

News Advisory

FROM: Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary – Virginia
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Goshen a shorebird tracked by scientists becomes second study bird to be lost on Guadeloupe

(Williamsburg, VA)---Scientists at the Center for Conservation Biology have determined that a second whimbrel they had been tracking as part of a long-term migration study has been lost in a shooting swamp on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. Goshen was lost in a heavily hunted swamp just north of the town of Port-Louis almost immediately upon arrival on the island. Although the transmitter has not been recovered the last satellite signals place the bird in the center of the shooting swamp. It now appears that both Machi and Goshen were shot in the morning of 12 September shortly after arriving.

Goshen and Machi were not migrating together but both stopped on the island after encountering different storm systems. Goshen flew through the east side of Hurricane Irene, landed on Montserrat, spent a week on Antigua and then flew to Guadeloupe. Machi flew through Tropical Storm Maria, landed on Montserrat and then flew directly to Guadeloupe. The two whimbrels were the first birds during the four-year tracking study to stop on Guadeloupe and both were lost

within hours suggesting that the hunting pressure on this island is extremely high. This island has several isolated mangrove swamps that serve to concentrate the shorebirds for shooting. An estimated 3,000 hunters participate in the shorebird hunt annually. Currently, shooting parties on the island are not regulated and no information is available on the number of shorebirds taken. Without such information it is not possible to assess the potential relationship between hunting and ongoing population declines.

Whimbrels migrating along the western Atlantic coast have declined by 50% since the mid-1990s. The collaborative tracking study has successfully tracked 17 whimbrels via satellite since the spring of 2008. The focus of this study has been to collect information that is vital to the long-term conservation of this population. Only 4 birds were being tracked during the 2011 fall migration season and half of those were lost in a single morning on Guadeloupe. The relationship between hunting pressures within the Lesser Antilles and population declines for the whimbrel and other shorebird species is unknown.

Most of the hunting activity conducted in the Lesser Antilles appears to be recreational. A video produced by a hunter on Guadeloupe within the same swamp where Goshen was lost illustrates the habitat, the shorebirds, and the shooting activity.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWFC2fEqVfI>

The tracking project is a collaborative effort between The Center for Conservation Biology, The Nature Conservancy, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, and Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences.