

RESTORATION OF THE GREATER FLAMINGO (*PHOENICOPTERUS RUBER*) TO ANEGADA,  
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

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*Abstract.*—Following a trial establishment of seven Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) on Guana Island, British Virgin Islands, in 1987, the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo provided 18 flamingos to The Conservation Agency, funded by the Falconwood Foundation, for reintroduction to Anegada in 1992, where a large nineteenth century population had been eventually extirpated in the twentieth century. These birds nested successfully in 1995. The flock has increased to 63 birds, including 11 fledglings, in 2001, and a population seems firmly established.

*Resumen.*—RESTAURACIÓN DEL FLAMENCO (*PHOENICOPTERUS RUBER*) EN ANEGADA, ISLAS VÍRGENES BRITÁNICAS. Después del establecimiento experimental en 1987 de siete flamencos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) en la isla de Guana, Islas Vírgenes Británicas, el Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo donó 18 flamencos a The Conservation Agency, fundada por la Fundación de Falconwood, para una reintroducción en 1992 en Anegada, lugar donde hubo una gran población nidificante en el siglo XIX que fue exterminada en el siglo XX. Estas aves se reprodujeron exitosamente en 1995. La bandada ha aumentado a 63 aves en 2001, incluyendo 11 pichones que han alzado vuelo, y la población parece estar firmemente establecida.

*Key words:* Anegada, British Virgin Islands, conservation, Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber*, restoration

SIR ROBERT HERMANN SCHOMBURGK (1804–1865), a British subject born at Freiburg, Prussian Saxony, traveled to America in 1829 and to the island of Anegada in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) in 1830 (Anonymous 1957). Schomburgk (1832) chronicled the vast numbers of Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) on Anegada, but noted they were even then declining and no longer nesting. By mid-twentieth century no resident birds remained, although small groups of flamingos occasionally visited the island (Mirecki 1977).

Reintroduction of flamingos to the BVI, in combination with the restoration of Anegada rock iguanas (*Cyclura pinguis*) to islands within the lizard's former range – the Greater Puerto Rico Bank – was a plan first conceived and promulgated by me in 1980 when I was employed by what was then the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, Government of the British Virgin Islands, under the direction of Robert Creque. My plan was initially vetted by Creque and proposed to several prominent leaders on Anegada: if I could find a suitable home for some Anegada rock iguanas, and capture and move them, I promised to obtain Greater Flamingos for re-establishment on Anegada. I did not know how difficult and expensive this would be, or that it would take over a decade to accomplish.

Over the next several years I worked with the owners of Guana Island to establish it as a wildlife sanctuary; remove or control exotics like sheep, burros, and cats; restore vegetation; and build a program of scientific research. During this period the National

Parks Trust (NPT) developed into a major quasi-governmental entity under the direction of Dr. Nicholas Clarke. The iguana transfer and flamingo importation – part and parcel of the same restoration program – were constant topics of conversation with Clarke, Mr. Louis Potter of Town and Country Planning, BVI Government (who was drawing up the excellent – if still unfulfilled – plans for a National Park on Anegada), and numerous other government officials. In 1987 we got the first flamingos from the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo, through the good offices of then-Director Richard Winchell. These birds came with the stipulation that they had to survive on Guana without being poached prior to placing any on Anegada. I published my plans in a local newspaper (Lazell 1987).

Guana Island and my organization, The Conservation Agency (TCA), continued to work hand-in-glove with Mr. Potter, the Deputy Governor Mr. Elton Georges, National Parks Trust then-Director Rob Norton, and government officials in general until finally, on 7 March 1992, we were able to bring 18 flamingos from Bermuda to Anegada. There was a great ceremony on that occasion, involving the BVI's then-governor Peter Penfold, then-Deputy Chief Minister Ralph O'Neal, then-Education Minister Louis Walters, Guana's owners Dr. Henry and Gloria Jarecki, the prominent citizens of Anegada, then-Director of NPT Rosmond DeRavariere, TCA's Vice-President Dr. Numi Goodyear (Mitchell), and many government officials. The proceedings were accurately described by Goodyear (1992) for NPT

and in the local newspapers by Johnson (1992) and Pickering (1992), the latter explicitly detailing the long-standing – and at last fulfilled – flamingos for iguanas trade I had envisioned and promised years before. I describe these details and cite the contemporaneous media coverage because of the erroneous assertion that iguanas “were moved without the permission and involvement of the BVI government” (Garcia 2001). Left uncorrected, and without the context of the flamingos-for-iguanas restoration project, this false statement could have seriously deleterious ramifications adversely affecting NGO projects in the BVI and ever farther afield.

Internationally, Barnes (1992) provided a good account of the initial restoration and Conyers (1996) and Colli (1996) documented the growth of the population. Unfortunately, Raffaele *et al.* (1998) made no mention of the Anegada (or other BVI) population. Over the years the original Guana flock dwindled as older birds died. By 1992, the remaining four individuals left Guana frequently and visited other BVI salt ponds. Far from being poached, they were extremely popular and welcome wherever they appeared. Conyers (1996) reported that four birds joined the original 18 on Anegada, making 22 before successful nesting 1995. These may have been the four Guana survivors, but Conyers saw no bands on them and believed all the birds from Bermuda carried bands.

There are still seven non-breeding birds on Guana Island, all replacements for the original seven of 1987. Attempts led by Dr. Caitlin O’Connell-Rodwell, of Stanford University, to induce breeding with artificial stimuli in this flock are scheduled for 2002. The Anegada population has grown regularly. BVI NPT’s Rondel Smith, long an active collaborator with TCA on the flamingo and iguana project, monitors the Anegada population. Christina Leahy, a TCA volunteer, and Lianna Jarecki, Stoutt Community College, Tortola, checked the Anegada population and reported to me on 20 July 2001 that it totals 63 flamingos, including 11 young of the year.

I am indebted to so many people for the success of this project that I can herein note only a few: Richard Winchell and James Conyers from Bermuda, Governors David Barwick and Peter Penfold, Deputy Governor Elton Georges, Chief Minister Ralph O’Neal, Town and Country Planner Louis Pot-

ter, National Parks Trust Chairperson Janice George-Creque, NPT Directors Nicholas Clarke, Rob Norton, Rosmond DeRavriere, and Joseph Smith-Abbot of the BVI, Henry and Gloria Jarecki of Guana Island, Tony Smith, Rondel Smith, Lowell and Sue Wheatley, Herman Groezinger, and the late Clement Faulkner of Anegada, and Numi (Goodyear) Mitchell of The Conservation Agency. I am especially grateful to National Parks Trust staff who monitor the flock and have been successfully responsible for resolving human-flamingo conflicts.

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