Anguilla successfully completes Ramsar Small Grant Fund project

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The Anguilla National Trust has successfully completed the project “Developing a platform for the conservation of Anguilla’s wetlands”.

Anguilla, a United Kingdom Overseas Territory, is an island state located in the north-eastern corner of the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean. Anguilla’s wetlands are of particular significance for biodiversity as the island holds a rich variety of natural habitats ranging from sea-grass beds and coral reefs to evergreen woodland and forest, mangroves, grasslands, brackish and freshwater ponds and offshore cays.

The lead implementing agency for this Small Grants Fund project is the Anguilla National Trust (ANT) who serves as the custodian of Anguilla’s heritage since 1993. This statutory agency works to preserve and promote the island’s natural environment as well as its archaeological, historical and cultural resources for present and future generations.

Project objectives

The main threats affecting biodiversity conservation in Anguilla are primarily habitat loss due to a surge in the development sector and a lack of public awareness and appreciation about the importance of the environment on the island. In 2005, in response to development pressure on Anguilla’s salt ponds, the Government of Anguilla drafted the Wetlands Policy of Anguilla to guide the conservation, preservation and wise use of the islands’ wetlands. However, limited resources and capacity precluded adequate wetland management and Ramsar Site designation.

The main objectives of the project were to increase understanding of the importance of and threats related Anguilla’s wetlands, improve their protection through Important Bird Area and Ramsar Site designations as well as enhance the capacity in all sectors of society to manage wetlands.
Project results

- A National Wetland Inventory of all mainland salt ponds including its offshore cays was produced. The 25 summary sheets for Anguilla’s mainland salt ponds which document the conditions and the threats affecting these wetlands are available electronically upon request.

- The datasheets for Anguilla’s Important Bird Areas have been updated and the number of IBAs increased from 7 to 14 during the course of the project. The data collected has also been used to identify potential Ramsar Sites including four offshore cays: Sombrero Island, Dog Island, Prickly Pear and Scrub Island. A report on the State of Anguilla’s Birds (2012-2013) has also been published.

- A Ramsar Information Sheet was compiled for Sombrero Island. Located 60 Kilometres north-west of mainland Anguilla, this offshore cay is an important island for many sea birds, listed as an Important Bird Area in 2005. Its remote location provides a landfall and refuge for many migratory birds and the island is also home to the endemic Sombrero Island Ground Lizard.

- In collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Anguilla National Trust developed a Draft National Plan based on the Ramsar Strategic Plan to guide wetland and Ramsar Site management.

- Several capacity building events were conducted to ensure the long-term program of work. In collaboration with University of Liverpool, Earth Analytic Ltd. and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the ANT organised a series of workshops on the Ramsar Site designation process, GIS training as well as fundraising and financial planning.

- Education and awareness raising were also important components of the project. Pre- and post-project surveys were conducted to determine the public’s general awareness of Anguilla’s wetland ecosystems. Two radio programmes and two public service announcements were aired on the local radio and three newspaper articles on Anguilla’s wetlands were published. Updates of the project were also provided through the ANTs quarterly newsletter One Rock. Over a dozen presentations and field trips were facilitated for both the public and school children.

The Governor in Council also designated the Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the Department of Environment as co-National Administrative Authorities to support the local implementation of the Convention in Anguilla.

Elise Allély-Fermé from the Ramsar Secretariat visited Anguilla in September 2015. The visit organised by the Anguilla National Trust included an extensive tour of Anguilla’s wetlands including the offshore cays Sombrero Island, Dog Island, Prickly Pear as well as some of the mainland’s IBAs and Marine Parks. A public event was organised and well-attended where Ms Clarissa Lloyd of the Anguilla National Trust showcased the importance of wetland services both for people and the environment. The visit also revealed the breadth of work and on-going efforts led by the Anguilla National Trust and its partners to document and preserve wetlands and biodiversity in Anguilla. It also highlighted some of the challenges and pressures which face coastal wetlands today and calls for increased collaboration across all stakeholders.

The Ramsar Secretariat would like to congratulate the Anguilla National Trust and its partners for the development of this strategically important and collaborative project. We look forward to learning about the future outcomes of the National Wetland Plan and wish the ANT continuing success in the monitoring and preservation of Anguilla’s wetlands and associated biodiversity. With the appointment of local Administrative Authorities, the Secretariat looks forward to increased collaboration for the implementation of the Convention in Anguilla including through the designation of Anguilla’s first Wetland of International Importance.

The Ramsar Convention Small Grants Fund is intended to assist developing countries and those with economies in transition in implementing the Convention and to support the conservation
and wise use of wetland resources, with a strong human and social dimension.

Report by Elise Allély-Fermé, Assistant Advisor for Europe

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