

FEATURES

# On the wing and on the move

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INTERNATIONAL Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) celebrates the many species of birds that do not spend their entire year in one place, but rather move between countries, and even continents, with the seasons.

Although officially on October 10, IMBD was recognised here in TT throughout this month through various activities. These included a migratory bird talk at the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) monthly meeting, an interactive bird display at the Green Market in Santa Cruz, a bird talk on Power 102.1 FM by the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) and two small migratory bird displays facilitated by the IMA.

IMBD is co-ordinated across the Western Hemisphere by Environment for the Americas (EFTA), and events are held in over 700 locations from Canada to Argentina. BirdsCaribbean, the largest organisation devoted to wildlife conservation in the Caribbean, co-ordinates activities throughout the region beginning in October, a time when migratory activity is at its peak in the Caribbean. The TTFNC has been facilitating IMBD activities for the past five years.

The theme of IMBD this year is "Restore Habitat, Restore Birds".

This theme is particularly relevant in the Caribbean, where natural habitats share limited island space with dense human populations and intensive development.

The migratory pathways and overwintering grounds of the Caribbean are an indispensable part of the life cycle of about 350 bird species, from egrets and ducks to hawks and songbirds.

As part of this year's festivities, BirdsCaribbean has produced a free ebook about native trees: *Heritage Plants: Native Plants for Birds and People in the Caribbean*.

This illustrated book explains the importance of native trees to birds and other animals, includes a guide to dozens of native trees of value, and serves as a resource to foster habitat restoration within local communities. This ebook is available for download on the "Resources" page of [birdscaribbean.org](http://birdscaribbean.org).

Bird migration is the seasonal movement of birds from one geographic area to another. Migration can be over varying distances. Some birds migrate relatively short distances. In Trinidad and Tobago, for instance, there is some evidence that suggests that the population of eared dove (*Zenaida auriculata*) moves about within the country.

And then we have the real long distance champions. Generally speaking, in the Caribbean we have two long distance migrations: the summer migrants, which are those birds that fly north in the spring months, and the northern migrants, which fly south in the fall months. At this moment, we are in the fall migration period.

Birds that migrate to TT from North America include the os-



The merlin is a northern migrant to TT.



Visitors participate in International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) activities which held in TT during October.

prey (Pandion haliaetus), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) and various sandpipers, while birds which migrate from South America during the austral winter include the fork-tailed flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*).

Migrants are amazing in their ability to travel such long distances to the same region every year. Many of them have such keen navigational ability that they can even find the same exact location they were in the previous year. Bird banding studies in the

and, generally speaking, there are two main reasons for migration.

One is food. When the seasons change, for example in the cold northern hemisphere, food can become scarce and if the birds did not move to another location they may starve to death. This may mean moving to a more southerly location or moving to a lower altitude. Some birds of prey from North America, like the merlin (*Falco columbarius*), may actually follow migrating shorebirds (their prey) south to the mudflats and swamps right here in TT (and the rest of South and Central America).

Another reason is to reproduce. Some birds have specific requirements for breeding including food and nesting sites. The Audubon's shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*), for example, spends most of its life far out at sea, feeding and resting on the open water. But every year, these birds return to oceanic islands including Little Tobago, off the north-eastern tip of Tobago, where they breed in burrows in the rocky soil.

As you can see, the Caribbean is a hotspot for migrating birds. This means that the health of the environment in the region can have an impact on global populations. Let's preserve our forests, marshlands and mudflats so that these avian athletes can find a safe place to rest, replenish and reproduce before moving on again.

For more info: on our natural environment contact the TT Field Naturalists' Club at [admin@ttfnc.org](mailto:admin@ttfnc.org), or visit our website at [www.ttfnc.org](http://www.ttfnc.org), Facebook and YouTube pages.

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