

# theHoustonMuseumofnaturalscience

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### Important birds face extinction

#### New online book provides plan of action



HOUSTON—While populations of the better-known Bald Eagle have risen enough for government officials to consider removing them from the threatened species list, the cracid family of birds face the serious threat of total extinction. Cracids (chachalacas, guans and curassows) are the family of Latin American game birds containing 50 large, forest-dwelling, fruit-eating species. Unfortunately, half of these 50 species are threatened or endangered, making them the most threatened family of birds in the Americas.

In an effort to help protect these unique birds, Daniel Brooks, Ph.D., curator of vertebrate zoology at the Houston Museum of Natural Science and chair of the Cracid Specialist Group, has outlined a conservation plan in the new book *Conserving Cracids: The Most Threatened Family of Birds in the Americas*. This book represents the work of over 40 authors from more than a dozen countries, compiling the most recent status updates and action priorities for threatened and regional populations of cracids, based on field data and on-the-ground expertise.

“We are trying to elevate the awareness of cracids to the same level as some of the more well-known, charismatic animals like pandas, whales and tigers,” said Brooks.

Cracids are an economically and ecologically significant family of Latin American birds. Avid birdwatchers visit the tropics to view these beautiful and unique animals, which contributes to the tourism industry in parts of Latin America. Cracids also help maintain lush rainforests through natural seed dispersal processes. Additionally, cracids are an important protein source for native people of Central and South America.

## *Conserving Cracids 2*

“Unfortunately, the same protein source that has proved vital to sustain the native people is also in demand by people of every walk of life that live in Latin America,” said Brooks. “Consequently, in many cases, the cracids are being over-harvested to the point where populations are plummeting dramatically.” The other main threat to cracids is destruction of the tropical forests they call home.

The book consists of several individual action plans, divided into chapters written by Cracidologists who specialize in one or more of the 25 endangered species. The easy-to-read format includes photographs and paintings of cracids. Each action plan provides a step-by-step guide on how to conserve a specific species.

Edited by Brooks and colleagues Laura Cancino and Sergio Pereira, the book is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese, making it useful to the people of Latin America who need it most, to conserve the rare cracids where they live. A generous grant from the Chicago Zoological Society will permit printing and distribution of hard copies of the book throughout Latin America, insuring that the biologists, conservation officers, government officials and educators who need it most will receive it.

*Conserving Cracids: The Most Threatened Family of Birds in the Americas* is for anyone interested in protecting these exotic birds. It is available for free online at [www.cracids.org/AP\\_Engl\\_ebook.pdf](http://www.cracids.org/AP_Engl_ebook.pdf).

**The Houston Museum of Natural Science**—one of the nation’s most heavily attended museums—is a centerpiece of the Houston Museum District. With four floors of permanent exhibit halls, and the Wortham IMAX® Theatre, Cockrell Butterfly Center, Burke Baker Planetarium and George Observatory and as host to world-class and ever-changing touring exhibitions, the Museum has something to delight every age group. With such diverse and extraordinary offerings, a trip to the Houston Museum of Natural Science, located at One Hermann Circle Drive in the heart of the Museum District, is always an adventure.

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