

AVIAN CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR THE CARIBBEAN REGION
AND PRIORITIES FOR THE SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY

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In 1996, Norman Myers said "We have ten years to conserve what we have." This statement is both a warning and a challenge to the human race. The Society of Caribbean Ornithology (SCO), at its annual meeting in Guadeloupe this year, dedicated eight hours over two days to setting priorities for avian conservation issues in the Caribbean region and for the Society.

Setting priorities and developing action plans at the regional level is a challenging proposition. The SCO represents 23 territories, many of which are their own island states. Some islands, like Saba, are small, whereas others, including Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, are large. This translates into a smorgasbord of cultural, social, political, economic and, of course, biological diversity. In addition participants spoke three languages: English, Spanish, and French, which necessitated spontaneous translation by excellent professionals, as well as bi- and tri-lingual participants.

GOALS: The goals of the workshop were to (1) learn the process involved in setting conservation priorities to provide island representatives with a framework to use in their home islands, to encourage ownership of local conservation efforts; (2) establish avian conservation priorities for the region and for the SCO with accompanying action plans; and (3) encourage networking and partnerships in avian conservation efforts.

FORMAT: The workshop was organized for full participation of all participants, beginning with an island perspective and leading into the regional perspective. Each participant was pre-assigned to one of six groups, which included individuals from both small and large islands, and integrated all languages represented. For larger islands with more than one representative, these participants were spread out among the groups. Therefore each group had a similar complement of representation; there was no polarization by island or by language. In addition, bi-lingual participants were included in each small group to facilitate discussions. Six people with leadership skills were identified to manage each of the groups: Eric Carey, Simon Guerrero, Kevel Lindsay, Lisa Sorenson, Ann Sutton, and Kate Wallace. After each segment of the workshop, the small groups reconvened to the large group, where each group's report was presented to all participants. The first day of the workshop (5 hours) involved the identification and elaboration of themes from an island perspective, development of themes from a regional perspec-

tive, and the prioritization of themes. In addition, identification and categorization of SCO priorities were discussed. Over 70 people participated. The second half-day of the workshop (3 hours) was focused on the establishment of the top three regional priority Action Plans and one Action Plan for the SCO. The Action Plans completed by four small groups (8 people in each) were reported to the whole group.

PARTICIPANTS AND COUNTRIES REPRESENTED: The following island states were represented: Antigua, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saba, and Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, the following countries were represented: Canada, Belize, France, French Guiana, Switzerland (RAMSAR), and the United States. Among the organizations represented were Parc National de la Guadeloupe, Bahamas National Trust, Birdlife International, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, Island Resources Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, RAMSAR, RARE Center for Tropical Conservation, and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, many local organizations were represented.

PREPARATION FOR WORKSHOP: Avian conservation themes were determined based on material previously researched and a pre-workshop questionnaire which was mailed to participants. Thank you to all participants who returned these questionnaires. The two questions asked were: 1) Which avian conservation issues do you believe are priorities for the island you represent?, and 2) Which avian conservation issues do you believe are priorities for the Caribbean region? Participants were given hand-outs, which included the goals and outline of the workshop, conservation issues, process guidelines for setting conservation priorities, and a map of the region. Each small group leader received a list of the conservation themes for discussion, and three tables that showed conservation concerns, needs, and legislation by island, including signatories to CITES and RAMSAR. (Representatives were requested to up-date legislation material during the workshop).

CONSERVATION THEMES: Themes for discussion included research and monitoring, legislation, training, wildlife management, protected areas and habitat conservation, environmental education and public outreach, revenues from wildlife, hunting, conservation ethic, and communication.

THE WORKSHOP

PART A: IDENTIFICATION AND ELABORATION OF THEMES — Each small group was charged with the task of discussing all themes and getting input from each of the island representatives on each topic. All points were noted by theme, one theme per page, for future reference. At the end of the hour, all feedback was collected and collated so that all information for each theme (from all 6 groups) was put together. This was done for all themes so that 10 packages representing each of the themes and, therefore, all islands, was available.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT OF THEMES — The thematic material (one or two per group) was distributed for discussion, integration, and preparation of a report to the whole group. The following is a summary of seven of the themes. As expected some overlap and integration of thematic material occurred.

Training. At the regional level, all law enforcement officers (rangers, wardens) should be trained. The region is in need of more ornithologists and therefore courses in ornithology, conservation biology, and ecology should be considered in the curricula of West Indian universities. Regional coordination of training for policy-makers and tour-guides should be implemented. A need for basic equipment and resources was identified for the region, as was training in database management.

Wildlife Management. Multi-species, ecosystem-based management is needed. Infrastructure for wildlife management is understaffed, and there is a lack of opportunity and funds for training. Baseline data on natural history of species are lacking, as is knowledge of the impact of introduced species (e.g., Shiny Cowbird, mongoose), biocides, and agriculture. Information on control of introduced predators, with techniques and directions for use is particularly needed. Management plans are needed, but lacking for many species. Where management plans do exist, they are often not implemented. Key management areas need to be identified. In relation to outreach, local communities need to be involved. Specific issues noted include the management of game species, a need for an infrastructure to manage ecotourism, and special attention focused on seabird colonies.

