



PROMOTING CITIZEN SCIENCE THROUGH BIRDING!

FINAL REPORT

ON BEHALF OF

The Environmental Awareness Group



Natalya Lawrence | Project Coordinator | eagantigua@gmail.com

Summary

In 2019, Ms. Shanna Challenger and Ms. Natalya Lawrence (Project Coordinators) made a successful project proposal submission to the Cape Cod Bird Club. They, with the additional support of local bird conservation educator Ms. Andrea Otto, sought to train a cadre of residents in bird identification, wetland monitoring and data submission to the online platform, eBird. The chosen wetland sites are Fitches Creek, Bethesda Dam, and Christian Cove, all globally designated Important Bird Areas, providing vital habitat for vulnerable resident birds in addition to wintering sites, feeding sites, and resting grounds for migrant birds.

In addition to training a group of local citizen scientists, the team has already made strides towards the formation of a long-lasting bird club as a result of this training. Further, the team hopes to improve the experience at major birding sites and views this project as the first step to converting major wetlands into sustainable multi-use areas, including bird and mangrove conservation, as well interpretive, watchable wetlands for low impact tourism, recreational and wellness activities.

The implementation of this project was met with great interest by participants with varied backgrounds. The project team first implemented a series of field training with a small group of trainees in 2019 with the anticipation of hosting classroom training supplemented with further field training. Online classroom training was done in May 2020 as activities had to be readjusted due to the global crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Details on the training are further explained in the Summary Table.

Following the online classroom training, 35 participants have been actively collecting bird data and submitting to eBird, as well as being actively involved in the now-established bird club. The student has become the teacher as some new birders have even introduced our team to previously unknown wetlands!

Summary Table of Activity Status

ACTION	STATUS
Conduct classroom training sessions	<p>Classroom sessions took place virtually in May, 2020. The response was greater than the team expected with 35 participants completing all 6 sessions. The sessions were streamed via Zoom and Facebook, with post reach and engagement exceeding 3,300 accounts.</p> <p>The course was named Birding for Beginners, and covered the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Importance of Birds ▪ Introduction to Birds and Birding ▪ Land birds ▪ Seabirds ▪ Wetland Birds ▪ Shorebirds ▪ Birding Hotspots ▪ eBird and Merlin ▪ Level 1 Monitoring Protocol (as per BirdsCaribbean) ▪ Ethical Birding ▪ Making Your Garden Bird-Friendly ▪ Wildlife Photography Tips <p>Quizzes, polls, and a final exam were also included to complement the sessions, and participants received certificates of completion and prizes based on their performance.</p>
Conduct field training sessions	<p>Field training began taking place in July 2019. Participants were taken out to wetlands and coastal areas to learn to identify birds by silhouette, sound, flight pattern and behavior. A total of 7 new birders participated.</p> <p>Currently, birders are monitoring and collecting data at wetland sites across the island, conferring with each other, and the facilitators. Due to restrictions implemented to safeguard residents, no joint birding activity has yet taken place. However, the first joint activity is being planned as the country will be reopened in June.</p> <p>Presently, participants are sharing bird photos, bird call recordings and videos of site monitoring with each other via the bird club WhatsApp group.</p>

ACTION	STATUS
Conduct simultaneous counts at three wetland IBAs	Following the opening of the country in June 2020, simultaneous counts will occur at several wetlands, with a high probability of including more than the three original sites listed in the project proposal. Additional sites will include Willoughby Bay, Five Islands Wetland, Potworks Dam and Darkwood Wetlands.
Repeated counts	The EAG bird club will charge itself with the regular monitoring of key sites that will feed data to the local Environmental Information Management and Advisory System and internationally to eBird.

Additional Comments

The team has been leading a successful mobile photographic exhibition of birds and other wildlife found in our wetland hotspots which has been well-received. The team took the exhibition on the local news station to be aired live to hundreds of viewers, as well as completed another exhibition at a World Consumer Rights Fair. This exhibition was visited by 115 people in 3 hours.

