

## Bermuda Audubon Society Newsletter Fall 2003 Vol.14 No.3

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# Hurricane Fabian

Andrew Dobson



September 5<sup>th</sup> 2003 will be imprinted on many people's minds for years to come. For those of us who were on the island at the time, we all have our own unique experiences and stories to tell. Hurricane Fabian, a category 3 hurricane with sustained winds of 100-120 mph and gusts to over 150 mph was one of the worst storms in 100 years. Thankfully our house had minimal damage. We lost a sizable garden wall and plaster came down inside the house. Much of the garden vegetation was shredded – but a poinciana and cedar tree remain standing. Two large sections of corrugated metal roof and beams from a nearby stable were embedded in the garden which shows why one should never venture out in a hurricane. Had we not been in the house, the front door would have blown in causing unimaginable damage – but we barricaded it during the storm. Without tapping the barometer needle – I actually watched it falling! All pretty scary. Bermuda took a battering. Hundreds of houses had roof damage and many lost homes altogether. Tragically there were four fatalities when cars were swept off the causeway. The Causeway – the link to the airport, was predictably breached in at least two places. The airport itself was badly damaged and flights were cancelled for several days. Cruise ships made an early exit and delayed their return. Several hotels are shut for extensive repairs – including the large Southampton Princess and Sonesta Beach. Thousands of trees are down – power remained out for many homes for more than two weeks. No power means no water, as homes rely on water pumps – so it has been a matter of 'dipping the tank'. Large numbers of waterfront properties have been trashed and the number of boats on the rocks or submerged is phenomenal. The start of the school year was delayed a week and St. George's Prep School will have to be re-built. The clean-up and restoration of services has gone extremely well. The regiment was mobilized and

additional help for power restoration came with a number of Caribbean workers flying in.

Plants eventually recover, property can be re-built, but lost for ever is a massive amount of South Shore coastline. More than just cliff collapse – for those of you who know Bermuda: the Natural Arches have gone; half of Gurnet Rock collapsed into the sea; Nonsuch Island has been divided into two at the former saltwater pond, Horseshoe Beach has been eroded back and the dune that divided the bay from ‘Baby Beach’ has gone!

And so to the bird life – no massive fall-out of birds as the hurricane eye passed a matter of one or two miles to our west. The resident birds that must have an instinct to hunker down during big storms, were much in evidence the following morning – especially bluebirds. Migrating birds arrived in the days following the storm – either displaced by Fabian or delayed by the storm on their way south. Lots of shorebirds, swallows and a noticeable arrival of warblers. Sad however to see so many nature reserves trashed – Spittal Pond nature reserve is scoured and casuarina trees were hurled into the pond. The mangroves at Tom Moores Tavern are a pathetic sight – full of every type of trash imaginable. Astwood Park has lost more than half of its trees – the Arboretum and Botanical Gardens are a sorry sight too.

Fabian is widely regarded as one of the worst hurricanes to hit Bermuda – made worse by rising sea-levels. I imagine we are going to be in for a tough time over the next six months with a lack of tourists and continuing restoration. So what can Audubon members do? There are plenty of opportunities to get involved in trash clean-ups. Trees need to be replaced – please read Lisa Greene’s excellent advice in this newsletter. Bluebirds will need nestboxes for next year – so why not consider making some over the winter (please note our workshop in December). Longtails have lost nest sites due to cliff collapse. If you think you have a suitable nest site for longtails – consider an artificial ‘igloo’ or create a suitable hole in your cliff or sea wall. For more advice, contact [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)

*Photos above show: Partial collapse of St. George’s Prep School; South Road, Smith’s; and destroyed seawall on Boaz Island. (Photos by Andrew Dobson)*

## **Re-planting After Fabian**

**Lisa Greene**

Bermuda, post-Fabian, certainly looks a lot browner from all the wind and salt-burned foliage, but not all is brown. Take a look at the hillside below Brighton Nursery from South Shore Road. The green cedars stand out visually like trees in an oasis. The same can be said of the palmettos on Glebe Hill, south of the Harrington Sound post office. I’m sure there are other examples to be seen throughout the island. The lesson to be learned is that native and endemic plants withstand severe weather, in most cases. They can be used in our gardens and public lands to provide a buffer that protects the more

ornamental plants we have come to love in our gardens since the cedar scale epidemic in the 1940s and '50s.

