Caribbean BIRDWATCH

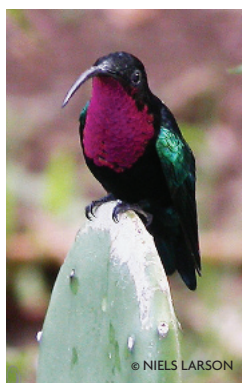
Expert advice to help you appreciate our region's beautiful birds

The Brown Noddy

EPIC Environmental Protection in the Caribbean is in year two of its project to create a Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles. This project aims to identify priority sites for conservation by collecting data on breeding seabird colonies in the Caribbean. Our seabirds are unfortunately under severe threat. Many colonies have been reduced dramatically in size and many breeding colonies have vanished. The causes include introduced invasive predators (such as rats), egg collecting, hunting, pollution, and habitat destruction. Fortunately many of these are reversible and in some places seabird populations are recovering.

✶ **For more information visit www.epicislands.org**

BIRD OF THE ISSUE: PURPLE-THROATED CARIB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How to spot it: A flash of emerald green and purple will alert you to the presence of this large, strikingly-coloured hummingbird. Its wings and tail are emerald green, while its throat and breast are iridescent purplish-red and the rump is bluish. The rest of the body and the bill are black. Look carefully and you will be able to tell the male from the female, which is smaller, and has a longer, more sharply down-curved bill.

Where to find it: Found on most of the Lesser Antilles, it prefers forests and banana plantations, but also frequents some semi-open areas like gardens where flowers are abundant.

What does it eat? Like all hummingbirds, this species feeds by rapidly licking nectar from flowers (and feeders if available) and supplements the protein in its diet by catching tiny insects. In Dominica it is regularly seen catching flying insects, much like a flycatcher.

Global status: This species is not currently threatened with extinction. However its total range is less than 5500 km2, therefore further loss of forest habitat from clearing, or a catastrophic event like a hurricane, could seriously impact its population. To ensure long-term survival, existing forest habitat in the Lesser Antilles should be protected.

HOW TO... IDENTIFY BIRDS

✶ **First, decide on the approximate overall size of the mystery bird in comparison to a bird you already know. For example is it as big as a bananaquit, gray kingbird or a cattle egret?**

✶ **Note the shape of the bird. Is it tall and lanky like a heron, or does it have a small compact body like a ground dove? Does it have a long and pointed tail like a mourning dove or a forked tail like a frigate bird? What about the shape of the bill? Is it short and stout like seed-cracking grassquits or long, for probing in the mud, like many wading shorebirds?**

✶ **Describe the bird's colour pattern, noting "field marks" – distinctive patches of colour, especially on the face, neck, rump and wings. Does the bird have any bars, stripes, or patches? Is the breast spotted, streaked or plain? What colour are the legs and bill?**

✶ **Finally, take note of the bird's behaviour as it moves and feeds. You can recognise many birds from a distance by their mannerisms. Swallows swoop through the air, snatching insects in flight, while sandpipers feed on the run. The brown trembler can be recognised from its peculiar habit of drooping its wings and shaking the entire body in a trembling motion when excited or as it searches for food.**

✶ **Resist the temptation to glance at the bird through your binoculars, then immediately turn to your field guide to look it up. Instead, observe the bird as much as possible while it is in view, making mental notes of all its features. Go birding as often as possible and your skills will improve rapidly! For more help, go to www.allaboutbirds.org**

MANY THANKS TO LISA SORENSON AND MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF CARIBBEAN BIRDS, WWW.SCSCB.ORG