ABSTRACT

Shorebird Habitat as an Indicator of Sensitivity to Coastal Development in Trinidad and Tobago

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The use of coastal habitats by shorebirds in Trinidad was investigated to determine the extent of this use as well as the sensitivity of the coast to development. Shorebird and seabird censuses were performed at fifteen coastal habitats once a month from January to December 1997. Shorebird abundance and species richness were used to develop a coastal sensitivity index.

The habitats were found to be, in order of decreasing sensitivity: sheltered tidal flats, exposed fine-grained sand, medium-coarse grained sand, mixed sand and gravel, wavecut platform, exposed rocky shore/exposed tidal flat, sheltered fine-grained sand and sheltered rocky shore.

Shorebirds were found to make maximum use of the coast of Trinidad during the migratory seasons, which were January-March (spring) and September-November (fall). However, a small proportion of birds utilized these habitats throughout the year.

Trinidad is an important stopover point in the migratory pathway of shorebirds, in addition to supporting shorebirds in the non-migratory period so that these sites need to be conserved.

The sensitivity index was then tested on Tobago's coast and found to be applicable to these coastal habitats as well. The index provides an additional tool for development control in coastal areas.

Keywords: Cindy Chandool; coastal; sensitivity; shorebirds