



UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES

October 2015

DIABLOTIN ON DOMINICA

Determining the presence of Black-capped Petrels on Caribbean islands in addition to Hispaniola has long been a goal. In the last 15 years, expeditions have been mounted on or offshore of most of the islands where the species was historically known to occur, including Dominica in the Lesser Antilles. There, the conventional approach of looking and listening for petrels did not produce conclusive evidence, but the recent use of portable marine radar has paid off.



Conducting surveys on Dominica. Photo by EPIC.

In July 2015, the results of the surveys conducted in January by Adam Brown with Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (EPIC) working with Dominica's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division were publicly released. The team surveyed 20 stations using protocols developed on Hispaniola and detected a total of 968 petrel-like targets at 17 of them. Vocalizations and visual observations confirmed the identity of the targets as Black-capped Petrels. The activity observed is enough to proclaim Diablotin re-discovered on a second island in the Caribbean.

The next steps in Dominica are to collect audio data from automated recording devices (ARUs; aka song meters) already deployed at potential nests sites. With the arrival of breeding season, the search for nesting petrels can commence. This step will also draw on lessons from Hispaniola – hopefully first-hand from individuals who have been working in Hispaniola for the past few years. Fundraising is underway for a technical exchange to bring a field team from the Dominican Republic to help identify specific habitat and nesting sites...effectively jump-starting the knowledge base on this second island.

Radar surveys on Dominica are concluded for now, as they are on Hispaniola. But the idea is to re-survey these islands in 3 to 5 years, to repeat counts to serve as an index for population trends.

WORK ON HISPANIOLA

Summary of Field Investigations 2013/2014

Grupo Jaragua plays the lead role for Diablotín field investigations on Hispaniola with support from American Bird Conservancy, BirdLife International, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Many of the activities and accomplishments of the 2013/2014 breeding season were reported in the June 2014 update letter. The wrap-up of that season is as follows:

- Intensive nest searches were conducted in the northern escarpments of Massif de la Selle, including the La Visite ridge and a new “high” density area discovered at the exploratory site along the cliffs of Seguin, Haiti. 36 nests are now known in the area. Eighteen were visited in 2014; 11 had live chicks.
- Most monitoring in the more accessible areas around the Haiti/Dominican Republic border (Loma de Toro and Morne Vincent areas). In 2013/2014, 47 active nests were monitored by hand or camera, with fledging success measured at 74%.
- Acoustic monitoring using autonomous recording units (ARUs), also known as song meters, was conducted at several sites. Data analysis is being conducted by Conservation Metrics and funded by American Bird Conservancy.

Summary of Field Investigations 2014/2015



Placing an ARU. Photo by Grupo Jaragua.

In the most recent breeding season, Grupo Jaragua focused on determining the extent of breeding on Hispaniola, specifically following up on radar findings in previously unexplored areas in the Dominican Republic. Specifically, Valle Nuevo National Park in the Cordillera Central was indicated as a potential nesting area. Unfortunately, finding nests in the approximately 100 km² of promising habitat is much like finding a needle in a haystack, not to mention the difficulty of access to this remote area. Nest searches were conducted in six areas of the park, but no nests were found. The team is hopeful that acoustic data will narrow down the search and will be deploying several ARUs there.

Nest searching in 11 areas of Sierra de Bahoruco National Park in the Dominican Republic resulted in the discovery of two active nests in a broadleaf forest area called Loma Quemada, approximately 25 km southeast of Loma del Toro. Threats to the area from humans and introduced animals (e.g., pigs) there have yet to be determined.

Nest monitoring in 2014-15 was limited to 15 nests in the vicinity of the Haiti-Dominican Republic border on Loma del Toro and Morne Vincent. Of these nine (80%) fledged. Human caused fires continue to be a major threat to Black-capped Petrel nesting areas on Hispaniola. In May 2015, a fire reached some of these nests but was fortunately of low intensity.

During the season five grounded birds were found and reported to Grupo Jaragua. One adult was reported from Loma del Toro where it likely hit an antenna. Four other birds, probably fledglings attracted to bright lights were recovered at locations in the vicinity of Sierra de Bahoruco, one of which was safely released. Grounding of juveniles may be a significant issue that deserves further attention.

Field investigations are accompanied by outreach to local communities, especially in Boukan Chat, where relationships are fairly well established. Unfortunately, this community suffered greatly from drought this past season, enduring increased economic stress and insecurity. Helping this community achieve greater economic security is a step towards more sustainable land use and ultimately habitat protection.

