

Migrate to Cul-de-Sac for Free Bird Event on Sunday

Cul-de-Sac, September 23, 2013 - Nature lovers of all ages are invited to attend St. Martin's celebration of International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD). The event will be held at the mangrove discovery trail at Étang de la Barrière, right beside the Pinel ferry dock in Cul-de-Sac on Sunday, September 29th from 8-11am. Attendees can stop by any time during the festival and stay as long as they like.

St. Martin's Migratory Bird Festival is free and open to the public. Guided tours of the mangrove discovery trail in English, French and Dutch will help guests understand these birds, their miraculous journeys, and the important wetland habitats that they depend on. Photographers will be on hand to give tips on how to get the best bird and wildlife photos. There will be bird art activities for children and free Caribbean bird coloring books. Attendees are encouraged to bring photos and memories of St. Martin birds and wetlands to add to a scrapbook that will be compiled at the event.

"The annual bird migrations are one of the most fascinating natural phenomena in the Western Hemisphere," explains event organizer Mark Yokoyama. "Each year, migratory birds travel between their North American breeding sites, and wintering grounds in Central America, South America and right here in the Caribbean. These birds travel thousands of miles, some flying for days without stopping. In St. Martin, some birds will stop to rest in September and October before flying on to South America, while others will spend the winter here, returning north in the spring."

Many of these birds are shorebirds. Although varied, they often have long legs for wading in shallow water and long bills they use to catch small fish and probe the mud for snails and crabs. Most of our shorebirds can be found on our beaches and salt ponds.

Étang de la Barrière, with its mudflats and shallow mangrove wetlands, is an ideal place to see these birds. An elevated boardwalk through this wetland was completed earlier this year and is now part of the Caribbean Birding Trail, a collection of the best birding sites in the Caribbean. Along with a number of other ponds and marine areas in St. Martin, it is considered a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

"We built the boardwalk trail at Étang de la Barrière to make it easier for residents and tourists to enjoy this unique part of our natural heritage," says Julien Chalifour, the Officer of Scientific Missions for the Réserve Naturelle. "We look forward to sharing it with the public at this event."

St. Martin's Migratory Bird Festival was organized by Les Fruits de Mer, a non-

profit association dedicated to raising ecological and cultural awareness, through publications like *The Incomplete Guide to the Wildlife of Saint Martin* and events like this bird festival. The Réserve Naturelle de Saint-Martin and Conservatoire du Littoral are co-hosts for the Migratory Bird Festival on St. Martin. Réserve Naturelle staff will be guiding tours at the event, teaching guests about our migratory birds and the wetland ecosystems that support them. The Réserve Naturelle and Conservatoire du Littoral protect and manage St. Martin's marine and terrestrial protected areas and constructed the discovery trail at Étang de la Barrière where the event will be held.

A number of additional partners and supporters, both local and international, are contributing to this event. Birdwatching equipment and educational materials for this event will be provided by Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (EPIC). EPIC has been working on St. Martin for over 12 years to protect the local environment through research and community-based action. For the LOVE of Grand Case will be providing refreshments for the attendees. They are a group of Grand Case residents dedicated to improving and enjoying Grand Case, through cleanups and other events. The Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) is the regional coordinator for IMBD events for the Caribbean. The Society is the largest organization devoted to wildlife conservation in the Caribbean, and has been coordinating IMBD events throughout the Caribbean for six years. Environment for the Americas produces educational materials for IMBD and is the overall organizer for IMBD events from Canada to South America.

To find out more about the event, visit <http://www.sxmwildlife.com>. Birders and non-birders alike are encouraged to attend and learn more about our fine, feathered friends.