Hunting. All hunting should be based on sound scientific and accepted wildlife management principles. Generally, adequate laws are in place throughout the region, but often little or no capacity to enforce laws exists. Often fines are not an adequate deterrent. The need for hunter education is important as is the need for hunting permits. Hunter groups (e.g., Martinique) can often self-regulate. Involvement of local people and hunters in data collection is important, followed-up with regional organization of the data. The importance of a conservation ethic in relation to wildlife is vital. More information on subsistence hunting in the region is needed. The Bahamas National Trust has been active in hunting issues and may serve as a good model and resource for other islands.

Revenues from Wildlife. Fees should be included in

ecotourism and go back into conservation, not the general treasury. Ecotourism requires the training of tour guides, and public relations. User fees should be implemented to visit parks and reserves, and the revenue generated used to maintain the park. Ecotourism needs to be sustainable; to avoid damage to the environment, a maximum carrying capacity of tourists needs to be determined. Ecotourism's effect on the local economy should be determined and presented to help convince governments of the economic value of wildlife and natural areas.

Legislation. The updating and creation of new wildlife laws is needed but enforcement is crucial. The judiciary needs to be aware of legislation and politicians need to understand the importance of environmental regulations and laws. Clarification of who has authority to enforce may need to be determined to aid public understanding. Control of cagebird trafficking is required, but often personnel to monitor effort are unavailable.

Conservation Ethic. Generally a conservation ethic is lacking or poorly understood throughout the region, although some islands are more successful than others. It is important to move beyond talk to how we will finance establishment of an ethic so that it is equal across countries and the region. Three models exist: (1) a conservation ethic starting from the ground up (Bahamas); (2) conservation ethic at the national level (policies on sustainable development; e.g., Cuba); and (3) conservation ethic among local peoples about the importance of biodiversity for human use (local culture; e.g., St. Kitts/Nevis). The group recommends that all three models should be used jointly.

Communication. Generally communication was identified as poor among islands, among conservation groups, and between governments and NGOs. To improve communication among islands, the group suggested that *El Pitirre* be in three languages. Further, the group suggested a web page be established to share publications, to allow news groups to share issues over e-mail, and for a list server to discuss and seek advice on conservation problems. It is important to note that Island Resources Foundation has an excellent list server and that a web page is in the process of being established by the SCO.

The Research and Monitoring, Protected Areas and Habitat Conservation, and the Environmental Education and Public Outreach groups also gave reports (discussed below).

PART C: SETTING CONSERVATION PRIORITIES — After all 10 reports were presented to the whole group, each participant was asked to individually select, prioritize and write down the three themes that were most important to focus on at the regional level. Results were tallied. The top priority was determined to be Environmental Education and Public Outreach, followed by Research and Monitoring, and Protected Areas and Habitat Conservation. These three themes were reported as designated for the creation of Action Plans.

PART D: CONSERVATION ISSUES FOR THE SCO— Each of the six groups was asked to identify, discuss and prioritize the issues that should be or are priorities for the SCO. Each group presented a summary of their report to the whole group. On completion of the reports, the six reports were collated for assignment to a working group for an Action Plan.

PART E: ACTION PLAN GROUPS. The three groups that were responsible for the top priorities were given the task of creating an action plan for their theme. The other three groups merged and were assigned to the SCO priorities Action Plan group. The Action Plan groups each consisted of eight people with a good cross-section of participants. The groups had two hours on the last day of the conference to complete this task, at which time each group presented a report to the whole group, and submitted a written report (given below).

Priority #1 – Environmental Education and Public Outreach – ACTION PLAN

Goal: Raise awareness and appreciation of the people in each West Indian country about the importance of the environment and natural areas to their long-term health and welfare.

Why? SCO members are particularly aware of the environmental degradation and destruction of habitat that is occurring throughout the region. We understand that public education (particularly of children) is crucial in achieving conservation goals. Thus, we want to facilitate dissemination of environmental educational materials and resources.

What? Make available environmental education materials and resources (e.g., workbooks containing natural history information and exercises illustrating ecological and conservation principles, teachers guides that describe teaching techniques, videos, slide presentations, posters, museum specimens and other hands-on materials, natural history books, binoculars, magnifying lenses, and CD-ROM) to everyone in the West Indies.

How? (1) Create a clearinghouse of information on which educational materials are available for the West Indies. Make this information available and accessible to the region through the creation of an SCO Education Web Page that lists and describes all materials and resources, and allows individuals, organizations, and schools to place orders. (2) Hold teacher training workshops for island education representatives on how to conduct training workshops (train the trainer). Island representatives would then train teachers in their communities.

When and How? We suggest that, concurrent with the publication of this report in *El Pitirre*, a job description be posted describing the need for a volunteer to get this project initiated.

Who? An individual is needed who will be responsible for compiling a list of all resources; creating and maintaining the SCO education web page, arranging training workshops and obtaining grant funds to publish additional copies of materials and send them out.

Where? We believe that where will be a function of who?

Priority #2 – Research and Monitoring – ACTION PLAN

Why? To contribute towards conservation of Caribbean biodiversity and develop regional and local expertise.

