

BIRDLIFE JAMAICA — INFLUENCING CONSERVATION IN JAMAICA

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Abstract.—The origins of the BirdLife Jamaica can be traced to the early days of the Natural History Society of Jamaica, then headquartered in the Natural History Division, Institute of Jamaica. Over the years, the growing importance of and urgency for conservation pointed to the need for more active involvement at national and regional levels. At annual meetings of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology (now the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds) in the 1980s and 1990s, exposure to North American biologists (many with experience in the Caribbean) and to funding institutions led to useful information and contacts for young Jamaicans. In 1993, the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica helped to fund the organization's first field project and has been a supporter ever since. With great encouragement and support from BirdLife International (formerly ICBP), BirdLife Jamaica made strides in structure that led to its development as a national organization with a clear mission and stated objectives. Through its publications, its involvement in developing an interest in bird ecology in students at the University of the West Indies, its outreach activities for schools and community groups, and its membership activities, BirdLife Jamaica has gained recognition as a national society for Jamaican birds and their habitats. Here we report on the major contributions of BirdLife Jamaica in promoting bird and habitat conservation, education, field research, and advocacy.

Key words: BirdLife Jamaica, Conservation, education, Jamaica

Resumen.—BIRDLIFE JAMAICA — INFLUYENDO EN LA CONSERVACIÓN EN JAMAICA. Los orígenes de la organización se remontan a los albores de la Sociedad de Historia Natural de Jamaica, para aquel entonces con sede en la División de Historia Natural, Instituto de Jamaica. A lo largo de los años, la creciente importancia y urgencia de la conservación señalaron la necesidad de una participación más activa a niveles nacionales y regionales. En las reuniones anuales de la Sociedad de Ornitología Caribeña (ahora la Sociedad para la Conservación y el Estudio de las Aves Caribeñas) en las décadas de 1980 y 1990, el contacto de jóvenes jamaicanos con biólogos norteamericanos (muchos con experiencia en el Caribe) e instituciones de financiamiento produjo información útil y contactos. En 1993, la Fundación Ambiental de Jamaica (Environmental Foundation of Jamaica) ayudó a financiar el primer proyecto de la organización y desde entonces ha sido un colaborador. Con gran estímulo y ayuda de BirdLife International (antes ICBP), BirdLife Jamaica mejoró su estructura y esto resultó en su desarrollo como organización nacional con una misión clara y objetivos declarados. Por sus publicaciones, sus esfuerzos para desarrollar el interés en ecología aviar en los estudiantes de la Universidad de las Indias Occidentales, sus actividades de sensibilización con escuelas y grupos comunitarios y sus actividades para socios, BirdLife Jamaica ha sido reconocida como la principal organización nacional trabajando con las aves jamaicanas y sus hábitats. Reportamos sobre las contribuciones principales de BirdLife Jamaica en las áreas de conservación de aves y hábitats, educación, investigaciones de campo, y promoción y defensa pública.

Palabras clave: BirdLife Jamaica, conservación, educación, Jamaica

Résumé.— BIRDLIFE JAMAICA — INFLUENCER LA CONSERVATION EN JAMAÏQUE. L'origine de l'organisation peut être remontée aux premiers jours de la Société d'Histoire Naturelle de Jamaïque, alors localisée dans la Division d'Histoire Naturelle, Institut de Jamaïque. Au cours des ans, l'importance croissante et l'urgence des questions de protection ont montré le besoin d'implication plus active aux niveaux national et régional. Les confrontations aux biologistes nord-américains (dont beaucoup avec une expérience caribéenne) lors des meetings annuels de la Société Caribéenne d'Ornithologie (désormais Association pour l'Etude et la Protection des Oiseaux de la Caraïbe) et aux agences de financements dans les années 1980 et 1990 ont permis d'obtenir des informations utiles et de développer des contacts pour les jeunes jamaïcains. En 1993, la Fondation Jamaïcaine pour l'Environnement a aidé à financer le premier projet de l'organisation et n'a pas arrêté depuis. Avec l'aide d'un fort encouragement et soutien de BirdLife International (anciennement ICBP), BirdLife Jamaica a évolué dans sa structure permettant son développement comme une organisation nationale avec une mission claire et des objectifs définis. Par ses publications, son implication dans le développement d'une émulation dans l'écologie des oiseaux chez les étudiants de l'University of the West Indies, ses activités continues vers les écoles et les communautés et ses activités associatives, BirdLife Jamaica a gagné une reconnaissance comme une société nationale pour les oiseaux de Jamaïque et leurs habitats. Nous montrons ici les apports majeurs de BirdLife Jamaica pour favoriser la protection des oiseaux et des habitats ainsi que l'éducation, la recherche appliquée et leur publicité.

