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Monthly Census of the Oilbird, *Steatornis caripensis* at Springhill Estate, Arima Valley, Trinidad, West Indies

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The Oilbird, *Steatornis caripensis* is a nocturnal, fruit-eating and cave-dwelling bird. Its first documented presence in Trinidad at Springhill Estate, Arima Valley was by Joseph (1838). Subsequently, French (1991) noted its presence at seven other localities in Trinidad although some of those populations are now extinct. Snow (1961) studied the general behaviour, feeding, breeding and population sizes of these birds at the Springhill Estate. He noted a population of about 25 - 30 birds.

In order to increase the size of the population of birds at the cave, several ledges were constructed by Jogie Ramlal, Elliott Olton and Roodal Ramlal, in 1962 under the direction of John Dunston to provide additional nesting sites. The population did increase in size and the cave was subsequently named as Dunston's Cave. Lambie and Debie (2009) confirmed this increase during the Annual Christmas Bird Counts from 1969 to 2008 and noted a high of 161 birds in 2008.

A more accurate count of population size is a monthly count rather than the annual count which is done on one day of the year. Accordingly, a monthly count was instituted in 2002 when the count was made on one day of each month. Starting in 2005, the count was made on the twenty-seventh day of each month. In 2002, counts were made for only five months while in 2003 data were available for seven months. Thereafter, data were available for at least ten of the 12 months of each year. The results are presented in the Table below.

Low counts were observed in August, 2003 when 110 birds were observed while a maximum of 203 birds were

recorded for June 2008 and September 2009. Monthly averages for the eight years however, varied between 129 for August to 156 birds in May. The average counts for each year however, show that the population is increasing from 122.6 birds per month recorded in 2002 to 169.4 birds in 2009 which confirms Lambie and Debie's (2009) observation on single counts made at the Annual Christmas Census.

Future observations will determine if these increases will continue or at what point the colony will become stabilized.

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Table. Monthly counts of Oilbirds at Dunston Cave, Springhill Estate, Arima Valley, Trinidad, 2002-2009.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Ave.
2002				114			120		127	132		120	122.6
2003			136			129		110	119	131	126	154	129.29
2004	131		130	135	123	117	123		146	130	116	167	131.8
2005	145	139	142	162	135	132	129	131	131	128	133	130	136.42
2006	142	147	143	140	171	166	149		142	137	157	154	149.82
2007	169	161	143	140	163	164	129	131	144	146	165	158	151.08
2008	175	175	187	178	178	203	174	154	187	159	171	161	175.17
2009	154	156	171	186	169	127		121	203	191	192	193	169.36
Monthly Ave	152.67	155.6	150.29	150.71	156.5	148.29	137.33	129.4	149.88	144.25	151.43	154.63	