



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER Summer 2009

P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.20 No.1

www.audubon.bm Email: info@audubon.bm

In this issue:

- Cahow breeding success on Nonsuch Island *Andrew Dobson*
- Christmas Bird Count 08-09 *Andrew Dobson*
- Bird Report late Dec 08 to May 09 *Andrew Dobson*
- Society News *Karen Border and Andrew Dobson*
- Future events

First Cahow hatches on Nonsuch Island for nearly 400 years

Andrew Dobson



Bad weather and other work commitments prevented Government Conservation Officer, Jeremy Madeiros from going out to Nonsuch 20-22 March, but when he landed on 23 March, he was surprised but thrilled to discover that the only egg being incubated had hatched. He determined that the chick had obviously received adult feeding visits as it was already well past a normal hatching weight. Its eyes were just opened so he judged it to be 2 or 3 days old. This was a momentous occasion in the Cahow recovery programme. The breeding grounds of the Cahow were re-discovered in 1951, with the Cahow critically endangered. David Wingate

commenced the recovery programme in 1960 and witnessed a slow and steady increase in number until his retirement in 2000. Jeremy has been involved with the project since 1984 and took over from David in 2000. He initiated the latest phase of the recovery programme, translocating 105 chicks between 2004-2008 from sub-optimal breeding islands to Nonsuch. All but three of them successfully fledged to sea. These birds are now returning to Nonsuch to establish a new breeding site. One pair produced the first Cahow to hatch on Nonsuch Island since about 1620. *Photo shows Jeremy Madeiros with 'Somers'.*

BirdLife International's latest evaluation of the world's birds has revealed that more species than ever are threatened with extinction. A staggering 1,227 species (12%) are

now classified as Globally Threatened but the good news is that when conservation action is put in place, species can be saved. But it's not only rare birds that are becoming rarer, common birds are becoming less common. In eastern North America, Chimney Swift (a regular visitor to Bermuda) is fast disappearing from the skies. Following continent-wide declines of nearly 30% in the last decade alone, this common species has been uplisted to Near Threatened. "In global terms, things continue to get worse – but there are some real conservation success stories this year to give us hope and point the way forward", said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife's Director of Science and Policy. The Cahow can give Bermuda and the rest of the world some hope.

Christmas Bird Count

Andrew Dobson

In conjunction with National Audubon in the States, the Bermuda Audubon Society held its 34th CBC on 27th December 2008. Features of this year's count included:

- 7,483 individual birds were counted (very similar to last year's total)
- 96 species of birds (95 in 2007 and 100 in 2006)
- One new species for count day
- European Starling was the most common species (20% of the count)
- Nearly 250 species have now been record on the CBC in Bermuda since 1975

Nineteen members of the Society counted every bird from dawn to dusk as well as adding any additional species seen during the week. Considerable effort went into planning the count, with the observers dividing the island up into nine areas. Completing much of the census on foot, observers also used car, bike, boat and golf carts! Some unusual species were seen this year. The Ross's Goose was the one new species for Bermuda's count, which had been in Bermuda for some weeks. In fact it was a good count for wildfowl species with three species of geese and 15 duck species. Spittal Pond hosted a record 20 Hooded Mergansers, while Mangrove Lake had record flocks of Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup. Two globally endangered Piping Plovers were recorded – a small shorebird which occasionally winters in Bermuda. The similar sized Semipalmated Plover was another record breaker with a flock of 10 birds at Spanish Point. However, about 50% of all birds recorded were starlings, kiskadees or sparrows – all invasive species which shouldn't really be in Bermuda and they have certainly had an impact on our local birds. The low numbers of migrant warblers continues a depressing downward trend in the population of these species. It is a reflection of loss of habitat in summer (breeding grounds) and wintering areas and in some cases the effects of global warming. Citizen Science is a way for people to connect with the natural world through fun activities that generate vital information for the conservation of birds. This partnership benefits us all: observers learn about birds by taking part in these science-based activities, and National Audubon's science staff gain invaluable information. Most importantly, the birds benefit because it helps Audubon focus on those birds and habitats that need our help most.

