



**Bermuda Audubon Society**

**NEWSLETTER** Summer 2016

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

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

In this issue:

- Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp 2016 *Freyja Kermode*
- Bird Report Apr-Aug 2016 *Andrew Dobson*
- Sea Dragon research trip *Paul Watson*
- Common Tern report 2016 *David Wingate*
- Society News
- Events

## **Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp 2016**

### **Freyja Kermode**



Before Nonsuch Camp, my only memory of the island was a brief adventure with my primary 5 class, where JP Skinner showed us around the main parts of the island. It was a short visit, and ever since that day Nonsuch Island had been a sort of mystery, shrouded by myths of endemic Bermuda species coming back from the brink of extinction, such as the legendary Bermuda Cahow. I was overjoyed when I heard about the Audubon camp, because it would give me the insight on the small island that I desired. I was expecting a new world out there, anxiously waiting to experience what Bermuda was like before human habitation. The eight days spent on Nonsuch were packed with activities of all kinds, from geographical dune fieldwork to evening

lectures about marine turtles. Waking up early and having a nonstop day became a comfortable routine, and although it was tiring, the group of people that I was with made it so incredibly enjoyable.

One morning, we had a bright and early 5:00 am tour of the island with Miguel, and it was honestly one of the highlights of the whole experience for me. I saw the world from a completely different perspective; being out that early in the morning brought out a completely different array of animals, and it was really incredible to see how life changes at different points of the day. As humans, we become so accustomed to our world that we begin to ignore what happens during the hours we are asleep. After a lecture one evening, the camp counsellors came around with an object known as the 'Spirit Stick'. I think that was the moment that all the campers realized that we were part of something bigger than just a camp; this was really a room full of people that are going to make a difference later in life. We were able to talk about ourselves on a level deeper than we do in everyday life and share things that generally don't come up in conversation.

I am so privileged to have participated in something as amazing as this camp, because it was really an eye opener for me; I always had tunnel vision on the ocean: that I was going to be a marine biologist. My future always seemed so concrete, but now there are so many options for what I can do in the future. I realized that there are so many different aspects of marine biology; it has many career paths. I really cannot put into words how much this trip meant to me. I discovered so much about Bermuda and learned about things I had never even put a single thought towards. It was hard work and physically draining, but the intellectual benefits made up for it all. I don't think that I could have shared this experience with a better group of people; they made this whole trip worthwhile, and I genuinely think that I have made lifetime friends because they're some of the best people I've ever had the privilege to meet.

*Photo: Camilla Stringer (Camp Director), Maia Steele (Spirit Award), Freyja Kermode (top student Academic Award), Andrew Dobson (Audubon President)*

# Bird Report April to August 2016

Andrew Dobson

Highlights include the first breeding attempt by a Leach's Storm-Petrel, Bermuda's second Western Marsh Harrier and third Cave Swallow.

The long-staying **West Indian Whistling-Duck** was last seen at Port Royal GC 13 May (DG). A **Gadwall** was a rare summer record at Spittal Pond 13 June (AD, PW). A **Hooded Merganser** at Port Royal GC 6-7 Aug was very unusual (AD). A record 115 pairs of **Bermuda Petrel (Cahow)** raised 56 successfully fledging young in 2016 (JM). The peak **Great Shearwater** passage at Cooper's Point 28 May saw 300+ per hour (AD, PW). A **Leach's Storm-Petrel** came into a recently vacated Cahow burrow fitted with webcam on Nonsuch Is. 6 Jun. This is the first



known occasion that a Leach's has prospected a nesting burrow in Bermuda. The bird was still visiting the burrow in July (JM). A **Band-rumped Petrel** was seen 65 miles west of Bermuda 14 May (PW). A **Double-crested Cormorant** in Mangrove Lake 8 Aug was the earliest fall record (MM). An imm.



**Brown Pelican** (above) was seen at various locations 2-16 Jul (MV, CL). Spittal Pond hosted a late spring record of **Least Bittern** 9 May and the earliest fall record 8-15 Aug (PW). A **Swallow-tailed Kite** was in the Port Royal area 14-23 Apr (AD, IP). The **Western Marsh Harrier** present 20 Dec 2015 to 22 Apr was photographed with a second bird at Hungry Bay 18 Apr (DG). A **Northern Harrier** was still present near Hinson's Is. 8 May (EH). A maximum 5 **Black-necked Stilts** were present at North Pond 1-9 June (AD). A **Ruff** on Mid-Ocean GC 22 Apr may have been the same bird at East End Dairy 27 Apr-1 May (PW). A **Wilson's Phalarope** was a Spittal Pond 9 June (AD). A **Great Skua** passed Cooper's Point 28 May (PW). Single **South Polar Skuas** were seen 81 and 108 miles west of Bermuda 14 May (EH, PW). A **Gull-billed Tern** was at Spittal Pond 9-12 May and another at the Airport 25 Jun-11 Jul (PW). A **Roseate Tern** was in

