

Strategic Engagement in Seabird Conservation

*An Opportunities Assessment
and Action Guide
for the Waterbird Conservation Council*



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Presentation Outline

State of Seabirds and their Conservation

- I. Introduction
- II. Seabirds
- III. Organizational Response
 - A. American Bird Conservancy
 - B. Birdlife International

UMD Findings and Recommendations

- I. Findings – Seabirds and Council
- II. Recommendations
- III. Flagship Conservation
- IV. Key Points for Discussion



Photo by: Mike Danzenbaker

Introduction

Our charge:

“...the Council desires input on how it should become involved as an entity in seabird conservation. In what strategies and in collaboration with what partners is the Council most likely to provide added value? What projects are most appropriate and feasible for the Council’s current and possibly future membership?”



Photo by: Eric Preston

Seabirds

- Definitions and characteristics
- Natural history
 - Seabird syndrome
- Families considered for analysis
 - Diomedidae (albatrosses)
 - Procellariidae (petrels, shearwaters, fulmars)
 - Hydrobatidae (storm-petrels)
 - Phaethontidae (tropicbirds)
 - Sulidae (boobies and gannets)
 - Fregatidae (frigatebirds)
 - Alcidae (auklets, murrelets, puffins)
 - Tropical members of Laridae (terns and noddies)



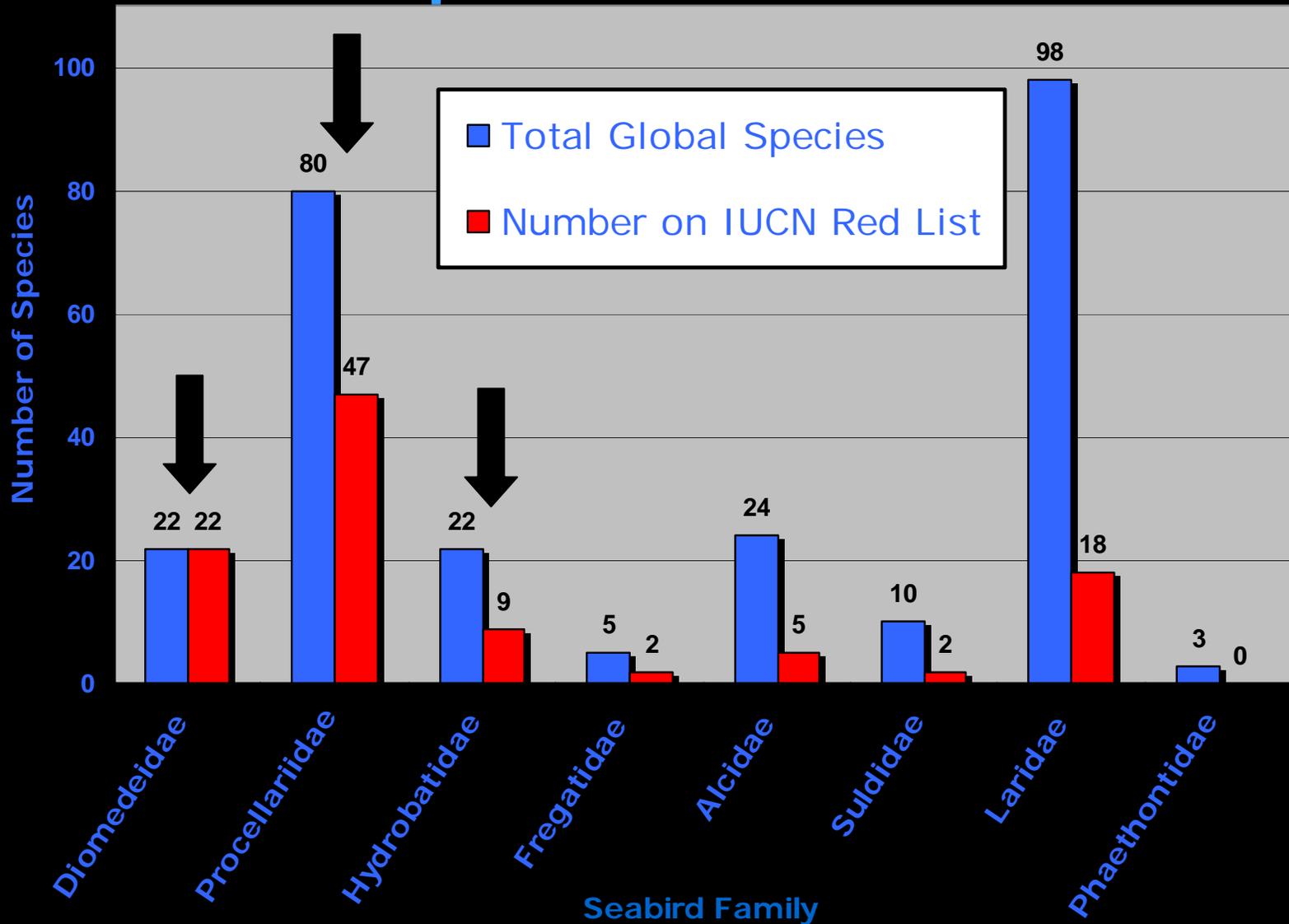
Photo Courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Global Seabird Status