CBC results will be available as they are entered onto the National Audubon website www.audubon.org/bird/cbc

Bird Report late Dec 2008 to May 2009

Andrew Dobson

The highlight of the report is the hatching of the first Cahow on Nonsuch Island since about 1620. The hatching took place about 21 Mar. Notable bird sightings include the second record of Common Greenshank (an Old World shorebird) and a spring Horned Lark.



This year not only produced the first **Cahow** chick on Nonsuch Island since the early 17th century, but it promises to be another record year with about 90 breeding pairs and 47 confirmed chicks to date. Shearwater migration started 27 Feb with one **Cory's** and 3 **Manx** off Watch Hill Park (AD). An imm. **Brown Booby** and a **Northern Gannet** were off Daniel's Head 24 Dec (PW). The gannet was seen various locations to 28 Feb (EA, AD). A **Brown Pelican** was at various locations 10-14 Apr (JF), *photo Andrew Dobson*. An imm. **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was at Spittal Pond 24 Oct-23 Feb (PW). A **White Ibis** was at Spittal Pond 31 Jan-21 Feb (KR). Five **Snow Geese** wintered and two were present until 10 Apr at Port Royal GC (AD). The island's first **Ross's Goose** was present at Belmont GC to 7 May (AD). Two **Canada Goose** wintered and one was present at Belmont GC 14 May (DBW). Six **Wood Ducks** were at Port Royal GC 26 Nov-2 Jan (DW). The long-staying male **Eurasian Wigeon** was present to at least 18 Jan in Harrington Sound (AD). A female **American Wigeon** was on North Pond 28 Apr (DBW). A drake **Northern Shoveler** was at Spittal Pond 23-25 May (DBW). Wintering **Northern Pintail** peaked six at Spittal Pond 2 Feb (EA). Record flocks of **Ring-necked Duck** (19) and **Lesser Scaup** (23) wintered at Mangrove Lake (AD). Two **Buffleheads** wintered at various locations (DW). A record 21 **Hooded Merganser** were



seen at various locations Jan-Mar (DW). A **Common Merganser** was at Mangrove Lake 27 Dec-1 Mar (PA). A male **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was over Port's Is. 24 Dec (PW). The long-staying **Red-tailed Hawks** were present to at least 21 May (DBW). One **American Golden-Plover** was with Black-bellied Plover at the airport 27 Dec-18 Jan (DBW). A record 10 **Semiplumbed Plovers** were at Spanish Point 27 Dec (AD). Two **Piping Plovers** wintered in Bermuda, at Ariel Sands and Cooper's Island. (AD). A **Black-necked Stilt** was at Spittal Pond 4-12 Apr (KR). A **Common Greenshank** was discovered at Spittal Pond 23-28 May (DBW), *photo Andrew Dobson*. This is the only Bermuda record other than a single-observer sight record in 1960. One **Lesser Yellowlegs** was present at Spittal Pond to at

least 7 Mar (AD). A **Eurasian Whimbrel** was on Stocks Harbour mudflat 11-12 Mar (EA). A flock of 19 **Sanderling** wintered. (AD). Two **Short-billed Dowitchers** remained at Port Royal GC until 27 Dec (EA). Single **Pomarine Jaegers** were seen at Challenger Banks 26 Apr and 3 May (AD, PH). A **Laughing Gull** was at Dockyard 19 May (DBW). Wintering **Black-headed Gulls** peaked at 7 in the Great Sound 5 Jan (PW). One was present to at least 23 Mar (JM). An **Iceland Gull** was present in the East End 3- 30 Mar (AD). A dying **Black-legged Kittiwake** was taken to BAMZ 3 Mar (DBW). A **Royal Tern** was in Castle Harbour 14-21 Apr (JM). Five **Arctic Terns** were off the west end of Bermuda 3 May (AD, DBW). A **Forster's Tern** was seen 1-5 Jan in the Great Sound (AD). A moribund **Atlantic Puffin** was found on Nonsuch Is beach 24 Feb (JF). A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was at East End dairy 11 Apr (PW). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at the Airport 27 Dec (DBW). A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was seen in Botanical Gardens 2 Jan (AD, FD), while another visited a Southdown Farm garden 11 Mar-15 Apr (SI), *photo Andrew Dobson*. A **Northern Flicker** was seen at Morgan's Point 8 Mar (AD, DW). A **Western Kingbird** was seen at Lover's Lake 18 Jan (DW). Single **Eastern Kingbirds** were at the airport 12 Apr (PW) and Jenningsland 17 Apr (JM). Two **Red-**



