pilot available for flights. When we arrived in Honduras, we had some complications getting *continued on page 2*



Daniel Gonzalez-Socoloske/LightHawk

Daniel Gonzalez-Socoloske/LightHawk



the plane into the country because Honduran Civil Aviation had just confiscated a private jet that was suspected to belong to a drug lord, and they were not allowing private planes into the country. Though we had all the paperwork submitted months in advance, we were facing a major delay. After three days of negotiating with the help of a local contact, Pepe Herrero, at USAID-Honduras, and his aviation lawyer, we were finally allowed to bring the plane from Costa Rica.

I was beginning to get stressed because we had lost our buffer for bad weather. When the plane arrived, I had only six days available and I needed six flights! On our first day of surveying, however, we achieved success. We sighted manatees and we covered the area that I needed. Our morale was sky high, but when we got back on the ground we received the news that there was a local shortage of jet fuel and private planes were being rationed only 30 gallons a day. We were spending between 40 and 50 gallons a day.

The next day, for whatever reason, we did obtain 40 gallons of fuel. We had another great day of surveying but not without drama; LightHawk quickly and professionally remedied a small mechanical problem with the help of a seasoned mechanic so we could resume flights. With good weather on both Sunday and Monday, we completed two more successful flights.

Tuesday was the last day that I had access to the plane before it was scheduled to go to Belize. That morning the sky looked clear, but we knew that rain was coming. We took off and headed east to our starting point. Just as we arrived we saw the rain coming

from the east towards us. We began our survey heading back west and the rain was right behind us always a mile or two behind. Once we completed our work, we were speechless as we headed back to the airport, amazed by what we had just accomplished.

The results from the flights revealed some interesting findings. When we compared our aerial surveys with those of 1979-80, there was a significant drop in the number of manatee sightings per hour. We were able to document that the population has declined in the last 26 years. Additionally, we observed a significant number of manatees in an area that had no sightings in 1979-80. This area currently lacks any form of protection and our findings may help in establishing a protected area there.

Our mission in Honduras was a total success, and we could not have done it without LightHawk. Everyone at LightHawk was very professional, from organizing the flights with the program director, to flying with volunteer pilot Chuck Schroll. It was evident that these flights could not have been done without a team like that which LightHawk has in place. Our results will go a long way toward protecting the remaining populations of Antillean manatees in Honduras.

I hope that next year we can do it again, to survey the eastern end of the coast of Honduras known as La Mosquitia. This area is remote and will be considerably more complicated to survey. And who knows what adventures may lay ahead!

*Daniel Gonzalez-Socoloske is a master's student of biology under Dr. Robert Ford at Loma Linda University in California.*

**Special thanks to the individuals and companies who helped make our flying in Latin America this season a success.**

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Bernal Arce                | Eva Figueroa   |
| Casa de Las Tias           | Steve Knaebel  |
| DICOA                      | Precision Aircraft   |
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| Janet Gibson               | Thanks to  |
| Isabel MacDonald           | Continental Airlines   |
| Roan Balas McNab           | for providing travel   |
| Luis Cuttler               | support for our Latin  |
| Pepe Hererro               | America Program.   |

# WHAT'S NEW AT

## CONTINENTAL AIRLINES RECEIVES "CHAMPION OF PUBLIC BENEFIT FLYING" AWARD

Every year the historic National Aeronautic Association and the Air Care Alliance, an umbrella organization for public benefit flying groups, join together to give a few awards to individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to public benefit flying. This year LightHawk nominated Continental Airlines for "Champion of Public Benefit Flying" for its years of support of our flying in Mexico and Central America. We are extremely pleased to report that on September 11, 2006, Continental was presented with the award in a ceremony in the United States Capitol Building. Continental was honored for providing passes for LightHawk volunteer pilots to get to and from locations in Central America and steadily supporting environmental aviation throughout the years, regardless of the economic conditions and the challenges facing the airline industry.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS WELCOMES BRENT BLUE

**Brent Blue** of Jackson Hole, Wyo. joined the LightHawk board of directors in September. Born and raised in Louisville, Ky., Dr. Blue attended Vanderbilt University and the University of Louisville School of Medicine. He received his post doctoral training at the University of California, San Francisco. Dr. Blue practices family and tourist medicine in Jackson Hole providing medical care at Emerg+A+Care in Jackson and in Grand Teton National Park. Blue is a recognized expert in aviation medicine, lecturing and writing for various aviation organizations and magazines. He also has been on several nonprofit boards, including the Teton Science School, Dancer's Workshop of Jackson, and currently serves on the Board of Health of Teton County. Dr. Blue made multiple environmental flight missions for the Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition/Save Our Cumberland Mountains in the early 1970s to document the environmental destruction, cultural devastation, and health impacts caused by open

## GET INVOLVED!

**PILOTS:** Join our volunteer pilot corps; the minimum requirement is 1000+ hours as pilot-in-command.

**DONORS:** A gift of \$35 or more makes you a member of LightHawk!

**OTHER VOLUNTEERS:** Volunteer expertise is needed to help build a new flight database and jazz up our powerpoint presentation so we can take it on the road. Please contact the Lander office to learn how you can help with either of these projects.

