R2RW

Writing Effective Press Releases for the Media Workshop Report

ARD

Ridge to Reef Watershed Project

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WRITING EFFECTIVE PRESS RELEASES FOR THE MEDIA WORKSHOP REPORT

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PREFACE

The Ridge to Reef Watershed Project (R2RW) is a five year (with an optional sixth year) activity contributing to the achievement of USAID/Jamaica's SO2 – "improved quality of key natural resources in areas that are both environmentally and economically significant." R2RW comprises three Contract Results or Components contributing to results under SO2. Component 1 will assist targeted organizations to identify and promote sustainable environmental management practices by resource users. Component 2 focuses on identifying and supporting solutions to improve enforcement of targeted existing environmental regulations, primarily in the Great River and Rio Grande Watersheds. Component 3 provides assistance to key organizations to support, coordinate, and expand watershed management efforts in Jamaica. ARD, Inc is implementing the Ridge to Reef Watershed project with assistance from Cargill Technical Services, Inc.

The Writing Effective Press Release Workshop was an activity requested by members of the Public Awareness Task Force of the Great River Watershed Management Committee. The main objective was the training of youth living in the watershed and members of various stakeholder organizations in effective writing skills so that they are able to better report on environmental issues and events affecting their communities. Encouraging youth to write for the local media, has also been strongly suggested as one way to get youth more involved in environmental activities.

The Great River Watershed Management Committee (GRWMC) was formed in June 2001, bringing together various stakeholders from government, NGO's and the private sector towards a unified approach regarding watershed management issues in the GRW area.

ACRONYMS

ARD	Associates in Rural Development, Inc.
CBO	Community Based Organization
CDC	Community Development Committees
CGA	Central Government Agencies
CIB	Coffee Industry Board
CR	Contract Result
EFJ	Environmental Foundation of Jamaica
ENACT	Environmental Action Project
EWS	Environmental Warden Service
EU	European Union
FD	Forestry Department
GOJ	Government of Jamaica
JAS	Jamaica Agriculture Society
JTB	Jamaica Tourist Board
NEEC	National Environmental Education Committee
NEPA	National Environment and Planning Agency
ODPEM	Office of Disaster Preparation and Emergency Management
PC	Parish Council
PSOJ	Private Sector Organization of Jamaica
R2RW	Ridge to Reef Watershed Project
RADA	Rural Agriculture Development Authority
SRC	Scientific Research Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, March 5, 2002, a Press Release Training Workshop was held at the Wexford Hotel in Montego Bay. Nineteen individuals representing government agencies, environmental NGO's, communities and civil society, among others, participated in the half-day workshop which was facilitated by Maria Protz (Participation and Public Awareness Specialist – Ridge to Reef Watershed Project).

The objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Involve youth from the Great River Watershed in the promotion of activities that encourage sustainable watershed management.

2. Introduce participants to the skills of effective writing so that they can report on environmental activities in their own communities.

3. Foster a relationship between community members and the local press.

4. Develop a plan for regular reporting of community activities in the local media.

Towards the fulfillment of these objectives, the following presenters were invited to share their experiences in working with the media:

Mr. David Geddes, Public Relations Manager - Office of Utilities Regulations

Ms. Beverly Sinclair, News Editor - The Western Mirror

Mr. Leo Douglas, R2RW Project Assistant and Media Relations Officer of BirdLife Jamaica and the Society of Caribbean Ornithology.

PRESENTATION BY DAVID GEDDES – HOW TO GET YOUR RELEASES PUBLISHED

Mr. David Geddes, Public Relations Manager - Office of Utilities Regulation
3rd Floor PCJ Resource Center
36 Trafalgar Road,
Kingston 10

Mr. Geddes emphasized: 1) the importance of being accurate - he noted that it only takes one incident to ruin someone's reputation as an accurate spokesperson. For example, the soon to be Minister of National Security in a public address noted that duty was being reduced by 120%, or in another statement that a policeman had been shot and killed six times. Both of these statements reflected poorly on the individual(s) in question.

1. Establish a relationship with an editor. This is an advantage, as editors will then recognize when material has been received from a trusted source and/or individual. For this reason, releases from some sources are often preferentially published. Send a formal letter of introduction – this establishes credibility. This is important in that it minimizes the change of spurious releases being received and utilized by the media. Reporters like to have extensive contacts in their "little black books", so that they can make a quick call if they need to get further information.

