

# Bermuda Audubon Society Newsletter

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## First Record of Kirtland's Warbler in Bermuda



Although exhausted from a full day's birding for the Christmas Bird Count (Dec 18<sup>th</sup> 2004), most participants usually gather in the evening to exchange stories and find out what everyone else has seen. Eric Amos was last to arrive at my house, carrying his laptop. He said it contained THE bird of the count – but we'd have to wait to view it! So when the food was finished we gathered around the computer to view the images taken by Eric on his video camera that afternoon at Hog Bay Park. None of us had ever seen a Kirtland's Warbler before. It's one of those birds you dream about, hoping to be the first person to find one in Bermuda. Well Eric's dream certainly came true – a bird that would surely appear in Bermuda one day was now displayed in magnificent detail on the screen.

Why such an exceptional find? Kirtland's Warblers are the rarest breeding warbler in North America. The world population of about 1,200 pairs breeds in Jack Pines in a small area of forestry plantation in Michigan. The birds migrate to their only known wintering grounds in the Bahamas – where they are extremely difficult to find.

Needless to say, plans were made to meet in Hog Bay Park car park at dawn in the hope of seeing this new species for Bermuda. We searched amongst the bushes on the coastline of the park where it had been seen the day before. After about 15 minutes the bird was first heard calling before it duly appeared and performed in front of ten admiring birders. Although it was seen later in the day – it has not been seen since. *(Photo from Eric Amos video)*

## Christmas Bird Count

### Andrew Dobson

On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December, 18 members of the Society carried out the 30<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Most were out from dawn to dusk counting every bird they could find on the island. Results of the count were entered directly into a data base on the National Audubon Society's website in the US, which collates all the results for the Americas, something they have been doing for 105 years since the first count.

The purpose of the count is to look at the health of bird populations and to determine whether there are any long-term trends with particular species. The count may well provide evidence of the effects on bird populations of global warming and habitat loss. In Bermuda, we average about 8,000 birds of about 90 species. There are many more

birds on the island, but the observers walk similar routes each year covering as much of the island as they can in the time available.

This year we managed 7075 birds of 92 species (with a further six species in count week). The total number of birds was down on recent years, due in no small part to the successful culling of feral pigeons which are posing a serious threat to longtail nesting, not to mention the problems they cause to farmers. The weather was windy and wet at times, but the variety of species seen was impressive. Had the count not taken place on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Kirtland Warbler would probably never have been found – one of 20 warbler species, including a rarely seen Townsend's Warbler in count week. Two hummingbirds were seen (probable Ruby-throated) at Port Royal GC and Orange Valley. Also unseasonal were Tree and Barn Swallows at East End Farm. A Dickcissel on the Talbot Estate was a good sighting. If a similar count was carried out every weekend – just imagine what would be found!

Results of the Bermuda CBC are available to everyone at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc)

## Bird Report December 2004 to February 2005

Andrew Dobson



The winter season began quietly, but as the weather worsened into January and early February, with cool temperatures and high winds, the birding got much better! The 45.8°F on 24 Jan was the lowest for about 50 years. Highlights of the period included the first record of Kirtland's Warbler in Bermuda, the second record of American White Pelican, the third and fourth records of Rough-legged Hawk, a Sabine's Gull and two Horned Grebes.

### Grebes to Hawks

Two **Horned Grebes** were in Castle Harbour 6 Feb (IF, PW). Three **American White Pelicans** flew along South Shore near Spittal Pond, crossing the island to North Shore on 2 Jan (HD, DS). There is only one previous record for this species in Bermuda. A **Great Cormorant** was in the Great Sound 5 Feb (IF, PW). **American Bitterns** have been seen regularly at Paget Marsh and Seymour's Pond. An immature **Snow Goose** appeared on Warwick Academy sports field 18 Dec (JH), while a **Canada Goose** briefly appeared at Southampton Princess Pond 23 (AD). Single **Eurasian Teal** males were first noted on Southampton Princess Pond 23 Jan (AD, PH) and Parsons Road Pond 30 Jan (TW). Five wintering **Common Goldeneye** is a new record count, with three at Spittal Pond from 26 Jan (DW) and two more at Mangrove Lake from 1 Feb (DW) Feb including an adult male. Birds of prey have included **Osprey**, the long-staying **Red-tailed Hawks**, **Northern Harrier** (2), **American Kestrel** and **Merlin**. But the arrival of two **Rough-**



**legged Hawks** at the airport 26 Jan (DH, PHol) and 1 Feb (DH) is quite exceptional as there are only two previous records for this species in Bermuda.

### **Shorebirds to Terns**

Of the less common wintering shorebirds, single **Greater** and **Lesser Yellowlegs** have been seen, as well as a **Red Knot** 18 Dec at Spanish Point (BL, JT). An **American Avocet** at Ocean View GC 21 Jan (RL) was the first winter arrival for this species and a rare Bermuda record. A first-winter **Black-headed Gull** was in Hamilton Harbour 26 Dec (IF, PW). A high count of up to 30 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** this winter was noteworthy, but the unusual gulls arrived during the storms of late Jan/early Feb. An **Iceland Gull** was seen at Coney Island 27 Jan (PW) and by the first week of Feb had been joined by two more Iceland Gulls and **Glaucous Gulls** (2) at various locations (IF, PW). A real find was an adult **Sabine's Gull** off Cooper's Point 3 Feb (IF, PW). A **Black-legged Kittiwake** passed Cooper's Point 6 Feb (AD, IF et al) while an adult came inshore 7 Feb (IF, DW). A **Forster's Tern** has wintered at Dockyard.

