

MONTserrat

INTRODUCTION

by Dennis Gibbs

Montserrat is a small forested volcanic island of about 98 km² in extent in the northern Windward Islands in the Caribbean Sea. It is a British Colony and has a population of about 12,000 with an economy based on holiday villa tourism and some agriculture. There are very few wetlands; only two patches of coastal mangroves, a number of mountain streams, and a few tiny ponds and marshes. There are, however, rich marine resources around the island and nesting beaches for several species of sea turtle.

The conservation body is the Montserrat National Trust, a non-governmental, non-profit volunteer statutory body concerned with all aspects of conservation, cultural as well as those dealing with fauna and flora.

One of the two most important wetlands on the island was protected in 1979 (Fox's Bay Bird Sanctuary), and the other, Belham River Estuary, has been declared a no hunting zone by the owners.

The Wild Birds Protection Ordinance as revised in 1982 gives full protection to all bird species except for two species of pigeon Columbidae and the ducks Anatidae. A further revision of the ordinance is expected soon.

The birds of Montserrat have recently been described by Siegel (1983), and in July 1984, W. Arendt conducted a survey of the breeding population of the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*.

WETLANDS

Site descriptions based on data sheets provided by Dennis Gibbs of the Montserrat National Trust. (For map, see Dominica.)

Fox's Bay Bird Sanctuary (1)

Location: 16°41'N, 62°13'W; on the west coast, 2 km northwest of Plymouth

Area: 6 ha.

Altitude: 0m.

Province and type: 8.41.13; 05, 07 & 08.

Site description: A coastal brackish pond, up to 3m deep, and mangrove swamp, with adjacent sandy beaches. The water level drops considerably during the dry season.

Principal vegetation: Mangrove swamps with *Laguncularia racemosa*, *Conocarpus erectus* and *Rhizophora mangle*, brackish marshes with *Eleocharis geniculata* and *Acrostichum aureum*, and coastal thorn forest.

Land tenure: Owned by the Montserrat Company, and on a twenty year lease to the Montserrat National Trust.

Protection: A Protected Wildlife Area established by the Montserrat National Trust in 1979, and administered as a bird sanctuary.

Land use: Nature tourism and some livestock grazing. Access to the interior of the swamp has been made relatively easy by means of marked trails.

Waterfowl: An important breeding area for many of Montserrat's resident species, and a wintering area for migratory Ardeidae and shorebirds. The main nesting site on the island for *Bubulcus ibis*, with a population of over 1,000 birds. Other breeding species include *Nyctanassa violacea*, *Butorides virescens*, *Gallinula chloropus* and *Fulica caribaea*. Regular winter visitors include *Egretta caerulea*, *Ardea herodias*, *Porzana carolina*, *Tringa melanoleuca*, *T. flavipes*, *Actitis macularia* and *Larus atricilla*

Other fauna: An important wintering area for North American warblers Parulidae. A breeding area for the sea turtles *Caretta caretta*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Dermochelys coriacea* and *Eretmochelys imbricata*. Other species recorded include *Bufo marinus*, *Eleutherodactylus johnstonei*, *Ameiva pluvianotata pluvianotata*, *Anolis lividus*, *Iguana iguana*, *Mabuya mabouya mabouya*, *Shaerodactyla fantasticus*, *Alsophis antillensis manselli*, *Artibens jamaicensis* and *Molossus molossus*.

Threats: There are some problems with overgrazing by domestic livestock and siltation.

Research and conservation: The avifauna is well known, and has recently been described by Siegel. W. Arendt conducted a survey of the *Bubulcus ibis* colony in July 1984. The sanctuary should be fenced to prevent intrusion by domestic livestock, and the possibility of pumping water into the swamp to prevent drying out during the dry season might be considered.

References: Siegel (1983); Portecop & Benito-Espinal (1984a).

Source: Dennis Gibbs.

Criteria for inclusion: 2a, 2b & 3a.

Belham River Estuary (2)

Location: 16°44'N, 62°14'W; on the west coast, 6 km northwest of Plymouth.

Area: 14 ha.

Altitude: 0m.

Province and type: 8.41.13; 02, 05, 10 & 11.

Site description: The estuary and lower stretches of the Belham River, with a series of small freshwater ponds and marshes, and sandy beaches at the river mouth. The river rises at a spring at 300m and falls rapidly to the coastal plain. The water level fluctuates according to local rainfall.

Principal vegetation: Thorn woodland, moist broadleaf forest, bamboos and grassland in surrounding areas.

Land tenure: Owned by the Montserrat Company and one private owner, and leased by the Montserrat Golf Club.

Protection: No habitat protection, but hunting is prohibited.

Land use: Part of the area is on a golf course; there is some grazing of domestic livestock, occasional turtle hunting on the beaches, and beach resort activities.

Waterfowl: A feeding area for resident waterfowl and a stop-over for migratory Anatidae and shorebirds, including *Gallinago gallinago*, *Tringa melanoleuca*, *T. flavipes* and *Actitis macularia* overwinter.

Other fauna: Similar to site 1, but with the addition of a variety of freshwater crustaceans and fishes.

Threats: The main threat is the possibility that measures might be taken to reduce flows by further encatchment of springs. This would affect the wetland habitat in the dry season, but rejuvenation by wet season flood waters would still occur. There is also some illegal grazing of domestic livestock.

Source: Dennis Gibbs.

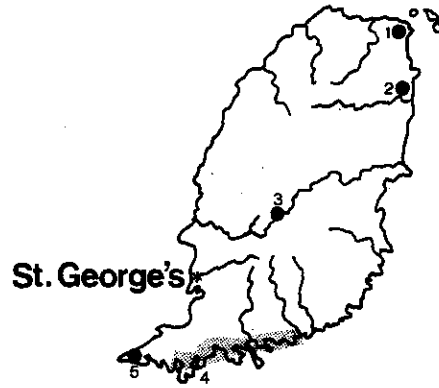
Criteria for inclusion: 2b & 3a.

DOMINICA



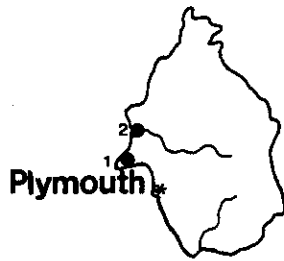
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GRENADA



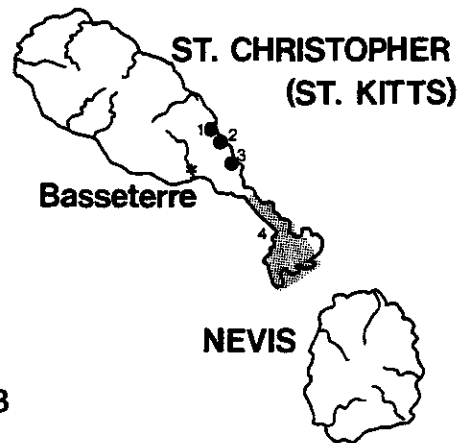
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MONTSERRAT



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ST. KITTS-NEVIS



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