   It is important to have standing on particular issues - i.e. some kind of policy.

2. To maximize the chance of a release being utilized, there needs to be something that will grab the attention of the editor. Generally, issues related to financial matters that affect the lives of people are often high impact stories. For example, if it were said that Jamaica stands to lose because of poor environmental practices, this would be considered a low impact statement as no one particularly cares, with the possible exception, of those who are specifically interested in the subject. If however, the story says that Jamaica stands to lose $600 million because of a particular practice, the hook becomes more powerful and grabbing to the general public.

Questions and Answers

Question

Do things have to be sensational to grab the attention of an editor?

Answer

Partially – but it must still be accurate. Sometimes captions are misleading or inaccurate, e.g. Title: "100 Drug Mules Arrested". The title does not say when or over what period were the 100 arrests yesterday, or since the start of the year? Another example is the title: "Barry G. Arrested" - this title is misleading because it is does not refer to the Barry G that we all know.

PRESENTATION BY BEVERLY SINCLAIR – WHAT THE MEDIA LOOKS FOR IN A MEDIA RELEASE

Ms. Beverly Sinclair
News Editor - Western Mirror
82 Barnett Street,
Montego Bay
St James

Ms Sinclair made the following points:

1. Prefers the term "news release" to "press release".
2. Be prepared before drafting a news release by knowing the "five Ws" – these answer the basic questions of who, what, when, where, and why.
3. An "advisory" is often sent before a news release - this simply states the facts and requests coverage.
4. Keep news releases short. If too long or too much work to condense, it probably won't get printed.
5. Timing is important – if too much time has passed between the actual event and the issuing of the release, it probably won't get covered.
6. Get the interest of the editor – let them know why it is important.
7. Stick to the basics: 200 – 300 words for print media, 150 words for radio/television
8. Put a date at the top of the release – don't say "yesterday" – but give actual dates.
9. Give contact names and a telephone number of the person who has the information. Editors often need information to be verified, and need to do it urgently.
10. Editors work under very strict deadlines. These can't be changed.
11. Use the company or organizational letterhead on the front page - without this, the release will get less attention. A letterhead also gives the release an official appearance.
12. Releases that get published are ones that are accurate, concise and interesting.
13. People don't like to read long stories – if it does not grab their attention or if the information they want is not in the first or second paragraph, it tends to get ignored.
14. A watershed project would be of no importance to most people who especially don't want to go through a lot of technical terms.
15. When preparing the release use bigger fonts – double-spaced.
16. Good information often doesn't get published because it can be boring.
17. Information should be timely, interesting and non-technical.

18. Don't send plain envelopes – on the outside say the source of the information.

19. Have accurate information on titles and spelling of names.

20. Use street language, with a specific hook. The media is not particularly interested in detailed technical information.

21. Sometimes a photograph with a caption may be all that is needed.

Questions and Answers

Question

Can information on a person who has been arrested be published in the press?

Answer

Yes, if they were actually, but one has to be very careful what is released in the media.

PRESENTATION BY LEO DOUGLAS – THE EXPERIENCE OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL NGO (BIRDLIFE JAMAICA)

Mr. Leo Douglas
R2RW Project Assistant
and Media Relations Officer for BirdLife Jamaica
and the Society of Caribbean Ornithology

Prior to 1997, BirdLife Jamaica had very little experience in working with the media. Information in the media from the organization was sporadic and largely dependent on members of the media contacting the organization, which occurred infrequently.

In April of 1998, the Rainforest Alliance, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of tropical forests for the benefit of the global community, conducted a two-day Public Information Skills workshop at the Medallion Hall Hotel with BirdLife Jamaica. The main objective of the workshop was to teach the organization how to work effectively with the media. This was of interest to BirdLife Jamaica as it was agreed that an informed public would be a very powerful partner and the most effective way to bring the message of bird conservation to the general public, was through the media.

After the workshop, BirdLife Jamaica established a list of media contacts (Appendix D). These contacts included the press, radio, television and web pages (go-local - Gleaner Co., Caribbean Today, and various list servers). Press releases were sent to all media contacts usually followed by a telephone follow-up.

