



Birding survey on Barbuda following the passage of hurricane Irma

Report Guadeloupe team
October 15th 2017



After the passage of IRMA on the islands north of Guadeloupe, we were very worried about the future of the Barbuda Warbler, the announcement of the damage caused on this island.

It is therefore natural that we offered our help when we learned that a team was setting up to follow up on the Barbuda bird populations.

After several weeks of discussion and collaboration, this help was realized by our presence in the field on Sunday, October 15, 2017, at the same time as the arrival of other ornithologists from the United States, Saint Lucia and Antigua.

We thank all of our partners and friends from Antigua and Barbuda, and BirdsCaribbean for trusting us despite the difficulties and the relatively short time we could mobilize. A special thanks to Natalya Lawrence and Lisa Sorenson.

This document is a summary of the progress of our day, from our departure from Guadeloupe in the morning until our return at the end of the day.

Cover illustration: Male Magnificent Frigatebird (Frantz Delcroix)

Crédits:

Photos: Anthony Levesque, Frantz Delcroix, Eric Delcroix (except 1 : Guadeloupe Team, by Hervé Pennel)

Map (page 5) : Eric Delcroix

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I. Flight from Guadeloupe to Barbuda



The start was scheduled for Sunday, October 15 around 6:30.

The expected means of transport was a small plane, a Piper PA28, with a capacity of 4 people, so the pilot and 3 passengers. The plane was powerful enough for a transport of optical equipment, a cooler to restore the day, and boots when needed.

Despite a bad weather for several days, an active tropical wave on Guadeloupe and Antigua and Barbuda all weekend, our pilot guaranteed us the opportunity to travel.

A first bad surprise however just before leaving: during his contact with the control tower of Guadeloupe to validate the flight plan to Antigua, our pilot learned that the airport of Antigua was closed to all the visual flights, accepting only flights to intrusments (IFR). Fortunately, we chose the right person because his plane was equipped and certified for this kind of flight.

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Take off at 6: 50, arrival at Antigua around 8:00 Flight longer than planned, because IFR flight. After the passage of the immigration control which is done relatively well, go to the control tower to validate the flight plan to Barbuda. As we suspected, we had trouble with the fact that we did not have written authorization from Major Michael. As I had taken the precaution of asking for the Major's contact information, after a few talks, the agent agreed to call him. She was able to validate our flight plan to Barbuda. Thanks to Helena for providing us with Major Michael's contact information, otherwise we would not have been allowed to continue our flight!
Take off from Antigua around 9:00; arrive around 9:20 in Barbuda.