**MATCHING GIFT PROGRAMS:** Double your gift; ask your employer to match your gift to LightHawk.

# T LIGHTHAWK?

pit strip mining in Appalachia. Those flights made lasting impressions and developed a commitment to environmental protection.

**THANK YOU** We wish to thank the many donors who contributed to LightHawk between August 5, 2006 and November 30, 2006 including:

**Foundations** Elinor Patterson Baker Trust, Monterey Bay Aquarium Foundation, Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust, Wiancko Charitable Foundation

**Major Donors** (\$5,000 and over) Anonymous, David and Gale Kunkel, Gil and Marge Ordway

**Sustainers** (\$1,000-\$4,999) Benjamin C. Pierce, Robert M. Williams & Margaret R. Caldwell

**Protectors** (\$500-\$999) Francis C. Farwell III, Robert K. Keller, Jr. & Carol Keller, Valerie Langer, Steve and Lisa Robertson, Allan Silverstein, Patricia C. Stein, G. Val and Mary Ann Tollefson

**Founders** (\$250-\$499) Philip A. Lathrap & Roberta A. Davis, Abigail Faulkner, Bruce and Annie McTavish

**Volunteer Pilots** Our heartfelt thanks to the many volunteer pilots who donated their time and the use of their aircraft to fly for LightHawk during this period.

## Protecting the Last Mountain Caribou Herd

by Sama Blackwell

This past fall, LightHawk and our conservation partners celebrated a significant victory for the protection of the last remaining mountain caribou herd in the lower 48 states. In a huge win, a federal court ruled that snowmobiles will be banned from crucial caribou habitat in northern Idaho. VP **Dick Walker** has been flying for over three years to conduct snowmobile monitoring with our partners at Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA). Other volunteer pilots who provided flights for this effort are **David Downey** (2004) and **Val Tollefson** (2005). The aerial photographs provided by these flights were critical to the court ruling.

The mountain caribou is regarded as the most endangered large mammal in North America, which has adapted to the snowy winters in the northern Idaho panhandle. Despite weighing upward of 400 pounds, caribou are able to walk on top of deep snow with their enormous hooves, allowing them to reach lichen hanging in subalpine fir trees. Their ability to travel to high elevations in deep snow protects them from predators and

human interaction.

However, the growing popularity of lighter, more powerful snowmobiles has brought winter recreationists higher and deeper into the backcountry, with devastating results for the caribou. Wildlife biologists note that the machines not only frighten the skittish caribou from feeding and calving

grounds, but the compacted trails create walkways for predators, such as cougars and competitors, such as deer.

In order to help protect the caribou, LightHawk provided a series of flights for SCA and their partners that allowed wildlife biologists, legal advisors, media representatives, and SCA staff to collect GPS and photographic documentation of snowmobile use (and violations) in areas deemed essential for caribou protection. Aerial surveys for caribou locations were conducted,

allowing researchers and SCA staffers updated information they could use throughout the legal process.

### Update

As LightHawk prepared to go to press we learned that the U.S. District Court judge who had banned snowmobiles in caribou habitat in September, in a stunning and unprecedented move, effectively reversed his decision in early November again allowing snowmobiles in crucial habitat. The reversal is particularly surprising since an agreement had been forged between SCA and the snowmobile community that protected caribou habitat and also allowed some snowmobile activity in the area. Despite this compromise, the judge gave snowmobilers far more than they had asked for in the negotiations, opening up virtually all known caribou habitat to motorized use.

LightHawk and our partners will continue to fight for the protection of the caribou herd. SCA has filed a motion to reconsider and is waiting to hear if the judge will accept additional evidence from their attorneys. LightHawk plans to continue providing flights this winter to monitor snowmobile activity. If snowmobiles violate this new, far less restrictive agreement, SCA will need photographic evidence to bring to court next year, as they continue their efforts for a sensible compromise to protect this last mountain caribou herd.

## Snowmobiles banned to help Idaho caribou

*The Associated Press, September 26, 2006*  
SPOKANE, Wash. - A judge has declared nearly 470 square miles of national forest land in northern Idaho off-limits to snowmobiles in an effort to save the last mountain caribou herd in the contiguous 48 states....  
...Citing aerial photographs that show snowmobile tracks crisscrossing caribou routes to vital feeding areas, the judge added, "The court chooses to be overprotective rather than under-protective."

