



NEWSLETTER

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HAIRY WOODPECKER (*DRYOBATES VILOSUS*) – FIRST PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD FOR BERMUDA

by Dr. Miguel Mejías

Chester Bennington of Linkin Park once said, “Best things come to those who wait,” and boy was he right! Ever since Herb Marshall and Joanne Smith reported a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) on December 17th, 2022, at the Botanical Gardens, I made it my mission to get stellar shots of the rare vagrant. To do this, I spent the following days at the Gardens, learning the hummer’s feeding routes along the “L-shaped” flowerbed of Celebration Lane. After an hour I realized it was pointless running after a teabag-sized bird that beats its wings about 50 times a second, while lugging a big camera lens and binos. In order to get a photo, I remained posted in front of a large patch of Shrimp Plant (*Justicia brandegeana*), a pretty bush with wine-colored flowers the hummer suckled from regularly. The flower visits ranged from every 20-60 min, with feeding sessions lasting no more than 30 seconds; not much time to get a great photo!! I would spend up to 5 hours watching and waiting, sometimes as silent and still as a King’s Guard, looking at the flowers, hoping to get the shot (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) feeding on Indian Shot (*Canna indica*) at the Botanical Gardens, Bermuda.



Fig. 2 First photograph and record confirmation of a Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates vilosus*) in Bermuda, seen scaling trees at the Botanical Gardens. The lack of red on the nape indicates it's a female bird

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Hairy Woodpecker
- Christmas Bird Count
- Diary of a Young Naturalist
- February Contest
- PART Team Update
- Bird Report Nov-Feb
- Society News & Events
- Upcoming Events

On December 21st, 2022, while posted at Celebration Lane, I was joined by Bruce Lorhan and Richard Lee. While conversating with the latter gentleman, my ears were immediately drawn to the loud “pic-pic-pic” notes of a woodpecker!! I turned around and began walking towards the calls, which were coming from a row of Royal Palms (*Roystonea regia*). “I hear a sapsucker calling,” I confidently told the two gentlemen. I then got a quick glimpse of the woodpecker, as it worked along the circumference of the trunk. My eyes then tracked the airborne bird to a nearby Rubber Tree (*Ficus elastica*), where it crept along an exposed branch. While it was certainly the size of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*), its attire was all wrong...it was black and white!!! I fired a few shots with my camera and realized that I was looking at a Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates vilosus*)!! I screamed the ID back to Bruce and Richard with excitement, before literally running after the woodpecker at full tilt, taking rapid-fire photos (Fig. 2).

Compared to the hummingbird, tracking the woodpecker, and its ruckus calls, from tree to tree, was child’s play. It remained in the area for about 5-6 mins, before flying straight east, and all was quiet again.

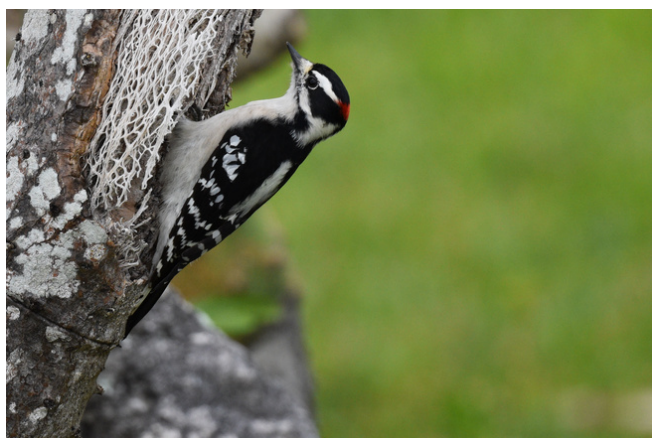


Fig. 3 A male **Downy Woodpecker** (*Dryobates pubescens*), coincidentally, also at the Botanical Gardens.



Fig. 3 Heavy spotting evident on vagrant **Hairy Woodpecker** (*Dryobates vilosus*)

Hairy Woodpeckers are a non-migratory species that breed throughout Canada, the United States, Mexico, and the Bahamas. Their preferred habitat is deciduous and/or coniferous forests, where they hammer away at tree bark to feed on wood-burrowing insects. They can be mistaken for their much smaller, black and white, distant cousin, the Downy Woodpecker (*D. pubescens*), another rare winter vagrant to Bermuda, albeit more common (Fig. 3). Strong weather systems in North America can sometimes push these otherwise sedentary species off the continent, where they must fly to faraway lands, like Bermuda. The heavy white spotting indicates its off the eastern North American race (Fig. 4); Hairy’s from the west have almost entirely black wings.

