

The Site Guide

Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles

Location Fifty miles north of Venezuela at 12 08' N, 68 17' W., 30 miles east of Curacao.

Description A semi-arid island 24 miles long, 5 miles wide; 112 square miles. The northern half is hilly and rugged terrain (up to 784 ft.), the southern half flat and virtually at sea-level. At the extreme northern end is 5000-acre Washington National Park, a rugged xeric environment with organ-pipe cactus, various opuntia, divi-divi and thorn acacias, rocky bluffs and beaches facing the windward shore. Several sizable salt-water lakes—Goto in the north, mangrove-bordered Lac Bay in the southeast—provide feeding grounds for water birds. At the extreme southern end of the island are the evaporative salt ponds of the Antillean International Salt Company, including the undisturbed waters of Pekelmeer, which supports the island's famous flamingo colony. Klein Bonaire, a small island off shore west of Bonaire, is flat and featureless except for two salt ponds.



The green oasis of Dos Pos, Bonaire

Access Bonaire is reached by air from Curacao or Aruba: (a ten minute flight via ALM from the former, 20-minute from the latter.) Curacao is reached via KLM or American from New York or Miami, Eastern via Puerto Rico and ALM from Miami. Flying time: Curacao-New York about 4½ hours. There is a weekly boat from Curacao. Proof of citizenship required. Register all cameras, telescopes, binoculars, etc., with U.S. customs before departure.

Accommodations The Hotel Bonaire is a typical and excellent resort hotel on a good beach, complete with casino, etc., just outside the capitol, Kralendijk. Medium priced. The Flamingo Beach club, in Kralendijk, has a good beach, 21 cottages, and is more informal. Also in or near Kralendijk are the Hotel Rochaline, and the Bonaire Bungalows. There are several restaurants and one nightclub, E Wo Wo. Rental cars and beach buggies available.



A view of Goto Meer

Birdwatching Although the Bonaire list stands at 126 species, the feature attraction of the island is its thriving colony of American Flamingos. Recent estimates place the population of the Pekelmeer colony at 6000 birds; in March 1974 there were 1500-1800 downy juveniles in the colony, about two-months old. Flamingos nest in December, the young are hatched in late January or early February, and fledge in early May. Flamingos may be seen and photographed from the perimeter highway along the western shore, and with permission of the salt company (apply at Main Office), from an adjacent dike. Flamingos are also found in smaller numbers in Goto Meer, which is a sanctuary, and nearby

Slagbaai. This Pekelmeer colony, one of the largest and most accessible in the West Indies, has prospered under protection by the island government and the salt company, although there is still some predation by poachers. One current mystery is where many adults of this colony spend the night. A local naturalist believes that the birds fly 48 miles east to the Aves Islands, but all birds (many hundreds in lines and skeins) seen returning from sea in the morning were coming from the *west* in the direction of Curacao or northern Venezuela.

The dikes of the salt ponds and the shores of other bodies of water produce in season a variety of shorebirds. Black-necked Stilt and Snowy Plover and Collared Plover are residents; other shorebirds seen in March included both Am. Oystercatcher, Semipalmated Plover, Black-bellied Plover, turnstone, Spotted Sandpiper, both yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers, and Sanderling, all still in winter plumage. Other prominent waterbirds include the Brown Booby (roosting and possibly nesting on the bluffs of Slagbaai, at the north tip), White-tailed Tropicbirds,

