



UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES June 2016

CONSERVATION ACTIONS AT BOUCAN CHAT

Of the known nesting areas of Black-capped Petrels, the most tractable area to begin conservation action is in the community of Boucan Chat, Haiti. This community has a population of approximately 12,000 people, is about 3 km from the Dominican Republic-Haiti border, and relies primarily on agriculture for subsistence and income. A colony of more than 50 petrels (25 known nests, of which 20 are monitored) was discovered in nearby forest in 2011. The community has organized farming associations, and the ownership of parcels nearest to nesting area is clear.

Encroachment by the community for agriculture and wood harvest poses the greatest threat to the Boucan Chat petrel colony, so members of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group have been working to establish a positive presence in the community, in order to mutually develop alternatives to the *status quo*. Specifically, Grupo Jaragua has been very mindful of introducing themselves to the community when undertaking field work, as has Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (EPIC) when working on the *Save the Devil* filming project.

Community Support

Helping the community of Boucan Chat achieve greater economic security is a step towards more sustainable land use and ultimately habitat protection. In discussions with Boucan Chat elders, the most critical need they identified was a reliable source of water; a need made sadly apparent during the drought of 2014-2015. Using funds from a crowdsourcing initiative started by Adam Brown (EPIC) and Aaron Straight (director for *Save the Devil*), the village was gifted the resources they needed to complete and/or upgrade



three cisterns in the community. This work commenced late 2015 and was completed this March. Plans are now in the making for future cistern improvements. Helping Boucan Chat to avoid running out of water in the future is not only a humanitarian project; it benefits the petrel colony by reducing the risk of desperate people harvesting the forest and strengthens the ties with the community to jointly pursue other activities.

Work on the water catchment systems in Boucan Chat. Photo credit: EPIC

Community leaders also identified reduction of field erosion and development of more profitable crops as priorities to improve the quality of life for Boucan Chat's human inhabitants. These are also priorities of petrel conservationists since improved agriculture practices would reduce the risk of forest clearing for new fields or wood harvest. In March 2016, members of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group invited staff from Plant with Purpose – a development organization that focuses on sustainable agriculture training, land restoration, savings-led microfinance, church mobilization, and local leadership (see www.plantwithpurpose.org) – to come with them to Boucan Chat. Adam Brown from EPIC, Anderson Jean from Société Audubon Haïti, the teams from *Save the Devil*, Grupo Jaragua, and Plant with Purpose all met with members of the community. Plant with Purpose introduced themselves and provided a presentation on their work, specifically Village Savings and Loan Groups. In turn, members of Boucan Chat talked about their community and their experiences with similar projects. It came to light that some members of the community already had positive interactions with Plant with Purpose and the meeting concluded with all parties excited about the prospect of working together.



Erosion control technique in use in another part of Haiti, and which could be used in Boucan Chat. Photo credit: Plant with Purpose.

Outreach and Education

Decision-makers. The March 2016 Boucan Chat meeting was an opportunity for petrel conservationists to lay out for the first time the status of the Diablotin, the on-going research, and what are believed to be important components to a long-term conservation effort. Prior to this, petrel conservation had not been an emphasis in interactions between conservationists and community, because it was important to feel confident that the community would be receptive to groups focused on wildlife conservation. Happily, the speakers from the community noted they would like to continue working with the petrel conservation team!



Schoolchildren in Boucan Chat meet the Diablotin mascot. Photo credit: EPIC

Schools. On previous visits, Boucan Chat teachers indicated that they would like their students to learn about the petrel and other natural resources. EPIC, with funding from the Walt Disney Company Foundation, is spearheading the education initiative. EPIC previously produced a Diablotin activity book and this year created a petrel costume to provide the initiative with a very visible mascot. Jennifer Wheeler, with BirdsCaribbean, developed a pilot curriculum and kits to teach about water, soil, trees and forests, tailoring the lessons for the conditions in Boucan Chat. Rene Jeune and Tinio Louis, two young men hired by Grupo Jaragua expressly to work on the petrel and the relationship-building with Boucan Chat,

will be undertaking a series of school visits. To date, Rene and Tinio have conducted lessons on two occasions, reaching 10 teachers and almost a hundred children, and additional visits are planned. The children are quite eager to see the mascot return!

The Public. In expectation of – and to bolster – community support for the Diablotin work, EPIC and *Save the Devil* had created soccer uniforms for the Boucan Chat soccer team prior to the March visit. The petrel formed the team logo, of course! The team was presented the uniforms and other equipment at a ceremony, which was followed by an exciting 90-minute international match between the Boucan Chat team and the conservationists!

Aaron Straight reported “65-year-old German goal keeper, Ernst Rupp (Grupo Jaragua) showed us all up... Adam Brown and Aaron Straight represented the US and what 42-year-old “dad bods” can do. It was a tight match ending in a 2-1 victory by the hometown favorites. Hundreds from the village came out to cheer and laugh at us all. This will be a first annual.”

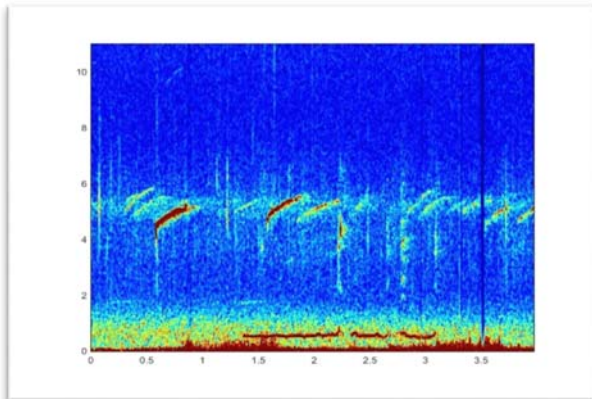


The Boucan Chat soccer team receives petrel-themed soccer uniforms. Photo credit: EPIC



CONTINUED RESEARCH ON HISPANIOLA

Supported by Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, BirdLife partner Grupo Jaragua continues to work on determining the extent of Diablotin breeding on Hispaniola. In the very densely vegetated areas of Valle Nuevo in the Cordillera Central, ground searches in 2013 and 2014 did not produce positive results. It was therefore decided to use autonomous recording units (ARUs) to narrow the searches prompted by positive radar results in 2013.



Spectrogram of a call at the “Las Neblinas” survey site – the Diablotin’s vocalizations are the red lines at the bottom of the image. Photo credit: CMI

In the subsequent calling season, units deployed October 2015 to February 2016 captured petrel calls at two survey sites in December and January. These sites will be the focus of ground searches in the future. The ARUs have now been moved to new sites down the ridgeline, and will produce data for February to June 2016.

Grupo Jaragua will begin nest monitoring of known nests in the border area of Loma del Toro in June 2016. Of course, petrel nests are sought whenever opportunities arise. In March, Grupo Jaragua staff searched the area of Zapoten in the Sierra de Bahoruco, which lies on the border between the DR and Haiti, for potential nests based on petrel calls being heard. However, no new nests were found.

Two ARUs are also deployed at LaVisite ridge in Haiti – the area with the greatest concentration of petrels on Hispaniola. Jim Goetz recently retrieved recordings from those units. He reported that no fires had occurred during the typical fire season of January-March (good news for petrels), but that development and clearing in the area seem to be accelerating (very bad news for petrels). In the past two or three years, he has observed the construction of several schools and churches, a Haitian Red Cross program to provide latrines for 700 families, and construction of roads that allow truck access to within 500 m of the nesting cliffs. Unfortunately, conservation action in this area is challenged by conditions where land tenure is uncertain, multiple communities of varying levels of cohesion surround the area, and there is currently no one focused on petrel conservation situated in the vicinity.

TECHNICAL EXCHANGE ON DOMINICA

In early 2015, radar confirmed large numbers of petrels on the island of Dominica. For two weeks in April 2016, a team from Grupo Jaragua traveled from the Dominican Republic to Dominica to assist Stephen Durand and other members of Dominica's Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division in the search for breeding petrels and to share their expertise in petrel research. George Wallace with American Bird Conservancy, the organization that coordinated and obtained funding for the exchange from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, joined the group for the first week.

Ernst Rupp gave the following account: "After a VIP reception and press conference, we worked daily going up and down hills searching for Diablotin nests. The search lasted 10 days without a break. We concentrated our search on two peaks of volcanic origin (Micotrine & Trois Pitons), both approximately 1300 m high and where radar had indicated a lot of nocturnal flight activity. The vegetation in this area, a national park, is in excellent, pristine state. It has extensive broadleaf montane forests (with huge trees) as well as dwarf forests."

"Even with our superhuman efforts we didn't find any nest signs, not even a feather, even though there were a lot of cracks and holes which looked suitable. We should remember it took over 5 years of hard work by many to find the key places in our island (Hispaniola) ... and even though we didn't find the Diablotin we gained awesome friends in our visit to Dominica, who we expect to see soon in the Dominican Republic!" (ABC holds funding for a reverse Dominica-to-Dominican Republic technical exchange next season.)



Bi-national field team, including the Director of the Dominica Forestry, Wildlife & Parks Division, Stephen Durand, on the steep, forested slopes of Dominica. Photo credit: ABC

The technical exchange is counted a success because of the relationships developed, and also because of the techniques, skills and equipment brought to Dominica, including ARUs and a plan for their deployment. Petrel work on Dominica also gained more visibility as the technical exchange drew television and press coverage. See the Marpin News' youtube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Vt_U0bs3zY (fast forward to 7:53) and <http://dominicanewsonline.com/news/homepage/news/general/scientists-in-search-of-rare-bird-in-dominica/>

JAMAICA RADAR FINDINGS

Adam Brown of EPIC traveled to Jamaica for 10 days in late March to conduct radar surveys for petrels. Staff from Jamaican Conservation and Development Trust joined him in the field. Unfortunately, the radar equipment was held up in customs for almost a week, so time in the field was limited. The radar equipment was set up first in seven Blue Mountain valleys inland from offshore locations where petrel were sighted in 2009. No targets were detected, so the equipment was moved up the Cinchona Botanical Garden, which is located on a ridge leading to Blue Mountain Peak. The garden was the site of the last record for Jamaican Petrels (in the 1860s, when petrel burrows were dug up during tree planting in the park).

