



## YEAR REPORT 2019

Written by: Fernando Simal

February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### **1. 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.

### **2. Board of Directors, General Assemblies and Membership**

#### **a. Board of Directors**

The initial Board of Directors that legally incorporated the society was selected with the goal that all the different fields related to caves (e.g. nature conservation, exploration, recreational use, tourism and cultural heritage) were represented and, for easiness of administration, that they were Bonaire residents.

In May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, during the 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of this year, President F. Simal and Board member B. Albus were reelected for a 3-year period. Therefore, as per December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 our Board of Directors remains as following:

- Fernando Simal Busto – President
- Elsmarie Beukenboom – Secretary
- Rob Hulsbergen - Treasurer
- Tamanaé Vargas Salazar - Commissioner
- Brian Albus – Commissioner

### b. General Assemblies and Board meetings

Two General Assemblies were held in 2019, the 1<sup>st</sup> one in May 14<sup>th</sup> and, the second, in November 5<sup>th</sup>. In the second one, President F. Simal announced that his resignation to the presidency will be presented during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020. He will remain an active CARIBSS member and his company, WILDCONSCIENCE BV, will remain an institutional member as well. He will continue to dedicate his time mainly to bats research and conservation. Additionally, during this assembly the official opening of the Bonaire Caves & Karst Park was scheduled for December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Additionally, three regular Board meetings were held this year.

### c. Memberships

In 2019, we had a significant increase in memberships. This was mainly a consequence of the Bonaire Caves & Karst Tour Guide Course. By December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, the society has a total of 32 members in good standing, 24 personal and 8 institutional. This represents an increase of approximately 25% in overall membership when compared to 2018.

## 3. Finances

The 2019 budget was revised during the General Assembly held on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at FUHIKUBO. The year ended on positive numbers (see annexed financial statement) and the funds granted by DierenLot for the Caves & Karst Nature Reserve project were used accordingly to the project's budget and plan. Additionally, the 2020 budget was unanimously approved at this assembly.

The increase in memberships, specially the institutional ones, boosted our income during 2019, finally achieving financial sustainability when it comes to our estimated minimum yearly expenses. Yet, there is still not enough funding available for conducting recreational, conservation, cultural or exploration activities towards our goals. Therefore, efforts in the area of obtaining funds should be increased by all members.



*Figure 1. Unexpected donations by DierenLot received by CARIBSS Board members.*

The recently created group within CARIBSS under the leadership of board member Tamanaé Vargas Salazar; Education, Tourism and Recreation (ETR), agreed and committed to collect USD 2.00 per cave tour customer and contribute this money to CARIBSS quarterly. For the year 2020, an amount of USD 1,240.00 was estimated as income from this new source. This is great news not only for a financial perspective, but also as a demonstration of willingness of the cave tour guide community to work together for the sustainable use of the Bonaire cave system.

CARIBSS member Ramón de León offered his online payment system to facilitate the administration of this contribution. This is the same system currently used for annual membership payment by our members abroad.

Our main sponsor, DierenLot, made 2 unexpected donations in 2019 during official visits to Bonaire for a total of USD 1,500.00 (Fig.1). Additionally, DierenLot's Esther Keijning-Schut made a field visit to the Caves & Karst Nature Reserve project in the month of May and was positively impressed with results of the project. We feel the relationship between our organizations was strengthened. In fact, on November 11<sup>th</sup>, DierenLot approved our second project proposal for monitoring the bat colonies in the main maternity caves in Bonaire. This proposal was for an amount of 5,326.32 Euros. These funds will be used in 2020.

#### 4. Activities

##### 4.1 Communications, education and outreach

###### 4.1.1 CARIBSS Web page

Since mid-year 2018, CARIBSS member Alejandro Gutierrez is the webpage administrator free of charge. The look of the webpage was prominently improved and its content increased in 2019. Content was organized according to working groups, making the structure of the website more user friendly, projects are now matching their group organization and its current state. Additionally, a list of the CARIBSS-certified cave tour guides was also introduced, presenting the current trained personnel, including a short bio and a link to their own websites. Crosslinks with other Bonaire caves related sites were added, namely the webpages of the Bonaire Caves & Karst Nature Reserve project ([www.bonairecaves.org](http://www.bonairecaves.org)) and the Bat Conservation Group for the ABC Islands ([www.pprabc.org](http://www.pprabc.org)). The first look at the website invites people to donate and/or become members. A news blog was also set up, now available to show the latest news regarding the organization. By the end of 2019 and into 2020, our domain name and hosting were passed to the company Athoyo Creative Works B.V., a CARIBSS institutional member, from which A. Gutierrez is the Director.

