Initiative Trilatérale des Îles | Trilateral Island Initiative | Iniciativa Trilateral de las Islas

# 2017 Summary Report

**Prepared for the Trilateral Committee of Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management**
**XXIII Annual Meeting, Sheperdstown, WV**
**April 9-13, 2018**
**by the Trilateral Island Initiative Working Group**

**Background**

The Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management was established in 1995 to effectively address priorities of continental significance and enhance the conservation efforts of North America marine and terrestrial bioregions of three countries. Under the umbrella of the Trilateral Committee, the first collaboration on seabird conservation was initiated in 2008. A Letter of Intent (LOI) was signed between Canada, United States, and Mexico in 2014. The purpose of the LOI is to promote collaboration on the conservation and restoration of island ecosystems and their adjacent coastal and marine environments. This includes islands located in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans, Gulf of California, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea.

The Trilateral Island Initiative (TII) has the following goals: 1) Strengthen on-the-ground conservation and restoration of island biodiversity and their surrounding marine waters, 2) Improve coordination on island-related natural resource issues of mutual interest, 3) Strengthen institutional capacities within the three countries, and 4) Improve efficiencies and increase success of island-related conservation projects. The Trilateral Island Initiative is focusing efforts on invasive species, biosecurity, restoration, local communities, and climate change. In 2017, federal, state, non-governmental, and academic partners from Canada, United States, and Mexico collaborated on multiple island-related activities, some of which are highlighted in this report.

**Partners**

**A. Collaborative Island Restoration Projects**

***Gwaii Haanas, British Columbia, Canada.*** Parks Canada, the Haida Nation and international partners restored seabird habitat in Gwaii Haanas from 2011-2015, by eradicating invasive black rats. During the two phased project SGin Xaana Sdiihltl'lxa: Night Birds Returning projects there was trilateral collaboration across four islands. Initially, the project was deemed a success across three out of the four islands treated. Partners included Parks Canada, the Haida Nation, Island Conservation, Coastal Conservation, Luckenbach Trustee Council, Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas (GECI), and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). As a result of continued monitoring, a different species of rat was found on two of the islands in September 2017. Though the response of seabirds to the absence of rats on these globally important islands has been positive (including a six percent increase in Ancient Murrelet calls), the presence of rats once again will need to be addressed to protect conservation gains. Parks Canada is working with the Haida Nation, local municipalities, Coastal Conservation, Island Conservation to bolster biosecurity measures. Also, Parks Canada continues to partner with the University of British Columbia Okanagan and study the genetics and movement of rats on the Haida Gwaii archipelago.

The major conservation focus in Gwaii Haanas in 2017 was Llgaay gwii sdiihlda/Restoring Balance, a project that aims to eliminate browsing pressure on the temperate rainforest understory. The forests of Gwaii Haanas have been negatively impacted by invasive and introduced Sitka black-tailed deer. Project partners included: Parks Canada, the Haida Nation, Coastal Conservation and Island Conservation. The project goal was to eradicate Sitka Black-tailed deer from six islands in order to encourage the regeneration of plants, animals and Haida cultural uses and to build upon seabird habitat gains thanks to the rat eradication efforts. During Restoring Balance three methods of eradication were used: bait station hunting, dog hunting and helicopter hunting. In total more than 595 deer were taken off the six islands and deer population densities were lowered on two other larger, neighboring islands to prevent migration. Though the deer were not fully eradicated from the islands, only a few remain on the largest, focal land mass: Ramsay Island. In turn the islands' forests are rebounding, many native plants are growing back and about 25% of the meat harvest during the project was shared with local communities.