Things that media releases were issued for (see examples in Appendix D):

- Workshops being held (e.g. Important Bird Areas Workshop and Launch);

- Visiting Experts/Officials (Scientists, Heads of International Agencies, Celebrities, Ministers of Government, Ambassadors, well known public figures);

- New Publications (e.g. the publication of the book “Threatened Birds of the World” – see pages 26 and 28);
- Launch of projects;
- Completion of projects;
- Response to items in the news;
- Important/significant environmental threats (e.g. species being killed or found dead, endangered species, etc. – see page 24);
- Opening a new office; and
- Grants received (Canadian Green Fund or EFJ give project funds).

Recycling Press Releases: Once one, or a few press releases have been prepared, information in them can often be recycled. For example, a paragraph outlining the mission and objectives of the organization can be copied into new releases as is. This constitutes standard information that would most likely be part of most regular releases.

Examples of a News Release published in the press were shown as overheads:

- *One in Eight Birds Face Extinction – Queen Noor of Jordan appeals for action*
- *Regions Largest Conference on Bird Conservation Held in Cuba*

It was emphasized that the use of photographs strengthened the likelihood of the release being utilized by media houses. These photographs could be scanned and sent by email. It was suggested that photos be archived for future use when related news releases were developed.

Using quotes from an authority (the president, a PhD, the head of a state agency, etc.) also adds interest and strengthens the credibility and authenticity of the story.

The layout of a newsletter was shown on an overhead. Specific points highlighted were: 1) the use of a letterhead; 2) putting notes to the editor as a separate page from the news release where further information related to the release may be placed; 3) adding contact information at the end of the release.

It was recommended that all items that were published by the press, be archived in a scrapbook. This would become a resource base in the future for individuals seeking information concerning the topics on which the material was prepared.

A six-page flyer produced by the Office of Public Affairs, United States Fish and Wildlife Service entitled, " *How to Write a News Release*", used by the media subcommittee of BirdLife Jamaica, was included in the package distributed to participants of the workshop.

PRESENTATION BY MARIA PROTZ – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE KEY ELEMENTS IF GOOD NEWS WRITING

Mrs. Maria Protz
Participation and Public Awareness Specialist
Ridge to Reef Watershed Project

Ms. Protz reiterated some of the key points that had been raised by the previous presenters. She briefly reviewed some tips for good writing and presented a series of overhead transparencies for writing effective news releases. The set of transparencies were also distributed as handouts to the participants and are included in Appendix C.

PRACTICAL PROGRAM – IDENTIFYING STORY IDEAS TO DEVELOP IN THE FIELD

In the final session of the workshop, participants were divided into groups and asked to develop small projects that could be done to coincide with dates on the national environmental calendar. The goal of this session was to allow the community members and youth to come up with "practical" story ideas that they would then further develop prior to the next training session. This could then enable participants to focus on a story idea that they would actually like to see appear in the media, and in turn, give them a chance to go ahead and actually develop one on their own for a real event. The small groups were then asked to present their project ideas to the plenary. The following are ideas proposed:

World Health Day – April 7

Jill Williams and Christopher Kerr prepared a fictitious press release for World Health Day. The release outlined a series of activities to be planned to commemorate the day.

Earth Day – April 22

Community Cleanup of Haughton Grove - Heather McFarlane presented an outline that is to be done as a joint project of the Haughton Grove community and the Sanitation Support Unit.

The Problem: Garbage is a major problem within the Haughton Grove community, with no place for its proper disposal.

Activity

The Earth Day Activity planning committee will contact the authorities to install disposal units on Earth Day alongside a cleanup project activity for the same day. A press release will be issued on the day's activities.

International Biodiversity Day - May 22

Mr. Edward Richards of the Forestry Department presented the outline of three projects to be developed to commemorate International Biodiversity Day as follows:

(a) Reforestation of Hermitage

The overall aim of this initiative is to restore the areas forests and overall biological diversity. The project is to be a community effort with the assistance and supervision of the Forestry Department. A press release will be issued on the subject.

(b) School Recycle Project

Prize to be presented to the Anchovy Secondary School for the Recycling Project. The date of the presentation is to be finalized. Mathew Hittle is to prepare press release.

(c) Tree planting at Blue Hole Nature Reserve

Tree planting at Blue Hole Nature Reserve. A press release is to be prepared.