### **Owls to Redpoll**

A **Long-eared Owl** was reported from Hog Bay Park 5 Feb (LH), while a **Short-eared Owl** was seen at the airport 13 Jan (DH). Hummingbird species, most likely **Ruby-throated** were seen 18 Dec at Port Royal GC (EA) and Orange Valley Road (BL), 9 Jan near Astwood Park (TW), and 31 Jan Lighthouse Hill (PT). A **Northern Flicker** was on Port Royal GC 3 Jan (AD). An **Eastern Phoebe** was seen at Compston's Pond 18 Dec (DBW), with a second at Wreck Road 2 Jan (WF). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** was a rare winter record at Morgan's Point 1 Jan (AD, PW). A **Blue-headed Vireo** was seen in Devonshire Marsh 20 Dec (JM). **Horned Larks** (3) were discovered at the airport 25 Jan (DH). **Tree Swallow** (2) and **Barn Swallow** were both recorded 18 Dec at East End Dairy (PW). At least one **Hermit Thrush** wintered at Hog Bay Park. Six **American Robins** were at Morgan's Point 1 Jan (AD, PW). A **Northern Mockingbird** was banded at the Biological Station in early Dec. A late **Yellow Warbler** was seen at Waterville 1 Dec (DW). A **Townsend's Warbler** was at Orange Valley Road 19 Dec (BL). A **Kirtland's Warbler** was found on the CBC 18 Dec (EA) – see separate article. A **Swainson's Warbler** was seen 16 Jan at Ocean View GC (AD, TW). Wintering sparrows included a **Grasshopper Sparrow** at Lover's Lake (DW). **Dark-eyed Juncos** have wintered at Port Royal and Mid-Ocean GC. **Snow Buntings** (2) have wintered on the Castle Harbour Islands (JM). A **Dickcissel** was recorded 18 Dec at Talbot Estate (EA). A **Common Redpoll** was at Cooper's Island 5 Feb (IF).

Observers: Eric Amos, Heather DeSilva, Andrew Dobson, Ian Fisher, Wendy Frith, Linda Hartley, Junior Hill, Peter Holmes (PHol), Peter Hopkin (PH), Ray Latter, Bruce Lorhan, Jeremy Madeiros, David Smith, James Tatem, Peggy Thompson, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, Tim Wershler, David Wingate (DBW).

## **Society News**

## **Natural History Documentary Film**

As you will have read in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary magazine, the Society is thrilled to be partnering with Castletown Productions in the making of 'Bermuda's Treasure Island' the remarkable story of Nonsuch Island and the Cahow. Included in the story will be the re-introduction of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, the translocation of the endemic White-eyed Vireo, challenges facing the tropicbird, and the 45 years of the Cahow conservation project. The producer, Deirdre Brennan, has spent the last four years preparing the documentary. The purpose of the film is to education, both at home and abroad. It will show people that they can make a difference in the world (as David Wingate and Jeremy Madeiros have) and create an international awareness to a uniquely Bermudian story. As members and friends of the Society, you have the opportunity to financially support this project and be associated with Eamon de Buitlear, the acclaimed Irish wildlife filmmaker

Eamon has been called the 'David Attenborough' of Ireland, filming and producing wildlife documentaries for over forty years for world-wide audiences. Filming is well underway and we have already raised 50% of the required financing. The Society would like to thank those businesses that have already agreed to become sponsors for the documentary - American International Group, Butterfield and Vallis (Barbour Holdings), Capital G, ChevronTexaco International, Dept. of Conservation Services, Goslings Ltd, Ministry of the Environment, Orbis Investment Management, Platinum Underwriters Ltd., and Starr International Charitable Trust.

Now it is our opportunity! There are many different levels of support: details are available through the Society, or simply feel free to make a donation. I hope that you consider being a part of this project for Audubon's special year.

Contact the Society at [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) for more information or send donations to 'Bermuda Audubon Society' P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX.

## **Buy Back Bermuda Campaign**

This campaign has really caught the public's attention and support. Many thanks to all those of you who have so generously contributed. More than half of the funds are already in the bank and the Society is working hard with the Bermuda National Trust to raise the remaining amount. Your contributions can be sent to: 'Buy Back Bermuda' P.O. Box HM 61, Hamilton HM AX.

## **Longtail igloos**

Longtails will be arriving back in Bermuda very soon. The Society has prepared a number of nesting igloos ready for installation if you have the right cliff habitat. Please email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) or call Audubon's number 292-1920 for more information

## **Bluebird nest boxes**

This is the time of the year to start thinking about making your own box or cleaning out last year's box. Why not come to the Bluebird Workshop at Government House on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March? Bring your own hammer!

## **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Magazine**

The magazines have proved to be very popular. Many people have asked where they can get additional copies. They are on sale for \$5.00 at many locations including Bermuda Bookstore, Washington Mall Magazines, the Phoenix Store, Botanical Gardens, BAMZ giftshop, St. Georges stores and Lindos in Warwick. Make sure you get a copy before they sell out.