# BIRDSCARIBBEAN SEABIRD WORKING GROUP NEWSLETTER

July 2026

- Conservation of the Sargasso Shearwater
- Update on the Caribbean Seabird Census
- Seabird Tracking with CAMAC
- Updates from the islands, and more...

Birds Caribbean

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Prepared by: Seabird Working Group, BirdsCaribbean, 841 Worcester St. #130, Natick, MA 01760-2076, USA. Website: www.birdscaribbean.org Email: info@birdscaribbean.org. Cover page photo: Nesting Sargasso Shearwater in Turks and Caicos Island (D. Prosper).

Translations of this newsletter are also available in Spanish and French.

# Index of bird species

## About the Seabird Working Group

The Seabird Working Group (SWG) was formed in 1998 to understand the big picture driving seabird communities in the region. Since then, the group has been composed of managers, conservationists, researchers, and educators working together to help study and protect populations of breeding and migratory seabirds in the Caribbean.

The aims of the group are to:

- Connect People - Bring together people working on, and interested in, Caribbean seabirds
- Share Knowledge - Share information about research, monitoring, management, and conservation of seabirds in the Caribbean
- Promote Conservation - Seek new opportunities to expand conservation and research activities on Caribbean seabirds, and support those working towards this goal
- Advocate for Seabirds - Respond to crises and threats that may impact Caribbean seabirds and their habitats

The SWG is currently managed by a committee of three co-chairs (below), supported by Nahíra Arocho-Hernández, Natalia Collier, Antonio Garcia Quintas, Luis Ramos, Louise Soanes, Adriana Vallarino, Jennifer Wheeler, and Lisa Sorenson. We are always looking for additional committee members to help lead SWG initiatives: if you have any questions or are interested in joining us, please contact us!

Dr Ann Sutton (asutton@cwjamaica.com)
Dr Rhiannon Austin (R.E.Austin@liverpool.ac.uk)
Yvan Satgé (ysatge@clemson.edu)

We wish to thank Patricia Bradley personally for her repeated support for the conservation of Caribbean seabirds.

### Survey of people interested in Caribbean seabirds

In 2020, we initiated a survey of people interested in seabird conservation, education, and research in the region: the results of this survey can be found in our 2021 Newsletter.

If you are new to the Caribbean seabird community or haven't responded yet, we are still interested in hearing from you. You can fill out the questionnaire at the following address: https://forms.gle/ykNMAfUYQVDmJKTw9.

# Communications

## Website

On the BirdsCaribbean website at www.birdscaribbean.org/caribbean-birds/seabirds, you will find links to background information on the working group, active seabird projects, seabird resources, and our seabird blog posts.

## Social platforms

### Groups.io community

The SWG has a listserv with Groups.io: https://birdscaribbean.groups.io/g/SeabirdWG. Anyone interested can become a member and start interacting via email or through the Groups.io webpages. This platform will be the main communication tool for SWG co-chairs to share information with the whole Caribbean seabird community, but it is open to anyone to share knowledge, post questions, and list information on recent publications, jobs, events, grant opportunities, etc. that may be of interest to all. Visit the Groups.io webpage for details on how to join.

### Facebook group

Members of our community have started a Facebook group (Caribbean Seabird Group) to provide an informal network for those who regularly use Facebook, and are interested in Caribbean seabirds and related topics. It complements the BirdsCaribbean Facebook page where regular updates on all Caribbean birds can be found. The Groups.io listserv will remain our main communication tool but we will do our best to relay information to and from the Facebook group as well.

### Whatsapp group

This spring, we started a Whatsapp Caribbean Seabird Community to exchange information, share updates, and coordinate activities related to seabird monitoring, conservation, restoration, and capacity building throughout the region. Within the community, members can join topic-specific subgroups (e.g., Caribbean Seabird Census), keeping discussions focused. To join the Caribbean Seabird Community, please use the following link: https://chat.whatsapp.com/DtfVYpYFsDB8rk4T9QmKi7

Please be aware that we have a zero-tolerance policy for any actions by group members that compromise the safety, fairness, or productivity of our platforms.

## Calls for collaborations

Sargasso Shearwater Recovery Group – If you want to help recover the Sargasso Shearwater, consider joining the budding Sargasso Shearwater Recovery Group. The first step will be the *Saving the Sargasso Shearwater: Building a Regional Recovery Strategy* workshop held on 27 July 2026 during the BirdsCaribbean international conference in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Please contact Will Mackin to join the group and participate. Read more about the Sargasso Shearwater in pages 12-13 below.
**Contact: Will Mackin** (willmackin@gmail.com)

Caribbean Roseate Tern Group – Ricardo Zambrano of the international Roseate Tern Recovery Group working group is interested in developing a Caribbean Roseate Tern group to help share information, needs, and experiences about the Caribbean Roseate Tern population, and look for collective funding. If you study or conserve Roseate Terns in the Caribbean, contact Ricardo to express your interest.
**Contact: Ricardo Zambrano**, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (ricardo.Zambrano@myfwc.com)

Latin American Chapter of the Pacific Seabird Group – The Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity committee of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) aims to develop seabird conservation in developing countries or regions with little or no institutional support for seabird researchers and conservationists. Carlos Zavalaga is seeking Caribbean and Latin American seabird researchers interested in joining this international community as Corresponding Members. Corresponding Members who report on their seabird research activities or conservation efforts are eligible to receive Travel Grants to attend the PSG Annual Meeting, as well as Research Grants. The Subcommittee also helps Corresponding Members network within the PSG community and generate connections that support critical seabird research and conservation efforts internationally.
**Contact: Carlos Zavalaga**, Universidad Científica del Sur, Peru (czavalaga@cientifica.edu.pe)

Database of seabird tracking studies in the Caribbean – Starting in the late 2000s, several groups have tracked seabirds in the Caribbean. The SWG is trying to compile a full list of tracking studies from the region. Up-to-date information can foster future collaborations, or be instrumental when applying for funding. Do not hesitate to contact Yvan if you have tracked seabirds in the Caribbean and would like your study to be listed.
**Contact: Yvan Satgé**, Caribbean Seabird Working Group (ysatge@clemson.edu)

# Regional Seabird Census and the Work of the Seabird Working Group

## Caribbean Seabird Census report in preparation

By attempting to compile a comprehensive dataset on seabird colonies across the region, the 2023–2024 regional Caribbean Seabird Census (CSC) was a landmark collaborative effort. A critical next step is transforming this dataset into a clear and compelling regional report, which requires the participation of census contributors. For those who contributed data, you should by now have received requests to validate your records and provide comments on the first draft of the report, thank you again for your contributions and support throughout this process.

The census has confirmed the continued global importance of the Caribbean for seabird conservation. Sooty Tern was the most abundant species recorded, followed by Bridled Tern, Red-footed Booby, and Brown Booby. Bridled Tern, Brown Noddy, and Laughing Gull were the most widely distributed species across the region. While around half of surveyed sites supported only one or two breeding species, several islands supported exceptionally diverse seabird assemblages, including Dog Island (Anguilla), Little Tobago (Trinidad and Tobago), and Diamond Rock and Petit Canouan in the Grenadines. We look forward to sharing the full findings in the final census report soon.

The census also identified sites of major international conservation importance. Six sites qualified as Global Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) for globally threatened species, while ten sites met criteria for supporting more than 1% of global seabird populations. In addition, 38 sites qualified as Regionally Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), including 18 sites not previously recognised under existing KBA or IBA frameworks.

### Your Perspective Wanted

We are currently struggling to best reflect the scale and impacts of the many threats facing seabirds across the region. We would therefore very much welcome your success stories, key challenges, major concerns, and examples of conservation action from your islands and sites. Although comparisons with historical data suggest that many populations remain relatively stable, some colonies showed substantial increases or declines. Capturing your experiences and perspectives within the final seabird census report is important, as it will help provide a clearer regional outlook and support future collaboration, planning, and conservation action.

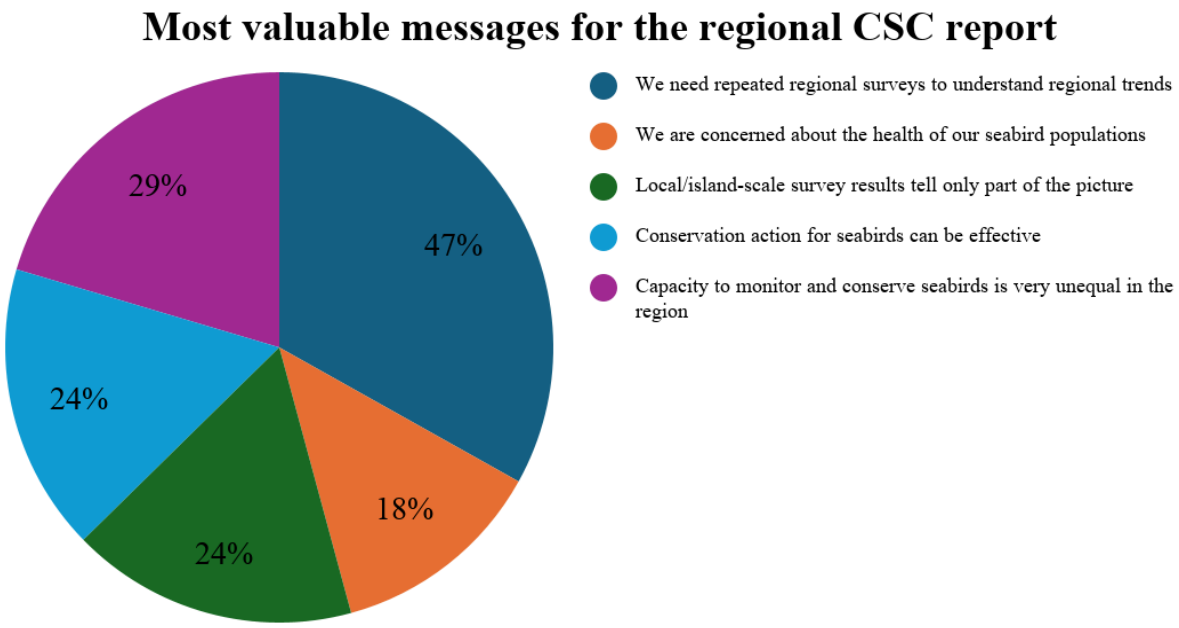
**If you are willing to answer a few short questions on the status of seabirds in your country, please complete the following survey.**

