



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2015

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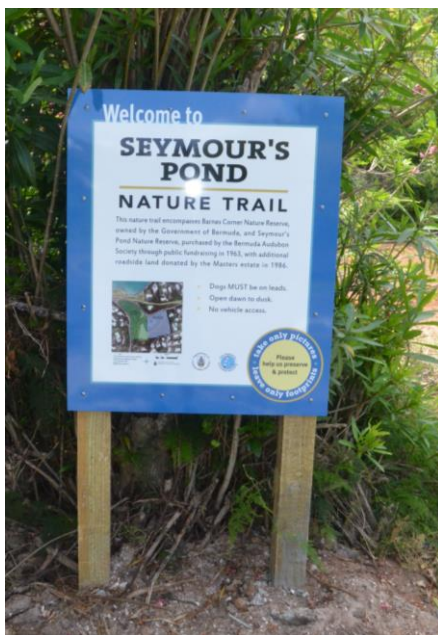
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Seymour's Pond Nature Reserve



If you have not stopped by the society's Seymour's Pond nature reserve for a while, you're in for a nice surprise. It now features a bird observation hide and a circular walking trail, which starts from a small parking area off the farm road to the west of the pond, weaves through the woods to the south and emerges back on Middle Road at the eastern end. There is also interpretive signage.

Seymour's Pond was the society's first nature reserve and the project to make it more accessible to visitors was part of our Strategic Plan for 2013-16. This follows on from the work carried out there in 2011 to enlarge the pond, which had been encroached on by invasive grasses and Brazil pepper. The bird hide and hard landscape work was done by Sousa's Landscape Management and the signage was produced by Graphix Signs. Volunteers cut the path for the trail. Further planting of native and endemic plants will be carried out in the fall.

Karen Border



Photo confirmation of Black-capped Petrel at sea off Bermuda - the value of digital cameras for bird identification

David Wingate

Camilla Stringer is a regular guide on the BZS whalewatch tours as well as on Andrew Stevenson's whale research trips. Her main role as a photographer is to photo document the unique undertail patterns of humpback whales and by her own admission she is not a birder and does not claim any refined ability at seabird identification. Nevertheless, I have urged her to photograph passing seabirds whenever she gets the opportunity because any photo of sufficiently high quality can always be identified to species later by professional ornithologists.



The extraordinary potential of modern digital cameras with their high pixel density and instant automatic focus now makes it possible to get sharp photos of fast flying birds in difficult sea conditions and then to zoom in one hundred fold without loss of resolution on what otherwise may look like a small image even through a telephoto lens. This is where the latest technology of digital cameras, digital photo-filing and the internet has totally revolutionized the potential of citizen science, even making it possible for non-birders with cell phone cameras to get photos good enough

for confirmation of identity, and thereby greatly expanding the reach of scientific data collection.

A classic example of this is a set of superb photos that Camilla took of a seabird that circled Stevenson's boat twice on Challenger Bank on 22 March, 2015 (see photo above).

To my astonishment it proved to be a Black-capped Petrel, *Pterodroma hasitata*, (the West Indian equivalent of the Cahow) which has only been confirmed from Bermuda on one previous occasion - 9 May, 1979 - when I photographed one off the south shore 3 miles south of Castle Roads. Pelagic birding was still in its infancy then, so not surprisingly I assumed the bird was a Cahow and published the record as such with the photo in the monthly bulletin of the Dept. of Agriculture & Fisheries (Vol. 50 No. 8: 61-62). It was only later, in the 1990s, when I became more skilled at seabird identification, that I realized my mistake. (We did not begin seeing Cahows regularly at sea until the early 1990s when the population had begun to increase under protective management and my only potential at-sea record before then was a bird I saw 4 miles off Castle Roads on 23 May 1977, which might just as readily have been another Black-capped Petrel).

