New discoveries of the Endangered Black-capped Petrel (Pterodroma hasitata) in Massif de la Selle, Haiti

Anderson Jean, Joel Timyan and Enold Louis-Jean Société Audubon Haïti January, 2012

Last November 20-21, 2011 we conducted two biological surveys in the Massif de la Selle funded in part by the Darwin Initiative grant to Birdlife International who is partnering with Société Audubon Haïti. The first site was near Morne Mare Rouge (Table 1 for location data) and the second site located near Morne d'Enfer. Although the main objective of the expedition was focused on the herptofauna of Haiti, we included an avian survey at both sites.

During the evening of November 20 at 2000, we detected the vocalizations of an estimated two dozen Black-capped Petrels (*Pterodroma hasitata*) near the locality of Bois Dimé. We were able to approach within 100 m of thickly forested, steep limestone cliffs that petrels typically select for nesting. To our knowledge, this site had never been explored and is approximately 24 km southeast of the nearest nesting sites at Tête Opaque along the northern escarpment in La Visite National Park (Wingate, 1964). Furthermore, the site faces the south rather than the northern exposures of the La Visite sites.

On November 21, we traveled by helicopter from Morne Mare Rouge area to Morne d'Enfer, approximately 35 km due west along the Massif de la Selle ridge. During the evening at 1900 we detected a second set of petrel vocalizations, around 10-15 individuals, near the escarpment of Bois l'Etat. We believe this to be another nesting site. It is the western-most site in the Massif de la Selle reported for BCPE and 5 km due east of the Nacel site where Wingate (1964) detected vocalizing petrels.

During a December, 2011 expedition, we detected vocalizations of 3-5 individuals passing overhead on 2 separate evenings: December 8 (between 2000-2100) and December 13 (between 1900-2000). Both sites were located within La Visite National Park about 3 km SSE of Morne La Visite. The birds may have been en route to nests along the northern escarpment. Figure 1 shows the sites where we detected BCPE.



Figure 1. The two new areas where the petrels may be nesting are Morne Mare Rouge and Morne d'Enfer (red circles). The sites where the vocalizations were detected overhead (yellow circles). Nesting colonies discovered by Wingate (1964) as reference (blue circles).

The Morne Mare Rouge site is considered part of the National Pine Forest Reserve. The Morne d'Enfer site is west of La Visite National Park and has been recommended by scientists and a University of Florida study to be included in the national park (Woods et al., 1992). However, there is little effort to protect these areas and in reality they remain unprotected. They host a large number of restricted-range, highly threatened species despite the fact that the forests are still being cut for timber, charcoal production and gardens. We are still uncertain the full extent of the impact that such human activities are having on BCPE. However, it remains necessary to continue studies during the breeding season to better prioritize conservation efforts in line with the recent conservation plan (Goetz et al., 2012).

Location				Elevation	Est. No.	
	Date	Latitude	Longitude	(m)	of Petrels	Habitat Description
Camp site at Ravine Gué,						
Morne Mare Rouge	November 20	18.32851	-72.02163	1922		Fallow annual garden, animal pasture
						Active garden with cloud forest woody
Bois Dimé	November 20	18.32842	-72.01162	1970		plants
					20-25	Disturbed cloud forest on steep slope of
BCPE near Bois Dimé	November 20	18.31895	-72.02618	1681		karst limestone
Camp site near Morne						
d'Enfer	November 21	18.33006	-72.37217	1437		Disturbed cloud forest and cow pasture
					10-15	Limestone cliff, primary cloud forest
BCPE near Bois l'Etat	November 21	18.33143	-72.37349	1472		vegetation
2.5 km S of Morne La					3-5	Pinus occidentalis forest with fern and
Visite	December 8	18.33222	-72.24813	1996		shrub understory
2.5 km SSE of Morne La					3-5	Pinus occidentalis forest with fern and
Visite	December 13	18.33430	-72.27447	1837		shrub understory

Table 1. Location data of new BCPE sites reported during November-December, 2011.

References

- Goetz, J., J. H. Norris and J. Wheeler (eds.). 2012. Conservation Action plan for the Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*). International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington DC.
- Wingate, D. B. 1964. Discovery of breeding Black-capped Petrels on Hispaniola. Auk 81: 147-159.
- Woods, C. A., F. E. Sergile and J. A. Ottenwalder. 1992. Stewardship Plan for the National Parks and Natural Areas of Haiti. Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville. 334 p.

This Société Audubon Haïti project was done in partnership with BirdLife International through funding from U.S. Forest Service, Darwin Initiative and MacArthur Foundation, and Pennsylvania State University through funding from the National Science Foundation.