Photo credit: Ian Jones, Parks Canada

**Gear Trial for Fisheries Bycatch Reduction, Newfoundland, Canada.** In 2016 and 2017 the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Restoration and Damage Assessment partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), researchers from Memorial University of Newfoundland, and commercial fishers on the NE coast of Newfoundland to test a new modified fishing gear that could reduce bycatch of seabirds and other organisms in gillnet fisheries across the northwest Atlantic. Bycatch is a major global concern for fishers, marine biologists and conservation organizations. In the Northern Hemisphere, gillnets are one of the most destructive gear types for non-target bycatch. The

study, which compared bycatch rates of nets equipped with visual deterrent high contrast black and white 'warning flags' with unmodified control gillnets, found no difference in fish yield between modified and control nets. This is an important first step in ensuring that the modified gear is feasible for widespread use. Results related to seabird bycatch showed promise; however, because seabird bycatch is highly episodic more testing is needed to assess the extent of benefit provided by the mitigation approach.

Photo: Northern Gannet caught in control surface-set herring gillnet (credit: Marina Montevecchi)

***Baja California Pacific Islands Seabird Restoration Project, Mexico***. A bilateral partnership aimed at restoring seabirds on seven islands off the coast of Baja California. Partners include Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas (GECI), Montrose Settlements and S.S. Jacob Luckenbach Trustee Councils, National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Friends of the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and Alianza WWF-Fundación Carlos Slim. A partner planning meeting occurred on January 23-25, 2017, in Ensenada, Mexico. During the fifth year of project implementation in 2017, seabird restoration activities included social attraction, monitoring, outreach, education and training, biosecurity, and disturbance reduction. Key outcomes to date include the recolonization of 21 extirpated colonies, the establishment of 11 new breeding colonies, and an increase in the reproductive success of target species. With all the baseline information and inter-annual data for seabird populations on islands off the Baja California Peninsula, GECI has begun work on an Action Plan for Mexican Pacific Seabirds that will address management for certain species (e.g., shearwaters, murrelets, petrels and auklets).

Vivan las Aves

Photo credit: GECI

***Socorro Island Restoration Project, Mexico.*** This bilateral project focuses on the eradication of the feral cat in order to protect the critically endangered Townsend's Shearwater (TOSH) in the Revillagigedo Archipelago. In 2011, feral sheep were eradicated from the island. As a result there has been an increase in vegetation and native and endemic taxa of land birds. In 2017, collaborative efforts continued to eradicate the feral cats with partners from GECI, American Bird Conservancy, NFWF, and Alianza WWF-Fundación Carlos Slim. It is anticipated that the eradication project will be completed in 2018. GECI is also systematically monitoring for the status and recovery of the TOSH, both on Socorro and Clarión islands.

Photo credit: GECI

***Guadalupe Island Restoration, Mexico***. Feral cats on Guadalupe Island pose a serious threat to nesting seabirds, such as the Laysan Albatross and Guadalupe Murrelet. In 2015, GECI completed a 735-meter long cat-proof fence along the southern tip of Guadalupe Island in order to protect the albatross and murrelet colony. In 2017, collaborative efforts were taken to eradicate the feral cats with partners from GECI, NFWF, and Alianza WWF-Fundación Carlos Slim. In 2017, approximately 300 Laysan Albatross nests were documented on Guadalupe Island proper, up from ~160 nests in 2014. In 2017, GECI also continued work on an extensive native forest and soil restoration project with 70,000 plants outplanted.

Photo credit: GECI

***Conservation of the Endemic Mule Deer of Cedros Island through the Eradication of Feral Dogs, Mexico.*** A bilateral partnership between the USFWS-Mexico Program and GECI. The purpose of this two-year project is to support the conservation and restoration of the species and ecosystems of Cedros Island by eradicating feral dogs and changing local communities' practice of introducing invasive species. GECI has carried out the following actions: 1) Launched an outreach and education campaign by hosting the first Cedros Island Environmental Fair for more than 137 community members from 19-23 July, 2017; 2) Held multiple talks with the Abulon Artisanal Fishing Cooperative Society in order to share the project activities and gather their perspective and support; 3) Deployed camera traps along 30 different spots that resulted in the identification of 54 feral dogs; and 4) Installed humane snare traps around feral dogs feeding areas. Project partners include the Mexican Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), the General Directorate of Wildlife (DGVS), and the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature. Project activities will continue through June of 2019.



Photo credit: GECI

**B. Conferences /Workshops**

***Pacific Seabird Group Conference, 22-25 February 2017, Tacoma, WA:*** Multiple presentations were given by GECI and partners on the bilateral Baja California Pacific Islands Seabird Restoration Project.

***Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management Meeting 15-18 May 2017, Ensenada, Mexico***: The Trilateral Island Working Group presented to the Migratory Birds, Species of Common Concern, and Executive Tables. A site visit for the Trilateral Committee to Todos Santos Island highlighted the successful bilateral seabird restoration project on the Baja California Pacific Islands.



Photo credit: Federico Méndez, GECI

***Island Invasives Conference, 10-14 July 2017, Dublin, Scotland*:** The South Georgia Heritage Trust, in partnership with the University of Dundee, hosted the third in a series of IUCN international conferences focused on invasive alien species on islands, their impact and management. The TII was highlighted in several talks at the conference, including one of the plenary talks. In addition, the TII presented a poster at the conference entitled: *Catalyzing Conservation of Islands through Collaboration: A North American Perspective.* The TII Working Group approached the conference organizers about hosting the next Island Invasives conference in North America in 2021.

***Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), 11-15 September 2017, New Zealand*:** The American Bird Conservancy attended the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) Advisory. At that meeting, it was noted that there was need for greater migratory flyway coordination with respect to understanding cumulative impacts of ACAP listed species (Laysan Albatross, Pink-footed Shearwater), and the group encouraged Parties and Range States responsible for breeding populations of ACAP species to implement the priority monitoring programs to increase current knowledge of their population size, trends and demography. Both of these species are wide ranging and nest or forage in Canada, U.S., and Mexico.

***California Islands Biosecurity Workshop, 23 October 2017, San Diego, California:*** This bilateral workshop was attended by representatives from GECI, CONABIO, USFWS, Catalina Island Conservancy, U.S. Navy, and National Park Service. Workshop topics included Early Detection Best Practices, Community Engagement, and Future Collaboration.

Photo credit: Juli Matos, TNC

***Honolulu Challenge on Invasive Alien Species***

During the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2016, there was call from the Union and the host community in Hawaii, including experts, governmental and intergovernmental representatives, NGOs, and protected area managers, for greater action on addressing invasive alien species in order to protect biodiversity and human wellbeing from their impacts. The outcome was the creation of the Honolulu Challenge on Invasive Alien Species that aims to multiply efforts in biosecurity and invasive species eradications and control. The TII became a supporter of the Honolulu Challenge and the activities reflected in this report demonstrate our on-going commitment towards implementation.

***Islands of the Californias Botanical Workshop***

***Sept 27–30, 2017, Channel Islands National Park, California***: Botanists and ecologists from the U.S. and Mexico held their annual workshop to discuss plant conservation on the California Islands archipelago. The group also assisted in habitat restoration efforts for seabirds on Anacapa Island.

Photo credit: Annie Little (USFWS), Morgan Ball (Wildlands Conservation Science)

**C. Exchanges/Trainings**

***Seabird Diet Training, 4-18 November 2017, Farallon Institute, Petaluma, CA:*** A biologist from GECI attended a training workshop at the Farallon Institute on identifying prey remains from California brown pelican nests. This is part of a bilateral effort to study the diet and prey availability in the marine environment across the range of this shared species.

**Coral Reef Conservation Training, Mexican Pacific**: A bilateral partnership between the USFWS-Mexico Program and WildCoast, A.C.. This is the second phase (years 3 and 4) of a four-year project aimed at conserving coral reefs in the Mexican Pacific. The goal is to strengthen conservation of 686,767 acres in six Marine Protected Areas in the Mexican Pacific: Isabel Island, Espíritu Santo Archipelago, Loreto Bay, Cabo Pulmo and Huatulco National Parks (HNP) and the Cabo San Lucas Wildlife Refuge. In 2017, WildCoast, A.C. trained park rangers from HNP on the installation techniques of anchoring systems for mooring buoys. Funding also supported a PADI certification course for the rangers. WildCoast, A.C. is also working with local communities, tour operators and visitors. Community members from HNP became certified on monitoring and surveillance practices and established five community patrolling committees. Furthermore, representatives from 10 tourism service providers received training on nautical tourism activities and coordination, and 4 environmental education workshops on coral reef conservation benefiting 160 children were delivered. Project activities will continue through June 2019.

***Institutional Capacity Strengthening for the Effective Implementation of Environmental Law Enforcement and Patrolling Actions in Bay of Loreto National Park, Baja California Sur, Mexico.*** A bilateral partnership between the USFWS-Mexico Program and Eco-Alianza de Loreto, A.C.. aimed at strengthening the operational and coordination capacities of Mexican authorities in Bay of Loreto National Park. Goal is to minimize the impact of illegal fishing and harmful tourism and recreational activities threatening the long-term conservation of marine mammals and critical habitats. Since June of 2017, Eco-Alianza de Loreto, A.C. has convened meetings with more than 11 state and federal Mexican authorities in charge of enforcing environmental laws and protections in the National Park with the purpose of validating field operation protocols aimed at reducing illegal fishing and poaching activities. Consequently, more than 100 land and sea patrolling and surveillance actions have been carried by the Mexican Navy, the Attorney General for the Environment, Environmental Police and CONANP in the area. Eco-Alianza de Loreto, A.C. also developed a database to track the number of patrols, detentions and prosecutions resulting from the enforcement actions. Funding provided also supported the purchase of a new vessel to carry out patrol actions.

***Summer 2017: Egg Rock, Maine***. Three biologists from GECI participated in the National Audubon Society's Seabird Management training program at the Audubon Maine Coastal Island Sanctuaries. The field practicum focused on applied seabird management techniques such as recolonization methods and techniques for conducting seabird censuses of surface and underground nesting seabirds, chick provisioning studies and measures of productivity. Participants also learned methods for managing field camps, solar technology and communications at remote field site.

***2-11 October 2017: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY:*** Cornell University hosted a GECI biologist for training workshops related to acoustic monitoring and intensive sound analysis. Training focused on both active and passive bioacoustics monitoring, behavioral ecology and techniques for acoustic social attraction.

Photo credit: Ana Vehrarami (Cornell Lab), Eduardo Inigo-Elias (Cornell Lab)

***15 November 2017: Anacapa Island, Channel Islands National Park*.** A team of U.S. and Mexico biologists visited Anacapa Island in order to enhance collaboration among the California Islands archipelago. Participants included National Park Service, NOAA, USFWS, GECI, and Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas. During the visit, the grouped discussed terrestrial and marine management within the California Islands.


Photo credit: Jen Boyce (NOAA), Annie Little (USFWS)

## D. Protected Area Designations

### *UNESCO Natural World Heritage site, Revillagigedo Islands, Mexico*

Following UNESCO's designation of Archipiélago de Revillagigedo as a World Heritage Site in July 2016, Mexico's government implemented this UNESCO's recommendation to expand the protection for the marine environment. In November 2017, Mexico created, through Presidential Decree, the Revillagigedo National Park, which became the biggest no-take marine reserve in whole North America at 148,087 km$^2$. GECI was instrumental in both the designation as World Heritage Site and National Park, particularly for delineating the expansion polygon in collaboration with James Ketchum and Mauricio Hoyos from Pelagios Kakunjá, A.C. Federico Méndez-Sánchez, GECI's Executive Director, was part of the Scientific Assessment Team designated by Mexico's Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources to draft the Park's Decree. *For more info: https://mpanews.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/mexico-creates-north-americas-largest-fully-protected-mpa*



Photo credit: GECI

### *Reserva de la Biosfera "Islas del Pacífico de la Península de Baja California", Mexico*

Setting a benchmark for island conservation in Mexico, Mexico's President established the 1,161,447.79 ha "Baja California Pacific Islands Biosphere Reserve" during the United Nations Biodiversity Conference held in Cancún, Quintana Roo, Mexico in December 2016. This new Biosphere Reserve consists of 21 islands and 97 islets located within the California Current. In 2017, the decree and protected areas draft plan was published.

