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**PRESS RELEASE
July 4, 2008**

EU GMPP-Iwokrama Birding Guide Training Program Increases Local Guide Expertise

Iwokrama Forest, Guyana – From May 31 to June 15, 2008, sixteen of Guyana’s intermediate-level birding guides participated in the first Iwokrama Birding Guide Training Programme. The goal of the course was to increase their avifauna knowledge and birding guide expertise to a level of professional guides. The 16-day course took place at many birding sites in Guyana’s North Rupununi, including Bina Hill Institute, Surama Village and the Iwokrama International Centre’s Canopy Walkway and Field Station. Professional instructors for the program were two top Neotropical birding guides: Chris Collins of the United Kingdom’s Neotropical Birding Club and Wildwings, and Barry Walker, owner of Manu Expeditions in Peru.

The main goal of the program was to provide knowledge and skills to Guyana’s leading birding guides so they will be better equipped to provide international caliber birding guide services to the international and domestic tourism markets. Four of the guide trainees also received train-the-trainer skills so they will be able to train future guides in Guyana as the birding tourism market continues to increase.

The training will allow Guyana’s tourism destinations to be better equipped for increases in tourism arrivals and will improve employment and income generating opportunities for local communities, while focusing on the importance of strong environmental ethics. All participants received birding equipment including waterproof binoculars, *The Birds of Northern South America* field guide set, and bird vocalization recording and playback equipment.

A major objective of the European Union’s Guyana Micro-Projects Programme (EU GMPP) - Iwokrama Birding Guide Training Programme was to make an overall contribution towards improving the standard of national guiding and interpretive services through the introduction of qualified guiding personnel, and is a component of Iwokrama’s tourism development strategy that includes strengthening links with the private sector and ensuring local community involvement in tourism in the Iwokrama Forest.

Guides that participated in the training included (home villages are in parentheses): Gary Sway (Surama); Chris Li (Yupukari); Ashley Holland (Yupukari); Rovin Alvin (Rewa); Luke Johnson (North Ruimveldt); Dexter Torres (Wowetta); Asaph Wilson (Sand Creek); Gabriel Andries (Annai); Hendricks Daniels (Rupertee); Edward Williams (Santa Mission); Kenneth Mandook (Yupukari); Manual Mandook (Yupukari); Archer Moses (Wowetta); Huxley Moses (Wowetta); Wally Prince (Upper North Ruimveldt); and Ron Allicock (Surama)

The Iwokrama Birding Guide Training Programme was primarily funded by the European Union’s Micro-Projects Programme, with additional in-kind contributions from many tourism partners in Guyana. Iwokrama, Caribbean Airlines, Trans-Guyana Airways, Cara Lodge, Rock View Lodge, Community and Tourism Services (CATS), Surama Ecolodge and the Bina Hill Institute provided donations towards the costs of travel, venue rental, lodging and meals. Among cash donations in support of the guide tuition fee and equipment

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The Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development is an autonomous non-profit institution established by Guyana and the Commonwealth. The Centre manages the nearly one million acre (371,000 hectare) Iwokrama Forest in central Guyana to show how tropical forests can be conserved and sustainably used for ecological, social and economic benefits to local, national and international communities.

purchases, Conservation International and the British High Commission each made contributions valued at US\$1,000. Other generous donations came from Birding Ecotours (US\$550), Judy Karwacki (US\$500), Doug Dunlevy (US\$200) and Susan Drennan of the US National Audubon Society (US\$150).

The Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) – United States Agency for International Development / Guyana Trade and Investment Support (USAID/GTIS) Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI) – renamed from the Guyana Birding Tourism Program – assisted Iwokrama with planning and coordinating the training program. The Iwokrama International Centre is one of Guyana’s functioning protected areas and has been identified as a critical institution for training for Guyana’s tourism industry.

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