

# Caribbean BIRDWATCH

Expert advice to help you appreciate our region's beautiful birds. In this issue we focus on the island of Grenada

## My best birding moment

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"Visiting Mt. Hartman to see the Grenada Dove is always an opportunity to learn something new and exciting about the bird. However, last July, while on the trail looking for it, I heard an unfamiliar bird sound not too far away up the hill. I was very eager to see what was calling, so I diverted away from the trail

and quietly followed the sound. It got clearer and clearer as I got close, but at the point when I was almost there the calling, to my disappointment, suddenly stopped. I stood and looked around and saw nothing. Then suddenly I heard a loud call, looked up and saw a Hook-billed Kite adult female. But this was not the call that led me there! I pointed my camera upward and took a few photos of the kite calling. I then stooped to change my batteries. From that low position I gazed up into the trees and my eyes and mouth opened in awe as I spotted two kite chicks sitting on a nest – they were the ones calling! I was able to monitor the nest for the rest of the season, gathering new photos and information about the species."

LEFT: Juvenile Hook-billed Kite



ANDREA EASTER-PILCHER

## PROJECT WATCH:

**The Grenada Dove Conservation Programme** (GDGP) and the Grenada Forestry and National Parks Department are working together to protect the critically endangered endemic Grenada Dove. Found only on Grenada, the species population totals less than 150 individuals with habitat loss and predation the main causes of the population's decline. With a recent grant to the GDGP from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, they are implementing an initiative to further strengthen the protection of Grenada's Key Biodiversity Areas. The GDGP is also engaged in research to identify and address potential factors limiting the population, including habitat use, breeding, water use during the dry season and predation.



BONNIE RUSK

## BIRD OF THE ISSUE.

**GRENADA HOOK-BILLED KITE**  
(*Chondrohierax uncinatus mirus*)

### 1 HOW TO SPOT IT:

A chunky hawk with a large deeply hooked bill, barring on the belly, white eyes (light irises) and a long banded tail. It is easy to identify due to its paddle-shaped wings and 'lazy' flapping pattern. Adult males have dark grey to black backs with grey and white barring on the breast and belly, whilst females have a brown back with reddish-brown barring and a distinctive rufous collar. If you're lucky enough to get up close, you can see bright blue-green to yellow eye markings. Juveniles are brownish-backed like females, but have whitish cheeks and underparts with variable barring from dark brown to none.

### 2 WHERE TO FIND IT:

The elusive Grenada race is found only on the island of Grenada. Kites have been observed in all habitats, but are most

frequently seen in dry woodland habitat. Kite nests, described as awkward, are located in the forks of secondary branches in trees above 40ft. Nesting season coincides with the rainy season from June-December, which is when they are generally sighted.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT EAT?

The kite has a very specialised diet of native and endemic tree snails. It extracts the snail from the shell by holding it against a perch with one foot and removing the dried membrane covering the aperture with their beak. The shell is then chipped to enlarge the aperture, and the upper mandible is inserted to progressively break the inner whorls of the shell with the tip of the bill, eventually freeing the snail, which is then swallowed whole.

### 4 GLOBAL STATUS

The Grenada species is listed as Endangered. The most recent estimate in 2007 suggested a population size of only 50-70 birds. The main threat is destruction of forested habitat and mature trees which provide habitat for arboreal snails and nesting sites for kites. Although quite obscure, they seem to be tolerant of human presence, as some have been observed nesting in areas near people.



Hook-billed Kite, adult male  
ANDREA EASTER-PILCHER

## CARIBBEAN BIRDING TRAIL

### TOP 3 HOTSPOTS: GRENADA

The island of Grenada offers a range of interesting and scenic habitats to explore and view birds – from coastal woodlands and lush rain forest, to mangrove wetlands and freshwater ponds and lakes. Home to over 150 birds, Grenada is a wonderful birding destination where you will discover the rare and unexpected, including the endangered and endemic **Grenada Dove, Grenada Hook-billed Kite**, many migratory waterbirds and Lesser Antilles specialties.



Lesser Antillean Tanager



White-rumped Sandpiper



Grenada Flycatcher

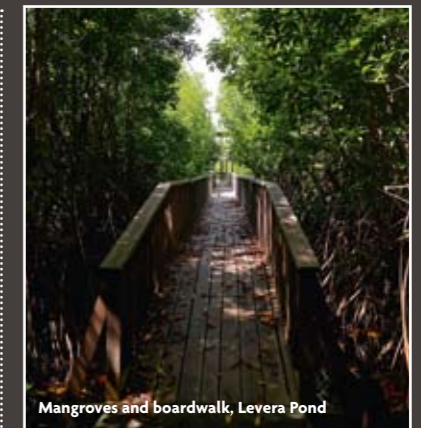
### 1 MT. HARTMAN NATIONAL PARK AND DOVE SANCTUARY

located on the southeastern Atlantic coast, contains last remnants of coastal dry forest scrub habitat and is one of two locations to spot the Grenada Dove and Hook-billed Kite. Dominated by acacia trees, the forest is a great location to also see the Eared Dove, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Caribbean Elaenia, Grenada Flycatcher, House Wren, Spectacled Thrush, and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. Mangrove wetlands bordering the

park are home to a great variety of waterbirds, such as herons, egrets, ducks, and many shorebirds.

### 2 GRAND ETANG FOREST RESERVE

is located in the high central forest range approximately 800m above sea level and is typical rainforest. At the famous Grand Etang Crater Lake one can see herons, grebes, ducks and osprey; other notable birds are Gray-rumped Swift, Cocoa Thrush, Lesser Antillean Tanager, Grenada Flycatcher, Antillean Euphonia, Green-throated Carib, and Ruddy Quail-Dove.



Mangroves and boardwalk, Levera Pond

### 3 THE LEVERA AREA

located on the Northeast Atlantic coast offers Grenada's best tropical island scenery. Typical dry forest ecosystem dominates the area, but the main attractions are Levera Pond and Bathway Beach. Large water bodies in the area, including Levera Pond and Lake Antoine, are noted for migratory ducks, raptors, waders and seabirds. Offshore seabird colonies can be found on small rocks and islets just off the coast, e.g. Diamond Rock.

TED EUBANKS