

CAYMAN ISLANDS

PATRICIA E. BRADLEY
CAYMAN ISLANDS REPRESENTATIVE
PO Box 907, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, BWI

BIODIVERSITY GRANT

The WWF-UK transferred a biodiversity grant, part of the spin-off from UK government from the Rio Conference, to the Cayman Islands National Trust (CINT) in 1998. Fred Burton, the Scientific Programmes Manager, with the help of volunteers, has spent 12 months mapping the primary vegetation of the three Cayman islands, using the latest GPS equipment, a major and arduous task. Fred is now ready to analyze the data. Several major conservation applications will follow; i.e., production of accurate vegetation maps, a basis to plan conservation management for the most sensitive habitats, and avian monitoring (and later the production of a breeding bird atlas). The results do not come a moment too soon, because pressure on the environment has increased alarmingly in the last two years, especially on Grand Cayman, where almost all the freshwater wetlands in the western half of the island have now been filled. Land costs have continued to escalate on the three islands, making large land purchase by the Trust (despite very successful fund raisers) virtually impossible. All conservation efforts for birds (and plants) are now focused on negotiating an environmental policy with the Cayman Islands Government, which will put environmentally protected areas into the Development Plan, and get major areas designated, as recommended by the Trust.

CAYMAN ISLANDS BIRD CLUB

It has not been a good year for the Bird Club, with more birders leaving the island and low attendance at meetings. The first nest of the Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) was found by a tourist and photographed by Patricia Bradley (previously only juveniles had been seen) and records of the rare Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*) were confirmed. Both records will appear in the British Ornithologists' Union Check-list for the Cayman Islands, now entering the last editorial stages, and due for publication in 2000. The Check-list includes 224 bird species confirmed for the three Cayman islands.

NATURE TOURISM PROJECT

A self-guided nature tourism project is due to open in December 1999 on Cayman Brac, with Patricia Bradley as consultant (and sign-maker, rock-mover, and web page author). Forty interpretive signs have been ordered and work is now taking place on four superb porcelain enamel panels, two of which will illustrate the life histories of the Cayman Brac Parrot (*Amazona leucocephala hesternae*) and the Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*). Part of the project calls for wetland habitat restoration, but this awaits the purchase of land for an alternate site for the public dump. Great cooperation has been given by the Cayman Brac branch of the National Trust, which has had another successful year under Wallis Platts' chairmanship and membership, and activities are continuing to grow. Wallis's efforts have resulted in a Brac family offering to donate the islands' only heronry to the Trust, hopefully by year end.

LAND PURCHASES

Another 17 acres of primary woodland have been purchased by the National Trust, making the Mastic Reserve up to 339 acres, the only area of protected woodland in Grand Cayman. The Trust also purchased 300 acres of mangrove in the Central Mangrove Wetland, with money raised by our master fund-raiser, Janet Walker. No progress has yet been made on protection of the Central Mangrove Wetland and its creation as a second Ramsar site, promised by the Government in 1995. We are still hopeful. This important wetland is the largest inland swamp in the West Indies, and is vital, in the true sense of the word, for the existence of Grand Cayman's birds, coral reefs, fishing industry, and underground freshwater lenses.

WEST INDIAN WHISTLING-DUCK WORKING GROUP

The West Indian Whistling-Duck Working Group (WIWDWG; Cayman Islands) is cooperating with the Grand Cayman Rotary Club to create a "watchable pond" at Willie Ebanks West Indian

Whistling-Duck feeding station at Hutland. Plans have now been passed and work is due to start in August to create a viewing area and upgrade the freshwater pond with labour and materials provided by Rotary, and an interpretive sign (\$1000) donated by the WIWDWG.

The WIWDWG has funded Martin Keeley, who lives in Cayman Brac, to be the major author of the WIWDWG wetland activity book, to be published in English and Spanish. Minor authors are Lynn Gape, Lisa Sorenson, Patricia Bradley, Lundy Spence, and Kate Wallace. The book is intended to get more wetland education into school curricula in islands within the range of the West Indian Whistling-Duck, which is our flagship species. Martin received travel funding to give slide and puppet shows on Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac in our continuing effort to educate children and adults on the importance of the West Indies' only endemic duck. He ran Friends of Boundary Bay environmental education programme, which reached 25,000 schoolchildren in British Columbia, and is now incorporated into the curriculum.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Patricia Bradley raised funds from RSPB, the largest UK conservation organization, and E. J. Williams, of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, raised funds for a National Trust breeding survey on the Cayman Brac Parrot. From 4-13 June 1999, Jim Wiley led a team (Fred Burton, Patricia Bradley, E. J. Williams, and Noel Holcombe, with Trevor Baxter and Teri and Terry from the Bird Club for two days) in searches for parrot nests in

woodland on karstic limestone (and avoiding the concealed caves). Only six nests were located (four in the Parrot Reserve), but many other non-breeding pairs held territories. We all agreed this project needed several years study to isolate the factors that drive this small amazon population (estimated at 400 individuals). Clearing of bluff woodland, with more areas planned for development, will fragment the already small breeding habitat of the parrot. Therefore, before further areas can be identified for protection, finding what (apart from dead cedar trees) controls their choice of nests is a priority. Nest reconstruction will also be considered.

BAT CONSERVATION

Bat conservation received a boost when Lois Blumenthal got bat biologist Annie Louise Band for a month on the islands. Band netted and researched all night and held public awareness meetings, talked to everyone to dispel local fears about bats, and explored caves and attics all day. She made a big impact and hopes to return for a year to continue work.

BREEDING SEABIRDS

Patricia Bradley contributed a Cayman Islands summary of breeding seabirds to the Seabird Working Group which, with reports from all of the West Indies, was intended for publication in BirdLife International as a monograph on West Indian seabirds. Unfortunately, it seems to have hit various snags; e.g., the reports would make the manuscript too large to be published with the species accounts and authors failed to submit reports for many of the islands.