



The Caribbean Seabird Initiative: Invasives

July 2010

CSI: Invasives is a project that seeks to increase regional capacity, support, and funding for invasive species work to benefit seabirds in the Caribbean region.

Oil Spill Concerns

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To date there is no indication that oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill has been transported out of the Gulf of Mexico into the Caribbean; yet, Caribbean seabirds are still at risk. Monitoring by the U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) indicates that circulation patterns now occurring in the Gulf of Mexico are preventing the movement of oil to the Florida Straits or Gulf Stream. In particular, the top of the Loop Current has pinched off as an eddy that is spinning clockwise, re-circulating within the Gulf any oil that it has collected. This phenomenon bodes well for Caribbean islands and waters, as does the prediction by NOAA that if oil is transported out of the Gulf, shoreline impacts would be in the form of scattered tar balls not a large surface slick of oil. However, even if Deepwater Horizon oil has not reached the Caribbean, Caribbean seabirds may have reached the oil. The Gulf is used for foraging by seabird species that breed in the Caribbean, Mexico, and even distant North Atlantic islands and these may be harmed by direct contact with oil or by eating or being fed oiled prey or tar balls.

The Deepwater Horizon spill response does include some at-sea surveys of seabird use in the spill zone, and authorities in Bahamas, Cuba and other Caribbean islands have invested in some collection of pre-impact ecological baseline information. Only time and the careful collection of information will tell if Caribbean seabird populations are impacted by this spill, although even then it will be difficult to quantify effects. Meanwhile, protection and management of breeding habitat, including the removal of invasive species, is a means of positioning Caribbean seabird populations to overcome possible losses from Deepwater Horizon or any other oil spills in the region.

“At present, the Loop Current does not appear to be a major source of transport of Deepwater Horizon oil to the Florida Straits or Gulf Stream.”

– NOAA, July 3

Sources of Information:

NOAA BP Oil Spill Incident Response

(http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/dwh.php?entry_id=815).

The Regional Activity Center/Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Information and Training Center (REMPEITC) for the Caribbean

(<http://www.cep.unep.org/racrempeitc>)

Shearwater die-offs: Though seemingly unrelated to the oil spill, a die-off of Greater Shearwaters and other migratory seabirds is being documented this season. People observing dead or dying seabirds are asked to take careful observations. For the Caribbean, contact Will Mackin willmackin@gmail.com for more information. In the U.S., please see <http://seanetters.wordpress.com/2010/06/15/shearwater-season/SEANET>.

Outcomes of the New Zealand IAS Workshop

Over a dozen participants linked to the Caribbean attended “Helping Islands Adapt: a Workshop on Regional Action to Combat Invasive Alien Species on Islands to Preserve Biodiversity and Adapt to Climate Change,” held in Auckland, New Zealand in April. During the five day workshop, the group highlighted successes, deepened connections within the region and facilitated the exchange of experiences with other regions (Coral Triangle, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean). While discussions outlined significant obstacles to invasive alien species management on islands, they also showcased how targeted successes have led to major gains for conservation. New initiatives are developing to demonstrate large-scale management of invasive alien species across island regions, and illustrate that collaboration across developmental and environmental sectors and sustained support are critical to success in the field. Plans are currently underway to develop a process for following-up on regional activities stemming from the workshop, which would enable continued sharing of information across regions and identification of further opportunities to accelerate and expand collaborative activities at the international and regional levels.



Caribbean-linked participants in NZ:

Top, l to r: Mat DaCosta-Cottam;

Dalia Maria Salabarría; Lloyd

Gamble; Olivia Renshaw; Spencer

Thomas; David Knowles; Dawn

Deavin; Bob Ramnanan.

Bottom, l to r: Jennifer Wheeler;

Nelsa English; Frank Lowenstein.

Not shown: Brad Keitt; Judy Pierce;

James Millett.

Specific follow-up activities by the Caribbean working group include:

- Steps to create a regional strategy to address threats of invasive alien species to trade, biodiversity and livelihoods. (See CABI GEF IAS Project story in this newsletter.)
- Development of a hub for networking and facilitating cross-island projects. (Contact Mat DaCosta-Cottam, Manager, Department of Environment, Cayman Islands, Mat.Cottam@gov.ky)
- Exploration of the possibility of market research to develop appropriate marketing tools. (Contact: Frank Lowenstein, Specialist, The Nature Conservancy, flowenstein@tnc.org)
- Link to other regional efforts and international organizations. (See Helpful Links section below.)

Visit

<http://www.conference.co.nz/index.cfm/ISW10/index.cfm/ISW10> for more information on outcomes and participants.

Helpful Link

The Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII) is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of Pacific Island Countries and Territories to effectively manage invasive species threats. However, much of the Information and Tools developed for that region can apply to the Caribbean.

