



UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES February 2017

Courting Black-capped Petrels began calling in the mountains of Hispaniola some weeks ago, and intensive field work for the 2016-2017 breeding season has commenced. Field teams have deployed in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to monitor known nests, seek new nests, repeat radar surveys, and biologists are listening for petrels (with the help of sound meters) in Dominica and Guadeloupe. Community outreach work and filming are also underway.

This update focuses on activities since the last newsletter in June 2016.

CONTINUED FOCUS ON BOUCAN CHAT FOR CONSERVATION ACTIVITY

The June 2016 newsletter reported on a number of conservation activities begun in the border town of Boucan Chat, Haiti, which abuts a forested area hosting a petrel colony. Community social structure is such that conservationists can meet with representatives and decision-makers to discuss sustainable development approaches to improve citizens' socioeconomic status while relieving the threat of encroachment into the colony area.

Grupo Jaragua's Haiti Field Officers, Rene Jeune and Tinio Louis, continued outreach and education activities through the summer. In 2016, they led education workshops regarding soil, water and forest conservation for over 300 children, met with over 50 members of the youth group *Asociation de Jeunes pour le Developement Boucan Chatte* regarding the possibility of establishing of a native tree nursery to support reforestation and agroforestry initiatives; displayed informational materials about the Diablotin at the cultural fair "Encuentro de dos culturas" in August. They also demonstrated the use of solar ovens as a sustainability tool; and continued conversations with Plant With Purpose on sustainable farming interests and goals.



Working with schoolchildren in Boucan Chat, Haiti.

Credit: Grupo Jaragua



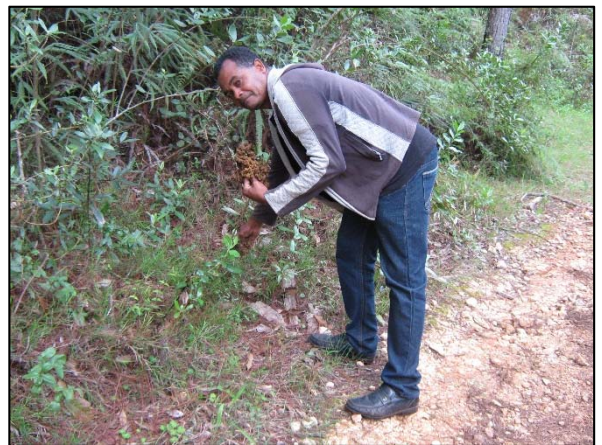
HURRICANE EFFECTS

At the very end of September, Hurricane Matthew, the fifth hurricane in the 2016 Atlantic hurricane season, wove a path of destruction as it tracked through the Caribbean. In Boucan Chat, the hurricane did some major damage to several houses and other structures (including the Catholic Church building, one of the largest structures in the community. It also caused excessive damage to cash crops grown in the area. Fortunately, no human lives were lost in Boucan Chat (~1600 people died in the storm elsewhere), but the destruction of the harvest is a serious blow to the community. Effects on petrel habitat or burrows in the affected areas has yet to be examined.

Petrels are out to sea during hurricane season, and populations are likely adapted to deal with these natural events. However, individuals may be blown well out of their usual range. The Gainesville Sun reported that following Hurricane Matthew, a Black-capped Petrel was spotted sitting on Newnans Lake in Gainesville, Florida, by Adam Kent, a local resident and President of the Florida Ornithological Society. Rex Rowan, who maintains the checklist for Alachua County, stated that the species has only been seen once before in Alachua County and only once elsewhere in inland Florida.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

On the Dominican Republic side of the border, Grupo Jaragua engages with the Ministry of the Environment to improve the management of all of the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park. A management activity closely related to petrel conservation is restoration of the park's most threatened ecosystem, the humid mountain forest, of which only patches remain. Restoration of degraded areas back to broadleaf forest would benefit forest birds such as the Bicknell's Thrush, La Selle's Thrush, Western Chat-Tanager; based on experience, it would likely provide Diablotin nesting habitat as well. Additionally, broadleaf forests are less prone to forest fires than pure pine stands, this is important as fire poses a serious risk to the petrels known to be breeding in some parts of the Sierra de Bahoruco. Grupo Jaragua is assisting by collecting and supplying seeds of several native and endemic plant species to the park administration of Sierra de Bahoruco to use in a nursery to produce broadleaf saplings.



Collecting seeds of native broadleaf trees.
Credit: Grupo Jaragua

Grupo Jaragua also worked with the Ministry of Environment to improve the situation of stranded petrels due to disorientation by lights. In 2015, several strandings were not handled properly due to lack of knowledge on the part of park guards receiving the birds. A release protocol was developed and translated into Spanish (a Haitian Kreyol version is in preparation) and presented to the park administrations of Sierra de Bahoruco and Valle Nuevo. From there, it was distributed to the different park stations and explanations were given to the guards. In 2016, no cases of stranded birds were reported, so the efficacy of the outreach remains to be determined, but outreach with this material be repeated in 2017.