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## Trails reopened in north Idaho caribou zone

### Environment

*The Forest Service plan lifts more restrictions than snowmobilers asked for*

*The Oregonian, Thursday, November 09, 2006*  
COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho - A federal judge has reopened popular snowmobile trails in northern Idaho that had been closed to protect caribou.

The ruling this week by U.S. District Judge Robert Whaley in Spokane lifted the snowmobile ban from the caribou recovery zone in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests surrounding Priest Lake....

"I've never seen anything like this," said Mark Sprengel of the Conservation Alliance. "This blindsided us. It contravenes all available science."

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## FROM THE FLIGHT LOG

### Eye to Eye with Flamingos: LightHawk flights help protect newly identified populations

Volunteer pilot Kelly Gottlieb provided a week of flights in June to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Bahamas National Trust that enabled them to conduct flamingo surveys of all locations in the Bahamas archipelago and Turks and Caicos where the species have been recently sited. The groups, along with The Nature Conservancy, are working to develop the first accurate estimate of the size of the species breeding population and document how population size and dispersion of birds changes between breeding and non-breeding seasons.

Conservation of Caribbean flamingos depends on conservation of all its subpopulations. After Cuba, the Bahamas likely represents the next most significant subpopulation in the region. Documenting habitat use is critical at this time because significant development is being planned in many areas believed to be important to the species. Only one area of documented flamingo habitat in the Bahamas currently is protected, and though protection efforts for other sites are underway, data to guide these efforts is largely lacking.

This survey is part of a larger project that will map, characterize, and assess productivity of flamingo habitat in the Bahamas. The survey also will assess the degree of tolerance to human disturbance and examine long-term patterns of productivity and environmental change. Ultimately, WCS seeks to determine how much habitat is required to support a flamingo population given the dynamic nature of the environment they inhabit.



### Volunteer Pilots Awards, *continued from page 1*

#### *Green Beanie Award*

**Michael Sutton** of Monterey, Calif. was recognized for the environmental knowledge and experience he brings to our flights and partners. His contributions often exceed our partners' expectations.

#### *I Bow at Your Feet Buddha Awards*

In recognition of their flexibility, reliability and Zen-like patience: **Steve Williams** of Georgetown, Maine. **Bob Peterson** of Jackson, Wyo. **Chuck Schroll** of Tucson, Ariz.

#### *Deluxe Accommodations Award*

**Kelly Gottlieb** of West Palm Beach, Fla. completed several open water flights, flying more than 16 hours in four days, enabling the Wildlife Conservation Society and Bahamas National Trust to develop the first accurate estimate of the size of this flamingo population.

#### *Well Grounded Award*

Each of our pilots instills a sense of security in our flying passengers. Many times our passengers use words like: confident, safe, careful, experienced. **David Kunkel** of Meeker, Colo. was recognized for his consistent good spirits, even when the going gets tougher than usual.

#### *Glutton for Punishment Award*

**Ed Steinman** of Ann Arbor, Mich. is a real trooper. No matter how far from home he is asked to travel for a mission, he not only says yes, but often says he'd be willing to go further! He routinely donates flights far from his home in such places as northern Wisconsin and Missouri.

#### *Rookie of the Year*

**Val Tollefson** of Bainbridge Island, Wash. jumped right in flying four hours of ferry time

to make his first LightHawk flight happen in support of Selkirk Conservation Alliance's caribou protection efforts. On his next mission he completed more than 10 hours of flying over three days to help a long-time LightHawk partner highlight the importance of preserving the Nooksack River watershed and restoring and preserving important salmon habitat.

#### *Volunteer Pilot of the Year*

While there were pilots that may have flown more hours, **Mike Sullivan** of Santa Fe, N.M. was bestowed VP of the year for generously flying nearly 103 hours in two countries on behalf of LightHawk. Mike is known to sit for days waiting for the skies to clear to give a partner the rare opportunity to fly. He will also fly out of his way to personally take photos he knew a partner so desperately needed to prove environmental crimes were taking place.

#### *President's Award*

The recipient of the President's Award is recognized as a person who embodies the spirit of volunteerism. From his home base in Salt Lake City, Utah, **Larry Swanson** flew through fog, hail, snowstorms, and truly amazing winds in order to get to Wyoming to provide flights over the ever-expanding oil and gas fields in that state. Larry was recognized for his heroic efforts, for his accommodating nature and for doing it all with a great attitude.

#### *Platinum Flier Award*

For long-standing dedication and 15 years of service: **Elmer Schettler**, Pagosa Springs, Colo. **Kevin Roache**, San Diego, Calif. **Peter Coltman**, Granbury, Tex. **Rick Durden**, Grand Rapids, Mich.



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*Newsletter comments?*

*Please contact Keri Foster, Membership Manager, at [info@lighthawk.org](mailto:info@lighthawk.org)*

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