

As President of Island Conservation Effort and as a resident of the Netherlands Antilles, I have a great appreciation of and concern for its native wildlife. I respectfully request that you use the influence of your office to oppose this introduction and to consider enacting legislation that will provide protection for natural resources by prohibiting introductions that could have negative impacts on native species.

This information and request for assistance is also being sent to the Governor General of the Netherlands Antilles, the Council of Ministers, the Chairman of the Parliament of the Netherlands Antilles, the Lieutenant Governor of Sint Eustatius, and the Executive Council of the Island Government of Saba. I thank you for your attention. I would be more than willing to provide additional information if you so desire.

Sincerely,

Martha Walsh-McGehee, President

Key Netherland Antilles Officials to contact to protest the introduction of exotic bird species:

- Governor General of the Netherlands Antilles, Jaime Sale, Fort Amsterdam, Willemstad, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles
- Chairman of the Parliament of the Netherlands Antilles, Errol Cova, Wilhelmina Plein #4, Willemstad, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles
- Council of Ministers, Fort Amsterdam Willemstad, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles
- Department of the Office of Environmental and Nature Aspects, Mr. P. Hoetjes, Heelsumstraat z/n, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles
- Lt. Governor Dennis Richardson, Administration Building, Clem Labega Square, Philipsburg, Sint Maarten, Netherlands Antilles. Tel: 599 5 2-6085; Fax: 599 5 2-4884
- Executive Council of the Island Government of Saba, Government Administration Building, The Bottom, Saba, Netherlands Antilles
- Lt. Governor E. R. Abdul, Government Guest House, Sint Eustatius, Netherlands Antilles

From The Electronic Evergreen, via the Island Resources Foundation

CMC SCIENTISTS DISCOVER OCEAN JEWEL IN HEART OF CARIBBEAN

WASHINGTON, Aug. 14 [1998]</U.S>. News-wire/ – Fourteen scientists just back from an expedition to the tiny, uninhabited Caribbean island of Navassa have returned with tales of biological riches unimagined when the expedition began on July 23.

“We suspected that the expedition teams would find rich biological diversity on the island and in the waters around Navassa,” said Roger E. McManus, president of the Center for Marine Conservation (CMC), which led the expedition. Speaking at a CMC press conference today to announce the scientists’ preliminary findings, McManus said: “We never dreamed that on a single visit the team would so greatly increase our knowledge of the number of species on Navassa.”

Navassa is a Caribbean island located 40 miles west of Haiti in the Greater Antilles. While the un-

inhabited island has an area of only two square miles – just nine times the size of the national mall in Washington, D.C. – it is surrounded by close to 4,000 square miles of marine habitat under U.S. jurisdiction. Navassa has been part of the United States since 1857, when it was claimed for the U.S. by sea captain Peter Duncan. The island is under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Office of Insular Affairs. Access to Navassa is hazardous, and no visitors are allowed on the island without permission from the Interior Department, which supported the expedition.

“I am excited by the findings revealed by the CMC expedition,” said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. “We will continue to move forward with our fact-finding and let science play a major role in our decision as to how best to manage Navassa Is-

land.”

LAND TEAM FINDINGS

“This expedition vastly increased our knowledge of species on Navassa,” said Michael Smith, <Ph.D. >, senior research scientist at CMC and the expedition’s land team leader. In fact, 81 percent of the species now known to be on Navassa were reported for this first time on the CMC expedition. “When we left for the island, we knew of some 150 terrestrial species that had been reported by earlier scientists,” said Smith. “We returned from Navassa with at least 800 species - a more than fourfold increase in the number previously known to be on the island.” The scientists estimate that their samples will include upwards of 250 new species once they are sorted and studied.

Smith’s team found 15 species that are known to be endemic (unique to Navassa). The scientists expect that even more endemic species will be found in the weeks ahead as the expedition’s specimens are sorted and analyzed. “We expect a very large proportion of the species to be endemic, since our samples include groups like ground spiders and wingless ground crickets that are prone to endemism on small islands,” said Smith.

Many of the previously unreported species found on the Navassa expedition are lichens. “No lichen has ever been reported from Navassa,” said Smith, “yet more than 100 species of lichens were collected during the expedition. We’ve barely begun to sort through the scientific specimens, but Dr. Richard Harris (a lichen specialist at the New York Botanical Garden) has already been able to confirm two new species within hours of opening the samples.”

