



On the Wind

**A Portrait of BRI's Science Expedition:
Seabirds of the Cay Sal Bank, The Bahamas
May 26 – June 1, 2012**

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*Contributors
Participants of BRI's First Ecotour*



To Dave:

Who inspires us all to fly.



Seabirding Expedition

Cay Sal Bank, The Bahamas

Day 4: The dusty pink and white lighthouse on Elbow Cay greeted us as we stepped out on deck this morning; we had anchored just offshore of the cay sometime during the night. The brick structure, now in ruins, climbed upward from the jagged rock to break the monotony of a bright blue sky.

I sensed a growing anticipation onboard our sailing vessel; the entire group, including some of the crew, was about to share a moment that we somehow knew would change us.







*“The more we learn about seabirds,
the more interesting they become.”*

Dr. Will Mackin, Expedition Leader



Seabirds spend most of their lives on open water, seeking land only to nest. Few people understand the lives these birds lead, or the physical hardships they endure.

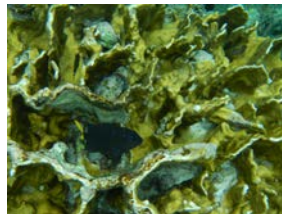
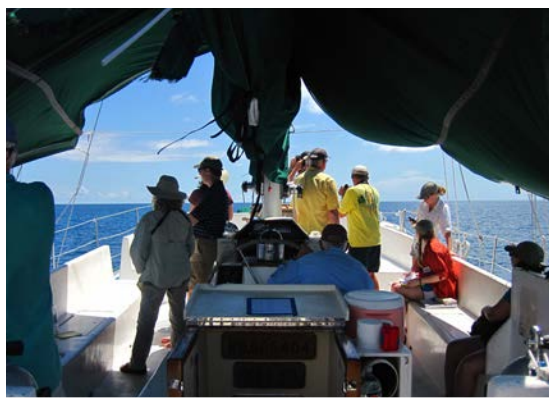
“Expeditions like this foster a connection to the natural world—engaging the general public is key to the future of conservation.”

Jeff Gerbracht, University of Cornell Lab of Ornithology



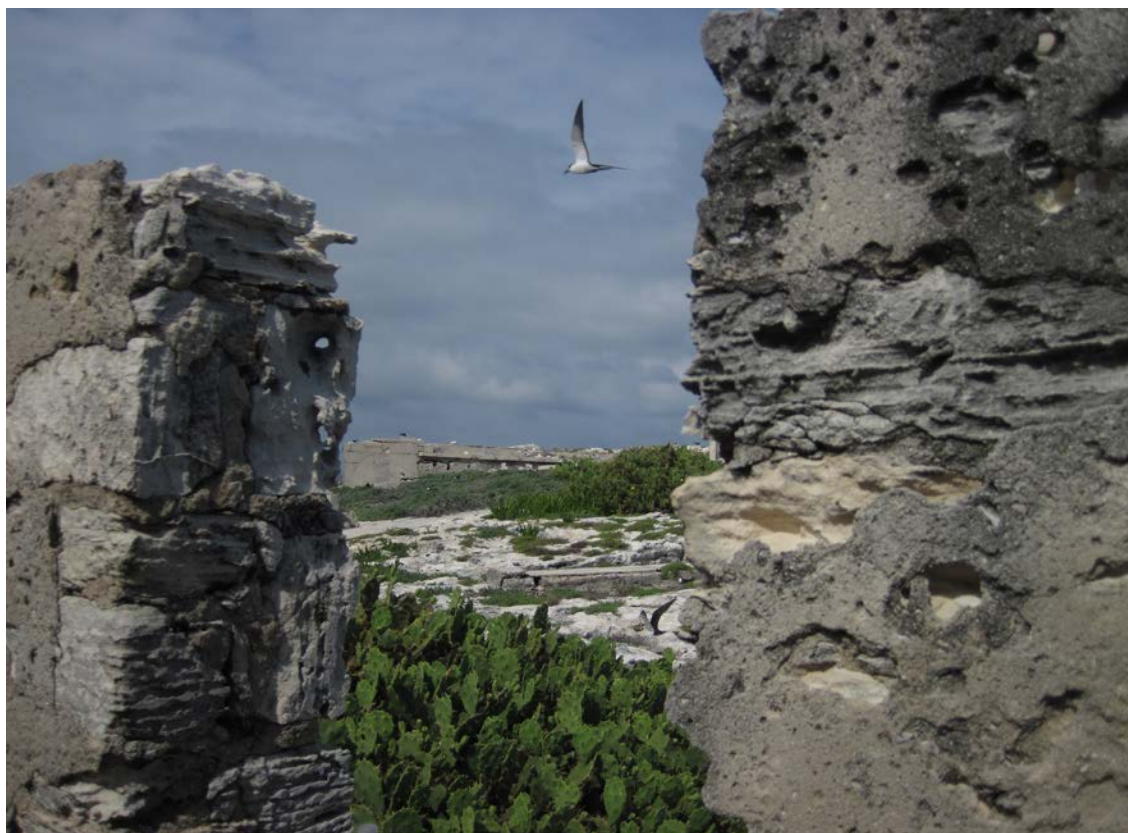
This expedition was a way for us to share our collective insights—insights that might help protect the beautiful birds that nested here on their short respite from a life spent living on the wind.