## March Webinar "Caribbean Seabird Census 2023–2024: Findings, Gaps & Building the Regional Narrative"

On March 26, 2026, the Seabird Working Group hosted a webinar to review progress on the regional report, engage contributors, and think about future activities. Moderated by BirdsCaribbean Executive Director

Lisa Sorenson, it featured presentations and discussions led by Louise Soanes with Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and long-time BirdsCaribbean volunteer Jennifer Wheeler, and had 25 attendees.

Louise presented draft maps and sections of the forthcoming Census report and asked the data contributors for their review and contribution to the report. In order to assist with making the final census report as impactful as possible, we also asked what messages resulting from the census resonated most with webinar attendees.




Based on these responses, all five of the proposed messages will be noted in the report, with an emphasis on the importance of repeated monitoring to understand trends. Indeed, population changes are a key gap in our knowledge of seabird populations, since geographic gaps and limited historical baselines mean we cannot yet produce robust regional trend estimates. It is for this reason that we need contributors to help develop clear, data-supported island conclusions — from colony losses and disturbance impacts to recovery successes.

Louise also reported on the data as it relates to key biodiversity areas. She explained challenges associated with determining international and regional site designations, given evolving criteria and data sources. For example, in the past only Caribbean populations were considered when calculating regional thresholds for Important Bird Areas. However, more recent international guidelines from BirdLife International recommend using biogeographic populations to determine populations which can extend outside of the Caribbean for some species.

In light of this complexity, when asked: *"Would you like assistance in assessing or updating census sites as IBAs and/or KBAs?",* 100% of respondents answered *"yes."*
Maria Gabriela Toscano of Birdlife International re-affirmed her interest in assisting partners with this topic.

Louise also noted that the KBA assessment reinforces a key issue for our region: many Caribbean seabird species are pan-tropical (distribution spans tropical regions of both western and eastern hemispheres), and individual colonies rarely exceed the global threshold (1% of the species' population).

Yet, given the apparent historic decline in regional populations, nearly every colony holds conservation importance. When asked: *"Would it be valuable to review and promote the Caribbean At-Risk Seabird species list?",* 100% of respondents answered *"yes."*

Clearly, the audience is eager to undertake a process of developing Caribbean-specific regional criteria to ensure that even smaller colonies receive recognition and protection.

## Continuing to work together

A major achievement of the CSC has been the strengthening of regional collaboration and capacity-building. Training workshops, webinars, translated materials, and ongoing communication through the SWG have helped establish a stronger and more connected network of seabird practitioners across the Caribbean. Continued regional collaboration will be essential to improving our understanding of Caribbean seabird populations and ensuring the effective conservation of key breeding sites into the future. To this end, the second half of the March webinar was to collect views on work that we should be prioritising for the future, including coordinated monitoring, research partnerships, and conservation financing opportunities.

### Taxonomic Gaps in Regional Census

Jennifer noted that the CSC includes limited data for species that are difficult to monitor, usually requiring special methods.

Sargasso Shearwater: Comprehensive surveys for the Sargasso Shearwater have only been conducted at a small number of sites, meaning that large parts of their breeding distribution remain poorly understood. A coordinated, regional approach to monitoring the species will be a topic addressed by the newly formed Sargasso Shearwater Recovery group.

Tropicbirds: The Caribbean's tropicbirds (White-tailed and Red-billed) are also difficult to monitor, breeding asynchronously in scattered sites, in crevices, sometimes on dangerous cliffs and remote islands. Across the region, practitioners are working on indices to derive estimates from aerial counts as well as use of technologies like drones, cameras, and acoustics.

When asked: *"Do you have an interest in organizing a discussion about Tropicbirds?"*

Eleven participants showed interest in a Tropicbirds discussion, with interest evenly divided between a webinar, a gathering at the next International Conference, and a group on the WhatsApp Caribbean Seabird Community.

Discussion topics might include development of a regionally-appropriate monitoring protocol, a regional compilation of information, and conservation and management recommendations.

### CAMAC regional tracking study

Plans are moving forward for a seabird tracking project associated with the Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities (CAMAC) study of interactions between marine megafauna and human

activities. The SWG has won a grant to track two groups of seabirds, terns and boobies. You can read more about this project in these pages.

## Getting Together

The webinar concluded with a quick look at upcoming gatherings:

BirdsCaribbean's International Conference: The Seabird Working Group will have a presence at the upcoming BirdsCaribbean's International Conference, 23-27 July 2026 in Trinidad and Tobago. There will be an opportunity for a round-table, on top of submitted presentations and the Sargasso Shearwater workshop. The Program is coming together here: **https://birdscaribbeanconference.org**

Twice-yearly online gatherings: The co-Chairs and other members of the SWG planning committee have proposed twice-yearly gatherings online (January, and July, except during International Conference years.) We anticipate a virtual meeting of the SWG in January 2027.

The following were suggested as topics for future SWG discussions and initiatives:

- Documenting invasive species presence (goats, sheep, rodents, etc.)
- Documenting marine litter in nests (photos, where to submit, etc.)
- Map making and QGIS help sessions
- "Blue Economy" or marine health projects involving seabirds
- Strategies for working with local communities for seabird conservation

## Looking Ahead

The March webinar underscored both the value of the CSC and the strength of the regional network that made it possible. While the census has confirmed the Caribbean's global importance for seabird conservation, it has also highlighted critical gaps in our knowledge that can only be addressed through continued monitoring, research, and collaboration.

The enthusiasm shown by participants for future initiatives—from improving site designations and monitoring protocols to advancing species recovery and tracking projects—demonstrates a shared commitment to seabird conservation. By continuing to work together, the Caribbean Seabird Working Group can build on the momentum of the census and help ensure a brighter future for the region's seabirds and the islands they depend on.

**Contacts:**

**Louise Soanes**, Caribbean Seabird Census coordinator (caribbeanseabirdsurveys@gmail.com) and **Jennifer Wheeler**, BirdsCaribbean (jennifer.wheeler@birdscaribbean.org)

In Grenada, Diamond Rock supports an exceptionally diverse assemblage of breeding seabirds. (J. James)

# Conservation of the Sargasso Shearwater

The Sargasso Shearwater, one of only two tubenose seabird species still breeding in the Caribbean region, has recently been the center of three important developments in seabird conservation.

## A new name

First, the bird formerly called Audubon's Shearwater has been officially renamed the Sargasso Shearwater by the American Ornithological Society. This process was initiated because the bird was named after the famous early ornithologist John James Audubon, and eponymous English bird names are being replaced by names that better represent their ecology, biology, or phenotype. The Sargasso Shearwater is named for the Sargassum seaweed (*Sargassum*), with which it sometimes occurs.

## A new conservation status

In July 2024, the complex of small shearwaters previously known as Audubon's Shearwater was split into separate species because of genetic, morphological, and behavioral differences. The shearwater found in the western Atlantic (the Sargasso Shearwater) became an (almost) endemic species in the Caribbean. Because it has lost many populations while others appear to be declining, the species immediately required listing. BirdLife International, which manages the Red List for birds, communicated with the SWG to gather information. BirdLife is now proposing to change conservation status of the Sargasso Shearwater from "Least Concern" to "Near Threatened" on the Red List of Threatened Species. This change is expected to be official in November.

## A new list

The third development is that Sargasso Shearwater has also been listed as a Yellow-Alert Tipping Point species by the Road to Recovery (R2R) initiative. This initiative works to save bird populations throughout the Western Hemisphere by creating strategic conservation initiatives for the 112 species listed.

Both the "Near Threatened" (IUCN BirdLife) and "Yellow-Alert" (R2R) categorizations represent the first level threat category by their respective organizations. These threat determinations were made because the Sargasso Shearwater does have a wide distribution and many (~100) known extant populations: unlike species with only a handful of breeding sites, these populations cannot be wiped out by one accident. To be listed at a higher level of threat, we would need to understand the population trend through accurate population counts; however, for this cryptic nocturnal bird, such counts are beyond our current funding and person-power capacity. Our data on population trends is disturbing in that shearwaters have disappeared from all the large islands in the Caribbean over the last several millennia and, in the short-term, they are declining on several protected islands where they have been monitored. However, these data are not conclusive because only a small fraction of the known colonies have been properly surveyed and we lack trend data on most or even a significant portion of the population.

