

# Seabird Conservation Status Report: Antigua-Barbuda-Redonda<sup>1</sup>

Prepared by Kevel Lindsay and Bruce Horwith

**island resources**  
FOUNDATION

*Eastern Caribbean Biodiversity Programme*  
*Biodiversity Publication #4*

June 1997

Seabirds have been the least studied group of birds in the eastern Caribbean country of Antigua-Barbuda. With the exception of the Least Tern, the species listed below only nest on the offshore islands and access requires the use of a boat. Visits to these islands and observations by birders and other interested people are therefore infrequent.

In the past, the main threat to seabirds was by people harvesting eggs. This practice climaxed in the late 1970s/early 1980s, and there has been a gradual decline since. Today, only a handful of fishermen carry on this tradition, and only occasionally.

Even in the absence of detailed quantitative data, it appears that the numbers of nesting and visiting birds has declined. As late as 1978, Holland and Williams reported seeing several species nesting in the hundreds, that now number only in the dozens (*e.g.*, Roseate and Sooty Terns).

The extent of the decline is not known, however, and several species still nest in fairly large numbers within the country taken as a whole. Laughing Gulls presently nest in the hundreds in Antigua; Least Terns and Common (or Roseate) Terns nest in the hundreds in Barbuda.

Factors that have been blamed for the decline include over-harvesting of eggs, the noise resulting from military testing in the 1970s, a dramatic increase in recreational use of the offshore islands, introduction of rats to the offshore islands, and degradation of marine resources. By far, the most pressing conservation threat today is the loss of habitat that would result if proposed commercial development on the offshore islands of the North Sound is realized.

Redonda, more so than any of the other islands within the country, is very infrequently visited and may have been able to maintain fairly large stable

---

<sup>1</sup> *This status report was presented as a paper at the annual meeting of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology held in Aruba, August 1997.*

populations of some seabird species. The island is extremely difficult and time-consuming to visit.

Starting in the spring of 1996, Island Resources Foundation initiated a seabird monitoring programme. The focus has been the North Sound, but other islands off the coast of Antigua have been included on an *ad hoc* basis. We have been recording species, population estimates, breeding estimates, breeding sites, egg and hatchling estimates. Monitoring is based on bi-weekly or monthly visits during April to July, depending on available time and resources. Including Barbuda and Redonda in the monitoring programme, or minimally to at least conduct baseline surveys there, is a conservation priority.

### **Species Accounts**

[NOTE: All notes are those of the authors unless otherwise indicated.]

**Manx Shearwater:** fossil record from Antigua (Halewyn and Norton, 1988) and Barbuda (Pregill *et al*, 1994).

**Audubon's Shearwater:** nesting sites on Antigua and Barbuda known to have been abandoned since 1900 (Halewyn and Norton, 1984); regularly encountered in coastal waters and may breed in Redonda.

**Leach's, Wilson's and Madeiran Storm-petrels:** occasionally seen in low numbers.

**Red-billed Tropicbird:** breed on Great Bird Island and Guiana Island in North Sound (10); York Island, Smith, Green on east coast (5-20). At least 50 nests in Barbuda; breeds on Redonda in unknown numbers (Halewyn and Norton, 1984).

**Yellow-billed Tropicbird:** known from fossil records (Pregill *et al*, 1988). Recorded for Barbuda (van Halewyn and Norton, 1984).

**Brown Pelican:** breed on Hells Gate, Rabbit Island, Red Head Island and Hawes Island (at least until the 1995 hurricanes) in North Sound (30 nests); 50-75 nests on Maiden Island on west coast of Antigua.

**Brown Booby:** only booby seen around Antigua, and encountered frequently; most common booby occurring in Redonda, but all three boobies observed to breed there. An unidentified booby species is known from the fossil record for Antigua (Pregill *et al*, 1984).

**Masked Booby:** see above.

**Red-footed Booby:** see above.

**Magnificent Frigatebird:** approximately 2500 nests in Barbuda; 50-100 nests on Redonda; until recently a few nested on the largest of the Five Islands off of the west coast of Antigua.

**Pomarine Skua:** occasionally seen.

**Laughing Gull:** listed as a common resident that breeds on offshore islands ("generally never seen in flocks larger than 25 birds, but 400+ seen at MacKinnon Pond" [Holland and Williams, 1978]). We have seen flocks of several hundred in North Sound in 1995 and 1996. May breed on Barbuda's northwest coast.

**Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull and Black-backed Gull** (not sure if Greater or Lesser): regular visitors in very low numbers.

**Gull-billed Tern:** occasionally seen; Holland and Williams (1978) make no mention of breeding.

**Royal Tern:** Holland and Williams (1978) report it as the most common tern in winter, scarce in summer; no mention of breeding.

**Sandwich Tern:** Holland and Williams (1978) found it occasionally in large flocks in summer, not observed in winter. Although they make no mention of it breeding, we observed about 15-25 pairs on sand bar west of Codrington Lagoon in 1997, in the company of Common Terns and Least Terns.

