

Dear supporters and friends,

In this, our last newsletter for the year, we feature firsthand reports from our projects and a look at one of the regions where we work: the Albertine Rift in Africa.

Trip report: Mexico, Cambodia and Thailand, October 2023

by Doug Bender

In my first field “assignment” as a new board member of ICF (ICFC’s US-based sister NGO), ICFC’s Scott Hecker and I spent a rather intense month traveling together to visit more than a dozen projects, partners, and potential partners in Mexico, Cambodia and Thailand. As a longtime volunteer at the ICFC-supported Marine Conservation Cambodia (MCC), I had invited Scott to join me on a visit there, but the trip expanded greatly in the spirit of “as long as we’re there let’s visit this other nearby project.” Fortunately, I have contacts and experience in all three countries so I could serve as tour guide. I had only met Scott in person one time before at his home in New Hampshire... good thing we turn out to get along well on the road! This was my first trip as an ICFC rep as opposed to volunteer or tourist and it was a great learning experience for me discussing strategies and considerations for partner selection and support. We met numerous conservation practitioners, many with no formal education but deep expertise and experience. I also got to watch expert bird enthusiasts at work. We hope to team up with some of these people in the future.

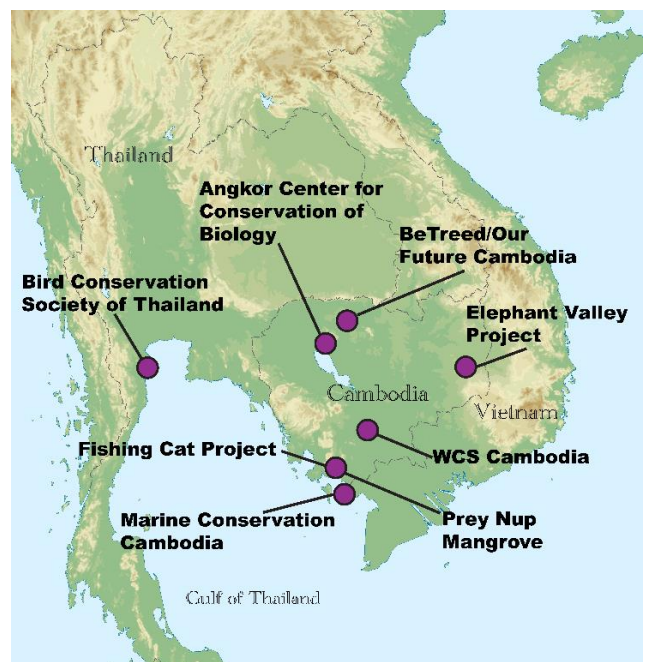
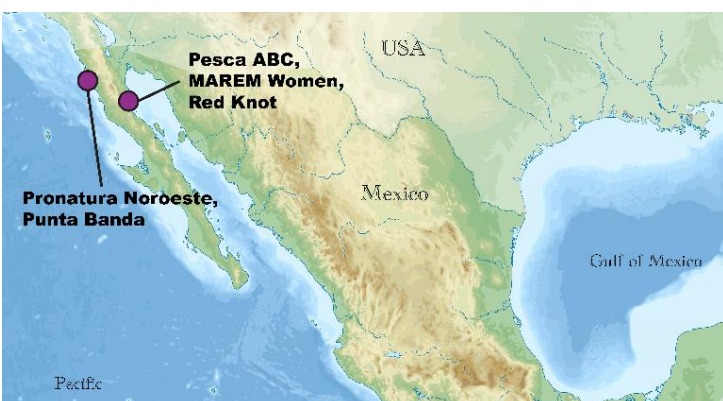
A few quick highlights: **Cambodia:** It was great introducing Scott to my friends at MCC’s tiny home-base island as MCC gears up for a significant expansion. Scott was able to observe block dropping (the under-water deployment of MCC’s Conservation and Anti-trawling Structures) and take part in dolphin surveys. In northern Cambodia we stayed in a protected forest surrounded by a moat to protect it from poachers, snaring, and domestic grazing animals. We got into an Asian longboat to tour possibly the largest (and still not very large) undisturbed mangrove swamp on the coast of Cambodia, home to birds, fish, fishing cats and otters. **In Thailand,** we toured salt flats and mangroves south of Bangkok with personnel from the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand to see one of the winter refuges protected by ICFC’s Spoon-billed Sandpiper project. **In Mexico,** we met with the team working to protect the rare vaquita dolphins through improved fishing methods, and we even got to go out fishing with them, risking seasickness on very rough water. We then met ICFC’s very impressive “grunion queens” of Baja California who, on a shoestring budget and in very challenging circumstances, protect both shore-spawning fish (grunions) and large numbers of migratory shorebirds (red knots) that depend on them along 20 kilometers of shoreline in Baja California.

Through this trip, I learned that ICFC’s contribution is not only to provide funding, but advice, mentoring and connections to some rather heroic projects. We made numerous contacts and visited potential project sites in Cambodia. My main impression is that we need to foster these few remaining “hope spots” before it’s too late.



Scott and Doug (at left, in top photo) with spoon-billed sandpiper project personnel, and (immediately above) with personnel from our two projects in Mexico – the vaquita project and the red knot (“grunion queen”) project.