Visit <http://www.issg.org/CII/pii/index.html>

Invasive Species and Climate Change

The workshop “Helping Islands Adapt” (see story above) took its name from the premise that invasive alien species management, by fostering ecosystem health, represents an effective form of ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change. The Global Invasive Species Program (GISP) is finalizing a report on this topic, which investigates the integration of climate change and invasive species concerns using case studies. The preliminary recommendations for the policy-making and scientific communities include:

- Integrate invasive species concerns into assessments of climate change impacts, and specifically in relation to ecosystem-based adaptation activities and plans.
- When considering priority ecosystem functions for climate change adaptation, identify existing invasive species or anticipated species that could affect those functions in order to prioritize prevention and management actions.
- Support inter- and intra-agency dialogue and integrate invasive species in national climate adaptation strategies and action plans and climate change into national invasive species strategies and action plans.
- Prevent the intentional and unintentional introduction of new invasive species as a matter of good practice.
- Avoid the use of known invasive species in habitat restoration activities.



Some seabirds now nesting on low-lying islands may be subject to sea level rise. The future of these birds is dependent on intense restoration and site protection on higher islands to provide them with suitable, predator-free breeding sites.

Contact Stas Burgiel, Policy Director, Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP), s.burgiel@gisp.org

CABI GEF IAS Project

The development of a regional strategy to combat the threat posed by invasive alien species to trade, biodiversity and livelihoods of the Insular Caribbean is one part of a project titled “Mitigating the Threat of Invasive Alien Species in the Insular Caribbean (MITIASIC)” This US\$6.4 million UNEP-GEF-funded project is being managed by CAB International (CABI), based in Trinidad, in cooperation with partners. Though funding for actual pilot projects is available only for a limited number of countries, the regional strategy is envisioned as a tool for organizations in all Caribbean nations to develop or enhance their own strategies. In June, the project held a Regional Consultation workshop to gain consensus on the need for and content of the regional strategy. Participants agreed that development of a draft strategy was a good first step and guide for building national capacity, specified core components and associated actions, and decided to craft specialized strategies based on distinct ecological groupings (terrestrial, freshwater and marine). October 2010 is the target deadline for completing the strategy.

Contact Bob Ramnanan, Project Manager, CABI, b.ramnanan@cabi.org, +1 868 662 4173; +1 868 645 7628 for more details, as well as information on an Impact Assessment Training held in conjunction with the regional consultation.

Threats to Seabirds in the Eastern Caribbean

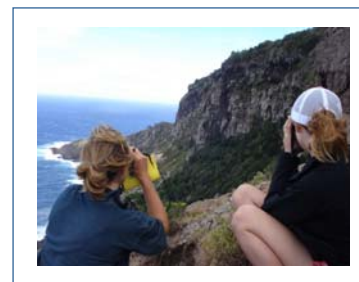
An ambitious census of breeding seabirds in the Eastern Caribbean, wrapping up this month, has also involved the collection of new information on the presence of invasive predators and herbivores. The census extends from Grenada to Anguilla and is an undertaking of Environmental Protection In the Caribbean (EPIC) in partnership with Katharine and David Lowrie. Begun in February 2009, the census involves two visits to each island in the study area (during the dry and wet season). The product of this work, a Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles, is expected by 2011.

The presence of invasive predators and herbivores was recorded throughout the study area, with rat trapping on offshore islands. Here is a brief report of the findings. Goats are ubiquitous on all main islands, but have also been found on many of the small offshore cays from Dog Island (Anguilla) to Battowia and the diminutive c.500 m² Mushroom Island in the Grenada Grenadines. In St. Kitts, vervet monkeys were observed returning from salt pans rich in breeding Black-necked Stilts, Least Terns and Roseate Terns, while mongoose there likely exact their own toll on seabird populations. Six rats were recorded during daytime surveys on Redonda, home to seven species of breeding seabirds. Saba, in the Netherland Antilles, likely supports the Eastern Caribbean's largest population of breeding Audubon's Shearwater, yet feral cats and rats range throughout their breeding areas.

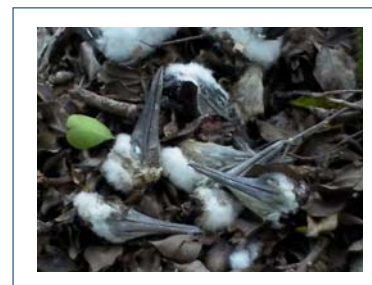
One of the most startling findings of the study, however, has been the harvesting of eggs, chicks and adult seabirds by people. This has been recorded particularly in the Grenadines, but not exclusively. Outboard engines allow fishermen to reach previously remote seabird cays, where rubbish, seabird remains and traps mark their passing. On Les Tantes, in the Grenadines, a man harvested over 80% of the Brown Booby chicks, whilst on Petit Canouan, also in the Grenadines, burning of habitat is being used to facilitate the harvest of Sooty Tern eggs; 'shoot-outs' are reputed to occur between rival eggers. After discussions with governments, NGOs and interest groups throughout the region, it has become clear that the key to halting the harvesting of seabirds must include appropriate legislation, enforcement and education.

Contact Katharine and David Lowrie, Environmental Protection In the Caribbean (EPIC), klowrie@epicislands.org, <http://www.epicislands.org>.

Find this newsletter posted at <http://wicbirds.net>



The EPIC team surveying for tropicbirds on the island of Saba



The severed heads of Brown Booby chicks harvested in the Grenadines



CSI: Invasives is an initiative of Waterbird Conservation for the Americas, a partnership with the vision that the distribution, diversity and abundance of populations and habitats of breeding, migratory and non-breeding waterbirds are sustained or restored throughout the lands and waters of the Americas.
www.waterbirdconservation.org