

# **EPIC Seabird Breeding Atlas: Summary of Seabird Findings on Sint Eustatius February 24-28 2009**

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## **Method**

After initial discussion with the STENAPA staff, who advised us on the most likely locations of seabird colonies, we carried out a series of water-based and land-based seabird surveys during our week on Statia. We also consulted local people for information on seabird colonies and the audubon's shearwater.

The first survey involved encircling the island in a motor boat to provide us with a better idea of where the key habitats for seabirds are. This and a subsequent water-based survey also involved stopping at intervals and taking a GPS (UTM) reading and counting the number of adult birds flying near the cliffs, as well as searching for apparently occupied nests (AONs) and nests with counts of adults, chicks and eggs. Where large colonies were visible, motoring passed the birds at speed allowed us to count circling birds, but guarded against double counts.

Land-based surveys involved walking to vantage points on the island and counting the number of aerial birds as well as walking through suitable habitat and searching for birds and their nests. Presence and absence surveys of audubon's shearwater were undertaken at night (between 9-11.30pm) from a vantage point by boat and land. This involved broadcasting the duet of the male and female birds from a loud speaker, with one minute for calls and one minute for listening for thirty minutes. If birds are present they will answer the calls.

Surveys, where possible, were undertaken between 9000-1030 and 1500-1645, but it was generally found that larger numbers of birds were observed during the afternoon survey 'window'.

Evidence of potential threats to seabirds were also recorded, including: rats, cats, dogs, humans, goats and cattle.

## **Preliminary Findings**

Over 250 red-billed tropic birds were observed around the island. The most important breeding areas were on the Fort Royal sea cliffs, Gilboa Hill and Zeelandia bay.

Thirty magnificent frigate birds were observed foraging around the island. Twenty three birds were found roosting at Venus bay, but no breeding sites were recorded on the island. Eight brown pelicans and four brown boobies were also observed foraging, but similarly, no breeding grounds observed.

Audubon's shearwater surveys were inconclusive. A 'potential' call was heard by three observers from the boat at Jenken's Bay, but it was very distant and may have been something else. No shearwaters were heard during the other land-based survey.

A presentation on Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles was given to staff and interns at STENAPA. Unfortunately, the radio interview was cancelled. A press release was sent to the local paper about EPIC's project on the island. A copy of our school presentation was given to a STENEPA staff member for work on the island.

### **Ongoing surveys**

It is recommended that seabird surveys be undertaken by the STENEPA team to further inform the Lesser Antilles Breeding Seabird Atlas and also to provide a long-term monitoring programme that will highlight changes in the seabird colonies. The results should guide conservation action and management plans for the species and the key terrestrial and marine habitats on the island.

Surveys should repeat the EPIC method to provide streamlined data and allow analysis. It is suggested that water-based surveys are carried out in the following locations: on the cliffs below Fort Royal to the oil pipe line (UTM 0501371, 1933395) and in Venus bay (0500141, 1937777). The boat should first motor pass the site slowly and record: flying and sitting adults, nests, AONs, chicks and eggs counted between 1500 and 1645. At the Fort Royal site where a large colony is present and double counting birds is more likely, a second count should be taken at speed passing the colony.

A land-based count should also be taken from Zeelandia bay (UTM 0502109, 1935516) looking to Gilboa Hill and across the bay. It is also advised that the beach should be walked to Schildpadden bay (where the cliff has been eroded by donkeys and cattle) and the number of birds on nests/ in the air, chicks, eggs, AONs recorded. These surveys should be repeated in February and June each year.

The EPIC team intend to return to Statia sometime in May-June 2010 to finish breeding seabird surveys. We would like to thank you for all your help and provision of resources, and for making us feel so welcome!