

**Interim Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Submitted by American Bird Conservancy
September 2014**

Black-capped Petrels

Nest Site Monitoring

With support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), ABC's Dominican Republic partner, Grupo Jaragua, has located 47 active Black-capped Petrel nests with brooding adults during the breeding season as of July 2014 in the combined monitoring area of Loma del Toro, Dominican Republic and Morne Vincent, Haiti. As of July 11, 2014, 25 fledglings had left their nests successfully while ten were still in the nest with eight ready to leave and two still with a fair amount of down feathers indicating somewhat delayed development (Table 1).

Result by 07/11/2014	Haiti	Dom. Rep.	Total
Fledgling left nest successfully	11	14	25
Fledgling still present in nest	4	6	10
Animal predation on chick	1	-	1
Animal predation on egg	1	1	2
Human predation on chick	2	-	2
Adults brooding, no egg or chick found	1	3	4
Egg abandoned	-	2	2
Chick dead, no predation	-	1	1
Total	20	27	47
Preliminary % successful nests	75	74	74.5

Table 1: Preliminary results for 2014 nesting season at Morne Vincent (Haiti) and Loma del Toro (Dominican Republic)

Causes of nest failure included animal predation, human predation, egg abandonment, and in one case, the chick died due to unknown causes. Human predation seems to play a role in Haiti, where the search for wild yams in the nesting area seems to lead people to the nests accidentally. So far we have not witnessed any targeted searching for nests by humans.

In 2014, Grupo Jaragua was able to follow up on petrel nesting identified during 2013 radar surveys. Of the 36 active nests found in the northern escarpments of the Massif de la Selle, Grupo Jaragua was able to check in on 18. Rains made the steep gradients very slippery and dangerous for the team and prevented the monitoring of the additional 18 nests. Of the 18 nests that Grupo Jaragua was able to reach, 11 had chicks, six were empty, and one contained a dead chick (approximate success rate 61%).

The state of the northern escarpments of the Massif de la Selle is critical as cattle continue to be moved in for grazing wherever slopes are not too steep. Vegetation consists primarily of bushes as bigger trees have all been removed. Without immediate intervention, the major nesting grounds for Black-capped Petrels in this location may soon be destroyed completely.

Radar Surveys

In 2012 and 2013, ABC's partner, Environmental Protect in the Caribbean (EPIC), used marine radar to survey for Black-capped Petrels on Hispaniola to determine flight corridors and nest activity centers for the species. During February and March 2014, EPIC staff along with members from Grupo Jaragua and Société Audubon Haiti, used radar to survey for Black-capped Petrels once again in various areas throughout Hispaniola. The group focused almost entirely on flight corridors and nest activity centers that had not been previously surveyed for petrels. One of the highlights of the radar survey season was locating new petrel activity centers in Sierra de Neiba and the north slope of the Bahorucos. For both of the locations, the flyways headed inland towards Lago Enriquillo where the petrels would need to fly either east towards Barahona or west towards Port-au-Prince. From the Sierra de Neiba station, Port-au-Prince is approximately 60km while Barahona is approximately 85km. The station on the north slope of the Bahorucos was approximately 90km from Port-au-Prince and 55km from Barahona. Both places are quite far from the sea and the petrels make a long trip to get from the sea to the nest sites associated with these flight corridors.

The petrels flying into the Bahorucos appeared to be heading to the main east-west ridge of the range. We observed this flight last year from the ridge line itself, and this year's observation substantiated last year's data. The petrels flying into the Neibas were headed to the western portion of that mountain range. According to Ernst Rupp of Grupo Jaragua, there is a small patch of wooded habitat at the head of this drainage that has the potential for petrel nesting.

In total, radar data was collected at 12 stations on Hispaniola in 2014. This data has already gone a long way in helping point us to new locations for field visits and nest searching and will continue to do so. In the future, we hope using radar will enable us to monitor Black-capped Petrel population trends.