Who? SCO working group of members involved in research. The group should expand to include other researchers and institutions; e.g., Caribbean universities.

What?

1. Set regional conservation priorities
 - a) for species in need of regional attention
 - b) for Caribbean habitats
2. Establish research and monitoring guidelines for local endemics.
3. Establish directory of research projects and resource persons.
4. Establish research protocols.
5. Establish control programs for exotic species, using model projects.
6. Establish a research trust fund for Caribbean students.
7. Provide cautionary advice about species re-introductions and translocations. Requires careful evaluation.
8. Establish training programs for young researchers.
9. Provide opportunities for experts from North America and Europe to share their expertise with Caribbean ornithologists.

Where? Entire Caribbean.

When? SCO working group to be formed now: Confirmed members: Peter Vogel (Leader) and Joe Wunderle.

How? Meetings at SCO conferences and networking using internet.

Priority #3 – Protected Areas and Habitat Conservation – ACTION PLAN

Why? Protect areas for biodiversity and watershed values.

Who? Formation of an SCO working group for protected areas.

Where and When? Have a workshop at next year's meeting in the Dominican Republic. Meet with the Caribbean Forestry Association at their next meeting in the year 2000.

How? Need funding; raise grant funds.

What?

1. Island nations need a land-use plan and biodiversity strategy, as well as the political will to implement such plans.
2. Plans must take into account human carrying capacity of island, particularly of tourist capacity.
3. Buffer zones and corridors to protected areas are important (including urban centers; e.g., planting native trees).
4. On some islands, need to identify areas for protection; i.e., seabird nesting cays.

5. Ecological restoration of disturbed, degraded habitats.
6. Consider all factors in conservation: cultural, social, ethno-botanical, and economic.
7. For any activity that uses natural resources, the financial benefits should be returned to acquire lands and manage natural resources.
8. Education should be integrated into park management and land-use plans.
9. Areas of high endemism should be priority areas for protection.
10. Protect remaining virgin, native natural forest areas.
11. Land-use policy must retain ecological integrity and function of the areas.
12. Use of exotics, especially plants, should be discouraged. Promote use of native species, including agricultural and aquatic use.
13. Form partnerships with local communities, hunters, and other stake-holders.

Long-term goal—How much forest on each island should be protected—forest restoration? The Association of Caribbean States was mentioned as a possible link towards this goal.

PRIORITIES FOR THE SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY – ACTION PLAN

The key priority identified by the group was Information Access and Exchange. Other areas where the SCO should play a role include education, publicity, research and monitoring, training, skills bank, fundraising for SCO, and political advocacy. The Action Plan focused on short-term goals for the key priority.

Information Access and Exchange – Action Plan for 1998–1999

1. Web page development
 - A. Sites
 - 1). using ornithological societies
 - 2). using Caribbean biodiversity mailing list (Island Resources Foundation)
 - 3). using links to existing pages
 - B. Access
 - 1). through national focal points (island representatives)
 - 2). RAMSAR may be able to help with wetland-related projects
 - 3). Need to identify who has problems and help them get access
 - 4). Provide links to funding sources
 - 5). Awareness: through *El Pitirre* and demonstration at next meeting
2. Meetings – SCO should consider adding training and monitoring workshops, to be conducted by local hosts and/or working groups. The West Indian Whistling-

Duck monitoring workshop in the Dominican Republic next year was suggested as a pilot project.

3. Skills Bank—Inventory of expertise maintained on a database.
4. Membership—Need to involve members more. (Timely receipt of dues).
5. Publicity—Need to develop a press release (a standard package about the meeting) for the region, and to be used by local organizers.
6. Research and Monitoring—Use news groups and web pages to share information about methods, requests for advice, and field activities.

Summary: Several issues were brought up throughout the workshop and involve all themes. Public outreach and environmental education surfaced as an integral part of all action plans. This translates into education at all levels, children, teachers, university students, law enforcers, politicians, hunters, tour guides, and so on. The need for the development of web pages to facilitate information access and sharing was frequently noted, as was the need for working groups for the initiation of action. Research and monitoring must be done and made accessible so that sharing takes place across the region. Finally, if areas are not protected, then the best efforts at education, research, monitoring, training, and communication will lack import if there is no biodiversity. Therefore, the strategic components must work in concert to conserve what we have.

The Action Plans described above reflect the need for communication among all working groups, integration of action plans that cross themes, access and exchange of information and, most importantly, a *conservation ethic* for the region. Conservation biology is inherently a science that includes many disciplines and involves the blending of biological sciences with social sciences. Communicating across cultures, sharing success stories among nations, and targeting role models to nurture, train, and help each other are all vital to achieving our goals. The Society of Caribbean Ornithology has taken on an enormous challenge in setting regional priorities. Through open-minded, but focused, discussion on the issues that affect all Caribbean nations, it is hoped that productive endeavors will ensue so that diversity, both biological and cultural, will be maintained and flourish. A key action is *involvement*. It is only through involvement at all levels that these challenges can be faced. Environmental education and public outreach has been identified by the members of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology as a top regional priority. It is now up to all of us to act to achieve this goal.