



**Waterbird Conservation for the Americas**  
Conservación de las Aves Acuáticas para las Américas

## **FINAL REPORT**

### **WATERBIRDS IN SAINT MARTIN**



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## Waterbird Conservation for the Americas Conservación de las Aves Acuáticas para las Américas

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Saint Martin is a French territory, a Commune within Guadeloupe. The island of St. Martin/St. Maarten is a condominium belonging to France (52 km<sup>2</sup>) and the Netherlands (33 km<sup>2</sup>). The center of the island is composed of mountainous areas rising to 425 m. The coastal areas are low hills or flat, punctuated by numerous ponds, primarily of high salinity. Shorelines are characterized by sand or rock beach with interspersed cliffs. Simpson Bay Lagoon, one of the largest lagoons in the Lesser Antilles, is a dominant feature of the island and a major yachting center. The French side of the lagoon is less polluted than the Dutch side and the yachting industry is less developed. St. Martin has two substantial mangrove communities. One is located in the Simpson Bay Lagoon, the other at Etang Aux Poissons. The terrestrial vegetation is thorny woodland, dominated by scrub in the lowlands and low forest cover in the mountains.

The human population is 36,000. However, the population increases greatly during the influx of seasonal visitors and tourists, which form the base of the economy.

The average annual temperature is 27°C and average annual rainfall is 1772 mm. Much of the precipitation arrives during hurricane season in late summer and fall.

The herpetofauna is represented by 11 species, including one endemic *Anolis* species.

The primary threat is development, primarily for the tourism industry. Ponds and lagoons are filled in and altered while building takes place on steep hillsides. Disturbance due to watercraft, All Terrain Vehicles, and other recreational uses is significant due to the high concentration of residents and tourists.

### 2. ORNITHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

The most important habitats for the birds of St. Martin are the saline ponds, mangroves, and secondary dry forest of the mountains. A total of 164 avian species have been recorded on St. Martin.

#### ➤ WATERBIRDS –

Fifty species of waterbirds have been recorded on St. Martin, including 13 species which breed. The pond Grand Etang is an important breeding area for Least Terns *Sterna antillarum* (82 nests). The offshore island of Tintamarre harbors approximately 60 Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* nests. Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* has been found breeding on Tintamarre as well; two nests have been located thus far.



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### **3. PROTECTED AREAS AND CONSERVATION SYSTEMS**

St. Martin's Reserve Naturelle covers 160 hectares of terrestrial area, representing 3% of the land area, and includes beaches, mangrove forests, and saline ponds. In addition, there are 2,900 hectares of protected marine area.

Loterie Farm eco-tourism site contains secondary dry forest in a canyon with a seasonal creek. The lower area has been converted to a ropes challenge course for tourists while the upper area remains a relatively pristine hiking area. Although this area has no legal protection, it is expected to remain undeveloped.

### **4. CONSERVATION INITIATIVES**

Environmental Protection In the Caribbean (EPIC) conducts avian research on St. Maarten. This year marks the fifth year of seabird and wetland surveys (weekly to monthly), including three years of pond water quality testing. Nesting success of Tropicbirds on Tintamarre and Wilson's Plover and Least Tern on St. Martin was monitored for one season. Funding is through private donors, local companies, and many volunteer hours.

The French government also sponsors periodic wetland and marine bird surveys, often conducted by Gilles LeBlond of Guadeloupe.

### **5. INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS**

As a territory of France, St. Martin is party to the following international agreements:

- Convention on Biological Diversity
- Convention on Fishing and Conservation of Living Resources of the High Seas
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar)
- Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)
- Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention)
- International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling
- International Tropical Timber Agreement, 1994
- Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer
- Protocol of 1978 Relating to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution From Ships, 1973 (MARPOL)
- Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (LOS)



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**6. CONSERVATION CONCERNS**

Development is a primary threat. Filling in or building encroachment at wetlands is permitted in some areas. Land based pollution via sewage and refuse is a visible problem. Nest predation by introduced species appears to be a key limiting factor in reproductive success on St. Martin. Populations of forest birds, particularly game birds such as Bridled Quail-dove, are reduced through hunting.

Primary obstacles to protection are insufficient laws and enforcement of regulations. Funding is not available for necessary projects, such as sewage treatment and predator eradication.

**7. CONSERVATION NEEDS**

The eradication of invasive predators from islands and wetlands would reduce a significant threat to breeding species, particularly Least Terns and Audubon’s Shearwater.

Hunting should be prohibited or further restricted, given the pressures already placed on avian populations by the limited remaining habitat.

Sewage systems should be upgraded or repaired in order to reduce contaminated effluent entering local waters.

**8. GLOSSARY**

EPIC – Environmental Protection In the Caribbean

**9. LOCATIONS**

**A. Grand Etang**

Grand Etang (63° 8.55' W 18° 3.43' N) is a large saline pond located in the gated Lowlands subdivision of St. Martin. It is approximately 50 hectares in size. Due to its high salinity (>100 parts per thousand), the pond has little vegetation. At the west end, a small pond is separated from the larger pond by a narrow strip of land. Electric wires on poles cross the pond at this point. The surrounding land is low hills of scrub habitat interspersed with roads and homes on large estates. A dirt road runs directly next to the shore along one side. An exclusive resort borders the road.

**Ornithological information** Least Terns nest on a sandy spit located in the smaller pond of Grand Etang. Wilson's Plover nests at the same location and in surrounding areas. In the summer of 2004, nesting success of both species was monitored by EPIC. During that time, a high count of 180 Least Tern nests and 82 breeding pairs was recorded. Ten pairs of Wilson's Plover were recorded. Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* also breeds at Grand Etang (25 nests). Grand Etang is afforded some legal protections as a recognized natural area

| Species                             | Season   | Year | Min-Max           |
|-------------------------------------|----------|------|-------------------|
| Least Tern <i>Sterna antillarum</i> | breeding | 2004 | 82 breeding pairs |

**Conservation issues** The primary threat to nesting birds at Grand Etang is flooding. Ten percent of Least Tern nests (n=130) were recorded as submerged after heavy rains raised the water level of the pond. Many others may



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have been flooded as well, but this could not be confirmed because the chicks may have hatched and moved away from the waterline between checks. Introduced predators are also a major concern for nesting birds. During Least Tern nest monitoring, predation was confirmed at 5% of all nests. Wilson's Plovers experienced a 30% predation rate (n=10) at Grand Etang. The actual percentages are likely much higher. Rats and dogs are the primary culprits. Fresh dog tracks were present at almost every weekly check. A fence should be constructed around the nesting area to keep dogs out. Another possibility is to dredge around the nesting site, creating an island, which would make the area less accessible to predators. Birds are periodically found dead under the powerlines which cross Grand Etang with signs of blunt trauma such as broken necks and wings. The lines may be difficult for the birds to see, especially migratory birds arriving at night. The lines should be rerouted away from the pond or markers should be placed on the lines to make them more obvious. Yard debris from surrounding residences is dumped into the pond and often burned along the shore of Grand Etang. The resort which borders the pond periodically empties its septic system by allowing the sewage and associated debris to flow across the road and into the pond. Funding for the existing sewage treatment plant for this area is not available. An individual with a shotgun was seen once walking around the border of Grand Etang but it is not clear if he was hunting.



The Least Tern and Wilson's Plover nesting area at Grand Etang.  
EPIC@2006



Predated Least Tern egg at Grand Etang.  
EPIC@2006

Least Tern chick and egg in nest at Grand Etang.  
EPIC@2006



### B. Tintamarre, Saint Martin

Tintamarre Island (62° 58.50' W 18° 7.16' N) also known as Flat Island, is located 3 kilometers from St. Martin and is approximately 100 hectares in size.

**Ornithological information** Red-billed Tropicbirds nest in the cliffs on the western coast. A thorough survey of all accessible crevices (48 nests) and an estimate for inaccessible areas resulted in a conservative estimate of 60



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nests. Two Audubon Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* nests with eggs and adults were found. This population is likely limited by the presence of rats. Shearwaters may nest in greater numbers in inaccessible cliff faces. A nocturnal call-playback survey was unsuccessful in attracting any visuals or audible calls. Birds which breed in the summer are primarily on the eastern side of the island. Species found during a survey in June 2004 included Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* (20 nests), Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* (140 nests), and Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* (7 nests). In addition, eleven American Oystercatchers *Haematopus palliatus* were present and vocalizing alarm calls, indicating possible breeding.

| Species   | Season   | Year | Min-Max  |
|---|----------|------|----------|
| Red-billed Tropicbird <i>Phaethon aethereus</i> | breeding | 2003 | 60 nests |
| Brown Noddy <i>Anous stolidus</i>               | breeding | 2004 | 140 nest |

**Protection status** The coastline of Tintamarre Island is part of the Reserve Naturelle St. Martin and extends to 300 meters inland. The interior of the island is privately owned. Activities prohibited inside the reserve include wildlife disturbance, plant collection, mining, fishing, jet skiing, and littering.

**Conservation issues** The primary threat to the avifauna, particularly seabirds, of Tintamarre is nest predation by rats. A proposal has been created to eradicate rats from the island but funding has not been secured. Trampling of nests by goats is also a concern. Grazing has likely altered the vegetation of Tintamarre, although it is not clear what effect this has had. Because the interior of the island is not protected, development of the privately held areas is possible, although no plans have been made public. Seabird nesting is restricted to the coastal zone and would be impacted by development primarily through disturbance.



Red-billed Tropicbird adult with chick in crevice on Tintamarre Island.  
EPIC@2006



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Part of the Red-billed Tropicbird nesting area on Tintamarre Island. Note snorkelers in foreground.  
EPIC@2006

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| <b>Table 1. Waterbirds occurrence, distribution, habitat and population estimates in Saint Martin.</b> |                        |                              |                        |                   |                |                            |                     |                          |
|--|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Family</b>  | <b>Species</b>         | <b>English Name</b>          | <b>Category (IUCN)</b> | <b>Occurrence</b> | <b>Habitat</b> | <b>Population estimate</b> | <b>Distribution</b> | <b>In-country trends</b> |
| Anatidae   | Dendrocygna bicolor    | Fulvous Whistling-duck       | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Dendrocygna arborea    | West Indian Whistling-duck   | VU                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Dendrocygna autumnalis | Black-bellied Whistling-duck | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Aix sponsa             | Wood Duck                    | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas strepera          | Gadwall                      | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas americana         | American Wigeon              | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas platyrhynchos     | Mallard                      | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas discors           | Blue-winged Teal             | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas clypeata          | Northern Shoveler            | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas bahamensis        | White-cheeked Pintail        | LC                     | Resident          |                |                            | Grand Etang         |                          |
| Anatidae   | Anas acuta             | Northern Pintail             | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |
| Anatidae   | Aythya collaris        | Ring-necked Duck             | LC                     | Passage           |                |                            |                     |                          |



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|                   |                       |                            |    |          |             |                                   |                            |  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----|----------|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Anatidae          | Aythya affinis        | Lesser Scaup               | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Anatidae          | Bucephala albeola     | Bufflehead                 | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Anatidae          | Oxyura jamaicensis    | Ruddy Duck                 | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Procellariidae    | Puffinus puffinus     | Manx Shearwater            | LC | Breeding | rocky areas | 2 nest located<br>(actual counts) | Tintamarre                 |  |
| Hydrobatidae      | Oceanites oceanicus   | Wilson's Storm-petrel      | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Podicipedidae     | Tachybaptus dominicus | Least Grebe                | LC | Resident |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Podicipedidae     | Podilymbus podiceps   | Pied-billed Grebe          | LC | Resident |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Threskiornithidae | Plegadis falcinellus  | Glossy Ibis                | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Threskiornithidae | Platalea ajaja        | Roseate Spoonbill          | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Ardeidae          | Nycticorax nycticorax | Black-crowned Night-heron  | LC | Passage  |             |                                   |                            |  |
| Ardeidae          | Nyctanassa violacea   | Yellow-crowned Night-heron | LC | Resident |             |                                   | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |



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|               |                     |                         |    |          |             |    |   |  |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----|----------|-------------|----|---|--|
| Ardeidae      | Butorides virescens | Green Heron             | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etand, Tintamarre and Pic Paradis |  |
| Ardeidae      | Bubulcus ibis       | Cattle Egret            | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etand, Tintamarre and Pic Paradis |  |
| Ardeidae      | Ardea herodias      | Great Blue Heron        | LC | Winter   |             |    | Grand Etang                             |  |
| Ardeidae      | Casmerodius albus   | Great Egret             | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etang                             |  |
| Ardeidae      | Egretta rufescens   | Reddish Egret           | LC | Passage  |             |    |   |  |
| Ardeidae      | Egretta tricolor    | Tricoloured Heron       | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etang                             |  |
| Ardeidae      | Egretta caerulea    | Little Blue Heron       | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etang                             |  |
| Ardeidae      | Egretta garzetta    | Little Egret            | LC | Passage  |             |    |   |  |
| Ardeidae      | Egretta thula       | Snowy Egret             | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etang                             |  |
| Phaethontidae | Phaethon aethereus  | Red-billed Tropicbird   | LC | Breeding | rocky areas | Ac | Tintamarre                              |  |
| Phaethontidae | Phaethon lepturus   | White-tailed Tropicbird | LC | Passage  |             |    |   |  |



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|                   |                           |                          |    |          |             |                     |                            |  |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----|----------|-------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Fregatidae        | Fregata magnificens       | Magnificent Frigatebird  | LC | Resident |             |                     | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |
| Pelecanidae       | Pelecanus occidentalis    | Brown Pelican            | LC | Resident |             |                     | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |
| Pelecanidae       | Pelecanus erythrorhynchos | American White Pelican   | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Sulidae           | Sula dactylatra           | Masked Booby             | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Sulidae           | Sula sula                 | Red-footed Booby         | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Sulidae           | Sula leucogaster          | Brown Booby              | LC | Breeding | rocky areas |                     | Tintamarre                 |  |
| Phalacrocoracidae | Phalacrocorax brasilianus | Neotropic Cormorant      | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Phalacrocoracidae | Phalacrocorax auritus     | Double-crested Cormorant | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Rallidae          | Porzana carolina          | Sora                     | LC | Winter   |             |                     |                            |  |
| Rallidae          | Porphyrio martinica       | Purple Gallinule         | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Rallidae          | Gallinula chloropus       | Common Moorhen           | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Rallidae          | Fulica americana          | American Coot            | LC | Passage  |             |                     |                            |  |
| Rallidae          | Fulica caribaea           | Caribbean Coot           | NT | Passage  |             | Few (2 individuals) |                            |  |



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|                  |                         |                        |    |                   |             | actual count)                 |                            |  |
|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----|-------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Haematopodidae   | Haematopus palliatus    | American Oystercatcher | LC | Possibly breeding | rocky areas | 11 individuals (actual count) | Tintamarre                 |  |
| Recurvirostridae | Himantopus mexicanus    | Black-necked Stilt     | LC | Resident          | pond        | Ab                            | Grand Etang                |  |
| Charadriidae     | Pluvialis dominica      | American Golden Plover | LC | Passage           |             |                               |                            |  |
| Charadriidae     | Pluvialis squatarola    | Grey Plover            | LC | Winter            |             |                               | Grand Etang                |  |
| Charadriidae     | Charadrius semipalmatus | Semipalmated Plover    | LC | Winter            |             |                               | Grand Etang                |  |
| Charadriidae     | Charadrius wilsonia     | Wilson's Plover        | LC | Resident          | ponds       | Aa                            | Grand Etang                |  |
| Charadriidae     | Charadrius vociferus    | Killdeer               | LC | Resident          |             |                               | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |
| Charadriidae     | Charadrius alexandrinus | Kentish Plover         | LC | Passage           |             |                               |                            |  |
| Charadriidae     | Charadrius collaris     | Collared Plover        | LC | Passage           |             |                               |                            |  |
| Scolopacidae     | Gallinago gallinago     | Common Snipe           | LC | Passage           |             |                               |                            |  |



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|              |                                |                           |    |         |  |  |                               |  |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----|---------|--|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Scolopacidae | Limnodromus<br>griseus         | Short-billed<br>Dowitcher | LC | Winter  |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Limosa<br>haemastica           | Hudsonian<br>Godwit       | LC | Passage |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Numenius<br>phaeopus           | Whimbrel                  | LC | Passage |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Bartramia<br>longicauda        | Upland Sandpiper          | LC | Passage |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Tringa<br>melanoleuca          | Greater<br>Yellowlegs     | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang                   |  |
| Scolopacidae | Tringa flavipes                | Lesser Yellowlegs         | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang                   |  |
| Scolopacidae | Tringa solitaria               | Solitary Sandpiper        | LC | Winter  |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Actitis macularius             | Spotted Sandpiper         | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang and<br>Tintamarre |  |
| Scolopacidae | Catoptrophorus<br>semipalmatus | Willet                    | LC | Passage |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Arenaria interpres             | Ruddy Turnstone           | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang and<br>Tintamarre |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris canutus               | Red Knot                  | LC | Passage |  |  |                               |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris alba                  | Sanderling                | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang and<br>Tintamarre |  |



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|              |                         |                         |    |         |  |  |             |  |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----|---------|--|--|-------------|--|
| Scolopacidae | Calidris pusilla        | Semipalmated Sandpiper  | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris mauri          | Western Sandpiper       | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris minutilla      | Least Sandpiper         | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris fuscicollis    | White-rumped Sandpiper  | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris melanotos      | Pectoral Sandpiper      | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Scolopacidae | Calidris himantopus     | Stilt Sandpiper         | LC | Winter  |  |  | Grand Etang |  |
| Scolopacidae | Tryngites subruficollis | Buff-breasted Sandpiper | NT | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Scolopacidae | Philomachus pugnax      | Ruff                    | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Laridae      | Larus delawarensis      | Ring-billed Gull        | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Laridae      | Larus marinus           | Great Black-backed Gull | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Laridae      | Larus argentatus        | Herring Gull            | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |
| Laridae      | Larus fuscus            | Lesser Black-           | LC | Passage |  |  |             |  |





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|                |                        |                  |    |          |             |    |                            |  |
|----------------|------------------------|------------------|----|----------|-------------|----|----------------------------|--|
|                |                        | backed Gull      |    |          |             |    |                            |  |
| Laridae        | Larus atricilla        | Laughing Gull    | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna nilotica        | Gull-billed Tern | LC | Passage  |             |    |                            |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna maxima          | Royal Tern       | LC | Resident |             |    | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna sandvicensis    | Sandwich Tern    | LC | Passage  |             |    |                            |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna dougallii       | Roseate Tern     | LC | Breeding | rocky areas | Ab | Grand Etang and Tintamarre |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna hirundo         | Common Tern      | LC | Passage  |             |    |                            |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna forsteri        | Forster's Tern   | LC | Passage  |             |    |                            |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna antillarum      | Least Tern       | LC | Breeding | pond        | Ac | Grand Etang                |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna anaethetus      | Bridled Tern     | LC | Breeding | rocky areas | Aa | Tintamarre                 |  |
| Laridae        | Sterna fuscata         | Sooty Tern       | LC | Passage  |             |    |                            |  |
| Laridae        | Anous stolidus         | Brown Noddy      | LC | Breeding | rocky areas | Ad | Tintamarre                 |  |
| Stercorariidae | Stercorarius pomarinus | Pomarine Jaeger  | LC | Passage  |             |    |                            |  |

Legend:

The ranges are based on Wetlands International estimates:



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B: 10.000-25.000

C: 25.000-100.000

E: >1.000.000

For numbers below 10.000:

A.a 0-50

A.b 50-100

A.c 100-250

A.d 250-500

A.e 500-1000