



The Conservation of the St. Vincent Parrot and the Integrated Forest Management and Development Program

By: L. FitzGerald Providence
Forestry Supervisor Development.





ABSTRACT

The St. Vincent Parrot *Amazona guildingii* has had protection since 1901 with the enactment of the Bird and Fish Protection Ordinance. However, it was in 1988 that an indebt conservation programme to protect this rare bird was started.

Since the completion of the initial conservation effort, additional developments in the conservation effort have been slow. The captive breeding and display aviary continues to be successful, however, this project is highly dependent on donations of food (both local and international) and external assistance in Veterinary care and research on the birds. The biennial censuses are affected by lack of equipment and the poor status of watch points caused by changes in the forest environment and lack of the appropriate scientific backing for the determination of accurate population numbers. However population trends are able to be observed.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is estimated to have between 25 and 30 percent forest cover with an estimated deforestation rate of 3% per annum. This continued threat of deforestation has grave effects of the natural resources including water, flora and fauna especially the endemics like the St Vincent Parrot. In order to cure this serious concern the forestry Department has embarked on a project titled 'Integrated forest M and D Programme'. This project is aimed at the involvement of the people in the management and protection of the island's natural resources.

The parrot which depends on the integrity of the interior forest is threatened by this deforestation and any effort to protect the forest resource would protect the parrot.

INTRODUCTION

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a multiple island nation consisting of approximately 32 islands and cays. Eight of these islands are inhabited and these are St. Vincent, Bequia, Mustique, Union, Canouan, Prune (Palm), Mayreau and Petit St. Vincent. The total land area is approximately 389 Km² or 38,694 Ha (the figure represents only the inhabited islands), with St. Vincent being the largest island with a size of 344 Km² or 34,462Ha.

The main island of St. Vincent is very rugged with 50% of the slopes 30 degrees or more and 20% less than 20 degrees (Barker, 1981 cited in CCA, 1991). The islands topography is due to



the volcanic origin of the island, resulting in a central north-south mountain chain with La Soufriere volcano (1180m) dominating the northern end of the island.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like other islands of the Eastern Caribbean is blessed with island endemic flora and fauna, which includes 15 flowering plants, 2 ferns, 1 mammal (extinct), 7 reptiles, 1 amphibian and 2 birds. The two birds are the St. Vincent Parrot (*Amazona guildingii*) and the Whistling Warbler (*Catharopeza bishopi*)

The St Vincent Parrot has been the main symbol of conservation and protection of the forest resources in St. Vincent and the Grenadines however there is need for increased conservation of the parrot with an estimated population between 500 to 600 continues to be under threat.

THE ST. VINCENT PARROT

The St Vincent Parrot is one of the four remaining species of Lesser Antillean Parrots in the genus *Amazona*, out of an original seven (CCA 1991). The parrot is listed as an endangered species with coverage under appendix one of the CITES international laws. The Forestry Department has had a programme of education, monitoring of the wild population and a captive breeding programme. The breeding programme has been successful with about one new bird per year since its inception in 1990. The wild population of birds is estimated to be about 512 birds after the most recent census of 2002.

The parrot is found in the relatively undisturbed rain forest and its range includes the upper watershed areas of Buccament, Colonaire and Cumberland. The 1987 Wildlife Protection act does declare a Parrot reserve which encompasses the central mountain range of the island. This reserve protects the habitat of the parrot and other wildlife. However, there is still concern of the removal of birds or eggs from the wild to be traded internationally. Also there is increasing deforestation due to illegal cultivation in the interior forest, which destroys habitat and reduces the range of the parrot and other wildlife.

THE CENSUS

The Forestry Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries has conducted a biennial St. Vincent Parrot census since 1988. The census is part of the conservation programme for the endangered national bird, the St. Vincent Parrot (*Amazona guildingii*).

The main objective of the census, conducted every two years, is to monitor the wild population of the parrot. For this census to be effective it must be conducted in strict accordance with the original methodology used in the first census in 1988, conducted by Mr. Paul Butler. Since that first census in 1988, censuses have been conducted in 1990, 1992, 1994, 1999 and 2002. There were no censuses in 1996 and 1998 due to lack of resources and effective support. Other constraints in conducting the censuses include;

- Limited manpower

- A lack of communications between observers
- A lack of essential observation aids such as binoculars
- No quantification of deforestation and habitat loss

The census results over these years have indicated that the bird population of relatively stable however, the individual sector results do indicate some variations over the years (figure 1).