The Black-capped Petrel is of special interest to me because I rediscovered its breeding grounds in the mountain tops of Haiti on Hispaniola in 1963 nearly a century after it supposedly became extinct (Wingate 1964. Auk Vol. 81: 147-159). At-sea observations by Dr. David Lee and many others in the gulfstream off Cape Hatteras subsequently confirmed that it is still moderately common, but actual nestsites have only been found within the last 10 years using sophisticated new techniques such as portable radar and night vision or heat sensitive scopes, because like the Cahow this species is nocturnal and extremely hard to find on its breeding grounds.

On-going research has revealed that there are actually three recognizably different populations of the Black-capped Petrel which may ultimately be designated as separate species. The smallest type has much less white on head, neck and tail coverts and more closely resembles the Cahow. That was the type that I photographed in 1979. Camilla's photos are so good that it is possible to state categorically that the bird she photographed is from the largest type which has the greatest amount of white around the neck and on the upper tail coverts. How's that for citizen science!

Bird Report March to May 2015

Andrew Dobson

Highlights included Bermuda's second confirmed Black-capped Petrel, a record spring arrival of Lesser Yellowlegs and a record flock of four Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.



There are few records of **'Blue' Snow Goose** in Bermuda, so a flock of 7 seen at various locations 21 Mar-9 Apr (PW, AD) was exceptional (photos above). The wintering **Redhead** at Port Royal GC was last seen 22 Mar (AD). A **Ruddy Duck** arrived at Spittal Pond 22 Mar (AD, TW). A **Common Loon** was well observed in the Great Sound, 20 Mar (WF). Bermuda's second confirmed **Black-capped Petrel** was photographed at Challenger Banks 22 Mar (CS). A 2hr 30 min sea-watch at Cooper's Point 20 Apr was a lucky day for AD & PW with nine seabird species: **Cory's Shearwater** (1), **Manx Shearwater** (39), **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** (5), **Leach's Storm-Petrel** (33), Storm-Petrel sp. (55), **White-tailed Tropicbird** (110), **Arctic Tern** (1), **Pomarine Jaeger** (4), **Parasitic Jaeger** (3), **Long-tailed Jaeger** (1), Jaeger sp. (11). A **Magnificent Frigatebird** was over St. Georges Harbour 9 May (J&K L). **Northern Gannet** has never been recorded in spring before, but one lingered in the Great Sound until 13 May (WF). A **Swallow-tailed Kite** was at various locations 28 Feb-14 Mar (FD). A spring **Northern Harrier** was on Hinson's Island 28 Apr (E&JH) and Spittal Pond 29 Apr (AC). A **Black-necked Stilt** was on Mid-Ocean GC 17 May (GB). The first ever spring flock of **Willet** (9) was seen at Shelly Bay 29 Apr (JM). An unprecedented fall-out of **Lesser Yellowlegs** included a record 60 birds at various locations 30 Apr (AD, PW et al). A female **Ruff** was at Spittal Pond 17 May (AD). An **Iceland Gull** was last seen at Dockyard 11 Mar (AD). Four **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** together on Wreck Road 28 Apr-1 May (DBW) was a Bermuda record count (below left). A **Black-whiskered Vireo** at Ferry Point Park 9 May (NM) was the first since 1999. A **Veery** at Seymour's Pond 3-7 May provided good views for many observers (RB). A flock of **American Pipits** (7) at Bermuda Airport 1-7 Apr (AD) was the first spring record. Rarely recorded in spring, a **Summer Tanager** was seen at Morgan's Point 3 May (DBW, WF). A male **Blackpoll Warbler** (below right) was also seen at Morgan's Point 3 May (AD). (Photos Andrew Dobson)



Observers: Geoff Bell, Richard Brewer, Alison Copeland, Andrew Dobson, Fiona Dobson, Wendy Frith, Erich & Janice Hetzel, Jade & Keith Lovell, Jeremy Madeiros, Neal Morris, Ron Porter, Camilla Stringer, Tim White, Paul Watson, David Wingate.