###### 4.1.1 CARIBSS Facebook page

There was an increase in page "likes" from 311 to 410 during 2019. Similarly, the number of page followers increased from 315 to 418, which represents an increase of approximately 30%. This increase is solely the product of numerous posts/shares regarding the progress of the Bonaire Caves & Karst Nature Reserve project, together with the "Nos ta Biba di Naturalesa" shares and their TV program. Overall, CARIBSS members are not active making posts of their activities on our Facebook page.

###### 4.1.2 Other media

CARIBSS was portrayed during 2019 in several media, including local radio, magazines, TV, newspapers and other nature organization's newsletters. Below, a list and some images of these promotions.

- **April**, CARIBSS was showcased in the TV program by Leo Dijkgraaf, Brunch & Babbels.
- **May**, Interview Dutch TV, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019.**June**, Tamanaé Vargas Salazar and Fernando Simal were interviewed by B-ONAIR TV during the hiking trail exercise conducted as part of the Caves and Karst Tour Guide Course.

- June, 2019 Extra newspaper, simulated rescue ambulance from caves.
- September, Nature Today from The Netherlands.
- December, NOS TV, BES reporter and Bonaire news

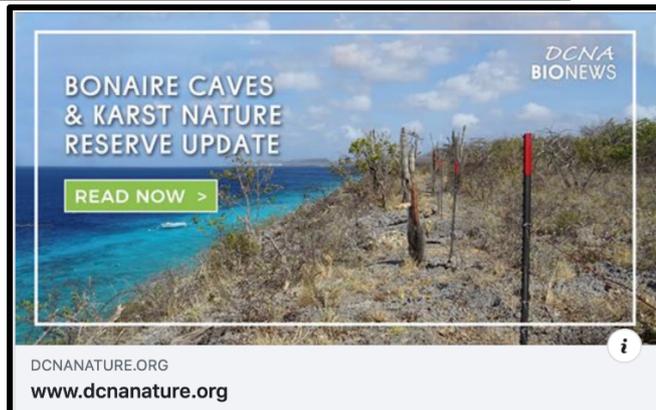


Figure 2. Several examples of CARIBSS appearances in local and international media.

#### 4.1 Education, communications and outreach outside media

Given the relevance of its content to cave protection on Bonaire, CARIBSS member Sophie Zeegers, summarized and translated to English the chapter on caves from the report produced by the University of Wageningen: “The Status of Nature in the Dutch Caribbean, 2017”. Both the document and the summary are available to download on our website. This document was commissioned by the Dutch Government with the intention to acquire recent data and facts about our nature, in order to make well-informed decisions at the national level. The report supports CARIBSS vision and mission and provides plenty justification for our conservation efforts.



Figure 3. TV- Different aspects of the I Bonaire Caves & Karst Tour Guide Course: classroom sessions, discussions, field exercises and certification.

In cooperation with WILDCONSCIENCE BV, OLB and PPRABC, CARIBSS organized and conducted the “I Bonaire Caves & Karst Tour Guide Course” between June 7<sup>th</sup> and June 21<sup>st</sup> (Fig. 3). The course was co-coordinated by Jafet Nassar and Fernando Simal, and 13 people successfully completed it and received their CARIBSS certification to operate as cave tour guides. Besides the obvious advantages of having properly trained and qualified people conducting cave tours, the course was essential for bringing a teamwork atmosphere and spirit of cooperation among old and new cave tour guides of Bonaire. In fact, they became an organized group (ETR) under the CARIBSS umbrella and a commitment was signed to elaborate a Memorandum of Understanding for conducting cave tours in a sustainable way. If a contract for the management of the Bonaire Caves & Karst Park is signed with the local government, it is this ETR group who will be in charge of the daily management and execution of the activities.

#### 4.2 Exploration

Unfortunately, not much has changed regarding the unguided exploration activities and ongoing non-guided visits to caves mentioned in previous reports (Fig. 4). Therefore, CARIBSS maintains its official position towards this undesirable situation, where fragile natural resources and human safety are at risk. During the forum conducted as part of the I Bonaire Caves & Karst Tour Guide Course, with the participation of representatives of OLB and LNV, our official position was supported by the officers of these institutions.

