



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER Winter 2010

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White-winged Black Tern – New to Bermuda

David Wingate



While on holiday in the Czech Republic this past summer with my daughter and family they kindly offered to help me look for some of the rarer European birds on my wish list. One of these was the beautiful White-winged Black Tern which nests in large freshwater marshes and flies to Africa for



the winter. When checking the range map in my field guide, however, I realized that the nearest breeding area was a bit beyond the range of a weekend field trip, so I missed seeing it.

Fast forward now to September 30th back on Bermuda. Hurricane Igor, originating near the Cape Verde's off Africa had just passed over Bermuda on the 19th bringing a Little Egret, presumably from Africa and I was birding the west end in company with Wendy Frith. As we crossed the Port Royal golf course to check its southwest pond I noticed a tern about the size of an American Black Tern dipping to catch top minnows in the pond in typical Black Tern fashion. But this was no Black Tern, being far too pale. Running forward for a better look we were able to get right under it at the edge of the pond and I quickly realized I was looking at the long wished for White-winged Black Tern in juvenile plumage - which proves the adage that I have long used to describe the nature of Bermuda birding: If you wait long enough everything eventually comes to you here, no matter how improbable or how far it has had to travel. (I once even recorded a species of Siberian flycatcher from the exact opposite side of the planet). In this case I suspect the bird got caught up in the swirl of Igor as it was flying down the coast of Africa. One would have thought it would stay a while after such a long trip but in typical fashion it continued on its way to God knows where after a few days. This species is not new to the New World, having been recorded several times now in Eastern

North America, so it was certainly on the list of species that I expected to occur in Bermuda sometime. But what satisfaction to be able to email my daughter so soon to tell her "never mind about my missing the White-winged Black Tern in Europe, I just got to see one here in Bermuda". (*Photos: Andrew Dobson*)

(*The tern was photographed by a non-birder on 29 Sept. and was last seen on 4 October. As well as a few records on the U.S. East Coast, there have been six records from Barbados – the latest being 9 Oct 2010. Ed.*)

Seymour's Pond Restoration Appeal Karen Border



Seymour's Pond was the very first nature reserve established by the Bermuda Audubon Society by means of a public fund-raising drive in 1963. A further strip of land on the roadside was gifted to the Society by the Masters estate in 1990, bringing its total size to 2.84 acres.

This beautiful reserve is located at the junction of Middle Road and South Road in Southampton and is highly visible for passing motor traffic. Backed by a densely wooded hillside and flanked by Government-protected farmland, the slightly brackish pond provides a rich feeding ground for many species of migratory waterfowl including ducks, herons, egrets, sandpipers and kingfishers. Moorhens, coots and pied-billed grebes have all been known to breed here.

Sadly, over the decades, Seymour Pond's effectiveness as a nature reserve has been compromised by a number of factors. The time has come for a major restoration project to restore the pond to its former healthy state and ensure that it continues to provide a prime wetland habitat for local and visiting waterfowl, as well as a beautiful and soothing view for the thousands of motorists who pass it each day on their way to and from work.

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO SAVE THE POND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS!

Why does the pond need restoring?

- Encroachment of invasive Brazil pepper bushes around the edge of the pond and the in-growth of grasses clogging the open water have reduced the pond's size by nearly half, making it less effective for waterfowl.
- The pond has become increasingly contaminated by chemicals and pollution, both from road run-off that drains into it and from pesticides and herbicides used on the adjacent farmland. This contamination has been extensively documented and monitored by Dr. Jamie Bacon and her

research team who are studying deformities in Bermuda's toad population. Seymour's Pond is one of the worst effected of the ponds in the study.

- The gradual but accelerating rise in sea level associated with global warming has already drowned part of the former farmland on the pond edge, aggravating the chemical pollution problems and forcing a redesign of the boundary between fields and pond.

What is the restoration plan?

We aim to address the problems with the pond and enhance the wetland and woodland areas of the reserve to a higher standard of management for conservation purposes. Planning permission has been granted to:

- Reinststate a part of the pond filled-in by garbage dumping in the 1930s, leaving a small islet near the north-east end as a safe nesting site for waterfowl.
- Remove the encroaching Brazil pepper and sheathed paspalum grass that are reducing the open water area.
- Excavated material will be used to re-contour the pond edge, providing a barrier between the pond and the farmland which will prevent run-off of chemicals into the wetland.

