



**Bermuda Audubon Society**

# **NEWSLETTER**

Fall 2015

P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.26 No.3

[www.audubon.bm](http://www.audubon.bm)

Email: [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)

In this issue:

- Green Turtle Hatching *Jennifer Gray*
- Nonsuch Natural History Camp 2015 *Linda Amaral*
- Bird Report June to October 2015 *Andrew Dobson*
- Events

## **Green Turtle Hatching**

**Jennifer Gray**

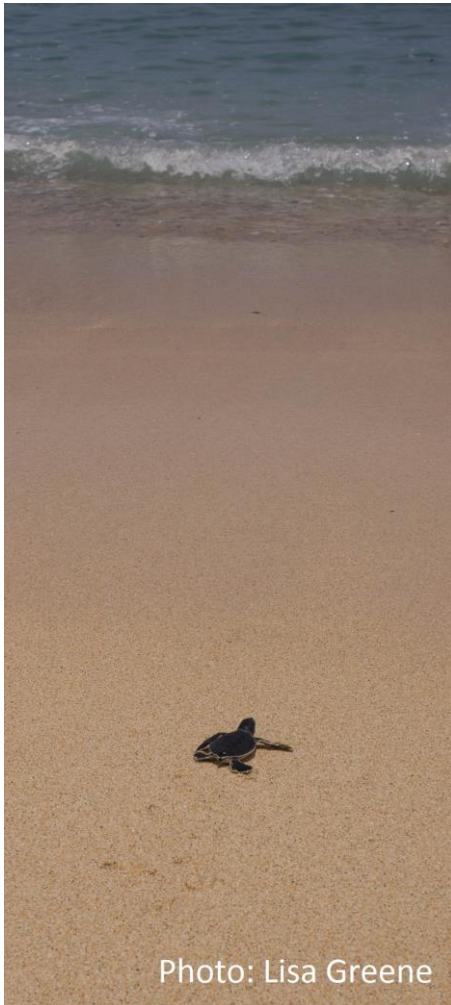


Photo: Lisa Greene

In the midst of the 2015 Bermuda Turtle Project field season, a new chapter unfolded for the natural history of Bermuda. For the first time in almost a century, hatchling green turtles crawled down a Bermuda beach and swam into the ocean off the east end of the island to start a long and challenging journey far out at sea. Huge thanks to Frank Burchall who noticed the first hatchling crossing Barry Road in St. George's in the early morning hours. The small sea turtle was lit up in the headlights of his car and tried to scurry away. Mr. Burchall had the curiosity, caring and foresight to pick up the turtle and alert the Aquarium about his find. Once the tiny sea turtle was identified as a hatchling green sea turtle a flurry of phone calls occurred and a team of excited conservationists descended onto nearby Building Bay Beach to locate the nest. The beach was crisscrossed with tiny turtle tracks but rather than leading from the nest to the sea they were scattered across the sand in all directions indicating newly hatched sea turtles were disoriented by street lights and having a hard time finding the ocean. A total of 11 hatchlings found caught in long grass along the base of a wall at the back of the beach were rescued. These were seen safely into the ocean and watched intently as they swam out to sea. An excavation of the nest site two days later revealed nearly ninety empty eggs and we hope that these represent the survival of many babies that will grow to continue the cycle of green turtle nesting in Bermuda.

The big question that everyone is now asking is if this nest marks the success of a restocking project that took place between 1968 and 1978 when green turtle eggs were flown from Costa Rica and Surinam and buried on beaches in Bermuda in the hope of reviving extirpated green sea turtle nesting. The answer to this question is not a simple one and while preliminary genetic testing of a dead hatchling has not ruled out the possibility, we await further analysis before a conclusion can be made. Stay tuned in the months to come.

In the interim it seems it may be time for Bermuda to keep a closer watch on our beaches for similar nesting events. It may also be time to 'turn the lights out' on beach front streets and properties to encourage the return of a healthy breeding colony of green sea turtles on our shores as was the case in 1609 when man settled here!

# Nonsuch Natural History Camp 2015

Linda Amaral



In 2015, from June 19-27, ten students and myself from various schools in Bermuda undertook an amazing and unforgettable nine days at Nonsuch Island. We discovered the flora, fauna and history of Bermuda. Moreover, we explored Bermuda's caves, beaches, surrounding waters and ponds as well as Nonsuch Island itself where we immersed ourselves in the ecology of the islands. We visited places on the island where I had never been and I've lived here for sixteen years!