Mots-clés: BirdLife Jamaica, Protection, éducation, Jamaïque

Table 1. Landmark publications concerning Jamaican birds, their habitats, and conservation, 1847–2000.

Category	Date	Author(s)	Title
Ornithology and natural history	1847	P. H. Gosse, assisted by Richard Hill	<i>The birds of Jamaica</i>
Field guide	1936	J. Bond	<i>Birds of the West Indies</i> (1 st ed.)
Natural history	1947–1957 (suspended with a brief run in the 1980s)	Natural History Society of Jamaica	<i>Natural History Notes</i>
Legislation	1945	Government of Jamaica	Wild Life Protection Act
Natural history	1955	Lady Taylor	<i>An introduction to the birds of Jamaica</i>
Natural history	1956	M. Jeffrey-Smith	<i>Bird-watching in Jamaica</i>
Journal	1963 to present	Gosse Bird Club (later renamed BirdLife Jamaica)	<i>Broadsheet</i>
Natural history	1976	D. Lack	<i>Island biology</i>
Field guide	1990	A. Downer and R. Sutton	<i>Photographic field guide to the birds of Jamaica</i>
Guide	1998	H. Raffaele, J. Wiley, O. Garrido, A. Keith, and J. Raffaele	<i>A guide to the birds of the West Indies</i>
Bibliography	2000	J. Wiley	<i>A bibliography of ornithology in the West Indies</i>

JAMAICA'S BIRDS are of global significance with 30 endemic species, the highest number of endemic bird species for any Caribbean island (Stattersfield 1998). Three of these endemic species are listed among the critically endangered birds of the world according to the IUCN Red List Criteria (BirdLife International 2000). Furthermore, many Neotropical migrants over-winter on the island or use it as a stopover site, with five warblers whose entire populations either pass through or spend the winter in the West Indies reported from Jamaica. Although the island is generally mountainous, a diversity of habitats exists for the roughly 250 species of native and migrant birds. There are offshore cays, beaches, mangrove wetlands and marshes, wet and dry forests at various altitudes, agricultural lands, and urban areas.

The conservation needs of Jamaican birds began receiving recognition in the 1930s (Bond 1936). Although large-scale degradation of natural habitats occurred since the arrival of Europeans, various factors have contributed to an alarming increase in loss in the post-World War II period. These factors include population growth and urban drift, greater access to machinery and expansion of housing, tour-

ism, and agriculture. Of particular interest is forest destruction and degradation because forests support many endemic Jamaican birds as well as several Neotropical migrants (Davis 1998). The growing importance and urgency of questions such as “What bird species and habitats in Jamaica need conservation?” and “What kind of protection is required?” inevitably increased the demand for reliable information on Jamaican birds.

Several major publications and documents, dating from as far back as the 1800s until the present time (Table 1), serve as indicators of knowledge and growing conservation awareness concerning Jamaican birds.

Philip Henry Gosse, a British naturalist, made an outstanding contribution to Jamaican ornithology with his book *The birds of Jamaica*. Publications during the second half of the 1800s revealed exploitation of wildlife for monetary and sporting value (Davis 1996). Nearly a century later, James Bond expressed concern that rare West Indian birds were in danger of extinction (Bond 1985). This was of particular relevance to Jamaica because by the early 1900s, two endemic species, Jamaican Petrel (*Pterodroma caribbaea*) and Jamaican Pauraque

Table 2. Summary of technical support provided by BirdLife Jamaica.

