



## YEAR REPORT 2016 and 2017

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May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

### **Introduction and background**

CARIBSS was incorporated in May 2016 in the Island of Bonaire. It is an open, all-inclusive and diverse group of people and institutions working for the preservation and protection of caves in the Island of Bonaire and the Dutch Caribbean region, having as core disciplines scientific research, exploration, education and conservation.

### VISION

To ensure that the caves in the Island of Bonaire and the Dutch Caribbean and their values are recognized, respected and protected by residents and visitors

### MISSION

CARIBSS aims to explore, document and preserve the cave systems of the Island of Bonaire and the Dutch Caribbean while ensuring their optimal management, and to serve as a forum where all the different organizations or individuals can share information, projects and initiatives.

### **1. Board of Directors**

The initial Board of Directors to legally incorporate the society was selected with the goal that all the different fields related to caves (e.g. nature conservation, exploration, recreational use and cultural heritage) were represented and, for easiness of administration, that they were Bonaire residents. Based on these two premises, the following people were selected:

- Fernando Simal – President
- Ruud Stelten – Secretary
- Yago Rodriguez – Treasurer
- Hans Voerman – Commissioner
- Brian Albus – Commissioner

On October 2016, Yago Rodriguez officially resigned via written letter because he unexpectedly had to leave the island. Tamanaé Vargas replaced him as an acting member. On May 2017 Hans Voerman resigned both as a board member due to lack of time to dedicate to the society.

Active Board members as per December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017:

- Fernando Simal – President
- Ruud Stelten - Secretary
- Brian Albus – Commissioner

## 2. Funding

Since before its legal incorporation, it was very clear to the founding members that making CARIBSS financially sustainable will be one of the biggest challenges for the society. With an estimated annual cost of \$2,000.00 to maintain the society up to date on its legal obligations and proper communication (e.g. accounting expenses, yearly reporting at tax office and webpage hosting), the memberships fees will not be sufficient at the beginning. Further, the collection of memberships by members non-residents on the Island of Bonaire were complicated due to bank transfer fees that were as large or even larger than the annual membership. Clearly, donations, volunteer work and writing grant proposals to conduct activities were the best three options to move forward with our society.

Between 2016 and 2017, Fernando Simal acting as WILDCONSCIENCE BV, wrote the grant proposal “Bonaire Caves and Karst Nature Reserve” for an amount of \$133.000,00, in which CARIBSS is stated as an official partner. This project aimed to be commissioned by the public entity of Bonaire (OLB) and is part of the nature projects funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV). At the time of writing this report, this project was fully approved and activities initiated. Therefore, CARIBSS is currently working in partnership with the public entity Bonaire (OLB).

During September 2016, Fernando Simal, representing only CARIBSS in this case, visited at his own cost the headquarters of the foundation DierenLot in The Nederland. Potential projects and the donation of a pick-up truck for conducting CARIBSS activities were discussed. Following up on the visit, Fernando S. wrote the grant proposal “Physical Protection of Bat Maternity Chambers” to this foundation in 2017 for an amount of \$12.564,09. This grant was partially approved in December 2017 for an amount of \$5.678,00. As per the writing of this report, the donation of the pick-up truck was also approved and will be delivered in August 2018.

From the two grants above, the first one will allow members to generate money for the society while working on our mission, yet volunteer work will be needed. The second, allows members of the society to work towards our goals, but not revenue can be generated for the society, since the entire amount granted by DierenLot is “earmarked” for materials and tools to close the bat maternity chambers.

During September 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 2017, CARIBSS demonstrated its working capacity by coordinating and conducting a complicated cave clean up inside a sink hole that was on the list of SELIBON and other local authorities for many years, but the task was beyond their capacity. This clean-up generated \$ 1.000,00 for CARIBSS via the Caves and Karst Nature Reserve Project.

Except for the above-mentioned grant proposals and activities, the society has been functioning predominantly on the generosity of a few volunteers donating their time and money to conduct activities. It is very clear for the Board of Directors by the end of 2017, that more members need to get active on grant proposal writing, acquiring donations and participating on the volunteer work. Finally, a system to collect memberships from members living abroad needs to be implemented. As per the writing of this report, the payment system for people abroad has been implemented and it is functioning thanks to the generosity of Reef Support BV, a local company directed by Ramón de León, a CARIBSS member.

### 3. Activities

#### 3.1. Communications and outreach

Between the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, Yago Rodriguez, on his own time and without any cost to the society, designed our logo. Additionally, Yago designed our website [www.caribss.org](http://www.caribss.org) and the Facebook page “Caribbean Speleological Society”. At the time of writing this report, both are active and Alejandro Gutierrez, also a CARIBSS member, is the actual webpage administrator free of cost.

On October 2017, Fernando Simal donated text for the iconic Bonaire Agenda produced by the Friends of Nature Foundation in exchange for exposure in the 2018 agenda. Educational information on bats and the CARIBSS logo, together with the Bat Conservation Group for the ABC islands logo were displayed (Fig. 1).

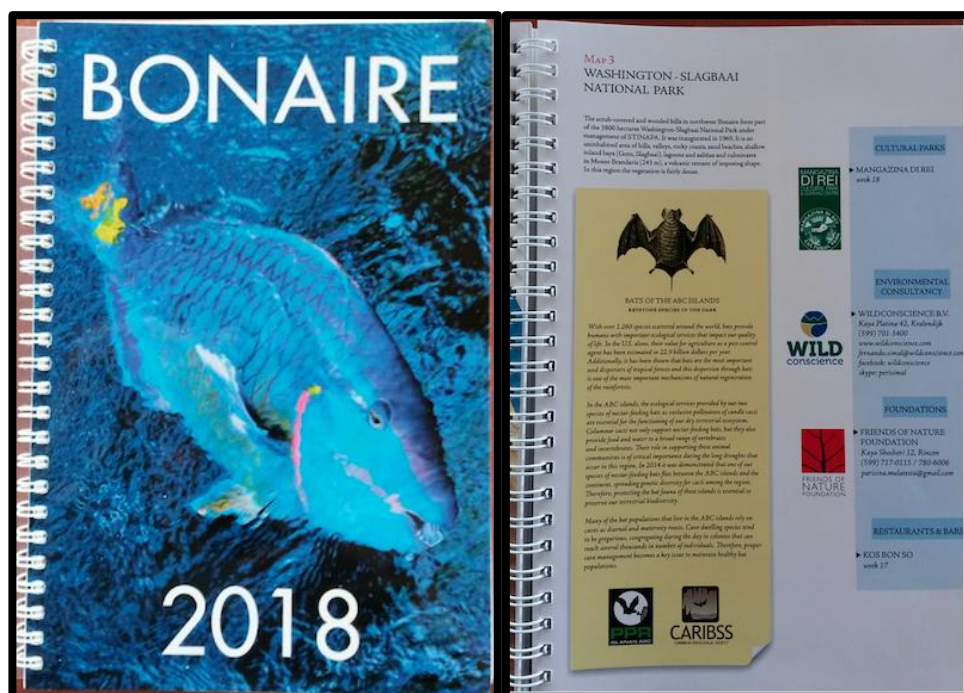


Figure 1. Image of the Bonaire Agenda cover on the right and the CARIBSS and PPRABC logos on the left.

Since 2016, WILDCONSCIENCE BV, an institutional member of CARIBSS, displays in the inner cover of all its official reports the CARIBSS membership. As per December 2017, 12 official reports delivered to clients and/or the Bonaire public entity (OLB) that promotes and give exposure to CARIBSS in this way (Fig. 3).

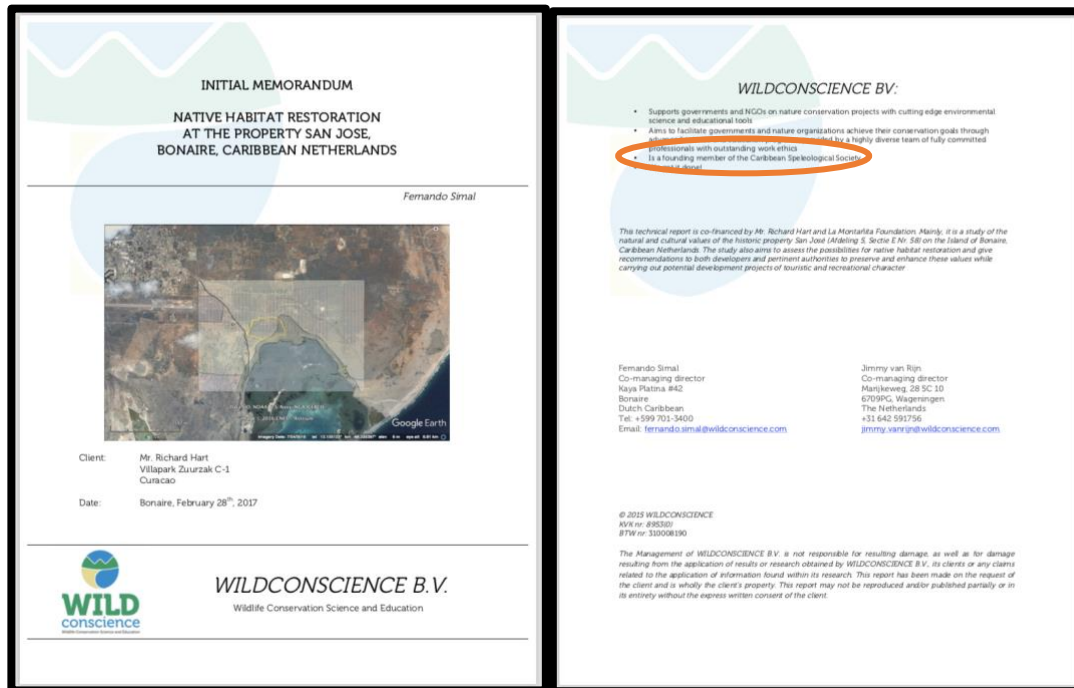


Figure 2. Sample of the front cover and inner cover of a WILDCONSCIENCE official report.

### 3.2. Exploration

At the end of 2016, as part on the Environmental Impact Assessment to relocate the WEB water plant at Piedra Haltu (1000 steps), WILDCONSCIENCE BV was given the task to explore and document the caves in the area and give advice on the potential impacts of the project on the bat colonies encountered. WILDCONSCIENCE's management decided to involve CARIBSS in the exploration and, with the assistance of Yago Rodriguez and the permission of the project leaders, two cave maps were produced (Fig. 3).

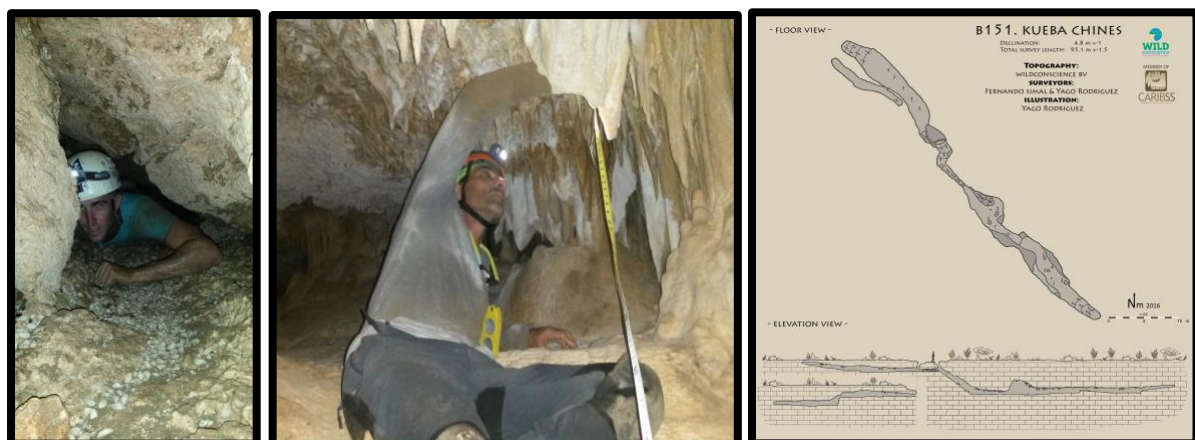


Figure 3. Two images of the caves exploration and documentation activities at Piedra Haltu and a sample of the produced maps with the CARIBSS logo included.

Ungoverned exploration activities and non-guided visits to caves have increased enormously in the last years on the Island of Bonaire. In fact, some of these exploration activities were conducted from the year 2014 on by actual members of the society and they are in no small part one of the motives for the creation of CARIBSS. However, in the last couple of years things are getting out of hand, especially in the area of cave SCUBA diving, where social media is being used to promote unregulated cave diving like Facebook posts promoting the “100% nanny free” Bonaire caves (Fig. 4).

