

Haiti Sentinel

Haiti-bred seabird subject of lawsuit by Center for Biological Diversity



Black-capped Petrel [file]

Written by Staff Writer
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MIAMI, USA (sentinel.ht) - An endangered Atlantic seabird which was once thought to be extinct until a few colonies were found on the island of Haiti is the subject of a lawsuit by the U.S. Center for Biological Diversity who says the birds are further threatened by plans by the United States to drill off-shore.

The black-capped petrel “is a nocturnal seabird with a deadly attraction to oily surfaces, so an oil spill in the petrel’s habitat could drive it to

extinction,” said Jacki Lopez, Florida director for the Center for Biological Diversity in a press release. “This cliff-dwelling bird urgently needs protection from imminent plans to open its fishing grounds to oil drilling,” he added.

For this reason, the Center for Biological Diversity on Monday filed a notice of its intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the agency’s failure to determine if endangered species protections for the black-capped petrel are warranted. Black-capped petrels are seabirds that forage off the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Florida; they were once believed to be extinct, but a few breeding colonies remain in the Caribbean.

On September 1, 2011, WildEarth Guardians submitted a petition to protect the black-capped petrel under the Endangered Species Act because of its low population and threats to its survival. The Endangered Species Act required the Service to determine whether listing the black-capped petrel as threatened or endangered was warranted no later than one year after it received the petition, or Sept. 13, 2012. To date — more than two years after that response was due — the Service has not made a decision.

“When it comes to protecting endangered species like this seafaring bird, delay can mean death,” said Lopez.

There are only 13 known breeding colonies in Haiti and the Dominican Republic and fewer than 2,000 breeding pairs. The petrel is considered endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the international authority on endangered species; it is threatened by the destruction of its breeding habitat through deforestation, as well as contamination and oil and gas development.

President Obama recently opened the Atlantic coast to seismic exploration activities for oil and gas, and the Department of the Interior is reviewing 10 applications for permits. Additionally, the administration proposed a plan to offer an area off the mid-Atlantic for drilling in its five-year plan for offshore oil leases. These industrial activities threaten the petrel and its habitat.