

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Birding Association Convention Presents Wealth of Birding Market Opportunities for Guyana

Snowbird, Utah – Representatives from the Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI) that attended this year's American Birding Association convention in Snowbird, Utah reported that the birdwatching community's interest in Guyana continues to grow, which allowed the team to make many important market connections while at the convention.

Over the course of the week-long convention, Guyana's representatives at the fair – Iwokrama Ranger and Tourism Coordinator, Wally Prince; Manager of Wilderness Explorers, Teri O'Brien; President of Small Planet Consulting and Tourism Director for the GSTI, Judy Karwacki; and GSTI senior writer and author of the Bradt Travel Guide to Guyana, Kirk Smock – met with several important organizations and companies from within the American birdwatching industry.

The team held a long meeting with Leica Sport Optics, one of the world's leading producers of optics, including binoculars, spotting scopes, cameras and lenses, during which they expressed great interest in forging a multi-faceted partnership that would bring a range of exciting benefits for Guyana.

Plans were discussed about the possibility of using Guyana as a destination for the new trend of digiscoping trips. Digiscoping is a method of taking photos by installing a digital camera to a spotting scope, and because it is a new and developing trend in birdwatching, Leica offers international field learning trips to their industry partners, media and consumers. The company is now considering Guyana as a destination for these trips. Countries that host the digiscoping trips benefit by receiving media attention and top-quality optics gear; it is also a chance for local guides to learn from the birding experts that attend the trips.

A partnership with Leica could also result in the company providing Guyana's birding guides with complimentary optic equipment to field test, as well as in-kind promos where top-quality equipment is traded for travel services. Developing digiscoping photo books featuring bird images from Guyana and possible assistance in developing a local birding and nature viewing sites guide were also discussed, as was listing information on birdwatching in Guyana on Leica's website and assisting with the development of volunteer conservation tourism programs in Guyana. To further the partnership, Terry Moore, Vice President of Leica's Sport Optics division, will be coming to Guyana on the upcoming November product familiarization trip.

Guyana reps also made a handful of connections within the birdwatching media that could introduce the country to millions of potential visitors. James Currie, the host of Birding Adventures stopped by the Guyana booth with little knowledge of it as a birding destination and left with plans for filming two different television shows in Guyana's interior: Birding Adventures and its partner show on fishing, Reel Adventures.

Birding Adventures, the first birding TV program that focuses on destination and adventure birdwatching, is billed as a show that, "explores the best exotic birding destinations on the planet; the most unusual, rare and highly sought after bird species; [and] amazing cultures and wildlife." Birding Adventures airs twice weekly in the Southeastern region of the United States to a potential market of 11.4 million viewers; the show also airs on Direct TV to more than 17 million viewers nationwide. Currie said he is interested in coming to Guyana to film three shows on birding and three shows on fishing; filming could start as early as October with the first show airing in 2009.

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Sharon Stiteler, the writer behind Birdchick.com, the highest read birdwatching blog on the internet, also visited the booth to gather information on birdwatching opportunities in Guyana. Besides discussing the possibility of joining a familiarization trip that would result in heavy promotion for Guyana on her blog and website that reaches thousands of people per day, Stiteler also spoke of her other passion of beekeeping and discussed possible volunteer conservation tourism opportunities connected to this increasingly popular hobby where people maintain honeybee colonies. In view of Bee Colony Collapse Disorder phenomenon, which is causing a staggering decline in honeybees, beekeeping is gaining interest worldwide.

In other media news, Rick Wright, freelance writer and Managing Director of leading birding tour operator Wings, also reported that the article he wrote about his trip to Guyana for the ABA publication, *Winging It*, will be published in an upcoming issue. Possibilities to publicize Guyana on BirdCinema.com, a video website where bird enthusiasts can watch and share bird videos (similar to YouTube), were also discussed with representatives of the website.



While it was only the third year that Guyana has exhibited at the ABA convention, the association is now showing a keen interest in the possibilities Guyana offers to birdwatchers. A handful of meetings were held with Richard Payne, ABA President and CEO; Tamie Bulow, ABA Convention and Tours Manager; and Fr. Tom Pincelli, Chair of the Board.

Many exciting opportunities for partnerships were discussed, including using Guyana as a destination for Institute for Field Ornithology Workshops and Century Club Donor Trips, which are birdwatching trips with top birders, educators and staff that are offered to top ABA donors. Guyana is also one of the countries seriously being considered for the ABA's bi-annual International Conference, which could bring upwards of 150 birdwatchers and ABA members to Guyana in 2011. The ABA also spoke about the prospect of being an official endorser of select birdwatching tours to Guyana and offering to sponsor experts who could help start volunteer conservation tourism programs in Guyana. GSTI intends to bring Ms. Bulow and Mr. Payne to Guyana in February 2009 to further the partnership.

Roughly 300 keen birdwatchers from around the United States came to the ABA convention in Utah to attend workshops, watch presentations, visit the trade show exhibits and go on birdwatching field trips. According to their website, "The American Birding Association represents the North American birding community and supports birders through publications, conferences, workshops, tours, partnerships, and networks."

ABA membership represents a range of birding interests, including ornithological education and conservation issues. The ABA also focuses on promoting the economic and environmental values of birding, and promotes and encourages the conservation of birds and bird habitats.

The Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative is receiving support from the Guyana Trade and Investment Support program, a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). For more information, please visit www.guyanabirding.com.



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