Caribbean Seabird Conservation: new study begins!

Title

A two-year study has begun to identify important feeding areas for a range of Caribbean seabird species on the UK Overseas Territories of Anguilla and British Virgin Islands (BVI). The study will use GPS technology to track Brown Boobies and Sooty Terns and Magnificent Frigatebirds on Dog Island, Anguilla and Magnificent Frigatebirds on Great Tobago IBA in the British Virgin Islands. This follows on from pilot work in 2012 where 20 Brown Boobies were tracked on Dog Island, and found to travel up to 300 km in a round trip!

Dog Island is an Important Bird and BiodiversityArea (IBA) and the second most important site for seabirds in the Caribbean, hosting four globally important populations (> 1 % of the total global population), despite its small size of just 2 km2. Dog Island and Great Tobago support two of the four Magnificent Frigatebird colonies in the area. In 2012, sixty birds were recorded dead at the Great Tobago colony due to entanglement with monofilament fishing line. Local partners with support from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) are removing line from the existing trees and it is hoped that tracking may help to identify areas where the birds are encountering the fishing line and explore solutions. The work will provide new information on these species' feeding ecology and help to identify important feeding areas, which can inform marine planning in the area. Potential threats to seabirds in Anguilla and BVI will also be identified, and long-term local seabird monitoring programmes established with local partners.

Louise Soanes and Anguilla National Trust team, Dog Island. Photo: Jenny Bright

The project is being implemented by The University of Liverpool, The RSPB, Anguilla National Trust, the BVI National Parks Trust and Jost van Dykes Preservation Society and is funded by Defra's Darwin Plus Scheme. Please see http://www.caribbeanseabirds.org.uk/ for further updates! Authors: Louise Soanes and Jonathan Green, University of Liverpool and Jenny Bright, RSPB.