- The team has had great success with educational outreach to the general public. Amidst the pandemic, the team has definitely inspired many residents to stop and appreciate local and migratory birds and their habitats through our weekly EAG Talk in the local newspaper, and through our social media initiatives #NatureStillOpen and #WildlifeWednesdays.
- Even though the team ventured into unknown waters as we led our first virtual training course, the results have surpassed our expectations, with over thirty persons across the country fired up and excited about birds and birding. The newly trained group has been relentless in their postings and sharing about bird sightings and monitoring.
- The newly trained group of birders have continually shared how the course has changed their thoughts on birds and conservation. One participant even wrote and published an entire article. Please see Appendix for comments, media releases, and highlights of participant feedback.
- The team and participants were very humbled to have had Dr. Herb Raffaele, author, ornithologist, and member of the Cape Cod Bird Club as a guest panelist on our fifth session discussing Shorebirds. Dr. Raffaele encouraged the participants and answered their questions on birding.

- The team was also very thankful to have Dr. Lisa Sorenson, Executive Director of BirdsCaribbean provide the virtual platform and be present at each meeting to interact with participants.

Lessons Learnt

- Be knowledgeable about the topic and ensure that each member is familiar with the content of all presentations in case of technical difficulties.
- Use anecdotes to make learning more interesting and memorable.
- Use polls, quizzes, and exams to make learning more interactive.
- Advertise well. The team had persons regularly tune in from different parts of the world.

Recommendations and Future Plans

- The project team realized that colleagues from across the region regularly tuned in to the training. The course can be easily replicated and we recommend that courses like this be offered throughout the region, to get residents involved in conserving birds.
- The project team is aggressively seeking funding to improve monitoring and enjoyment of birds and other wildlife at key wetland sites.
- The project team is preparing to offer more specialized training on monitoring bird groups: Seabirds, Shorebirds, Landbirds, Wetland Birds, to have more specialized groups of bird monitors.

Acknowledgements

The project team wishes to thank the Cape Cod Bird Club for first providing us with funding to train residents to connect with nature through birding, and thereby providing vital data on birds. Thank you for your patience, understanding and amazing support!

The team also wishes to thank BirdsCaribbean for their support of this project, their technical support, their training, their donation of monitoring equipment, providing Powerpoint templates, from which we were able to develop our own, and their interaction with our trainees.

Finally, we would like to thank the entire EAG team who was behind the scenes, making sure that all went smoothly as we implemented this project.