eyed Vireos were at Clearwater 19 Apr (PW). A **Horned Lark** was at Commissioner's House, Dockyard 8-19 May (RG), *photo Andrew Dobson*. A late flock of 16 **Tree Swallows** was at the East End dairy 10 Dec (DO) with at least 20 remaining into Mar (AD). Two **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were at Cloverdale 2 Jan and various locations to 28 Feb (DW). A **Golden-crowned Kinglet** was on Morgan's Point 27 Dec (EA).

Single **Wood Thrushes** were seen at Ferry Point Park 18 Jan (AD, DW) and Wreck Road mangroves 29 Jan (AD). A **Summer Tanager** remained at Jenningsland 14 Dec-4 Feb (JM). A **Scarlet Tanager** was at Paget Marsh 25 Apr (RGr). A flock of 18 **Snow Buntings** was present at the Airport 27 Dec-18 Jan (DBW). Two **Blue Grosbeaks** were on St. George's GC 24 Apr (PW) and another at Cooper's Is 26 Apr (DBW). A **Dickcissel** was seen at Boaz Is 4 Jan (PH) and a **Bobolink** was at the same location 26 Dec (PH). A **Red-winged Blackbird** was in Mills Creek/Point Shares area 19 Feb-9 Apr (JT). Two **Common Redpolls** were at Spittal Pond 10 Feb (PW, KR, SB).

Observers: Observers: Peter Adhemar, Eric Amos, Stephen Barton, Andrew Dobson, Fiona Dobson, Joe Furbert, Richard Ground (RGr), Richard Gozney, Peter Hopkin, Stanley Ingham, Jeremy Madeiros, David O'Neill, Keith Rossiter, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW).

Society News

Karen Border and Andrew Dobson

The Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival

The Society was pleased to be taking part in the festival celebrating birds – particularly birds in culture – during April and May. Organised through the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, much of our focus was on our Eastern Bluebirds this year, but the arrival of ‘Somers’ gave us the opportunity to publicise our only true endemic, the Cahow or Bermuda Petrel. Many of the other activities are reported in the following accounts.

Bird identification competition in the Royal Gazette



The Society was thrilled to be able to partner with the Royal Gazette newspaper and run a competition for primary school students on our local birds. Pictured with the paper's Green Pages' Sales and Marketing Coordinator, Carlene Spencer-Darrell (far left) the winners included Mikhail Nisbett, 6, from Sycamore Tree Home School, Malaysia Burt, 5, from Bermuda Institute and Alison Lamb, 10, from BHS seated next to Andrew Dobson from the Bermuda Audubon Society. Prizes included a Bluebird box, birdfeeder, field guides and Audubon Society paraphernalia. Our thanks goes to Tricia Walters at the Royal Gazette for such a successful competition.



“Oceania to Suburbia” lecture marks 400th anniversary

One of the Society's contributions to the island's 400th anniversary celebrations was to host a lecture by Dr. David Wingate on Earth Day, 22 April: “From Oceania to Suburbia: 400 Years of Dramatic Change for Bermuda's Bird Community”. Speaking to a packed lecture hall at BUEI, David drew on eye-witness accounts of settlers, amateur naturalists and scientists over the centuries to trace the ornithological history of the island. The lecture was sponsored by PartnerRe and attended by our patron, Sir Richard Gozney and Lady Gozney; our honorary patron Lady Vereker; Minister of the Environment Mr Glenn Blakeney, and Permanent Secretary for the Environment Mrs Ellen-Kate Horton.

