



Caribbean BIRDWATCH

Expert advice to help you appreciate our region's beautiful birds. In this issue we focus on *St Vincent & the Grenadines*

BIRD OF THE ISSUE:

WHISTLING WARBLER

(*Catharopiza bishop*)

HOW TO SPOT IT: A few soft, almost inaudible notes, followed several seconds later by a crescendo into a resounding whistle, are often the first (and sometimes only) sign that the elusive and rare Whistling Warbler is present. If you listen closely you can also hear a much quieter single-note call as the bird forages in the undergrowth. Though dark in appearance against the rainforest canopy, a closer look reveals a bird with a blackish hood and upper parts, with a broad black band on the upper breast, white throat and belly, and a striking white eye-ring. The immature Whistling Warbler appears brownish-grey and

paler with the same white eye-ring. Its behaviour – frequently cocking its tail and fluttering its wings – is another key to identification.



WHERE TO FIND IT: The Whistling Warbler primarily inhabits thick undergrowth in St Vincent's rainforest, generally at around 300-1100m in elevation, but can also be found in palm brake forest (33-60% palm trees) and elfin forest (short, thick forest, no greater than 5m in height). The best locations to see it are in Colonarie, Perseverance Valley, Buccament Valley and Richmond Peak.

WHAT DOES IT EAT? This bird is known to eat various types of insects and larvae, and may occasionally take fruit. It actively forages in the undergrowth canopy and dense undergrowth, working its way through vine tangles, sometimes pursuing flying insects.

GLOBAL STATUS: This endangered species is endemic to the island of St Vincent. Its habitat is in decline due to deforestation (primarily for logging and agriculture) and volcanic eruptions of Soufrière. Although no targeted management is in place, this species benefits from habitat protection within the 10,870 acre St Vincent Parrot Reserve. Research and education of the local population about threats to the Whistling Warbler would benefit this species, which is so often overshadowed by the country's national bird and other endemic: the St Vincent Parrot.



The Whistling Warbler often cocks its tail

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

CARIBBEAN BIRDING TRAIL

TOP 3 HOTSPOTS: ST VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

This spectacular country has a wide range of habitats. It is home to two endemic birds: the *Saint Vincent Parrot* and the *Whistling Warbler*; two endemic subspecies of the *Rufous-throated Solitaire* and the *House Wren*; and two regional-endemics confined to SVG and Grenada: the *Grenada Flycatcher* and *Lesser Antillean Tanager*.



Antillean Crested Hummingbird

JULIANA COFFEY

1 ASHTON LAGOON: Located on Union Island, the hub of marine activity in the Grenadines, Ashton Lagoon is the largest wetland and mangrove complex in the country, home to a 61-acre stand of mangroves. Though there is a traversable path, the Ashton Lagoon Restoration Project is working to establish a boardwalk and bird-watching station for visitors. Here you can expect to see herons, egrets, migratory shorebirds, seabirds and even a variety of land birds hiding in the mangroves.

2 MUSTIQUE LAGOON: On the privately owned resort island of Mustique, the Lagoon Nature Trail offers a great family birding experience along a trail circumnavigating the lagoon, accompanied by narrative signs aimed at budding naturalists. Visitors can observe birds around the lagoon from multiple vantage points as well as from a bird hide. This 17-acre sanctuary is important



SVG TOURISM AUTHORITY

for both local and migratory birds, and is the only actively protected wetland in SVG.

3 VERMONT NATURE TRAIL: This two-mile trail on the leeward coast of mainland St Vincent runs through the

10,870-acre Parrot Reserve that was designated to protect the endangered St Vincent Parrot, of which only 700 remain in the wild. On your visit, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for the Whistling Warbler, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Lesser Antillean Tanager, St Vincent House Wren, three species of hummingbirds and, of course, the St Vincent Parrot, which can also be observed from the Parrot Lookout.



ALISON DEGRAFF

Ashton Lagoon, Union Island

SIPKE STAPERT

Green Heron
BELOW: St Vincent Parrot in flight



Mustique Lagoon

ALISON DEGRAFF



Semipalmated Plover

SIPKE STAPERT

Project watch NEW BIRD BOOK OUT SOON

A field guide to SVG combines scientific research and community observations

A **comprehensive**, user-friendly field guide for St Vincent & the Grenadines and Grenada will soon be available. *Birds of the Transboundary Grenadines* by Alison DeGraff and Juliana Coffey includes scientific, local ecological knowledge and folklore from Grenadine citizens, plus observations from sailors passing through coastal and offshore waters.

In 2014, the authors met with over 50 resource users and citizens who contributed a substantial amount of previously undocumented information about birds in the Grenadines. This information will now be preserved for future generations, hopefully instilling a sense of pride, ownership and community-driven stewardship for the beauty and natural resources of the Grenadines.



Conducting local knowledge interviews on Bequia

Observations from sailors on seabirds and migrating birds seen at sea are also being sought for documentation (see website for survey).

This guide will be a valuable resource for the training of local bird monitors, educating the public, promoting sustainable tourism initiatives and enhancing the conservation and management of Grenadine resources. It will also be useful to both local and foreign birdwatchers.

Find out more at: grenadinesbirds.tumblr.com
Birds of the Transboundary Grenadines will be published in 2015.

MANY THANKS TO LYTRA CULZAC-WILSON, ALISON DEGRAFF, JULIANA COFFEY, AND THE ST VINCENT PARROT RESERVE, SOCIETY OF BIRDSCARIBBEAN (FORMERLY THE SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF CARIBBEAN BIRDS)

LOVE BIRDS? Visit www.birdscaribbean.org and www.caribbeanbirdingtrail.org. Or follow us on Facebook (search for 'Caribbean Birds').



Tricoloured Heron
SIPKE STAPERT