## A new group

R2R is encouraging recovery teams to begin working on all the listed species, and we are creating a Sargasso Shearwater recovery group. We are planning a workshop within the BirdsCaribbean conference in Trinidad this summer: Saving the Sargasso Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*): Building a Regional Recovery Strategy (27 July). This recovery group is open to anyone in the region who wants to help recover the Sargasso Shearwater. Please contact us to join the group and participate. We will use this process to strategically improve our knowledge and conservation actions so we can identify and eliminate threats but also build a team to study and improve our knowledge of the bird. We lack survey data that would more precisely quantify the level of threat to the species. We hope to identify a way forward through the R2R process.

**Contact: Will Mackin** (willmackin@gmail.com)

Photo: Sargasso Shearwater in flight. (A. Sutton).

# Tracking Seabirds with the Region-Wide CAMAC Project

The Caribbean-wide CAMAC project, CAribbean marine Megafauna and anthropogenic ACtivities, aims to improve knowledge about marine megafauna and human activities interactions and strengthen regional collaboration. The SWG is helping develop a tracking study of two groups of seabirds: boobies, and terns and noddies.

## What is CAMAC?

Human activities such as fishing, shipping and tourism often take place in the habitats of marine megafauna (sharks, sea turtles, marine mammals and seabirds). These activities frequently interact with a large proportion of Caribbean marine species, which can be negatively impacted. While these interactions can be a problem for human activities (bycatch and depredation can lead to degradation or loss of fishing gear, or reduced yield), some activities depend directly on the presence of marine megafauna species, such as artisanal fishing, whale-watching, or scuba diving. Co-funded by the European Union, the CAMAC project seeks to improve knowledge of these interactions and strengthen regional collaboration to provide Caribbean governing bodies and environmental stakeholders with recommendations and tools to reduce the negative impacts of interactions between marine megafauna and human activities.

CAMAC has seven work packages: among them, Work Package 4 focuses on enhancing knowledge of the marine distribution of marine mammals and seabirds via sailboat surveys (marine mammals and seabirds) and GPS-tracking (seabirds only). CAMAC's primary objective for seabird GPS tracking is *"[...] to gain a deeper understanding of Caribbean seabirds spatial ecology and behaviour by analysing movement data from bird tags to estimate home ranges, identify foraging hotspots, and link seabird movement patterns to environmental variables to provide insights into ecological factors shaping birds' movement strategies."*

## CAMAC and Seabirds

### The species selection process

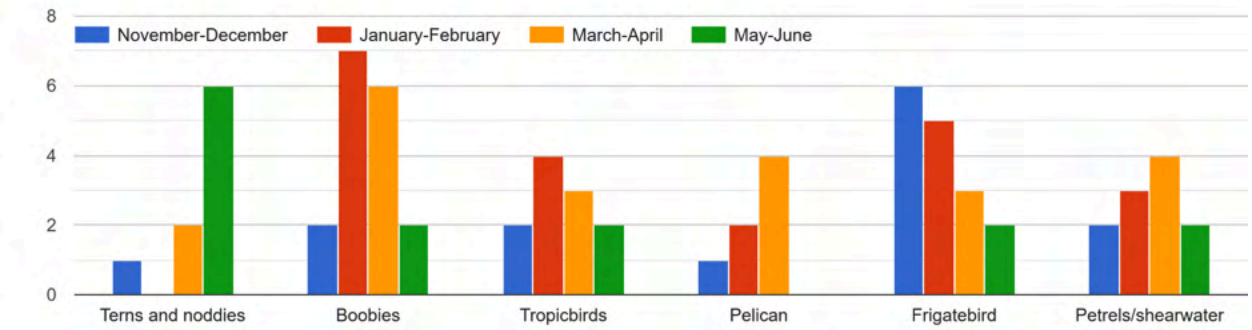
In the fall of 2025, the CAMAC team approached the SWG for help developing the seabird tracking study. In particular, they wanted insight to help narrow down the eligibility to two species or species groups, for which a total amount of €120K was going to be made available for bidding. As a result, two online round tables were organized with interested SWG members, in October and November. These provided preliminary information used by the CAMAC team to refine its requirements: the species or groups of species needed to be present at colonies between November and May, to be easy to capture and tag, and

to provide broad information about seabird habitat use at sea (i.e., one of the targets had to be a long-distance forager). Additionally, fieldwork was to occur in accessible colonies, where a local partner would be willing and available to support a tagging project.

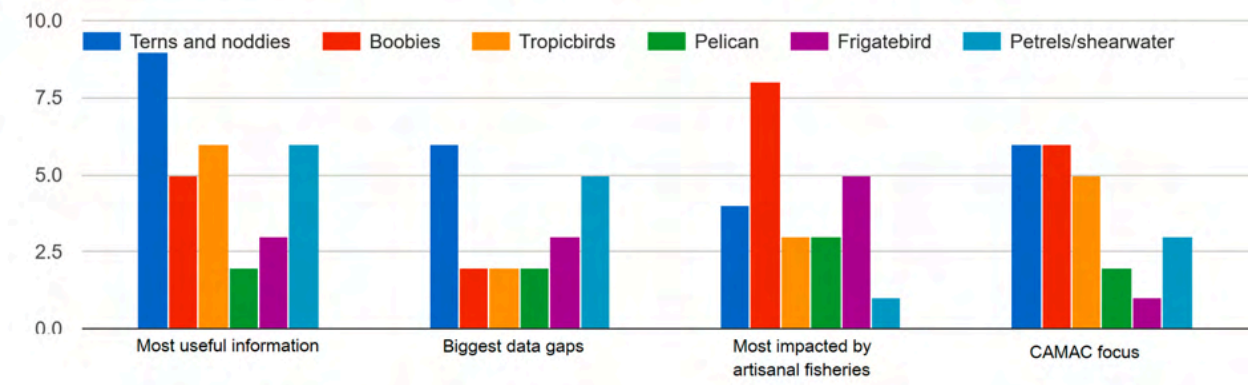
Therefore, in mid-November, the SWG sent out a survey to the group's listserv and to the CAMAC Work Package 4 stakeholder group. Respondents were asked to provide information or insight on the temporality of breeding, importance of tracking data for understanding habitat use, data gaps, impact of artisanal fisheries, and focus of CAMAC study, for the following seabird species or groups of species: Terns and Noddies, Boobies, Tropicbirds, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, and Petrels and Shearwaters. Respondents were also asked to propose two species or groups of species, and provide additional details such as the ease of capture/recapture, whether the species or group had already been tagged with GPS in the Caribbean, and whether there is local support for studying the species or group.

Twelve people responded to the survey, from the following areas: Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexican Caribbean, Sint Eustatius, U.K. Overseas Territories (UKOTS), and Venezuela. Here are responses to the main questions:

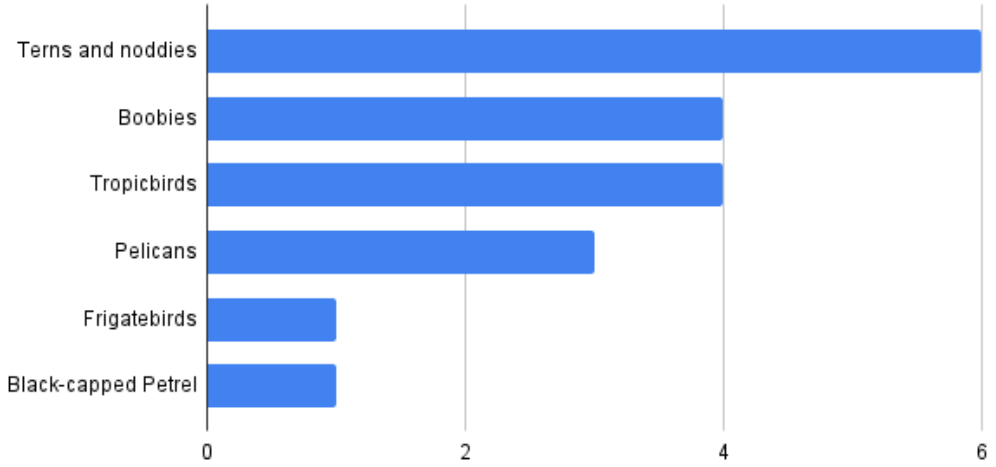
- In your opinion, during which months do these species or groups of species breed? If species breed year-round, enter information for peak breeding.




- In your opinion and experience, how would you describe each species or groups of species?



- Which species or group of species should be included in a call for tender for seabird tracking?




Based on survey responses and experiences tracking and studying seabirds in the UKOTs, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and in the pan-Caribbean region, the SWG's planning team met in late November to assess pros and cons of the three groups that received most support from survey respondents: Terns and Noddies, Boobies, and Tropicbirds. Pelicans received support from responders but the CAMAC team previously rejected this species because of the difficulties to capture breeding birds on nesting trees.