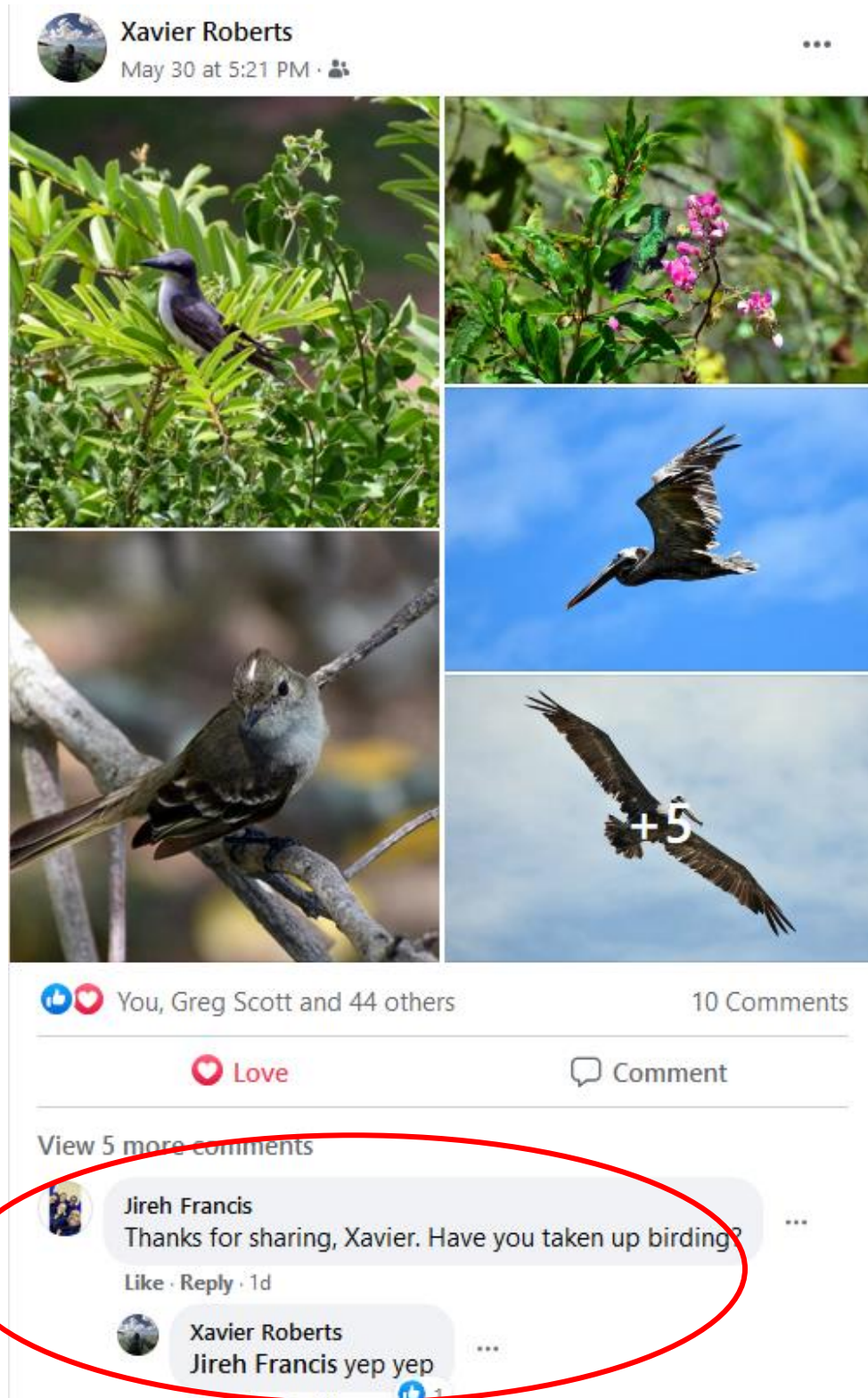
Appendix



Photo Exhibition in March 2020 at World Consumer Rights Day Fair – © Kariana Kelsick



Natalya Lawrence on the set of ABS Television (Local News Station) bringing awareness of birds to the homes of residents. Courtesy EAG



New Birder, Xavier Roberts, regularly shares pictures from his birding trips as well as uploads data on eBird. Also note his confirmation of having taken up birding. Courtesy Xavier Roberts.

Newspaper Article and LinkedIn Article on Course



EAG TALK

Birding for beginners and continuers

By Natalya Lawrence

We have all had to adapt to a drastically different way of life in a very short time. Notwithstanding, we have risen to the challenge and made the best of a difficult situation. The EAG is consistently seeking out means to connect our people with nature, thereby promoting a greater understanding of, and appreciation for how our natural environment provides essential services that support our very lives. As is evident, a lot of the work that EAG implements is to support the conservation of birds and their habitats. One way in which we aim to do so is to get our residents to go out and become citizen scientists—observing birds, collecting data, and sharing it on a platform that can be used by scientists and decision-makers.

But first, how do we get people to bird, if they don't know much about the birds? And how do you bird during a pandemic lockdown? The EAG team decided to launch an online Bird Training session called Birding for Beginners, in the month of May. Antigua and Barbuda is home to several species of resident birds, and over one hundred species of birds (migratory) spend part of their year here. Birds are ubiquitous on our islands - many are found on the mountain tops of the Shek-erly mountain range right down to the wave-chasers on our sandy beaches. We have big, imposing raptors and tiny little hummingbirds. We have landbirds, shore-birds, wetland birds, and in-



Purple-throated Carib, credit Anthony Levesque.



Green-throated Carib, credit Nick Hollands

between birds! During the webinars, the participants were challenged to learn to identify birds by their shape,

size, colour, behaviour and location. For example, one should be able to look at a bird's bill and decide if it's a

meat-eater, a seed-eater, an insect-eater, a fruit-eater, or otherwise. Some birds glide in flight while others flap.

