LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

My kids love the ocean; they get in and don’t want to get out. There are amazing fish to see, waves to ride, games to play. I believe that their time in the ocean is not just fun and exploration, but also building a sense of caring for this wonder of nature, just as spending time with a friend builds a relationship. As Senegalese poet and naturalist Baba Dioum said:

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love.
We will love only what we understand.
We will understand only what we are taught.”

That last part, about being taught, can take on so many forms and should not be limited to the traditional classroom image. Perhaps nature itself is the best teacher, which is why it is so important that we get children outside. It is not only good for them, but in the end it will be good for the Earth as well as we create a sense of understanding and love for the natural world.

EPIC tries to bring this sense of wonder about nature to children by getting outside with schools whenever possible. When it’s not possible, we use interactive materials to engage students in that crucial element, understanding nature. Whether it’s teaching volunteers about mangrove trees while planting seedlings, engaging with government officials about legislation, or encouraging businesses to improve their practices, education is one of the main components of all our work. It forms part of the multi-faceted approach to environmental protection EPIC uses, along with research and conservation action, to ensure a long-term impact.

We hope that you enjoy learning about EPIC’s accomplishments in this annual report and appreciate that all of us together make this effort possible. Whether you are a donor, a volunteer, or helping to foster a love of nature among friends and family, each of us contributes to making the world a better place. Thank you for being a part of EPIC and Caribbean conservation; let’s keep up the good work!

Natalia Collier

Cover photo: Torrid Jewel Bug (Pachycoris torridus) by: Mark Yokoyama, The Incomplete Guide to the Wildlife of St. Martin
The Love the Lagoon Project was established in 2007 with the mission to protect and restore one of the largest lagoons in the West Indies, the Simpson Bay Lagoon of St. Maarten. The project has grown to include the many threatened wetlands and coastal area on the island. This past year, EPIC continued to expand our multi-disciplinary approach to conservation through a variety of activities.

**ADVOCACY**

Project Manager Rueben Thompson advocated tirelessly and successfully for the passage of key environmental legislation which he helped to draft. The Parliament of St. Maarten passed motions to ensure public access to beaches and national monuments, create the first terrestrial protected area, protect national heritage, and provide financial support to EPIC. Last but certainly not least was the motion to protect Mullet Pond, the only substantial stand of mangroves remaining in St. Maarten’s Simpson Bay Lagoon. The campaign to protect this important area began in 2004. In addition, Rueben continues working with the government and St. Maarten Nature Foundation towards protection of Mullet Pond under the international Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, also known as Ramsar.

Love the Lagoon monitors development activities and also serves as a point of contact for the public to report environmental violations they observe, such as illegal construction within wetlands. EPIC investigated reports, informed government, and then followed up on numerous infringements.

**CONSERVATION ACTION**

While environmental problems can get you down, planting mangrove trees is a surefire way to pick you up. These amazing trees fill so many important roles. We were thrilled when Florida Coastal Mangroves donated 300 Red Mangrove seedlings for the restoration of Little Key islet in Simpson Bay Lagoon. An enthusiastic crew of planting volunteers got to learn about mangroves while helping to create valuable habitat.

There’s no longer an excuse for leaving trash behind on St. Maarten’s beaches. EPIC partnered with St. Maarten Tourist Bureau and the Timeshare Association to place 22 much needed trash bins on beaches. In addition, EPIC led numerous trash clean-ups throughout the year, including participation in the International Coastal Cleanup.
The Simpson Bay Lagoon is a major yachting destination yet, until this year, it lacked a basic service expected for a world-class destination, a place to properly dispose of onboard sewage. With key support from CA Technologies, Island Global Yachting, and Princess Port de Plaisance, as well as a number of individual sponsors, EPIC was able to purchase a sewage pumpout boat, named “Slurpy”, which is now in operation! Our appreciation also goes out to St. Maarten Shipyard, which provides disposal of pumpout boat waste into their secure land-based holding tank free of charge. The waste is then removed by a septic truck and taken to the wastewater treatment facility for processing.

To schedule pumpout service
Phone: 1-721-527-4049
VHF CH. 72 call sign: SLURPY
E-mail: Jose.matrixmarine@gmail.com

Rewarding those who make the extra effort to care for our environment can have great results. The international Blue Flag Beach and Marina Program offers an eco-label to participants who voluntarily follow environmental and safety criteria.

EPIC, as the National Blue Flag Operator, along with the Ministry of Tourism were pleased to hold the second annual Blue Flag award ceremony this year. Award recipients Divi Little Bay Resort and Yacht Club Isle de Sol join the nearly 4,000 Blue Flag sites found globally.

EPIC will be expanding its eco-label opportunities on St. Maarten this year to include the Green Key Program, which awards tourism facilities, such as hotels, that have proven to reduce waste, energy, and water usage and ensure other eco-friendly practices.