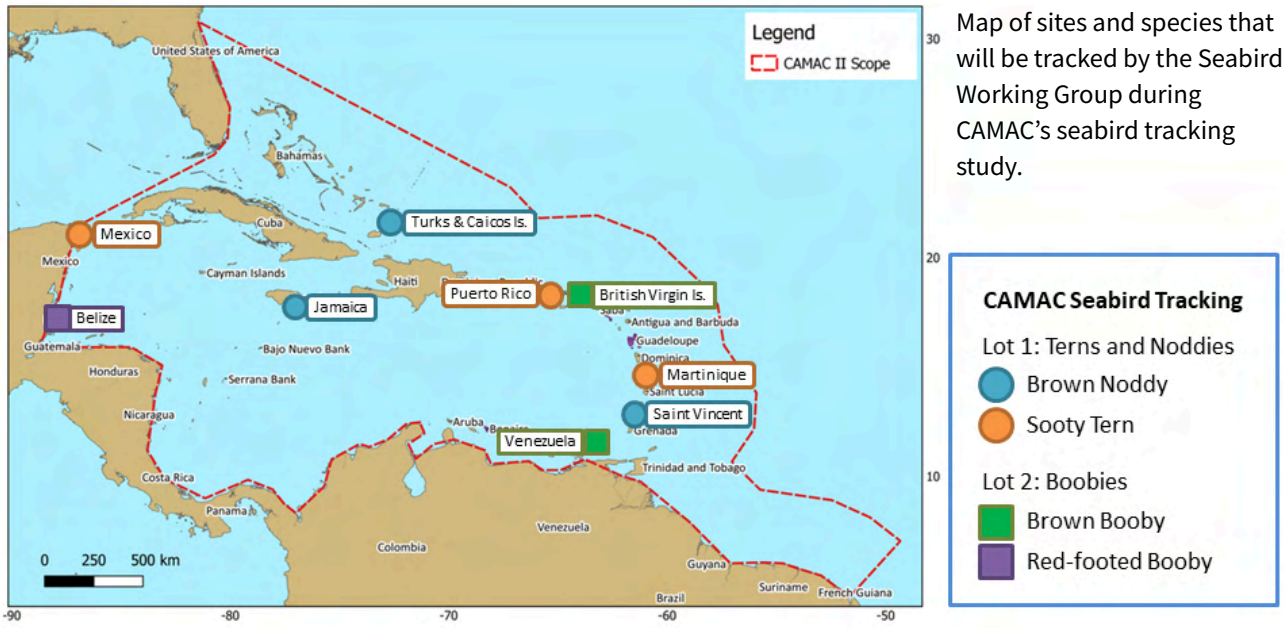
Criteria used to select two groups of species for the CAMAC seabird tracking study

| | Pan-Caribbean | Marine domain | Fisheries impact | Existing tracking studies |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Terns and Noddies | • | Coastal + Pelagic | Yes (Royal Tern) | Sooty Tern (n =3)<br>Bridled, Royal, Sandwich, Roseate Terns (n = 1) |
| Boobies | • | Coastal + Pelagic | Suspected | Brown Booby (n = 7)<br>Red-footed Booby (n = 4)<br>Masked Booby (n = 3) |
| Tropicbirds | • | Coastal + Pelagic | Unknown | Red-Billed Tropicbird (n = 5)<br>White-tailed Tropicbird (n = 1) |

In addition to receiving most support from survey respondents, Terns and Noddies as well as Boobies were proposed to CAMAC because of their pan-Caribbean distribution, relevance for assessing exposure to fisheries, ease of capture/recapture, and the availability of anterior tracking studies. Species with anterior tracking studies (and available data) were given priority because, in the particular scope and limited funding of the CAMAC project, we recognized the need for a conservative and robust dataset.

## SWG proposal for CAMAC seabird tracking

In April 2026, after seeking input and partnership from interested partners, the SWG responded to CAMAC's call for tender with a proposal to track Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies (Lot 1) at six sites, and Brown and Red-footed Boobies (Lot 2) at three sites. The proposal was later selected by the CAMAC team.




Map of sites and species that will be tracked by the Seabird Working Group during CAMAC's seabird tracking study.

Therefore, between November 2026 and May 2027, twenty remote-download GPS devices will be deployed per species per site. Solar-powered remote-download technology (~3.0 gram for Terns and Noddies; and ~12.0 gram for Boobies) will eliminate the need to recapture birds, significantly reducing handling stress, and improving data recovery rates.

This regional approach to tracking is the first of its kind for the Caribbean basin and offers a unique opportunity for better understanding distribution within the human interface. Moreover, it is also an opportunity to strengthen regional collaboration among conservationists, a goal of both CAMAC and the BirdsCaribbean Seabird Working Group. Results of the study will be shared in this newsletter.

**Contact: Yvan Satgé**, Caribbean Seabird Working Group (ysatge@clemson.edu)

# Updates from the Islands

A wide range of activities involving seabirds are taking place throughout the Caribbean, including those focused on monitoring, research, conservation, and education. Below are some of the most recent projects from the region.

## Projects

### Invasive goat removal to restore seabird nesting habitat in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (EPIC), in collaboration with the Forestry Department of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Science Initiative for Environmental Conservation and Education (SCIENCE), is currently undertaking a project to remove invasive goats and restore seabird nesting habitat in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The second year of this five-year project has just been completed with seabird surveys conducted on Battowia and the Pillories in April, June, July, and November 2025, and in March and April 2026.

Red-footed Boobies, and Brown Boobies, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Laughing Gulls, and Brown Noddies are confirmed as nesting species on Battowia, while Red-billed Tropicbirds and Laughing Gulls are confirmed as nesting on the Pillories islands. Sargasso Shearwaters were also detected in the waters along the coasts of the Pillories during night surveys.

These species face threats from invasive goats, and the poaching of birds and eggs. By removing the invasive goats from the islands, EPIC is aiding their natural regeneration after years of overgrazing by the goats and the impacts of Hurricane Beryl in 2024. With the goat removal on Battowia concluded, restoration efforts now start in earnest. Initially, this will comprise allowing time for natural regrowth of the vegetation on Battowia, then re-seeding or re-planting in the last two years of the project as needed.

This project is funded by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration funds administered by the United States Department of Interior.

**Contact: Allanson Cruickshank** (acruickshank@epicislands.org), Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (EPIC)

Photo: An adult Brown Booby flying in the Bequia Channel. (J. Gooding)

## Seabird diversity and conservation challenges across the Los Testigos Archipelago, Venezuela

The Los Testigos Archipelago, a group of 16 islands in the southeastern Caribbean, is a critical regional sanctuary that supports at least eight seabird species, although multi-season data remains historically scarce. A monitoring initiative funded by BirdsCaribbean James Kushlan Award assessed waterbird distribution, abundance, and breeding success across two consecutive research seasons in 2025 and 2026.

The baseline surveys conducted in May and August 2025 documented a total of 14,401 individuals belonging to 26 waterbird species across the entire archipelago. Six species were nesting: Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Booby, Laughing Gull, Bridled Tern, Red-billed Tropicbird, and Yellow-crowned Night Heron. These data strongly suggested a "sanctuary effect" on islands free of feral cats, identifying Morro Afuera and Isla Conejo as the primary multi-species nesting hotspots within the island complex.

The follow-up expedition in May 2026 focused on quantifying the critical breeding colony of Magnificent Frigatebird on Isla Conejo. A total of 300 active nests were systematically documented within a precisely sampled area, yielding an extraordinary core nesting density of 253.6 nests/ha under the canopy of the *Capparis odoratissima* dry forest. Difficult boat access and rugged terrain have historically prevented a full, archipelago-wide census of all nesting sites; nevertheless, our results suggest that this sector might harbor one of the largest breeding aggregations of frigatebirds globally.

During the May 2026 transects we discovered 20 dead adult frigatebirds. Local testimonies confirmed an ongoing hunting of adult frigatebirds within the nesting colonies to extract their breast meat. This targeted poaching triggers egg neglect, high chick mortality, and potential colony abandonment.

To address these immediate threats, the project implemented a community workshop in Testigo Grande during 2026, focusing on the ecology of seabirds and their intrinsic relationship with artisanal fisheries. Local fishers rely on these birds as biological indicators to locate schools of fish. We are now directing our efforts toward nominating Isla Conejo and Morro Afuera as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), providing a framework to guarantee the long-term survival of this vital Southern Caribbean seabird cradle.

**Contact: Jemimah Rivera** (jemimahrivera@gmail.com), National Parks Institute of Venezuela (INPARQUES) and **Sabino Silva**, Union of Ornithologists of Venezuela.

Photo: Magnificent Frigatebird chick at Los Testigos, Venezuela. (J. Rivera)

## Protecting seabirds from climate and pollution in Samaná Bay, Dominican Republic

Between 2020–2024, we have investigated a recurring mystery along the northern shores of the Dominican Republic's Samaná Bay. Every June and July, we have been finding numerous seabirds washing ashore—many deceased, and others simply too exhausted to fly. Great Shearwaters are mostly affected but we have also documented severe impacts on Cory's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Sargasso Shearwater, Sooty Tern, and Red-billed Tropicbird. Conducting surveys, both by boat and on foot, along the coastal habitats from the Río Colorado to Cocos de Guillo, our field team has pieced together a highly concerning environmental puzzle.

In the bay and on these beaches we are witnessing the devastating result of extreme weather events colliding with marine thermal anomalies, making it incredibly difficult for the birds to successfully forage for food. By the time the waves push them onto the shores, they are completely starved and debilitated. While we do everything we can to rescue, hydrate, and rehabilitate the birds we find alive, the mortality rate remains tragically high. Local scavengers—such as ghost crabs, feral dogs, rats, and beetles—quickly claim fallen birds, often leaving only skeletons to study and identify. To broaden the impact of this local data, we are discussing with the Atlantic Marine Bird Cooperative to integrate our findings with regional frameworks across the entire Atlantic basin.