Technical support	Specific activity and output	Beneficiary
Field training	Bird identification	South Trelawny Environmental Agency (STEA), Blue & John Crow Mountains National Park (BJCMNP), under graduate and postgraduate students of University of the West Indies (UWI)
	Bird banding	Mason River Game Sanctuary, STEA, BJCMNP, undergraduate and post-graduate students of UWI
Technical workshops	National Workshop on the Cockpit Country (1998)	Environmental professionals and the general public
	National Workshop for the Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program (2001)	Partners in the IBA Programme
Educational workshops and presentations	Training of educators workshop Bird identification and conservation awareness presentations	Environmental educators island-wide BJCMNP, several community-based organizations, and schools island-wide
Production and distribution of educational resource material	Production of <i>A teacher's guide to the birds of Jamaica, the birds of Jamaica — a celebration</i> , as well as accompanying posters	Environmental educators and schools island-wide, general public
	Distribution of Society of Caribbean Ornithology's West Indian Whistling-Duck Conservation Project material	
Documentation	Initiating a database of bird specimen records	Natural History Division of Institute of Jamaica and BirdLife Jamaica
	Contribution of information to reports, meeting, workshops	Parks in Peril Project – Cockpit Country, National Environment and Planning Agency

(*Siphonorhis americanus*), were presumed extinct. Bond noted that parrots were at special risk and also pointed out the lack of research on the life history of endemic species.

The need for (1) greater appreciation of Jamaica's unique wildlife, (2) protection of endangered species, and (3) more research on the biology and ecology of Jamaican birds began to be addressed by locals through the Natural History Society of Jamaica (NHSJ) and published *Notes*. The NHSJ was established in 1941 by staff of the Natural History Division of the Institute of Jamaica as a non-government group that provided a forum for dialogue on Jamaican wildlife and its natural history.

Undoubtedly, the passing of the Wildlife Protection Act in 1945 motivated further interest in conservation with respect to birds. All birds were declared protected with the exception of

“domesticated” species. Unfortunately, some endemic species and subspecies (e.g., Jamaican Crow *Corvus jamaicensis*, Ring-tailed Pigeon *Columba caribaea*, and Olive-throated Parakeet *Aratinga nana nana*), as well as other doves, hawks, and migratory ducks, were also excluded from protection. Unprotected species were vulnerable to hunting and collecting pressure, although bird shooting was regulated through the designation of game birds and the establishment of game sanctuaries. In 1960, the Act was amended to address regulations for bird-shooting seasons. Eventually, hunters' licenses and reports on harvest became mandatory for bird-shooting seasons. Since then, the Wildlife Protection Act of 1945 has been periodically revised and all native Jamaican species are now legally protected. Unfortunately, a major deficiency of the Act is that it does not address protection of habitat of wildlife (Levy 1996).

Table 3. Number of field projects facilitated or administered by BirdLife Jamaica, 1994–2002.

	Source of funding		
	Local ¹	Local + overseas	Overseas ²
No. of projects	1	2	3

¹Local = Environmental Foundation of Jamaica.

²Overseas includes National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and American Bird Conservancy.

By the mid-1950s, public support was being sought for the protection of Jamaica's birds through May Jeffrey-Smith's *Bird-watching in Jamaica* and articles in the daily newspaper by Lisa Salmon. Jeffrey-Smith dedicated her book "... to the Jamaican public in the hope that it will stimulate keener appreciation and arouse desire to preserve birds, ..." (Jeffrey-Smith 1956). It was Jeffrey-Smith, an active member of the NHSJ and an avid birdwatcher who, together with Anna Black, conceived the idea of the Gosse Bird Club (1996). They envisioned a local organization dedicated to the knowledge and conservation of Jamaican birds. Shortly after, the Gosse Bird Club (GBC) began printing the *Broad-sheet*, a biannual publication for the exchange of information on Jamaican birds. Both the GBC and the *Broadsheet* have survived 40 years with the organization being renamed "BirdLife Jamaica" in 1998.

