

Black-capped Petrel Nest Monitoring in La Visite National Park, Haiti: 2025 Breeding Season



Report by

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Introduction

The Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) is a seabird that historically nested on many Caribbean islands (Dominica, Guadeloupe, and Hispaniola). The population of this species drastically declined during the early 20th century to the point it was believed extinct, until David Wingate confirmed with evidence the species still occurred in Haiti in the 1950's and the population was estimated at 4,000 to 25,000 birds.

In recent years, field research in Hispaniola confirmed the presence of breeding colonies in Massif de la Hotte, Massif de La Selle, Sierra de Bahoruco, and the Cordillera Central. While difficult to accurately estimate the population size of these colonies, most of the reports concluded populations of the Black-capped Petrel were severely declining.

To better estimate the Black-capped Petrel population size, a series of radar surveys was conducted from 2012 to 2017 and the data results determined the highest population of Black-capped Petrel (~1,900 pairs) in La Visite National Park, Haiti. The habitat of this park is under intense pressure due to deforestation, a result of agricultural expansion and the use of woods as the main source of energy for cooking. Additional threats to Black-capped Petrels included forest fires and tower collisions.

To better identify additional causes that drive the species population declining in Haiti, it was mandatory to get access to the species' nests. It is in this context that we initiated a long-term nest search and monitoring effort in La Visite National Park (specifically on Tèt Opak). From 2018 to 2024, we monitored petrel nest activities, determining nest locations and nesting success.

The main threats we initially identified that caused nest failure included: the harvesting of tree ferns, the predation by exotic carnivores (rat, dog, cat and mongoose), animals grazing, and unsustainable agricultural practices. To mitigate the impact of these threats we proceeded to control the exotic carnivore population and create awareness through the communities living nearby the breeding colonies we are monitoring.

Our goals for the 2025 Black-capped Petrel nest season in La Visite National Park included (1) monitoring the previous known petrel nest cavities at the Tet Opak nest colony, (2) Monitor invasive predators and work with the community and dog owners on ways to keep loose dogs out of the colony, and (3) Carry out monthly environmental education activities, in schools and with farm groups.

Methods

Nest Monitoring

At the beginning of the breeding season (January 2025) we revisited the three known nest areas of Black-capped Petrels on the flanks of Tet Opak. Initially, as in past years, we removed all objects that blocked the nest entrances to facilitate birds access to nest burrows.

Each nest (defined as a cavity or crevice with present or past evidence of petrel activity, including feathers, feces, egg, chick, or adult) detected was labeled or had been previously labeled with an aluminum tag identified with a unique number. Once a nest was located, we

monitored it each month through August 2025, to record its contents. Occasionally, when difficult to detect if a cavity had evidence of petrel use, we used a digital endoscope with a smartphone as a monitor.

Camera traps were not used in 2025 due to malfunction of all devices.

Predator Observation

During each visit to the nest colony (January-August 2025) the team documented tracks, feces, and live observations of rats, mice, dogs, cats, and mongoose within the colony.

Results

Nest Monitoring

During the 2025 Black-capped Petrel breeding season at the Tet Opak nest colony, we followed 56 nests. Of the 56 nests, 41 nests contained evidence of active nesting (adult, chick, or egg). Of the 41 active nests, 30 nests successfully fledged a chick while 11 nests failed.

Predator Observations

During all visits to the colony, the team observed cat and rat feces within the colony and did not observe evidence of other predator species.

The team observed a dead adult Black-capped Petrel within the colony that had evidence of predation by a mammal.

Data Sharing

The data sheets from the 2025 nest monitoring in La Visite National Park have been shared with Yvan Satge, per the guidance of this contract.

Other Observations of Note

In April, there were grazing cattle in the upper part of the colony and there was evidence of burning near the boundaries of the colony

In May, there were grazing cattle in the upper part of the colony, there was evidence of vegetation clearing, and there were observations of small farm plots on the edges of the upper colony.

In June, there were grazing cattle in the upper part of the colony, there was evidence of vegetation clearing, and there were observations of small farm plots on the edges of the upper colony.

In July, we observed multiple new trails created within Site 2 that led to areas where trees had been cut and removed. Further, following a number of rain storms, we observed numerous nest entrances blocks with soil that has washed down the slope.

Discussion

Pre-season colony maintenance took place in all three nesting sites and included the removal of debris from the entrances of nest cavities. This enabled access to the nests for breeding pairs of petrels.

As in previous years, our team worked with the farmers in the area to improve sustainable farming practices, specifically around erosion control as well as providing buffer areas around the nest colonies. Despite efforts to deter residents from removing vegetation in petrel habitat, we observed evidence in site two of tree removal. Further, site one had notable agricultural activity including farming and grazing of animals.

Regarding predators within the colony, we continue to observe evidence of rats and cats. The team needs additional supplies to support future efforts to control predator populations in the colony.

Regarding environmental education in this area, we have regularly visited one school (*Ecole Presbyteral Notre Dame Altagrace de Seguin*) in Seguin and taught 115 pupils the conservation need of Black-capped Petrel and how they could contribute to preserve the species.

We continued our sustainable agriculture program this year and met with 40 farmers from two community associations in Seguin. For these groups, we presented two subjects: Conservation of the Black-capped Petrel and Sustainable Agriculture.

Recommendations

Research

- Continued Black-capped Petrel nest monitoring of the Tet Opak colony. Acquire and deploy camera traps at each nest and band adults and chicks.

Conservation

- Mammal trapping in the nest colony areas prior to and during the nesting season by a mammal focused trapping team and providing them with appropriate trapping equipment.
- Work with family farmers that farm the areas above and below the Tet Opak nest colony to offset the human encroachment into this valley.
- Carry out a local youth environmental education program.
- Repair damaged nests and transition them to reinforced artificial burrows as is being done in the Dominican Republic.

Tables

TABLE 1. Sub-colony locations for the Black-capped Petrel nesting areas at Tet Opak in La Visite National Park.

Black-capped Petrel sub-colony Site	Latitude	Longitude	Altitude (meter)
Site-1	18.351463°	-72.236568°	2142
Site-2	18.350923°	-72.231261°	2142
Site-3	18.350900°	-72.231650°	2249

Images



Image 1. Environmental education on the Black-capped Petrel at a primary school near La Visite National Park, Haiti.



Image 2. Black-capped Petrel in nest cavity.



Image 3. Research staff checking contents of Black-capped Petrel nest in La Visite National Park, Haiti