



Globe staff photo/Bill Greene

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Protector of the environment

*From Boston to Belize,
Gerard Bertrand fights
for the cause*

By Carol Stocker
Globe Staff

Gerard Bertrand, who looks a bit like New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan without the wolfish eyebrows, is a hard charger who gives off sparks. If he were reincarnated, he says he would probably come back as one of the flashier large predators — perhaps a big jungle cat.

As one-time White House science adviser and chief of International Affairs for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Gerard Bertrand has traveled to 67 countries, worked on international conservation treaties and made 15 trips to India to help set up wildlife

conservation programs.

Now president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, he is leading that organization in an unprecedented global direction as it creates a 150,000-acre migratory bird refuge in the tropical Central American country of Belize.

While many are bemoaning the loss of tropical forests as the greatest ecological sin of our time — maybe

in history — Bertrand is doing something about it. "We're going to lose one out of every five kinds of plants and animals by the turn of the century. That's a fact that could make you cry, but I'd rather fight than wring my hands."

Bertrand was sitting behind his desk at his Lincoln headquarters next to a silky white-on-white embroidered 16th-century tapestry of Chinese egrets, a species that may or may not survive into the 21st century.

"All Americans are rich by world standards. Rich beyond the dream of Solomon," said Bertrand. But he believes that with all our riches — and all our waste — there's much we can learn from the people of the Third World.

"When 50 percent of the people get their roofing directly from the forest, as in India, or when women walk five miles to carry water, as in Somalia, they have a direct relationship with their resources.

"In the United States we're so insulated from sources of supply that we don't even realize it when we're poisoning our ground water by using lawn care services. My neighbor came over last week with a robin in the palm of his hand, its legs spastic and pumping. I said, 'I see you had your lawn treated
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Strong voice for the environment

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today.' And he said, 'How did you know?'

Bertrand rolled his eyes.

He is a man with vision — 20/10 or better according to his optometrist. He can identify an immature northern goshawk soaring over distant woods without raising his binoculars.

But he also has another kind of vision, one of the future — and he is doing everything he can to keep it from coming true.

"When I travel to India and Japan I see two possible futures for this country. India has 700 million living in a land mass one third the size of the United States and it makes me wonder what life here will be like when we have 700 million people.

"India has 100 million homeless people living on the streets. Living on the edge of survival like that — everybody's got an angle. They're like New Yorkers!" Bertrand said, not without admiration.

"Japan, on the other hand, has the same kind of population density, but it's clean, well-preserved. The trade-off is that there's very little freedom, because everything you do affects your neighbor."

Bertrand doesn't want to see the United States follow either scenario, and he thinks the most important thing we can do to maintain the quality of life we enjoy here is keep our population down.

But even though Massachusetts' population has not grown markedly in recent years, it has spread out as each body has demanded more space and more resources. Suburban developments, freeways and shopping malls have obliterated woods, farms and fields. Six hundred acres of open land are being lost to development each week in the state.

At the same time there's more interest in bird feeding and bird watching than ever before as residents look for that contact with the wild world that is slipping from their lives.

This has translated into a 50 percent increase in Massachusetts Audubon membership during Bertrand's seven years at the helm. With almost 40,000 families, Massachusetts has the largest per capita Audubon membership of any state. And that support has translated into political and financial clout.

Working from a five-year plan that is perennially updated, the society has made energy conservation, water resources and ecosystem protection its top three priorities, but as Bertrand admits, "They're all one issue."

Clean drinking water is the No. 1 environmental concern of the Massachusetts public according to a Massachusetts Audubon survey. The organization has fought hard on this issue, successfully supporting three important water management laws during his tenure.

On the political front

Bertrand said the Audubon Society gets at least one bill a year through the state Legislature and describes his working relationship with State Senate President William Bulger and House Speaker George Keverian as "cordial and productive."

The Audubon Society also lobbied strongly for the Open Space Capital Outlay Bill that passed the state Legislature this month and provided \$500 million for the protection of land in Massachusetts, including watersheds, farms, coastal areas, aquifer lands and urban parks.

Less successful was the land bank bill that called for up to 1½ percent of the sale price of property to be set aside for the acquisition of open space or affordable housing at the option of the town. Opposed by the

Massachusetts Association of Homebuilders, it lost by five votes in the Legislature. "It will be our No. 1 priority for passage in the coming year."

Bertrand is ferocious on the subject of saving land for conservation. His proudest achievement is the 5,500 new acres acquired for new or enlarged Audubon sanctuaries during his seven years here. His greatest regret is "every square inch I've missed."

His aggressive approach has included using aerial photography to spot undeveloped tracts, hiring a "land protection officer" to handle negotiations and, even, as a last resort, paying fair market value for property, though most still comes through bequests or at discounted prices.

Much of this new acreage has been south — Sharon, Lakeville, South Dartmouth, Marshfield. Now the Massachusetts Audubon has extended itself far far to the south — putting up half a million dollars toward the purchase of 110,000 acres of tropical forest in Belize, a country the size of Massachusetts.

Of this amount, \$200,000 will be a gift and the rest is considered a loan to prime the pump for more than \$5 million in international public fund raising.

This is an especially brave undertaking when you realize that the Massachusetts Audubon Society is not affiliated with the National Audubon Society, but is instead an independent local organization.

There are 10 independent Audubon societies in various states. These as well as other conservation organizations have been invited to join on the project. Bertrand dearly hopes they will.

"The society has stuck its neck out very far on this one. We need help to make it work. But turtles don't make progress unless they stick their necks out."

When added to 40,000 acres contributed by Coca-Cola Foods, the forest will be consolidated into Belize's largest national park.

The project evolved by chance after the World Wildlife Fund asked Massachusetts Audubon to take on support of the fledgling Belize Audubon Society as a sister organization. After Coca-Cola Foods came under fire by environmentalists for acquiring a huge tract of forest with the goal of turning some of it into citrus groves, Bertrand approached them and the window of opportunity opened.

Some 40 percent of "our" Massachusetts birds spend their winters in Latin America's dwindling forests, Bertrand points out.

Grandmother's influence

Of Irish, French and Iroquois Indian extraction, Bertrand was born in Boston but grew up in a half dozen states and in Europe while his father was a colonel in the medical service corps.

Bertrand traces his interest in nature to his grandmother and his prodigious energy level to his mother. "I don't deserve any credit for it. It's something I inherited. The question is what I do with that energy."

His Washington years left Bertrand with can-do confidence and a great respect for pragmatic politics. "Of the presidents I worked under, Nixon had the least personal interest in the environment and accomplished the most. He saw it simply as a good vote-getting issue. On the other hand, Carter cared the most and accomplished the least. He ran on a platform of Washington bashing, and when he brought his people to Washington, they couldn't get anything done."

It was Bertrand's ability to get things done that pushed him into an increasingly managerial role. His biggest thrill was working on the endangered species



Globe staff photo/Bill Greene

Gerard Bertrand bird-watching in Lincoln.

convention in 1973 that banned products made from whales, jungle cats and other threatened species, and which introduced him to the conservationists of the world.

How does an American of goodwill who has seen the pressures and poverty of the Third World live with the moral inconsistencies of our own abundant lifestyle?

The biggest personal sacrifice that Jerry Bertrand, and his wife Faith have made to world conser-

vation is to have only two children, he said.

"We both love kids! We would have liked to have four or five. But even if we just had three, that third child would have consumed more in non-renewable resources than all of our life-long efforts saved."

He shrugged and waved one hand, a man dismissing a personal loss. "It's an old saw, but every child born in America uses up as many resources as 100 children born in Ethiopia."