

"Redonda, the 'Jewel of the Caribbean', is now a protected area."



Redonda Arial. Credit: Fauna & Flora/Ed Marshall

Port of Spain, 25 October 2023 – With an area of just 1.6 square kilometres, the uninhabited island of Redonda may be small in size but is a giant in terms of biodiversity. Located southwest of Antigua and Barbuda, this volcanic island provides nesting sites for thousands of seabird species and boasts several unique plants, some of which are found nowhere else in the world. Its steep cliffs offer a dramatic backdrop to the crystal-clear waters below, making Redonda a paradise for divers and snorkelers.

However, the island has been facing numerous challenges and threats over the years. Invasive species, such as rats and feral goats, have wreaked havoc on the island's native flora and fauna, leading to habitat degradation and loss, as well as soil erosion.

In a landmark decision, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda recently declared the entire island a protected area. One of the key factors that led to the declaration of Redonda as a protected area is its biodiversity, which includes several endemic species, such as the Redonda ground dragon (*Pholidoscelis atratus*) and the Redonda Ameiva (*Pholidoscelis atratus*).



Redonda Ground Dragon. Credit: Fauna & Flora/Jack Ibbotson

The declaration provides legal protection for Redonda's ecosystems, safeguarding them from habitat destruction, invasive species, and illegal activities such as poaching and unregulated tourism. It also ensures that efforts to restore and protect Redonda can continue with greater support and resources.

Significantly, this decision is the product of a successful collaboration between local communities, conservation organisations, government agencies, and international partners, including longstanding CANARI partner in Antigua and Barbuda, the Environmental Awareness Group (EAG), and Fauna & Flora International (FFI), which both played a critical and active role in bringing about the declaration.

CANARI is currently supporting the work of both organisations through its role as the Regional Implementation Team for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) in the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot. FFI and EAG were recipients of CEPF funding during the first Caribbean investment between 2010 and 2016 and both organisations are current grantees, implementing projects that will continue to strengthen biodiversity conservation in Antigua and Barbuda.

Additionally, CANARI recently supported the Redonda Ecosystem Reserve (RER) initiative, using funds from the Natural Infrastructure for Caribbean Resilience (NICaR) programme, to remove approximately 538 square feet of the invasive Guinea Grass (*Megathyrsus maximus*). This action will encourage the regeneration of native vegetation and help the recovery of Redonda's ecosystem.

"I warmly congratulate the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda for designating the Redonda Ecosystem Reserve. This is also to the immense credit of our friends and partners at the Environmental Awareness Group, who have worked tirelessly to champion and restore Redonda and its wildlife, drawing on valuable training and support made possible by CEPF who continues to provide essential support to conserve endangered wildlife, including unique species on Redonda that will benefit from this new protected area", said Jennifer Daltry, Caribbean Alliance Director at Re:wild and Fauna & Flora.

Arica Hill, EAG's Executive Director, explains "The EAG has, for the past few years, been building its capacity to manage protected areas and ensure that these areas become more than just paper parks. We are pleased that our previous CEPF grant built technical capacity to remove and manage invasive species, which has become a benchmark for success across the many offshore islands that the EAG co-manages."

"That was a great starting point for us, and with the current funding received under our new CEPF grant, "Accelerating Conservation Action in Antigua and Barbuda", we have developed a Sustainable Finance Unit that will not only help us to develop innovative ways to fund this protected area and others, but also reduce the reliance on project funding for some core costs and therefore continue to accelerate conservation action in Antigua and Barbuda", she added.

This united effort demonstrates the power of cooperation in achieving conservation goals and sets an example for similar initiatives worldwide. CANARI looks forward to continuing to support the work of these partners in Antigua and Barbuda.

For further information, please contact: Wendy Dyemma-Harper, CEPF Communications and Information Management Officer, at caribbeanrit@canari.org.

Click on the link below to browse our interactive map of current CEPF grants in the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot: <https://bit.ly/3VIFCJC>.

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