

BIRDS JOIN THE DOTS:

A way to realizing Cayman's conservation goals

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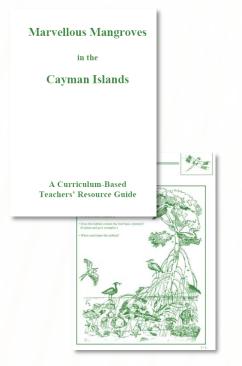
Flagship species on which to build conservation outreach and participation projects

2013 saw a renewed commitment to the environment at Ministry level in the Cayman Islands government and the passage of a longawaited National Conservation Law for the Cayman Islands. The law added protection of the terrestrial environment to the marine protections that had begun over 25 years earlier. Among its objectives the new legislation adds statutory weight to the adoption of habitat and species conservation plans, enables the designation of terrestrial as well as marine Protected Areas, and promotes wider Understanding and Awareness of the significance of ecological systems and the involvement of Voluntary Citizen Scientists in research and monitoring.

Birds have long played key roles, both as recipients and as promoters of conservation endeavours. Five new and continuing examples in the Cayman Islands are illustrated in the panels below. Birds and their natural habitats lie at the heart of each initiative. They range from long-term NGO-lead schools programmes to the actions of small groups or even single individuals.

Directly or indirectly, each promotes the valuing of biodiversity and ecosystem services which needs to be more widely adopted if Cayman as a country is going to secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources as mandated by the 2009 Constitution. The new law now offers mechanisms for both the government and the private sector to effect significant protection of both marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

Mangrove Ecosystem Education – a new generation learns why we need Protected Areas



The National Trust has offered a Marvelous Mangroves workshop to public primary school Year 5 pupils annually for fifteen years. The curriculum was first developed by Martin Keeley in Cayman; it has gone on to become a cornerstone for the Mangrove Action Programme.

Up to 500 children each year, and an estimated 6,400 in total have participated. In the classroom they currently study the water cycle and do an experiment on salinity. When learning about the different species of mangrove, the students are not shy, to taste the salty leaves of Black Mangrove, a favoured species for parrot nesting.

The highlight of each workshop is a field trip into the Central Mangrove Wetland, regarded as the ecological lungs of Grand Cayman. Covering 8,500 acres it plays a key role in ground water regulation and contributes to the higher rainfall in the western half of the island. (MAP B).



The Wetland was identified as one of Cayman's ten Important Bird Areas in 2008 due to its value as breeding habitat for the endemic parrot, Amazona leucocephala caymanensis and the regionally vulnerable West Indian Whistling Duck.¹

Seventy-five per cent of the Wetland is without protection and a 2004 proposal for designation as a Ramsar site did not advance.











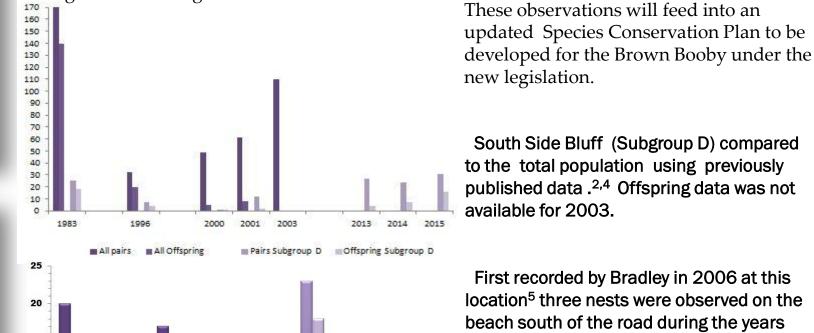


Seabird Citizen Science on Cayman Brac

The Caribbean population of Brown Booby, Sula leucoaster, was estimated to have declined by 59% between 1984 and 2007 notwithstanding a fair increase after the late 1990s.² The Cayman Brac population reflected and contributed to these regional findings up to 2003. On 8 Nov 2008 the northwest eyewall of category 4 Hurricane Paloma passed over the the eastern end of Cayman Brac with storm surge of 4-8 feet.³ This followed a lesser impact from Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

In 2010 Isabelle Brown and other resident naturalists began casual monitoring of the South Side Bluff population (MAP A). Occupied nest sites are easily visible from the road below the limestone cliff. The breeding season is long, extending from November to June but from the 2012-3 season onwards sufficient records were accumulated by the group to allow preliminary broad scale analysis and comparison to the prior years.

