

PROPOSED BIRD INTRODUCTIONS TO SINT MAARTEN

MANDY WALSH-MCGEHEE

Windwardside Post Office, Box 599, Saba, Netherlands Antilles

Last month I received a copy of a proposal to introduce exotic bird species into Sint Maarten. Included on the list of birds that the man in St. Maarten "wants to start with" are flamingo, Troupial, Saffron Finch, House Sparrow, Brown-throated Parakeet, Scarlet Ibis, Bare-eyed Pigeon, and a long list of doves and finches from Holland. He asked me to send my opinion in writing. I told him that whereas I shared his appreciation for the varied and colorful birds found in other countries, I opposed the introduction of exotic species, particularly without having scientific studies done to determine the probable impact on native species. I cited numerous examples of introductions, planned and accidental, which have gone awry. Nothing more was heard until I received a phone call from a Sint Maarten newspaper reporter. On Saturday 5 September 1998 a two-page article was published outlining the proposal and my opposition arguments as well as those of the Director of the San Diego [California] Museum. The article stated that despite a lot of opposition from ornithologists, Mr. Richardson is not prepared to give up easily.

To date, I have written a letter of opposition (see below) and sent copies of the newspaper article to the governments of Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, Saba, and the central government of the Netherlands Antilles. I have attached my mailing list and a sample letter to this e-mail. I am working on letters to the French government because of the dual nationality of the island.

I would very much appreciate the help and support from members of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology. I can be reached by telephone 599 4 6 2382 fax 599 4 6 2695 or e-mail tropbird@icanect.net. My mailing address is Windwardside, P.O. Box 599, Saba, Netherlands Antilles.

Thank you for your help.

Mandy Walsh-McGehee

Copy of letter to Lieutenant Governor Dennis Richardson, Philipsburg, Sint Maarten Netherlands Antilles

Lieutenant Governor Richardson;

I am sending you a copy of an article printed in the 5 September 1998 edition of Sint Maarten's Daily Herald regarding the proposed introduction of exotic bird species into that island. It has sparked controversy, not only on Sint Maarten, but also throughout the West Indies, England, and the United States.

The ecology of islands is often fragile, and the introduction of non-native species, planned or accidental, can have disastrous results. In the Caribbean, we can easily see the problems caused by black and Norwegian rats that accidentally reached our shores. We introduced the mongoose which has not eliminated the rats, but which has done enormous damage to native bird populations. It has also been found to carry rabies, posing a potentially serious threat to humans. The Collared Dove, one of the birds being proposed for introduction into Sint Maarten, has been introduced into Florida, the Bahamas, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. It has caused a dramatic decrease in the populations of native doves in those locations and continues to be a threat to their survival.

Island Conservation Effort advocates the preservation of native species and their habitats, and is concerned about the proposed introduction. Sint Maarten is in close proximity to other islands, not only Saba and Sint Eustatius, but also other island nations. There is a possibility that the proposed introduction could affect the wildlife of these neighboring islands.

Of greater concern, perhaps, is the lack of legislation to regulate wildlife introductions and to require environmental impact studies before permission is granted or denied. Without legislation governing the introduction of exotic species, even the best of intentions can cause enormous damage.

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-