REGULATORY DEVELOPMENTS

Black-capped Petrel added to SPAW Protocol

The Diablotín is now listed under Annex II of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol), indicating that this species requires full protection by signatory nations under this international convention concerning the wider Caribbean region. Its listing was voted on at the 8th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Protocol which took place in Cartagena, Colombia in December 2014, and reflects a lengthy process for the species review working group of SPAW. This amendment to the Annexes is the first since the adoption of the SPAW Protocol, and represents a significant step for its implementation. Among countries within the known or historic breeding and non-breeding range of the Black-capped Petrel, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Guadeloupe/Martinique (under France) and the U.S. have signed and ratified the SPAW Protocol. Haiti and Dominica have not.

Read more at http://www.car-spaw-rac.org/IMG/pdf/spaw_newsletter_no15.pdf and <http://www.car-spaw-rac.org>

U.S. Endangered Species Act Lawsuit Pending

On April 13, 2015, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) filed a notice of its intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the agency's failure to determine if protections for the Black-capped Petrel are warranted under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On September 1, 2011, WildEarth Guardians submitted a petition to list the Black-capped Petrel under the ESA because of its low population and threats to its survival. The ESA required the Service to determine whether listing the Black-capped Petrel as threatened or endangered was warranted no later than one year after it received the petition, or Sept. 13, 2012. No decision has been made to date. CBD is particularly concerned about threats to the petrel in its foraging areas offshore of the mid- and southern U.S. The U.S. recently opened the Atlantic coast to seismic exploration activities for oil and gas, and the Department of the Interior is reviewing 10 applications for permits. Additionally, the Obama administration proposed a plan to offer an area off the mid-Atlantic for drilling in its five-year plan for offshore oil leases. These industrial activities may threaten the petrel and its marine habitat.

Read more at http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2015/black-capped-petrel-04-13-2015.html

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PARTNERS

Grupo Jaragua Staff Capacity

For many years, Grupo Jaragua has benefitted from its status as the Dominican Republic's national partner in BirdLife International's global network. Most recently, BirdLife International has secured support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to build Grupo Jaragua's staff capacity in project that directly focuses on Black-capped Petrels. This project will allow hiring, training, and supporting a Project Manager in Santo Domingo, DR – a position recently filled by Andrea P. Thomen. Funds are also available to allow Ernst Rupp to continue as Grupo Jaragua's principle investigator, and to develop a new position to lead on field work and relationship-building in Haiti. This person will receive training in petrel field techniques and will continue relationship-building in the community of Boukan Chat near the Haiti - DR border, a process which hopefully can be extended into the community of Seguin in La Visite area in Haiti. The implementation of the project started on 1 June 2015 and will cover until 28 February 2017.

Fondation Seguin Staff Capacity

The known global hotspot for petrels is in Haiti's Massif de la Selle in La Visite National Park. Fondation Seguin is a conservation organization that operates in the area, and recently they received a grant from the Bicknell's Thrush Habitat Protection Fund to support two promising biologists in both Haiti and the DR. A young woman, Francois Benjamin, will receive hands-on training in curatorial techniques and public outreach from Hodali Almonte, ornithological curator at Museo Natural de Historia Natural de Santo Domingo, followed by training in grant writing from Grupo Jaragua. Benjamin and Almonte will then work together to conduct field surveys for Bicknell's Thrush and other species at La Salcedoa Scientific Reserve in the DR's Cordillera Septentrional, followed by bird and habitat monitoring in La Visite, Haiti, working with Jim Goetz. Vermont Center for Ecostudies mediated this work to build binational ornithological capacity in Hispaniola, an approach that will ultimately help all birds there.

“SAVE THE DEVIL” MOVIE UPDATE



Production of the feature film “Save the Devil”, and now a variety of shorter pieces, continues!

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 has been moved from a server operated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to that of BirdsCaribbean. For the library of documents related to the Black-capped Petrel (most unpublished) please visit www.BirdsCaribbean.org and search under “Petrel.”

Meetings: The 20th International Meeting of BirdsCaribbean (formerly the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds) provided a venue for members of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group to meet face-to-face, as well as presentations summarizing recent work, especially the finding of petrels on Dominica. Please see the working group website (above) for notes.

Jennifer Wheeler is presenting on behalf of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group at the Second World Seabird Conference, taking place in Cape Town, South Africa, October 26-30. The presentation will be part of a workshop, Advancing Gadfly Petrel Conservation.



Prepared by Jennifer Wheeler (Jennifer.Wheeler@BirdsCaribbean.org), 29 October 2015, with contributions from Adam Brown, EPIC; Ernst Rupp, Grupo Jaragua; Verónica Anadón, BirdLife International; Chris Rimmer, Vermont Center for Ecostudies; George Wallace, American Bird Conservancy.