Dr. David Wingate, former Government Conservation Officer, who began the restoration of Nonsuch Island using natives and endemic, feels strongly that certain plants should never be planted. First on his list is casuarina, followed by Indian Laurel, Brazil pepper and fiddlewood. Instead, Dr. Wingate recommends that, in our increasingly urban island, cedars, palmettos and olivewood should be planted, not just in parks and large properties, but also on boundaries of smaller properties. These trees grow in scale with the Bermuda landscape, are hardy, and don't shed on roofs.

**Palmettos** should be planted eight to ten feet apart and can be planted as a hedgerow or as a group of three or more. **Olivewood** will grow naturally as a hedge if planted in a row, growing into a hedgerow with time. Plant eight to ten feet apart. They can be kept as a hedge by trimming but do not make as good a hedge as some other plants. If you want olivewood to develop into a tree, plant them fifteen to twenty feet apart. **Cedars** need bigger spaces than palmettos and olivewood and should be planted between twenty to twenty-five feet apart.

Some natives to consider:

- **Buttonwood** is great for coastal properties.
- **Forestiera** is small and good for birds.
- **Jamaica dogwood** is quick-growing and pretty.
- **Wax myrtle** is a bush and is excellent for birds.
- **Snowberry** is a sprawling bush or vine, good for planting under trees.
- **Hackberry**, a tree, loses its leaves in the winter letting the sun through but providing shade in the summer. When faced with a storm it will lose its leaves rather than blow down. A negative is that its roots produce suckers that can interfere with flower and vegetable gardens, but in a lawn that is mowed regularly the suckers are not a problem.

Dr. Wingate cautions that our native and endemics will need five to six years before they can compete with invasives which grow much more quickly. The gardener must "bite the bullet" and be prepared for intense pre-cleaning and aftercare of the site. The rewards will be worth it though when you see your ornamental garden protected by these hardy Bermudian plants.

## First Record of White-winged Dove in Bermuda

Andrew Dobson



An email awaited me at work on the 18<sup>th</sup> June from Audubon member Gerry Ardis. He reported an unusual orange and black bird. From his excellent description it was probably an escaped cage-bird (Bishop?),

which was understandably absent from his field guide. Just to make sure, I decided to drive over to St. David's in the afternoon. I met Gerry and searched the local gardens to no avail. Passing the Chapel-of-Ease Church, a dove flew across in front of me – not a Mourning Dove – but quite obviously a White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*).

Thankfully the bird alighted on the overhead cable running along Chapel-of-ease Lane. From about 20 metres I was able to obtain excellent views. The bird remained for 5 minutes before flying strongly downhill and out of view. It gave me plenty of time to note all the main features of the bird. *Size: About the same as a Mourning Dove (Zenaida macroura), but not as slender. Plumage: Grey-brown. Most striking feature was the narrow white stripe along the edge of the folded wing. Dark wing tips. No spotting on lower back (unlike Z. macroura) Head: Blue around the red eye was very obvious. Short black streak on face below the cheek. Legs: Red. Tail: In flight, white-edge and square (unlike pointed diamond of Z. macroura) Upper-wing: In flight, striking white upper-wing patch in centre of wing, angled outwards from the hind-wing to the fore-wing. Black primaries.* I'm not sure that Gerry could understand my excitement of our having found a new species of bird for Bermuda, having failed to find his mystery bird!

**(Photo: White-winged Dove at St.Davids – Andrew Dobson)**



The bird was found at a bird feeder in Chapel-of-Ease Lane on 21 June to the relief of four local birders (see photo) – one of the largest 'twitches' for a rare bird in recent months. The White-winged Dove (*Z. asiatica*) was feeding on the ground on spilt birdseed, with Mourning Doves and House Sparrows. There was also a Ringed Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia risoria*) at the feeder, a bird that has been present in the area for about six years. The group of birders then discovered the mystery bird,

confirmed as an Orange Bishop (*Euplectes francisanus*). The White-winged Dove was last seen by David Wingate at 9.10 am on 22 June 2003 when it flew off. According to DW, the White-winged Dove has long been on the list of expected additions to the Bermuda bird list as it has wandered widely in North America. It is also expanding its range eastwards through the West Indies.