- IUCN Red List analysis
 - Diomedidae, Procellariidae, and Hydrobatidae make-up 47% of global seabird species and 74% of seabirds on IUCN Red List
- NAWCP Assessments
 - All “highly imperiled” species within these families (11/11)
 - Nearly 25% of species of “high concern” within these families (10/44)

Global Seabird Status By Family

Based Upon the IUCN Red List



Global Threats

- On Land
 - Introduced mammalian predators, outright habitat loss, soil erosion and compaction, harvest
- At Sea
 - Bycatch in commercial fisheries, prey depletion, water pollution, and ingestion of debris such as plastics
- Emerging Issues
 - Climate change, sea level rise



Photo by: Graham Roberston

International Response

Fisheries

- FAO Code of Conduct and International Plan of Action for Seabirds
- Regional fisheries efforts

Island Conservation

- Intensive local efforts around the world

Needs



Photo by: Juan Pablo Galvan

Council Partners – In Conservation Action

- Jennifer Arnold – American Bird Conservancy – Seabird Program
- Esteban Frere – Birdlife International – South America Seabird Program

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Photo by: Mike Danzenbaker

Conservation Gaps

- Knowledge
 - At-sea distribution
 - Impact of fisheries interactions
- Capacity
 - Resources
 - Technical expertise
- Integration
 - No Western Hemisphere-wide body coordinating seabird conservation
- Species

Species Gap

- Seabirds are a gap within waterbirds
- Procellariids are a gap within seabirds
 - The majority are not a focus of ACAP in the Southern Hemisphere
 - Basic baseline population and threat data are lacking
 - Regional and species-specific work ongoing, but no coordinated effort for procellariids as a group