#### ***CARIBSS 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, CARIBSS’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.*



Figure 4. Example from 2019 of inadequate cave SCUBA diving activities and promotion.

## 4.3 Nature conservation

### 4.3.1 Scientific Research

During 2019, the last two monthly capturing sessions of the 2018-19 year-cycle for data collection at the Bakuna maternity cave were successfully completed in January and February. After that, we conducted 5 additional netting sessions with a 60-day interval with the goal of corroborating the phenological cycle provided by the 1<sup>st</sup> year of data collection. The cycle was confirmed and now we know with certainty what species of bats are using this cave for reproduction in which months of the year, including at what stage of their reproduction cycle.

A scientific study of the impact of the physical barriers installed on the five maternity chambers on bat entry and exit behavior was initiated in the month of September and the field work finalized in the month of November. The study's goal was to evaluate the potential disturbance to the colonies. The study is being conducted by CARIBSS-members Jafet Nassar and Fernando Simal with the support of WILDCONSCIENCE's intern from the HAS University of Applied Sciences, Jilly Sarpong. It consisted in infrared filming of bat behavior during entries and exits pre, during and post installation of the barriers. An article with the findings will be submitted to a scientific journal in 2020.

**Special note:** CARIBSS-member, Dr. Jafet Nassar, was awarded in Venezuela during the XIX edition of the “Lorenzo Mendoza Fleury” prices for his “scientific talent, creativity and productivity” (Fig. 5). He received the price during the month of November. Jafet has been involved in scientific research and conservation of bats and caves in the ABC islands and the arid regions of Venezuela for decades. Coincidentally, Jafet was expending his second sabbatical year on Bonaire, involved in CARIBSS projects, when he was awarded. In the name of our society, a huge congratulations for his well-deserved award!



*Figure 5. The four receivers of the XIX Lorenzo Mendoza Fleury Award and the Award Committee during the ceremony. Jafet Nassar holding the award in the center of the image.*

### 4.3.2 Conservation

CARIBSS member, Jafet Nassar, translated to English the technical documents of the two AICOMs and two SICOMs of the island during the month of May. The translations are also available as downloads on our website. Since these documents contain key information for policy makers, area managers and law enforcers, the translated versions were sent to OLB, LNV, STINAPA and other relevant organizations, including the consultancy company in charge of drafting the BES Islands Nature Policy Plan, Wolfs Company BV. All the internationally recognized important bat conservation locations can be observed below (Fig. 6).