World Environmental Week – June 1-8

Tree planting with Navel Strings in Shettlewood - the project is to be conducted as a joint activity with the Police Youth Club and the Forestry Department. Fruit trees are to be used for the activity.

Follow-Up Training Session

A follow-up training session was set for Tuesday, April 16th from 9:00 to 11:00a.m. At that time, the participants will present the press releases that they have prepared and there will be an opportunity to critique them together. The intended output from the follow-up training will be:

1. A set of press releases that will be ready to release for the intended dates and events.

2. A plan for further activities in the upcoming year and quarter for which additional news releases may need to be prepared.

3. A plan for possible stock photographs that can be done together with community groups to support the events they are organizing.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA OF MEETING

1st Training Session, Tuesday March 5th, 2002, Venue: Wexford Court Hotel, Montego Bay
Time: 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Participants: Youth of the GRW and Public Awareness Task Force Members

Proposed Agenda

Registration (8:30 to 9:00 a.m.)

1. Greetings and Introduction to the Workshop (9:00 to 9:15) - Maria Protz (Participation and Public Awareness specialist, R2RW)

2. Goals and Objectives: Overview of Training Session – Maria Protz (9:15 to 9:30)

3. Review of Priority Issues in the Great River Watershed (9:30 to 9:45) - Marceleen Wheatle (Chairperson, Public Awareness Task Force)

4. What Press Releases can do for enhancing Public Awareness (9:45 to 10:00) - Mr. David Geddes (Public Relations Manager, Office of Utilities Regulation)

(10:00 to 10:15) Coffee Break

5. What the media looks for in a press release (10:15 to 10:30) - Mr. Lloyd B. Smith (Editor in Chief, the Western Mirror)

6. The Experience of an Environmental NGO: Bird Life Jamaica (10:30 to 10:45) - Leo Douglas (Project Assistant, R2RW)

7. An Introduction to the Key Elements of Good News Writing (10:45 to 11:15) - Maria Protz

8. How to tell a good story – small group critique work (11:15 to 12:00)

9. Practical Programme – Identifying Story Ideas to develop in the field (small group work/ cluster groups) 12:00 to 12:30

10. Setting of Date for Next Training Session and follow-up activities 12:30 to 12:45

Vote of Thanks & Close

Lunch – 1:00 p.m.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

State Agencies

1. Delores Samuels
   JAMAL Foundation

2. Edward Richards
   Forestry Department, Western Regional Office

3. Christopher Kerr
   St. James Health Department

Local Government

4. Sophia Kerr-Reid
   St. James Parish Council, Director of Planning

5. Trevor Jangalie
   Westmoreland Parish Council, Assistant Superintendent

Civil Society

6. Heather McFarlane
   Sanitation Support Unit (SSU)

7. Jill Williams
   Montego Bay Marine Park (MBMP)

8. Matthew Hittle
   Recycle for Life

9. Sharon Clark
   Cool Runnings Spring Water Company

Community

10. Joel McLeod
    Shettlewood Police Youth Club

11. Claudette Campbell
    Vibrant Youth Club, Haughton Grove, Ramble

12. Jackie Murray
    Vibrant Youth Club, Haughton Grove, Ramble

13. Violet Brown
    Montpelier Youth and Police Club

R2RW Technical Team

14. Mark Nolan
15. Leo Douglas
16. Maria Protz
17. Clive Waddell

Guest Speakers

18. Beverley Sinclair
    The Western Mirror

19. David Geddes
    Office of Utilities Regulation

APPENDIX C

TIPS FOR WRITING GOOD NEWS FEATURES AND PRESS RELEASES

Effective Writing & Communication Must Always Answer the Following Questions:

WHO?
WHAT?
WHEN?
WHERE?
HOW?
WHY?

When writing an effective press release to announce a community event, the questions are usually answered in the following order:

WHO is involved in the event?
WHAT is happening exactly?
WHEN will it take place?
WHERE is it happening?
HOW is it happening?
WHY is it happening?

Relate to people's present situation and priorities (pose problems that they can relate to)

Before beginning to develop your article, think carefully about what approach you are going to use. What do people really need to know about what you want to say? What do they already know about it?

The best way to be sure that people are as interested as possible in what you have to say is to make it as relevant to them and their daily lives and personal problems as possible.

Consider ways to package your topic as a "problem" that they need to address for themselves – something that can relate to in their everyday life.

What Makes a News Story Great?

For newspapers, a story will not pass through the editorial window if it does not meet these criteria:

Impact

- Timeliness (how relevant is the story to other current events that are taking place?)
- Prominence
- Proximity (how close is the event to lives of the people who will be hearing about it?)
- Conflict
- Bizarreness (how unusual is the event discussed in the story?)

News editors know that their readers want to be "*entertained"* and "*informed*."

There are some specific characteristics that make stories more enduring, interesting and attractive to a news editor. It is good if there is an element of paradox or mystery involved.

The element of paradox includes stories such as "The Titanic": the "unsinkable ship sinks", "beautiful people suffer an ugly death". This is an extreme example, but indicates the type of "juxtaposition" that makes a story catchy and newsworthy.

What are the possible PARADOX or remarkable stories in your community that you may want to write about?

- A poor person, who despite all odds, became successful?
- A single mother who, through farming, nevertheless educated all of her children?
- Is there a person with an "underdog" type of experience, winning a case of human justice against all odds?
- What are the contradictions in the community that would make good stories?
- Can you make local stories more interesting by using paradox or mystery to keep your readers' interest?

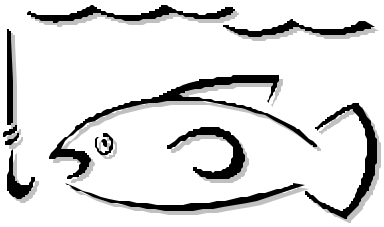
What do these elements mean for environmental stories? How can we make environmental issues in our community interesting and exciting to people outside?

Environmental stories can be made more interesting by adding a "human interest" angle and by linking folk, culture and vignettes from traditional knowledge to environmental events that are taking place. For example:

1. ***Solid waste*** – recycling (describe a little boy that is using recycled materials to make kites or trucks, or vehicles – tell the story from his perspective)
2. ***Solid waste*** – children are usually sent to the garbage skip to dump garbage, but they can't reach so the garbage is left on the ground. A new community project to introduce smaller bins will make it easier for them to drop off their garbage. Telling the story from a child's perspective will make it more interesting.
3. ***Deforestation*** – older people in the community (like Mr. Whyte in Bethel Town) remember the Hermitage plantation being full of fruit trees and that school children were fed from the trees. Presenting the issue as an oral history makes it more interesting.
4. ***Water Quality*** – there are many older people in the watershed who can tell you about all the types of fish that no longer exist in the river but which they used to catch and eat when they were children. Older people also talk about the river water being "stronger" in those days than the treated water that is drunk now. This is an important angle that could be used to introduce a story.
5. ***Cultural landmarks*** – many sites in the watershed may be associated with folk stories from slavery days. For example, one pond on the Hermitage plantation is linked to a story about a pregnant slave girl that once worked there. There are also many stories about caves and springs. Can these be used creatively to address the issue that you are raising?

“Developing a Good Hook”

These are all suggestions for finding an interesting way to introduce your story. It is very important at the beginning of your news feature to use a “hook” to catch the eye of the editor and also of your readers. A good hook will help to then reel them in so that they will want to read the rest of the article.



A hook must be directly relevant to your story, of course, and ideally, should be of most relevance and interest to the specific audience you are trying to reach.

For example, if you are writing a press release that identifies an issue related to water quality that you hope will have particular impact on women and mothers of small children, you may want to use some older Jamaican proverbs that have to do with water and with women’s work, such as:

> “Bwoy, old time people used to say – ***Everyday bucket a go a well, one day di bottom a go drop out”***. Have you ever really thought about what that means? What does it mean for women here today, especially those with young children to care for.

This will help you to catch people’s interest right from the beginning.

Biblical Parables

Most people in rural communities are fairly religious. If it is appropriate and if you are so inclined, you might wish to use an example from scripture to get people thinking about what you want to say.

Developing your “Creative Treatment” and your own Style

An “official” sounding press release may be what you are used to, but it will not always be the best way of informing and instructing other people. It may be necessary to persuade your audience, giving reasons and explanations – or even to inform indirectly by entertaining or amusing them.