White-winged Dove is resident in the extreme southwestern USA, southern Texas and through Central America. It is also found in the southern Bahamas and Greater Antilles. It was introduced into Florida. Vagrant birds have found their way inland, but have favoured the coast from Florida to Newfoundland. The *meloda* race is found along the Pacific coast of South America from southwestern Ecuador to northern Chile.

## SCSCB Conference in Tobago

Andrew Dobson

The 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds was held in Tobago in July 2003. The theme for the meeting was “*BIRDS - WINGED*



*AMBASSADORS FOR CARIBBEAN CONSERVATION*” Both Jeremy Madeiros and Andrew Dobson attended the conference and are grateful for the financial support in attending the conference from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK). Jeremy (photo left) updated the conference on the Cahow programme while Andrew spoke on the effects of invasive species of fauna and

flora in Bermuda. (The kiskadee was after all introduced from Trinidad!) Both powerpoint presentations were well received.

The Society has already accepted the offer of the Government of Guadeloupe to host the next meeting in 2005. Before then, the Society will begin to implement the strategic work plan finalized by the Directors in Tobago. The initial way forward is by the formation of several working groups focused on various groups of birds, thereby working towards preservation of critical habitat areas around the region.

**The West Indian Whistling Duck Working Group**, headed by Lisa Sorenson and Patricia Bradley with much active support from many island groups in the Region, has already been in action for several years. Focusing on wetlands in general, the WIWD is identified as the key species for this project. So far the group has held many workshops to train teachers, both in Spanish and English, a colouring book, puppet show and teacher’s resource book have been written, produced and distributed around the region in both Spanish and English. This Group’s achievements are a model for newer groups being formed by the Society.

The next up-and-coming success group is the **Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival Group**, led by Adrienne Tossas from Puerto Rico. Now approaching its third festival, the CEBF runs annually from Earth Day, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, to Bio-Diversity Day, 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Each island nation is encouraged to focus on their own endemic birds and also their local birds that occur within the Greater Caribbean Region (including Bermuda). Bermuda has taken part in this promotion of avian awareness in the past and Andrew looks forward to coordinating events in 2004.

Several more working groups are in embryo form, some just convened at the Tobago meeting last month. They include waterbirds, a new Caribbean Parrots group, White Crowned Pigeon group, Migratory Bird group, Invasive Species group, a Media group and newest of all, a Caribbean Wildlife Art group. Jeremy is already actively involved in the seabirds group. All these groups invite participation by SCSCB members. This is an excellent way to meet and work with members from other Caribbean island nations with similar interests.

The former scientific journal of the Society, *El Pittire*, will soon become the *Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* with a new editor, Dr Jerome Jackson. The Society is most grateful and indebted to Dr Jim Wiley, editor of *El Pittire* for many years of dedicated service. The listserv is open to all members of the Society. Contact Eric Carey [ecarey@bahamas.net.bs](mailto:ecarey@bahamas.net.bs) to subscribe. The website for the Society is [www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/SCSCB/index.htm/](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/SCSCB/index.htm/) or simply click on the links page on the our Society's web site where there are also details of membership.



The objectives of the SCSCB are:

- to promote the scientific study and conservation of wild birds and their habitats in the Greater Caribbean Region, including Bermuda and The Bahamas
  - to promote the sharing of information about birds occurring in the Caribbean
  - to provide a central body to address concerns, coordinate efforts and increase the ability of members and affiliated groups to study birds and promote their conservation
  - to encourage formation of groups for the study and conservation of Caribbean birds and their habitats and facilitate collaboration among these groups
- to provide technical assistance in ornithological matters to the membership and affiliated groups
  - to increase awareness and appreciation of wild birds and their habitats.

