



PHOTO & CAPTION

Sustaining Communities, Changing Lives



Photo: USAID/Eliana Stanzioia

Located in San Lorenzo National Park in the Panama Canal watershed, El Achiote is a world-renown site for bird watching. According to Audubon Society records, it holds the most bird sightings for a given period. In addition to birds, it boasts a diversity of flora and fauna.

The community of El Achiote has been working to ensure that it preserves its status as a premier birdwatching site for generations to come: they have built a sustainable tourism infrastructure that is not only protecting the natural resources they depend on, but also improving their quality of life.

With help from USAID, the community developed a plan to build the tourism infrastructure. Every day women and men came together in the tropical heat and humidity to carry heavy stones and lumber to build the trails, bridges, and lookout towers that are the centerpiece of the project. Exhausted, but very proud of their hard work, the community will now run the El Tucán visitor center, a small restaurant, and two interpretative trails, thus improving the services that they provide to local and foreign visitors.

Michael Castro is one of the seven bird watching guides at El Achiote. “We never knew that we could do something like this in our community,” he said. “We thought that we could only make money from agriculture and raising cattle.”

One of the trails, *El Trogón*, is named for the brightly feathered Trogón bird (*Trogon massena*). It offers visitors a chance to live the tropical rainforest experience and enjoy sightings of the Lattice-tailed Trogón. “On this trail you can listen to the calls of a large variety of birds species. In addition to all the birds, we can also observe different kinds of spiders and many mammals,” says Michael. By preserving this important ecological area, Michael and others are making it possible for future generations in El Achiote to enjoy a higher quality of life, and for future visitors to enjoy the breathtaking environment.

“We always thought that having a website was just a dream, but USAID helped us make it a reality,” said Michael Castro, a guide at the El Achiote birdwatching site.