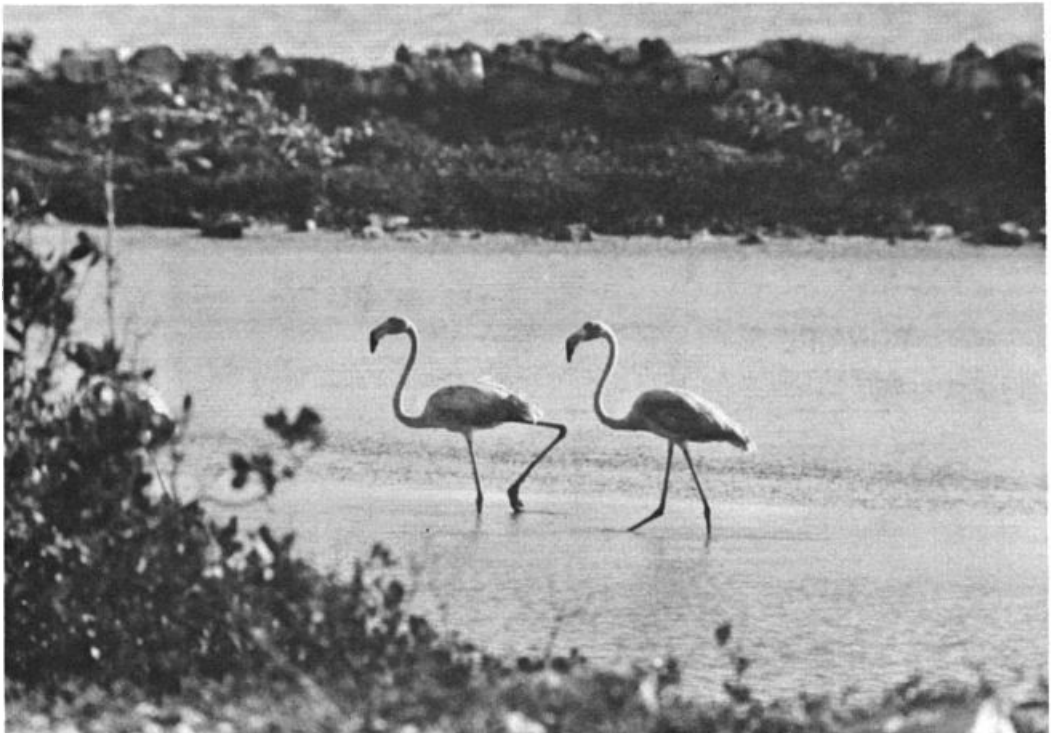
Brown Pelican, frigatebird, a variety of herons including Reddish Egret and several terns.

Bonaire has two native parrots: the Yellow-winged, of which a small population still survives and is conspicuous in tree cactus in the hilly north, and the Yellow-headed Parakeet, perhaps more abundant and more likely near habitations. Both would be "Blue-listed" in the U.S.

Two handsome hummers are common on Bonaire: the brilliant Ruby-Topaz, and the Caribbean Emerald, in the expected garden habitats.

Most verdant and perhaps most productive landbird area is the spring-fed valley of Dos Pos, on the north central road. A waterhole in Washington Park is also productive.

Other typical species more or less easily found, include: White-tailed Hawk, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Bare-eyed Pigeon, Eared Dove, White-fronted Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, Groove-billed Ani, Cayenne Nighthawk, Tropical Kingbird, Gray Kingbird, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Smooth Flycatcher, Caribbean Elaenia, Pearly-eyed Thrasher (Dos Pos), Black-



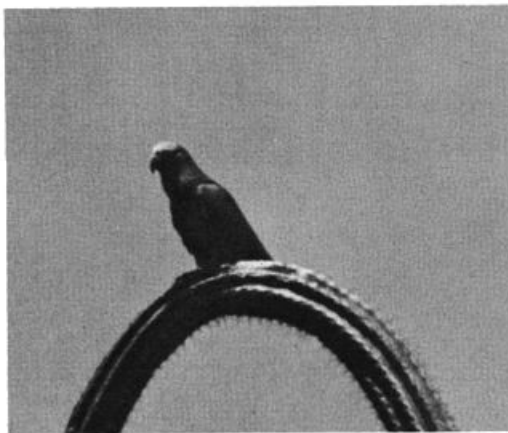
American Flamingos in a tidal pool, Bonaire / Photos, R. Arbib.

whiskered Vireo, Bananaquit, Black-faced Grassquit. In migration seasons a variety of North American landbirds may be expected. Bonaire has been relatively unworked, and diligent visitors might well be able to add to the island's list. Intensive search in spring would surely add to its migrant bird list.

Handbooks: Bond, James. *Birds of the West Indies*. Houghton Mifflin, 1971. Voous, K.H., *Birds of the Netherlands Antilles, Curaçao*. 1955. Rooth, Jan. *The Flamingos on Bonaire*. RIVON, Zeist, Netherlands, 1965.

Rating Spring **** Summer * Fall **** Winter ****

— Robert Arbib



Yellow-winged Parrot