Acoustic Monitoring

In addition to working with Grupo Jaragua and EPIC, ABC and Grupo Jaragua have worked with Conservation Metrics on acoustic monitoring of Black-capped Petrels on Hispaniola. Conservation Metrics gathered with all project collaborators in Forêt des Pins, Haiti to present results of the 2012 acoustic monitoring data, develop standard deployment protocols, identify potential calibration and exploratory survey sites for the 2014 field season, and develop a standard recording schedule for Black-capped Petrel monitoring on Hispaniola. Additionally, Conservation Metrics conducted two Song Meter training sessions with Grupo Jaragua staff and Anderson Jean of Société Audubon Haiti. One hands-on training session covered steps for field deployment and maintenance of acoustic sensors. A separate training session was held on how to program Song Meters. Conservation Metrics also recently purchased six new Song Meter 2 acoustic sensors for the project on top of the one already available. The initial plan developed with Grupo Jaragua was to monitor three calibration sites for the remainder of the 2013-2014 breeding season (Loma del Toro, Hoyo del Diablo, and Boucan Chat), and up to seven exploratory sites for one-month periods (Farallones Seguin, two sites in the Cordillera Central, two exploratory sites on Loma del Toro, and Caseta two and Caseta three on the southern part of the Bahoruco range in the Dominican Republic).

In the end, logistical constraints prevented repeated deployments at multiple exploratory sites and no sites could be monitored in the Cordillera Central. Although fewer exploratory sites were visited in 2014, an unanticipated increase in nest density data at survey sites increased the number of available calibration sites, including a new “high” density area discovered at the exploratory site along the cliffs of Seguin, Haiti.

During the 2014-2015 breeding season, Grupo Jaragua plans to re-deploy the seven available acoustic sensors at calibration and exploratory survey sites starting in Sep. 2014. Conservation Metrics will work with Ernst Rupp and his team to develop a song meter deployment and retrieval schedule for the 2014-2015 season. Exploratory sensors will be moved at least three times during the 2014-2015 breeding season to maximize coverage.

Communications Towers

In February 2014, petrel behavior was monitored in the vicinity of communication towers at Tet Kay Jak, Seguin in Haiti. Monitoring did not show any birds passing the antennas. It is assumed that the bright spotlight on one of the antennas was the major attraction for the birds last year and produced the massive collisions reported by Adam Brown and Jim Goetz. Ever since Goetz persuaded the tower owners to turn off the light last year, the birds have not apparently been attracted to the antennas.

Community Outreach

Grupo Jaragua held a meeting on February 12th with Asosyasyon Nég Vanyan Plantè Boukan Chat (ANVPBF) including their coordinator Derosémé Desantil and 15 additional members. ANVPBF is active in Boukan Chat, the community adjacent to nesting areas in Morne Vincent and Loma del Toro on the Haiti/DR border. One of the major problems which Boukan Chat is experiencing is the lack of water. The subject of the origin of the problem and possible solutions was a subject of intense discussion during the February 12th meeting. A project that improves the water situation by repairing existing water catchment devices and building new ones would be a good inroad to building trust within the community and combine reforestation activities with conservation efforts to maintain petrel nesting grounds. Meetings on this topic are ongoing. ANVPBF has executed several reforestation projects in the past utilizing the introduced fast growing *Grevillea* (or Southern silky oak, *Grevillea robusta*). They have also planted the endemic Hispaniolan pine (*Pinus occidentalis*), the dominant tree at higher elevations in the Sierra de Bahoruco. The idea is to get ANVPBF interested in supporting reforestation with native species. A good candidate, in addition to the native pine, is the Sabina (*Juniperus gracilior ekmanii*), which is endemic to the Sierra de Bahoruco and the Massif de la Selle. It is critically endangered with only a few trees left in Bahoruco, and a single tree in la Selle. There is very high interest on the Haitian side to re-establish the species in the country. The leader of this movement is Pierre Ogé of the Ministry of Agriculture who is also interested in Black-capped Petrel conservation. He has supported radar investigations in Haiti by helping with permitting and has organized events at the University in Port-au-Prince on Black-capped Petrel. Grupo Jaragua has been able to secure Sabina seeds and is presently working on their germination. Some of the seeds were sent to a nursery which is run by Fondation Seguin in Seguin.

Fire Management

Weather conditions have been abnormally dry during the last several months, and Grupo Jaragua, continues to monitor and work to reduce fires in petrel nesting areas. The Sierra de Bahoruco has been spared large fires this year, but in the Cordillera Central within the Valle Nuevo National Park a big fire erupted mid-summer and destroyed large areas of pine forest. The fire reached the Nizaito area which, according to the radar survey done in 2012, may hold nesting petrels. By this time of year, fledglings

should have left and there should not be direct damage. The fire may facilitate access to the Nizaito area. Last year it was impossible to penetrate far into the area because of thick, nearly impenetrable undergrowth. In 2012 a fire went over the nesting area of Morne Vincent, Haiti shortly after the fledglings had left the area. Adults did use the nests again the following season in 2013. Hopefully the same will apply to the Nizaito area.