Bluebird nest box workshop at Government House



The Society held its annually nest box workshop at Government House in March and the 50 boxes were constructed in what seemed like record time! People of all ages turned up to make a box for their garden and it was good to see so many families attending.

Bluebird education

Three local primary schools enjoyed our Bluebird Powerpoint presentation in May. David Saul and Karen Border spoke to two groups of Primary One students at Saltus Cavendish, and Alana Tucker took the presentation to St. George's Prep and Somerset Primary. As usual, the children were very interested in learning about the threats to Bluebirds on the island and how nest boxes can help.

Annual Nest box competition winner



The winner of this year's bluebird nest box competition at Bermuda's Annual Show was Mount St. Agnes student Kip Malpas. The standard of entries was very good, and Kip's design was most appropriate for Bermuda's 400th anniversary (see photo). He will keep a special Audubon nest box trophy for the next year.

Collaborative effort means everyone wins - especially Bluebirds

Bermuda Audubon Society once again participated in the PartnerRe Dollars for Hours scheme this year, teaming up with students from Berkeley Institute to make Bluebird nest boxes. PartnerRe financed the materials for the project and the students put in hours of effort to make the boxes, supervised by Audubon volunteers. In return, Berkeley receives \$30,000 from PartnerRe to support educational programmes. The 50 boxes made were then painted by the Bermuda Boys Brigade as part of their community service badge work, and sold to the Bermuda Society of Arts. BSoA recruited local artists to paint the boxes, which were exhibited at the City Hall culminating with an auction on 15 May. Audubon's new educational panel on Bluebirds was on display during the exhibition and auction. Audubon is also grateful to Warwick Academy, where students have been making nest boxes in their design & technology classes.

Buy Back Bermuda

Buy Back Bermuda – a joint initiative between Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda National Trust – has reached its fundraising goal for the Round 2 Campaign to acquire two areas of open space, at Skroggins Hill in Southampton and the site of the former Eve's Pond near Shelly Bay. Round 2 was launched in October 2007 to acquire the land, which totals 11 acres. The Skroggins Hill property was in fact donated to Buy Back

Bermuda by Sharon Vesey last year. The \$2 million required for the purchase of Eve's Pond and restoration of both properties as nature reserves, has been raised by contributions from individuals, organizations and Government. Work is already underway at the Vesey Nature Reserve, Skroggins Hill, but the properties will not be ready for public opening until next year.

Bermuda Society of Arts -Audubon Auction



What a great evening! With 50 bluebird boxes painted by local artists – the creativity had to seem to be believed. Some displayed great humour with prowling cats or young birds asking to be fed. The expertly drawn 'surfer dude' provided the purchaser the opportunity to colour their own box!



Audubon-Masterworks Bird Collection



The Society was very pleased to accept another wood-carved bird from Larry Weston – a White-eyed Vireo to add to the Eastern Bluebird and European Goldfinch. We are not only grateful to the generosity of Larry, but also to the Masterworks Gallery who have agreed to house the collection.

Future Events

Annual General Meeting – 3 June 2009

You are cordially invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Bermuda Audubon Society to be held at 6pm on Wednesday 3rd June at Government House. The agenda for the meeting will include:

- President's Report
- Treasurer's Report
- Election of Officers and Members of the Committee of Management.

We are always keen to have enthusiastic new members on the Committee of Management, so if you would like to put yourself forward for election, or to nominate someone, please contact the Secretary, Karen Border on 238-8628 or email info@audubon.bm.

Government House security requires the names of those attending the AGM, so if you plan to come please RSVP to Karen Border on 238-8628, or email info@audubon.bm.

Nonsuch Island Fieldtrip 27 June 2009

For reservations and details, please contact Karen Border on 238-8628

Paget Island Bird Camp 2-4 October 2009

For reservations and details, please contact Karen Border on 238-8628