However, a changing climate is not the only threat these migrating birds face. During our coastal surveys, we consistently encounter seabird remains entangled in extensive accumulations of plastic, other anthropogenic debris, and sargassum deposited along the shoreline by storm surges and routine wave action. This stark imagery serves as a continual reminder of the chronic pollution afflicting our oceans. This is why the recent closure of the local plastic packaging and recycling preparation plant in Sánchez, due to a lack of funding, is such a devastating blow to our conservation efforts. This facility was a crucial line of defense in managing local solid waste and mitigating environmental threats to marine life and community sanitation efforts. As we share our findings through this network, our most urgent hope is to spark a dialogue with partners and community members about potential funding sources. Reopening this indispensable plastics collection facility is a vital step toward ensuring a cleaner, safer Samaná Bay (and Dominican Republic) for both its people and its winged visitors.

**Contacts: Wayne Arendt** (wayne.arendt@usda.gov), U.S. Department of Agriculture and **MaríaPaulino** (mpaulino0888@gmail.com), Grupo Accion Ecologica

Photo: Seabirds washed off among plastic litter on Samaná Bay's coastline. (M Paulino).

## Updated rat detection and monitoring efforts at Buck Island National Wildlife Refuge, US Virgin Islands

Since 1969, Buck Island National Wildlife Refuge (BINWR) is one of nine refuges that comprise the Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The 45-acre island is located two miles south of St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. Despite significant past human impact, the island holds considerable potential for habitat restoration and enhancement to better support breeding populations of migratory birds. The island provides nesting or roosting habitat for Magnificent Frigatebird, Red-billed Tropicbird, Laughing Gull, and Bridled Tern.

In 2005, introduced Norway and black rats were successfully eradicated from BINWR. The refuge is closed to the public but surrounding waters contain coral reefs and a shipwreck that are frequented by tourism operations, which raise concerns about rat recolonization. However, due to logistical challenges, recent visits to BINWR have not occurred.

In April 2026, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service team assessed the presence/absence of rodents on BINWR. To maximize the chances of detecting any rats, the team established an island-wide grid system and used four distinct monitoring techniques (chew tags, ink card tracking tunnels, motion- detection field cameras, and environmental DNA sampling) in all habitat types across the island. Encouragingly, no evidence of rats was observed, so we assume that rats remain absent from BINWR. The team also documented five active Bridled Tern nests along the shoreline and observed two rare reptile species, the Virgin Islands bronze skink, which is currently proposed for listing, and a sub- species of the Puerto Rican racer thought to be endemic to Buck Island. These sightings highlight the island's unique and valuable biodiversity.

To protect nesting seabirds, rare reptiles, and their habitats from rodents, we are moving toward a proactive outreach model which will include establishing a robust, long-term biosecurity and monitoring program to enable early detection and rapid response to new rodent introductions. Through partnerships with local tourism operators who regularly use the waters surrounding BINWR, we can help ensure that all visitors respect the refuge regulations. This collective effort to keep visitors off the island will serve as a key strategy to reduce the risk of invasive species and protect this sensitive ecosystem for nesting seabirds.

This project was funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Program and with support from the NWR Law Enforcement Program.

**Contacts: Claudia Lombard** (Claudia_lombard@fws.gov) and **Nahíra Arocho** (nahira_arocho@fws.gov), Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Photo: USFWS Nahíra Arocho sets a rat detection station at Buck Island NWR (C. Lombard USFWS).

## Seabird restoration project on Desecheo National Wildlife Refuge, Puerto Rico

Desecheo Island is situated 14 miles off the northwest coast of Puerto Rico. Designated as a National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in 1976, it is one of nine refuges managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the Caribbean. Historically, Desecheo served as a critical habitat for seabirds; however, the introduction of invasive mammals such as cats, rats, monkeys, and goats resulted in significant habitat loss and increased seabird predation. Following years of collaborative effort, the island was declared free of invasive mammal species in 2017, enabling the initiation of a seabird restoration project.

This project incorporates biosecurity protocols and social attraction techniques, including the use of decoys, mirrors, and sound systems to attract seabird species such as Bridled Terns, Brown Noddies, and Sargasso Shearwaters, with the goal of re-establishing and augmenting breeding colonies on Desecheo NWR. These interventions have resulted in increased nesting by Bridled Terns and Brown Noddies, as well as the first documented nesting of Sargasso Shearwaters on the island. The first Sargasso Shearwater egg was recorded in 2023, and nests have been observed over the past three years. Artificial nest boxes have been installed for shearwaters, and this year, the first egg was documented in one of these boxes. Although the egg was not viable, this milestone demonstrates the effectiveness of integrated restoration strategies for seabird populations on Desecheo.

In 2023 and 2026, the USFWS expanded restoration efforts through collaboration with the American Bird Conservancy by installing sound systems on the island to potentially attract the endangered Black-capped Petrel. This year, we also broadened the seabird restoration project by introducing decoys for Red-footed Boobies, a species that historically nested on the island with records of up to 15,000 breeding pairs. We hope these measures will encourage Red-footed Boobies to return to make Desecheo their home again. These actions are funded through the USFWS's Migratory Bird Program.

**Contact: Nahíra Arocho** (nahira_arocho@fws.gov), Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Photo: Sargasso Shearwater egg inside the artificial nest box placed next to the social attraction sound system speaker on Desecheo NWR. (N. Arocho USFWS).

## Monitoring coastal bird breeding at Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge, Puerto Rico

The Cabo Rojo Salt Flats (CRSF) in southwestern Puerto Rico rank among the Caribbean's most ecologically significant coastal ecosystems for migratory and resident shorebirds, supporting the region's only breeding population of Snowy Plovers as well as notable nesting colonies of Wilson's Plovers and Least Terns. Yet habitat loss, predation, human disturbance, invasive species, and climate-driven flooding pose growing threats to reproductive success.

In 2023, biologists Nahíra Arocho and Luis Ramos established the Coastal Bird Breeding Program (CBBP) to conduct long-term monitoring, characterize nesting habitat, identify threats, and guide management actions for these priority species with the help of volunteers.

Between 2023 and 2025, the program documented 614 nests across the Candelaria and Fraternidad lagoons, revealing annual variation in nest numbers, habitat use, and survivorship. Nest losses in 2024 were especially severe, driven by predation from feral cats and dogs, human disturbance, and flooding. These pressures prompted targeted interventions, including public access restrictions, community education campaigns, invasive predator control, and a removal program for invasive Red-tailed Boas (*Boa constrictor*). In this project, invasive Red-tailed boas were actively removed for 2 years, resulting in the removal of 800 individuals.

The adoption of a digital data-collection application improved data quality by standardizing inputs, reducing errors, streamlining fieldwork and providing experience to the volunteers. Over 50 volunteers have been trained through the years. Additionally, the installation of a social-attraction nesting platform offered Least Terns a safe, elevated alternative breeding site. Results from 2025 suggest that nest loss has declined following these conservation measures. The CBBP represents the first long-term, structured breeding monitoring program at CRSF and generates essential data to support adaptive management. Sustained efforts in predator control, habitat protection, hydrological management, community outreach, and expanded fledging monitoring will be critical for stabilizing and improving the reproductive success of coastal bird species at this regionally significant site.

**Contact: Nahíra Arocho** (nahira_arocho@fws.gov), Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Photo: Training refuge volunteers in species identification and monitoring at the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats, NWR. (N. Arocho USFWS).

## Black-capped Petrel Conservation Update

The 2025–2026 breeding season for the endangered Black-capped Petrel, or Diablotin, was marked by both significant challenges and encouraging progress. A gap in funding, unfavorable weather, losses of breeding birds to dog predation and collisions, and escalating gang violence near La Visite nesting area in Haiti all complicated conservation efforts. Despite these obstacles, local partners Action pour la Sauvegarde de l'Ecologie en Haïti in Haiti and Grupo Jaragua in the Dominican Republic (DR) continued monitoring known nesting areas and addressing threats wherever conditions allowed.

There was also welcome good news. At the Valle Nuevo colony, in the DR, where invasive mongooses have suppressed breeding success for years, trapping efforts appear to have paid off. Early results raise hopes for improved reproductive success. Detailed results from the 2025–2026 breeding season will be released later this year by local partners. In the meantime, our International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group March 2026 Update (posted on the working group's website) highlighted a major milestone: the creation of a comprehensive Black-capped Petrel Nest Monitoring Database. Developed in 2025, the database brings together 13 years of nest monitoring data, allowing researchers to make standardized comparisons among nests, colonies, and breeding seasons. The project, led by Yvan Satgé, represents a significant advance in understanding the factors that drive conservation success for this endangered species.

Another exciting development came from the island of Dominica, where two grounded Black-capped Petrels were recovered and released in May 2025 and February 2026. Both birds were discovered by the same individual at the upper construction site of the Dominica Cable Car Project, near Boiling Lake. Particularly noteworthy, the May 2025 bird was a fledgling with downy leg feathers, strongly suggesting it originated from a nest in Dominica's mountains. This discovery has renewed hopes that an as-yet-undiscovered breeding population exists on the island. Discussions are underway with project managers for the cable car construction and local partners, including Dominica's Forestry Division, to explore both mitigation measures for nighttime lighting and opportunities to search for nesting sites.

Looking ahead, the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group will convene a discussion session at the upcoming BirdsCaribbean International Conference in Trinidad. Anyone interested in the future of this remarkable seabird is encouraged to attend!

**Contact: Jennifer Wheeler** (jennifer.wheeler@birdscaribbean.org), International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group

Photo: A Black-capped Petrel fledgling sits on a chair after being rescued from a construction site in the mountains of Dominica, May 2025. (C. Carbon).

