

THREATENED BIRDS OF THE CARIBBEAN: CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR THE REGION AND FOR THE SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY

TUESDAY 3 AUGUST, SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY MEETING, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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THE "THREATENED BIRDS of the Caribbean" workshop was attended by about 60 people, and was, by all accounts, extremely successful and productive. Below is a brief summary of the proceedings, feedback on which should be directed to David Wege at BirdLife (email: david.wege@birdlife.org.uk). Thank you to everyone who participated

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Introduction to BirdLife International  
Introduction to the Globally Threatened Species Program  
Workshop aims/goals  
Break-out groups  
Report back and next steps

*BirdLife International:* see <http://www.birdlife1.org.ec> for details of the BirdLife Partnership and programs.

THE GLOBALLY THREATENED SPECIES PROGRAM

We are all interested in preventing species extinctions, but to do this we need to know which species are at the highest risk before we can take the appropriate species- or site-specific conservation action. The Globally Threatened Species Program aims to collect and analyze data, disseminate information, promote conservation action, and monitor progress for the species at greatest risk of extinction. The main differences this project has from previous reviews of threatened species are:

- An attempt has been made to be as inclusive as possible with the review process
- The systematic mapping of the current and historic distributions of species (which helps in quantifying the extent of range loss)
- The identification of species conservation targets from which action plans for species, species groups (e.g., seabirds, waterfowl, hunted species etc.), or countries could be developed, and against which conservation progress can be monitored

GOALS/AIMS

To discuss the use of globally threatened species as:

- A framework against which to set the agenda for conservation action in the region
- A framework against which to monitor and report on conservation progress in the region
- A means to encourage networking and partnerships for bird conservation
- A means of advocating conservation issues in the region

WORKSHOP BREAK-OUT GROUP QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

*Are globally threatened species the highest priorities for conservation action?*

Whereas there was general acceptance that globally threatened species are the most important set of species to consider (i.e., they act as flagships and indicate problems), there was a strong feeling that regional and local priorities need to be considered. This was explored from various angles, the main points being:

- the need for a regional perspective
- protection of regional gene pools and distinct populations, subspecies etc.
- local issues capture the local imagination.

Other issues that arose were:

- the need to focus on habitats and ecosystem conservation as an effective means of capturing species
- migratory species can attract funding and encourage people to take a wider view
- need for public education re: threatened species and their plight

The key issues here are that regional priorities need to be considered and that habitat conservation is essential, but globally threatened species can help prioritize habitat, and some species will always need individual attention (e.g., when they are hunted or traded).

*Are there species or species groups that can unite SCO members in common actions in a similar way that the West Indian Whistling-duck group has?*

Many species and species groups were suggested as subjects for common actions, and these included: seabirds, shorebirds, parrots, woodpeckers, doves, orioles, waterfowl, raptors, endemics, Neotropical migratory songbirds, Shiny Cowbird, Bicknell's Thrush, Kirtland's Warbler, Black-capped Petrel, and White-crowned Pigeon. Many issues or subjects were highlighted as options for targeted work, however, and these included:

- hunting and hunted species
- invasive species; all natural habitats
- forest and wetland habitat conservation
- development planning
- protected areas system expansion
- research and monitoring
- institutional strengthening
- public education and advocacy
- birds as economic incentives.

The key issue here was that any of these combinations could work to unite researchers and conservationists as long as there is strong leadership and good communication.

Could the species conservation targets be presented in such a way that SCO members, island representatives or working groups could report against them on an annual basis?

Whereas it was recognized that there were constraints on time and resources, it was generally agreed that the presentation of species targets in the form of island (or working group) action plans would allow for easy and effective reporting on conservation progress. This was seen as a way of strengthening the SCO and maintaining interest between meetings (as well as encouraging European and North American researchers to meet Caribbean priorities). To be successful, this strategy requires simple, well-presented plans (with action points), and the full support of the existing SCO working groups, island representatives and member organizations. It was suggested that existing species action plans (e.g., for migrants within their breeding ranges) should be expanded to include action points for their wintering ranges.

*Would the compiled species texts and maps be useful to SCO members as a regional publication?*

There was overwhelming agreement that a regional publication would be useful as an education and advocacy tool. It was also emphasized, however, that there needs to be further moves towards electronic publication (with perhaps the data maintained on a web page), and freer access to data and GIS coverage (while recognizing the intellectual property rights of the researchers and organizations involved).

*Are there any other uses for the species data within the Caribbean?*

Many suggestions for the use of this information included: advocacy, outreach, education, and ecotourism. It was also suggested that the information could help: develop research and monitoring programs; target research work (and volunteer work); identify gaps in current protected areas systems; prioritise various work programs; indicate the environmental health of an area/island; drive active management and restoration work; and access funding.

#### NEXT STEPS

Two primary "next steps" were identified by the workshop:

- BirdLife International to investigate the costs involved in producing a regional threatened species publication (in Spanish and English), and explore potential funding sources.
- BirdLife International to compile the species targets and develop simple, island action plans against which to report on relevant activities.

Additional activities that arose as a result of the workshop included:

- Investigating the possibility of running a threatened species program within the region (what this would achieve, how much it would cost, and how to fund it).
- Producing this report for workshop participants and *El Pitirre*.