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Census of the population of Black Capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) Search of probable nesting sites.

Introduction

The Black - Capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) is one of the rarest birds in Cuba, only reported for a small area of the south eastern coast of Cuba at Las Brujas inlet, south slope of Sierra Maestra, between the Turquino and Bayamesa mountain ranges. Although this bird has been reported as a breeder in other Caribbean islands such as La Hispani6la (Raffaele et al. 1998), its breeding status in Cuba has not been confirmed. In Cuba this bird has been reported from November through May which comprises of the breeding season of the species. There are not published reports on census of the Cuban population and the most important unpublished report dates back from 2004 when close to 40 individuals were seen at Las Brujas.

One of the main research needs of the Cuban ornithology and more specifically with the avifauna of Turquino and Bayamesa mountain ranges (both areas proposed as Important bird areas) is to verify whether the Black - Capped Petrel breeds in these areas of the Cuban territory which adds an extra value to both areas (Turquino and Bayamesa) and will be also very helpful to better design the management plans for both areas and set up the major research and conservation needs.

This species has been reported nesting in crevices and burrows in steep terrain of inaccessible mountains of Haiti and Dominican Republic (Raffaele et al. 1998). In some areas of the Turquino and Bayamesa mountain ranges there are places with these characteristics that could be potential breeding sites for the species. Nevertheless, the inaccessibility of these places hinder studies related to its breeding status in Cuba. In the other hand, in the last edition of the Bird Songs of Cuba edited at Cornell Laboratory of Natural Sounds (2006) the calls of the species is not available, thus its vocalisations are not available for the Cuban ornithologists and all those interested in this subject.

Having this in mind, we visited the coastal area on January 27 of 2006, where the species has been reported with the following objectives:

1. To census the colony of *Pterodroma hasitata* reported south of Las Brujas inlet.
2. To record the vocalizations of the species.
3. To search on the Suecia peak in order to find evidence of the breeding of the species.

Methods

The census was carried out by one observer form 5:00pm to 7:00pm

Observations were made with Binoculars 10x. A Kowa Sporting Scope 15-60x was also used.

Recordings were made with a Marantz PMD-222 tape recorder and a Senheiser ME 66 Microphone from the Juan C. Grundlach Library and Laboratory of Natural Sounds (LBSNJCG) of BIOECO. Two people were in charge of recording the species using the equipment described above and separated 100 m from each other along the road which at this location runs close and parallel to the sea coast.

Recordings were made at night time from 7:00pm until 5:00am next day.

Results

Census

As a result of the census, 4 individuals of *Pterodroma hasitata* were observed during three hours of observation. The highest number of individuals ever reported for the area is 40 (unpublished data.)

There was a cold front in the eastern part of Cuba on the day when observations were made. We reported sustained south - east winds of 25km per hour with gusts of 40km per hour.

This brought waves of 2 meters and higher which made impossible to watch Petrels floating in the water surface were individuals have been seen before in the sea.

All individuals counted were seen flying low above the sea surface 500 meters off the coast.

There were probably more individuals we were not able to see due to the bad weather condition. The maximum number of individuals is given as the maximum number of individuals seen flying at the same time.

Some of the individuals seen flying were detected "landing" on the water surface and were not seen afterwards which support our theory that there were more individuals floating in the water not detected for us due to the high waves.

Recordings

We recorded two tapes with three kinds of vocalisations of the Black - Capped Petrel which are placed at the LBSNJCG in BIOECO.

These recordings are the first recordings of this species made in Cuba and one of the few recordings made of this species.

Search of probable nesting sites of the species

To determine whether this species breeds or not in Cuba is one of the research and management priorities for Turquino Baymesa Park.

At the end of December of this year we carried out a eleven days field expedition to Turquino peak, specifically to Suecia peak where a Cuban biologist claim to have seen in the past a sea bird resembling to Black - Capped Petrel. This species nest in the highest mountains of Las Hispaniola and due to is threatened status, one of the research priorities of the Cuban ornithology is to proof whether the species breed or not in Cuba. We stay four days at Suecia Peak during which we carefully reviewed of the peak and as a result no evidences of the breeding of the species was found.

Nevertheless, there are still many places with the same characteristics of the nesting sites they use in La Hispaniola where searches of the species have never been

attempted due to the inaccessibility of the area which must be considered in future searches.

Recommendations

We recommend the authorities of the park to organise the search of the species on the highest rocky peaks of the park with the goal of detecting evidence of the breeding activity of the species during September through February when the species usually feeds 500m off the coast at Las Brujas.

References

Raffaele, H, J. Wiley, O.H. Garrido, A. Keith and J, Raffaele 1998. *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press.