Procellariids

From Shaffer et al. 2006

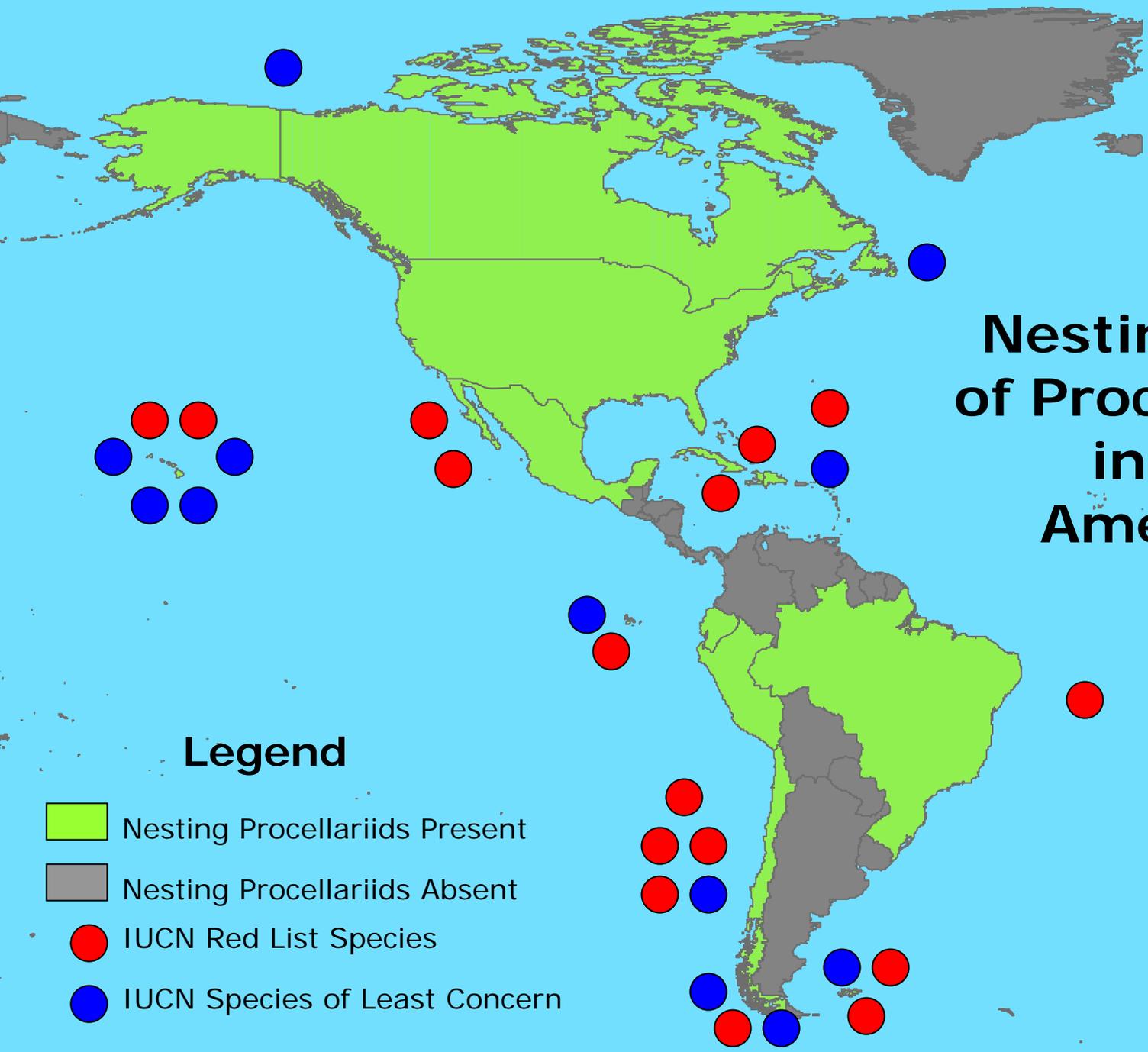


- Ecology
- Migration
- Biological and political links between north and south and beyond
- Threats

Nesting Sites of Procellariids in the Americas

Legend

-  Nesting Procellariids Present
-  Nesting Procellariids Absent
-  IUCN Red List Species
-  IUCN Species of Least Concern



Waterbird Conservation Council

- Reviewed NAWCP, annual meeting notes, website
- Interviews:
 - Strengths
 - Limitations
 - Council benefits
 - Council structure
 - Best Council niche



Photo by: Waterbird Conservation Council

Waterbird Conservation Council

- Strengths
 - Passionate & dedicated people
 - Diverse expertise & geographies
 - Well-connected
- Council benefits
 - Information node
 - Networking
 - Opportunities to make an impact
- Limitations
 - Mainly voluntary
 - Diverse expertise & geographies
 - Little funding
- Council structure
 - 60% North America
 - Little Policy/Fisheries
 - Topical committees

Best Council Niche

- Opportunities and areas of collaboration
- Raising awareness
- Information sharing
- Influencing policy
- Leveraging funding
- Identifying research needs
- Capacity building

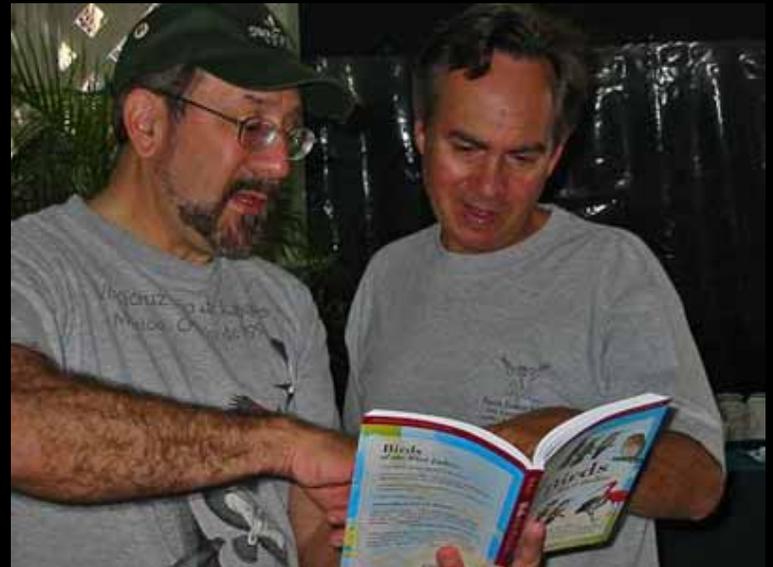


Photo by: Waterbird Conservation Council

Next Steps Should...

