2016 - A year in birds

Bird Watching Curaçao
www.facebook.com/birdwatchingcuracao
2016 - A year in birds is a publication by the Curaçao Footprint Foundation, powered by the extensive bird watching efforts of the volunteer editors of Bird Watching Curaçao on Facebook. The group was born from a Birds of Curaçao course given by the Foundation in 2014 and is growing into a full bird watching and spotting group/page, regularly posting bird lists on Ebird and encouraging others to also start bird watching.

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- Long-winged Harrion by Mr. Hubert de Palm. Photographed in February in Ramsar-area of Malpais
- Bluecrowned Parakeet by Mr. Rob Wellens. Photographed at roost in May
- Yellow warbler by Mrs. Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez. Photographed in Ramsar-area of Malpais
- Pied-billed grebe by Mrs. Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez.

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Brown Booby found at IBA Jan Thiel in the month of April. The animal was exhausted and after examination by Vet Dr. Odette Doest it became clear the animal had trouble with its eyesight. The Booby is still with Dr. Doest and is now part of the educational program for schools.

Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
In January 2015 a team of bird enthusiasts started the Bird Watching Curaçao Facebook page under guidance of the Curaçao Footprint Foundation. All administrators of the page followed the extensive Birds of Curaçao (ornithology) course of the foundation. They wanted to stay active to keep up with the bird information of the region and the island, and to train field identification skills.

The main focus of the page is education of the general public on the bird diversity of Curaçao and bird (breeding) behavior and stimulation of bird watching in general. Now, after two years of activity the page has evolved and now also includes bird watching tips, scheduled bird watching trips, and, more importantly, is a platform where the general public has the chance to upload their pictures of birds and/or questions about birds. As more and more people interact with the page editors and send in their observations, the page now also registers all new bird species and special sightings on the island.

Bird watching has never been more exiting as it becomes clear that more and more people are joining in to spend time in nature and observing the bird world.

As we are planning even more bird related activities in 2017, it is the right time to publish a colorful booklet including a great number of pictures made by the pages contributors as well as followers with short information on sightings and behavior which was spotted in 2016. And of course we include all the species that were observed for the first time on the island. We hope you enjoy this work.

Curaçao Footprint Foundation
Male Blue-tailed Emerald hummingbird stretching its wings. 
Photo by: Marvin Thodé
1. Short overview of 2016

Bird life on Curaçao consists of approximately 60 species of breeding birds and more than 200 species of migrating birds visiting the island in the autumn and spring migrations and, in years with a lot of rain filling dams, the local water catchment systems, birds coming over from South America.

The numbers of migrating birds are growing almost every year. Now that more people are actively birdwatching and also photograph birds visiting the garden or birds seen during nature hikes, much more information is collected on the time frame migrants are arriving and leaving the island as well as on the diversity of species visiting the island. Therefore it is difficult to claim species as ‘new’ for Curaçao as the observation group has only recently grown to its current size and level of professionalism. The so called ‘new’ species might have visited the island for years but were never discovered as such.

Exciting new observations on birds include an unexpected spotting of the Great Kiskadee in January 2016 at the birdwatch of Sta. Barbara Resort. The bird was spotted by long time birder Mrs. Anita de Moulin after which the species wasn’t seen again until November when nature photographer and birder Mrs. Yvette Smit photographed an individual at the RAMSAR-site of Muizenberg Dam. The sighting was confirmed again by Bird Watching Curaçao editors Mrs. Cisca Rusch de Lijster, Mr. Rob Wellens and Mrs. Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez. Several pictures are available of this sighting.

Another first was the spotting of a Long-winged Harrier in the Ramsar area of Malpains in January by nature hikers which was photographed by Mr. Hubert de Palm. Contributor Mr. Rob Wellens confirmed the spotting and the same species was seen a week later at the water basins and dams in Kwartier, a birding hotspot which is almost inaccessible, by birder Mr. Carel de Haseth.

Visiting veterinarian and bird fanatic from the Netherlands Mr. Job Stumpel discovered a Yellow-hooded Blackbird in the month of April in the area of Klein Hofje, a water treatment plant which is a birding hotspot. Not exactly a first for the island, as the animal was spotted once before, but nonetheless a great find.

