

# Seabird Conservation Program

Saving Caribbean Seabirds through Monitoring, Research, and Conservation

## CARIBBEAN SEABIRDS ARE IN CRISIS

The Caribbean once hosted millions of breeding seabirds; now, we speak of thousands. The populations that remain are remnants of their former selves and are under continuing pressure.

Why are seabirds in crisis? The major global threats to seabirds, which are all of concern in the Caribbean, include predation by introduced mammals, bycatch in fishing gear, harvesting by humans, coastal development, and impacts of climate change (e.g. severe storms).

Seabirds lead rather secretive and elusive lives. They spend most of their time at sea, returning to often remote islands and cays to nest and raise chicks. For these reasons, their populations can dwindle and disappear before anyone notices.



Red-billed Tropicbird

## CARIBBEAN SEABIRDS NEED OUR HELP

The BirdsCaribbean Seabird Working Group has been looking out for Caribbean seabirds for a long time. We have held workshops to train local biologists and volunteers in how to study and monitor seabirds, and we have published articles and inventories of what's known about seabirds and their breeding locations in the Caribbean. Despite these efforts, not enough is known! Many sites have not been surveyed for decades, and numerous areas that are potentially suitable for seabirds have never been surveyed at all. Meanwhile, threats to seabirds are mounting both on land and at sea.

In order to effectively protect seabirds, we urgently need to improve knowledge of the distributions and sizes of populations throughout the Caribbean. We need a **regional census program to bring the Caribbean seabird crisis to light... and give us tools to develop the advocacy, protection, and management actions that these species need!**



These are reported colonies. Updated information on the status of most colonies is lacking, but we are aware that some colonies are extirpated or threatened, while others hold >1% of a population. Current data is needed for nearly all colonies.

## THE CARIBBEAN SEABIRD CENSUS PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

What will a seabird census program achieve?

- A systematic monitoring and management approach for seabird populations, to fill critical knowledge gaps.
- The ability to compare today's numbers with previous colony counts, or in some cases, establish baseline data.
- Coordination and technical assistance to partners across the region, to build efficient collaborative efforts.
- The implementation of standardized 'best practice' census methods across the region to better understand long-term population trends, and increase our ability to identify threats.
- Peer-to-peer capacity building between islands to motivate organizations and individuals, building sustained regional capacity for long-term seabird monitoring and conservation.

## HOW CAN WE DEVELOP AN EFFICIENT SEABIRD CENSUS PROGRAM?

**Training** to ensure that local practitioners have the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to survey and monitor selected sites.

**Logistic Support** to regularly and safely access seabird nesting sites.

**Data Management Systems** to combine and assimilate new and existing data from Caribbean seabird surveys, and make regional information widely accessible.

**Capacity Building** through regional coordination and local partnerships to ensure long-term program effectiveness, legacy, and ultimately, conservation for seabirds.



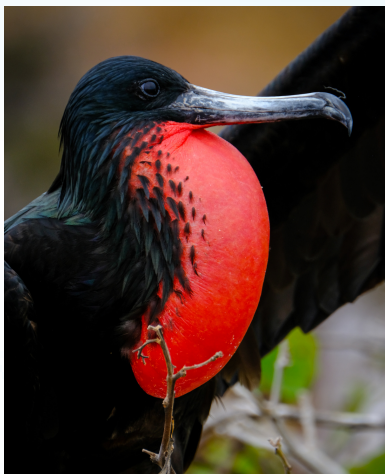
Brown Noddy

## WE ARE TARGETING 2023 FOR THE FIRST COORDINATED CARIBBEAN-WIDE REGIONAL SEABIRD CENSUS. HELP US MAKE THIS A REALITY!



**Top:** Photo credits [L-R]: Rhiannon Austin, Hannah Madden, and EAG Antigua and Barbuda.

**Bottom:** Photo credit: Alison DeGraff.



Magnificent Frigatebird

## SAVING SEABIRDS SAVES SO MUCH MORE!

Seabirds play essential roles in ecosystems and economies. Caribbean seabirds are:

- **ecological connectors**, circulating nutrients between the land and sea;
- **sentinel species**, providing information on wider ecosystem health and effects of climate change;
- **umbrella species**, whose protection benefits plant and animal communities in and around nesting sites;
- **cultural icons** in both archaeological records and modern day societies; and
- **ambassadors** in the shared ecosystems of the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and North Atlantic.