Barn Owl Census

Jeremy Madeiros

In 1990 I carried out a Barn Owl census to determine active and inactive nest sites and foraging territories for nesting pairs of Barn Owls on Bermuda (Bermuda Audubon Newsletter, 1990. Vol. 1 No. 1). I was assisted by the general public in reporting sightings. Analysis of regurgitated owl pellets of indigestible parts of food items was also carried out to determine prey items. This followed on from a similar survey my class group undertook in 1989 in Surrey, England, while I was there as a student 1988-1991. I was able to confirm 15 active Barn Owl nest sites scattered around Bermuda, almost all in coastal cliff holes but a couple in locations like Devonshire Marsh and in a church steeple. The foraging range for each pair consistently turned out to be about 1 square mile, compared to 20+ square miles for some pairs in the U.K. More rats on Bermuda, I guess, although analysis of regurgitated pellets found at nest sites also showed that they feed on other items such as small birds including sparrows and starlings, caught roosting on cliffs, and even occasionally on large Antiguan Anole (Warwick Lizards) during the summer months, when they climb utility poles at night to feed on moths and flying insects attracted to the street lights.

This year I have been revisiting nest sites active in the 1990s (a number of which are still active, e.g. Abbott's Cliff, Great Head, High Point, and Great Sound islands), and would like to enlist the public's help once again. If anyone has had confirmed sightings of Barn Owls in the last six months, or has any over the next six months, please report your observations to info@audubon.bm. Alternatively, this information could be entered directly into eBird.org. Any of the following information would be useful:

- Date:
- Time and length of time observed:
- Location:
- Owl observed at this location before?
- Number of birds:
- Behaviour (flying, hunting, perched etc):
- If flying, in what direction?
- Did the owl call? (Barn Owls do not hoot but make a rasping shriek, sometimes likened to a fingernail scraping across a blackboard, while Night-Herons make a guttural croak or barking noise).

Global Big Day

Andrew Dobson

Bermuda Audubon Society members and non-members took part in the first 'Global Big Day' (May 9th) organized by Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology. Countries from all around the world participated in the event, with the aim of seeing and recording at least half of the world's 10,000+ bird species. The Cornell Lab established and maintains the largest data base of bird records in the world created by citizen science. One the day, just over 6,000 species were seen and entered into eBird, an amazing effort from citizen science. In Bermuda, we contributed 51 species. Surprises included a Black-whiskered Vireo (a spring overshoot from the Caribbean) and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Anyone can access the data base at www.ebird.org and then create your own free account and enter your records. Millions of records are in the database from observers all over the world. In Bermuda, more than 100 users have already entered thousands of checklists of 383 different species. It's a great way of keeping a record of the birds you see in Bermuda or when you go to other countries. The mega data is a great tool to create species distribution, seasonal migration and abundance. Uses of the data include being able to identify migration fly-ways and ensuring conservation efforts are targeted in the best possible way.



Notice of Annual General Meeting

Thursday 11th June 6:00pm

The Education Room at Waterville (Bermuda National Trust)

This will be followed by a harbour boat cruise on 'Explorer' 7:00-9:00pm

There will be a charge of \$20 for the boat trip with light refreshments

Reservations are required at info@audubon.bm or call 238-8628

Events – for your diary

Saturday 30 May

Nonsuch Island Fieldtrip 10:00am to 3:30pm

The day will include a morning tour with possible Cahow encounter and time to swim & snorkel in the afternoon. Bring a picnic lunch and swim/snorkel gear if you wish. Boat leaves from Tucker's Point dock (details will be sent those who sign up). Price \$30 members, \$50 non-members.

Spaces are limited. To sign up email info@audubon.bm or call 238-8628 with names and a contact number.

Thursday 11 June

Annual General Meeting and harbour cruise

Friday 19 to Saturday 27 June

Nonsuch Island natural history camp for students

Friday 16 to Sunday 18 October

Paget Island Bird Camp

Save the date – details to follow