The land team was unable to find a number of species that had been reported by previous scientific expeditions. “We searched intensively for a number of endemic species like the Navassa curly tail lizard,” said Smith. “Unfortunately, we couldn’t locate several of the unique species encountered by the first visitors, and we have to conclude that extinctions are occurring.”

MARINE TEAM FINDINGS

The team of marine experts led by CMC Research Scientist Nina Young found similar riches on their dives in U.S. waters off Navassa. A remotely operated vehicle, dubbed “Wizard,” made additional dives to videotape the underwater environment. “The island is a true gem, with some of the most spectacular diving and enchanting underwater vistas

in U.S. waters,” she told reporters at the press conference. “Throughout Navassa’s waters, reef fish, invertebrates, and algae are abundant and diverse. Navassa may possess some of the most pristine and healthy coral reefs in the U.S. - and perhaps in the whole of the Caribbean.”

In addition to a wide variety of marine species, Navassa’s waters include an incredible diversity of marine habitats, from cliff ledges to seagrass beds to sand plains. “These habitats are relatively untouched by the threats of overfishing, pollution, and coastal development that plague other parts of the Caribbean,” said Young.

Among the marine team’s most exciting discoveries were healthy populations of marine organisms that are in decline elsewhere in the Caribbean. These include healthy elkhorn coral on the shallow shelf off Lulu Bay - significant because elkhorn coral has been severely damaged by disease and bleaching in other areas of the Caribbean. The team also found large numbers of Black Spiny Sea Urchins around the Northeast Point - notable because there was a catastrophic Caribbean-wide die-off of this urchin in the 1980s.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXPEDITION

The findings of both the land and marine teams are noteworthy because of the extreme pressure being placed on Caribbean species by the region’s dense population. The islands of the Caribbean are home to more than 40 million people - approximately the same number that live in the states California, Oregon, and Washington combined. Yet this population occupies land equivalent to the state of Oregon alone. “Uninhabited islands like Navassa are the very best chance we have to understand and protect the diversity of life in the Caribbean,” said CMC President McManus.

NAVASSA WEB PAGE

At the press conference, CMC also announced a new web page where members of the public can learn more about the expedition and its findings, as well as about Navassa’s history - from its discovery by crewmen of Christopher Columbus in 1504 to its present-day status as part of the U.S. The site can be accessed through CMC’s homepage (<www.cmc-ocean.org>).

The expedition, which ran from July 23 through Aug. 5, was sponsored by CMC, DOI, and the Henry Luce Foundation. In-kind support was provided by American Divers, Divers Alert Network

(DAN), the Captain and crew of the vessel Mago del Mar, Deep Ocean Exploration and Research, The Royal Geographical Society, the U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, and West Marine. Participating scientists were from Avila College, Deep Ocean Exploration and Research, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, the National Museum of Natural History of the Dominican Republic, New York Botanical Garden, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. National Park

Service.

— *The Center for Marine Conservation is the largest national nonprofit organization committed solely to protecting ocean environments and conserving the global abundance and diversity of marine life through science-based advocacy, research and public education, as well as informed citizen participation. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., CMC has regional offices in California, Florida, and Virginia. The Center was established in 1972.*

NAVASSA ISLAND

ENTREPRENEUR SEEKS RIGHTS TO GUANO-RICH ISLAND

By ANDREW SHULMAN
Washington Times, August 6, 1998

A bitter fight to excavate bird dung on a tiny uninhabited Caribbean island may be coming to an end with the discovery that the obscure U.S. territory [has] rare plants and a bird thought to be extinct.

Entrepreneur Bill Warren claims that the Department of the Interior has been trying to stop him from mining guano, which is used as fertilizer, on Navassa, an island about nine times larger than the Mall in Washington.

Mr. Warren is staking his claim to the lucrative petrified bird droppings under the little-known Guano Act of 1856, which provides that any uninhabited land containing guano and not under the control of another nation may be claimed in the name of the United States.

He sued Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright after the federal government refused to set a bond price for the purchase of the island located 50 miles west of Haiti in the Greater Antilles. Mr. Warren said Sens. Jesse Helms, North Carolina Republican, and Dianne Feinstein, California Democrat, suggested that he sue to compel the government to let him mine guano.

But Mr. Warren may encounter a more slippery legal slope if the Interior Department declares the island off-limits due to environmental concerns.

The Center for Marine Conservation, along with the Interior Department and a host of other groups, finished a survey last week that found numerous rare plants and the Navassa ground dove, previously believed to be extinct. Among their other discoveries

so far is a spectacular reef, apparently in pristine condition, that lies to the northeast of the island.

"We are delighted," said David North, public affairs officer for the Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs.

Mr. Warren, of Alpine, Calif., is suspicious of the timing of the government's discovery.

"In a way I am kind of happy that they did that because it shows how greedy the government is and ridiculous, caring more about some plants... than people having jobs and good fertilizer for the things we eat," he said.

Mr. North said the Interior Department visited the island, not studied by scientists since the 1930s, to "see what it had."

Roger McManus, president of CMC, said the plan to survey the island was already in the works when Mr. Warren filed his lawsuit. "We were looking into the region because we do a lot of joint international, expeditionary and museum work in the northern Caribbean," Mr. McManus said.

The United States claimed Navassa in 1857. The Navassa Phosphate Co. Mined the island until it abandoned the territory after a slave revolt in 1898. The Coast Guard maintained an unmanned lighthouse there until 1996. Then the Interior Department assumed responsibility.

To support his argument that the island is open to property claims, Mr. Warren cites the case of W. S. Carter, who asked the State Department for permission to buy Navassa in 1905. The department said at that time it "possessed no territorial sovereignty"

over the land.

"I think it actually adds more fuel to the fire," Mr. Warren said.

The two sides do agree there's guano in them thar' rocks. "We found a book at William and Mary [College] called 'My Memoirs of Navassa,' written

by the Navassa Phosphate Company's chief geologist," Mr. Warren said. "In 1886 he wrote about the island and its ecology and its bird guano. ...he said the entire island is solid sea-bird guano."

"I will not be stopped and I believe I will win island ownership," Mr. Warren said.

BIRDLIFE JAMAICA

On 15 July 1998 BirdLife Jamaica came into being. This is the new name for the former Gosse Bird Club and the change signifies a developmental leap to meet the future. The name change marks the culmination of a series of events which have taken place over a number of years, and it embodies the organization's flight to become an increasingly recognized beacon for the conservation of Jamaica's native bird life. The change also produces an obvious alliance with BirdLife International, the oldest environmental group in the world, and one with the greatest influence at regional and international levels with respect to bird conservation. BirdLife Jamaica is the partner-designate of BirdLife International.

With the highest number of endemics in the Caribbean region, and having one of the highest rates of endemism for islands worldwide, Jamaica is important in the context of global biodiversity. There are 30 species of birds found on our island and no where else on earth. Unfortunately there is an overwhelming need for conservation action to safeguard their existence. Habitat loss, along with the introduction of exotic predators, has been blamed for the extinction at least three of Jamaica's unique bird species and at present another 10 are considered threatened or vulnerable. BirdLife Jamaica is the only local organization which specifically focuses on the conservation of our island's birds and their habitats.

The organization's publication, the *Broadsheet*, has appeared twice a year without fail since its inception in 1963 and this year the organization celebrates the appearance of the 70th issue. This publication is the only journal that reports on the natural history of Jamaica's birds, and the only one in the Caribbean devoted to the study of birds and their habitats.

The activities of BirdLife Jamaica incorporate the

interests of casual observers of wild birds with intensive research projects and initiatives sponsored by various local and international organizations, including the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica, Wildlife Protection Trust International and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All these projects involve young Jamaican ornithologists and biologists who are both studying and working for the conservation of our bird life and for the biodiversity of our island.

At present, the priorities of BirdLife Jamaica will be to strengthen its ability to carry out its strategic objectives, including the education of Jamaicans on the uniqueness and increasingly threatened nature of our bird life. Ultimately BirdLife Jamaica aims to encourage and facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge, expertise and resources for the conservation and management of Jamaica's birds and their habitats.

BirdLife Jamaica's office is in the Department of Life Sciences of the University of the West Indies and is staffed by two part-time employees and several volunteers who contribute to important activities such as the educational programme.

For further information, contact:

BirdLife Jamaica

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