- We must raise \$75,000 to make this dream a reality!
- This is Bermuda Audubon Society's first independent capital project since the campaign to purchase Stokes Point Nature Reserve in 1980.
- Please give as generously as you can. See below for donation form.

I WOULD LIKE TO HELP RESTORE SEYMOUR'S POND

To make an online credit card donation go to www.bermudatix.bm and click on Bermuda Audubon Society. The only cost deducted will be the bank's credit card processing fee.

OR

Complete this form and return it with your cheque to:
Bermuda Audubon Society, P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX.
Cheques should be made payable to Bermuda Audubon Society.

Title and Name: _____
Postal address _____
House name/Unit #/P.O. Box: _____
Street #: _____ Street: _____
Parish/City/Town: _____ State/Province: _____
Post code/Zip code: _____
Country (if not Bermuda): _____
Email*: _____

*Help us save paper and postage by allowing us to acknowledge your gift via email.

I wish to support the Seymour's Pond Restoration Appeal with a donation of:

- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- \$200
- \$500
- Other \$ _____

For more information contact info@audubon.bm or call Karen Border on 238-8628.

THANK YOU

Bird Report July to November 2010

Andrew Dobson

June-July (Summer season)

The last **Cahow** chick departed on 27/28 June. Another record breaking season in which 93 confirmed nesting pairs produced 51 successful fledglings. Summering herons included a **Snowy Egret** and **Little Blue Heron** at Spittal Pond (AD). An adult **Spotted Sandpiper** at Saltus Island 2 Jul (PH) was the first fall shorebird. **Common Terns** had a poor breeding season due mainly to rat predation. A total of 6 pairs fledged 9 chicks (DBW). A flock of **Northern Shovelers** (20) flew over St. Georges 4 Jul (JR). A **Prairie Warbler** still singing until at least 27 June (JH) on Hinson's Island represented the latest summer record of any warbler species in Bermuda. A **Northern Waterthrush** at Tucker's Town Bay 26 Jul (JM) was the first fall warbler.

August-November (Fall season)



Hurricane Igor 19 September was the main weather event of the season, probably resulting in Bermuda's first White-winged Black Tern and fourth Little Egret. Several Magnificent Frigatebirds arrived ahead of the storm. Other highlights included the first record of a pair of Downy Woodpeckers in Bermuda (there have been very few previous sightings), the first Brown Creeper since 1992 and a record number of Red-breasted Nuthatches and Northern Mockingbirds.

A **Northern Gannet** found at Pilchard Bay 12 Nov (AN) was taken into care and released after two days. Just prior to Hurricane Igor there were three sightings

of **Magnificent Frigatebird**: Ferry Reach (PW) 17-18 Sep, Mangrove Bay (PH) and St. Davids (R&KL) 18 Sep. A Magnificent Frigatebird was also over Harrington Sound 20-21 Oct (AD). A **Least Bittern** was suspected of having over-summered at Paget Marsh and was last seen 14 Oct (AD, RG). A **Little Egret** (*photo: Andrew Dobson*) was seen at Edward Gibbons NR 21 Sep and remained on the island to 25 Sep (AD). One **Canada Goose** at Parsons Road 27 Nov was joined by another 30 Nov+ (AD). An exhausted **Brant** was at Spittal Pond 16 Oct (DBW) and was found dead the next day. A **Common Goldeneye** 14 Nov at S.Princess Pond probably re-located to Mangrove Lake 22-28 Nov (PW). A **Ruddy Duck** was



found at Tucker's Point GC 12 Nov (DW). A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was over the Talbot Estate 23 Sep (AD), one of seven bird of prey species seen in the fall. Of the less commonly occurring shorebird species, single **Piping Plovers** were at Cooper's Is 19 Aug (RG) and on Warwick Long Bay 28 Aug-5 Sep (LM). Single **Willetts** were at Spittal Pond 28 Aug (AD) and over Nonsuch Is. 23 Sep (JM). A **Curlew Sandpiper** was on North Pond 4 Oct (DW). One A 1st winter **Black-headed Gull** in Hamilton Harbour 2 Nov (PW) was seen with an adult bird at Tucker's Point GC 22 Nov (PW). A **Least Tern** 8 Sep was joined by two others in Harrington Sound 10 Sep accompanied by 50+ **Common Terns**

(PH). A **Sooty Tern** was found exhausted on a Devonshire roof and died in captivity at BAMZ (SC). Bermuda's first **White-winged Black Tern** was identified by DBW 30 Sep. It was present on Port Royal GC 29 Sep-4 Oct. Two hummingbirds (probably Ruby-throated) were seen at Hog Bay Park 2 Sep (JR). A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** in Smiths was present 10-30 Nov+ (J&K L). A male **Downy Woodpecker** (*photo: Andrew Dobson*) was discovered in the Botanical Gardens 14 Nov (DW). A female was photographed 17 Nov (AD) and two were seen together 18 Nov (PH). The male excavated two holes in a

camphor tree and the last sighting was 27 Nov. This is the first record of Downy Woodpecker for 20 years and the first time more than one bird has been seen together. There are at least 8 previous records. An **Eastern Phoebe** was on Mid-Ocean GC 3-9 Nov (DBW). **Great Crested Flycatcher** was in Riddell's Bay mangroves 8 Sep (AD). A **Grey Kingbird** was at Lukes Farm 29 Aug (NM, PH). Single **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were seen at Cambridge Beaches 16 Oct (MH), Ferry Point 2-5 Nov (DBW), Paget Is 3 Nov (DBW) and the A.B. Smith N.R. 22 Nov (DW). This is a record number for any year. A **Brown Creeper** was seen at Ferry Reach 6-13 Nov (NM). A flock of four **Golden-crowned Kinglets** on Morgan's Point 21 Nov (AD) was most unusual. A **Veery** was at BIOS 12 Sep (AD, DW). A **Grey-cheeked Thrush** was on Wreck Road 16 Oct (AD). **Northern Mockingbirds** were seen at Harrington Sound 19-20 Sep (PA), St. Georges 7 Oct (GO), Government House 17 Oct (RG) and Tudor Hill 18 Nov (DW) creating a record number in any year. An **American Pipit** was on Riddell's Bay GC 13 Oct (DW). Thirty-six warbler species were recorded during the season. Notable records included: **Golden-winged Warblers** at Coney Is. 11 Sep (DBW) and Heydon Trust 14 Oct (AD); a late **Yellow Warbler** in Botanical Gardens 16 Nov (PW); two early **Blackpoll Warblers** on Wreck Road 31 Aug (WF); single **Cerulean Warblers** at Wreck Road 31 Aug- 3 Sep (WF) and Ferry Point 8 Sep (DBW); a **Swainson's Warbler** in Riddell's Bay mangroves 6 Sep (AD); a **Louisiana Waterthrush** at Mangrove Lake 4-5 Sep (DBW); a **Mourning Warbler** at Talbot Estate 9 Sep (AD); and single **Yellow-breasted Chats** at Wreck Hill 7 Nov and Alton Hill 14 Nov (PH). **Dark-eyed Juncos** were seen at Cooper's Point 11 Nov (AD) and Lagoon Park 13 Nov (DW). **Snow Buntings** were seen at a number of locations including 3 at the Maritime Museum 13 Nov (DW). An imm. **Red-winged Blackbird** was at Hungry Bay 7 Nov (DG). An **Eastern Meadowlark** was on Port Royal GC 6 Oct (R&K Latter). A **Brown-headed Cowbird** flew over Botanical Gardens 14 Nov (PW). Three **Common Redpolls** were at Cooper's Point 13 Nov (PH).

Observers: Peter Adhemar, Stephen Barton, Stephen Copeland, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Derek Gibbons, Richard Gozney, Marya Halderman, Janice Hetzel, Junior Hill, Peter Hopkins, Ray & Kay Latter, Jade & Keith Lovell, Jeremy Madeiros, Leila Madeiros, Natasha Merino, Neal Morris, Anson Nash, Gillian Outerbridge, Jill Raine, Keith Rossiter, Tim White, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW).

Nature Notes by David Wingate

First record of Potamogeton pondweed, an important food for waterfowl of freshwater marshes in America

It never rains but it pours. On the same day that I found the tern and at the same golf course pond I discovered a submergent pond weed that has never been recorded in Bermuda before. It has long stems with spindle shaped leaves that are rooted in shallow water and emergent seed heads that look a bit like tiny corn cobs. This is a very significant find because waterfowl food plants are extremely few in Bermuda and this new arrival will greatly enhance our ponds for migrant ducks and rails if it can be established in our other freshwater ponds. I checked with the golf course superintendent and he told me that it definitely was not introduced. Moreover, David Wallace recalls that it was already established before the recent golf course up-grade. This means we are witnessing the colonization of a new native plant species by natural dispersal, in this case probably by seed brought in on the feet or in the gut of migrant waterfowl. Its failure to become established- or to survive- in the past may be due to the fact that most of our marshes are brackish and this species requires freshwater. The golf course ponds are unique in this regard because they are pure freshwater contained by an impermeable pond liner.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos feed on Buckeye butterfly caterpillars in Bermuda