- Capitalize on existing members talents/interests
- Contain broad geographic coverage & connectivity
- Be tangible and focused
- Make use of existing connections; build new ones
- Build upon existing work, priorities, recommendations
- Engage members at individual & Council levels
- Inspire the Council to rally behind an initiative

Recommendations



- Critical Issues to Promote
- Specific Projects
- Internal Affairs
- Flagship Conservation Concept

Critical Issues to Promote



- Protection of important habitat
- At-sea science
- Bycatch issues
- Oiling and pollution
- Climate change
- Identification of additional emerging threats

Projects to Consider

- Seabird nesting site threat assessment
- Cost-effective seabird conservation
- ACAP
- Disseminate Technical Information



Photo by: Falklands Conservation

Internal Affairs

- Funding
- Capacity building
- Membership and structure
- Outreach and awareness
- The inspiration factor



Photo by: Karl Kaufmann

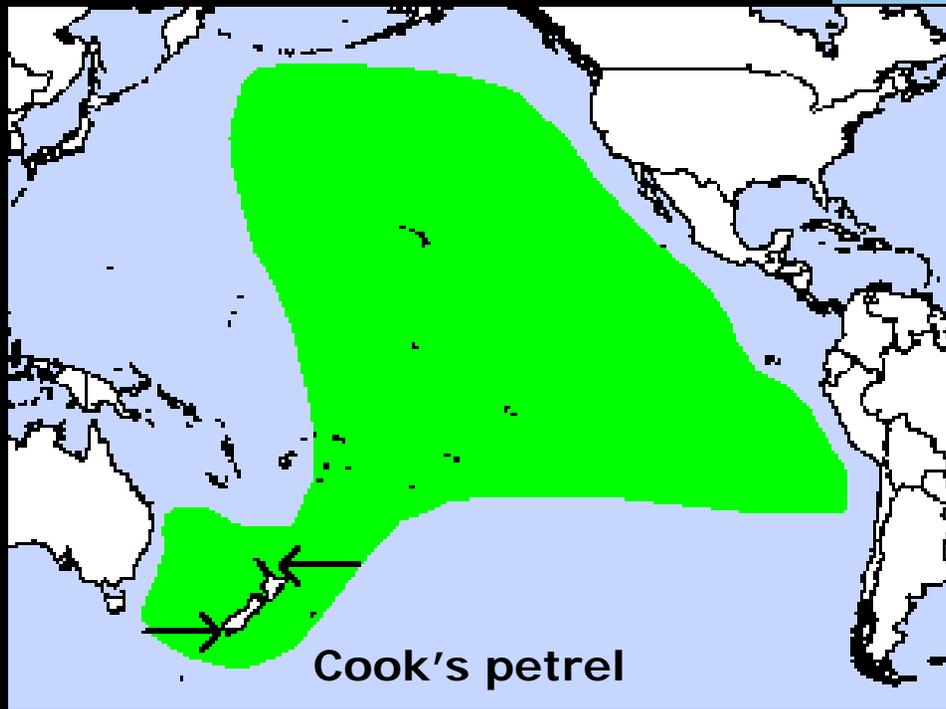
Flagship Conservation

- Flagship concept
- Conservation gap in procellariids
 - Albatrosses and fisheries interactions
 - ACAP coverage
- Distribution throughout the Americas
 - Trans-equatorial migrants
 - Substantial numbers breed in the Americas
 - THE seabird of the Americas
- Would focus Council effort, expertise and experience



Drawing by: Alexander Balloffet

Flagship Conservation- Common Threads



BirdLife International

Flagship Conservation - Opportunities

- Promote an important issue in seabird conservation
- Strengthen ties and build capacity within South America and the Caribbean
- Raise Council's profile within seabird community, increase collaborations and potential financial support
- Initiate a concerted effort and set priorities in the Americas

Flagship Conservation - Strategic Species Assessments

Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*)

Region: West Indies, Caribbean

Species: Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri lherminieri*)

Distribution: West Indies and Caribbean Region

Breeding Site(s): Numerous small cays in The Bahamas, and Lesser Antilles. Subfossils and historical reports show populations extirpated on mainlands including Bermuda, Abaco, Crooked, and Mona Islands, while offshore populations at Tintamarre (St. Martin), Little Tobago, and other sites have been decimated more recently.

