

## REPORT OF THE MONITORING WORKING GROUP

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LONG-TERM BIRD MONITORING programs are crucial to conservation efforts. Monitoring data provides information on abundance, distribution, and diversity. Knowledge of population size and trends of birds in specific habitats are required in order to carry out informed conservation and management activities as well as assess the effectiveness of these activities.

The Monitoring Working Group was formed at the 2005 meeting of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB), following a symposia and workshop entitled "Strategies for monitoring birds in the Caribbean—How to design and carry out a monitoring program." Participants at this session recognized the need for collaborative monitoring efforts and expanded training opportunities. Specific issues that were identified included the lack of qualified biologists or other resources in key regions and confusion over how to compare monitoring data across large areas, especially when local organizations often have their own goals and locally defined monitoring objectives.

During the workshop the following types of monitoring programs were explored: inventories, definition of population size and habitat relationships based on a broad-scale set of point counts, censuses based on repeated counts, constant effort mist-netting, the determination of reproductive success and reproductive rate through nest monitoring, and the estimation of population composition, survivorship, and site fidelity through a comprehensive program of mist netting and/or color-band resighting.

The group was chaired by Steve Latta and Jon McCracken, who facilitated the workshop and held an introductory meeting, published a report in the *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* (Latta 2005a), and developed a vision and 5 yr plan and questionnaire (Latta 2005b). Steve also prepared a training project for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act fund but this was not successful. Unfortunately Steve has changed jobs and his time to work with the group is limited; both Steve and Jon have resigned as co-chairs. Chris Wood and Ann

Haynes-Sutton have stepped in to provide leadership as co-chairs.

### VISION AND GOALS

The long-term vision of SCSCB's Monitoring Working Group is to enable Caribbean countries to build high-quality bird monitoring and training programs that have regional relevance and significance because of shared species and habitats. Within this context, the working group will:

1. Foster inter-island cooperation and collaboration in the regional monitoring of shared species of birds (including Neotropical migrants) and their associated habitats;
2. Work to significantly increase the number of skilled field biologists living in the region; and
3. Build regional capacity to carry out standardized monitoring and training programs.

Although the focus of the working group is on the Caribbean islands, the group will cooperate with other groups, agencies, and interests working on common goals within the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Western Hemisphere.

The objectives of the group were: to promote training of SCSCB members in monitoring techniques; to encourage inter-island cooperation in monitoring shared species and habitats; to prepare a regional report on bird monitoring that will include existing monitoring programs, existing training opportunities, and recommendations for standardized monitoring protocols; and to explore options for funding training programs in the region.

Over a 5-yr period the Monitoring Working Group planned to (from Latta 2005b):

1. Compile and disseminate information on existing monitoring and training programs that are relevant to the Caribbean;
2. Identify and promote standardized monitoring protocols that can be used to report upon trends of species of interest within the Caribbean;
3. Promote the need for the creation of a common database structure and data-sharing system, so that data of regional interest can be archived, retrieved and analysed by program participants;

4. Support the development of an internet program to facilitate regional data input from scientists and volunteers (birdwatchers, students, etc.), to compile data, and retrieve reports, maps, etc.;

5. Promote standardized protocols for training specialized field staff, with a view towards creating a cadre of trainers in the Caribbean;

6. Attempt to identify one or more regional “centers of excellence” in the Caribbean that can take a lead role on developing monitoring and training programs within the region; and

7. Seek resources to undertake the above.

#### SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

All present agreed that the monitoring group was very important to the work of the society. It was agreed that the framework developed by Latta (2005a, b), although ambitious, was excellent. The group expressed a desire to continue working on the objectives identified by Latta (see above).

The following measures were deemed achievable:

1. Chris Woods and Ann Haynes-Sutton agreed to be co-chairs.

2. Chris Woods agreed to help the society explore how eBird and the Avian Knowledge Network can provide a possible mechanism to meet monitoring group objectives related to databases and information sharing. Ideally at least one person per island should be recruited to develop filters to screen information.

3. Ann Haynes-Sutton and Antonio Celis-Murillo (acelismurillo@usgs.gov) will work to develop a Bird Banding Network for the Caribbean as there seems to be very little communication between island banding programmes.

4. Ann and Chris will develop a concise questionnaire to identify people, programmes, protocols, and

resources related to monitoring in the Caribbean.

5. Ann and Chris will explore the options for a monitoring project; funding for training workshops will be pursued.

#### UPDATE

The Monitoring WG submitted a proposal for the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative (WHMSI) training workshops, funded by the Organization of American States’ FEMCIDI Program, on 30 June 2008. The group recently received news that the proposal, entitled “Long-term Bird Monitoring in the Caribbean—Why, What, Where and How?” was successful and will receive US\$45,000 in funding. Plans are underway to deliver a monitoring training workshop in early 2009.

The SCSCB has launched eBird Caribbean—a web portal that allows birders to manage their personal bird observations through an intuitive online database. Anyone can submit observations of birds and explore maps and charts to better understand seasonal distribution of birds anywhere in the Caribbean. All data can be downloaded for free through the Avian Knowledge Network: ([www.avianknowledge.net](http://www.avianknowledge.net)).

#### LITERATURE CITED

- LATTA, S. 2005a. Bird monitoring symposia and workshop: strategies for monitoring birds in the Caribbean—how to design and carry out a monitoring program. *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 18:83-84.
- LATTA, S. 2005b. Bird Monitoring Working Group of the SCSCB: Towards all-species monitoring and expanded training opportunities in the Caribbean. *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 18:109-114.