

WE CALLED IN THE MILITARY

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What comes to mind when you hear the word military? Certainly, each person will react differently, depending on one's own experiences or simply what one believes in. For some, the military is an organization longing for war and destruction; for others, these are men and women who keep order and peace and are very helpful when natural catastrophes occur. People who believe in the good of the military can add a new dimension to their importance. The honor for this achievement belongs to the army of the Dominican Republic. This army will take part in a life-saving mission by participating in our Dominican Republic Owl Conservation Project (DROCP) to save the endemic owl species of their country from extinction. They will finance and build three aviaries for the Hispaniolan Burrowing Owl (*Athene cucularia troglodytes*) at ZOODOM, the National Zoo of the Dominican Republic (Fig. 1). I can understand that you, reading this, are a little bit puzzled because it is something globally unheard of. At the beginning of the 21st Century, the Dominican Republic put a new positive meaning to the word military, which can be described as a milestone in military history. Can you imagine if other countries would follow and use their army power in nature conservation and that soldiers would join the battle to protect their countries nature treasures? How much better our world would be. Hats off to the men and women in the Dominican Republic who made this decision.

But there is even more good news about our DROCP. The Banco de Reservas (the government bank) will pay the food costs for the captive owl population.

And how do our owls fare under human care at ZOODOM? We have completed two aviaries for the endemic Ashy-faced Owl (*Tyto glaucops*). The only pair we have so far occupies one aviary, and that pair produced five owlets in 2001. Five females occupy the second aviary. Our three unrelated pairs of Hispaniolan Burrowing Owls are awaiting the completion of their aviaries. We have also taken four colorful Hispaniolan Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus domingensis*) into our care. The fourth Owl species for which we have concern, the Hispaniola Stygian Owl (*Asio stygius noctipetens*), is still absent from our breeding project.

Please consider how much engagement, dedication, understanding, and love is needed to make this all possible. I think we (the rest of the world) owe the people of the Dominican Republic, especially the military, the Banco de Reservas, the administration at ZOODOM and last, but not least, Prof. Simón Guerrero, our project leader, a profound and heartfelt "Thank you."

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Fig. 1. Captive Burrowing Owl (*Athene cucularia troglodytes*) in nesting chamber at ZOODOM, Dominican Republic.