



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER Spring 2011

P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.22 No.1

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

In this issue:

- Black-tailed Gull - New to Bermuda *Peter Hopkin*
- Society News *Andrew Dobson*
- Bird Report December 2010 to February 2011 *Andrew Dobson*
- Cahow Report *Jeremy Madeiros*
- Christmas Bird Count *Andrew Dobson*

Black-tailed Gull - New to Bermuda



Another new species of bird has been recorded in Bermuda. Bermuda Audubon Society member Peter Hopkin identified a Black-tailed Gull on 8 January in Somerset. Peter commented at the time: "The day started with the spectacular sight of two gannets plunge-diving for fish in Mangrove Bay, taking a heavy toll of the Bermuda Half-beaks and Houndfish...followed by an adult winter Black-tailed Gull, the first record for Bermuda. I first saw the bird off Watford Bridge, when a small adult Lesser-Black-backed type gull flew past, with...a black tail. Gulp! After checking Sibley at home, I was more than convinced that my gut feeling was correct, and came out after lunch to look properly. I compiled a full description, but the key features are:

- it is smaller than Lesser Black-backed Gull, midway between that and Ring-billed

- the head shows some streaking , but this is finer on the nape and head than the smudges of LBBG, with a greyish cast
- the bill is long and straight sided, looking quite tube-like, which has the effect of making the head look smaller
- the bill colour shows a dull red tip over the whole distal end, with a prominent broad black band, yellowish base. Less clear cut defined than the bird in this photo below
- the mantle colour slightly paler than LBBG, with a browner tinge
- the rump bright white, with a crisp, broad black-tail band except for the outer webs of the outer feathers. Really obvious in flight.
- the primaries pure black, with some small white tips but no white mirrors”

It is a fairly common bird in East Asia, with a range centred on China and Japan. The species is migratory with birds being regularly recorded as far south as Hong Kong and vagrants reaching as far south as Australia. It is a great wanderer and although birds are recorded almost annually in Alaska, some are even flying via a likely northern route and appearing on the East Coast of North America. There have been more than two hundred gulls in Bermuda at the moment but this medium sized grey-backed gull can be distinguished by its pale yellow legs and a red and black spot at the end of the bill. As the name suggests, it has a black tail. The bird has a cat-like call, giving it its Japanese name – Umineko, "Sea cat" and Korean name – Gwaeng-yi gull, which means "cat" gull. (Photos: Andrew Dobson)

Society News Andrew Dobson

Seymour’s Pond



If you have driven past Seymour’s Pond near Barnes Corner in Southampton you will have seen that work is underway in enlarging and restoring this wetland habitat. Full details were given in the last newsletter and you hopefully received a flyer in the mail.

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

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.

Warwick Academy students help our birds



As part of a 3-day expedition for their Duke of Edinburgh's Silver Award, thirty-three students from Warwick Academy undertook two conservation projects. On the first day of the expedition they constructed twelve bluebird nest boxes which will be available for the forthcoming breeding season. Morgan Simons said "We listened to a talk from Audubon President Andrew Dobson about the problems which bluebirds face in Bermuda and the fact that they are solely dependent on nest boxes in order to breed. It was really satisfying to think we were doing something to safeguard the future of bluebirds". The following day's route included a walk to the end of Cooper's Island where the group was met by Government Conservation Officer, Jeremy Madeiros. Owen Siese explained "Mr. Madeiros told us about the history of the island, the fact it is now a nature reserve and a very important area for Longtails to breed. Many natural nesting cavities have been lost due to hurricanes and housing development, so providing 'government housing' seems like a great idea." Rickai Edwards said "I particularly enjoyed mixing the concrete which we use to fix the igloos in place and then to secure the dome nests with nearby rocks. Emi Froud said "We put in four igloos, I'll be back to see if any of the nests are used by the longtails this summer."

Audubon joins Aberfeldy for nest box workshop



About 100 people turned out for the bluebird nest box workshop hosted by Aberfeldy Nursery. David Wingate was on hand to give a short lecture about our bluebirds and several members of the Society as well as Aberfeldy staff were on hand to assist in the box making. Nearly 50 boxes were assembled – a great effort! Boxes and kits can now be purchased from Aberfeldy, with proceeds to Audubon.

Audubon sponsors LookBermuda in new film



LookBermuda Educational Media Foundation

The Bermuda Audubon Society was pleased to be one of the sponsors for a new documentary on our national bird, the Cahow. Filmed and produced by LookBermuda, the 'Higher Ground' film will be aired regularly on LookTV. The documentary focuses on the recent translocation phase of the Cahow Recovery Programme. It also includes the most recent development with data loggers attached to the bird's leg revealing their movements in the North Atlantic.

