

Bermuda Audubon Society
NEWSLETTER

February
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P O Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.7 No.1

A Winter of Surprises

by Andrew Dobson

There has been some exceptional weather this winter - above average rainfall, constant gales during the Christmas season and cool temperatures. The birdwatching however has been surprisingly good, producing a number of notable winter records. Several species have wintered in Bermuda for the first time - an **American Avocet** took up residence on Mid Ocean golf course, while the Madeiros residence in Jenningsland played host to two equal rarities, a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** and **Ruby -throated Hummingbird**. The nuthatch has been making frequent visits to the bird table, not only devouring pounds of nuts and seeds, but storing them in every nook and cranny of the surrounding trees. The hummingbird has spent much of its time flycatching as well as feeding on the nectar of brightly coloured plants. This male with a striking ruby throat has also been making daily visits to a hummingbird feeder.

Other highlights have included a record influx of up to fourteen **Glossy Ibis**. Seventeen species of duck have been recorded with Spittal Pond the site for **Gadwall**, **Eurasian** and **American**

Wigeon, **Greater and Lesser Scaup** and **Common Goldeneye**. Widespread and frequent flooding has not only supported the ducks but also about two hundred **American Coot** that are wintering. One or possibly two **Peregrine Falcons** may well be the first birds of this species to have wintered here. In November and December, four **Saw-whet Owls** were recorded. This reflected a well observed movement of this species in eastern North America during the late Fall.

The severe storms in the US were undoubtedly responsible for the arrival of **Killdeer** and near record numbers of **Dunlin** in mid-January. Other unusual arrivals at this time included a **Horned Lark**, **Red-winged Blackbird**(3), **Common Grackle** and **Brown-headed Cowbird**.

The occurrence of wintering warblers is one of the delights of birding during the winter months in Bermuda. At similar latitudes in the USA, freezing temperatures at this time of the year push the birds into the West Indies, Central and South America. Thanks to the ameliorating influence of the Gulf

Stream, our mild winters allow more than twenty species of warbler to regularly winter. Most unusual this year were single sightings of **Kentucky Warbler** and **Connecticut Warbler** in mid-December.



Late news concerns another new record for Bermuda. A **Marsh Wren** was discovered at Pembroke Marsh by Eric Amos on 24th January 1996. It was seen by many birdwatchers the following day and was recorded on camera and video. The January surprises continued with a **Northern Mockingbird** at Hog Bay Park - the first for many years, and finally, Bermuda's second ever **Ash-throated Flycatcher** found by Bruce Lohran. This flycatcher from the western side of North America is rarely seen in the east, let alone Bermuda!

Several other notable sightings were made this winter, and these are commented upon in the annual Christmas bird count.

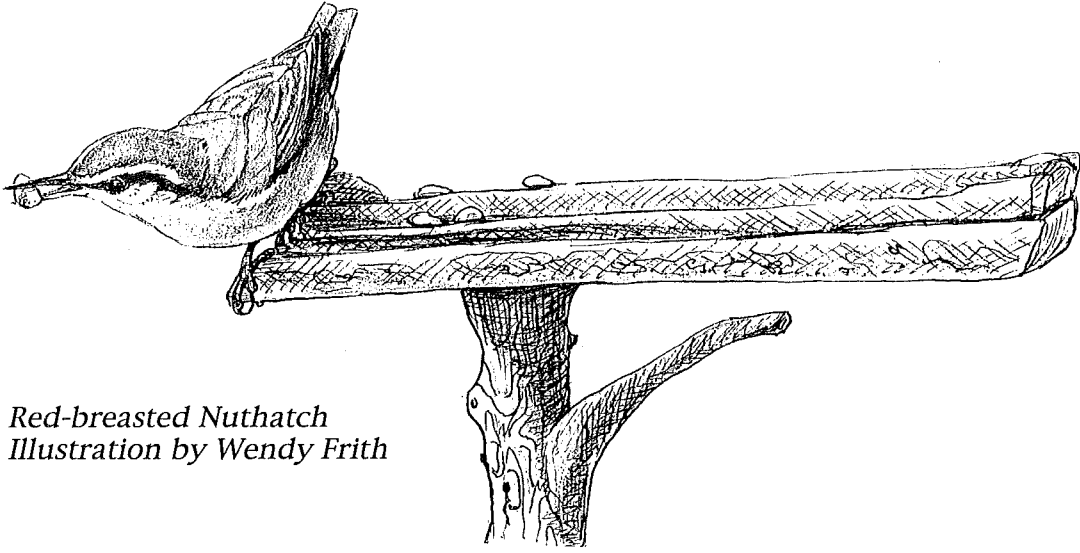
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Illustration by Wendy Frith