The knowledge I gained during this time was not the only thing I remembered once the camp was over. When I first arrived at the camp, I was wary about not knowing people or the prospect of not having my phone. However, as I became involved with the various camp activities, I developed close relationships with my fellow campers and mentors. They became my friends and there were special moments like when the mentors presented each camper with a necklace made from the same cedar branch becoming a symbol of the Nonsuch Island camp, our unity, and our bond.

One tradition in the camp was the use of the "Spirit Stick" in group discussions. The spirit stick enabled the person holding it to be the sole speaker and focus of the group. It was special - as each participant at the camp added a meaningful object onto it, with the intention of future campers adding their own significant object. Each day we became more and more comfortable with our surroundings. Our feeling of worry from the first day changed to a feeling of anticipation. Snorkeling developed into a daily activity. Discovery and learning something new was an integral part of the camp. Every day we would explore different parts of Bermuda such as the coral reefs near North Rock, Grotto Bay caves, and Walsingham Pond. As everyone became better friends, the daily schedule of lab reports, lectures and quizzes were not so difficult to do. Besides, we all came to be more efficient as everyone had plenty of practice undertaking them! In any case, if anyone had any difficulties, another one of the campers or the lecturers would help.



So the Nonsuch Island camp was not just an educational opportunity, but also an enjoyable social experience. It was an event that a camper, lecturer, or mentor could share with others in the future. Just like the Spirit Stick, which will continue on, our memories of this time will forever be with us. Nonsuch Island camp is and was perfect for those students with a thirst for knowledge, an interest in biology, or those ready for a week full of new experiences.

*Saltus School's Linda Amaral, 16, receives her award from camp director Camilla Stringer and Audubon president Andrew Dobson. The camp was run by Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda Zoological Society. Funding was provided by Catlin Insurance, PartnerRe and The Garden Club of Bermuda.*

# Bird Report June to Oct 2015

Andrew Dobson

**June to July 2015** - Highlights of the season included the first record of Alpine Swift, a West Indian Whistling-Duck (last recorded in 1907), the first seasonal records of Hooded Merganser and White-throated Sparrow.



Bermuda's second record of **West Indian Whistling-Duck** (photo Andrew Dobson) was discovered at Tobacco Bay 27 Jun (CS) and appeared at various locations to Jul 31+. The only previous record was in 1907. Two male **Wood Ducks** were present throughout the summer period at various locations (AD). An imm. **Hooded Merganser** discovered at Seymour's Pond 14 Jun (AD) relocated to Port Royal GC to 31 Jul+ providing the first seasonal record for Bermuda. **Cahows** (Bermuda Petrels) had another successful breeding season despite losing 4 or 5 pairs during hurricane *Gonzalo* in October 2014. The total number of active breeding pairs producing an egg was 112, up from 108 the previous year. The total number of confirmed fledging chicks was 53, down from last season's record number of 59 (almost certainly caused by disruption and damage to nest burrows from *Gonzalo* (JM). A juv. **Brown Pelican** came aboard the Bermuda-bound RV Atlantic Explorer at 31 30' N and 064 24' W on 16 Jul and was almost certainly the same bird present 19-31 Jul+ at various Bermuda locations (LG et al). A **Glossy Ibis** was present at Somerset Long Bay 1 Jun-31 Jul+ (AD). **Black-necked Stilts** were present at various locations 6 Jun-31 Jul+ peaking at 5 on 7 Jul (AD). A

**Wilson's Phalarope** was at Spittal Pond 21 Jul (NA). Two **South Polar Skuas** passed Cooper's Point 16 Jun (PW). An adult **Roseate Tern** was in the Great Sound 25-30 Jun (PW). The **Common Tern** population in Bermuda remains critically low. Three pairs successfully raised a total of 7 young. A further two female-female pairs both laid infertile 6-egg clutches (DBW). A Royal Tern was at Dockyard 25-28 Jun (PW). Bermuda's first record of **Alpine Swift** was present at East End Dairy, Bermuda 7-9 Jun (PW). A White-throated Sparrow discovered at Ferry Point Park 18 Jun to 16 Jul (MM) provided the first Bermuda summer record.

**August to October 2015** - Highlights of the season included the first Red-necked Phalarope for 21 years and the first fall record of Red Crossbill.