The month of May included a very rare sighting of a White Ibis by editor Mr. Rob Wellens who went on to spot a Glossy Ibis in the same month. The White Ibis was seen once before on the island. Later in the year an individual was observed again in Christoffelpark and Santa Barbara in December.

Another visiting birder from the Netherlands Mr. Dirk Hilbers discovered the presence of the Amazon Kingfisher, another first record for Curaçao, in the month of August in the Piscaderabay. The presence of the animal was confirmed by contributors Mr. Rob Wellens and Mrs. Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez and another individual was spotted at the saliña of Boka Samí two weeks later by both contributors.

In October Mrs. Anita de Moulin was driving on the road from Bullenbaai to Willemstad with colleague birder Mr. Peter van de Broek and suddenly saw two large American Black Vultures sitting in a tree along the road. Pictures confirmed the identification and the birds kept flying in the area of Vaersenbaai-Bullenbaai-Malpains in close proximity to the landfill at Malpains.

November was the month in which the Greater Ani, a rare bird for the island, was spotted in Muizenberg by editors Mrs. Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez and Mr. Rob Wellens.
Bird Watching hikes
In 2016 we regularly organized bird watching trips to a variety of habitats for the first time. The RAMSAR-site of Malpais, the Hato plains, Important Bird Area (IBA) Jan Thiel, the saltflats of Daaibooi and the mangrove area around the water treatment plant of Klein Hofje were the stage for these trips. Most participants of these trips were local people. A total of 21 bird watching hikes were organized throughout the year and besides these scheduled trips our volunteers went birdwatching with a couple of bird watchers from abroad with very specific wish lists.

Global Big Day
2016 also marked the very first time we organized an island-wide bird count during Global Big Day on May 14. More then 25 people actively participated and collected bird lists all over the island and either uploaded the lists to E-bird on their own accounts or sent the lists to Curacao Footprint Foundation. The foundation uploaded them collectively. With these efforts Curacao was able to secure the 3rd place in the Caribbean of most lists uploaded and had a honorable mention on Ebird.

Ebook Birds Caribbean
In December author and photographer Mark Yokoyama invited editor Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez to submit an article on waterbirds for a new Ebook by Birds Caribbean. The article with the title ‘An Unpolished Jewel in an Urban Landscape’ about the RAMSAR-area of Muizenberg and the issues it is confronting was part of the Caribbean Waterbird Ebook. (Download it her: http://www.birdscaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Caribbean-Waterbirds.pdf)
Male Eared Dove at the feeders in the garden of Curaçao
Backyard Birding.
January was an extraordinary month birdwise. Torrential rains at the end of November 2015 in approximately the area of Malpais filled up the dam in this Ramsar area, creating a fresh water lake full of birds. It was the only dam which filled up like this and as such provided nesting opportunities for Common Gallinules, Pied-billed Grebes and American Coots. Many birds of prey could be seen in the area as well.
Solitary Sandpiper in Ramsar-site Malpais
Photo by: Cisca Rusch-de Lijster

Tropical Mockingbird attacking Crested Caracara in Malpais
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Hunting Green Heron in IBA Jan Thiel
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Neotropic Cormorant in Ramsar-site Malpais
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

First record of Great Kiscadee on Curacao at Sta. Barbara.
Photo by: Anita de Moulin
February was marked by the sighting of two Long-winged Harriers in Malpais, photographed beautifully by Mr. Hubert de Palm during a hike in the area. The animals, which were seen a week later by another hiking group, have been observed for a month in this area and were also spotted in the neighbourhood of Kwartier. It is still unclear if these were the same individuals as were spotted in Malpais.
American Kestrel with his catch of the day, a mouse.
Photo by: Marvin Thodé

Flock of Blue-crowned Parakeets at Malpais flying to the roost.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Juvenile Southern Lapwings born on the golf course of Emmastad
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Pied-billed Grebe chicks in Malpais
Photo by: Rob Wellens