On what level do you want to appeal to your readers? Your approach might be:

- Formal (a correct, official style, seeking to impress or gain approval)
- Informal (relaxed, direct, not ceremonial)
- Colloquial (conversational, chatty, probably using a local dialect, idiom or slang phrases)
- Personal (intimate, friendly, everyday talk as with family and friends).

For people who write in a formal style for their official business, it may be very hard to write in any other way. It is easier to talk than to write informally, so it may help to tell someone your message and then write it down the way you said it.

It is essential that the material can be easily understood – otherwise there is no point in writing it. Unless there is some special reason to follow a traditional style or to use ambiguous language, material should be written in a straightforward and uncomplicated way. It is helpful to:

- Be absolutely clear about what you want to say and why, before beginning to write.
- Say it clearly and directly - it may help to write something down roughly and improve on it later and read it through aloud to see if it flows naturally.
- Test what you have written – get others to read it and check that they can understand what you mean.

Writing Simply

Here are some sentences taken from draft material intended for literacy learners. They can all be written more simply so that they are easier to understand:

1. Trees have been identified as being indispensable to people.
2. Every location is supposed to have a tree nursery.
3. The efforts of those who helped to initiate this book cannot go unthanked.
4. One spraying is done immediately after the first weeding and a second is executed after the second weeding.
5. Grade one potatoes are put in sacks and then transported by any available means to a market for sale.
6. It should be remembered that the local people who depend wholly on the coconut tree will never at all draw their firewood from the trunk of this tree.
7. Weeding starts after the plants have grown to some reasonable height (15 cm).

These sentences can provide some examples of points to keep in mind, particularly when writing for newly literate and semi-literate readers.

Material is readable if it can be read and understood by those for whom it is intended. If someone else has to explain, it has not been written well for the intended purpose even if your audience understands the explanation.

Choice of words

- Use concrete words – words with an immediate meaning
- Use short, simple words – “people need” rather than “indispensable to people” (sentence 1)
- Avoid general notions such as “trees have been identified” (sentence 1)
- Familiarity – use common and familiar words wherever possible. (sentence 3) If a specialist or technical term or unusual word is really needed, make sure that it is acceptable and then use it consistently. Explain a new term fully with relevant examples and pictures.

- Vocabulary – do not be afraid of using a simple word more than once; there is no point in varying them unnecessarily. In sentence 4, “done” could be repeated, rather than introducing “executed” later in the same sentence.

- Local vocabulary – look out for words related to local culture, or to topics which are important in the district. For example, there may be some special terms for herds or crops.

- Colloquial and local words – popular slang and idiom can be very effective, and make material more interesting for local readers. Do not feel you must protect your readers from “incorrect” grammar and use of language; but be sure that slang expressions are appropriate for the intended audience and remember that people from other groups may find them difficult to understand.

Sentences

- Keep sentences short.

- Keep sentences simple. Avoid constructions such as: “It should be remembered that the local people who depend wholly on…will…” (sentence 6)

- Use active words. “Ask the Agricultural Extension Officer to help you plant a tree nursery” is better than “every location is supposed to have a tree nursery” (sentence 2). “Take your potatoes to market” is better than “potatoes are transported by an available means to a market” (sentence 5)

- Positive statements are better than negative ones. Use “We want to thank” rather than “those who helped…cannot go unthanked” (sentence 3)

- Personalize the writing: “start weeding…” or “you can start weeding…” is better than “weeding starts…” (sentence 7)

Avoid very long passages of continuous prose; they can be tiring and boring to read.

Length (word count)

The objective of writing a press release is to get your article published in the paper so that people know about it. Your chances will be better if your press release is short, punchy and to the point. For this reason, try to keep your article to 500 words or less. 500 words are roughly equivalent to two typed pages of text, double-spaced.

Depending on the space that they have available, editors may need to cut information from your article. Usually this is done by eliminating text from the end of your story. Therefore, when writing news features and press releases, it is important to use “the inverted triangle” technique.

The Inverted Triangle

APPENDIX D

EXAMPLES OF MEDIA RELEASES

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release Date:

One in Eight Birds Face Extinction Queen Noor of Jordon Appeals for Action

A new report from BirdLife International says that 1,200 species of the world birds or one in eight species are threatened with extinction globally. The report also notes that a further 600-900 species (so-called near-threatened species) are close to being added to the threatened list. This number includes ten (10) Jamaican bird species.

Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan, when announcing the figures described the situation as shocking.

Queen Noor, Honorary president of BirdLife International, said:

"The prospect of one in eight of the worlds birds disappearing forever is unthinkable. But these figures are the signs of an even greater tragedy. Environmental degradation is now having a very real effect on the lives of millions of people, especially the poor and disadvantaged. Protecting the environment must become a top priority for governments and industry everywhere, to prevent the these birds disappearing forever, and even more people suffering from the destruction of the environment".

The report which underscores the fact that birds and people share the same problems and solutions notes that habitat destruction, the high environmental impact of agriculture and other land use practices are the greatest problems. Although threatened birds occur in many different habitats, nearly 75% of all threatened bird species are forest birds. With the tropical rainforests being extremely rich in bird species, the report highlights that Asia and the Americas (including the islands of the Caribbean) as particularly important areas for conservation action. Jamaica, which has 30 birds, found no where else on earth and the highest endemic rate in the region, has a deforestation rate of 5.3 % per annum, one of the highest rates of forest loss in the world.

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Additional Notes:

1. BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organizations that focuses on birds and their habitats and, through that, works for the sustainability of all life.

2. BirdLife Jamaica, partner designate of BirdLife International, is the only local organization specifically interested in the conservation of birds and their habitats

3. Jamaica has 30 species of birds found here and nowhere else in the world giving this island the highest rate of endemism in the Caribbean, and the fifth highest for an oceanic island worldwide.

Contact Information

BirdLife Jamaica
Mailing address:
2 Starlight Ave,
Kingston 6,
Jamaica W.I.
Tel & fax (876) 927-8444 (home)
(Catherine Levy, President)

or

Tel (876) 924-4203 (home)
(Leo Douglas, Media Relations Officer)
e-mail: leodouglas@cwjamaica.com

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release Date

West Indian Seabirds In Serious Decline

A new publication by the Society of Caribbean Ornithology (SCO) entitled the "**Status and Conservation of West Indian Seabirds**", states that almost all of the regions seabirds are in serious decline. The publication, which represents the combined efforts of a large number of biologists working in the greater West Indian region and North America, is a direct result of the concerns expressed at a 1997 International Seabird Workshop held at the SCO's annual conference in Aruba. The SCO is a non-profit organization whose goals are to promote the scientific study and conservation of Caribbean birds and their habitats, to provide a link among island ornithologists and those elsewhere, and to provide a written forum for research. The Society is the largest single organization devoted to wildlife conservation in the region.

The book notes that of a total of 21 seabird species nesting in the West Indies, 6 are considered to be "Critically Endangered", 3 are "Endangered", 4 are "Vulnerable", and 2 species "Near Threatened". That is, more than half of the regions nesting seabird species are of current conservation concern. Furthermore, all six (6) of the regions endemic seabird taxa are listed among those species of conservation concern, namely; the Black-capped and Jamaican Petrel, Audubon's Shearwater, White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Pelican and the Cayenne Tern.

The major reasons cited for the declines are habitat destruction and disturbance, human consumption of eggs and birds, the introduction of predatory animals, and chemical and solid waste/pollution. Additionally, it was strongly noted that in a historical sense, the most recent reason for seabird declines was the regions growing tourist industry. The development of coastal habitats has increased, and isolated small islands, rocks and cays which were formerly safe nesting sites are now increasingly being developed as attractions and/or are visited by tourists seeking remote island experiences. The book notes that it is ironic that while West Indian seabird colonies have become attractions for the regions eco-tourism industry, this in turn is contributing to their rapid demise.

The new publication, which is the SCO's first book, represents the most up to date account on the distribution and status of West Indian seabirds. The publication highlights serious conservation issues and discusses the steps vital to the long-term survival of this rapidly disappearing regional heritage and resource.

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Additional Notes to Editors:

1. Jamaica possesses more endemic birds than any other island in the Caribbean and more than that found on almost any other oceanic island worldwide.

2. Jamaica's only endemic seabird has not been seen in over 100 years. Two specimens of this species are housed in the collections of the institute of Jamaica.

3. Eleven species of Jamaican birds are considered to be species that could become threatened with extinction in the near future.