## Community, restoration, and resilience at Road Salt Pond, Anguilla

Road Salt Pond continues to showcase the tangible benefits of habitat restoration. Over the last two years, the Anguilla National Trust has been working with the Sandy Ground community, the Government of Anguilla, BirdsCaribbean, Wildlife Management International Ltd., Fauna & Flora, ReWild, and Fort Worth Zoo to conserve and restore one of Anguilla's most iconic wetlands.

Supported by the UK Government's Biodiversity Challenge Funds and the US Fish & Wildlife Service's Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the National Trust, together with local and corporate partners, constructed and deployed a series of floating rafts lined with a layer of fine rocky substrate. These structures have created approximately 100m$^2$ of biosecure resting and nesting habitat for shorebirds and seabirds. Peaked wooden shelters, colourfully painted by local schoolchildren, were placed across the four modular platforms, providing much-needed shade from the tropical sun. In March 2026, the season's first nest (a killdeer's) was recorded on the platform. Since the start of the seabird nesting season in May, more than 30 pairs of Least Terns have also been recorded nesting on the specially designed habitat.

In addition to creating habitat for Road Salt Pond's bird populations, the project has focused on strengthening connections between the Sandy Ground community, visitors to the pond, and the wetland itself, while fostering a greater appreciation of the ecological, social, cultural, and economic value of Road Salt Pond and indeed all of Anguilla's salt ponds. Partnering with Mr. Binkie van Es of the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation, community members have been trained as ecotour guides, helping to promote sustainable, nature-based livelihood opportunities.

Guided by a ten-year management plan developed collaboratively by the Sandy Ground community, project partners, and other stakeholders, efforts are also underway to control invasive rodent populations and reduce predation pressure on the pond's birdlife. Complementing these invasive species management efforts, a rewilding programme involving the planting of native trees has also been launched. Looking ahead, the ANT and its partners are continuing to explore opportunities to secure formal protection for this internationally important wetland, helping to ensure that Road Salt Pond remains a thriving haven for wildlife and people for generations to come.

**Contact: Farah Mukhida** (fmukhida@axanationaltrust.com), Anguilla National Trust

Photo: Floating platforms provide safe nesting habitat for Least Terns on Road Salt's Pond, Anguilla. (J. Wheeler).

## Seabird observations during the Blue Belt Programme Expedition to the Cayman Islands

In early 2026, the *RRS James Cook* set sail from the Dominican Republic as part of the Beyond the Reef expedition (JC286), visiting three UK Overseas Territories: Anguilla, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Cayman Islands. The voyage forms part of the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, a conservation partnership protecting roughly four million square kilometres of ocean across several Caribbean territories.

Between 12–25 February, trained observers conducted systematic seabird and marine mammal surveys throughout the Cayman leg of the expedition. Scanning continuously during daylight hours, the team logged 144 individual birds across nine species — building a valuable baseline of offshore wildlife data for the region.

Brown Boobies were the most commonly sighted, with birds recorded far from their known breeding colonies on Cayman Brac. The Red-footed Booby, which breeds at the west end of Little Cayman, was the second most frequently observed, regularly spotted diving for fish well out of sight of land. Notably, immature birds of both booby species were recorded at the offshore Banks, suggesting these productive areas serve as important foraging grounds not just for experienced adults, but for juveniles dispersing from their colonies for the first time.

Magnificent Frigatebirds were seen throughout the survey, often alongside other species. Several frigatebirds were observed engaging in kleptoparasitism — harassing boobies into dropping their catches — while others were spotted hunting directly at the surface. A single White-tailed Tropicbird was also recorded near Cayman Brac, reflecting its preference for coastal waters.

The survey consistently found higher bird activity near the offshore Banks, pointing to these areas as likely hotspots for seabird foraging. While no large multi-species feeding aggregations were observed, the dataset lays important groundwork for future research into how oceanographic conditions shape wildlife distribution across Cayman waters — knowledge that will be essential for informed, evidence-based conservation planning across the region.

**Contact: Jane Haakonsson** (Jane.Haakonsson@gov.ky), Department of Environment, Cayman Islands Government

Photo: Jane Haakonsson and Matt Southgate survey seabirds and marine mammals from the bridge of the *RRS James Cook* during the Beyond the Reef expedition. (J. Haakonsson).

## Potential effects of the 2024 marine heat wave on seabirds at Culebra, Puerto Rico

We are studying three species of seabirds (the Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, and White-tailed Tropicbird) at Culebra National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico. We did not detect avian influenza in any of the birds that we sampled during 2024 and 2025, based on antibody assays (IDEXX).

We have also followed the body condition, physiological condition, and trophic ecology of these species during the breeding and nonbreeding phases. We measured body condition based on mass:dimensional ratios (mass / diagonal tarsus x wing chord x total head). We measured physiological condition with baseline corticosterone and feather corticosterone. We analyzed trophic ecology with stable isotopes (C,N) analysis.

We noted shifts in trophic ecology that corresponded with broad environmental patterns. During 2024, a marine heat wave created record ocean heat content while, during 2025, there was a large influx of Sargassum. The marine conditions appeared to be more favorable in 2026. This year, more seabirds were present near Culebra, and the breeding phenology was earlier, particularly for Sooty Terns. Local partners also reported more signs of sardines in 2026. By contrast, temperatures in spring 2026 were cooler than usual and plant phenology was delayed compared to previous years. Some nest sites that were shaded by vegetation during the past two years were open during May and early June 2026. Laughing Gulls, which can depredate eggs and chicks, were present at colonies 2024 and 2025 but they were not observed at the colonies in 2026.

**Contact: Hector Douglas** (douglashe@gram.edu), Grambling State University

Photo: Sooty Tern at Culebra National Wildlife Refuge (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

## Elsewhere in the region:

- In **Cuba**, seabird studies have been significantly impacted by the complex situation affecting the country, especially since late January 2026. Recent measures implemented by the U.S. administration have resulted in significant socioeconomic issues, including major fuel shortages. This has prevented access and monitoring of seabird breeding colonies. Despite significant efforts by Cuban colleagues to monitor their usual working areas, their endeavor proved to be unfeasible. They are currently looking at new strategies to ensure the continuity of fieldwork during the next breeding season.

- Between 2023-2025, marine biologists and conservationists from the **Caribbean Cetacean Society** collected seabird data during sailboat expeditions as part of their Ti Whale An Nou program. Surveys took place across the Lesser Antilles and the ABC islands. Close to 10,000 seabird sightings were recorded, showing strong community structure, with sulids, frigatebirds and tropical terns being the most numerous taxa. Several species of conservation concern (like Black-capped Petrel and Black Noddy) were also recorded, exclusively in restricted areas offshore. A manuscript is in preparation. **Contact: Solène Baudillon**, Caribbean Cetacean Society (solene.baudillon@ccs-ngo.com)

- Planning for the removal of invasive predators and restoration of seabirds on Alto Velo island in the **Dominican Republic** continues. American Bird Conservancy, SOH Conservación, and Island Conservation are working with the Ministry of the Environment on developing an operational plan and collecting baseline information. Sooty Terns were documented breeding in December and small numbers of Brown Noddies in June. Efforts to count them are ongoing. Plans for social attraction and other seabird restoration and monitoring work are being developed for after invasive rats and feral cats are removed from the island, which will occur when all required funding is secured. **Contact: Brad Keitt**, American Bird Conservancy (bkeitt@abcbirds.org)

**We missed your seabird project? We want to hear about it!**
**Please send updates through this form: https://forms.gle/p2X9xj8WUMd5xDA1A**

# Upcoming Conferences

## BirdsCaribbean 25th International Conference, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 23-27 July 2026

BirdsCaribbean is organizing its 25th International Conference in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. From 23–27 July, attendees will showcase their conservation projects and discuss the conference's theme *Birds, People, Prosperity: Harnessing the Caribbean's Natural Advantage*. This theme celebrates the power of birds and nature as drivers of resilient economic growth. For more information, visit birdscaribbeanconference.org.


On the morning of 26 July, two sessions have been set aside for presentations on seabird conservation and research. And, during the afternoon of 27 July, a workshop will formalize a subgroup of the BirdsCaribbean Seabird Working Group focused on the Sargasso Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*). A meeting of the Black-capped Petrel Working Group will also take place on 26 July.