Members out in force to oppose SDO

I would like to thank members of the Bermuda Audubon Society who joined thousands of others on the walk to demonstrate their opposition to the granting of the Special Development Order for the Rosewood Tuckers Point property.

<http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20110307/NEWS07/703079959/-1/news07>

The walk was organised jointly by Tucker's Town Historical Society, Bermuda Audubon Society, the Bermuda National Trust, Bermuda Environmental and Sustainability Taskforce (BEST), Greenrock, Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda and Save Open Spaces – who are all totally opposed to the SDO.

Please sign the petition at <http://www.gopetition.com/petition/43111.html>



Fieldtrip to Morgan's Point a great success

About 25 members enjoyed a fascinating walk around Morgan's Point led by David Wingate and Andrew Dobson. People were amazed by the way in which nature has regained control since the US Navy left in 1995. The extensive casuarina woodland provides habitat for the two resident Red-tailed Hawks which most of the group were able to see. Other birds of note included a flock of waxwings and a number of species of wood warbler.

Cats and birds in Bermuda

The Audubon committee recently met with Kim Sherlaw from the SPCA. We plan to work together to generate increased responsibility amongst cat owners and lessen the impact on bird populations. Please read the 18 March article which appeared in the Washington Post. It is very much in line with our thinking. The Grey Catbird is one of our few native breeding birds. http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/no-good-for-the-birds-but-also-no-good-for-the-cats/2011/03/17/ABLGkvr_story.html

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.

Cahow Report

Jeremy Madeiros

There is very positive Cahow news from the new colony site on Nonsuch island where 7 pairs have so far hatched 4 chicks, one pair failed and 2 pairs are still incubating eggs (as of 22 March). In addition, another 4 nests have had prospecting visits or are claimed by single birds (most likely males), which are trying to attract mates. Two new pairs have formed in artificial nest burrows there, and two more translocated Cahows have returned to Nonsuch, making a total of 22 translocated birds that have returned to Nonsuch, in addition to 8 more translocated birds have also returned to the original nesting islets; total of returned translocated birds = 30. Two of the birds were translocated to this site as chicks in 2007 and 2008 (the first returned translocated bird from the 2008 group) and one of them a non-translocated bird which fledged in 2008. Two birds were non-translocated birds, so it is obvious that there is a big enough nucleus of translocated birds that have returned already that they are also now attracting non-translocated birds. This has only been possible to confirm because all of the translocated, and over three-quarters of other Cahows, have at this point been fitted with identification bands (rings), so we know exactly where and when they have originated from.

Including the 4 Nonsuch chicks, a total of 49 chicks have already been confirmed as hatching, with some adults still incubating eggs, and burrow-scoping should confirm more when conditions allow. At all of the original nesting islets, the Cahows are doing well, despite the hammering these islets took during hurricane "Igor" last year, and I can now report that the total population (including the Nonsuch birds) stands at a record 98 nesting pairs, that is, those pairs that have produced eggs. I can tell this at this point because we now have burrow-scope equipment that makes it possible to see the nest chambers of all of the deeper natural nests except for one (which seems to be well over 20' deep!). That one cannot be confirmed until later in the season; if it also produces a chick then it will be 99 nesting pairs. Three of the older pairs broke up because of the failure of one or both birds to return, while a whopping 9 new pairs have come on-line with their first eggs produced.

Bird Report December 2010 to February 2011

Andrew Dobson

Highlights of the period included Bermuda's first record of Black-tailed Gull, third record of White-winged Dove and the first winter records for Franklin's Gull and Bridled Tern.

Cahow to Terns

Early news of this year's **Cahow** nesting season suggests at least 98 breeding pairs (JM). Two immature **Northern Gannets** were seen in many locations but appeared to favour the Great Sound mid-Dec-28 Feb+ (WF). The first returning **White-tailed Tropicbird** was recorded off Church Bay 3 Feb (AD). A **Magnificent Frigatebird** was in Hamilton Harbour 8-10 Feb (PB). A **Glossy Ibis** was present in the Somerset area throughout the period. A **Northern Harrier** was on the Airport throughout the winter season (PA). A single **Snow Goose** was present at Belmont GC 26 Dec (AD) and also Lukes Farm 22 Jan-Feb 28+ (AD). Three **Canada Geese** were in various locations 29 Nov-Feb 28+ (NM). Seventeen species of ducks were recorded during the season including seven **Gadwall** (16 Jan-28 Feb+), a male **Eurasian Wigeon** 16 Jan-28 Feb+ (DG), single **Goldeneye** at Mangrove Lake and Port Royal GC, a male **Long-tailed Duck** at Spittal Pond 16-29



