

Baldemir Ricky Manzanero – Casa Avian Support Alliance, NGO

Born and raised in Bullet Tree Falls, Ricky Manzanero has been a conservation emissary since 1988, introducing both locals and visitors to the cultural and natural wonders of Belize. His heartfelt concern for the environment, his exceptional knowledge of avian wildlife, and his familiarity with the cultures that have shaped Belize, have brought him recognition as a premier birding guide and placed him among the most sought-out tour guides in Belize.

Ricky's intimate knowledge of the *Peten*, a vast region that stretches eastward from western Belize into Guatemala, was gained in large part as a young man accompanying his father in search of *chicle*. Long days spent on the bush trails and nights passed in neotropical jungle campsites provided subject and lesson, often seen through his father's eyes. Always eager to share his knowledge of the bio-diversity found in the *Peten* he is equally comfortable on an early morning birding trek or a night time journey into the bush where he identifies the nocturnal creatures and their activities that can only be viewed during the hours of darkness.

Having earned great recognition for his knowledge of the migratory and resident birds found in Belize and their bush habitat, and seeking greater involvement in the conservation effort, Ricky was offered and humbly accepted, in 2007, the position of In-Country Director for Casa Avian Support Alliance (CASA), NGO. In the years since, Ricky has been both steward and student coordinating the three inter-related and inter-dependent goals of CASA, which are habitat restoration, education, and avian rehabilitation and release. He is also a Community Associate with ISIS Belize, an international studies organization, located in San Ignacio.

The resurgence of avi-fauna in CASA's habitat restoration area is testimony to Ricky's efforts and knowledge of the bush and the habitat requirements of avian wildlife. Working alongside CASA's four Avian Clinic Managers, Ricky has contributed to numerous educational opportunities, and has embarked on a training program to qualify as a wildlife rehabilitator focusing primarily on avi-fauna. His time in the bush and tireless observations of the local birds have provided him with substantial and much valued information as to the flora favored by numerous species of birds for both sustenance and nesting – knowledge which is critical to rehabilitation efforts where natural food sources and proper caging enhancements are essential to successful rehabilitation – all knowledge that he gladly shares with students and visitors.

Staff, students and guests are comforted by Ricky's knowledge and manner - their experiences with him, both at the facility and in the bush, are a lasting part of the memories they carry home from Belize.