Christmas Bird Count 1995

by Eric Amos

During a winter of endless storms and gales, the fine weather on the count day yielded five new species in a total of 100 species (the second highest total in 21 years). There were 16 participants in 8 parties (by far the most ever fielded) and we also had our first ever "feeder watch". The "Bird of the Count" is difficult to pin down. We had our first wintering **American Avocet**, a species which winters on the east coast from the Carolina's south, so it

had to happen sometime. It came as no surprise, having been resident on Mid-Ocean GC for some months. The Madeiros's amazing **Red-breasted Nuthatch** and **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** (both at feeders) were also strong contenders, but they had also been present for some while. Wendy Frith's **Empidonax flycatcher** was supported by a sketch and notes but could not be pinned down to an individual species. Andrew Dobson added



Red-breasted Nuthatch
Illustration by Wendy Frith

a new species to the count week - a **Northern Shrike**. Wendy, her daughter Saskia and Bruce Lohran also elevated a **Tree Swallow** from a previous count week to CBC status. David Wingate did the same for the American race of **White-eyed Vireo**. There were also second records for **Northern Gannet** (Paul Watson) and **White-crowned Sparrow** (Jeremy Madeiros) and the second consecutive year for **Solitary Vireo** (Wingate et al). Also notable was the third record of a **Gadwall** on the count. But the "Count Bird" must go to Steven DeSilva's **Grey-cheeked Thrush** -

which might even turn out to be a **Bicknell's Thrush** if greater study is possible.

High counts were few and far between. Of local birds, only **American Crow** and **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** were seen in record numbers. High counts among the migrants were - **Lesser Black-backed** and **Bonaparte's Gulls**, **Belted Kingfisher**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Black-and-white Warblers**, **American Redstart**, **Common Yellowthroat** and **Northern Oriole**.

Bermuda Audubon Society
Hotline 238-3239

Bird News Society Business
Environmental Concerns

The effect of "Hurricane Felix" on White-tailed Tropicbirds and how to help their recovery.

by *Jeremy Madeiros*

Last year was one of the most active hurricane seasons in the North Atlantic. Of nineteen named storms, four hurricanes - "Felix", "Iris", "Luis" and "Marilyn", and two tropical storms - "Barry" and "Chantal", either directly affected the island with high winds or indirectly with high surf and heavy rainfall.

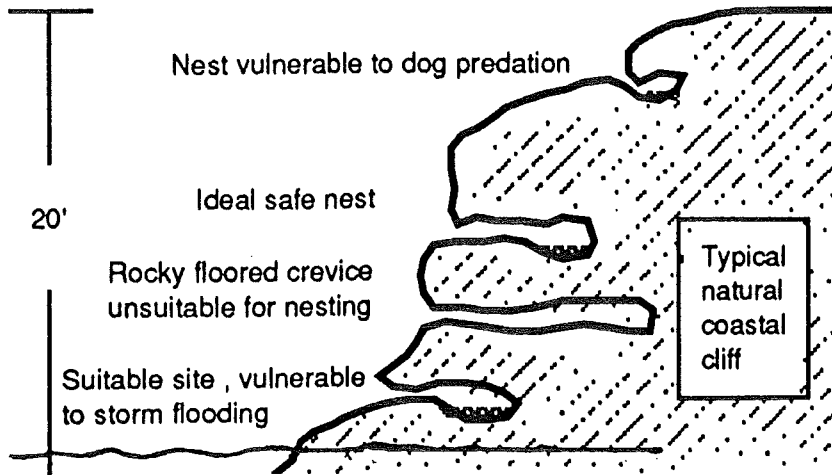
"Felix" will be remembered for the enormous coastal erosion to the South Shore, with cliff collapse and entire beaches eroded to the bedrock. The continuation of huge swells and waves caused by "Iris" and "Luis" may have made this the worst period of coastal erosion since the great hurricane of 1899. Much vegetation was washed away and hundreds of reef fish were washed ashore. Perhaps the most serious effect on our wildlife was the damage to the nest sites of our national bird, the **White-tailed Tropicbird** or "**Longtail**" *Phaethon lepturus*. It is estimated that 20-30 % of Longtail nest holes may have been destroyed or rendered useless along the south and south-east facing coasts. To make matters worse, up to one-third of Longtail chicks may still have been on their nests, and a few late breeding adults were still brooding eggs or downy chicks. Fatalities must have been great.