Below: Sites visited in Mexico, Thailand and Cambodia



Spotlight on the Albertine Rift: a priority region

- Andre Boraks

The Albertine Rift escarpment in the eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo** is one of Africa's most biodiverse regions. This tropical moist broadleaf forest ecoregion features a predominance of Africa's endemic and small-ranged plant, amphibian, and mammal taxa. At least 980 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, butterflies, dragonflies and plants are endemic to the Albertine Rift. This eco-region has been highlighted by conservationists as a priority for decades—most recently in a 2023 [preprint](#) on “conservation imperatives”.

The largest contributors to biodiversity loss in the region are land conversion, stemming from rapid population growth and a need for increased agriculture output, and mineral extraction, driven by the global push for rechargeable batteries in the energy transition from fossil fuels. To complicate the matter, violent conflict by rebel insurgencies continues to plague the region.

Through ICFC's field partner Strong Roots, led by Dominique Bikaba, we are working to establish community-managed forests in the area between Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Itombwe Natural Reserve. Our objective is to form a contiguous forest corridor linking the two protected areas, to reduce pressure on the critically endangered **Grauer's gorilla** (*Gorilla beringei graueri*) and many other endemics. To make this happen, Dominique has been coordinating efforts among government, chiefdoms, and communities. His work is the subject of a new documentary film (by Age of Union, a co-funder), aptly named 'Corridor', which recently had its [debut screening](#) in Toronto. Roughly one-third of the corridor has been officially established to date, representing a dozen community forests in four chiefdoms. With your help, we can finish the corridor and secure a wild refuge for plants and animals in this biodiversity hotspot.

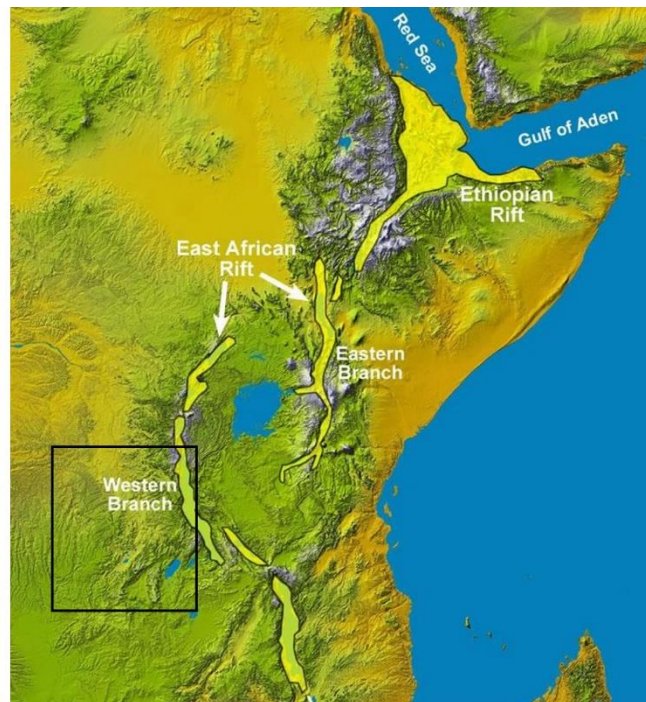
Visit to ICFC's "Fish for Tomorrow" project in Malawi

- Anne Lambert & Tom Welch

In May, we spent six days in the field in Malawi with Ripple Africa founders Geoff and Liz Furber, Country Director Force Ngwira, and Pam Haigh, UK General Manager. We sat in on meetings with the organization's field staff and a top official for Salima District and were welcomed by various communities who are clearly enthusiastic about working with Ripple Africa. One community member told us that Ripple does more for them than the government does! It was great to see firsthand the progress made in our Fish for Tomorrow project. Organizational management is top notch, with a laser focus on action and results. (On a budget of about £1.2 million, Ripple Africa has 700 paid personnel and about 15,000 volunteers involved in its programs.) Fishing communities understand and strongly support newly established fish breeding areas and new regulations on fishing nets—actions that are transforming a highly unsustainable fishery into a thriving one. We were impressed as well with Ripple Africa's work (funded by others) related to sustainable agriculture and fuel-efficient cookstoves.



Geoff Furber shows drone footage of a fish breeding area to village children.



Above: The Albertine Rift is identified in this map as the Western Branch of the Great Rift Valley.

Below: Dawn approach at a fish landing site on Lake Malawi.



Tax changes affecting charitable donations in Canada

Changes to Canada's Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) that will take effect January 1st, 2024 will affect some individual donors, reducing the benefits associated with charitable donations. The changes will affect higher-income earners who make large donations of cash or qualifying securities. Those whose incomes are less than \$173,000 are not subject to the AMT and will not be affected.

Those affected may want to consider making some of your planned 2024 donations this year while the current 2023 rules remain in place. There is online information from accounting/tax firms such as [Grant Thornton](#) and banks. [Scotia Wealth Management](#), for example, suggests strategies that you could consider in consultation with your financial and tax advisors to help mitigate the effects the pending changes to the AMT. Each situation is different and requires a detailed calculation, so it is important to consult with a tax advisor.

Your support is needed...

As we approach the year end, we want you to know how vital your support is—now more than ever—in enabling us to carry on with the projects touched on in this newsletter and with our other programs.

THANK YOU and best wishes from all of us at ICFC!

Your ongoing support makes a difference!

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