As a preview of the seabird sessions, we share the list of seabird abstracts selected for the conference:

**Rhiannon Austin** et al. Local and regional population estimation of tropical subterranean shearwaters. [Oral presentation]

**Allanson Cruickshank** et al. Restoring seabird nesting habitat through Invasive goat removal on Battowia and the Pillories, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. [Poster presentation]

**Antonio Garcia Quintas** et al. Seabirds bioindicate contrasting mercury levels from several breeding sites in Cuba. [Oral presentation]

**John Griffith** et al. Tracking reproductive patterns of Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) on Sandy Island, Grenada through a decade of environmental change. [Poster presentation]

**Ernesto Hernández Pérez** et al. Aspects of the breeding ecology of the Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*) in the Lanzanillo–Pajonal–Fragoso Wildlife Refuge, Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago, Cuba. [Oral presentation]

**Dalila Lezcano** et al. Current status and dynamics of elements of marine coastal ornithological diversity in the Guanahacabibes Peninsula Biosphere Reserve, Cuba. [Oral presentation]

**Shivam Mahadeo** et al. Voices in the Dark: Revealing Tobago's Hidden Shearwaters Through Counts, Sound and Sight. [Oral presentation]

**Alexis Marianes** et al. Island of Wings: Tracking T&T's Offshore Colonies Coastal Strongholds. [Oral presentation]

**Alcides Morales-Pérez** et al. Monitoring breeding colonies and nesting success of White-tailed Tropicbirds (*Phaeton lepturus catesbyi*) in the north-west Coastal Cliffs Important Bird Area in Puerto Rico. [Oral presentation]

**Andrea Thomen** et al. Advancing conservation of *Pterodroma hasitata* (Black-capped Petrel) in Hispaniola. [Oral presentation]

**Adriana Vallarino** et al. Trophic ecology of terns in the Mexican Caribbean. [Oral presentation]

**Ajhemae White** et al. From ashes to habitats: Colonisation of new volcanic landscapes by Least Terns (*Sternula antillarum*) in Montserrat. [Oral presentation]

## 4th World Seabird Conference, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 7-11 September 2026

The World Seabird Union is organizing its 4th World Seabird Conference in Hobart, Australia between 7-11 September. Held once every five years, the World Seabird Conference is the world's biggest meeting dedicated to seabird research, conservation, and community engagement. In a time of rapid environmental change, seabird scientists, students, and practitioners will discuss this year's conference theme *Wings of Adaptation: Seabirds in a Changing Climate* and examine how seabirds are responding and adapting to the pressures of climate change, shifting ecosystems, and human impacts.SWG's co-chair Yvan Satgé will represent the working group with a poster entitled "*The 2023-2024 Caribbean Seabird Census: A collaborative effort to assess and conserve seabird populations in the Caribbean archipelago*".

A photo contest is also orgnized to liven up the conference. Photos will be displayed during the Conference Welcome, and morning and afternoon tea breaks. Prizes for 1st, 2nd, 3rd place, and People's Choice will be awarded. Don't hesitate to represent the region and submit your photos of Caribbean seabirds!

Contact Yvan for details or questions (ysatge@clemson.edu).

## A seabird story

You wake up with your body covered with a perfect coat of waterproof feathers. The salty wind dries your back while you fly over the ocean in search of food. Since you were born, you learned to trust the sea: all that you are depends on what you find on its surface and under its waves. Fish, squid, small crustaceans. You are a seabird and this keeps you alive and gives you the energy to return to your nest and feed your chicks. But something has changed.

One day, you pick from the water an object that looks like food. It floats, smells like the sea, and lets itself be caught easily. You carry it in your bill to your nest, and so your chicks devour it with desperation. Yet they keep asking for more. They scream with the same insatiable hunger as always. You begin to feel it too. Your stomach is full, but you don't feel nourished. Your body grows heavy. What you swallow doesn't digest. You lose weight. You grow weak. Every flight takes more effort. It's not worms or some mysterious illness. It's plastic.

Without knowing, you mistook pieces of bags, lids, nets, and packaging for real food. The ocean that once provided you with fish is now littered with objects that humans made. Some are large and visible;

others are so small you can't see them. Microplastics measure less than a millimeter, and nanoplastics are even smaller, thousands of times smaller. But they all share a disturbing characteristic: they practically never disappear. They break down, disperse, and remain.

In the ocean, those pieces take on the scent of food. Microorganisms grow on their surface, releasing sulfur compounds—the very scent you use to locate krill and other prey in the vastness of the sea. Your extraordinary sense of smell, which has allowed you to survive for millions of years, may now betray you.

Once you swallow plastic, it is almost impossible for you to get it out. It accumulates in your stomach, takes up space, and makes you feel falsely full. Soon, your body stops receiving enough nutrients. What is more, these fragments release chemicals capable of disrupting your hormones, weakening your immune system, and affecting your fertility. Plastics also carry contaminants and microorganisms that may be harmful for you. And the worst is that your chicks, still growing, are even more vulnerable than you.

Living on a remote island cannot even protect you. Marine currents and winds carry trash everywhere on the planet. Torn nets, synthetic fibers, invisible particles make it to your colony, where they mix with branches and seaweeds in the nests. Your story is also that of thousands of marine species. And, in the end, it is the story of humans themselves. The ocean gives them food, oxygen, water, a stable climate and economic livelihood. If they keep filling it up with plastic, they are not only putting your future at risk but also theirs.

Perhaps you will never understand where those strange objects floating between the waves come from. But it depends on the humans to understand in time that every discarded plastic bag, every unnecessary package, and every choice to buy something has consequences that reach even the most remote corners of the planet. If *they* change, perhaps your descendants will continue to cross the seas and return each year to the same islands to raise their chicks. If they don't, one day the ocean will fall silent.

**Adriana Vallarino**
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## Recent Seabird Publications and Resources

Below is a list of recent publications and resources on Caribbean seabirds, and on themes that may be of interest to the Caribbean community of seabird enthusiasts. Most publications are free to access but, if that is not the case, we encourage asking the authors directly for a copy: authors are usually very keen to share their research.

**Nutrient connectivity via seabirds enhances dynamic measures of coral reef ecosystem function (2025) Cassandra E. Benkwitt et al.** *PLoS Biol 23(7): e3003222* DOI:10.1371/journal.pbio.3003222. The authors investigated how seabird guano influences coral reefs. In the inner Seychelles, they quantified seaweed and fish biomass and productivity at sites with a range of seabird densities due to different rat invasion histories. Turf algae grew faster with increasing amounts of guano, fueling productivity and biomass of herbivorous fishes. In contrast, seabird guano did not increase cover of turf algae nor did turf algal cover affect herbivores.

**A roundtable on marine protected area finance: Lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean on four keys to success for improving financial sustainability (2025) John Bohorquez et al.** *Marine Policy 182* DOI:10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106891. Marine Protected Areas (MPA) around the world are often limited by insufficient financial resources for enforcement, monitoring, and other activities. The authors propose levers for improving financial sustainability, diversifying income and innovating MPA mechanisms, strengthening internal financial capacity, leveraging partnerships to support financial sustainability, and aligning policies to remove barriers to entry.

**A Seabird's Messages to the Blue Humanities: The Frigatebird, Steward of Water, Land and Cultures (2025) Chadia Chambers-Samadi.** *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics 48(3).* To exemplify the importance of interdisciplinary research in a time where conservation efforts will determine our future, this essay proposes a seabird, more specifically the frigatebird, as a steward of conservation for waters, lands and culture. Frigatebird representations from the Pacific, where the bird is mostly revered, confront the seabird's symbolism in the Caribbean for the Atlantic realm, and more specifically in Martinique and Guadeloupe where, despite its ability to guide seamen, the bird is not always associated with good omens. In all texts encountered across oceans in the francophone world, the frigatebird's unique ability to glide endlessly, its piracy skills and its inability for a seabird to dive in the water allow us to determine that it becomes a steward of land, water and culture (literal and metaphorical) as a model of transformation and adaptability in a fast-changing environment.

**High-Resolution Satellite Telemetry Data Reveal Full Migration Cycle of Gulf of Maine-Breeding Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) (2025) Aliya Caldwell et al.** *Waterbirds 48(3)* DOI:10.1675/063.048.0301. This study analyzes satellite data collected from Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) breeding in the Gulf of Maine, USA, to explore non-breeding movement behavior. It details the space use and movement behavior of Common Terns across the full non-breeding cycle (including the Caribbean), which is critical for informing conservation efforts in the face of impacts from anthropogenic infrastructure, pollution, and climate change.

**Records of Cetaceans and Birds in a Pelagic Transect Between La Guaira and Isla de Aves, Venezuela, Southern Caribbean (2026) Sergio Cobarrubia-Russo et al.** *Caribbean Journal of Science 56(1)* DOI:10.18475/cjos.v56i1.a19. Venezuela encompasses a significant portion of the Caribbean Sea, largely due to the presence of Isla de Aves, which is situated 666 km from the mainland but hosts a scientific-naval base (the Simón Bolívar Scientific-Naval Base). The authors leveraged these cruises to survey cetacean and bird populations, with the objective of determining their distribution along a range of five degrees of latitude. During the first three surveys, which were conducted in 2023, 12 species of birds were recorded in 120 samples (three Sulidae, one Phaethontidae, one Fregatidae, four Sternidae, one Hydrobatidae, one Scolopacidae, and one Laridae).

**Biodiversity Assessments of Pigeon Island, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, West Indies (2025) Juliana Coffey.** *Report prepared for the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Environment Fund*. The author assessed nesting birds (especially seabirds), reptilian presence, vegetation cover, and introduced mammals on Pigeon Island (known locally as Ramier Island), a government-owned wildlife reserve in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Pigeon Island is one of the sites that has been highlighted as a site of intended restoration, due to its status as a wildlife reserve and past notoriety for seabird populations. Red-billed Tropicbird and Brown Noddy were nesting on the island, with Brown Booby, Laughing Gull, and Magnificent Frigatebird observed roosting or flying over. Black rats and sheep were recorded with camera traps.

**The First Zooarchaeological Synthesis of the Leeward Antilles (Caribbean): Trends and Implications for Archaeology and Conservation (2026) Christine Conlan and Christina Giovas.** *Environmental Archaeology*DOI:10.1080/14614103.2026.2666441. While the Caribbean has received increased zooarchaeological attention in recent years, the southern islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao (the ABC islands) remain understudied, with much of the existing data scattered throughout the published and grey literature. The authors combine faunal data from 26 archaeological sites dating from ca. 4000 BC to the late nineteenth century to provide the first synthesis of zooarchaeological data for the ABC islands. They identify spatial and regional trends in the available faunal assemblage data and reveal current knowledge gaps that prevent meaningful integration of zooarchaeological data into environmental and heritage conservation planning.

**What Can Bird Poop Teach Us about the History of U.S. Imperialism?: Guano Islands and Manifest Destiny Beyond Continental Borders (2025) Eliot Fackler.** *The Councilor 88(2).* By examining the Antebellum guano rush and its devastating consequences, this article highlights the lasting impacts of the 1856 Guano Islands Act and links the guano rush to subsequent empire-building efforts, U.S. militarism, and ecological destruction.

**Breeding phenology and reproductive success of larid species nesting in Cuba (2025) Antonio Garcia-Quintas et al.** *Marine Ornithology, 53(2)* DOI: 10.5038/2074-1235.53.2.1643. The Caribbean constitutes a breeding hotspot for seabirds, although information about their phenology and reproductive success is limited. The authors characterized the breeding phenology and reproductive success of seven larid species during the 2021 breeding season on three cays in Cuba. Through weekly surveys and camera trap monitoring, they recorded the number of nests, eggs and fledglings. Overall, breeding phenology was seasonal and relatively synchronous, occurring primarily from May to August, possibly reflecting increased prey availability during the

rainy season in Cuba. Additionally, denser vegetation cover—resulting from higher rainfall—may offer greater protection against predators. Reproductive success was high (≥ 50% per pair) for Laughing Gull, Sooty Tern, and Roseate Tern in all cays, while Bridled Tern and Royal Tern exhibited variable reproductive performance between cays.

**Distribution and density of seabirds at sea around Cuba (2025) Antonio Garcia-Quintas et al.** *Bulletin of Marine Science, 102(2)* DOI:10.5343/bms.2024.0133. Cuba hosts a large number of seabird breeding colonies, but lacks extensive information on the at-sea distribution and density of seabirds. Between July and September 2023, the authors conducted seabird surveys at sea, as part of a multidisciplinary marine expedition throughout the Cuban archipelago. They recorded eight families of seabirds, with Laridae (gulls and terns) and Fregatidae (frigatebirds) exhibiting the highest density at the regional scale. The Southwest and North Central regions hosted the highest diversity (number of families), while the Southwest, South Central, and Northwest showed the highest densities of seabirds. Phoenicopteridae had significantly higher density than Laridae and Fregatidae, and the latter two showed higher densities than Phaethontidae (tropicbirds) at the transect scale.

**Prioritisation of conservation areas for tropical breeding Laridae under current and future development plans (2025) Antonio Garcia-Quintas et al.** *Biological Conservation 311* DOI:10.1016/j.biocon.2025.111447. The authors implemented systematic reserve site selection algorithms to identify important conservation areas for the breeding habitats of Laridae in Cuba, considering four of the most significant human pressures: fishing, wind farms, coastal tourism and nightlight pollution. They compared the conservation areas identified with the existing marine protected areas to highlight conservation needs for Cuban Laridae. Spatial patterns of the proposed areas were relatively consistent across different socioeconomic prioritisation scenarios, regardless of the conservation target. The findings underscore the importance of designing marine protected areas based on conservation and economic interests simultaneously, particularly to conserve highly threatened biota like seabirds.

**What to eat when far from home? A vagrant seabird selects novel but analogous prey (2025) William Kennerley et al.** *Marine Ornithology, 53*(2) DOI:10.5038/2074-1235.53.2.1644. From 2005 to 2021, a Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, far outside its usual range, was a summer resident at Seal Island, Maine, USA. In 2020 and 2021, the authors collected fecal samples from this individual and identified prey types consumed via DNA metabarcoding techniques. Atlantic Saury *Scomberesox saurus* and Atlantic Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* contributed ~75% of DNA reads. These two species have not previously been documented in the diet of Red-billed Tropicbirds, yet they were important in both years despite contrasting environmental conditions.

**Macroplastic pollution in Latin America and the Caribbean: a scientometric review of research trends and gaps (2026) Alan Lacerda Gomes Camargo et al.** *Latin American Journal of Aquatic Research, 54(2)* DOI:10.3856/vol54-issue2-fulltext-3500. This study reviews macroplastic research in Latin America, identifying trends, gaps, and opportunities for future studies. A total of 206 relevant studies were identified, with Marine Pollution Bulletin being the most prominent journal in this field. Research on macroplastic pollution was primarily conducted in marine coastal beaches (56.6%) and marine islands (12%), while freshwater

ecosystems (7.2%) remained underrepresented. Few studies have explored trophic transfer, plastic fragmentation, or macroplastic ingestion by non-marine species.

**Sexual dimorphism in Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) from Puerto Rico: Biometric evidence corroborated by molecular and necropsy techniques (2025) Antonio A. Mignucci-Giannoni et al.** *Waterbirds, 48(2)* DOI: 10.1675/063.048.0207. In the Puerto Rico Archipelago, historical declines of Brown Pelican populations were driven by habitat loss, food scarcity, and other human pressures. Currently, sex identification requires genetic testing, as the species lacks obvious sexual dimorphism. The authors evaluated whether morphometric measurements could provide a noninvasive alternative. Culmen length emerged as the most reliable variable for distinguishing sex. With training and experience, this morphometric may provide a preliminary field cue for sex estimation, although validation is required.

**Satellite tracking supports hypotheses of breeding allochrony and allopatry in the Endangered *Pterodroma hasitata* (Black-capped Petrel, Diablotin) (2025) Yvan Satgé et al.** *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology 38* DOI:10.55431/jco.2025.38.59-66. The authors report on pre-breeding movements of two male *Pterodroma hasitata*, each of a different morphotype, tracked by satellite from non-breeding areas in Gulf Stream waters of the western North Atlantic Ocean to breeding locations in Hispaniola in late 2019. Based on a combination of tracking locations, location error classes, battery voltage, and satellite communication schedules, they infer that the light-form petrel visited a nest in central Dominican Republic, and the dark form visited a nest in southeastern Haiti.

**Global tracking of marine megafauna space use reveals how to achieve conservation targets (2025) Ana Sequeira et al.** *Science* DOI:10.1126/science.adl0239. The authors compiled tracking data from thousands of large marine vertebrates representing more than 100 species and identified important migratory corridors and areas where many species reside. Their findings show hotspots of movement and reveal that 30% protection will be inadequate for effective conservation, particularly considering the distribution of threats to biodiversity.

**Shorebird and seabird nesting at two leatherback sea turtle nesting beaches in St. Kitts, West Indies, 2010–2013 (2025) Kimberly M. Stewart et al.** *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology 38* DOI:10.55431/jco.2025.38.39-44. The authors conducted surveys to identify nesting shorebirds and seabirds during leatherback sea turtle nesting seasons between 2010–2013 on the two main leatherback nesting beaches: Keys Beach and North Friars Beach, in St. Kitts, West Indies. Two species of shorebirds, *Anarhynchus wilsonia* (Wilson's Plover) and *Himantopus mexicanus* (Black-necked Stilt), and two species of seabirds, *Sternula antillarum* (Least Tern) and *Thalasseus maximus* (Royal Tern), were documented nesters during the study period. Establishing usage and confirming nesting by these species is critical in the development of conservation management programs to ensure these areas are protected and that disturbance to these nesting species is minimized.

**Invasive Species: Major Threat to Caribbean Netherlands Biodiversity (2025) M. Van den Burg et al.** *State of Nature Report for the Caribbean Netherlands, 2024.* WUR report C001/25 This report chapter assesses the presence and impact of invasive alien species (animals and plants) within the Dutch Caribbean. The authors reviewed recent literature to present characteristics and ecological aspects of invasive alien species,

highlighting some of the most impactful species. They also review recent developments in monitoring and management and provide recommendations for national conservation objectives.

**Identification and distribution of the brown and cocos boobies and their subspecies (2025) Eric Vanderwerf.** *Western Birds 56(3)* DOI:10.21199/WB56.3.2. The Brown–Cocos Booby complex occurs in tropical and subtropical oceans worldwide and consists of five named taxa. The Cocos Booby (*Sula brewsteri*), including the subspecies *brewsteri*, *etesiaca*, and *nesiotes*, was split recently from the Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*), which retains the subspecies *leucogaster* and *plotus*. Because information about their field identification is limited, especially for females, this article evaluates characters distinguishing the five taxa by examining 50 museum specimens and photos of 754 living Cocos and Brown Boobies from 47 locations in the ranges of all five subspecies.

**Colonization and defaunation on a small island: evidence from Quaternary fossils of Sombrero Island (2025) Lazaro Willian Viñola-Lopez et al.** *Journal of Paleontology 99(2)* DOI:10.1017/jpa.2025.10104. Sombrero is a very small island located within the limits between the Greater and Lesser Antilles and is largely barren of vegetation and freshwater. The island was extensively mined for bird guano in the 1800s, which profoundly altered its topography and fauna. The authors describe a collection of microvertebrates recovered in 1964 from Sombrero, which documents an unexpectedly high number of colonization events and high extinction rate for this territory, providing support for the role that island hopping played in regional biodiversity in the Cenozoic. These fossils further show that large scale defaunation also affected vertebrate communities on very small islands in the Caribbean.


An incubating Brown Pelican observes the photographer at a breeding colony in Sint Maarten. This photo won First Place Best Bird Photo during BirdsCaribbean's 2025 Global Big Day. (F. Milani)