The *Broadsheet* initially served as a medium for reporting bird observations, educational articles, club reports, and notices. It has grown, however, to include research news, articles, and book reviews. It has proven to be a valuable resource in the development of three recent publications, namely *Birds of Jamaica – a photographic field guide*, *A guide to the birds of the West Indies*, and *A bibliography of Ornithology of the West Indies*. In fact, Jim Wiley (2000), in his bibliography stated, "By far, the greatest number of entries (4101; 44.6%) are from the *Gosse Bird Club Broadsheet*" Furthermore, submissions to the *Broadsheet* have formed the basis of a database on species occurrence and distribution in Jamaica.

Several Caribbean and mainland scientists strongly advocated the (1) creation and management of protected areas and national parks, (2) regulation of poaching and trade in wildlife, (3) further regulation of bird-shooting, and (4) greater promotion and facilitation of field research (Davis 1998). David

Lack (1976) was one of the first to emphasize conservation of habitat, in particular Jamaican forests. BirdLife Jamaica has been instrumental in the advancement of habitat protection, stronger regulations, and increased research on Jamaican birds through its education, advocacy, and field research programs and activities. This paper will only allow for highlights to be presented on the major contributions to bird conservation in Jamaica.

As a non-government organization relying primarily on volunteer effort, BirdLife Jamaica does not have the institutional capacity to manage habitat or protected areas. Technical support, however, has been provided to a national park, environmental non-government organizations, and the University of the West Indies in the form of (1) field training, (2) educational and technical workshops, (3) production and distribution of educational resource material, and (4) documentation of scientific data and information (Table 2).

Before the establishment of protected areas, some sport shooting clubs were actively managing private properties by maintaining woodlands or vegetation that would attract birds (Levy 1996). While encouraging protection of habitat for birds, BirdLife Jamaica has lobbied consistently for adequate bird-shooting policies and adherence to hunting regulations through its representation on the Game Bird Committee of the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). Currently, collaborative effort is maintained among BirdLife Jamaica, NEPA, and the University of the West Indies for research projects on game birds (columbids) and migratory duck surveys.

With regard to improved legislation to support conservation in Jamaica, BirdLife Jamaica has participated in reviews of the Wildlife Protection Act. Suggestions made include:

- Establishing categories of species: "at risk," "vulnerable," and "endangered."
- Review of the "all birds protected" policy for alien species such as the Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) and birds in captivity (Levy 1996).

BirdLife Jamaica also helped prepare local legislation for, and serves on, the Convention on International Trade & Endangered Species Committee that advises NEPA on issues and requests concerning external and internal trade in endangered flora and fauna.

Within the last 10 years, BirdLife Jamaica has evolved as an organization with the capacity for

supporting and implementing field research. In addition to providing technical assistance to undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of the West Indies, BirdLife Jamaica has successfully attracted both local and overseas funding. Opportunities for overseas funding have been greatly facilitated by making contacts with researchers and funders at annual meetings of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds. To date, BirdLife Jamaica has facilitated or administered six projects related to birds and their habitats (Table 3).

As a member of the BirdLife International Partnership, BirdLife Jamaica is currently conducting the Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program in Jamaica. Through field research and national collaboration, sites that meet international IBA criteria will be identified. BirdLife Jamaica is seeking to strengthen its influence on conservation in Jamaica by advocating on-the-ground conservation for the IBA sites by the relevant authorities. It is expected that the promotion of community participation in the development of bird management plans will further national efforts at protecting habitats that are of critical importance to birds and wildlife in general (BirdLife Jamaica 2001).

Outlines of Bird Research Projects are documented in *El Pitirre* (Vol. 11:70 [1998]; Vol. 14:97 [2001]).

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