Trinidad and Tobago are at the forefront of eco-tourism in the Caribbean. Well-trained and extremely knowledgeable guides lead tours on both islands. The scenery, fauna and flora are outstanding on both islands. The fieldtrip during the conference to the seabird colonies on Little Tobago was particularly memorable. We took the opportunity of extending our stay in Trinidad by spending a few days at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, high up in Trinidad's northern mountain range. A birder's paradise, it is possible to see more than 50 species of birds without even leaving the verandah of the reserve centre. Interestingly, Dr William Beebe (famed for his bathysphere dives off Bermuda) used Simla (now part of the Asa Wright Nature Centre) from 1949 until his death there in 1962. (*Photo: Rufous-tailed Jacamar by A. Dobson*)

## **Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp**

**Louise Grenfell**



In June I had the privilege of attending Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp where 14 students were selected to camp out on Nonsuch Island for the week to learn about Bermuda's biodiversity. We were given the unique opportunity to experience a variety of Bermuda's natural habitats. During the week we carried out fieldwork, to be evaluated later in the evening. We swam in Walsingham Pond; explored Hungry Bay mangroves; had a tour of Fantasy Caves; snorkelled on the coral reefs in Castle Harbour and much more. We had the pleasure of meeting many people who gave us tours of various parts of the island and shared their knowledge with us through lectures and slides.

Students were chosen from several different schools throughout the island. We met new teens during our week-long stay and became fast friends. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and would recommend it to anyone interested in the environment. Anyone considering a career involving Bermuda's environment would greatly benefit from this camp.

*Photo shows Louise Grenfell (Bermuda High School) - recipient of the Mervyn White Memorial Shield as top student on the camp. Right is Audubon Patron, Lady Vereker. Left is Jeremy Madeiros, Government Conservation Officer (Terrestrial).*

## **Bird Report June-Sept 2003**

**Andrew Dobson**

The summer season typically produces a limited number of bird species with one or two surprises. This year was no exception, with Bermuda's first record of White-winged Dove and the discovery of Green Heron nests. The fall birding season was seriously disrupted by 'Fabian' and to a lesser extent by 'Isabel'.

### **June to July**

A record 70 pairs of Cahows raised a record 39 young (JM). An immature Masked Booby was videoed accompanying the Bermuda Biological Station's research vessel during three offshore trips just south of Bermuda in July (JC). Green Heron was first proved breeding in 2002. Two surveys on 27 and 29 July revealed a total of 20 adults and 10 active or vacant nests (DW). A Snow Goose that arrived in the winter continued its stay



through the summer period at Outerlea Farm (SR). A Northern Shoveler was present throughout the period at Spittal Pond, the first summering record for Bermuda (EA). The long-staying Red-tailed Hawk was last seen over Daniel's Head 13 July (PH). Two Black-necked Stilts over Kindley Field 18 June were the first of eight at various locations in Bermuda in late June/early July (PW). Three Willets were in the Great Sound 15 July (AD). First returning shorebirds, Spotted Sandpiper and Least Sandpiper, were seen at Spittal Pond 12 July (DW). A Sandwich Tern flew past Albuoy's Point 7 June (SR). A further decline in the number of breeding pairs of Common Terns was noted this year with only 18 nests counted (DW). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo (SR) at Spittal Pond 7 June was an unusual summer visitor. A White-winged Dove (AD) in St. David's 18 to 22 June was the first record for Bermuda (see separate article).



### August

A Cory's Shearwater (photo by Andrew Dobson) was released onto the open ocean 27 Aug (JM), the first of two releases after they 'crash-landed' onto a Bermuda-bound cruise ship. A probable Pacific Golden-Plover was at the Airport 26-27 Aug (PW). Photos and descriptions may help to prove only the second record for this species in Bermuda. A Baird's Sandpiper, rarely occurring in Bermuda, was at the National Sports Stadium 27 Aug (AD, PJH). A Bobolink near Clearwater 27 Sept was one of the earliest

ever fall records (AD, PS).