The long-staying **West Indian Whistling-Duck** relocated to Port Royal GC 18 Sep-31 Oct (AD). About 100 **Blue-winged Teal** were noted at various ponds 6 Oct, the day after Hurricane Joaquin (DBW). An ad. **Brown Booby** was seen in Castle Harbour 9 Oct (JM). A long-staying imm. **Brown Pelican** was still present in Mangrove Bay to at least 24 Oct (AD). Single **Sharp-shinned Hawks** were seen on Nonsuch Is. 9 Oct and Alton Hill 24 Oct (AD). A **Black-necked Stilt** remained at Spittal Pond until 18 Sep (NA). A **Hudsonian Godwit** was discovered on Port Royal GC 25-28 Oct (DB). A **Ruff** was at Port Royal GC 8 Sep (AD). A **Baird's Sandpiper** was at Spittal Pond 5-11 Sep (AD). A **Wilson' Phalarope** was at Outer Lea Farm 5 Oct (TW). The first **Red-necked Phalarope** since 1994 was photographed in Jews Bay 19 Sep (RB). A large tern flock in the Little Sound 14-15 Oct included **Least** (1), **Black** (2), **Common** (60), **Forster's** (3), **Sandwich** (4). A **Royal Tern** flew over Mid-Ocean GC 8 Sep (AD). A imm. male **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was seen on Wreck Road 25 Sep (DBW). An influx of 15 **Eastern Wood-Pewees** was noted 9-27 Oct (AD et al). A **Western Kingbird** was on St. Georges GC 10-16 Oct (AD, PW). A **Gray Kingbird** was on Riddell's Bay GC 8 Sep (PW). Six species of vireo were recorded during the season including a **Blue-headed Vireo** at Tudor Hill 26 Oct (AD). Thirty-four species of wood warbler have been recorded so far this season. There was a big fall of hundreds of **Blackpoll Warblers** 14-18 Oct (Mult obs). A **Swamp Sparrow** was seen on Coney Is. 25 Oct (NM). Perhaps an indication of a harsh winter in North America, up to five **Red Crossbills** on Nonsuch Is. 25 Oct was a real surprise (JM).

Observers: Niall Aitkin, David Bates, Richard Brewer, Andrew Dobson, Lisa Greene, Jeremy Madeiros, Miguel Mejias, Neal Morris, Crista Smith, Paul Watson, Tim White, David Wingate.



## Events – for your diary

**Wildlife TV presenter Nigel Marven : "Filming Birds: Behind the Camera with Attenborough, in Front of the Lens with Albatrosses".**

**BUEI Auditorium Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November Lecture starts 7:30pm**

Tickets are \$20 (BAS/BUEI members) \$25 non-members and available by calling 294-0204 or visiting BUEI's Oceans Gift Shop.

**5:00 - 6:30pm:** Sushi Happy Hour at Harbourfront (specially priced drinks & sushi)

**6pm:** Harbourfront opens for dinner

*Ticket holders are entitled to 10% off dinner at the **Harbourfront** (food only) before or after the lecture. Please call 295-4207 for reservations and be sure to mention the lecture. Cannot be combined with any other special offers.*



Nigel Marven is a British wildlife TV presenter, television producer, author and ornithologist. His career started at the BBC Natural History Unit and he worked for 12 years with David Attenborough. In 1998 he moved to ITV producing and presenting wildlife documentaries. He is known for his unorthodox and daring style of presenting wildlife documentaries as well as for including factual knowledge in the proceedings. He has swum with sharks, grappled

with snakes and had giant spiders crawling over his face. This has led some people to compare him to Steve Irwin. In 2003, he founded his own independent company and started making his own wildlife films. Many of his TV wildlife programmes also seek to highlight the conservation of nature and endangered species.

## Cahow Field Trips in November 2015

**Sat 7th, Sun 8th, Wed 11th (Public Holiday), Sat 14th, Sun 15th, Sat 21st, Sun 22nd**

- Do you want to see the Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) on the open ocean?
- The birds gather a couple of miles off-shore prior to coming into their burrows under cover of darkness.
- The best place to experience this amazing opportunity is off Cooper's Point in the late afternoon.
- Why November? Pairs of Cahows are performing courting displays and laying claim to their nesting burrows.

In a joint venture between the Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda Zoological Society, a maximum of 24 persons will board the 'Endurance'. (Trips for Nov 7/8/11/14/15)

Departure: 2pm Aquarium Dock. Return: 6.30pm

Cost: \$50 per person which will include a donation to the Cahow Recovery Programme

The trips on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov will be on the Triangle Diving boat and depart from Grotto Bay Hotel dock. To make a reservation, email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)