

REPORT FROM THE SYMPOSIUM AND ROUND-TABLE  
DISCUSSION “CONSERVING THE REGION’S WATERBIRDS  
AND WETLANDS—CHALLENGES, SUCCESSES, AND SOLUTIONS”

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THROUGHOUT THE CARIBBEAN, wetlands—and the birds that rely on them—are in dire need of conservation action. Many of the region’s original wetlands have been lost, and those that remain are subject to destruction for development (e.g., for tourism, industry, housing, and agriculture) and degradation (e.g., pollution, cutting of mangroves, and invasive species). Waterbird populations are also subject to hunting, human disturbance, egg and chick harvest, and predation by introduced invasive species such as rats (*Rattus* spp.), cats (*Felis catus*), and mongoose (*Herpestes javanicus*). These threats are all compounded by lack of protection, poor enforcement of existing protections or insufficient management. Despite this bleak picture, there are a number of promising approaches being applied in the region, and an energy and level of investment which bode well for wetland and waterbird conservation, even if one site at a time!

The Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) has had a long-standing interest in waterbirds (including seabirds, wading birds, marshbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl) and their wetland habitats. Efforts to develop an overarching waterbird conservation framework or plan for the region began in 2001, and all subsequent SCSCB meetings have included sessions to share and expand on approaches to waterbird and wetland conservation. Although the plan has never been formally completed, significant steps have been made in assessing the region’s waterbird and wetland resources, and SCSCB, together with our partners, has made marked progress in achieving some of the plan’s goals, especially with regards to outreach and education. Identification of the most important waterbird sites has been completed. The West Indian Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*; WIWD) and Wetlands Conservation Project has been conducting training workshops and providing educational materials to teachers and natural resource agency staff throughout the region to raise awareness about the functions and values of wet-

lands. The project has also sponsored WIWD surveys and monitoring, conducted hunter outreach and education, organized and facilitated a workshop on the restoration of Ashton Lagoon in Union Island, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and promoted and assisted with the development of Watchable Wildlife Ponds (Cayman Islands, Bahamas, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica). Activities relating to advocacy, monitoring, site protection, and restoration have also been ongoing on various islands.

OBJECTIVES OF SYMPOSIUM AND DISCUSSION

1. Learn about the work across the region to identify Important Bird Areas for waterbirds and related information on waterbird and wetland resources and conservation needs.
2. Identify the most urgent needs and next steps for bolstering conservation activities to benefit waterbirds and wetlands across the region.
3. Clarify the form that the Caribbean Waterbirds Plan will take in order to be of greatest utility to conservation efforts throughout the region.

SYMPOSIUM MESSAGES

The symposium included six presentations, beginning with a regional-scale perspective, followed by two national overviews, and concluding with three site-specific case studies.

Verónica Anadón-Irizarry summarized the activities of a multi-year project to compile waterbird Important Bird Areas (IBAs) across the region as well as national-scale information on species, threats, and conservation activities. Outputs from this project, undertaken by the BirdLife International partnership on behalf of the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas initiative, will be documented in the IBAs of the Caribbean book (due out in early 2008) and in national reports made available on the Internet. Predensa Moore then described the process of compiling IBA information for the Bahamas, and the use of that information by the Bahamas National Trust to focus and guide site con-

servation activities. Junior Prosper described the many challenges and threats facing Antigua's wetlands and efforts to counter these threats through education and community involvement, mangrove restoration, advocacy, and monitoring of West Indian Whistling-Ducks.

The latter presentations were case studies presented by Fred Schaffner, Clive Petrovic, and Lisa Sorenson, respectively. The case of Laguna Cartagena, Puerto Rico, illustrates how wetland protection must also be accompanied by management if benefits to waterbirds are to be ensured. Laguna Cartagena once provided important habitat to resident and migrant aquatic birds, but it has failed to recover from severe reduction and degradation (despite being designated as a national wildlife refuge) as a result of insufficient management, especially of water levels. The case of Josiah's Bay Pond on Tortola, British Virgin Islands, is an example of the ability of some aquatic bird populations to take immediate advantage of newly-available suitable habitat. Josiah's Bay Pond underwent an unintentional transformation from seawater-fed salt pond to freshwater wetland, which resulted in the appearance of many species unreported for several decades as well as species previously unknown in the BVI. The case of Ashton Lagoon, Union Island, St. Vincent and the Grenadines—in addition to being a cautionary tale about shady development schemes—was presented to underscore the importance of community involvement in site stewardship. The eventual recovery and long-term sustainable use of the lagoon, damaged by an ill-conceived and irresponsible marina “development” project that

was eventually abandoned, is dependent on communication and collaboration between key stakeholders, including residents.

#### RESULTS OF DISCUSSION

Unexpected changes in the meeting schedule allowed for very little time for discussion. Rather, the participants were queried for quick input on the group's structure, activities, and next steps:

1. The participants reaffirmed the need for a network focused specifically on waterbird and waterbird habitat conservation topics.

2. Lester Doodnath and Joseph Prosper kindly volunteered to co-chair this group.

3. Participants agreed in concept to the importance of focusing on a limited number of activities, most likely based on priority sites.

4. Determination of the working group activities is dependent on the information soon to be available in the form of the IBA book and national waterbird reports.

5. Because of the working group's overlapping interests with other SCSCB working groups (specifically Seabirds and West Indian Whistling-Duck Working Groups), the question of the Waterbird Working Group's scope relative to these other groups will be posted to the SCSCB network for input and opinions.

6. The fate of the Caribbean Waterbirds Plan was not resolved; however, it was recognized that it should be revised and updated, based on new information that will soon be available in the national waterbird reports.