

INICIATIVA
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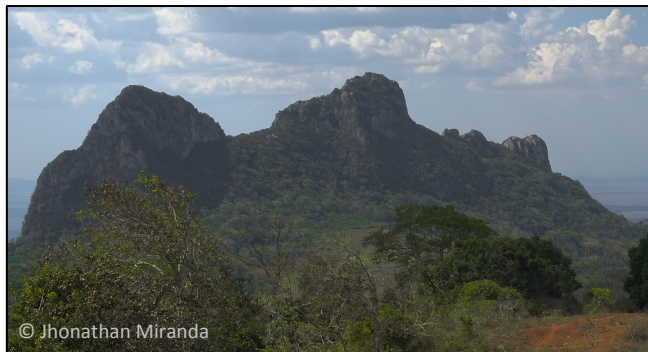
REDSISKIN
INITIATIVE

The Red Siskin Initiative (RSI) has had its most successful year yet, thanks to the hard work and contributions of team members and supporters! We look forward to an even bigger and busier 2016 with major new phases and initiatives planned for research (captive breeding, genomics, agroecology, and field surveys in Guyana and Caribbean), fundraising to construct a breeding center at Parque Zoológico y Botánico Bararida (PZBB) and implementing a social marketing campaign to combat the wildlife trade. Read on for updates on project priorities. **Happy Holidays** to all!

Project Milestones

Captive Breeding - A research population of captive Red Siskins has officially been established at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute. The first pair of Red Siskins were transferred from Toldeo zoo to SCBI in October. Five more breeding pairs, generously donated by Jim Sillers, will arrive this week.

Molecular Research - Whole genome sequencing of Red Siskins by the Duke Center for Genomic and Computational Biology is nearly complete. Our bioinformatics team from the Smithsonian and University of Maryland will begin *de novo* genome assembly this month. We expect one of the highest quality bird genomes produced to date, which will fully enable development of a hybrid detection assay and the other extensive molecular work that we have planned.



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Updates

Website - An English version of www.RedSiskin.org was launched in August. A Spanish version is in the works. Upcoming features include interviews with team members and regular updates on research.

Venezuelan Coordinator Hired - In September, the Smithsonian Grand Challenges Consortia awarded the RSI a stipend to hire Miguel Angel Arvelo as project coordinator for Venezuela. Miguel holds a DVM, has experience in government and zoo administration, and has been an RSI partner for two years. Miguel's skill, energy and dedication will increase productivity in all project facets.

PZBB Red Siskin Breeding and Education Center Will Ruhl, Ruhl Walker architects, will travel to Australia in February to study the breeding facilities of the Save the Gouldian Finch project (www.sarahpryke.com) and work with the lead building contractor and Mike Fidler, project co-founder and expert finch aviculturist, to further the design of the PZBB complex.

Field Research - The Venezuelan field crew has made seven field trips since May, and has collected habitat data and searched for siskins in over 30 locations - none with sightings yet, but many with promising habitat.

In Guyana, the South Rupununi Conservation Society (SRCS) has made six trips since May to document behavior and habitat, band birds and

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collect data to help refine range estimates. As always, direct field training and education in conservation and bird observation skills for students and local community members are a major focus of all SRCS field trips.

Using recent and historical data, the RSI is developing new protocols for long-term population monitoring and will implement these in the new year.

Shade Coffee Initiative-The SRCS received a grant from the Rufford Foundation in May to support a shade coffee feasibility study and pilot program that aims to advance a broad sustainability agenda in southern Guyana.

Habitat Modeling - Dr Ada Sanchez-Mercado is leading the effort to build a model of the historical Red Siskin distribution to help understand habitat parameters and identify promising areas for future reintroductions. Thus far, the team has collated museum records and sightings from experts, identified a sampling universe and important environmental variables, and built an initial model, which is being refined with habitat validation results coming in from the field.

Grant Applications Pending or in Process.

American Bird Conservancy: Avian diversity and habitat in VE shade coffee

Mohammed bin Zayed: Anti-wildlife trafficking

Smithsonian Bond Fund: Field and molecular research to assess origin and current status of Red Siskins in Caribbean region

Smithsonian Women's Committee: Support for US project coordinator

Smithsonian Fellowship: Postdoctoral molecular research for RSI

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

- Environmental Protection Agency, GY
- Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (IVIC), VE
- National Finch and Softbill Society, USA
- Parque Zoológico y Botánico Bararida, VE
- Parque Zoológico El Pinar, VE
- Provita – Conservation NGO, VE
- Ruhl Walker Architects, USA
- Smithsonian Institution
- South Rupununi Conservation Society, GY
- Universidad Central de Venezuela, VE

SUPPORT

American Bird Conservancy, American Federation of Aviculture, Band Foundation, Bird Life International, Conservation Leadership Program, IVIC, Ornithological Council, Rufford Foundation, Scion Natural Science Association, SI Grand Challenges Consortia and National Museum of Natural History