Population Size: 3,000-5,000 pairs

IUCN Threat Status: species of least concern (based upon global population)

Primary Threat(s): NAWCP lists Audubon's Shearwater as highly imperiled within the plan area. This assessment was based upon biologically significant population declines and documented threats to breeding birds. According to those working in the region, the primary threat for this species is introduced rats and cats. Island nesting habitat is being lost as smaller islands are being developed. The once large breeding colonies have been reduced by orders of magnitudes, with smaller populations persisting on smaller uninhabited cays.

Biological Brief: There are as many as twelve subspecies of Audubon's Shearwater, although most taxonomic relationships are not yet determined (Brooke 2004). Recent phylogenetic work, however, suggests that the Caribbean Audubon Shearwater may be a distinct species from the widespread Pacific Audubon Shearwaters (Austin et al 2004). It nests in rock crevices in several locations within the Caribbean. The West Indies may hold 3000-5000 pairs (subspecies *P. l. lherminieri*) of which more than one-half are believed to nest in The Bahamas. The southwest Caribbean population near Panama (subspecies *P. l. lyeonmülleri*) is reported to be very close to extinction (Lee 2000; Brooke 2004).

Current Conservation Activities: Conservation efforts appear to be limited to monitoring and census efforts spearheaded by a few biologists working in the region at this point. EPIC (Environmental Protection in the Caribbean) is currently looking for funding to carry out rat eradication programs that may improve breeding success at some colonies. Will Mackin of Elon University, N.C. is currently monitoring nesting sites and estimating survivorship for Audubon's Shearwaters on Long Rock in the Exuma Cays Land and Sea State Park in The Bahamas. He is interested in pursuing a citizen science project in which artificial nesting boxes will be used to create additional sites for nesting on predator-free islands.

Conservation Gaps or Needs: According to sources working in the region, the primary conservation need relates to raising the awareness within the public concerning seabird conservation issues. Educational activities or citizen science projects could help to form a grassroots movement to protect nest sites. Conservation projects such as predator eradication efforts aimed at this species could reestablish former colonies. Populations should also be monitored and surveyed every few years to determine if the decline of the species is slowing. Additional needs include securing protection for breeding colonies and funding for priority projects.

Individuals working with this species should consider outreach efforts aimed at tourists and local fishermen in order to prevent the introduction of predators to predator-free islands. Outreach efforts aimed at the owners of small cays with nesting shearwaters may also be helpful.



Photo by: Brian Patterson ©

According to one source, the number of biologists and managers addressing the needs of this species is limited to few people in the region. Building capacity and interest in this species within the wildlife management and seabird conservation community should be a priority.

Species Synergies: The island of Tintamarre, St. Martin, is home to nesting seabird colonies of Red-billed Tropicbird, Audubon's Shearwater, Bridled Tern, Brown Noddy, and Roseate Tern. Though now reduced to two nesting pairs, the island was once among the largest Audubon Shearwater colonies in the region. Predator eradication efforts on this island may have substantial positive impacts for several additional species nesting on the island.

Council Connections:

Nation	Affiliation	Individual(s)	Other Connections
St. Martin	EPIC	Natafia Collier	Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds
U.S.	Elon University, NC	Will Mackin	Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds
U.S.	Virgin Islands FWS	Judy Pierce	Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds
U.S.	Loma Linda University, CA	William Hayes	
U.S.	U.S. FWS Int'l Office	Herb Rafael	Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, WHMS!
U.S.	N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences (Emeritus)	David Lee	
The Bahamas	The Bahamas National Trust	IBA Coordinator	