Of special interest and concern is the expansion of beach nesting at this location. These nests are susceptible to an additional range of challenges, especially dogs and human interference. The up-coming breeding season may also be affected by the vast amounts of Sargassum washing ashore.



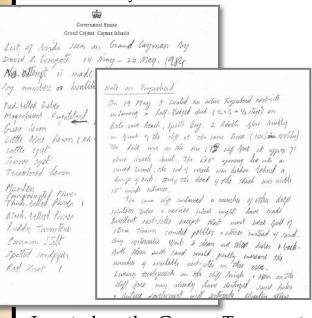
new legislation. South Side Bluff (Subgroup D) compared to the total population using previously

First recorded by Bradley in 2006 at this location⁵ three nests were observed on the beach south of the road during the years 2010-2012. Beach nesting pairs and juveniles increased dramatically this last season. Whilst pairs nesting on the Bluff top have declined over time, nests with young and surviving to juvenile stage have

National Museum promotes awareness



Passing Through was seen by over seventy five hundred visitors to the Cayman Islands National Museum and twelve hundred school children during its twelve month run. The visual and aural exhibit was curated by Christine Rose-Smyth and Wray Banker to complement the IMBD Festival held by the National Trust. It featured photography by many of the Islands' eBirders, and records from the Cayman Islands National Archive.



Right above - Miss Arthurlyn feeds RuddyTurnstones on the shore behind the Bodden family store, North Church St., George

Right below – A rare passage migrant arrived in time to be included.

Left – David Wingate's records of Tropicbird breeding 1984.

Located on the George Town waterfront (MAP D), the CINM also hosts a permanent exhibit – The Natural History Gallery – which showcases the Islands' geology and its terrestrial and marine ecosystems.



DDVV, banded in the Yucatan on 7 September 2014, was photographed at Malportas Pond, Grand Cayman on 27 October (MAP C).

eBird has also facilitated the sharing of data on the arrivals and departures of dispersing post-breeding Phoenicopterus ruber with Grupo para la Concervacion del Flamenco del Caribe, GCFC, in the Yucatan.

Five in the fall 2014 flock were killed by entanglement in power lines but the surviving nine remained over winter and were last recorded at the pond on 15 March 2015.

Since 2009 many local birders have adopted eBird for personal recording. Its alert system supplements texts and emails. As a result of year round data entry the validity of bar charts has greatly improved. Historic records are in the process of being uploaded and we hope eventually to have a record of every species known from the Islands in the database. This was greatly assisted when founders of the C.I. Bird Club, Michael Marsden and Peter Davey uploaded their

eBird encourages data collection



Breeding birds are now clearly distinguished from migrants.



Among eleven new records for the Cayman Islands since 2009 were: Franklin's Gull, 9-20 Dec 2013; Vesper Sparrow, 17 Oct 2012; Clay-coloured Sparrow, 22-23 Oct 2011 and Townsend's Warbler 8-25 February 2014.

Bird Festivals attract all ages and birding skills

■ Bluff Juveniles







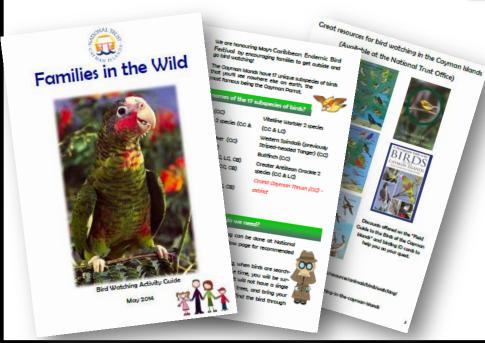
been less affected.

A tall glass building halts the progress of a couple of enthusiastic migrants playing the Migration Game. Hanging decorated recycled carton birdhouse feeders.

Participants at the bird walk on 19th January. Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet discusses camera equipment and photography techniques with a rapt







The Families in the Wild Bird Watching Activity Guide, developed to accompany Endemic Bird Festival in 2013, was made available online via the National Trust website and Facebook page. It was also sent out with the NT **Education Newsletter to over** 40 schools' contacts.

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Series #15

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