**Roseate Tern:** Holland and Williams (1978) reported 100+ breeding colony in May on eastern end of York Island (Mill Reef) for several years; but no longer breed in these numbers, if at all (an unidentified tern species breeds in North Sound in low numbers today).

**Common Tern:** Holland and Williams (1978) report seeing it in fall migration. Although they make no mention of breeding, we observed upwards of 500 nests on the sand bar west of Codrington Lagoon in 1997. They were nesting in the company of Least Terns and Sandwich Terns.

**Black Tern:** identified by Gricks in 1993.

**Bridled Tern:** in 1997, approximately 70 nests observed in North Sound — Great Bird Island (15-20 nests on south end of ridge), Monocle Point (2 nests), Rabbit Island (10-15 nests), unnamed island east of Jenny Island (5 nests), Hell's Gate Island (4 nests), Galley Islands (24 nests), unnamed island north of Great Bird Island (4 nests), Little Bird Island (1 nest).

**Sooty Tern:** 30 nests observed in May-June, 1996; 50-70 in May-June, 1997 — on north ridge of Great Bird Island in two colonies. Holland and Williams

(1978) report several hundred nesting on Great Bird Island and other North Sound islands, and seeing the bird in low numbers all seasons in North Sound.

**Least Tern:** Holland and Williams (1978) reported it as a "common summer breeder, inhabiting any sandy flat area from April to September". We have seen 10 pair nest on Byams Wharf in Antigua, and isolated pairs elsewhere in Antigua. At least in the hundreds in Barbuda — Gricks observed 330 birds on September 13, 1993 at Spanish Point, Barbuda, and we observed hundreds nesting in 1997, on the sand bar west of Codrington Lagoon, in the company of Common Terns and Sandwich Terns. The three species were concentrated in a part of the narrow strip that was breached during the 1995 hurricane season.

**Black Noddy:** spring and fall migrant in low numbers; no mention of breeding.

**Brown Noddy:** summer breeder in dozens in May and June on Great Bird Island and North Sound islands; Holland and Williams (1978) reported several hundred breeding pairs.

**REFERENCES**

[Note: Key references are in bold]

**Bond, J. 1980. Birds of the West Indies. Fourth edition. Houghton Mifflin Company. 256 pp.**

Cory, CB. 1891. A collection of birds taken by Cyrus S. Winch in the islands of Anguilla, Antigua, and St. Eustatius. *The Auk*, V8(1):46-7.

Cory, CB. 1891. Notes on West Indian birds. *The Auk*, V8(1):41-6.

Danforth, ST. 1934. The birds of Antigua. *The Auk*, V51(3):350-364.

**Evans, P. 1990. Birds of the Eastern Caribbean. MacMillan Caribbean. 162 pp.**

**Gricks, N, B Horwith and K Lindsay. 1997. Birds of Antigua-Barbuda-Redonda. Unpublished in files of Island Resources Foundation.**

**Holland, CS and JM Williams. 1978. Observations on the birds of Antigua. *American Birds*, V32(6):1095-1105.**

Horwith, B and K Lindsay. 1997. Wildlife Report. Submitted to Ivor Jackson and Associates. Unpublished in files of Island Resources Foundation.

Island Resources Foundation. 1997. Bird Island Marine Reserve Management Plan. Prepared for the Organization of American States.

Lawrence, GN. 1878. Catalogue of the birds of Antigua and Barbuda, from collections made for the Smithsonian Institution, by Mr. Fred A. Ober, with his observations. *Proceedings of the United States National Museum*, V1:232-42.

Lawrence, GN. 1879. A general catalogue of birds noted from the Lesser Antilles visited by Mr. Fred A. Ober; with a table showing their distribution, and those found in the United States. *Proceedings of the United States National Museum*, V1:486-8.

**Mussington, John. 1997. Pers comm. Mussington is a marine biologist residing in Barbuda.**

Pregill, GKD, W Steadman, SL Olson, and FV Grady. 1988. Late Holocene fossil vertebrates from Burma Quarry, Antigua, Lesser Antilles. *Smithsonian Contr. Zool.*, V463:1-17.

Pregill, GKD, DW Steadman and DR Watters. 1994. Late Quaternary Vertebrate Faunas of the Lesser Antilles: Historical Components of Caribbean Biogeography. *Bulletin of Carnegie Museum of Natural History*. Number 30. 51 pp.

Riley, JH. 1905. Catalogue of a collection of birds from Barbuda and Antigua, British West Indies. Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, V47:277-91.

Schwartz, A and RF Klinikoski. 1963. Observations on West Indian birds. Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, V155(3):53-77.

Spencer, W. 1981. A Guide to the Birds of Antigua. 16 pp. Unpublished in files of Island Resources Foundation.

Terborgh, JW, J Faaborg and HJ Brockmann. 1978. Island colonization by Lesser Antillean birds. *The Auk*, V95:59-72.

Terborgh, JW and J Faaborg. 1980. Saturation of bird communities in the West Indies. *American Naturalist*, V116(2):178-95.

van Halewyn, R, and RL Norton. 1984. The Status and Conservation of Seabirds in the Caribbean. ICBP Technical Publication No. 2. pp. 169-222.