For the past several years I have noticed that Yellow-billed Cuckoos feed actively on lawns while transient through Bermuda in fall. Close observation has revealed that they are catching and eating the spiny caterpillars of the endemic race of the Buck-eye butterfly exclusively, and the number that they find, even on a small patch of lawn, is simply mind boggling! This fall I have been watching several in succession on

a lawn outside my living room window. With head held high they look about slowly then take a couple of hops and grab and swallow. This is repeated at a rate of approximately one caterpillar per minute and I have counted up to 25 caught in a single feeding session lasting less than half an hour. It is noteworthy that the other lawn feeding birds - starling and bluebird never touch the Buck-eye caterpillars, preferring the non-spiny earthworms and cut worms instead. This ground feeding habit is unusual for cuckoos and must be dangerous in the presence of cats for I have seen two missing their long tails due presumably to close encounters with cats already this fall. It is fortunate, perhaps, that the cuckoo season here is a brief one in October-November, otherwise the Buck-eye might soon become an endangered species!

Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp for Students 19-26 June 2010

Kate Cooper



When we all arrived on the dock on Saturday morning, we were all slightly wary, some people knew each other, but most of us were total strangers. So we were all surprisingly quiet, this however only continued for the first half of the day, by lunch we were all starting to bond. Filling up our solar showers was one of the first things we decided to do. As there is only electricity when the generator is on, we had to use a bucket to haul up the water, and then pour it through a funnel into the shower bag. This was easier said than done for most of us the first time, but by the third day we could do it much better. We also discovered that when the generator is running in the evening, we could use a hose to fill up our showers. This was much easier than hauling up a bucket and most

likely pouring half the contents on ourselves. The first night we started off sleeping inside the building but it was quite warm so we all moved onto the field and slept under the stars. We slept there every night and I got the best night's sleep ever. It was cool and quiet and it only rained one night.

The first day after we had got settled, we were given a tour of the island by Dr. Wingate, who was able to tell us an immense amount of information about all the different habitats on the island. When we were coming up from the beach the girls were told that we should pick out a long piece of wood. At first we were confused what for, then we realised it was going to be our shower rail for the week. We did many different field trips, but I had two favourite ones. On the Tuesday we went to Northrock. We were very lucky, the day that we went, the tide was exceptionally low, and so we could actually climb on top of the rock and walk around. The water was so clear out at North Rock and the fish and coral we saw were beautiful. My other favourite is almost a polar opposite. We went to Hungry Bay and waded through the swamp. A couple of us managed to get slightly stuck in the peat marsh. The water there was all brown and the peat was very squishy. Despite looking rather disgusting this was one of the most fun field trips because it was something that you normally don't get a chance to do. This was one of the main things that I loved about Nonsuch Camp; we got a chance to go to places and try out different things that we normally wouldn't get a chance to do. I would recommend Nonsuch Camp for anyone who is interested in sciences, geography or the environment. The first two days are the busiest, but once you make it through those two then the rest of the week will be easy. This was one of the most fun weeks I had all summer, and I wish I could attend it again. *(Photo shows Kate Cooper receiving the 'Top Student' camp trophy from Audubon Patron, Sir Richard Gozney).*

Pay Your Membership Online

We are now set up for online memberships. If you have not yet paid your 2010-2011 dues you can now do so by credit card online at www.bermudatix.bm – just click on Bermuda Audubon Society under 'Memberships' on the Home Page.

Society News

Paget Island Bird Camp 2010

The Paget Island bird weekend went very well. Bird highlights included:

A female Wood Duck –flying in off the sea at Cooper’s Island and later seen over Paget Is. An Osprey and two Merlin at Paget Is. Nine species of shorebird including three Buff-breasted Sandpipers at the Airport. A small influx of Yellow-billed Cuckoos and one Black-billed Cuckoo. Fifteen species of warbler including a Tennessee Warbler at Ferry Point. Sightings of both Summer and Scarlet Tanager. Very obliging immature Chipping and White-crowned Sparrows on Paget Is and a possible Lincoln’s Sparrow. In all – over 60 species, fabulous weather and great food!