White-cheeked Pintails in Malpais
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Bird Watching Curaçao editors were not only out more to spot birds in a wide variety of habitats, the enthusiasm for photography was also growing in the group, resulting in some unique behaviour to be captured on digital images. The series portraying a group of Chestnut fronted Macaws, which are doing very well in the wild, cracking open the fruits of calebash trees had never been photographed before on Curaçao.
April marks the start of the breeding season for many seabirds on the island. Terns, gulls and also Southern Lapwings start displaying breeding behaviour. In 2016 breeding behavior and confirmed nests of several of these species were observed in areas such as Shete Boka, Ascencion, Fuik, Klein Curaçao, Jan Thiel salt pans, salt pans of Boka Samí and the north shore of Hato and Playa Kanoa. The Lapwings breeding was confirmed for the golf courses of Santa Barbara, Emmastad and Blue Bay. We will not reveal the exact locations of the breeding locations in this publication to avoid future disturbance, but information is available at the foundation. We have observed a number of nests destroyed by free roaming dogs in the mentioned areas. Efforts are unfolded to better inform the public about the breeding activity in these months in 2017.

April also marks the start of the spring migration when birds migrate back to North America from the south.
American Flamingo at Water Treatment Plant Klein Hofje.  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Brown Pelican in IBA Jan Thiel  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Mallard at Klein Hofje water treatment plant  
Photo by: Cisca Rusch-de Lijster

Spotted Sandpiper in breeding plumage at Klein Hofje  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Common Gallinule at Klein Hofje.  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Scarlet Tanager at Pannenkoek. Regular migrant. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Green Heron chick in nest in the middle of Punda. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Flock of Laughing Gulls displaying courtship behavior in Punda. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Snowy Egret in breeding plumage at Jan Thiel. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Black-necked Stilt chick hatched at water treatment plant Klein Hofje. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
May

In the month of May Curaçao participated, for the second time, in the Global Big Day. It was the first time however that Bird Watching Curaçao introduced the event to the public and urged citizens to participate in the counting of birds. There was extensive media coverage with interviews both on the radio and in local newspapers, leading to a group of about 30 people who actively participated on May 14th covering a large area of the island in the count. The effort resulted in Curaçao being in the top 3 of Caribbean countries participating in the count that day, a result which was also picked up by the media.

May was also the month in which we continued to discover nesting locations of seabirds and had the opportunity to both photograph and film the nesting behaviour of Least Terns.
Rufous-collared Sparrow at Shete Boka  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Chestnut-sided Warbler, a migrant.  
Photo by: Marvin Thodé

First viewing in years of a White Ibis.  
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Chestnut-fronted Macaws at roost.  
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Wilson's Plover, a migrant at Ascencion.  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Glossy Ibis.
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Glossy Ibis.
Photo by: Carel de Haseth

Incoming Least Tern at breeding site.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Black-bellied Plover, migrant.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

American Kestrel in Otrobanda.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Scarlet-fronted Parakeet.
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Male Blue-tailed Emerald.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Tricolored Heron at Boka Samí.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Semi-palmated Plover, migrant, at Ascencion.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Flamingoes at Jan Kok.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
June

Least terns were still rearing their young on several locations. Several species of birds were also reported nesting at Klein Curaçao but we were too short on time to properly identify these birds. Most of the tern breeding locations however were abandoned after successful breeding. Other birds were showing nesting behaviour in June, such as the Yellow Oriole.

A couple of swallows were spotted and photographed at Klein Hofje, but no conclusive identification has been made up till now.
Yellow Oriole in nest.
Photo by: Cisca Rusch-de Lijster

Still unidentified swallows.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Bare-eyed Pigeon bathing in a scarce rain shower.
Photo by: Marvin Thodé

Neotropic Cormorants at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Yellow-crowned Night Heron
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
July

The month of July was a relatively calm one. July is typically one of the hottest and driest months of the year on Curaçao. Bird activity is low, and many birds start to go into gardens and landscaped areas for food and water.
Neotropical Cormorant.
Photo by: Cisca Rusch-de Lijster

Photo on the left: Juvenile Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Photo on the right: Neotropical Cormorant.
Photos by: Cisca Rusch-de Lijster
The really exiting period of new discoveries for Curaçao started in August. Starting with the first record of an Amazon Kingfisher, the arrival of literally thousands of swallows set the stage for a busy migration season. August was also the month we restarted bird watching trips on the island and introduced a bird safari to the Hato plains for the first time.
Short-billed Dowitcher. Regular migrant.  
Photo by: Leo Spoormakers