When feeding, some probe and peck, while others snap prey out of the air, or flip over everything in sight. How about their behaviour on the ground? Some run around, some pose majestically with a piercing gaze, and some even twerk (i.e., bob their tail incessantly).

Participants learnt the importance of birds. We highlighted a few of their vital ecosystem roles, including keeping the insect population under control, dispersing seeds, pollinating flowers, cleaning up carcasses, advising on the weather, enriching the soil, and even influencing fashion! Participants also learnt about birding "hotspots," Important Bird Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas across our islands. These include our offshore islands, Christian Valley, Wallings, McKinnons and the Codrington Lagoon.

Of course, we also delved into identifying common birds, rare birds, resident birds and migratory species, highlighting birds of conservation concern due to threats they face, both human-caused (e.g., destruction of their habitats) and natural (e.g., hurricanes). Special mention was made of our endemic Barbuda Warbler, found nowhere else in the world but Barbuda.

To wrap up the course, participants learnt how to implement actions to conserve birds, how to monitor them, and how to use the online applications eBird Caribbean and Merlin to identify birds and store their birding observations.

The participants were an eager, energetic lot who joined us via Zoom and Facebook. We had a larger number than expected and everyone returned regularly to keep up with the course. Most of our participants were local, but others were



Antillean Crested Hummingbird, credit Nick Hollands



Purple-throated Carib, credit Anthony Levesque

colleagues from across the region including Anguilla, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Trinidad and Tobago. We even had persons from the UK and US who are regular visitors to our country follow the course!

Following the course, the participants and facilitators are organising our local bird club, yet to be named! The field training and monitoring will continue once restrictions are lifted. We anticipate building up our team of local contributors who monitor birds and their

habitat, and have fun doing it!

The ability to provide this training opportunity and continued mentorship would not have been possible without the support of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Cape Cod Bird Club, BirdsCaribbean, and the Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival. On one of the days, our participants were treated to a special appearance by Dr. Herbert Raffaele, former Director at USFWS (funding millions of dollars for conservation projects

across our region), current member of the Cape Cod Bird Club, and award-winning author of several books include *The Birds of the West Indies*. Special thanks to Dr. Lisa Sorenson of BirdsCaribbean for supporting and being present at every webinar, supporting the presenters and answering questions.

We urge you to start appreciating our natural world. Join the EAG and join our bird club too! For more information, contact us at 462-6236 or eagantigua@gmail.com.



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Environmental Awareness Group

For the Love of Birds!!!



Shawn Maile | [Follow](#)

Labour Relations Officer at Antig...

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Back Story

Sometime during the beginning of the shut down here in Antigua I was sitting on my porch and noticing how many birds were around my neighborhood daily. I jokingly posted a status to say that maybe I should take up birdwatching. My brother Jeremy quickly jumped in and was gassing me up saying I should buy a camera and get into outdoor photography and how lucrative birding photography was.

The Universe Speaks



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Within a matter of days, there was a poll by the EAG on Instagram asking if persons would be interested in an online birding course. As if the universe was just waiting on me to be ready for what it was planning all along. I answered yes and within a couple of days, I was signed up for a two-week birding course.

The Eye-Opener

From day one I realized that I had absolutely no clue as to what types of birds were native to and migrated through Antigua and Barbuda. My birding eyes were literally opened to see what was always right before me. Of course, I knew what blackbirds, yellow breasts, pigeons, hummingbirds, and the like were. What I didn't know that these birds were actually called Carib Grackle, Bananaquit, Zenaida Dove, and Green Throated Carib, Purple Throated Carib, Antillean Crested Humming Bird. The sheer amount of species, colors, and characteristics was mind-blowing. For the duration of the course, we dialed in as to the when, where, how, and the why's of birding. Truth be told I was exploring a whole new world ripe with opportunities for exploration. Though not an expert, I was no longer a novice.

A Brave New World

Fast forward to the end of the course and I have currently logged over 25 different species of birds. I can no longer walk, drive, run, or simply go outside without seeing, hearing or sensing a bird. Now armed with the skills to identify and count the avian species, I can proudly say I am a certified beginner birder. Armed with my binoculars and ebird app, I forage into the unknown tracking and viewing my winged friends.

Lesson Learnt

Sometimes you throw something out to the universe not expecting it to throw anything back. Next thing you know, you're signing up for an online birding course in the middle of a pandemic and starting a new hobby. AIN'T LIFE GRAND!

Published By



Shawn Maile
Labour Relations Officer at Antigua ...

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Birding for Beginners

Participant Feedback:

Complete evaluations can be found [here](#).

“I appreciate the efforts on the part of the instructors to delivery the material in a clear, efficient and effective manner. The instructors were well informed and it made learning very easy. I also like the pop quizzes after completing certain sections of the course material. It made the learning experience interesting and fun. I was not bored at all during the whole training session as the manner of the delivery was fun and the topics were very interesting. All the instructors were able to have my undivided attention. I also liked that Herb who is a renowned birder attended a session and also the presence of Lisa made a difference. She had so much extra information to share. I am really happy that I decided to complete this course.”

“Everything! This course was amazing. I just wished it was longer. At first, I wasn't too sure how interesting birding would be; but now, my interest is peaked. I initially joined this class to learn more about species in Antigua. I studied environmental science in Canada so I was never familiar with our local species and my course was not as focused on animals, and I have always had a soft spot for animals. Every class was interesting. I just loved to see the passion that each panelist had towards birds. I actually have come out of this appreciating birds more. I now find myself sitting in my backyard watching birds or just looking at them while I am parked in my car. I cannot wait to see what other course will be available in the future.”

“I enjoyed learning about birds in general, but was most excited to be able to recognize the various birds in my backyard, as well as those I came across as I travelled through the island. I gained a greater appreciation for birds, and was also amazed at the variety we have in Antigua (including migratory).”

“That the presenters were enthusiastic and insightful yet playful and whimsical. They were able to balance the right amount of learning with the right amount of interaction and instruction. I am truly happy that I now have a new lens through which to look at the world thanks to the hard working folks of the EAG with support from its donor partners.”

All recent visits to eBird have been from newly trained bird monitors

Browser address bar: <https://ebird.org/region/AG?yr=all>

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Antigua and Barbuda

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144 Species | 2055 Checklists Updated ~19 hr(s) ago.

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	SPECIES NAME	COUNT	DATE	BY
1	West Indian Whistling-Duck <i>Dendrocygna arborea</i>	12	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
2	White-crowned Pigeon <i>Patagioenas leucocephala</i>	10	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
3	Zenaida Dove <i>Zenaida aurita</i>	10	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
4	Green-throated Carib <i>Eulampis holosericeus</i>	2	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
5	Black-necked Stilt <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	6	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
6	Laughing Gull <i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	12	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
7	Magnificent Frigatebird <i>Fregata magnificens</i>	5	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
8	Tricolored Heron <i>Egretta tricolor</i>	1	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
9	Caribbean Elaenia <i>Elaenia martinica</i>	5	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
10	Gray Kingbird <i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>	2	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis
11	Carib Grackle <i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>	4	31 May 2020	Jermaine Jarvis

St Kitts & Nevis | **Antigua and Barbuda**

[Send feedback](#)

The Cornell Lab  **GLOBAL BIG DAY**
9 MAY 2020
Every bird counts.

Recent Visits

Checklists submitted within the last hour are not shown.

OBSERVER	DATE	SPECIES
Jermaine Jarvis	31 May 2020	13
Kim Jacobs	30 May 2020	7
Natalya Lawrence	29 May 2020	10
Jermaine Jarvis	29 May 2020	12
Desanne Meneses	28 May 2020	3
Xavier Roberts	28 May 2020	4
Natalya Lawrence	27 May 2020	15
Chandy Hampson	27 May 2020	6
Shawn Maile	27 May 2020	6
Rennelle Bruno	27 May 2020	7