

Cahow (Bermuda petrel) Recovery Program

One of the rarest seabirds on Earth, the Cahow nests only on Bermuda, and is endemic to the island. Active conservation management has increased its population from 18 pairs with only 8 fledged chicks in 1960 to 98 pairs in 2011.



Project Objectives

To control or eliminate threats affecting the Cahow; To preserve existing habitats and establish new nesting colonies safe from storm erosion/flooding; To track Cahows through banding and geolocational data loggers in order to study breeding biology.



Translocated Cahow chick being fed Anchovy

Summary

The **Cahow or Bermuda petrel** (*Pterodroma cahow*) is endemic to Bermuda and has been listed as a globally endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources (IUCN). The Cahow spends most of its life on the open ocean, returning in November to four tiny islets in the Castle Harbour Islands Nature Reserve to nest in deep crevices and artificial burrows. A single egg is laid in early January, with downy chicks hatching in early March after a 53-day incubation period. Chicks are fed squid and fish gathered by the adult birds on foraging trips that can span thousands of miles of ocean. Chicks fledge to sea in late May and early June at about 90 days of age, not to return to the breeding sites until they are 3 to 5 years of age.

Due to extensive hurricane erosion and overwashing of the small nesting islets, a project to establish a new nesting colony on the larger and more elevated Nonsuch Island was carried out from 2004 to 2008. Translocation of 102 chicks was carried out from the original nesting islets to a complex of artificial nest burrows constructed on Nonsuch. In 2008, the first of these translocated birds began to return to Nonsuch. In 2009, the first Cahow chick since the 1620s hatched on Nonsuch and fledged to sea 3 months later. By 2011, a total of 28 translocated Cahows had returned to Nonsuch, with 7 new pairs incubating eggs. In 2010, the total population of Cahows nesting both on Nonsuch and the original nesting islets increased to a record 92 nesting pairs with 52 chicks successfully fledging to sea.

Cahows are a member of the Gadfly Petrel family, which are related to Albatrosses and Shearwaters. They are long-winged seabirds which are fast and agile fliers, living on the open ocean, never visiting land except to breed.



10-day old downy Cahow chick



Adult Cahow flying over nesting island



Full-fledged Cahow chick exercising

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