### September

Hurricane Fabian (5 Sept) failed to provide a fall-out of birds, as the eye passed a few miles to our west. Isabel followed shortly after and blocked any significant arrival of migrants as high pressure developed over Bermuda for most of September with an easterly airstream. About 12 Chimney Swift were seen in Somerset as Fabian strengthened about mid-day on 5 Sept (WF). Shorebirds arrived on 7 Sept especially on flooded areas like Cloverdale, where 12 species were present. A Buff-breasted Sandpiper was at the Airport 21 Sept (AD). A Wilson's Phalarope joined a variety of shorebird species at Jubilee Road 21 Sept (SR). A Great Crested Flycatcher was at East End Dairy 8 Sept (PJH). Good numbers of swallows were present with the main concentrations at Daniel's Head Farm, Port Royal GC and over the growing vegetation dump on Pembroke Marsh. An above average number of Eastern Kingbirds arrived after Fabian, including a flock of five at Mid-Ocean GC 10 Sept (AD). Warblers have been noticeable by their absence - the worst fall in anyone's memory. Highlights included two Chestnut-sided Warblers at the A. B. Smith reserve 10 Sept (AD), a Swainson's Warbler at Port Royal GC 20 Sept (SR), and a number of Kentucky Warblers. Two Common Waxbills were seen at Paget Marsh 1 Sept (AD, PJH).



### Early October

Just when we were beginning to think the birding fall would pass us by – a rain-bearing front that arrived at the start of the month produced one of the best falls of migrants in recent years. The variety of warbler species was noteworthy, with at least 33 species recorded in the first 5 days of the month.

Highlights so far this month have included a Dunlin at East End Dairy 4 Oct (AD), a hummingbird in St. David's 5 Oct, Northern Flicker at the A. B. Smith reserve 5 Oct (EA), Grey Kingbird on St. George's GC 4 Oct (AD), Warbling and Philadelphia Vireos at both ends of the island, single Golden-winged Warblers in Salt Kettle 1 Oct (WF) and Wreck Road 2 Oct (WF). A Brewster's Warbler at Hog Bay Park 5

Oct (EA). A Cerulean Warbler 5 Oct on Tudor Hill (EA). A smattering of the rarer warbler species have included Tennessee, Blackburnian, Swainson's, Kentucky, Connecticut, Mourning, Wilson's, Canada and Yellow-breasted Chat. An immature White-crowned Sparrow was on Paget Island 3 Oct (AD).

*(Photo: Kentucky Warbler found exhausted in Somerset and released the following day- Andrew Dobson).*

**Stop Press: Bermuda's first Scissor-tailed Flycatcher found at Port Royal Golf Course 23 October (PJH, DW).**

Observers: Eric Amos, John Caines, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Peter Holmes, Peter Hopkin (PJH), Jeremy Madeiros, Steve Rodwell, Keith Rossiter, Penny Soares, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW).

## Society News

### Spittal Pond Field Trip

The Society's field trip to Spittal Pond at the end of August was a success in many ways. An early morning walk in such lovely surroundings is good in itself, before the heat of the day. We were treated to a variety of shorebirds as soon as we reached the eastern end of the pond – yellowlegs, plovers, dowitchers and five species of sandpipers including an uncommon Western Sandpiper. As well as the usual resident birds, a Belted Kingfisher flew past as we followed the edge of the pond. One of two summering Snowy Egrets performed a balletic feeding display over the center of the pond and the group had good views of a Northern Shoveler – the first of this species to spend a summer in Bermuda. Amongst the 25 members, it was particularly pleasing to have so many young children on the trip. The group was also fortunate in walking through the nature reserve before Hurricane Fabian changed the reserve forever!

### Cockroach Comment

Following the comment I made in the last newsletter concerning the naming of Cockroach Island, Audubon member Clarice Lindley wrote me the following note: "One evening in the 30's, my husband and I went boating on Harrington Sound, taking a picnic supper with us. Unfortunately our boat broke down and we drifted towards "Cockroach Island" and we could not get it going again. We became stranded and spent a most miserable night being 'attacked' by hundreds of cockroaches. Sleep was out of the question. That Island is certainly correctly named.

**Coming Soon** - **The Natural History of Bermuda** by Dr. Martin Thomas  
Published by the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo