

Caribbean Waterbird Census

A Call to Action



Ensuring that important wetlands are monitored and conserved, so that our highest priority endemic and migratory species are protected.



The Caribbean Landscape

The Caribbean is home to over 185 species of waterbirds (seabirds, wading birds, marshbirds, waterfowl and shorebirds), including a number of endemic and globally threatened species and many migrants. It is up to us to study, monitor and conserve these beautiful birds and the habitats they need to survive. The Caribbean Waterbird Census (CWC) Program—a partnership of Caribbean organizations, communities, and individuals that monitor waterbirds—was set up to do just that.

The places that are important to waterbirds are also important to people. Wetlands, including mangroves, salt ponds, sandy beaches, mud and tidal flats, provide natural flood control, protection from storms, and a sustainable food supply, thereby supporting economies and tourism. Keeping these places safe and healthy helps to protect birds and people.

About the Caribbean Waterbird Census

The CWC is a multi-partner region-wide waterbird and wetland monitoring program led by BirdsCaribbean. The goal of this program is to learn more about the distribution, status, and abundance of waterbirds in the Caribbean in order to improve science-based conservation planning and management of these beautiful birds and their habitats. We also aim to increase awareness, build capacity, and engage non-governmental organizations, government agencies, communities, and volunteers in wetland monitoring and conservation. Ultimately, we want to identify and ensure that as many important wetland sites as possible are conserved and monitored.

Why Count Waterbirds?

Throughout the Caribbean, wetlands—and the birds that rely on them—are in urgent need of conservation action. Many of the region's original wetlands have been destroyed, while those that remain are threatened by pollution and development for tourism, housing, agriculture or industry. In addition, waterbird populations are also subject to hunting, egg and chick harvest, and predation by introduced invasive species such as rats, cats and mongoose. Increased frequency of storms and sea level rise due to global climate change also threaten wetland habitats and waterbird populations, but the effects are not yet well understood. Monitoring the health of waterbird populations and their habitats is beneficial to both birds and people, since we rely on the same habitats for our health and well-being.

Photos: Page 1: West Indian Whistling-duck, Lisa Sorenson; Sooty Tern, Creative Commons, Purple Gallinule, David Hill; Roseate Spoonbill, Bill Majoros. Page 2: Counting birds, Lisa Sorenson; Lesser Yellowlegs, Anthony Levesque; Snowy Egret, Bill Majoros.

All That Data!

Data shows that many waterbird species are declining, however, we still have much to learn about population sizes and trends. There are very large gaps in our knowledge of Caribbean waterbirds, such as which species are at greatest risk and what habitats are most important. Large scale monitoring through the CWC is beginning to help us answer these questions. The 2014 regional count had more than 120 participants from 18 countries. They submitted 523 checklists, recording 257 species at 211 sites.



When is the CWC Held?

Each year, BirdsCaribbean organizes one region-wide count during a 3-week period from January 14th to February 3rd. This provides us with a “snapshot” of waterbird population numbers and habitat use throughout the Caribbean. To learn more about migratory routes and important sites, everyone is asked to count waterbirds, as often as possible throughout the year, especially during fall (August-November) and spring (March-May) migration periods.



Answer the Call!

We need your help to monitor more sites and conduct more frequent counts at new and existing sites! The CWC is designed so that at the basic level anyone—from professional biologists to citizen scientist volunteers—can implement the program and contribute to monitoring. All are welcome to be part of the program. Basic count methods (protocols) and data sheets are provided here: <http://ebird.org/caribbean/news/cwc>.

Everyone is asked to enter their count data in eBird Caribbean (<http://ebird.org/content/caribbean/>), choosing one of the CWC protocols (CWC Point Count or CWC Area Search) on Step 2 under Submit Observations. eBird Caribbean is also a fantastic resource to explore CWC count data and learn more about waterbirds in your country.

Visit www.BirdsCaribbean.org and contact Lisa Sorenson (Lsoren@BirdsCaribbean.org) for more information on training and resources to participate in the CWC.



International Partners and Supporters

And thanks to all of our local partner organizations participating in the CWC, too numerous to list here.



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