Title

Forestry staff from Montserrat?s Department of Environment are currently in the field conducting the annual bird monitoring exercise to determine the bird populations in the island?s Centre Hills Important Bird Area.

The exercise consists of two teams visiting 87 predetermined sites, located on 11 monitoring routes that encompass wet, moist and dry forest types. The number and species of bird are recorded both by visual observation and by sound.

Prior to 2011 each site was visited once, but in an effort to strengthen the integrity of the statistical data, all 87 points will be visited three times over a 4-week period. This will give a better estimate of the number and distribution of birds in the Centre Hills, enabling the Department of Environment to make informed decisions regarding conservation of the birds and their habitat.

Montserrat Oriole Icterus oberi
(Critically Endangered)

Accompanying the foresters in the field is Dr. Steffen Oppel, Senior Conservation Scientist with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, BirdLife in the UK). Dr. Oppel is particularly interested in analyzing the data for the globally threatened Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi* (Critically Endangered) and the Forest Thrush *Turdus lherminieri* (Vulnerable). Ms. Sorrel Jones, a volunteer from the RSPB, is also involved in the monitoring exercise.

Montserrat (a UK Overseas Territory) is home to 12 restricted-range bird species, including the endemic Montserrat Oriole. A number of environmental impacts, such as habitat degradation, invasive species, volcanic eruptions and hurricanes, may negatively affect the island?s bird populations. Therefore, the annual bird monitoring exercise acts as an early warning system that will help equip conservation managers take appropriate action in a timely manner.

Gerard A L Gray **Director of Environment** 2 April 2012