

REPORT FROM MEDIA SYMPOSIUM AND PANEL DISCUSSION
“SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES—BIRDS
AND THE CARIBBEAN MEDIA”

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The Media Working Group of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) aims to assist the Society to:

1. Raise its profile using all available media;
2. Facilitate a public response on issues related to Caribbean bird conservation; and
3. Provide ongoing support and training in media relations to interested members, local partners, and collaborating organizations.

Following recommendations received from participants at the Working Group (WG) in Puerto Rico in 2007, the focus for the 2009 meeting in Antigua was creating a forum that would facilitate the exchange of the knowledge, skills, and tools for effective media relations currently institutionalized within the Society's membership. The forum, delivered in a 3-part symposium, was titled “Sharing Knowledge and Experiences – Birds and the Caribbean Media: Symposium and Panel Discussion.” Part 1 included a formal paper session in which contributed papers detailed specific aspects of the “birds in the Caribbean media” experience. The papers presented were:

1. International Migratory Bird Day in the News by Susan Bonfield;
2. How to Make Bird Organizations Effective Communicators by Andrew L. Dobson;
3. Media Involvement in Conservation Efforts in Dominica by Bertrand Jno Baptiste and Stephen Durand;
4. Promoting Conservation through the Written Press by Simón Guerrero; and
5. The “Save Cockpit Country” Campaign: Effective Collaboration with Media Outlets to Protect a Biodiversity Hotspot from Bauxite Mining by Susan Koenig.

The paper session concluded with a lively discussion of the lessons from each of the papers presented and the plenary reflected on the years of work

and numerous media items that the presenters referenced during their presentations (all presentations can be viewed as PDFs on the Media Working Group page at www.scscb.org). It was noted that outside their core responsibilities as researchers and conservation practitioners, many members of the SCSCB had effectively engaged the media, some for over three decades, with impressive results. Commendation was extended to the many SCSCB members who consistently engage the media as part of their efforts to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats. The WG further recognized and thanked all those members who had brought newspaper articles to the symposium for a display of clippings that extended over six poster-boards.

Part 2, a facilitated round-robin, allowed symposium attendees to share their experiences and personal insights of working with their local media houses and representatives. Much of the ensuing discussion focused on three issues:

1. How best to manage difficult situations involving the media, such as the misrepresentation or misquotation of information, and managing difficult interviews with the media;
2. The value of building long-term personal relationships with the local public and private media houses, entertainers, and local celebrities;
3. The importance of developing a media strategy that maximizes media coverage and interest (e.g., deliberately encouraging and soliciting responses to published articles, such as in the form of letters-to-the-editor).

In the third and final segment, the plenary reflected on three questions:

1. What is the *message* that the Society wishes to communicate via the media?
2. What *audience(s)* are we trying to reach by way of local and regional media? And
3. How could the working group better facilitate

this process?

Based on this exercise, it was concluded that all the messages that the WG covered were already captured within the SCSCB mission statement. What was now necessary was to present the individual messages in ways that were interesting, provocative, culturally relevant, factually correct, and delivered through the most appropriate local and/or regional media. For example, Simón Guerrero, who has been writing weekly articles on conservation and science in a free local newspaper for many years, uses provocative titles and humor in his articles to capture the interest of the reader. Andrew Dobson described how Bermuda Audubon has formed creative partnerships with a variety of local businesses and the press to engage the public and educate them about conservation issues and birds. The meeting discussed the challenges of media relations resulting from trying to reach a diverse audience. This audience includes stakeholders with a wide range of educational levels, technology resources, and languages in geographically separated islands.

Following the discussion of the challenges of taking the message of the Society to this diverse and geographically disjunct audience, Alleyne Regis discussed an alternative approach that would model the Caribbean Broadcast and Media Partnership (CBMP) and their successes in promoting health related messages. CBMP's program focuses on facilitating and collecting media items produced by its participating individuals and organizations, then re-

packaging and redistributing these programs to its partners. The value of the SCSCB's support of innovative programs on radio, television, and street-theater that promote an understanding of the aesthetic, ecological, and economic value of resident and migratory species was emphasized. Importantly, it was emphasized that while the CBMP approach was desirable, such a strategy could not be managed by volunteers and would depend on an established SCSCB secretariat or committed persons within established member organizations.

In closing, all participants were provided with a copy of the post-conference media release and instructed how to access photos taken during the conference. Possible strategies for enhancing the post-conference media release were discussed, including using photographs taken of the two book launches that occurred during the conference: *Birds of Jamaica* (Haynes-Sutton *et al.* 2009) and *Seabirds of the Caribbean* (Bradley and Norton 2009). Additionally, copies of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's handout "How to Write a Press Release" were distributed to the plenary.

LITERATURE CITED

- HAYNES-SUTTON, A., A. DOWNER, AND R. SUTTON. 2009. A photographic guide to the birds of Jamaica. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- BRADLEY, P. E., AND R. L. NORTON (EDS.). 2009. An inventory of breeding seabirds of the Caribbean. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, FL.