Preparing the plane for the IFR flight



A look on Antigua



Landing at Antigua



Barbuda approach



Landing at Barbuda



II. On Barbuda

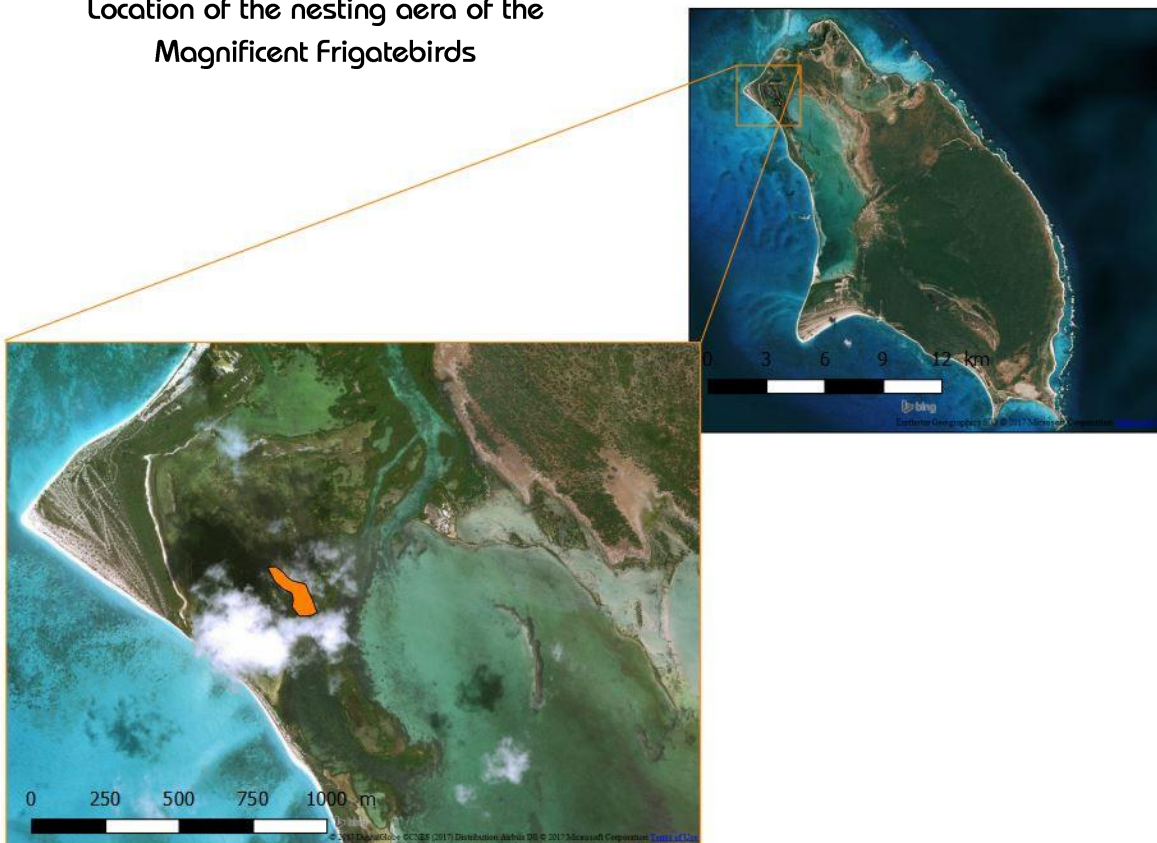
On our arrival, we make a first survey: a few Barn Swallows circle around us, including 1 Bank Swallow. Also, an American Golden Plover in the parking lot. Then we were greeted by an agent from the airfield, who kindly took us to the port where the rest of the team has just arrived by boat. There we met Jeff, Franck, Lenn, and the others.

We all went to the house that serves as housing for the team in place.

Kelly joined us later; he managed the boat which led us to the colony of frigates. In the meantime, we did some birding around the neighborhood.

We took departure at 11:15 towards the colony. Our plane pilot came with us, so he discovered the avifauna of Barbuda, which he did not know at all.

Location of the nesting area of the
Magnificent Frigatebirds





Arrival at 11:30 on the colony, by far we saw hundreds of frigates in flight, and the bushes were adorned with the red pockets of the males!

We made the count on an area of 4,5 Ha (11,12 Acre). We estimated the Magnificent Frigatebirds at 1710, and found also 17 Brown Boobies.

Subsequently, we estimated the sex ratio this count on 7 bushes representing 279 birds. We found 83 females and 196 males. We can estimate the sex ratio at 30% of females and 70% of males. It was constant in the bushes counted.

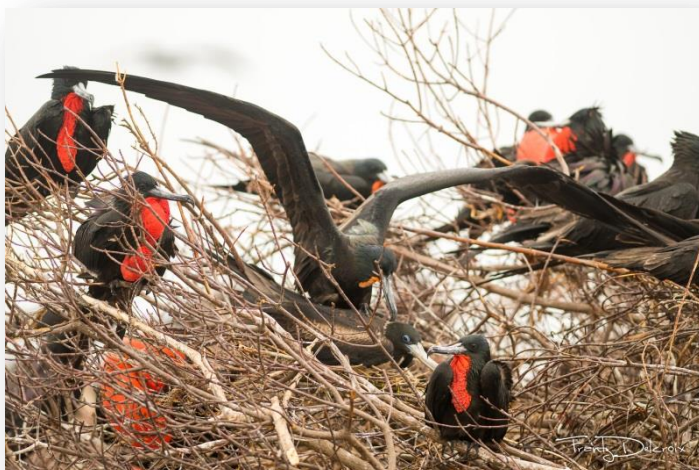
90% of the females were on nests, and we attended some birds courting and mating.

We could also see some males carrying some materials for building the nests.



