

CITES Master's Course Regional Cohort: Latin America and the Caribbean



Photos: jaguar (Levi Novey/USFWS), fiery-throated hummingbird (Levi Novey/USFWS), coral (Adam/CC), blue and gold macaw (Dennis Jarvis/CC), hawksbill sea turtle (Willyam Bradbury/Shutterstock)

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is the world's third largest biodiversity hotspot and has nearly 4,000 wildlife species protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Illegal wildlife trade is a significant threat to wildlife and plants, yet government authorities are challenged to control and monitor illegal trade due to insufficient capacity. To help develop the capacity to implement CITES, in 2018-2019, the USFWS supported 15 wildlife professionals from 11 LAC countries with scholarships to complete their Master's degree in the Management and Conservation of Species in Trade: The International Framework (the CITES Master's Course) offered through the International University of Andalucia in Spain. The CITES Master's Course helps professionals develop the technical expertise to regulate wildlife trade. This scholarship aims to reinforce the technical knowledge necessary to implement CITES, with the ultimate goal to counter wildlife trafficking in the region. The graduates of the course (below) contribute their expertise to protecting CITES-listed wildlife from trafficking and unsustainable harvest throughout their region.



Airam Lopez (Guatemala)

Airam is an Aquaculturist and works in the Governing Institution of Protected Areas and Biological Diversity that also implements the CITES Convention. Airam has completed research projects related to the conservation of wildlife, hydro-biological resources, and aquatic ecosystems. Airam's thesis topic examined whether fishing of silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) in Guatemala is having a detrimental impact on wild populations.



Carmen Medina (Panama)

Carmen works in the Panama Ministry of the Environment which also houses the CITES Administrative Authority of Panama. Carmen's thesis topic was on examining the technical and operational needs of enforcement agencies in Panama in relation to wildlife crime.



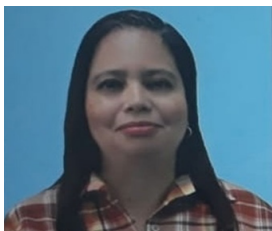
Cesar Belteton (Guatemala)

Cesar is an Agronomist in Renewable Natural Resources within the National Council of Protected Areas of Guatemala (CONAP). Cesar is also currently the Head of the Forestry Directorate of the National Council of Protected Areas and the Regional Representative for Central and South America and the Caribbean in the CITES Plants Committee. Cesar's thesis topic was an evaluation of the implementation of CITES for timber species of the genus *Dalbergia* in Guatemala.



David Mahabir (Trinidad and Tobago)

David is a Wildlife Biologist, Head of Wildlife Section, and the Assistant Conservator of Forests for Trinidad. David is involved with a variety of wildlife related research including scientific research projects involving the west Indian manatee, sea turtles, avian species, zoonotic diseases that affect wildlife, genetic testing of wildlife species, and GIS fire predictive modeling. David's thesis topic was an evaluation of CITES Authorities in Trinidad and Tobago.



Judith Perez (Nicaragua)

Judith works for Nicaragua’s Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA). Judith is involved in assessing CITES permit requests, inspection of zoos and of wildlife exports, and environmental education for students and government agencies throughout Nicaragua. Judith’s thesis topic focused on the international trade in strawberry poison dart frog (*Oophaga pumilio*) and green and black poison dart frog (*Dendrobates auratus*) from Nicaragua.



Mercedes Valdez (Belize)

Mercedes is a Forester at the Belize Forest Department and has served in the capacity of Officer-in-Charge of three Forest Department range offices. She is currently the Officer-in-Charge at the Ignacio Forest Station. In addition to her work in forestry and wildlife management, she also advises the Forest Department in CITES-related matters. Mercedes’ thesis topic was the analysis of the regeneration of *Dalbergia stevensonii* in the Deep River Forest Reserve, Belize.



Victoria Caceres (Dominican Republic)

Victoria is a Technician at the Department of Regulation and Control of Wildlife of the Directorate of Biodiversity within the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. Victoria prepares CITES permits, and inspects plant nurseries, zoo and theme parks. Victoria recently conducted a workshop for the International Academy for Conservation Leaders (ICCA) concerning compliance related to combating illegal wildlife trafficking. Victoria’s thesis topic examined the impact of trade on CITES listed plant species exported from the Dominican Republic.



Vladimir Baiza (El Salvador)

Vladimir is a Agricultural Engineer and Technician for the CITES Scientific Authority in El Salvador and primarily works in the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources with conservation and timber species rescue. Vladimir has participated in a CITES Arboreal Species Program Project and worked on conservation projects with endangered species. Vladimir’s thesis topic examined the commercial trade of tropical rosewood (*Dalbergia* spp.) from El Salvador, and offered guidelines for the conservation and sustainable harvesting of these vulnerable tree species.

Other recipients of the USFWS LAC Master’s Course Scholarship:

- Adonika Spellen (Guyana)
- Adriani Nicholson (Belize)
- Alexander Montero (Panama)
- Carlos Mario Orrego Vasquez (Costa Rica)
- Desi Corneille (Bahamas)
- Lemuel Cromwell (Guyana)
- Ricardo Miller (Jamaica)

“With this learning, I can contribute to better combat illegal trafficking that occurs every day in the world.”
- Victoria Caceres, LAC Cohort



The LAC Cohort with other CITES Master’s Course students.
Photo by David Mahabir

