Threatened whistling-ducks arrive at Woodbourne, Barbados

Title The BirdLife Caribbean Program established Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge on Barbados in 2009 with funding and support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service. Originally a 5-ha wetland ?swamp? managed specifically for shorebird hunting, Woodbourne was abandoned and fell into disrepair until BirdLife restored it as a ?no-shooting? refuge for migratory shorebirds and resident waterbirds ? a move that has been actively (and financially) supported by the Barbados Wildfowlers Association. The result is that in just over two years, an astonishing 24 species of shorebirds have found safe haven at Woodbourne. 2011 has been a difficult year for wetland management in Barbados. Above average rainfall in 2010, culminating in full flood conditions after hurricane Tomas at the end of October 2010 meant that Woodbourne started the 2011 autumn migration season with plenty of water. Further rains this autumn led to early flooding and very limited shallow water and shoreline habitat for shorebirds to alight on. For example, on one day at the end of August more than 270 Lesser Yellowlegs (a Species of Conservation Concern) passed through Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge without finding a place to stop. While shorebird habitat was limited, Woodbourne did prove to be attractive to other waterbird species, and on 10th September, two West Indian Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna arborea* - a globally Vulnerable species) turned up, associating with the resident Black-bellied Whistling-duck population (which currently stands at about eight pairs and 60-70 young). The West Indian Whistling-duck is an insular Caribbean endemic which is traditionally distributed only to the northern end of the Lesser Antilles in Antigua and Barbuda. However, with an expanding population in Antigua, the species has recently colonised Guadeloupe, and now two birds have arrived in Barbados. After arriving at Woodbourne, the West Indian Whistling-ducks appeared to move around the island a lot. One was photographed at Fosters shooting swamp in the St Lucy IBA (whistling-ducks are not a target species for hunters on Barbados), and then the two birds were seen together again at Woodbourne on 3rd October when undergraduate students from the University of the West Indies were visiting the refuge on a biology field trip. The only other modern record of West Indian Whistling-duck on Barbados was of four birds spending a week at Graeme Hall Swamp IBA in 1961.

?*Water management at Woodbourne has been a challenge in 2011. In early October, a number of Hudsonian Godwits could find no suitable lighting ground at our refuge, but they were able to rest and feed for several hours at the nearby Hampton shooting swamp before resuming their migration. This demonstrates how critical the network of artificially maintained wetlands in Barbados is for waterbirds. The godwits, the whistling-ducks, Whimbrel and indeed many other waterbird species are not targeted by the hunters on the privately-owned and managed swamps. However, a number of migratory shorebird species are hunted and the Barbados Wildfowlers Association is working closely with BirdLife towards objective regulation of this hunting based on sound science*? said **Mr. Wayne Burke, BirdLife?s Barbados Project Manager**