There are two facets of sight—looking and seeing: One is practical—
one is passionate. One is for navigation, the other for connection.

Each of the 19 members of our expedition saw the rocky islands
with very different eyes.







The scientists in the group were on a quest to collect data—how many birds were nesting, how many could be banded?

The naturalists were interested in eradicating invasive species, plant and animal.





“I wanted to make myself useful on this trip...by culling the Australian casaurina...if left alone, this very invasive pine tree will form a dense, tall forest, totally changing the habitat.”

Dr. David Wingate, Bermuda Government Parks Department



“With conservation, there is no easy path.”

Denny Moore, Bahamas National Trust



The conservationists saw the adventure as an opportunity to help preserve a unique wildlife habitat.





The educators mapped out lesson plans and possible future excursions for their students, those they hoped would venture into Nature's classroom.

The students onboard imagined the people who had inhabited these remote islands, those isolated souls who lived among the birds.



*Broken, weathered, a lonely light long forgotten
now stands crumbling amidst the cacophony of
caws, and twarps, and staccato chirps.*

The birders
were thrilled to
increase their
life lists.



*Serious scholars turn giddy
with excitement at the sound of
the word, "Sighting!"*







The photographers sought the best lighting to capture the perfect shot.

The sailing crew saw the islands as a navigation challenge, and the cook, well, the cook did not see the islands at all—he was stuck in the galley.









I watched and wondered how the birds saw these interlopers—the birds that fly at the center of this story. Their instinct is to survive, to wing on ocean winds, to return here year after year to this remote and isolated outcropping to lay a single egg. Did they have some sense, as we captured and banded and released them, that we were there to help them?



*“Until you’ve been to a place like this and experienced
it yourself, you can’t appreciate it.”*

Dr. Lisa Sorenson
Society for the Conservation and
Study of Caribbean Birds







One thing was certain—although each person on our expedition saw the birds from a different perspective, all were willing to learn and understand from each other how these views intersected.

“This trip is a model for partnerships between tourists and scientists.”

Dr. Ann Sutton
Society for the Conservation and
Study of Caribbean Birds







It is at the intersection of practical needs and passionate connection where answers to the hard questions are found.

The birds have friends in these explorers, and I do believe they understood that.











Front row (left to right): Denny Moore, Bahamas National Trust (BNT); Mary Kay Clark, David Lee, Ph.D., The Tortoise Reserve; Samantha Plenner, Graduate Student; Caitlin Howard, College Student; Lisa Sorenson, Ph.D., Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB); Ann Sutton, Ph.D., SCSCB. Back row: Katie Siever, Ph.D., University of Florida; David Siever; Lisa Eggert, Ph.D., Trip Leader-BRI; Orin (Sonny) Bass, U.S. National Park Service (retired emeritus); Kathy Carpenter; Jeff Gerbracht, Cornell University, Lab of Ornithology, Will Mackin, Ph.D., Trip Leader; Helge Wingate; David Wingate, Ph.D., Bermuda Government Parks Department (1966-2000), Mike Sorenson, Ph.D., Boston University; David Clare, BNT; Deb McKew, BRI.
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Lisa Sorenson, Michael Sorenson, Ann Sutton, David Wingate