Blue Flag
The Green Key

The Blue Flag awards ceremony for St. Maarten
Volunteers helped to clean up the birdwatching hut at Little Bay Pond so that school groups could use the area for field trips. We reached nearly 1,400 students through classroom presentations and were able to provide hands-on experience during field trips for 200 children. Many thanks to Environmental Education Specialist Katie Riley who stayed very busy during her three month volunteer internship.

We celebrated World Wetlands Day with an educational kayak tour through the Lagoon, sponsored by Tri-Sport.

We continue to use media to get our message out, using social media, interviews for TV, radio, and print media as well as press releases at least monthly.

Free public bird walks and a library presentation marked Migratory Bird Day as well as the Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival.

FINDING THE ENDANGERED BLACK-CAPPED PETREL

“I remember pulling up to this deep valley at Savanne Zombie near the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic in early February 2013,” says EPIC Senior Biologist Adam Brown. “I had been staring at this site on Google Earth for three years, banking on it to be the ideal place to find Black-capped Petrels flying from their at-sea foraging grounds to their highland nesting colonies. It had taken a lot to get to this location; terrible roads, flat tires, failing brakes, customs officers, and impenetrable bureaucratic red-tape. But in the end, it was worth it, the site was more amazing than I could have imagined!”

Adam and his EPIC colleagues led a team of international conservation groups on the island of Hispaniola with the goal of using marine radar to identify new nesting locations for this endangered petrel. After a very successful expedition to the known colony location in the Dominican Republic during 2012, the team was ready to start identifying new colony locations throughout Hispaniola.

Success was quick and ever-present for the team; the team located petrel flyways and likely nesting colonies throughout the Dominican Republic. The expedition moved systematically from east to west along the high crests and located petrel activity the entire way, including birds flying along the crest,
circling cliff faces, and pairing up with other birds. The expedition then crossed the border into Haiti and the deep valley that runs along the western edge of Savanne Zombie.

“I could tell right away that this survey location would be ideal,” Adam says. “We were at a major confluence of two valleys, one that led north to Loma del Toro and Boucan Chat and the other which led westward to the high peaks of Massif de La Selle. As soon as we turned the radar on at sunset, the petrel activity began, starting slow and then building as the night grew darker. By 9 p.m., we were recording 10-20 birds flying past our location every five minutes. We observed birds flying both landward and seaward as well as us up both forks of the confluence. It was the most amazing petrel migration I had ever witnessed. At about midnight, the nightly passage of birds slowed down to a trickle and finally stopped. I really couldn’t believe what I had just witnessed.”

On that February night, Adam and his team recorded over 1,000 Black-capped Petrels and likely found one of the most important flight corridors for petrels on the island of Hispaniola. Following Savanne Zombie, the EPIC expedition went on to locate six additional flight corridors within Haiti and capped an amazing and ground-breaking expedition to Hispaniola. EPIC is looking forward to returning to Hispaniola to work with Black-capped Petrels in 2014.

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**EPIC Completes its Twelfth Year of Bird Conservation and Research on St. Maarten**

Bird walks, wetland bird surveys, seabird surveys, and songbird surveys all were part of EPIC’s 12th year of bird conservation on the island of St. Maarten. EPIC volunteers Binkie van Es, Ronald Pieters, and Mark Yokoyama along with EPIC staff members Adam Brown, Natalia Collier, and Rueben Thompson led numerous bird walks to many of the wetlands on St. Maarten during the past year. The EPIC volunteers were also busy collecting waterbird data for EPIC, as they took part in the regional Caribbean Waterbird Census by collecting data for St. Maarten. Additionally, volunteers monitored Least Tern and Wilson’s Plover nests on St. Maarten. Unfortunately, none of the monitored nests were able to successfully raise a chick.

*Adam Brown collects a sample from a Bananquit as part of parasite research.*
EPIC is working to address threats to these ground-nesting birds, such as predation by invasive predators and damage from off-road vehicles. EPIC’s St. Maarten-based winter waterbird survey effort was led by Senior Biologist Adam Brown. This long-term dataset provides valuable information about changing and threatened wetlands and the wildlife which depend upon them. Our data has illuminated that change in habitat over the past decade, including the loss of habitat due to development as well as the enhancement of habitat through reforestation, has contributed to notable trends in local bird populations. Most notable is the downward trend of small-bodied wintering shorebirds such as Least Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plover. Over the past year, the most common bird species encountered at wetlands included Black-necked Stilt, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Common Moorhen, Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, and White-cheeked Pintail.

