

RACING EXTINCTION TO SAVE THE BAHAMA WARBLER



BAHAMA WARBLER RESEARCH AND BANDING PROJECT

When Category 5 Hurricane Dorian made its slow march across Abaco and Grand Bahama, thousands of people were displaced and entire communities were destroyed. Many species were also dramatically impacted by the devastation Dorian left in its wake. One species, in particular, we feared the worst for, The Bahama Warbler. Once found on both islands, this endemic bird seemed to have been washed away with the 20-foot storm surge that invaded the island of Grand Bahama during Dorian.

The Bahama Warbler only lives in pine forests on these two islands. After saltwater intrusion and the waves and winds of hurricanes systematically obliterated the pine forests of both islands, the Bahama Warbler's numbers began to dwindle. After Dorian, the forestry department estimated that there were as few as 232 km² (2019) of healthy pine forests compared to the 400 km² documented by Global Forest Watch in 2014.

Along with The Bahama Nuthatch, a bird that hasn't been seen since 2018, the disappearance of The Bahama Warbler on Grand Bahama paints a terrifying picture of what lies ahead for many species in the face of a changing climate.

When the BNT and our partners conducted comprehensive surveys of birds and their habitats post-Dorian, our science teams didn't find a single Bahama Warbler on Grand Bahama. We had to act immediately to reverse the decline of this species. Our first move was to recommend the [IUCN](#) to recognize The Bahama Warbler as an endangered species. We were successful in our efforts when the [IUCN](#) reclassified the conservation status of The Bahama Warbler from 'vulnerable' to 'endangered'. This new status helps us to garner the support of international conservation organizations and foundations that are funding work to save endangered species worldwide.

Our next step was to put boots on the ground in Abaco to launch a more targeted monitoring effort, including the first banding of these birds, to gather more information on the warblers. Banding these birds lets us track their movements, and learn about their longevity, mortality, population demographics, behaviour, and much more. We began our monitoring in The Abaco National Park in South Abaco. Because this portion of the island wasn't seriously affected by Dorian, this national park is almost serving as a 'refuge' for birds that lost their habitats in severely impacted areas. This banding effort is part of our larger avian monitoring and research program geared towards increasing our



understanding of resident and endemic Bahamian birds and how they are using our national parks. Learning more about the Bahama Warbler is the first step in saving this bird from extinction.

Simultaneously, we began training community members on both islands to be able to identify these birds as part of our Empowering Communities for Conservation Program. These participants will become ambassadors for their ecosystems and the conservation of species like the Bahama Warbler.

As we learn more about the Bahama Warbler, we can develop conservation strategies that leverage the protection in National Parks to help restore their populations and ensure their survival into the future. We hope that through our monitoring, management, education and outreach activities, and working with local and international partners we can race and beat the extinction of our precious Bahama Warbler.