This is arguably the best bird I’ve found, thus far, in Bermuda. There is only one other Hairy Woodpecker record for the island, however, it lacked photographs. It has become apparent to me that digital photography, video, and/or audio recordings have become the new gold standard for confirming new or rare records; in the past birds were collected as specimens to prove records! Thus, my photographs, which are the first for this species on the island, now make the Hairy Woodpecker an unquestionable record for Bermuda. After getting images of my long sought-after hummingbird, and the surprise Hairy Woodpecker, I am now an even stronger believer that best things do indeed come...to those who wait.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

by Janice Hetzel



Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) Photo: Herb Marshall

On December 17th ten teams of intrepid bird watchers took off early in the morning to observe and count every bird that they could see. They travelled by boat, by car, by bike, by golf cart and by foot. This was Bermuda's 48th year participating in the annual Christmas Bird Count of the National Audubon Society in the US. This long-term data helps scientists assess the long-term health and status of bird populations and to inform strategies to protect birds and their habitat.

This year we counted 9230 individual birds and 90 species on count day. We also had 5 additional species during the count week. This is up from the past few years where we had 78-80 species. These numbers are remarkable considering that we have only 17 permanent resident species meaning we observed 70 migrant species on the island in one day. On average we will see 200 different species in Bermuda in the course of a year. Bermuda is an important stop for migrant birds as it provides food and shelter on their long trips across the ocean. Bird populations are declining across the globe, and we must protect habitat to provide this safe haven for our visitors.

As in the past, our invasive species were present in the highest numbers with European Starlings on top (2397) followed by House Sparrows (2030) and then Kiskadees (1182). Notable species seen included Red-breasted Merganser, Black-crowned Night Heron, Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-throated Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Nineteen varieties of warbler were observed as well as the usual raptors (Osprey, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin.) Of note, the American Eagle was not seen during the Christmas Bird Count and has not been seen again this year. Notable birds during the count week included Red-breasted Nuthatch, Baltimore Oriole, Virginia Rail and Savannah Sparrow.



Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) Photo: LeShun Smith

Thanks to all of the participants for their hard work and to Heather Bottelli for organizing and collating the data.

DIARY OF A YOUNG NATURALIST

by David Wingate

[FOREWORD: This was one of my earliest Cahow night watches after taking on the Cahow Conservation program from Louis S. Mowbray in 1957. My boat was an open 12' plywood hull with 10hp outboard engine. There was no consideration for safety. It was not equipped with any boat safety gear and I had no radio. (This was well before the era of cell phones!) My only means of communication to shore was by morse code, using my flashlight. I was dependent on my own cognisance as the saying goes. My only comfort on the islet was a wooden hut for sleeping in, placed there by Mowbray in 1954. Heaven knows what my parents and my girlfriend Anita, (who I was soon to marry), thought.

1958

Oct 22

Immediately after work yesterday, being a calm day, I went straight out to the islands, arriving on Inner Pear about sundown, too late to check the burrows for fear of disturbing any flying birds in the vicinity. I took up a partially concealed position until about 9 p.m. Saw nothing, but heard a few "barking" sounds nearby about 6:30 which could have been Cahows. I slept outside till 4 a.m when a shower made me retreat to the hut. It was still calm at 4 a.m.



Oct 23

Awaking at 6:30 a.m. I was amazed to find the island in the grip of a easterly gale. Huge seas ran outside the reef and being easterly exposure surrounded Inner Pear as well. A very slight lee saved my boat from foundering at its mooring. To attempt getting ashore was hopeless as all my escape routes except the beach were under heavy swell. A beach landing was out of the question as boats invariably roll over in breaking waves - I refused assistance offered by airforce personnel from Kindley twice during day when they suggested a beach landing. Because my boat remained safely afloat, bobbing in the swell I decided to stay until a change in weather made escape with the boat possible. All day the wind remained strong from east. By six p.m. approaching dark and a few increasing gusts I - the human being - was feeling despair (for £160 of boat & engine).

I myself could outlast the gale even if it had lasted 3 days though I had no food and very little water. The whole impression conveyed this evening though was the utter isolation and uninhabitable atmosphere of the island. No doubt the secret of its success as a foolproof sanctuary for Cahows against man for 300 years! and just at this moment when even to imagine the horrors of being caught out on the raging ocean beyond the reefs made me shudder, listening to the roar and thunder of waves, seeing cascading white foam off Cooper's Pt. and Outer Pear and praying that my boat - hidden in dark shadows of waves will stay afloat and not break loose - just at that moment, gliding as gracefully as an albatross out of the wild ocean beyond the reefs comes the real inhabitant of this wild island, the gray shadow of a Cahow circles the island at high speed before landing in one of the burrows.....

Oct 24

...Escaped Inner Pear mid a.m. as the wind and seas had declined sufficiently to risk running broadside to the swells into the bay of Clearwater beach in the lee of Grazeburys Is. However it was still scary, with views of the land nearly disappearing in the troughs and waves steepening to near breaking near Grazebury's. Moored the boat off the smaller beach south of Clearwater and arranged to get a lift home. A heavy rain today made me fear my boat would fill with water and be sunk so I went down at night to bail it. Soon after I got in it the anchor rope broke. I could never have been luckier than to be there when it happened! Fortunately a small beach was nearby so I pulled it up onto that with no mishap except that I was almost shot by a guard who took me for a sabateur and had me standing against a wall with arms out before I could explain who I was!

THE GREAT FEBRUARY BERMUDA BIRDING CONTEST

by *Erich Hetzel*

The results of the Great February Bermuda Birding Contest 2023 (GFBBC) are official!

The idea for the GFBBC was hatched three years ago as a fun way to liven up an often cold and rainy birding month. We also wanted to test a theory that increased birding activity in February might result in more species being seen.

All birders – whether novice or well-seasoned– had a real chance to come out on top, due to handicapping based on past birding records. Each birder was given an alias and periodic standings were published. Knowing your own position, but not knowing who was in the lead or which birder was nipping at your heels, seemed to spur everyone on. Final scores included the handicapped starting points, one point per species seen and one point for each day a record was submitted. Additional points were available for the best bird ID or artistic photo or audio recording. With Bermuda's birders sharing near up-to-the-minute sightings via WhatsApp, you really could be in the running if you just got out there and looked.



Judged the best of the many Hummingbird Photos:
Richard Brewer

Bermuda has recorded four-hundred bird species, amazing for a country with only twenty resident breeding species. In any given year we'll see approximately 200 of those. To put this in perspective, there are only about 500 bird species that breed east of the Mississippi with around 170 more that occur regularly in the Eastern US but breed elsewhere. So how has Bermuda recorded so many?

One reason is that Bermuda is on the Atlantic flyway - a documented bird-migration route that, in the Fall, runs from eastern Canada/Northeast US to Central and South America. Though most migrants simply pass us by, some stop in Bermuda briefly and a few choose to stay the winter. Examples of some wintering visitors are the Black-and-White Warbler, American Redstart and Ovenbird.



Runner Up for the Best Artistic Photo: Herb Marshall



Runner Up for the Best Bird ID Photo: Tim White

Other birds might be taken up by strong gales off the North American continent and become accidental visitors. These could be quite rare. This winter, such wind-borne birds included a Downy Woodpecker, a Hairy Woodpecker and a Townsend's Warbler. The Hairy Woodpecker had been recorded just once before in Bermuda, while the Downy Woodpecker and the Townsend's Warbler only a handful of times.

So, who won the 2023 GFBBC you want to know?... Cue the drum roll please ... This year's overall winner was Richard Brewer. Richard has only been birding for several years and uses only a camera to find and record his sightings - a special skill mastered by just a few. In second place was Ingela Persson with Andrea Webb in third. To help cement their 1st and 2nd place finishes, Richard won both the best bird ID photograph as well as the best artistic bird photograph, and Ingela won the best sound recording for her audio of an Ovenbird. It was a close finish with the top contestants separated by just a few points. The winner takes home the coveted "Stone Owl", a carved masterpiece which we're sure Richard is proudly (and prominently) displaying! Of note, Paul Watson recorded the most species seen in February at 99 and five contestants recorded 28 lists - at least one per day.



Best Bird ID Photo: Indigo Bunting, by Richard Brewer



Best Artistic Photo: Gray Catbird, by Richard Brewer

Has the contest achieved its goals? Absolutely! The number of species recorded in February has increased from an average of 86 over the previous nine years, to an average of 110 for the three years this contest has run - a thirty percent increase. And, not least of all, Bermuda's February birders had fun! Eight hundred and thirty-seven checklists were submitted in February 2023 by 28 observers. Eight hundred and sixty-two bird photographs were submitted. Some of these photographs are stunning! All of Bermuda's birding data is entered into the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's data tracking system known as eBird. This data then helps scientists better understand bird populations, migration patterns, habitat use and changes in these patterns over time. This information is also used for conservation planning, decision-making, and can help inform policies related to bird conservation and management. All this data is available to see via www.ebird.org



BUYING BACK BERMUDA FOR YOU AND OUR WILDLIFE

Buy Back Bermuda is busy on the ground at Somerset Long Bay East, Vesey and Eve's Pond nature reserves. We hope you make regular visits to these special places to monitor progress and enjoy the beauty of the great outdoors. Planning is underway on the new High Point Nature Reserve in Southampton and the general public will get a sneak preview of our new gem if they participate in the Palm Sunday Walk on April 2nd.

We are currently running a campaign to support the Buy Back Bermuda nature reserves and hope for your support. Please visit <https://www.buybackbermuda.bm> for more information or to donate. If you are looking for that meaningful birthday or anniversary gift, consider the gift that keeps giving and make a donation in your loved one's name. We will supply the gift certificate complete with bow.

BUY BACK BERMUDA
NATIONAL TRUST | AUDUBON SOCIETY

A gift that keeps on giving

STEWARDS OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

You will be recorded in perpetuity as a donor to Buy Back Bermuda Campaign Three.
THANK YOU

PART TEAM UPDATE

by Janice Hetzel

The Planning Application Review Team (PART) is a collaborative effort by Bermuda Audubon Society (BAS), Bermuda National Trust, Bermuda Environmental Sustainability Taskforce (BEST), the Bermuda Agricultural Group – Heritage Collective and several concerned citizens. We meet weekly and review, comment on or object to planning applications which would impact areas of conservation or protective zoning. