

First ever chick photos give hope for threatened Caribbean seabird

Title A new nesting location for Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* has been discovered in Haiti by the efforts of a joint Dominican ? Haitian field team. **Black-capped Petrel** (BCPE) is a Globally Threatened species (Endangered on the IUCN Red List 2011) with a population estimated at 1,000 breeding pairs, although records at-sea suggest that over 5,000 individuals could persist. The only breeding sites presently known are at Loma del Toro (in **Sierra de Bahoruco IBA**) in south-west Dominican Republic and at La Visite and Macaya in Haiti (in the south-east and south-west of the country, respectively). The species has been extirpated from some sites, and it is anticipated that both the breeding range and population will continue to decline as a result of ongoing habitat loss and degradation, hunting and invasive predators. Concern over the status of this seabird was discussed during an International Workshop of the **Black-capped Petrel Working Group** held in Santo Domingo during November 2010. The need to undertake surveys of potential nesting sites was one of a number of clear actions identified during the planning workshop, and in order to facilitate the search for nests, a map of potential breeding habitat was produced by John Gerwin of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science. Using the map to target efforts, **Grupo Jaragua** (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic) spearheaded an initiative to search for Black-capped Petrel nests early in 2011. The searches were a natural extension of the support provided to James Goetz (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and his efforts to promote national, binational and international collaboration for the species over the last few years. The searches are also identified as a critical next step in Grupo Jaragua's **strategy for monitoring endangered species**.



http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/BCPE_Brooding-Adult-3-march-Photo_Grupo-Jaragua1-300x225.jpg

Brooding adult on a nest, 3 March 2011

The presumed breeding season of the Black-capped Petrel was already underway when the Grupo Jaragua team (of Ernst Rupp, Jairo Issa Arache, Gerson Feliz, and José Luis Castillo) started the expedition to search for nests on 3rd March. The team was joined by two members (Djeff Alexis and Evanita Sanon) of OJAA ? a youth organization in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti ? who have been involved with Grupo Jaragua-led conservation efforts for the Critically Endangered *Ricord?s Iguana* *Cyclura ricordi*. After reaching the small, rural Haitian community of Savann Zombi by vehicle, the expedition continued on foot along the Massif de la Selle in order to reach a site close to Morne Vincent ? one of the sites pinpointed by John Gerwin as a possible nesting location. Morne Vincent is a steep hill with cliffs, forming part of the mountain chain of the Massif de la Selle, and surrounded by land heavily impacted by slash-and-burn agriculture. On arrival at the site day-time searches for nests were initiated, followed by efforts to locate calling birds at night. After two days of intensive day and night efforts, no sign of the bird had been discovered. Not wanting to admit defeat, Jairo Isaa Arache ? a field assistant trained by Grupo Jaragua in the use of camera traps and telemetry ? decided to search an adjacent (as yet un-surveyed) hill on his own. From somewhere up on the hill, the team heard Jairo shout ?I think I have found the bird!? Inside a small cave an adult Black-capped Petrel was sitting motionless on a nest of dry pine needles and fern leaves. Nothing seemed to disturb the bird, and each team member took turns to have a short look at this miraculous find. The first ever active nest of a Black-capped petrel had been discovered! A camera trap was set up a safe distance from the nest as a minimal-impact tool to monitor activity at the nest including any possible predators, 24 hours a day. More than 3,000 photos were taken during the period March ? July 2011. ?The amount of energy the parents invest in their off-spring is incredible. They only have one nestling, but dedicate half a year to brood the egg and feed the chick until it grows to full size and leaves the nest. Half a year is a lot of time! ? said Ernst Rupp from Grupo Jaragua. On 2nd August, the team returned for the last time to the nest site and found that the camera trap had stopped working on 4th July. Although the final movements of the fledgling had not been recorded, it seems the young bird safely left the nest for the ocean as no signs of predator activity were found. http://youtu.be/Y_GqxnftFc8 Two more nests were discovered in the vicinity of the first nest, one of which, on 13th March, contained a brooding adult. Neither of these nests was successful ? their eggs did not hatch. One was found with the remnants of the nestling in the egg, and the other nest had broken eggshell without any trace of a nestling. Both nests were situated within a ravine where it is suspected that flood waters may have damaged them. The discoveries in Haiti, and the collaboration involved in making them provide real hope for the Black-capped Petrel, and a boost for the implementation of the recently-published *Conservation Action Plan for the Black-capped Petrel*. The action plan details three main objectives that will be the focus of work in the near future: defining distribution and abundance; understanding the breeding ecology; and

working with local communities to conserve the species. The Grupo Jaragua team is already preparing for the 2012 season, and their part in the implementation of the conservation action plan. This **important discovery** is the result of a huge collaborative effort on behalf of the Black-capped Petrel for which Grupo Jaragua and James Goetz would like to sincerely thank the support of many individuals and organizations including: Abdel Abellard, Jesus Almonte, J. Hart, Anderson Jean, Miguel Landestoy, Enold Louis Jean, T. Mejia, René Jeune, Evanita Sanon, Djef Alexis, Markus Kleber, Jerbin Volquez, **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, MacArthur Foundation, BirdLife International, SEO/BirdLife, AECID, US Forest Service, MIRENA, Société Audubon Haiti, Sociedad Ornitológica de la Hispaniola, Foundation Seguin, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, North Carolina Museum of Natural Science, American Bird Conservancy, Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds and Environmental Protection in the Caribbean.**