4. BirdLife Jamaica, the only local organization specifically interested in the conservation of birds and their habitats, is the Jamaican partner of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release Dated: October 7, 2000

Rescue Package Launched To Halt Bird Extinction Crisis

"***Threatened Birds of the World***", the most authoritative and comprehensive assessment ever published on the status of any of the worlds threatened animal species group, was launched by Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan at the World Conservation Union (IUCN) World Congress in Amman on Saturday October 7th. The new publication notes that a shocking 12% of all birds on the earth are now at risk of extinction.

While noting that the extinction trend facing the world's birds is but a reflection of many global environmental problems, the publication emphasizes the point that the global extinction crisis could be reversed by implementing a landmark rescue package that combines practical solutions and policy commitments.

"We need to act urgently and on a scale greater than anything previously achieved", said BirdLife International Director and Chief Executive, Dr. Michael Rands. "***Threatened Birds of the World*** sets out the specific, practical actions and solutions required to save these species from extinction".

Queen Noor of Jordan, Honourary President of BirdLife International, describes the effort as a fight to rescue global assets and a quality of life for nature and humanity. "If we act now to address the urgent needs identified within these pages, we can ensure a better future for the worlds birds, for ourselves and for our children", said HM Queen Noor.

This new assessment shows that the number of bird species threatened with global extinction rose dramatically by 75 from 1,111 in 1994 to 1,186 in 2000 – a shocking 12% of all bird species. Of the new total, 99% are at risk of extinction from human activities such as deforestation, intensive agriculture, longline fishing, hunting and trapping. Alarmingly, the extinction rate for birds continues to rise. The current rate is 50 times greater than the prehistoric or 'natural' rate, and is predicted to rise to 250 times greater within the next generation. Of grave concern, is the movement of an overall total of 100 species into the two highest threat category lists in the last six years.

For the first time the assessment also sets out potential solutions to the crisis, identifies the practical actions required to save species from extinction, and sets specific conservation targets to be met by 2005, including aiming to reduce the total number of threatened bird species by 10%. BirdLife Jamaica, the only partner of BirdLife International in the Caribbean will work to implement these strategies within Jamaican and the wider Caribbean.

Jamaica, which has more endemic birds than any other island in the Caribbean and almost the highest rate of unique bird species of any other oceanic island world-wide, has ten (10) globally threatened and near threatened species. At least three (3) Jamaican endemic birds have become extinct since the 1800s.

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Notes

1. *Threatened Birds of the World* is the most authoritative and comprehensive assessment ever published on the status of the world's threatened bird species, and has been compiled by

BirdLife International. Previous editions were published in 1988 and 1994 under the title "Birds to Watch".

2. BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries who together, are the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting bird life.

   BirdLife Jamaica (partner of BirdLife International) is the only local organisation specifically interested in the conservation of birds and their habitats. Visit us at www.birdlifejamaica.com.

3. Additional quotes on the extinction crisis facing birds described in *Threatened Birds of the World*:

   "This threat to the diversity and richness of life has been brought about by the wholesale changes that we have made to the face of the earth. Such losses need not continue." Sir Richard Attenborough, writer and broadcaster, UK.

   "All the indications are that we are standing at the opening phase of a mass-extinction event comparable in scale to the previous five, the most recent of which eliminated the dinosaurs 65 million years ago." Dr Russ Mittermeier, President, Conservation International, USA.

4. A selection of Critical, Endangered and Vulnerable species entries with accompanying images that can be downloaded for media use will be posted at the BirdLife International website at www.birdlife.net.

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APPENDIX E

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	Collin Steer (assoc. ed. News); Garfield Grandison (managing editor)			922-6223	ggrandsn@gleanerjm.com	Judith Thompson (sec.)
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Jamaica International Newspaper		Mr. Stefano Reschauer	819-9878	957-4347	Jamview@yahoo.com	Negril based
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Love FM		Mrs. Tania Campbell Case	968-9046	968-7545		
Love TV		Erica Maine	920-9774 [h] 968-9046 [w]			
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Caribbean Today (newspaper)		Peter Webbly			caribtoday@earthlink.net	
WUI – Public Relations Office	Mona News	Carrol Edwards (editor) Mrs. Degia	977-5941			Deadline: 20th of the month. Clive Allen

R2RW

Ridge to Reef Watershed Project