The loss of breeding sites is serious and is the worst since hurricane "Dean" in 1989, which like "Felix" was an early storm with significant destructive wave action. Longtails can recover from natural disasters such as this, but it can take decades and there are also a number of other problems caused by man. The Longtail is already in decline as a nesting species in Bermuda, due to human coastal development, dog and cat predation, competition for nest sites from feral pigeons and trash being stuffed into burrows. These have contributed to a substantial decline in Bermuda's Longtail population - perhaps as much as 40 to 50% over the last 20 to 30 years. So how can you help?

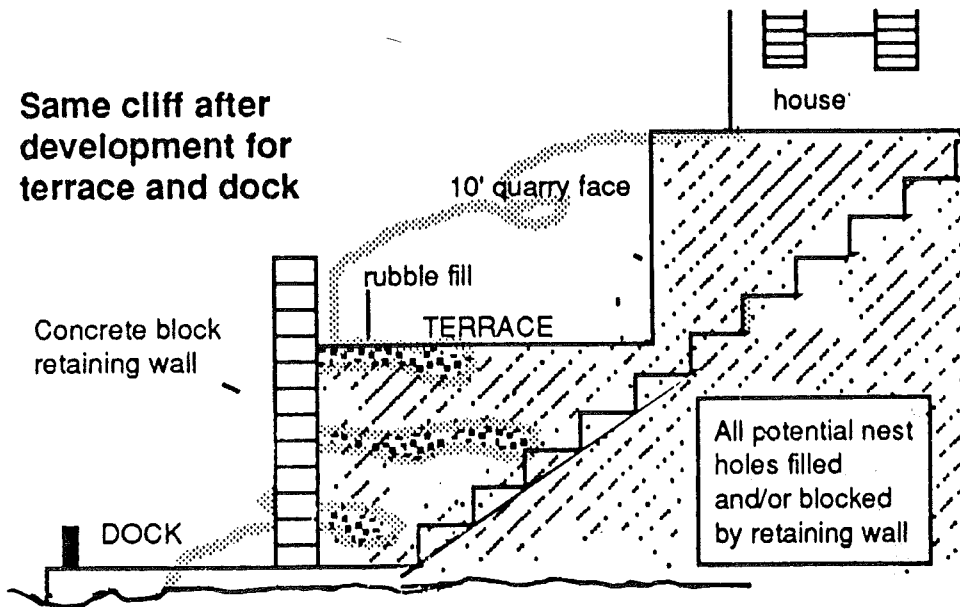
1. Remove rocks, trash and other debris from burrows and make sure the base has a covering of clean sand (necessary to prevent egg breakage).
2. Enlarge existing holes on cliffs.
3. Build cavities into retaining walls.
4. Create miniature 'stone houses' with two foot long tunnels on gently sloping shorelines - but only where there are no dogs or cats.

The following diagrams designed by Dr. Wingate show how artificial burrows can be created. Additional copies are available from the Parks Department.