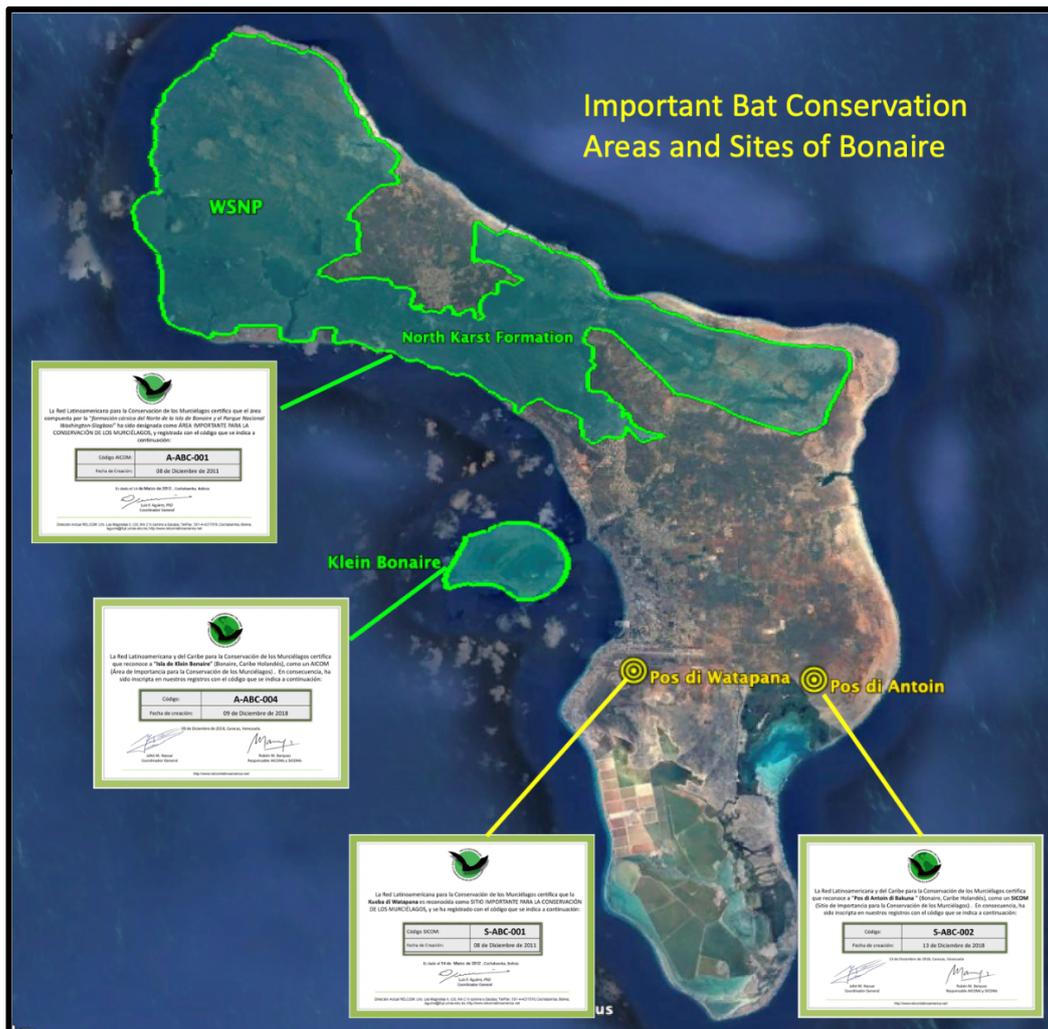


Figure 6. AICOMs and SICOMs of Bonaire after the two additions achieved in 2019.

In June 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, a commission from the Netherlands came to Bonaire to gather information from all nature conservation organizations for the elaboration of the new Nature Policy Plan for the BES islands (fig. 7). CARIBSS Secretary, E. Beukenboom, was in charge of giving the presentation to initiate discussions. CARIBSS President, F. Simal, also attended this meeting. Consensus among all attendants on the importance of caves and bats was achieved with remarkable success. As a consequence, bat and caves conservation is now included in the plan as one of the main strategic long-term goals (2030-2050), including seven specific sub-targets with activities that should open opportunities for CARIBSS (Fig 8).



Figure 7. Aspect of the workshop for the elaboration of the BES Islands Nature Policy Plan.

<b>D. Caves and all bats</b>	D.1 Conserve 100% of the cave ecosystems on Bonaire and stabilize bat populations
	D.2 Conserve, protect and proper research to stabilize bat populations on Saba and Sint Eustatius
<b>Sub-targets</b>	
67. Experts have set populations targets for all key species determined while building and using local experts' knowledge	
68. Instruments protecting 100% of the caves and the surrounding habitat and migrating routes to e.g. foraging habitat for bats	
69. Infrastructure in place to mitigate impact of tourists visiting the caves	
70. Jobs created to protect and maintain the caves, the infrastructure for visitors and the surrounding habitat and migrating routes to and jobs created to visit the caves with tourists	
71. Expertise built on the caves and the surrounding habitat and migrating routes to e.g. foraging habitat for bats, for example	
72. Baseline population numbers and monitoring trends of bats on Bonaire through populations baseline research at inventory level by local experts	
73. Obtain baseline population numbers and monitoring trends of bats on Saba and Sint Eustatius and where necessary implement basic management measures to protect the most important maternity roosts by local and or regional experts	

Figure 8. Two extracts from the BES Nature Policy Plan addressing long term goals for bats and caves (top) and sub-targets (bottom).

Fencing of the Bonaire Caves & Karst was completed in 2019 by Bon Berde BV, a local, nature conservation-oriented company. By mid-year the 1,7 Km. fence was completed and all gaps caused by the irregularities of the terrain were covered and tested. The same personnel doing the fencing trapped over several goats while working on the fence. Additionally, the organization Echo was given the task of removing the last goats that reminded inside. Their initial count was circa 60 individuals and by the month of August all goats were removed. We are proud to have the Bonaire Caves & Karst Park as the first goat-free nature conservation area of the island.

On June 19<sup>th</sup>, the recently formed ETR group conducted their first activity: a major clean-up of the south side of the park in which six 8m<sup>3</sup> truck-loads of trash were removed from the area (Fig 9).



Figure 9. Members of the BCKTG during the clean-up of the south boundary of the park.

