

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 17TH MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF CARIBBEAN BIRDS

The following reports are from the plenary lectures, workshops, symposia, roundtable discussions, and working group meetings convened during the 17th Meeting of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, held in Jolly Beach, Antigua, 14–18 July 2009. The scientific program and all abstracts from the meeting can be downloaded from www.scsb.org.

REPORT FROM THE WORKSHOP “RESTORING SEABIRDS AND OTHER NATIVE SPECIES IN THE CARIBBEAN: A WORKSHOP TO EMPOWER PARTICIPANTS TO PRIORITIZE, PLAN, AND SECURE FUNDING FOR REMOVING DAMAGING NON-NATIVE VERTEBRATES FROM ISLANDS”

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In insular ecosystems like the Caribbean, invasive species are responsible for two-thirds of extinctions and represent the greatest current threat to biodiversity. Invasive species are the primary threat to Caribbean seabird populations as well as many endemic plants, birds, and reptiles. After invasive species have been eradicated from uninhabited or lightly populated islands around the world, populations of seabirds and other sensitive species have increased dramatically. This powerful conservation tool, however, has been under-utilized in the Caribbean. To help remedy this situation, an interactive workshop was held at the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) meeting in Antigua, July 2009, to advance the practice of invasive species eradications in the region. This workshop supports the goals of both the SCSCB Seabird Working Group and Invasive Species Working Group.

OBJECTIVES OF WORKSHOP AND DISCUSSION

1. Provide context for eradication of terrestrial vertebrates to protect and restore island habitats.
2. Empower participants with the knowledge of what islands are good candidates for invasive vertebrate eradication and the social criteria that must be

met to enable successful projects.

3. Summarize what is known about the presence of invasive species at seabird colonies.

4. Mine the collective knowledge of SCSCB to improve our understanding of invasive vertebrate presence on Caribbean islands.

5. Establish a framework for collaboration to promote and facilitate high-priority eradications.

RESULTS

The workshop was well attended and included a broad suite of people with on-the-ground knowledge of islands and the local communities in the Caribbean.

Presentations by staff of Island Conservation, an NGO dedicated to preventing extinctions by removing invasive species from islands, provided participants with an understanding of the context and potential for conservation through eradications, as well as the social and political readiness criteria necessary for successful eradication projects. Will Mackin, manager of the West Indian Breeding Seabirds Atlas, presented on the state of knowledge about Caribbean seabird colonies and co-located invasive species (visit wicbirds.net to view and contribute to the West Indian Breeding Seabirds Atlas

database). These presentations can be accessed on the SCSCB website (www.scsb.org).

Workshop participants then broke into sub-regional groups to expand on known information by reviewing the records in the West Indian Breeding Seabird Atlas and completing questionnaires relevant to invasive species eradication. Island Conservation will continue to collect this information over time to inform eradication needs and feasibility (visit www.islandconservation.org, navigate to the pages relating to work in the Caribbean and contribute using the “Caribbean Seabird Restoration–Invasive Mammal Datasheet”). The end product will be used to highlight the need for conservation at these sites, enable participants to begin the process of setting the stage politically and socially for eradication, and direct conservation dollars to these important projects in the future.

In addition to the benefits to participants and the garnering of important new information for regional databases, the workshop provided organizers opportunities to build relationships to undertake an overarching regional strategy of information-gathering, strategic-planning, capacity-building, and successful eradications.

NEXT STEPS

We recommend the following five goals should be a focus for action:

1. Implement high priority invasive vertebrate eradication projects identified during the workshop that meet the initial social and political readiness criteria;

2. Continue program to increase our knowledge of invasive vertebrate distribution in the region – continue data collection begun at the workshop, collate, and analyze. Continuous updating and evaluation is needed with flexible priorities that can change as new information comes in. Areas identified with particular need for more data are Cuba and southern Bahamas.

3. Develop network to facilitate invasive vertebrate eradications on islands in the Caribbean. Provide support for staff that can, through SCSCB and other partners, identify strong local partners in which we can develop local capacity to help plan, facilitate, and monitor vertebrate eradications in each country, including skills and support maintaining islands free of invasive vertebrates. Capacity to implement eradications would be shared among international experts and local capacity would be developed as appropriate.

4. Provide support, advice, and resources for control projects for invasive vertebrates in situations where eradication is not feasible.

5. Incorporate taxa other than birds into the regional assessment and develop priorities for conservation that take these into account.