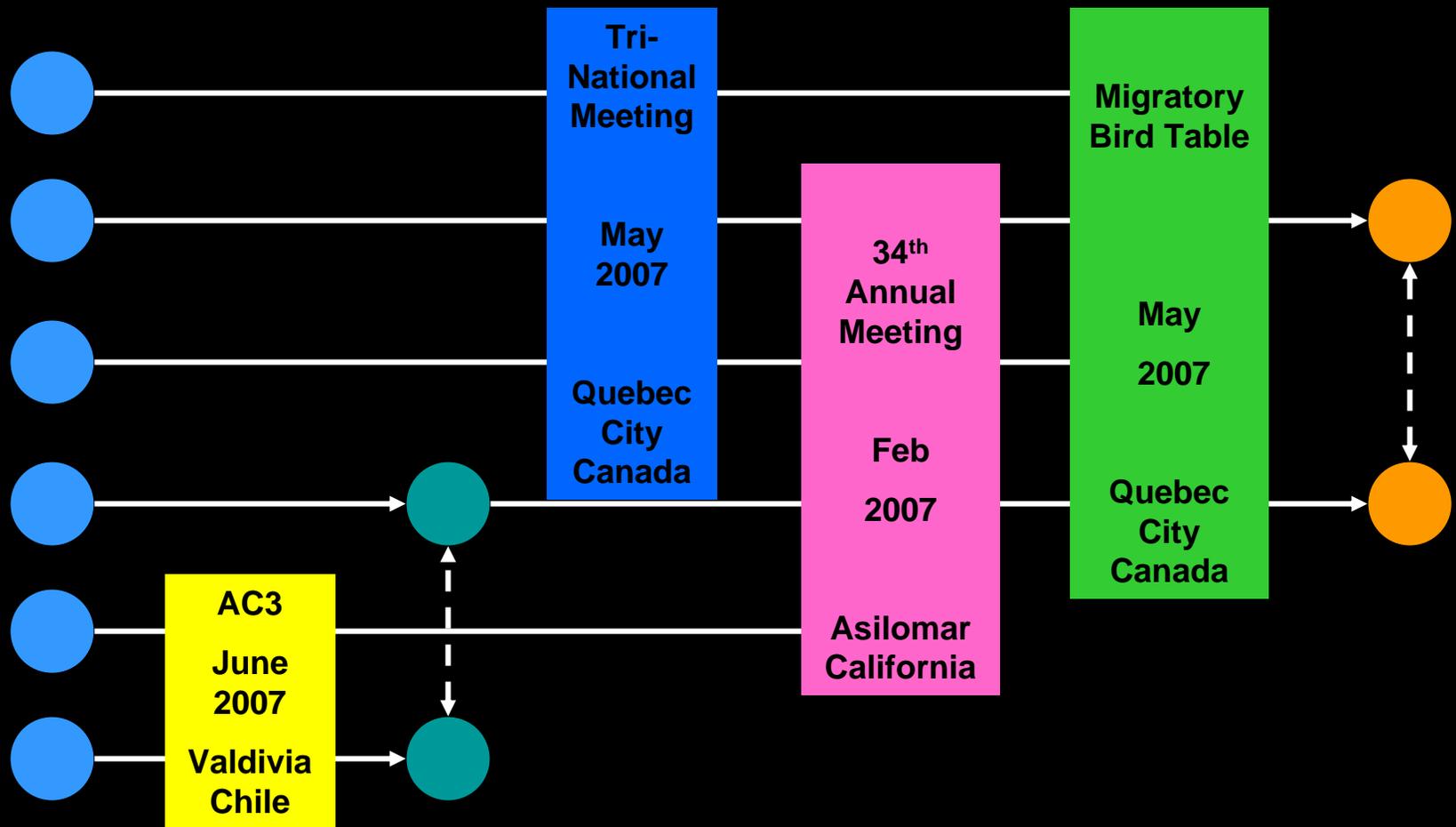
Recommendation for Council Action: Council members are advised to disseminate this information to all relevant individuals and to raise general awareness of the need for conservation action, within this species' wintering and breeding grounds. Without a concerted effort, this species may be on its way toward extinction in the Caribbean.

Identification and recruitment of partners who may be poised to carryout significant projects for this species should be a priority. Council members may also be able to assist by locating funding sources for additional projects related to this species. Considering the limitations on funds, Council members should help prioritize potential projects with an eye for tangible projects that may involve the public over projects solely of a scientific nature.

Finally, individual Council members may be able to put a discussion of Audubon's Shearwater on the agenda of the next meeting of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds.

Strategic Connections

WCC	ACAP	BLI	CEC/NABCI	PSG	Tri-Lateral	WHMSI
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Key Points for Consideration

- Conservation gaps and needs of seabirds in the Americas
- Interests/expertise of individual members and capability/capacity of entire Council
- Assets and abilities of other organizations with which the Council could collaborate
- Focused efforts on identified list of priorities
- Opportunities associated with promotion of flagship conservation

Acknowledgements



WHSMI



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada



CONS

sustainable development and conservation biology



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND



Commission for Environmental Cooperation

Discussion



- Clarifying Questions
- General Impressions
- Ideas for Action
- Opportunities
- Challenges
- Leading the Way Forward

Thank you
and good
luck!

¡Gracias y
buena
suerte!

RL

Photo Courtesy of Juan Fernandez Island Conservancy

