

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTARY

Note: I would like to use this column to comment on various topics of interest to the Society's membership, assuming that I can make the editor's deadlines. In addition, I intend to provide a version in Spanish in the future. Additional comments or rebuttals are welcome.

PLUGGING THE CARIBBEAN INFORMATION DRAIN

To appreciate the difficulties faced by island residents trying to obtain information about the flora and fauna or ecosystems of their particular island(s), it is useful to realize that most of the information on these subjects resides outside of their island(s). In fact, with the exception of some universities, government agencies, and NGO libraries scattered throughout the region, much of this relevant information cannot be readily found in the Caribbean. Most of the published information is accessible in the academic libraries of North America and Europe and specimens are often only available in the continental museums and herbaria. Therefore it is not surprising that island residents are sensitive to this information drain from their island territories. To make matters worse, some visiting investigators have been insensitive to these concerns and have made no effort to "repatriate" the results of their island studies. Admittedly, in the past it was difficult for some foreign investigators to know just where or to whom to send the results of their island studies in the Caribbean. These problems, of course are not unique to the Caribbean, as developing nations throughout the tropics have routinely suffered this information drain. Obviously, the inaccessibility of this information delays both the appreciation of the native flora and fauna by island residents and subsequent conservation efforts.

The Society of Caribbean Ornithology was founded, in part, to provide a forum for the exchange of information relating to ornithology and conservation in an effort to improve the flow of information to and from the region and to facilitate exchange among island residents. The Society's annual meetings and our newsletter, *El Pittire*, all contribute to this effort. These efforts have enabled continental investigators and managers to present their island findings and experiences to some of the folks who might benefit most from these studies as well as enabling island residents to

exchange valuable information among themselves. No longer do continental or island investigators and managers have the excuse that regional mechanisms are nonexistent for the exchange of information in the Caribbean. The Society's methods of communication have evolved over time from the publication of an irregularly issued journal (*Ornitología Caribeña*) to a regularly published newsletter, and annual meetings based on traditional 15 minute presentations, to meetings with a combination of traditional presentations, workshops, and round-table discussions. This evolution of the Society's information exchange format has been healthy and the trend towards more interactive meetings should be continued. The more interactive meeting format should enable us to move beyond the simple exchange of information to an emphasis on identifying its importance and how it might be applied.

The problem of locating the ornithological literature specific to an island territory has been partially solved by a computerized bibliography of Caribbean ornithology, compiled by Jim Wiley. Jim first presented the design and format of this bibliography at our annual meeting in August 1994, in Martinique. This massive undertaking which includes about 10,000 entries on computer diskette with cross references by key words, author's names, and titles will greatly facilitate our ability to identify authors and their studies conducted anywhere in the Caribbean. The major hurdle now facing this bibliography is finding a publisher willing to publish the bibliography and provide the necessary diskettes, and obtaining funding to complete publication. Jim has approached the executive board of the Society for backing of the bibliography. Given the importance of such a bibliography to our membership, I would hope that our board provides endorsement of Jim's valuable efforts, which are consistent with the Society's objectives. Once the bibliography is finally published we will need to develop mechanisms to enable island residents to easily obtain copies of the literature relevant to their island territories. These efforts will help the Society ensure that the ornithological and conservation information relevant to the Caribbean is available in the region.

Joe Wunderle