Reserves benefit from ACE Global Day of Service



For their Global Day of Service on 22 October, a group of eight volunteers from ACE put in a good day’s work on two of the Society’s nature reserves, supervised by committee members David Wingate and Fiona Doe. At the Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve in Paget they re-opened the pathway from the gate on South Road up to the ridge-top trail and weeded around a number of native and endemic tree saplings that were planted by member volunteers in Spring 2009. All the plantings have survived and have doubled in height despite droughts and hurricanes. In the afternoon, the group moved on to the Freer Cox Memorial

Reserve, opposite Christ Church on Middle Road in Devonshire, where they cleared the roadside field of stones. This will enable the field to be leased for cultivation. Thanks to the Centre on Philanthropy for putting the Society in touch with ACE for the volunteer day.

Cahow Fieldtrips

Two very successful fieldtrips were held in November in search of Cahows. A scan of the ocean from Cooper’s Point on 11th November about twenty Audubon members to see up to ten Cahows flying over the ocean in the late afternoon in perfect viewing conditions. Due to bad weather we only managed one of the planned pelagic trips to see Cahows over the ocean a few miles south of Cooper’s Point on 21st November. The optimistic group aboard the ‘Phoenix’ was rewarded with several sightings of our national bird, included one that flew right over the boat – a truly memorable moment.

Living Green Expo



The Society’s stand at the Living Green Expo held at the Botanical Gardens on 17 October proved popular, with a lot of interest in our Bluebird information panel in particular. Many thanks to volunteers Jocelyn Morrison, David O’Neill, Morgan & Richard Amos, Suzanne Koren and Paul Breen for manning the stall.

Bluebirds 2011

It’s almost time to ring in the New Year and another season of caring for nesting Bluebirds. Last year was the best ever for the Botanical Gardens/Camden Bluebird trail, almost entirely due to finding a remedy for the bird mite that had devastated nestlings in the past. I am interested in hearing from other folk who are managing BB boxes to find out how they did in 2010. Did they suffer from the bird mite plague or not? Do they have feral chickens in the area – or not? Did they have good results and would it be possible to keep some sort of tally of the number of young fledged and where? Anyone interested in sharing information can contact Susan Harvey, 236-4415 or susanh@logic.bm

National Volunteer Day

Every year in early December, the Centre on Philanthropy recognises volunteers nominated by many of the island's charities. This year's nominee from the Bermuda Audubon Society was Karen Border who has performed outstanding work on the Committee of Management as well as with the Buy Back Bermuda committee. Well done Karen! And a big 'thank you' to the Centre on Philanthropy for arranging a special evening with special guests H.E. The Governor, Minister Michael Weeks and Minister Neleetha Butterfield.

Dollars for Hours



PartnerRe once again ran its Dollars for Hours programme, linking schools to local charities. In return for a generous \$30,000 donation to each school, the students were involved in a project with the charity. Warwick Academy was partnered with the Bermuda Audubon Society and we were fortunate enough to have fifty bluebird nest boxes made for the nest breeding season. Our thanks go to the staff and students of Warwick Academy who made this possible – and to PartnerRe for such a generous initiative.

Christmas Gifts – all available from the City Market at Bull's Head Car Park on Saturday 18th December (morning)



- **Cahow t-shirts** are still available for sale. Make great Christmas stocking stuffers! \$15 or \$25 for two. Sizes Youth L and XL, Adult small, large, XL and 2XL still available.
- **'Treasure Island' DVDs** – the Society's very own story of Nonsuch Island and the Cahow. Produced by Deirdre Brennan, this made for TV documentary is available for \$20. We also have a very few copies of 'EnviroShorts' – a set of 3 DVDs which focus on Bermuda's environment is available for \$30. This series, produced by Sangita Iyer has been shown on local television.
- **Bluebird Boxes** – kits make ideal presents – or buy a ready-made box. Both are supplied with an information leaflet. Boxes \$25. Kits \$15.
- **Memberships** – why not make a gift of membership to someone for

Christmas?

- **Seymour's Pond Donation** – buy a gift donation certificate as a Christmas gift (see form above).

If you are unable to make it to the City Market - contact Karen Border on borders@logic.bm or 238-8628 to arrange for delivery.

Seasonal Greetings
from the
Bermuda Audubon Society

