

IDENTIFYING AND PROTECTING PIPING PLOVER HABITAT IN THE BAHAMAS



BNT staff member Prescott Gay

The islands of the Bahamas have long been recognized as a vital wintering area for birds that breed in the U.S. and Canada. Recent data on Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) distribution and abundance has revealed that The Bahamas is far more important to this species than ever realized before. An increased survey effort in 2006 documented approximately ten times the number of wintering Piping Plovers than previously accounted for on similar surveys. While the Bahamas ranks third, after Texas and Florida, in terms of Piping Plover numbers, the number of birds counted in the 2006 survey was very likely a gross underestimate. The small number of kilometers reported for the Bahamas (124 km) compared to Florida (1,200 km) and Texas (1,500 km), suggest that Piping Plovers may be quite concentrated in The Bahamas relative to other areas.

The shoreline of Northern Andros is 729 km alone, which means that there is a lot of area to cover in search of the top sites for Plovers in the Bahamas. This coming winter we are planning the most comprehensive survey of shorebirds to date. As a part of the USGS

International Plover census, and in association with the Bahamas National Trust, the USGS and Audubon will train and educate interested local citizens in survey techniques. We will also discuss the threats to shorebirds in the Bahamas and, where possible, implement simple habitat management that will benefit the birds.

This collaborative project will result in the most thorough and complete information to date about high-priority shorebird species, their habitats, threats, and management needs in the Bahamas. It will present Bahamas National Trust with data necessary to identify and formally protect high value sites in the for high-priority shorebirds. More importantly, it will greatly expand the network and training of citizen scientists and cooperating partners that will work with Bahamas National Trust to implement site-specific monitoring and management actions that will have direct conservation benefits for shorebirds.

We are looking for the following forms of support for the efforts:

- 1) **Citizen scientists** willing to go count birds on Andros Island in the Bahamas for a week in January 2011. The project would also greatly benefit from some photographers attending.
- 2) **Donated binoculars** and telescopes for Bahamians or **funding** to help with their purchase.
- 3) **Money** to support this program of training Bahamian citizen scientists.

Budget:

Training

\$1,500 - Training of the Bahamas National Trust staff to conduct the citizen science workshops
\$10,000 - Implementing workshops on 5 islands - \$2,000 per workshop

Equipment

Binoculars and Telescopes will be held by BNT on the islands that receive the workshops. These banks of equipment will then be used for scientific survey work and educational outreach going forward.

\$7,800 - Binoculars – 10 per island – receiving workshop - \$130
\$1,800 - Telescopes – 1 per island receiving training - \$300
\$ 950 - GPS – 1 per island - \$150 each

Other

\$1000 - Car rental
\$5,260 - Watercraft rentals
\$12,000 – Associated costs and BNT Census Coordinator
\$8,490 - 3 Audubon coordinators (airfare, accommodations, car rental, food)

Donations can be made both locally through Hilton Head Audubon Society, Audubon South Carolina or National Audubon Society through the International Alliances Program. Checks can be mailed to either address below. Please contact Matt Jeffery for other types of donation.

When making a donation, please indicate that the donation is for the Bahamas Plover Project.

Donations of used equipment in good quality can be either given to Charlotte White at the Hilton Head Audubon meetings or sent to Matt Jeffery at National Audubon.

Contact:

National Audubon Society
Matt Jeffery
National Audubon Society
International Alliances Program
1150 Connecticut Ave, NW
Suite 600
Washington DC 20036

Phone: 202-861-2242 ex. 3033
Cell: 917 293 8341
Email: mjeffery@audubon.org

Hilton Head Audubon Society
Charlotte White
PO Box 6185
Hilton Head Island,
SC, 29938

Phone: +1 843-540-3858
Email: docwhite@hargray.com

Audubon South Carolina
Norm Brunswig
State Director
336 Sanctuary Road
Harleyville,
SC 29448

Phone 843.462.2150
Fax 843.462.2713
Email: nbrunswig@audubon.org