The annual terrestrial bird banding research at Pic Paradis showed that overall capture rates of resident birds continued to decline as has been the case since the forest was thinned in 2007. Numbers of migratory species remained steady and our most common recorded birds were American Redstart, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, and Black-throated Blue Warbler. Notably, in late December 2012, EPIC captured and banded St. Martin’s first Tennessee Warbler. During this year’s banding effort, EPIC partnered with the University of Missouri to sample for parasites affecting resident and migratory birds. The research was led by Senior Biologist Adam Brown who was assisted by staff member Natalia Collier and volunteers Binkie van Es, Ronald Pieters, and Mark Yokoyama.

This migratory Tennessee Warbler captured during research on bird health was the first record of this species occurring on the island of St. Maarten/St. Martin.

SAVE THE SEABIRDS CAMPAIGN

We continue to work towards the conservation goals outlined in EPIC’s Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles. Two major focal areas are predation by invasive species and the harvesting of seabirds, including adults, chicks, and eggs, for consumption by people. We are working with partners in the Grenadine islands to address these conservation priorities. In September, EPIC will be working to raise $5,000 from 50 donors to help fund this project through a fundraising challenge of Global Giving, which is a non-profit that connects donors with grassroots projects around the world. We hope you will be able to join in this campaign!

You can purchase a copy of the Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles through Amazon, CreateSpace, or Kindle. More information is available at EPIC’s website, www.epicislands.org.
EPIC is registered as a non-profit organization in the United States as well as a registered foundation in Saint Maarten and each group has its own Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors of EPIC U.S. would like to thank to Michelle Hester and Susan Bain, who recently stepped down, for their many years of service on EPIC’s Board. Michelle was a founding Board Member in 2000 and will continue to provide valuable advice. Susan Bain will remain active as a committee member.

EPIC’s U.S. Board will soon begin the selection process for candidates to fill seats on this dynamic and engaged Board of Directors.

Interested persons are requested to contact Adam Brown at info@epicislands.org.

The EPIC St. Maarten Board of Directors would like to thank Tajiana Ancora-Brown, who recently stepped down, for her contribution to the organization and welcomes Claudette Forsythe-Labega as the newest Director.

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Board of Directors – EPIC U.S.
Dr. Paul Sikkel – Chair
Boris Fabres – Vice-Chair
Adam Brown – Treasurer
Helen Gratil – Secretary
Natalia Collier – Executive Director
Andrew Brown
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Board of Directors – EPIC St. Maarten
Natalia Collier – President
Adam Brown – Treasurer
Oldine Bryson– Pantophtel – Secretary
Claudette Forsythe -Labega
Alexandra Halley

The Board of Directors of EPIC in the United States held its annual review and planning meeting in St. Maarten. In addition to addressing and strengthening core governance issues, this meeting provided the opportunity to see projects first hand and meet Project Manager Rueben Thompson.

To learn more about any of EPIC’s projects or how you can get involved, please visit www.epicislands.org

www.facebook.com/epicislands

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Thank you for making EPIC’s work possible!

Donors
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Adam Brown
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Maria and Terry Collier in honor of Caroline Collier
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Tri-Sport
Tropical Shipping

Volunteers
Margaret and Neil Fisher
Ronald Pieters
Katie Riley
Jim Tietz
Binkie van Es
Mark Yokoyama

Statement of Financial Position as of May 31, 2013
Assets
Cash $110,044.00
Property and Equipment $15,675.00
Total Assets $125,719.00
Total Liabilities $-
Total Liabilities and Net Assets $125,719.00

Statement of Activities for Year Ended May 31, 2013
Revenue
Individual Contributions $48,899.00
Grants $45,289.00
Contracts $3,745.00
Sales $374.00
Interest $14.00
Total Revenue $98,321.00

Expenses
Research and Conservation Programs $39,298.46
Outreach $19,030.20
Administration $4,126.83
Total Expenses $62,455.00

Assets
Net Assets Beginning of Year $16,500.00
Increase in Net Assets $-
Depreciation Expense $825.00
Net Assets End of Year $15,675.00

In-Kind Donations
Products $1,200.00
Living Expenses $20,100.00
Check out our new website at www.epicislands.org

- Donate online
- Learn more about programs
- Download reports and publications

YES, I will continue to support Caribbean conservation. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation of:

- $25 TROPICBIRD LEVEL
- $100 MANGROVE LEVEL
- $500 CLOUDFOREST LEVEL
- $1000 ISLAND LEVEL
- $5000 OCEAN LEVEL

Donors who give $40 and higher will receive an EPIC t-shirt. Please indicate size requested.

For more information on donating contact Natalia at (707) 845-1171

MAIL your check, payable to Environmental Protection in the Caribbean, 200 Dr. M.L. King Jr. Blvd, Riviera Beach, FL 33404.

Name________________________________________
Address______________________________________
______________________________________________
Amount Enclosed______________________________