

Shooting of Whimbrels sparks calls for regulation of shorebird hunting in the Caribbean

Title

Two Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* tracked by scientists from a US university have been shot by hunters on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, highlighting the continuing lack of protection for migratory shorebirds in this important part of their flyway. Scientists at the Center for Conservation Biology at Virginia Commonwealth University were using satellite technology to follow the Whimbrels, known as Machi and Goshen. The birds were not migrating together, but both stopped on the island on the morning of 12 September, after encountering different storm systems. Goshen flew through the east side of Hurricane Irene, landed on Montserrat, spent a week on Antigua and then flew to Guadeloupe. Machi flew through Tropical Storm Maria and landed on Montserrat before flying directly to Guadeloupe. The two birds were the first of the 17 Whimbrels followed by the four-year tracking study to stop on Guadeloupe, and both were lost within hours of arriving, suggesting that hunting pressure on this island is extremely high. Guadeloupe has several isolated mangrove swamps that serve to concentrate the shorebirds for shooting. An estimated 3,000 hunters participate in the shorebird hunt annually. Currently, shooting parties on the island are not regulated, and no information is available on the number of shorebirds taken. Without such information it is not possible to assess the potential relationship between hunting and ongoing population declines. The number of Whimbrels migrating along the western Atlantic coast has fallen by



Guadeloupe is an overseas *département* of France, with representation in the French and European parliament. But in common with other French (and British and Netherlands) overseas *départements* and territories in the Caribbean, it is not covered by the European pillars of biodiversity conservation, namely the Birds and Habitats Directives and the Natura 2000 network. The French overseas entities around the world are home to more endemic birds than all of continental Europe, and the lack of regulation, investment and training in conservation has in part led to France having the seventh highest number of globally threatened birds of any country in the world. Most of the migratory shorebird species breeding in eastern North America and the Arctic pass over the Caribbean region during late August, September. When they encounter severe storms, the birds use the islands as refuges before moving on to their final destinations. Hunting clubs take advantage of these events to shoot large numbers of the birds. Having weathered Tropical Storm Maria, Machi made a brief landfall on Montserrat (UK) before flying on to Guadeloupe (France), where he landed in a 'shooting marsh' operated by hunters. 'The shooting of Machi in Guadeloupe highlights the urgent need for updated hunting regulations in the French West Indies and Barbados', said Lisa Sorenson, President of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB). 'These Lesser Antilles islands are particularly important because they serve as refuges from tropical storms and hurricanes that birds encounter during migration along this Atlantic flyway.' 'Hunting is a huge issue for migratory shorebirds in the Americas, with tens of thousands shot each year in Guadeloupe (France), Martinique (France), Barbados and then Suriname', confirmed David Wege, BirdLife's Caribbean Programme Director. 'BirdLife, in conjunction with Canadian Wildlife Service, has been working with the hunters in Barbados for a number of years, to help them avoid shooting species of conservation concern, and to move towards sustainability by setting bag limits. We have established a 'no shooting' refuge, the Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge, in Barbados, and would like to establish other such reserves to provide safe havens for resident and migratory waterbirds alike.' LPO/BirdLife France, together with local NGO partners on the ground, has launched an appeal for the protection of birds and their habitats in the French overseas *départements* of Reunion, Martinique and French Guiana. Projects funded by the European Union's LIFE+ initiative are providing techniques and lessons which can be applied in other French and European overseas *départements* and territories. 'It is disappointing to note that these migrating birds have been shot down in one of our overseas *départements* after having flown thousands of kilometres hoping to find shelter from the tropical storms and recharge their energy stocks. This year, France is celebrating its overseas entities, whose biodiversity is remarkable, rich and also threatened. Our country really must evaluate the current hunting legislation in these overseas *départements* where the European nature directives do not apply', said Allain Bougrain Dubourg, President LPO/BirdLife France. This news is brought to you by the [BirdLife Flyways Programme](#). You can help shorebirds in the Caribbean by [donating here](#)
