

Reader's Poll Question OF THE DAY

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FEATURES

BirdsCaribbean reps flock to Kingston

LESTER DOODNATH

Every two years, bird educators, scientists and conservationists from throughout the Caribbean and beyond gather for BirdsCaribbean's International Meeting.

At this year's meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, over 220 international and local delegates gathered to share the latest in Caribbean bird science, conservation and education.

"Birds—Connecting Communities and Conservation" was the theme for the meeting, the largest conservation conference held in the entire Caribbean in recent years.

Tobago hosted the meeting in 2003 and Trinidad in 1997. There was ample representation from TT and the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist Club (TTFNC) with at least five Trinbagonians in attendance. The immediate past president of CaribbeanBird, Trinidadian Howard Nelson, was present and from the TTFNC Darshan Narang and Robyn Bath presented a paper entitled the "Status of seabirds in Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago".

The BirdsCaribbean Founders' prize for best student presentation went to Trinidadian, Deanna M Albert who presented on "Participatory Geographic Information System (GIS) for nesting, feeding and roosting habitat sites for the Scarlet Ibis in Caroni Swamp Trinidad".



THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

ttnfc log

Two Trinbagonians took part in an all-day bird skin workshop whereby bird specimens were prepared for scientific display. One of the two endemic birds of Trinidad was highlighted in the talk: 'Analysis of Genetic Variation in the Critically Endangered Trinidad Piping Guan' by Amelia A Grass and Ian L McDowall of the University of Chester.

BirdsCaribbean is a non-profit organisation committed to the conservation of wild birds and their habitats in the insular Caribbean. More than 100,000 local people participate in its programmes each year, making it the most broad-based conservation organisation in the region. The conference opened with "Jamaica Day — A Celebration of Jamaica's Unique and Wonderful Birds" which included a dozen presentations about Jamaica's birds, from the latest research in tracking Jamaican seabird populations to the role of birds in pest control on Blue Mountain coffee farms. The extended look at Jamaica's birds also included reports on the arrival of the Caribbean Birding Trail programme to Jamaica and Jamaica's historical contribution to ornithology.

The meeting continued with a series of outstanding presentations from famous conservationists, who spoke on a wide range of topics including the importance of involving the community in bird conservation, why it



Leo Douglas, president of BirdsCaribbean.

is important to conserve birds, how photography can be used to influence hearts and minds and the importance of habitat restoration for birds and people. Workshop topics focused on capacity building and included fundraising, advocacy and the use of social media.

Other highlights of the meeting included the announcement of the rediscovery of the Black-capped Petrel on the island of Dominica and the launch of a new book: *The Endemic Birds of Cuba* by Nils Navarro. The week before the conference, 30 children enjoyed a summer camp all about birds at the Hope Zoo, and two dozen Jamaicans were trained as birding guides during the Caribbean Birding Trails Jamaica launch.

"This year was the perfect time to bring the BirdsCaribbean meeting back to Jamaica," noted BirdsCaribbean President Leo Douglas.

"The Blue and John Crow mountains were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site just weeks before the meeting, while the Goat Islands and Portland Bight Protected Area are currently facing the threat of development. At this moment Jamaica is in the spotlight, representing both the irreplaceable value of Caribbean natural heritage and its vulnerability." In addition to over 120 presentations, workshops and panel discussions,

the delegates enjoyed a variety of field trips to explore Jamaica's natural areas first-hand. Conference trips visited Hope Gardens, Goat Islands, Cockpit Country, western Portland Bight, Portland, and the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, amongst other destinations. Many meeting participants were particularly eager to catch a glimpse of some of the 29 bird species endemic to Jamaica that can be seen nowhere else in the world and all expressed their amazement at the richness of Jamaica's biodiversity and landscape and the warm welcome they received.

International sponsors included the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service International Programs, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Dutch Conservation Nature Alliance, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, Rare Species Conservatory Foundation, International Fund for Animal Welfare, and Anguilla Nature Explorers/Birds in Paradise Tour.

Learn more at www.birdscaribbean.org or find "Birds Caribbean" on Facebook and on Twitter @BirdsCaribbean.

For more info on our natural environment contact the T&T Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttnfc.org, our website at www.ttnfc.org, Facebook and YouTube pages.