the Great Sound 5-10 May (DBW). **Common Nighthawks** are unusual in spring, so 4 at East End Dairy 9-10 May were notable (PW). Record numbers of **Cliff Swallows** appeared in Aug with a maximum flock of 40 at Spittal Pond 12 Aug (IP, WF). Bermuda's third record of **Cave Swallow** (above) was at East End Dairy 10-11 May (PW). A late **Louisiana Waterthrush** was at BIOS 10-18 May and another provided the first returning fall warbler at Compston's Pond 31 Jul-2 Aug (PW). A male **American Redstart** was seen in Jenningsland 10 July (LM), the first July record. A **Blackburnian Warbler** (right) was at Spittal Pond 9-10 May (AD). Spring **Bobolinks** are always scarce but at least 7 were seen at various locations 7-15 May (AD).



Observers: Geoff Bell, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Derek Gibbons, Erich & Janice Hetzel, Chris Loscalzo, Jeremy Madeiros, Leila Madeiros, Ingela Persson, Marianne Vahey, Paul Watson, David Wingate.

*Photos Andrew Dobson*

# SY Sea Dragon Sargassum Research Trip 13-15 May 2016

Paul Watson

Day 1: Following a safety briefing, the 72-foot expedition yacht *Sea Dragon* departed St George's Harbour at 11:00 am with eight scientists and a crew of three. I was asked to be a part of this research trip to monitor seabirds and was also joined by fellow Audubon member Erich Hetzel. **American Herring Gull** and **Mallard** were seen inshore. Once offshore we headed SW from Spit Buoy to clear the south shore reef. As expected, large numbers of **White tailed tropicbird** (Longtail) were seen throughout the transit of the South shore of Bermuda. The first pelagic bird, a **Cory's Shearwater**, was seen at 12:20 pm about 2.5 nm south of Spittal Pond This species breeds in the Azores, Madeira, Canary and Cape Verde islands as well as the Mediterranean. Another appeared 30 minutes later. Later in the afternoon an obliging if somewhat late **Humpback Whale** gave fair views. This was followed by a **Great Shearwater**, a Southern Atlantic Ocean breeder. This bird can be seen in large numbers off Bermuda between May and Mid July. Shortly after, another long distance migrant, an **Arctic Tern**, was seen. This species sees the most daylight in its lifetime migrating between the Arctic in the summer to breed and the Antarctic in our winter. Moments later the large and menacing **Pomarine Jaeger** headed toward the boat allowing good views at around 100 metres showing the twisted spoon tail and 'light phase' plumage. A Longtail was seen 16 nm to the SW heading offshore to feed, followed shortly thereafter by our first **Sooty Shearwater** a species which breeds in the islands around the tip of South America as well as around New Zealand and migrates into the North Atlantic as well as Pacific. This was followed 20 minutes later by our first **Leach's Storm-Petrel** a small black and white seabird which breeds in northern latitudes in both the Pacific and Atlantic (Maine through to Newfoundland and Greenland, as well as northern Europe) and migrates into the tropics in winter, and a second **Great Shearwater**. Moments later a pair of **Leach's Storm-Petrels** flew in close to the boat allowing good views. The day was drawing to a close and just before sunset a medium large tern was seen about ¼ mile away. This was either an adult **Sooty** or **Bridled Tern**.



Day 2: First light had the boat around 65 miles west of Bermuda and started with **Sooty Shearwater** and **White tailed tropicbird** which was sitting on the ocean. At 7:45 am a medium sized storm-petrel approached the boat very close and the size, structure and flight was immediately recognizable as **Band-rumped Storm Petrel**, a bird which was only first seen in Bermuda Waters in 2013 and Atlantic birds hail from Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde, Ascension and St Helena. Erich and the rest of the boat were rudely awakened shortly after by the shout of "**South Polar Skua!**" and our first encounter of the trip of this skua which breeds around the Antarctic edge and Antarctic Peninsula, and migrates into the

North Atlantic in our Summer. The day continued with **Sooty Shearwater**, and both **Leach's** and our first **Wilson's Storm-Petrel**. The latter is a circumpolar Antarctic and sub-Antarctic islands breeder and believed to be one of the most prolific birds (in numbers) in the world, however as it spends all its life on the ocean it is seen by few people. Unfortunately we had made it about 100 nm west of Bermuda but had to U-turn and head for home in within our allotted time-frame. Around 12:00 pm, two more **Sooty Shearwater** flew close by the boat, but the weather was not to cooperate and wind and rain caused those not on 'watch' to remain below decks thoroughly dejected with the deluge. By 6pm the rain had stopped and birding resumed with an obliging **Arctic Tern** heading north, and then our second **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** and second **South Polar Skua**. The birds were then few and far between and the day ended with a **Sooty Shearwater**.

