

## The status of the Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* in the Dominican Republic

Robert S. R. Williams, Guy M. Kirwan and Chris G. Bradshaw

Hispaniola sostiene actualmente la mayor población del amenazado *Pterodroma hasitata*. Todas las colonias se encuentran en Haití, a excepción de una. Reproducción de esta especie en la República Dominicana fue probada en 1981 cuando una pequeña colonia fue descubierta en Lomo de Toro. Esta colonia fue redescubierta en abril de 1996 por los autores, cuando fueron localizados petreles vocalizando, heces frescas y una cueva desocupada. Otras colonias en el Parque Nacional Baoruco pueden todavía ser descubiertas.

Hispaniola currently supports the most important breeding populations of the threatened Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*. Twelve colonies are known from Haiti; one (size unknown) discovered as recently as 1984 in the Massif de la Hotte, and the others (all of at least 50 pairs) from the Massif de la Selle in 1963<sup>2</sup>. On the evidence of follow-up visits to the Massif de la Selle in February 1980 and winter 1984 it was considered that at least some of these populations had declined, some by as much as 40%<sup>5</sup>. There is no subsequent information on the status of any Haitian colonies though it is likely that further declines may have occurred through human activities, even within the confines of La Visite National Park.

Although predicted by both Wetmore<sup>3</sup> and Bond<sup>1</sup>, breeding in the Dominican Republic remained unproven until February 1981, when a small colony was found on the slopes of Lomo de Toro (18°19'N 71°41'W, at 2,300 m) above El Aguacate within the subsequently declared Parque Nacional Sierra de Baoruco<sup>2</sup>. Despite visits by numerous birdwatchers to the El Aguacate/Zapotén area, especially since the mid-1980s, there have been no further published records, although a local tourist guide reported that the species was still present (Julio Filiz pers. comm.).

On 18 April 1996 the authors visited the highest slopes of Lomo de Toro in an attempt to relocate the colony. In the late afternoon calls were heard, presumably emanating from the species's burrows, on the highest slopes of the massif, at an altitude of approximately 2,250 m, just above the densest area of coniferous forest. In addition we located both fresh and old petrel faeces, possessing a strong salty taste and fishy aroma, on the rocky, partially forested slopes. One unoccupied burrow was discovered within the same area, c.100 m below the area from which the calls appeared to emanate.



Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* burrow, Lomo de Toro, Dominican Republic: April 1996 (Chris G. Bradshaw)

The weather conditions made further exploration of the steep slopes impossible on this occasion, whilst future visits proved impossible due to damage to the car and worsening weather conditions.

It seems probable that other colonies within the Sierra de Baoruco await discovery. The area is thinly populated and still extensively forested, in marked contrast to the situation in neighbouring Haiti. It is worthy of note that illegal selective logging within the section of the park adjacent to Haiti is occurring and that charcoal-burning camps were found in the area.

In July 1977 local fishermen reported that petrels were breeding in the seacliffs at Cabo Falso (17°47'N 71°41'W) although this was never proven<sup>4</sup>. Julio Filiz also suggested that petrels breed in the area. Future visitors to the Sierra de Baoruco are urged to search for and count burrows.

**References**

1. Bond, J. (1956) *Check-list of the birds of the West Indies*. Fourth edition. Pennsylvania: Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.
2. Collar, N. J., Gonzaga, L. P., Krabbe, N., Madroño Nieto, A., Naranjo, L. G., Parker III, T. A. & Wege, D. C. (1992) *Threatened birds of the Americas: the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book*. Cambridge, U.K.: International Council for Bird Preservation.
3. Wetmore, A. (1932) Notes from Dr R. Ciferri on the birds of Hispaniola. *Auk* 49: 107-108.
4. Wiley J.W. and Ottenwalder, B.N. (1990) Birds of the islas Beata and Alto Velo, Dominican Republic. *Studies on Neotropical Fauna and Environment* 25(2): 65-88.
5. Woods, C. A. (1987) The threatened and endangered birds of Haiti: lost horizons and new hopes. Pp. 385-429 in *Proceedings 1987 Jean Delacour/IFCB Symposium on Breeding Birds in Captivity*. North Hollywood, California: International Foundation for the Conservation of Birds.

**Robert S.R. Williams**

School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, U.K.

**Guy M. Kirwan**

6 Connaught Road, Norwich NR2 3BP, U.K.

**Chris G. Bradshaw**

6 Collet Walk, Parkwood, Gillingham, Kent ME8 9QL, U.K.