Dec (NM). A **Virginia Rail** was seen at Pembroke Marsh 9 Dec (NM) and another was found injured 14 Dec and taken to BAMZ but later died. Two **American Golden-Plovers** were on the Airport 2-5 Jan (DBW). A **Piping Plover** was on Grape Bay 24 Dec-2 Jan (AD). A record number of **Killdeer** wintered with 504 recorded on 2 Jan (AD et al). Two **Red-tailed Hawks** remained in Bermuda throughout the period. A **Red Knot** was seen at Port Royal GC 9-12 Dec (AD). A single **Dunlin** was at Spittal Pond 2 Jan (AD), while two were at the Airport 5-15 Jan (DBW). A **Black-tailed Gull**, the first record for Bermuda, was present in the Great Sound/Mangrove Bay area 8 Jan-28 Feb+(PH) but often elusive. A **Franklin's Gull** was present at Port Royal GC 1-11 Dec (DBW). At least three **Black-headed Gulls** were present during the season. A wing-tagged **Ring-billed Gull** 16 Dec-Feb 28+ (AD) was banded in Massachusetts (*see photo A. Dobson*) A first winter **Iceland Gull** was at Dockyard 11-15 Jan (AD). Two **Forster's Terns** were in Harrington Sound 14 Dec- 9 Jan. A **Common Tern** was in Harrington Sound to early Jan. A **Bridled Tern** found exhausted on Port Royal GC 14 Dec died in captivity at BAMZ.

Doves to Redpoll

A **White-winged Dove**, the third record for Bermuda, was seen in the Smith's Hill 2 Jan (JM). A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was at Ferry Point Park 26 Dec-2 Jan (PW). A **Short-eared Owl** was at Spittal Pond 28-30 Dec (AD). A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** made regular visits to a Smith's Parish garden throughout the period. A single **Hermit Thrush** was at Morgan's Point 15 Jan (AD, DW). A **Brown Creeper** discovered in Nov was still present 13 Feb (NM). Two **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were present on Morgan's Point 2-15 Jan (AD, DW). Two **American Pipits** in the West End 27 Dec (PH) were the first of an impressive 112 noted. Of 21 species of warbler recorded during the period, the most unusual was a **Kentucky Warbler** at Mid-Ocean GC 15 Jan (DW). Few **Snow Buntings** were noted this year with up to three in Dockyard and one at Ferry Point Park. A **Brown-headed Cowbird** was discovered at Westover Farm 2-4 Jan (PH). A **White-winged Crossbill** was at Cooper's Island NR 16 Jan (NM). **Common Redpolls** were seen at Paget Marsh, 3 on 1 Jan (AD), Ferry Point (3) 16 Jan (AD, DW) and Spittal Pond (10) 27 Feb (PW).

Observers: Peter Adhemar, Paul Breen, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Derek Gibbons, Peter Hopkin, Jeremy Madeiros, Neal Morris, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW).

36th Christmas Bird Count Winter 2010-11

Andrew Dobson

The Bermuda Audubon Society held its 36th CBC on 2nd January 2011. Highlights of this year's count were:

- 9,046 individual birds (400 more birds than last year's total)
- 102 species of birds (100 in 2009)
- Two new species for count day
- European Starling was the most common species (27% of the count)
- About 250 species have now been recorded on the CBC in Bermuda since 1975

Sixteen 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. New species for Bermuda's count included a White-winged Dove seen by Jeremy Madeiros in the Smiths Hills and a Brown Creeper seen by Paul Watson in Ferry Point Park. Other unusual species included a Northern Gannet which passed through Andrew Dobson's field of view while he was watching two Humpback Whales off Warwick Long Bay! Two globally endangered species of birds were recorded, our own national bird, the Cahow, and the Piping Plover, a small shorebird which breeds in the eastern US and Canada. High counts were broken for several species, notably Killdeer (504) and American Pipit (112). These two species arrived in large numbers as a result of the bad weather and the storm systems that reached Bermuda. However, over 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. This year there may well have been mortality in Bermuda as a result of the long period of winter storms.

More than 50,000 observers in the Americas participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action. Prior to 1900, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt". They would choose sides and go into the field with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition-a "Christmas Bird Census"-that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count. 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 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. As to the future in Bermuda - the considerable variety and number of birds wintering in Bermuda emphasizes the need to maintain and protect open spaces. Private landowners can help by planting trees and shrubs and trying to leave some natural 'wild' areas on their property. The Government has a series of national parks, but it can further assist by allocating money to the purchase of open space and not allowing the development of areas zoned as woodland reserve and arable land. Everyone can help by supporting organizations like Buy Back Bermuda, the Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda National Trust in their efforts to establish and maintain nature reserves.