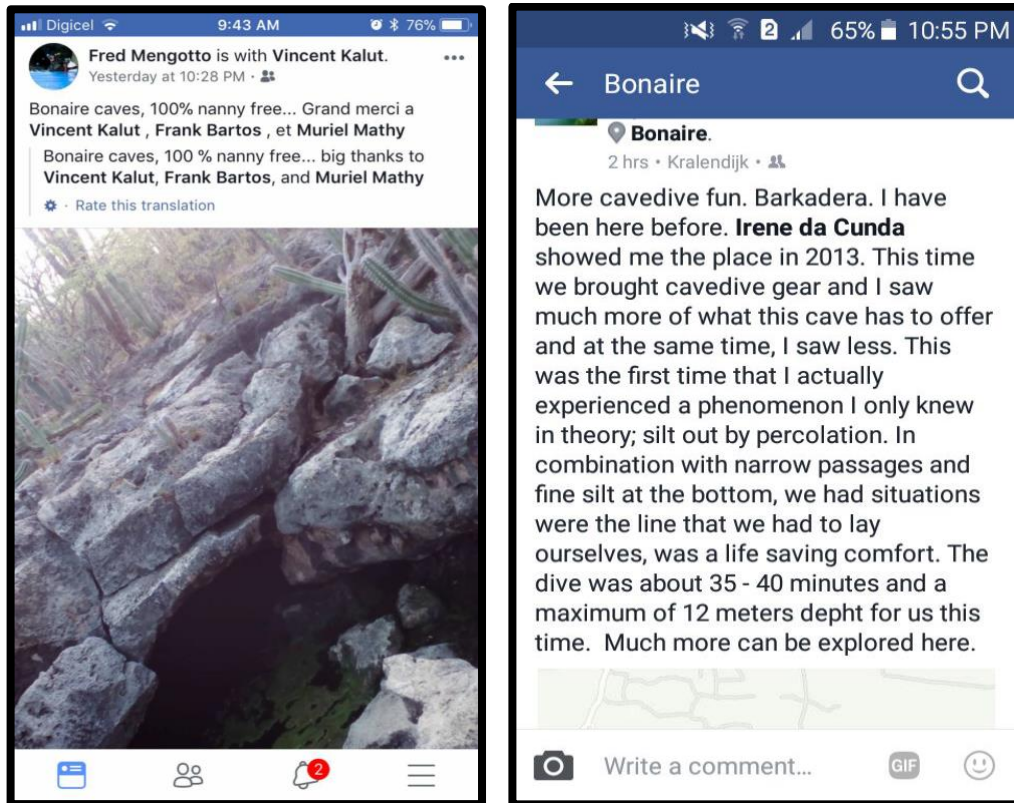


Figure 4. Two examples of social media promoting unregulated cave diving and exploration on Bonaire.

Given this undesirable situation, where fragile natural resources and human safety are at great risk, CARIBSS decided to set the example and halted unregulated cave exploration activities until the situation improves significantly. Next, our official position on exploration:

January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017

*After careful evaluation of the advantages and the risks of unauthorized cave exploring and documenting activities on Bonaire executed by individuals and/or organizations without any kind of government, CARIBBS’s official position is against the continuation of such activities. It is very clear to our society that at this point in time the risks greatly outweigh the benefits.*

*Considering the magnitude of the natural and cultural values of our caves and the fragility of these values, before such activities can take place, a minimum requirement of conditions must be met.*

*Among others, these conditions include government involvement, a (complete and approved) written strategic plan with very clear goals and objectives (preferably non-profit), leadership and involvement in the project by local people, proof of qualifications by the people involved and adequate management of communications, especially through social media.*

*At CARIBSS, we are working hard to obtain that kind of organization and management for the caves of our island.*

### 3.3. Nature conservation

Much of our nature conservation efforts have been reported on the “funding” section of this report. In total, we obtained approximately \$140,000.00 for cave protection and management activities. By the end of 2017, the complex cave clean-up conducted in cooperation with SELIBON at the sinkhole used as an illegal dump, from where abundant trash of all different types was extracted and transported to the land fill, was the main nature conservation activity conducted by CARIBSS volunteers (Fig.5).



*Figure 5. Collection of images of the sinkhole clean-up activities.*

### 3.4. Cultural heritage

There are no activities to report on this field.

### 3.5. Recreation

There are no activities to report on this field.

### 3.6. Management and administration

The CARIBSS Strategic plan 2018-2022 was completed at the end of 2017 and will be presented at the 2018 General assembly for approval.

Keeping up with the society's accounting, good standing of members, administrative obligations to the tax office and other legalities exclusively on a volunteer basis, proved to be a challenge. This fact became more evident during the large period of inactivity in 2017 caused by the unexpected delay of more than one year to receive funds from the Caves and Karst Nature Reserve project, which idled the motivation and enthusiasm of some members. Looking for solutions, ideas and initiatives to keep the society ongoing, board members and regular members met officially 7 times in 2016 and 2 times in 2017 to brainstorm and make decisions on how to continue. For instance, we decided to conduct the sinkhole clean-up with our own means before grant's funds were deposited. At the time of writing this year report, the remaining members of the Board of Directors are still working on such matters on their available time.

On November 30<sup>th</sup> 2017 a general assembly was called and, reflecting the situation above mentioned, attendance was extremely low, with only 2 board members present. Given the low attendance, no major decisions were taken and we decided to regroup and prepare better for the 2018 General assembly.