***Scott Islands National Marine Wildlife Area, Canada***

In 2016, the Government of Canada announced proposed Regulations and Notice of Intent to designate the Scott Islands as Canada's first ever marine National Wildlife Area. The Scott Islands and surrounding waters together make up one of the most productive and biologically diverse marine ecosystems on the Canadian Pacific Coast, particularly for seabirds. Over 1.5 million seabirds breed on the Scott islands (the highest concentration of breeding seabirds in the Canadian Pacific) including 50% of the world's Cassin's Auklets and 7% of the global population of Rhinoceros Auklets. Additionally, 5-10 million migratory seabirds use the surrounding waters for foraging. Introduced invasive mink and raccoons are threatening seabirds and other native species on the islands. Many of these seabirds use part or all of the California Current system connecting Canada, the U.S. and Mexico offshore in the Pacific Ocean. In 2017, the designation of the Scott Islands National Marine Wildlife Area continued to move through the regulatory process and should be designated in 2018.

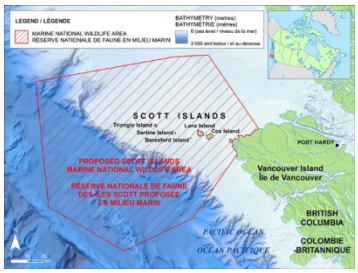



Photo credit: Environment Canada, Catherine Jardine, Chris Gill (Coastal Conservation), Greg Jones (ECCC)

## E. Research/Monitoring

**Acoustic Monitoring, Spring 2017**: Cornell Lab of Ornithology provided GECI a total of 20 Swift recording units which were deployed on several Baja California Pacific Islands in Mexico for seabird monitoring.

**Diving Birds Study**: *Determining Fine-scale Use and Movement Patterns of Diving Bird Species in Federal Waters of the Mid-Atlantic United States Using Satellite Telemetry.* The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management released the final project report in 2017 for a groundbreaking 5-year long satellite tracking study (see https://www.boem.gov/espis/5/5635.pdf), conducted between 2012 and 2016. The USFWS-coordinated study tagged and tracked nearly 250 Northern Gannets, Red-throated Loons, and Surf Scoters in the U.S. and Canada using PTT and GSM-GPS tags, and analyzed tracking data for over 400 individuals; one of the most comprehensive satellite tracking studies of marine birds ever conducted in Atlantic North America. The primary study objective of the work was to better understand how diving marine birds used offshore waters during migration and winter, in order to inform siting decisions of offshore energy facilities in the U.S., and provide pre-construction baseline data. In addition to BOEM and USFWS, major project partners included: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Biodiversity Research Institute, and USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

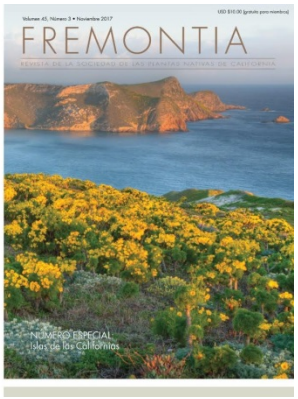
Photo: Red-throated Loon with satellite transmitter by J. Fiely.

**F. Grants/Publications**

**Commission for Environmental Cooperation, February 2017**: The TII Working Group, in partnership with the National Invasive Species Council, submitted a funding proposal entitled *Safeguarding North America from the adverse impacts of invasive alien species*.

**Western North American Naturalist, February 2017**: A manuscript entitled *Connecting Island Communities on a Global Scale: Case Studies in Island Biosecurity* was completed and accepted for publication. This paper will be published in the 9th California Islands Symposium Proceedings in 2018. This paper was a culmination of a special session held at the Symposium during which practitioners from Canada, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United States presented on biosecurity advances, challenges, and opportunities.

**Fremontia, November 2017**: A special issue entitled *Islands of the Californias/Islas de las Californias* was published in both English and Spanish. This publication highlights the unique flora and vegetation communities of the California Islands in both the U.S. and Mexico and efforts to restore and protect these resources through bilateral collaboration.




**G. Coordination Calls**

Trilateral Working Group coordination conference calls were held on 3 February, 20 April, and 11 September 2017.

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