



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

REPORT

WATERBIRDS IN MONTSERRAT

Authors: GEOFF HILTON (ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS), LLOYD MARTIN AND JAMES 'SCRIBER' DALY (DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, MONTSERRAT) AND RICHARD ALLCORN (FAUNA AND FLORA INTERNATIONAL)

Edited by: Verónica Anadón-Irizarry and David Wege (BirdLife International)

Part of an evaluation of waterbirds population and their conservation in the Caribbean, a project coordinated by BirdLife International within the initiative of Waterbird Conservation for the Americas and sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

2008

This report is based on: BirdLife International (2008) *Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean: key sites for conservation*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. (BirdLife Conservation Series No. 15)



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1. Introduction

Montserrat is a UK Overseas Territory in the Leeward Islands towards the northern end of the Lesser Antilles, just 40 km south-west of Antigua and between the islands of Nevis and Guadeloupe. The island is about 16 km long and 11 km wide, and its volcanic origins are reflected in an extremely rugged topography. There are three major volcanic hill ranges—the Soufrière and South Soufrière Hills, the Centre Hills, and the Silver Hills. There are a few, very small offshore islets. The coastline is mostly rocky and rather steep, with low cliffs in a few places in the north. A number of relatively small, sandy beaches are scattered around the island.

The natural vegetation over the great majority of the island is tropical forest. This ranges from dry deciduous forest in the lowlands, through semi-deciduous and evergreen wet forest in the hills, to montane elfin forest on the highest peaks. There are small areas of littoral woodland, and in the driest areas of the lowlands, the vegetation is xerophytic scrub, with numerous cacti. The island has very few wetlands. Prior to the eruption, Foxes Bay Bird Sanctuary contained areas of saline lagoon and mangroves: this area was destroyed by heavy silt deposits of eroded volcanic debris. A very small, partly degraded saline lagoon and mangrove area remain at Carr's Bay.

The recent ecological and human history of the island is dominated by the eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano, 1995–2008 (and ongoing). Explosive eruptions, ash-falls and pyroclastic flows have been frequent and devastating. The southern two thirds of the island have been evacuated, including the capital, Plymouth. The majority of the human population emigrated, with the population declining from c.12,701 (July 1994) to 2,726 (1998). Economic, administrative and civic life was massively disrupted by the mass emigration and the loss of the capital. The forests of the Soufriere/South Soufriere hills ranges were almost entirely destroyed by pyroclastic flows, leaving only a small remnant in the Roche's area. Most other areas of Montserrat, including the largest surviving forest block in the Centre Hills, were subject to repeated heavy ash-falls and acid rain. The remaining human population is now clustered in the north, around the fringes of the Centre Hills. Prior to the volcanic eruption, tourism (though not mass tourism) and agriculture were the mainstays of the economy. Subsequently, both sectors have been depressed, and reconstruction work has provided the main economic activity for the island's greatly reduced human population.

2. Protected Areas and Conservation Systems

The Department of Environment (DOE) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment (MALHE) has responsibility for biodiversity conservation. Enabling legislation for conservation is provided by the Forestry, Wildlife, National Parks and Protected Areas Ordinance which makes provision for the designation of protected areas and the protection of wildlife. However, as yet, there are no national parks on Montserrat. However, this legislation does not reflect recent research findings or the obligations of regional and international environmental agreements. With this in mind, a legislative review and revision has recently been conducted to produce modern, relevant, and enforceable environmental legislation. An advance draft of this legislation, which has benefited from broad based stakeholder consultation, is (July 2008) before the Legal Department for final drafting before submission to cabinet for approval.

The main conservation NGO is the Montserrat National Trust. It is mandated to preserve and protect the natural, historical and cultural heritage of Montserrat. To date, most funding for conservation work is received from international donor agencies and UK government funds such as the Overseas Territories Environment Project (OTEP) and The Darwin Initiative. Several UK-based NGOs (e.g. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, RSPB, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, DWCT, and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew) as well as the U.S. International Institute of Tropical Forestry have a long history of involvement in Montserrat's conservation, working in partnership with the Forestry Division of DOE and the National Trust. Academic researchers have also been active in recent years, perhaps most notably entomologists from Montana State University, bat experts from South Dakota State University and marine



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turtle experts from University of Exeter and ecologists from University of East Anglia. Conservation actions have focused on the Centre Hills and the globally threatened species therein. In June 2005, the Darwin Centre Hills Project was launched with a primary goal to enable the people of Montserrat to effectively manage the Centre Hills and associated resources. Under the umbrella of this project, NGO-assisted efforts (working in collaboration with MALHE) have included detailed socio-economic assessments, in-depth biodiversity assessments, and area management planning (for a proposed national park). The Centre Hills Project concluded in March 2008 with the integration of pending and planned activities into the workplans of each of the project partners (which included Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, and Environment, Montserrat National Trust, Montserrat Tourist Board, RSPB, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and DWCT). The release of the Centre Hills Management Plan has amplified the need for more funding to be directed to Biodiversity conservation and use of environmental goods and services to ensure effective management.

Montserrat's ecology has been radically altered by human activity since the arrival of Europeans. Massive forest clearance during the plantation era left only a tiny remnant of primary forest. Subsequently, much of the area of the main hill ranges reverted to secondary forest. Parts of the Silver Hills are heavily degraded by soil exhaustion and erosion. Much of the lowland and coastal areas of Montserrat have been converted to agriculture and settlement. Lowland forest is now relatively rare, and occurs primarily as narrow riparian strips. The devastating Hurricane Hugo hit the island in 1989 and caused massive tree fall and almost complete defoliation. This was followed six years later by the start of the volcanic eruptions, which have had a massive impact on the native wildlife. The impacts of these natural catastrophes have been exacerbated by the human habitat degradation that preceded them. Ash-fall is known to have had pronounced effects on the arthropod fauna, with knock-on effects on the food chain, although the direct impacts on birds are not well known. As a result of the volcanic eruptions, the human population is now entirely in the north of the island. There is much pressure to provide new housing and infrastructure to accommodate the relocation, and the return of emigrants. However, there is clearly a need to ensure that this development is environmentally sustainable, despite its urgency. Non-native species of mammal are widespread on Montserrat. Recent research on *Icterus oberi* and *Leptodactylus fallax* indicates that rats *Rattus* spp. are major predators of the native biota, and probably also affect vegetation dynamics. Feral cats, goats and pigs are also significant conservation problems. Invasive alien plants have not been well studied, but may also have significant impacts.

3. Waterbirds species occurring within Montserrat

Of Montserrat's 101 recorded bird species, 47 are resident breeding land birds and 54 are Neotropical migrants (either passage migrants or winter visitors). The Near Threatened Caribbean Coot *Fulica caribaea* survives in a pond at Brimm's Ghaut, but appears to have been extirpated by the volcanic eruption from the Foxes Bay wetland and other small ponds in the north of the island.

There are some seabird nesting colonies around the island, with White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*, Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* and Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* thought to nest. Establishing the size of the populations at these colonies would be a valuable exercise and should perhaps be built into the broader biodiversity monitoring program for the island.

4. Formal and informal international instruments for aquatic bird conservation:

As part of the United Kingdom, Montserrat is party to the following international agreements:

- World Heritage Convention (WHC) = *Signed and ratified*
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) = *Signed and ratified*
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands = *Signed and ratified*
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals = *Signed and ratified*



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5. Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Gerard Gray and Stephen Mendes (Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and the Environment), Philemon Murrain, James Boatswain, Calvin Fenton, John Martin, Lloyd Aymer, Jervain Greenaway, Chris Bowden, Liz Mackley, Joah Madden, Mark Hulme, Alan Mills (Alan Fisher Consulting), Ian Fisher (RSPB), Richard Young, Matthew Morton (DWCT), Colin Clubbe, Martin Hamilton (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), Mike Ivie, Katie Marske, Sarah Sanders (RSPB), Stephen Mendes (DOE), Carole McCauley, Calvin Fenton and Jervain Greenaway (DOE).

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Table 1. Waterbirds occurrence, distribution, habitat and population estimates in Montserrat.									
Family	Species	English name	Category (IUCN)	Ocurrence	Habitat	National population estimate	Distribution	In-country trends	References
Anatidae	Dendrocygna bicolor	Fulvous Whistling-duck	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Dendrocygna viduata	White-faced Whistling-duck	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Dendrocygna autumnalis	Black-bellied Whistling-duck	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Aix sponsa	Wood Duck	LC	Vagrant					
Anatidae	Anas penelope	Eurasian Wigeon	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Anas americana	American Wigeon	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Anas discors	Blue-winged Teal	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Anas clypeata	Northern Shoveler	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Anas bahamensis	White-cheeked Pintail	LC	Native					



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Anatidae	Anas acuta	Northern Pintail	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Anas crecca	Common Teal	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Anas crecca		NR	Vagrant					
Anatidae	Anas carolinensis		NR	Native					
Anatidae	Aythya collaris	Ring-necked Duck	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Aythya affinis	Lesser Scaup	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Lophodytes cucullatus	Hooded Merganser	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Nomonyx dominicus	Masked Duck	LC	Native					
Anatidae	Oxyura jamaicensis	Ruddy Duck	LC	Native					
Procellariidae	Calonectris diomedea	Cory's Shearwater	LC	Native					
Procellariidae	Puffinus lherminieri	Audubon's Shearwater	LC	Native					



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Hydrobatidae	Oceanodroma leucorhoa	Leach's Storm-petrel	LC	Native					
Podicipedidae	Podilymbus podiceps	Pied-billed Grebe	LC	Native					
Threskiornithidae	Plegadis falcinellus	Glossy Ibis	LC	Native					
Threskiornithidae	Platalea ajaja	Roseate Spoonbill	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Botaurus lentiginosus	American Bittern	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Ixobrychus exilis	Least Bittern	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Nycticorax nycticorax	Black-crowned Night-heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Nyctanassa violacea	Yellow-crowned Night-heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Butorides striata	Striated Heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Butorides virescens	Green Heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Bubulcus ibis	Cattle Egret	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	Ardea cinerea	Grey Heron	LC	Native					



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Ardeidae	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Great Blue Heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	Great Egret	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>	Reddish Egret	NT	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	Tricoloured Heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	Little Blue Heron	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret	NR	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta gularis</i>	Western Reef-egret	LC	Native					
Ardeidae	<i>Egretta thula</i>	Snowy Egret	LC	Native					
Phaethontidae	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>	Red-billed Tropicbird	LC	Native					
Phaethontidae	<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>	White-tailed Tropicbird	LC	Native					
Fregatidae	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	Magnificent Frigatebird	LC	Native					



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Pelecanidae	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	Brown Pelican	NR	Native					
Sulidae	<i>Sula dactylatra</i>	Masked Booby	LC	Native					
Sulidae	<i>Sula sula</i>	Red-footed Booby	LC	Native					
Sulidae	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby	LC	Native					
Phalacrocoracidae	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	Neotropic Cormorant	LC	Native					
Phalacrocoracidae	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	Double-crested Cormorant	LC	Native					
Anhingidae	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	Anhinga	LC	Vagrant					
Rallidae	<i>Rallus longirostris</i>	Clapper Rail	LC	Native					
Rallidae	<i>Porzana carolina</i>	Sora	LC	Native					
Rallidae	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>	Yellow-legged Gallinule	LC	Native					
Rallidae	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Common Moorhen	LC	Native					



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Rallidae	Fulica americana	American Coot	LC	Native					
Rallidae	Fulica caribaea	Caribbean Coot	NT	Vagrant					
Haematopodidae	Haematopus palliatus	American Oystercatcher	LC	Native					
Recurvirostridae	Himantopus mexicanus	Black-necked Stilt	NR	Native					
Recurvirostridae	Himantopus mexicanus	Black-necked Stilt	LC	Native					
Recurvirostridae	Recurvirostra americana	American Avocet	LC	Native					
Charadriidae	Vanellus vanellus	Northern Lapwing	LC	Native					
Charadriidae	Pluvialis squatarola	Grey Plover	LC	Native					
Charadriidae	Charadrius hiaticula	Common Ringed Plover	LC	Native					
Charadriidae	Charadrius semipalmatus	Semipalmated Plover	LC	Native					



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Charadriidae	Charadrius wilsonia	Wilson's Plover	LC	Native					
Charadriidae	Charadrius alexandrinus	Kentish Plover	LC	Native					
Charadriidae	Charadrius collaris	Collared Plover	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Lymnocyptes minimus	Jack Snipe	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Gallinago gallinago	Common Snipe	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Gallinago delicata		NR	Native					
Scolopacidae	Limnodromus griseus	Short-billed Dowitcher	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Limosa fedoa	Marbled Godwit	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Numenius phaeopus	Whimbrel	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Bartramia longicauda	Upland Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Tringa erythropus	Spotted Redshank	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Tringa melanoleuca	Greater Yellowlegs	LC	Native					



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Scolopacidae	Tringa flavipes	Lesser Yellowlegs	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Tringa solitaria	Solitary Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Tringa glareola	Wood Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Actitis macularius	Spotted Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Catoptrophorus semipalmatus	Willet	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Arenaria interpres	Ruddy Turnstone	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris canutus	Red Knot	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris alba	Sanderling	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris pusilla	Semipalmated Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris mauri	Western Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris minutilla	Least Sandpiper	LC	Native					



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Scolopacidae	Calidris fuscicollis	White-rumped Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris bairdii	Baird's Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris melanotos	Pectoral Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris alpina	Dunlin	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris ferruginea	Curlew Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Calidris himantopus	Stilt Sandpiper	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Philomachus pugnax	Ruff	LC	Native					
Scolopacidae	Steganopus tricolor	Wilson's Phalarope	LC	Native					
Laridae	Larus delawarensis	Ring-billed Gull	LC	Native					
Laridae	Larus marinus	Great Black-backed Gull	LC	Native					



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Laridae	Larus argentatus	Herring Gull	LC	Native					
Laridae	Larus fuscus	Lesser Black-backed Gull	LC	Native					
Laridae	Larus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull	LC	Native					
Laridae	Larus philadelphia	Bonaparte's Gull	LC	Native					
Laridae	Larus atricilla	Laughing Gull	LC	Native					
Laridae	Rissa tridactyla	Black-legged Kittiwake	LC	Native					
Laridae	Sterna nilotica	Gull-billed Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	Sterna maxima	Royal Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	Sterna sandvicensis	Sandwich Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	Sterna hirundo	Common Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	Sterna forsteri	Forster's Tern	LC	Vagrant					
Laridae	Sterna antillarum	Least Tern	LC	Native					



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Laridae	<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Bridled Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	<i>Sterna fuscata</i>	Sooty Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	White-winged Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Black Tern	LC	Native					
Laridae	<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Brown Noddy	LC	Native					
Laridae	<i>Anous minutus</i>	Black Noddy	LC	Native					
Laridae	<i>Rynchops niger</i>	Black Skimmer	LC	Native					
Stercorariidae	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	Great Skua	LC	Native					
Stercorariidae	<i>Catharacta maccormicki</i>	South Polar Skua	LC	Native					
Stercorariidae	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	Pomarine Jaeger	LC	Native					
Stercorariidae	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Parasitic Jaeger	LC	Native					



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Stercorariidae	Stercorarius longicaudus	Long-tailed Jaeger	LC	Native					
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