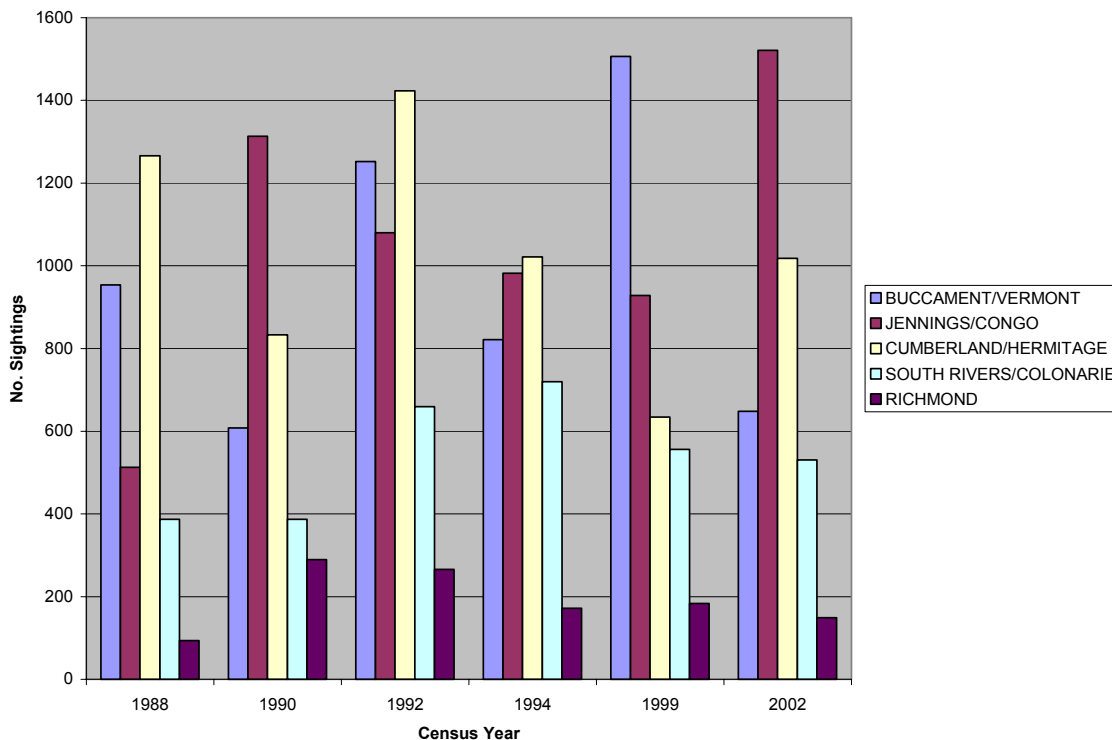


Figure 1. Number of Sightings per Census Year

On looking at the reports of the censuses conducted since 1990 some anomalies are evident. These anomalies include;

- Changes in implementation times.
- There is not direct relationship between the number of sighting and the final population estimate or “guesstimate”.
- Also, due to these anomalies, the conclusions and comparisons made about and between censuses have little statistical or scientific base due to some human bias being introduced into each census.

These concerns along with the constraints encountered in implementing the census can only be resolved by greater research of the wild parrot population and its habitat. This research would



include developing a census technique that would improve the ability to determine a more accurate parrot population.

Increased observation of the wild population between census years is also needed to determine the effects of deforestation on the parrot population. The negative effects on the forest ecosystem and wildlife caused by increasing and shifting deforestation must be determined. The Forestry Department recognising the need to have better monitoring of the forest and its resources and the need for improved management is in the process of developing a new participatory approach to forest management.

INTEGRATED FOREST MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Forestry Department in the Ministry of Agriculture Lands and Fisheries recognized the need to examine and redirect its approach to management of the forest resources of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This new approach would assist the department in more effectively achieving its mission 'to conserve, protect and develop the forest resources for the optimum benefit of the entire community of St. Vincent and the Grenadines'.

Year 2001 was the first year of implementation of the development of this project. The development process continued in 2002 with the development of the Integrated Forest Management and Development Program.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Integrated Forest Management and Development Project was initiated due to the recognition of several issues facing the forest resource and its appropriated management in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. These issues as summarized as follows:

- The increasing rate of loss of interior forested areas to the cultivation of seasonal crops both legal and illegal. Also other forests including coastal forests (dry woodlands and mangroves) are under threat from changes in land use, particularly the increasing demands for housing and coastal development.
- The loss of effectiveness of the conventional approaches to enforcement against illegal crop cultivation, squatting and deforestation and the absence of effective land use policies in relation to land use resulting in uncontrolled development.
- The global economic changes occurring particularly in relation to trading arrangements for bananas has resulted in, and would have severe impacts on, the farmers and national economy. This threat to rural livelihoods and the national economy has resulted in the



recognition of the need for diversification, and forest resources play an integral role in the diversification process.

- The recognition that any policy towards diversification in a small island economy would include the area of tourism development. The forest resources are rich in diversity of uses including forest trails, waterfalls and rivers and bird watching. These resources can provide economic benefits to rural communities through local management and protection, serving to diversify the rural income.

The St Vincent Parrot being the national bird and dependant on a healthy forest, would benefit from any effort to protect and better manage the forest resource, and the Integrated forest Management and Development Program, would hope to achieve this.

The Integrated Forest Management and Development Program has three components which are; the strengthening of the Forestry Department, a project management unit and an alternative livelihood project.

The Strengthening of the Forestry Department involve the development of the capacity of the department to quantify, develop and manage the forest resources through infrastructure, equipment and human resource development. The Project Management unit would be a project(s) coordinating unit with increased autonomy and decision making power not hindered by the overlays of bureaucracy. This unit would encourage the participation of the private sector, NGO's, CBO's, international organisations and other forest users and interest groups. The Alternative Livelihood component is aimed at providing viable alternative of economic gain, to rural communities and individuals that do not negatively impact on the forest environment. first year of the project was the development phase of the plan and involved information sharing and gathering sessions with stakeholders and communities. A successful programme, implemented over a period of five (5) to ten (10) years will result in increased public awareness and participation in forest resource management and the protection of the islands biological resources, specifically the endemic and endangered species such as the endemic St. Vincent Parrot.



Reference

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