



THE STORY OF THE CAHOW: BERMUDA'S NATIONAL BIRD

When the Sea Venture was wrecked on Bermuda in 1609, the survivors discovered many thousands of seabirds living here. These seabirds were unique to Bermuda and they called them Cahows because of the sound they made. When the first settlers arrived in 1612, they found the Cahows were very easy to catch and good to eat. Within 20 years, the settlers along with the rats and cats that came to Bermuda with them, had killed every Cahow they could find.

For 300 years the Cahow was thought to be extinct. But a very few had survived on some tiny islands off the east end of Bermuda and in 1951 they were rediscovered. An intensive conservation programme to increase their numbers was started by Dr. David Wingate in 1959 and has been continued by Jeremy Madeiros since 2000. This has enabled the Cahow to recover from only 18 breeding pairs to 108 pairs in 2014.

Cahows spend most of their lives living out on the ocean, where they eat squid and small fish, and only return to land to breed. They visit their breeding islands at night, so few people ever see them. They nest in burrows under the ground and only lay one egg each year.

Cahows return to the island from which they first flew out to sea. In recent years a number of chicks were moved to burrows on Nonsuch Island Nature Reserve before they were ready to fledge, in a process call 'translocation'. Some of those chicks are now mature and have returned to Nonsuch Island to breed themselves. Nonsuch Island is much larger than the small islands on which the species survived for so many years. The burrows are better protected from hurricanes and there is much greater potential for a large and secure colony to ensure the long-term survival of the species.

For more information visit www.audubon.bm or www.conservation.bm/bermuda-petrel-cahow/