Protection to the four of the five known bat maternity caves on the island started in 2018 with the installation of concrete signs at the entrances of all of them. In 2019, vinyl signs depicting the life cycle of the different bat species using these caves and educating the public about their high vulnerability during reproduction periods were installed (Fig. 10).

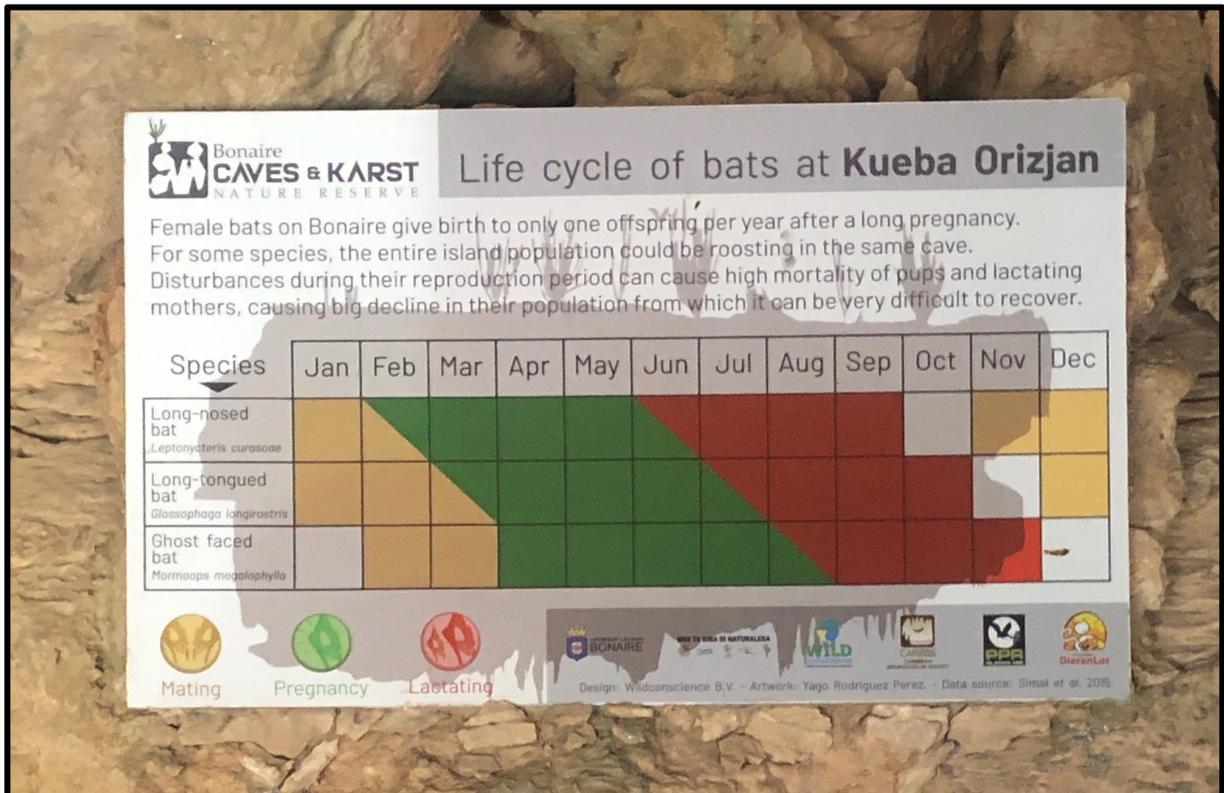


Figure 10. Information sign located at Kueba Orizjan, one of the five most important bat maternity caves.

Finally, between August and September, the actual barriers were installed in a gradual way and using impact protection for the safety of the bats (Fig. 11). Materials and tools for the physical barriers to be built at these maternity caves were purchased with funds provided by DierenLot.