Full reports by Grupo Jaragua, as well as the release protocol, can be found at <http://www.birdscaribbean.org/our-work/black-capped-petrel-working-group/>

CONSERVATION METRICS REPORTS ON ACOUSTIC MONITORING

In Hispaniola. As reported previously, after radar surveys in 2013 and 2014 indicated petrel activity, song meters were placed at exploratory survey sites in Valle Nuevo National Park to help locate nests in this densely vegetated area. Matthew McKown with Conservation Metrics analyzed data collected from seven locations (monitored December 2015 to February 2016) and another seven locations (monitored February to May 2016). A total of 1,891 hours were recorded on a 783 combined survey nights, and Black-capped Petrel calls were detected at four locations. The number of calls recorded ranged from 2 to 19 calls, and activity was largely detected from two to five hours after local sunset. At this point, it is not possible to know if these calls were from individuals in transit through the valley, from birds at small breeding aggregations, or from prospecting individuals exploring areas without extant breeding burrows. In July 2016, Grupo Jaragua undertook the first on-the-ground surveys in two of these locations: Las Neblinas and the canyon by La Nuez. Unfortunately, no nests have been registered so far, but in 2017, the team will undertake additional searches and continue to use song meters to guide their work.

In Dominica. To date, acoustic surveys on Dominica have not detected any petrel calls. Song meters were deployed at three exploratory survey sites after radar surveys in January 2015 indicated high petrel activity on the island. A total of 587 hours from 261 combined nights of survey effort during January to August 2015 was analyzed. Data from 2016 have yet to be analyzed. Though it is disappointing no petrel calls were recorded, modifications to placement and timing of song meter deployment may produce different results in 2017.

Conservation Metrics' full report with details on equipment, design, analysis and discussion at <http://www.birdscaribbean.org/our-work/black-capped-petrel-working-group/>

Note: Three song meters have been deployed this season in the mountains of Guadeloupe by Antoine Chabrolle with AMAZONA.

TECHNICAL EXCHANGE FOR PETREL BIOLOGISTS

Staff at the Dominica's Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division, who are undertaking nest searching work on their island, are preparing to travel to the Dominican Republic in March 2017 for the second half of an island-to-island technical exchange in order to strengthen their knowledge on Black-capped Petrel field methodologies. This work will be supported in part by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and ABC.

NEST MONITORING IN HISPANIOLA

In addition to the nest searches noted above, teams under Grupo Jaragua continued a schedule of nest searching and monitoring in known and suspected breeding areas on either side of the DR-Haiti border until July 2016. In total, 5 nests were located in Loma Quemada (two produced fledglings), 11 nests were monitored at Morne Vincent (7 produced fledglings) and 14 nests at Loma del Toro (all produced fledglings).

In 2017 season, partner USFWS will provide funding to support conservation actions for the Black-capped Petrel including nest site monitoring and protection identified as priorities by the BCPE Working Group.



Diablotin chick. Credit: Grupo Jaragua

TURNOVER IN WORKING GROUP'S CHAIRMANSHIP

In August 2016, George Wallace left ABC to take a position with Rainforest Trust as their Chief Conservation Officer. As co-Chair of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group in recent years, George provided much-appreciated financial support, expertise and investment of personal time and energy. ABC continues to be committed to conserving high priority seabirds, including the Black-capped Petrel. Hannah Nevins, ABC's Seabird Program Director, located in Santa Cruz, California now serves as the lead for ABC on this species' conservation and will act as co-Chair with Jennifer Wheeler. vHannah has a long history with Pacific seabird conservation and brings much expertise to the group.

WORKING GROUP CONSIDERATIONS



Meetings:

If attending the **Pacific Seabird Group 44th Annual Meeting**, 22-25 Feb 2017, Tacoma, Washington, please connect with Hannah and Jennifer at the meeting: hnevins@abcbirds.org & Jennifer.Wheeler@birdscaribbean.org.



Anyone attending the **BirdsCaribbean International Conference**, taking place July 13-17 in Topes de Collantes, Cuba is invited to a meeting of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group to discuss ongoing work and new ideas for conservation. Contact Jennifer.Wheeler@birdscaribbean.org

Listserv: Group members can stay in touch with one another using the Diablotin@yahoogroups.com list. All interested parties are invited to join. Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com>, search under "Diablotin" and sign up. You need not have a Yahoo account.

Website: The website for the working group is hosted by BirdsCaribbean. Includes a library of documents related to the Black-capped Petrel project (most unpublished). Please visit www.BirdsCaribbean.org, and search under "Petrel".

Presentations: The website library now includes a presentation on the Black-capped Petrel made at the North American Ornithological Conference, August 2016 in Washington, DC.

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