Reddish Egret dancing for food.  
Photo by: Henny Klein Klouwenberg

Snowy Egret at Klein Hofje  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Groove-billed Ani.  
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Chestnut-fronted Macaws investigating.  
Photo by: Rob Wellens
In September large groups of swallows arrived on the island and were seen on several locations. In locations such as Klein Hofje the numbers grew into astonishing amounts with thousands of individuals, active especially during the late afternoon hours. A video is available of this phenomenon. Other migrants also started to arrive. On September 30 hurricane Matthew passed alongside the island, causing some rain, some wind and huge coastal waves a few days later.
A group of flamingo’s in one of the LVV dams
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Pectoral Sandpiper at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Henny Klein Klouwenberg

Migrating Barn Swallows killed by traffic at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Bank Swallow at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Presumably a Caribbean Martin, spotted at Klein Hofje
Photo by: Leon Pors

Juvenile Reddish Egret with features from dark and white morph. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Presumably a Caribbean Martin, spotted at Klein Hofje
Photo by: Leon Pors

Fork-tailed Flycatcher at the dams of LVV.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Crested Bobwhite at Hato plains.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

American Oystercatcher at Holiday Beach hotel.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Ruddy Turnstone eating a chickenbone at Holiday Beach Hotel.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
October

October was the real start of the rainy season on the island. Several areas on the island were slowly getting greener, with patches of fresh water staying behind in dams and water tanks. The area of Muizenberg contained such patches with a wide variety of both native and migrating birds feeding on seeds and insects. Many of the migrants stayed for months. Monitoring by the volunteers was turned up a notch, including regular counts at Muizenberg, Hato plains, Klein Hofje and others.
Magnificent Frigatebird kleptoparasiting on a Brown Booby
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Photo on the left: Belted Kingfisher at Jan Thiel. Photo on the right: Blue-winged Teals at Klein Hofje.
Photo on the left by Rob Wellens and on the right by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Bobolink at Ramsar site Muizenberg.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Yellow-billed Cuckoo at Hato plains.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Northern Watertrush at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Common Gallinule at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Blackpoll Warbler at a private property at Grote Berg.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Black-whiskered Vireo at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Common Gallinule at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Blackpoll Warbler at a private property at Grote Berg.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Tropical Kingbird at private residence in Mahaai.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Black-whiskered Vireo at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Another Bobolink at Ramsar site Muizenberg.
Photo by: Leon Pors

Group of sandpipers at Klein Hofje.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

First observation of Peregrine Falcon during fall migration at Mahaai. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
November

A first record for the American Black Vulture, a second record (for Curacao and for 2016) of the Great Kiscadee, the first sighting of the season of a Purple Gallinule, a sighting of the rare visitor Greater Ani, a spectacular recording of the hunting techniques of a Peregrine Falcon, courtship behaviour of American Flamingo's and the real start of the rainy season characterized the month of November.
Juvenile Little Blue Heron at Ramsar site Muizenberg. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Greater Ani at Ramsar site Muizenberg. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Great Blue Heron at Ramsar site Muizenberg. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Flight shot of the American Black Vulture at Ramsar site Malpais. Photo by: Leon Pors

Wilson's Snipe at Ramsar site Muizenberg. Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez
Brown-throated Parakeet at Ramsar site Muizenberg.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Osprey drying its wings after a hunt at Malpais.
Photo by: Rob Wellens

Peregrine with Cattle Egret catch at Muizenberg (2)
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Courtship behaviour of American Flamingo’s at IBA Jan Thiel.
Photo by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Orange-winged Parrots at their roost.
Photos on this page by: Michelle Pors-da Costa Gomez

Lesser Scaup at Klein Hofje.
December

Bird watching continued in several areas on the island, including several new ones, as the rain was going on, filling up dams and so called ‘tanki’ (human made walk-in water reservoirs). All dams in the Western part of the island and also on the Eastern part, were filled up creating more wetland habitat for waterbirds. Probably because of this the density of birds at the water treatment plant of Klein Hofje lessened.
Blue Crowned Parakeet at roost.