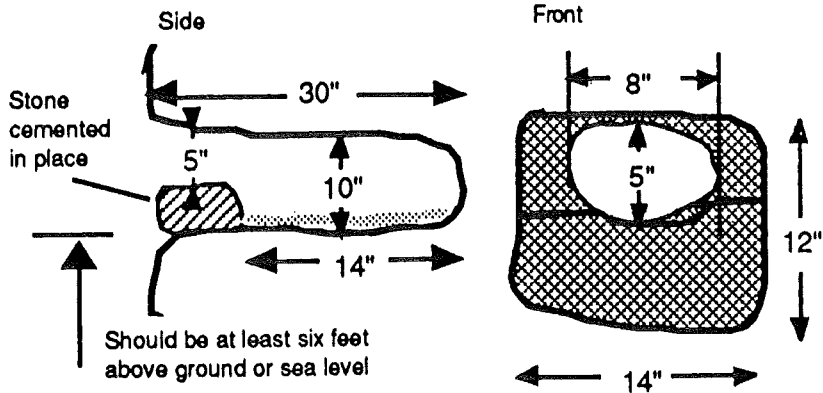
Example of original natural habitat



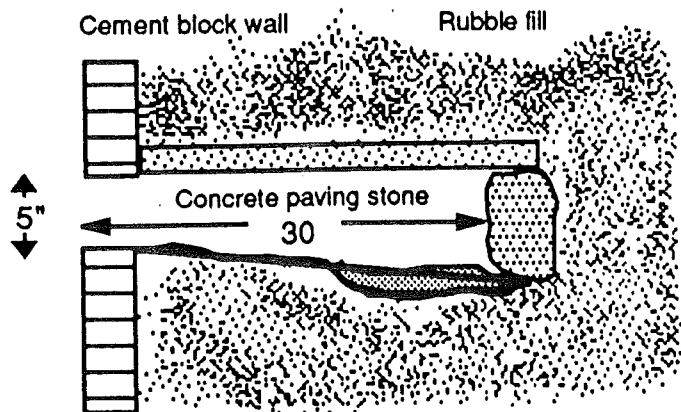
Same cliff after development for terrace and dock



Nest hole excavated into a quarry face or sheer coastal cliff
 (It is easiest to drill or jack hammer the hole to the dimensions of the nest chamber and the stop down the the entrance afterwards with stones cemented in place.)



Nest built into retaining wall or rubble - filled terrace



This design is only practical if the nests are built into the terrace as it is being constructed unless the roof of the nest is at ground level

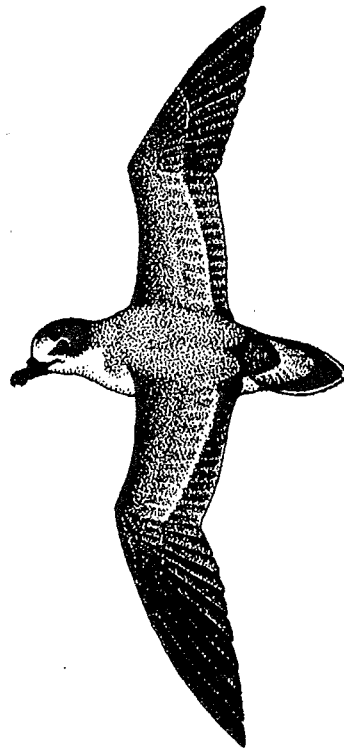
Cahow Field Trip

by Penny Soares

The pelagic field trip was a great success, marking a milestone in cahow observations. The weather postponed the trip until 18th November when fourteen people braved choppy seas with 3-5 foot swells and rain squalls - hoping to glimpse what few have ever seen at sea - the **Bermuda Petrel** *Pterodroma cahow*.

We left the Biological Station at 2.15pm, and with a NNE 10 knot wind blowing we headed five miles ESE off St. David's Lighthouse. David Wingate and Peter Holmes laid out a fish oil slick in the hope of attracting some cahows that might be returning to their burrows. By 4.15pm, all we had seen flying were a few flying fish! Although several of us were feeling decidedly unwell, optimism was still running high. All of a sudden there was a shout from the bridge "Birds on the horizon". David shouted "Cahows!" Three or four birds were flying towards the boat, no doubt having smelt the fish oil. We could scarcely believe our eyes as two came extremely close to the boat. One cahow actually circled the boat giving us splendid views and time to study its distinctive features. - the jet black cap and dark brown back with snowy white underside. We could also see its black carpel spot as it turned beside us. The cahow flight is so graceful, it seems to rear up, then almost come to a stop before gliding down into a trough between the waves. With its long narrow wings (3 feet across) the cahow can fly at great speed using the wind.

The sun was setting fast and it was time to return. As we headed back, more birds were seen. About turn we went and another fish oil slick was put out. Of the two cahows that were seen this time, one came close enough to get exceptional views. We were unsure if these were two new birds or two of the four seen earlier. The day ended with a beautiful sunset as we returned to St. Georges, our trip a resounding success. David was ecstatic, the first time he had observed cahows so close at sea. We were pleased to share the rare event with him.



BAMZ Library

come on by!

Some of you are already familiar with the library at the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo, but for those of you who are not, this is an invitation to come and see what we have to offer. Although primarily for staff use, this is a reference source that is also open to the public - especially anyone with an interest in natural history.

Apart from the book collection, which includes a growing junior section, there are the ever useful 'Bermuda Binders', (topic binders on Bermuda's natural history which are consulted constantly and added to all the time). Magazines, journals and newsletters from *Audubon* to *Zoonooz* explore many areas of natural history, marine biology and science education. *Ranger Rick* and *National Geographic World* are there for the young, while teachers will find great ideas in *Science & Children* or *Science Scope*.