Day 3: Started with thunder and lightning before dawn as we approached the west of Bermuda and between thunder storms, an **Arctic tern** flew quickly North using the strong South winds as a push. Four **Sooty Shearwater** and nine **White-tailed Tropicbird** all heading offshore, were our south shore escorts as we transited around 3-8 miles offshore. As we approached St George's harbor tropicbird numbers increased dramatically and a single **Lesser Black-backed Gull** sat and watched our arrival into the harbour.

*Photo: Paul Watson (centre) on board Sea Dragon (Erich Hetzel)*

# Common Tern Report 2016

David Wingate



This year one of the male Common Terns failed to return so there are now only two male/female pairs and two female/female pairs left in the population. We conducted an experimental fertile egg transfer from the buoy nesting M/F pair in St. Georges Harbour to an island nesting F/F pair in Harrington Sound in an effort to boost productivity. The four eggs were hatched successfully by the fostering F/F pair and the chicks have now fledged. They are double banded to be recognisable and will be monitored through the rest of the summer until they fly South. The buoy nesting pair from which the eggs were taken re-laid immediately as expected and hatched a second clutch but two of the three chicks have since fallen overboard and been lost. That is the unavoidable hazard of buoy nesting and the best mitigation to solve that problem if the pair returns to the buoy next year will be to tether a proper tern nesting raft to that buoy, but funds will be needed to make that raft. The M/F pair nesting on Ricketts Islet in Hamilton Harbour successfully fledged 3 chicks, so the total reared this year so far is 8. The other buoy nesting pair in Little Sound was a F/F pair with 4 infertile eggs which would have failed anyway, but it is worth relating what happened to that nest on the last day of Heritage Week, because it provides some indication of the problems the terns may face during America's Cup next June. On National Heroes' Day, June 20th, the Correia Construction's giant barge served as the floating platform for music groups and host of a gigantic rafting party. It tied up to the very buoy where the terns had their nest despite warning signs and previous government publicity warning boats to stay clear. By the time the marine police were notified the momentum of the occasion made a change of venue unenforceable. A total of 400 large and small pleasure craft were counted close around the barge and buoy by afternoon. The eggs were broken and the terns abandoned.

The Bermuda Weather Service was permitted by Bermuda Audubon Society to erect an anemometer on their Pearl Island nature reserve in early April for the benefit of the America's Cup. The installation is attached to the marine navigation light on the islet and it is not expected to pose a problem even if terns should re-colonize there next year.

*Photo: Little Sound nesting buoy (Andrew Dobson)*

## Society News

### Treasurer needed

The Society is looking for a new treasurer to start in January 2017. Please email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) if you would like to know more information.



Left: The Audubon Society was able to assist with BirdLife International which decided to make Bermuda the venue for its Global Advisory Group in June. A focus of their attention was on the 'Flyways of the World' – the main migratory routes for birds and the challenges they face. The Bermuda Audubon Society assisted with the meeting including presentations from David Wingate, Jeremy Madeiros and Andrew Dobson. They visited Nonsuch for a fieldtrip. Left: Jeremy Madeiros showing a Cahow to BirdLife CEO Patricia Zurita. (photo Kirsten Hines)



Left: Bermuda National Trust annual awards 2016. David Wingate (second from left) receives an environmental award on behalf of the Bermuda Audubon Society for the Seymour's Pond Nature Trail.

Right: There was a very good turnout for the AGM, providing an opportunity to say farewell and thank you to our patron of the past 4 years H.E. George Fergusson and Margaret Fergusson



Left: The annual fieldtrip to Nonsuch Island was a great success, especially the Cahow encounter. Members were given a tour of the island and also saw nesting Longtails. Many thanks to Jeremy Madeiros

## Events - for your diary

- **Thursday 25th August**

Fund-raising cruise around the harbour and islands on Michael Hayward's 'Explorer' on 7:00-9:00 pm .  
Departure from The Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club Cost: \$25 - members, \$30 - non-members.  
Bring your own picnic supper, we'll supply the wine! If you want to swim - come prepared.  
Email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) for reservations. **THIS CRUISE IS FULLY BOOKED**

- **Saturday 3 September**

A guided bird walk at Spittal Pond as part of the World Shorebird Count (2-6 Sept)  
Meet at the eastern car park at 8:00am



- **Friday 28-Sunday 30 October**

Paget Island Bird Camp  
Email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) for more details

- **Cahow Field Trips in November 2016**

**Sat 5th, Sun 6th, Fri 11th (Public Holiday), Sat 12th, Sun 13th, Sat 19th, Sun 27th**

- 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'.

Departure: 2pm Aquarium Dock. Return: 6.30pm  
Cost: \$50 per person which will include a donation to the Cahow Recovery Programme

To make a reservation, email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)