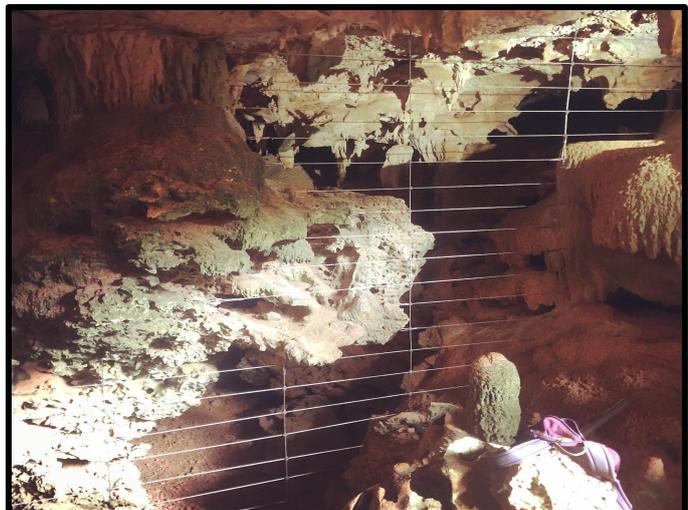
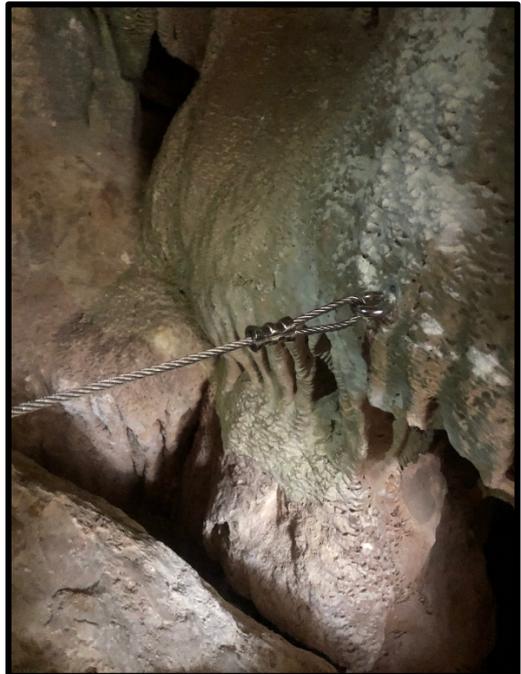
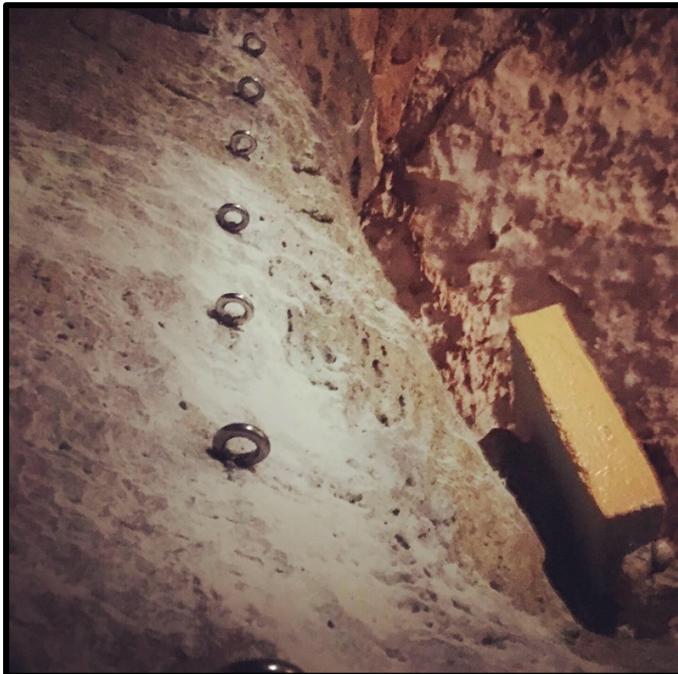
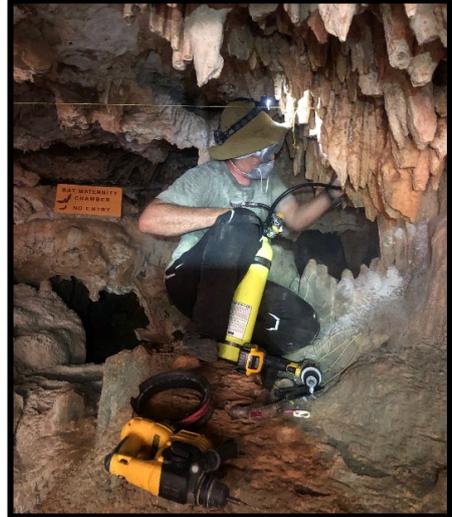


Figure 11. Different aspects of the installation of the physical barriers at the bat maternity chambers and on the bottom left image the final product at Kueba Raton di anochi.

#### 4.4 Cultural heritage

No activities were conducted in this area during 2019. Since our archaeologist and ex-Board Secretary, Ruud Stelten, moved from Bonaire, our society is still looking for a person to lead this working group. Further discussion on this topic is planned for 2020.