There is a large bird section (of course!), ranging from Bent's *Life Histories* and Bannerman's *Birds of the Atlantic Islands*, to encyclopedias and field guides covering many parts of the world. Also on the shelves are the first two volumes of *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, a magnificent donation from the Bermuda Audubon Society, which you should definitely see. A fairly recent innovation is the setting up of a library computer which means you can search various library catalogues, including the Bermuda Natural History Bibliography.

If you would like to come in for a browse, or if you have a student in the family who is working on a natural history project, give me a call at 293-2727 to arrange a time. Hours are 1.30 pm - 5.30 pm, Tuesday to Friday, and Saturday mornings from 9.00 am - 1.00 pm. I look forward to hearing from you!

Penny Hill
BAMZ Librarian

Bermuda Audubon Society

Committee 1995-96

President	Jeremy Madeiros
Vice-President	Andrew Dobson
Treasurer	Ted Cassidy
Secretary	Heather DeSilva
Committee members	Penny Hill Peter Holmes David O'Neill Helge Trapnell David Wingate
Newsletter	Andrew Dobson

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(see address label for expiry date)

Name.....Tel.No.....

Address.....

Adult.....\$10.00

Student.....\$ 5.00

Donation...\$.....

New Member

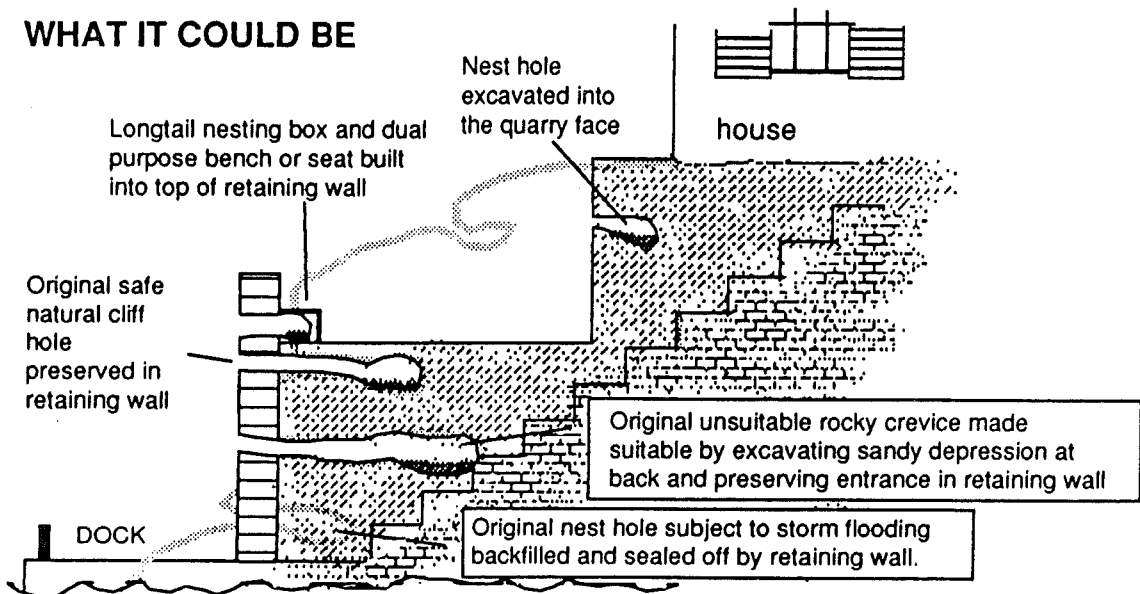
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WHAT IT COULD BE



If undelivered please return to:



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Future Events

**Sunday 18th
February**

**Harbour Islands Field Trip
Depart Albuoy's Point 2.00pm
Cost \$15 Tel. 238-3239 for reservations**

**Saturday 9th
March**

**Working Party - Vesey Street - 2.00pm
Remove Mexican Pepper/Clean-up**

**Wednesday 20th
March**

**"The Flora and Fauna of the Cayman Islands"
Slide Show and Talk by Richard Ground
Horticultural Hall 8.00pm**

**Saturday 20th
April**

**Whale Watch
Depart Albuoy's Point 8.00pm
Cost \$60 Tel.292-0707 for reservations**