

2001 MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY AT TOPES DE COLLANTES, CUBA

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From 16 to 22 July 2001, the Society of Caribbean Ornithology, the largest regional organization devoted to wild-life conservation issues in the Caribbean, held its 13<sup>th</sup> meeting Cuba. The meeting, which took place at the Kur-Hotel in the Topes de Collantes National Park, brought together the leading authorities in regional bird conservation from the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. The main objectives of the conference were a scientific interchange about species, habitat conservation, and environmental education. Among its 175 participants were 163 members from 24 countries (Table 1). Delegates participated in field trips to Codina, Guanayara, El Cubano, and Vegas Grandes.

One of the major accomplishments of the meeting was the formation of several task forces that will work towards the development of comprehensive Caribbean-wide plans to:

1. promote environmental education, information access, and exchange;
2. identify a network of sites throughout the region (Important Bird Areas), in an initiative towards the protection of sites necessary to conserve the region's unique native species; and
3. promote Caribbean waterbirds conservation, including the conservation of the West Indian Whistling-Duck, a West Indian endemic species of particular conservation concern.

Dr. Martín Acosta Cruz was honored for his outstanding contribution to the development of bird ecology in Cuba. He is the Director of the Museum of Natural History Felipe Poey of the Universidad de La Habana, and an Auxiliary Researcher in the Faculty of Biology of the Havana University. Dr. Acosta has worked on bird ecology for the last 25 years, and has published more than 60 papers and participated in more than 40 national and international conferences and events. He is the representative of BirdLife International in Cuba, member of the National Committee for the Ph.D. program in Forestry and Science, and member of the Hunting National Commission, among others. Drs. Hiram Gonzalez, Lourdes Mugica, and Martín Acosta were also recognized by the Society for their outstanding work towards the success of the meeting. In addition, Dr. James Wiley of the University of Maryland was recognized for his significant role in the development of Cuban ornithology and the training of Cuban nationals.

The Society of Caribbean Ornithology meeting forms part of international focus on the Cuban environment for the year 2001. Earlier this year, the city of La Habana was nominated, jointly with Torino (Italy), to host the World Environmental Day celebrations of 5 June. World Environmental Day is one of the principal vehicles through which

the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action. The islands of the Caribbean are now recognized as one of the top three areas on the planet for biodiversity conservation action, given the immense species richness of the islands combined and the high risk of extinction many species face.

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean. It accounts for over half of the Caribbean's landmass, and is home to over 350 species of birds. Twenty-five of these are found nowhere else in the world, including the smallest bird (and warm-blooded vertebrate) on the planet, the Bee Hummingbird. Unfortunately, a staggering 16+ species of Cuba's birds are globally threatened with extinction.

This year's meeting of the Society was made possible through the financial support of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Forest Service, Ducks Unlimited, and Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds (RSPB). Participating Cuban organizations included Instituto de Ecología y Sistemática, Facultad de Biología de la Universidad de la Habana, Empresa para la protección de la Flora y la Fauna, Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Sociedad Cubana de Zoología, and Sociedad ProNaturaleza.

Table 1. Participants in the Society of Caribbean Ornithology's 2001 meeting at Topes de Collantes, Cuba.

Country	Number of delegates
Anguilla	2
Bahamas	4
Barbuda	1
Bermuda	3
Brazil	1
British Virgin Islands	5
Canada	4
Cayman Islands	2
Cuba	40
Dominican Republic	8
French Guiana	1
Great Britain	6
Guadeloupe	5
Haiti	1
Jamaica	8
Mexico	2
Montserrat	2
Puerto Rico	8
Surinam	1
Trinidad and Tobago	3
Turks and Caicos	2
United States	52
U. S. Virgin Islands	1
Venezuela	1