

AQUATIC BIRD CONSERVATION IN THE CARIBBEAN—NEXT
STEPS IN DELIVERING THE CARIBBEAN WATERBIRD CONSERVATION PLAN

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THE CARIBBEAN is home to over 185 species of waterbird (seabirds, wading birds, marshbirds, waterfowl and shorebirds), including a number of endemic and globally threatened species. Planning for the conservation of Caribbean waterbird species began in 1997, and culminated with the presentation of a second draft of a Caribbean Waterbird Conservation Plan (CWCP) at the 2003 SCSCB meeting in Tobago. The plan is intended to increase awareness of waterbird conservation needs throughout the region, and was conceived as a process through which the SCSCB can coordinate its efforts with international initiatives such as Waterbird Conservation for the Americas, Partners in Flight, the Important Bird Areas (IBA) program, and TNC's Eco-regional planning initiative, amongst others.

Waterbird Conservation for the Americas, through BirdLife International, has recently initiated a regional waterbird conservation planning project throughout Latin America and the Caribbean ("Range-wide Waterbirds"), which intends to build upon the existing CWCP and the regional IBA program in order to strategically advance conservation for critically threatened waterbird species and sites in the region. A waterbird conservation planning workshop was convened at the 2005 SCSCB meeting in Guadeloupe to discuss consolidation of the existing CWCP and to move towards the achievement of its goals. Breakout groups were asked to discuss priority needs for consolidating the plan focused around three themes (the priority areas identified at the Tobago meeting): acquisition of baseline information, site conservation and awareness-building. To help orientate discussions, three questions were posed to each group:

1. What would you do with a significant amount of funding?
2. What would you do with a small amount of funding?
3. What should be the role of the SCSCB in these

initiatives?

A summary of the specific ideas that were proposed and the amount of funding required is presented in the table below. Each group was asked to synthesize their individual replies into themes. Many of the resulting themes were common to all three groups. The principal priorities identified were:

1. The identification and filling of priority data gaps (a variety of specific gaps were listed).
2. The establishment of clear targets for species and habitat conservation (to facilitate monitoring and evaluation).
3. The development of a coordinated monitoring program, building upon existing efforts, and involving local people and private enterprises (ideally through Site Support Groups). This program should have a clear goal to produce periodic status reports, should build on local government reporting requirements, and be linked to reporting mechanisms for international conventions (e.g. Ramsar and SPAW).
4. Greater awareness building at all levels, but especially among decision-makers (government, business, NGO and community leaders), with emphasis on the economic value of nature and the fact that many sites are interconnected (in part through shared bird populations).

5. Development of an effective lobby for waterbird conservation, capitalizing on the attention focused on small island nations through climate change.

6. Implementation of site conservation action, channeled through Site Support Groups, and with an emphasis on training and capacity-building.

Each group gave careful consideration to the role of the SCSCB in the implementation of the CWCP. Once again, there was broad consensus among the groups, and the following roles were highlighted:

1. Set strategic direction (identification of priorities and targets).
2. Regional coordination (including effective information dissemination).
3. Regional representation (including lobbying, and the building of partnerships and alliances).
4. Facilitation (fundraising, establishment of best practices and use of sound science, dissemination of good models, training and capacity-building).
5. Monitoring and evaluation (defining successes).

Several general concerns were raised regarding the plan. Among them was the need for a broad consensus from across the Caribbean and from many different sectors; in fact, without a broad constituency of stakeholders involved, “plan” may be rather a misnomer. It was also stressed that many smaller islands do not have the “luxury” of dedicated bird conservation people, but rather general wildlife officers. The plan should therefore be flexible enough to adapt to a broader taxonomic approach.

An overall consensus existed that the plan needs to be finalized as soon as possible, to provide a uni-

fying strategy and guiding framework, and to capitalize on the new opportunities that have appeared since Tobago to start implementation (such as the range-wide waterbirds project). To achieve this, the following next steps were identified during a separate meeting of the SCSCB Waterbirds Task Force:

1. Ann Sutton will complete the plan in its current format as a specific product for NFWF (in satisfaction of project requirements).

2. BirdLife range-wide waterbird project staff (Rob Clay and Verónica Anadón) will draft a strategic vision document by the end of October 2005, using the existing draft plan and notes from the Tobago and Guadeloupe meetings. This document will concisely present SCSCB’s strategic framework for waterbird conservation in a style appropriate for “marketing” to potential donors. This document will be reviewed by persons representing the interests and needs of SCSCB, Waterbird Conservation Council, and BirdLife (Lisa Sorensen, Patricia Bradley, Ann Sutton, Jennifer Wheeler and David Wege). The goal is to have this document ready for publication by the end of 2005.

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WEST INDIAN WHISTLING-DUCK AND WETLANDS CONSERVATION PROJECT: SYMPOSIUM REPORT AND PROJECT NEWS

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THE WEST INDIAN WHISTLING-DUCK (WIWD) and Wetlands Conservation Project of the SCSCB has been working to reverse the decline of the globally threatened WIWD and the continuing loss of wetlands throughout the Caribbean. Crucial to achieving this is increasing the awareness and appreciation by local people for the value of wetlands and wetland biodiversity. Our strategy has been to produce educational materials on birds and wetlands, and through intensive workshops, train enthusiastic teachers and local partner staff, who in turn, teach children and train others. This “multiplier

effect” has helped us to reach a large number of people, in order to develop a network of local people that care about birds and wetlands and become involved in their conservation. The project also develops *Watchable Wildlife Ponds*—wetlands equipped with interpretive signs and viewing areas where local people, school groups, and tourists can easily observe whistling-ducks and other wildlife.

Funding from several sources enabled us to continue our programme of wetlands outreach and education. Since 2002, a total of 2,084 teachers and natural resource staff have been trained in 78 work-