#### 4.5 Recreation and exploitation

The finalization of the Bonaire Caves and Kart Park was also one of the main focus of CARIBSS during 2019. By mid-year the park was completely ready to be used and the surrounding areas cleaned up of solid waste. There was consensus among the cave tour guides to maintain the park low profile and with the natural, rough look of Bonaire's karst environment. Therefore, small low-impact signs that are not easily seen from the main roads were placed indicating the park entrances (Fig. 12).



*Figure 12. Two examples of the low-profile entrances of the park.*

Hiking trails were marked using upside-down small karst rocks from the area, mainly at the base of trees delimiting the hiking trails, avoiding in this way the use of concrete, treated wood or paint for trail markers. The trails are mainly natural karst rock stripped of vegetation, no concrete or filling material was used to make it smoother (Fig 13). We intend with this approach that cave tours inside the park give the experience of entering a pristine natural area.



*Figure 13. Images of the recently open hiking trails and the spectacular view to the sea by the cliff side.*

The official opening took place on December 13<sup>th</sup> with the presence of Commissioner Elvis Tjin-Asjoe, who officially inaugurated the park. Also present there were LNV's Senior Policy Officer Paul Hoetjes, and OLB's Nature Policy Advisor, Frank van Slobbe. Additionally, members of the press, CARIBSS members and the President from El Pueblo neighbor's association were also present, together with general public. Additional to the opening speeches given by Fernando Simal and Elvis Tjin-Asjoe, two more speeches on sustainable use of the caves and bat protection were given at two different caves by Dirk Groneboer and Jafet Nassar respectively (Fig. 14).



Figure 14. Images of the official opening of The Bonaire Caves & Karst Park.

#### 4.6 Management and administration

During the month of August, an account was opened at Budget Marine for the materials and tools for the closing of the maternity caves. After the conclusion of the project, the account is still active and functional.

A good relationship was initiated with the neighbors of the Bonaire Caves & Karst Park. Namely, El Pueblo Neighbors Association and the Caribbean Club. They are collaborating with the maintenance and surveillance of the park.

During November 4<sup>th</sup>, the tax office (Belastingdienst, CN) conducted a routine inspection of CARIBSS. President F. Simal and Treasurer Rob Hulsbergen received officer Silos Pourier at Kaya Platina, 42 and answered questions about operations and administration procedures. A report based on this inspection was produced by the tax office and delivered to CARIBSS during the month of December. There was nothing worth mentioning in this report, as it was a routine inspection. At the end of 2019, CARIBSS was in good standing at the tax office.

### **5. Equipment and materials**

In August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018 we received a pickup truck as a donation from DierenLot. The vehicle provided transportation for the entire year of 2019 and it is still in good condition. Likewise, the tools and materials acquired in 2018 are also still available and in perfect condition to be used in the future for other projects. We have incremented the list of tools and materials purchased, which now include a reserve of 5mm stainless steel cable, 5mm crimps and crimping pliers to be used in case replacement of some lines is needed at the maternity caves. On the field of electronics, we purchased a SONY Ultra HD Handycam Camcorder, model FDR-AX53 4K with Night Vision capacity (infrared recording).

### **Acknowledgements**

CARIBSS's many achievements in 2019 would have been impossible without the funding provided by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV). Likewise, the public entity Bonaire (OLB) was key to our successes by commissioning us with the execution of the project Bonaire Caves & Karst Nature Reserve. Also, a huge thanks to DierenLot for trusting us with additional funding and the use of the donated pickup truck. Members Lisette de Graauw and Erik Birkhoff for the cave maps produced for the Bonaire Caves & Karst Park. Finally, a big thanks to all the society members that donated in several ways to the society this year; Ramón de León for the online payment system, Alejandro Gutierrez for administering and improving our website, Rob Hulsbergen for accounting services, Sophie Zeegers for summarize and translate the cave chapter of the University of Wageningen 2017 report, Jafet Nassar for translating to English the technical AICOMs and SICOMs documents and Tamanaé Vargas, Elsmarie Beukemboon, Rob Hulsbergen and Brian Albus for their time at the meetings.