At the Botanical Garden, six petrel-like targets were recorded. These were in three pairs, moving very fast (approximately 60 miles per hour), in a very straight path from the direction of Blue Mountain peak directly to ocean. The targets were seen during the interval in early evening when petrel flights are expected and tracked almost 3 km across the radar screen. However, they were tracked from about 1 km away, so no visual or aural confirmation was made. On the subsequent and final night, the team moved to a location down the ridge closer to the detections, but recorded no targets. The results from Jamaica are inconclusive regarding petrel presence (or what species of petrel) but compelling enough to warrant another expedition with radar next breeding season.



Setting up marine radar to survey for petrels in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica.
Photo credit: EPIC

GADELOUPE EXPEDITION PLANNING

Black-capped Petrels were common on Guadeloupe, French West Indies, in the early nineteenth century, and there has long been interest in expeditions to see if they can be found today. The environmental organization, AMAZONA has raised some funds for habitat assessment, and is seeking funds to host EPIC for radar surveys next season. Please contact Antoine Charbrolle (Antoine.Chabrolle@email.com) if you have ideas or funds to contribute.

REGULATORY DEVELOPMENTS

U.S. Endangered Species Act Settlement Regarding Deadline

On September 9, 2015, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reached an agreement that the agency would decide by September 2018 whether listing the Black-capped Petrel under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) is warranted. CBD is particularly concerned about threats to the petrel in its foraging areas offshore of the mid- and southern U.S. Read more at the CBD's website (search under "black-capped petrel"). The timeline for this issue, thus far:

- September 1, 2011: Petitioned by WildEarth Guardians for protection under the U.S. ESA.
- June 12, 2012: 90-day finding by USFWS indicates listing may be warranted.
- September 13, 2012: 1-year deadline for decision (not met).
- April 13, 2015: Notice of intent to sue USFWS by CBD for failure to determine.
- June 22, 2015: Lawsuit filed.
- September 2018: New deadline for determination.

“SAVE THE DEVIL” MOVIE UPDATE

The many activities that took place in and around Boucan Chat in March 2016 were captured on film by the *Save the Devil* film crew. They also gathered footage in Les Cayes, where Anderson Jean of Société Audubon Haïti is based, and along the south coast and route to the Dominican Republic border. The evolving vision of *Save the Devil* is to tell the story of conservation in Haiti from a variety of perspectives, including the various conservation groups that work there. Please visit the Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/savethedevilMOVIE> or the main website www.savethedevil.net for more information.

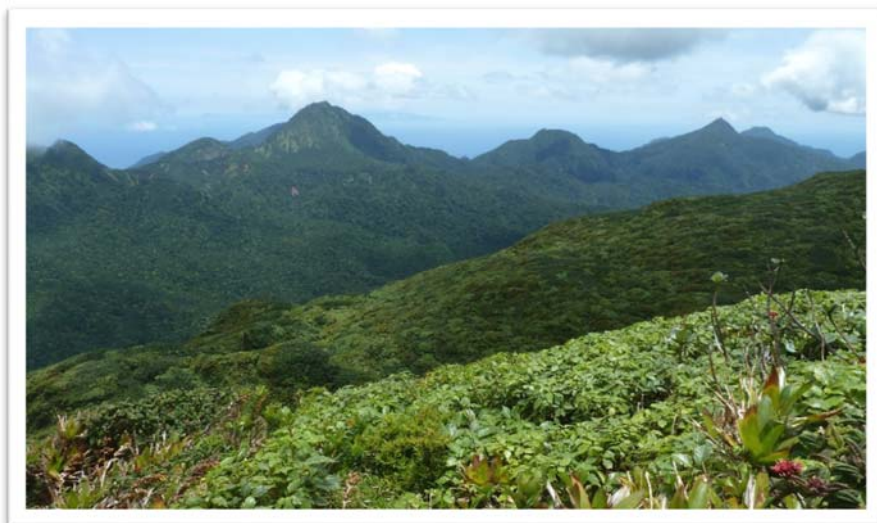
WORKING GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

Listserv: Group members can stay in touch with one another using the Diablotin@yahoogroups.com list. All interested parties are invited to join. Join by sending a blank email to Diablotin-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

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 includes a Presentation on the Black-capped Petrel made at the World Seabird Conference, October 2015. A similar, but updated, presentation will be made at the upcoming North American Ornithological Conference, August 2016 in Washington, DC.

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Elfin forest on Morne Micotrine,
Dominica. Photo credit: ABC