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Brown Boobies with the frigatebirds

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Back to Codrington around 12:30, lunch break, and we went back to the field. Having no vehicle available, we decided to go to a pool noticed on a map before coming to Barbuda. Along the way, we made several surveys of the species present. Thus, on a wasteland not far from the town, we met our first Barbuda Warblers. They were very active and easily responding to pishing. They were eating some caterpillars.



Barbuda Warbler

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We continued to the pond, where we found 2 Lesser Antillean Flycatchers, 2 Long-billed Dowitchers, 1 Stilt Sandpiper, some Semipalmated Sandpipers, 1 Solitary Sandpiper, as well as a Scaly-breasted Thrasher.

We continued our surveys until around 2:45 pm, before returning to the accommodation to pick up our belongings and returned to the airfield on foot, for a takeoff around 03:45 PM.

Arrival in Guadeloupe at 16:20, after crossing some clouds...



Guadeloupe Team



In the plane, back home



III. Our general impression



Some damage on Barbuda

Even if we were there to conduct a birding survey, we had our hearts tense when we saw all the damage and the difficulties that the inhabitants of Barbuda. It was an amazing experience but with a strange sensation of desolation for people who lost everything and the discovery of the Frigatebird colony reneating and the "survivor" Barbuda Warbler... Nature is Strong! It can destroy almost everything and permit the survival of a 10 g bird...

We were also surprised by the resilience of all those species. Before the hurricane, the Frigatebirds were in a period of reproduction, with chicks still in the nest. We suppose that they were around 4000 – 5000, as they usually are.

Just after the hurricane, a first team went on the site, and saw the disaster: around 300 birds were there, and no chicks anymore.

One month and a half later, they are now more than 1700, starting a new reproduction period, with almost all the females on nest!

The mangrove seems to be burnt, but we could see some new leaves on the trees.



IV. List of birds seen or heard

- ❖ Helmeted Guineafowl - *Numida meleagris*



- ❖ Magnificent Frigatebird - *Fregata magnificens*
- ❖ Brown Booby - *Sula leucogaster*
- ❖ Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis*
- ❖ American Golden-Plover - *Pluvialis dominica*
- ❖ Semipalmated Plover - *Charadrius semipalmatus*
- ❖ Killdeer - *Charadrius vociferus*
- ❖ Stilt Sandpiper - *Calidris himantopus*
- ❖ Pectoral Sandpiper - *Calidris melanotos*
- ❖ Semipalmated Sandpiper - *Calidris pusilla*
- ❖ Long-billed Dowitcher - *Limnodromus scolopaceus*



- ❖ Solitary Sandpiper - *Tringa solitaria*
- ❖ Lesser Yellowlegs - *Tringa flavipes*

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- ❖ Rock Pigeon - *Columba livia*
- ❖ White-crowned Pigeon - *Patagioenas leucocephala*



- ❖ Eurasian Collared-Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*



- ❖ Common Ground-Dove - *Columbina passerine*





- ❖ White-winged Dove - *Zenaida asiatica*



- ❖ Zenaida Dove - *Zenaida aurita*



- ❖ Belted Kingfisher - *Megasceryle alcyon*
- ❖ Caribbean Elaenia - *Elaenia martinica*
- ❖ Lesser Antillean Flycatcher - *Myiarchus oberi*



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- ❖ Gray Kingbird - *Tyrannus dominicensis*
- ❖ Black-whiskered Vireo - *Vireo altiloquus*
- ❖ Bank Swallow - *Riparia riparia*
- ❖ Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*
- ❖ Scaly-breasted Thrasher - *Allenia fusca*
- ❖ Pearly-eyed Thrasher - *Margarops fuscatus*



- ❖ American Redstart - *Setophaga ruticilla*
- ❖ Yellow Warbler - *Setophaga petechia*
- ❖ Blackpoll Warbler - *Setophaga striata*
- ❖ Barbuda Warbler - *Setophaga subita*
- ❖ Bananaquit - *Coereba flaveola*
- ❖ Black-faced Grassquit - *Tiaris bicolor*
- ❖ Lesser Antillean Bullfinch - *Loxigilla noctis*
- ❖ Carib Grackle - *Quiscalus lugubris*



All the lists done this day has been recorded on ebird.org