Annex 1. 2019 Financial statement

**Report on the 2019 accounts.**

**Table of contents**

1. Balance sheet as at December 31, 2019.
2. Notes to the accounts.
3. Income and expenses.
4. Budget 2019 and proposed budget 2020

**1. Balance sheet as at December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019**

<b>ASSETS</b>			<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>
			<b>\$</b>		<b>\$</b>
<b>Bank</b>					
	MCB Current account		7,548		9,313
<b>Short-term</b>					
	Debtors			-	
	Receivables				
			0		0
<b>Total assets</b>			7,548		9,313
		-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-			
<b>LIABILITIES</b>					
			<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>
			<b>\$</b>		<b>\$</b>
<b>Equity</b>					
	General Reserve	1,074		7,492	
	Retained earnings 2018	6418			
	Retained earnings 2019			325	
	<b>Total Equity</b>		7,492		7,817
<b>Short-term</b>					
	Creditors	56		1,346	
	Deferred income			150	
			56		1,496
<b>Total liabilities</b>			7,548		9,313

## 2. Notes to the annual accounts 2019

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### **Functional currency**

The functional currency of the Society is US Dollar.

### **General**

The financial statements have been prepared in a computerized accounting system.

### **Translation of foreign currencies**

Transactions arising in foreign currencies are translated into the functional currency at the exchange rate at the date of transaction.

### **Investments**

Investments are stated at the amounts- and allocated to the year at which they were acquired. The Society does not use a system of depreciation.

### **Assets and liabilities**

Assets and liabilities are stated at the amounts at which they were acquired or incurred.

### **Income and expense**

Income and expenses are allocated to the year to which they relate.

### 3. Breakdown by period of income and expenses

Description	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Totals
<b>Income</b>													
2019 contributions				644.34	50.00	891.52	25.00					77.82-	1,533.04
Other income	1,372.44					275.21					5,689.66		7,337.31
Services			190.00										190.00
Bank interest													-
	<b>1,372.44</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>190.00</b>	<b>644.34</b>	<b>50.00</b>	<b>1,166.73</b>	<b>25.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5,689.66</b>	<b>77.82-</b>	<b>9,060.35</b>
<b>Expenses</b>													
<i>Cave Park</i>													
clean up													-
Field equipment													-
Caves and Karst mat.							222.05	3,374.29	523.70	264.90	491.50	580.91	5,457.35
Signs													-
<i>Car</i>													
Fuel		74.65	66.81	70.80	73.42	87.06	82.66	75.73	156.94	247.79	206.32	181.38	1,323.56
Maintenance		214.44		10.00					224.26	145.00		7.20	600.90
Road tax and Insurance		190.00	459.00					8.40					657.40
<i>Miscellaneous</i>													
Differences prev. Year													-
Communications	120.00												120.00
Office expenses					34.80					65.00	49.30	234.00	383.10
KvK, Legal fees	120.00												120.00
Bank expenses	1.77	6.95	1.40	0.56	0.59	6.36	0.59	3.40	0.59		6.36	45.23	73.80
<b>Totals</b>	<b>241.77</b>	<b>486.04</b>	<b>527.21</b>	<b>81.36</b>	<b>108.81</b>	<b>93.42</b>	<b>305.30</b>	<b>3,461.82</b>	<b>905.49</b>	<b>722.69</b>	<b>753.48</b>	<b>1,048.72</b>	<b>8,736.11</b>
<b>Result 2019</b>													<b>324.24</b>

#### 4. Budget 2019 and proposed budget 2020

Description	Budget 2019	Actual 2019	Differences		Budget 2020
<b>Revenues</b>					
Members contributions	825	1,533	708		1,500
Grants		7,337	7,337		5,900
Donations					
Sales merchandise					2,500
Cave tours contributions					?
Services	1,000	190	-810		
	<b>1,825</b>	<b>9,060</b>	<b>7,235</b>		<b>9,900</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
<i>Cave Park</i>					
Clean-up		0	0		
Field Equipment	1,500	0	-1,500		1,900
Materials Caves and Karst	1,200	5,457	4,257		
Maintenance BC & KP					300
Payments to 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties					4,000
Signs etc.	300	0	-300		
<i>Car</i>					
Fuel	800	1324	524		1200
Maintenance	200	601	401		200
Road tax and Insurance	700	657	-43		650
<i>Miscellaneous</i>					
Differences previous years		0	0		
Taxes					90
Communications	200	120	-80		150
Office expenses	100	383	283		100
Merchandise costs					1,250
KvK and Legal fees	120	120	0		120
Bank expenses	50	74	24		50
Unforeseen					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5,170</b>	<b>8,736</b>	<b>3,566</b>		<b>10,010</b>