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## **SMALL CARIBBEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION MAKES A BIG IMPACT**

When biologists Natalia Collier and Adam Brown visited family in the Caribbean as college students in the late 1990s, they didn't imagine that they would devote their lives to protecting the natural heritage of the region. But that's exactly what they did when they started the non-profit organization called Environmental Protection in the Caribbean, or EPIC for short. Today, EPIC has been around for 20+ years, thanks to the hard work and dedication of hundreds of partners across the world, including those in Dominica.

In 1999, the two recognized the dramatic difference between environmental research and protection in the Caribbean and the United States. Natalia noticed and was bothered by negative impacts to the natural places she grew up visiting. As they traveled, they found Caribbean residents were also alarmed about water pollution, litter, and unsustainable development in the places they knew and loved. Sometimes there was a lack of scientific knowledge, funding, or people-power to make significant improvements.

Frustrated by the lack of solutions, Adam and Natalia took the initiative and implemented environmental projects. Eventually in 2000, they registered EPIC as a U.S. Florida-based non-profit with the mission of protecting the Caribbean environment through research and community-based actions. Adam and Natalia attribute EPIC's success to a grassroots approach, which includes empowering local communities. The ongoing knowledge-base and agility necessary to remain effective comes through the recruiting of local leaders who run and manage EPIC's programs. In addition, there is a focus and commitment to combining the tools of scientific research, education, advocacy, and community support to affect change.

"Where nature and people interconnect is where EPIC teams work to improve outcomes," is a quote from EPIC's 2020 annual report. Much of EPIC's work focuses on the blue-green economy including a sustainable farming project in Haiti and ecotour guide training in Sint Maarten. This grassroots approach has enabled people of all backgrounds to protect their natural heritage.

What started as a two-person operation has grown to a team of hardworking staff and volunteers, hailing from local and international communities and much of the work is in partnership with on-island non-profit organizations. **EPIC's work in Dominica has focused on protecting the endangered Black-capped Petrel seabird. EPIC currently works with Dominican scientists as part of the International Black-capped Petrel Working Group and has directly supported expeditions in 2015 and 2020 to locate nesting areas. EPIC also conducted seabird research on Dominica and the data was included in the Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles.**

Now, EPIC has entered a new era. Last week, the organization celebrated two big changes: the creation of a new logo and a new website at [www.epicislands.org](http://www.epicislands.org).

“The update of the logo and website reflect the immense growth of our organization over the past decade. Our logo reflects our connection with the land, sea, and people. The new website tells the story of the relationships EPIC has with Caribbean communities,” says Adam Brown, co-founder of EPIC and Program Director for the Black-capped Petrel program.

The website project came together over the course of the last year and it quickly became a storehouse for all the prior work that had been done. This effort was inspired by EPIC’s Executive Director Tabitha Stadler who has cultivated an EPIC vision of the Caribbean region as a global focal point for conservation in the way that we think of the Amazon rainforest or Florida’s Everglades.

“I hope the EPIC story, website, and logo will serve as a catalyst for transforming environmental concern into action and bring global attention to the needs of the Caribbean. Being a part of EPIC means being part of something greater; a community of people who also share a common cause and are ready to make a difference” says EPIC’s Executive Director Tabitha Stadler.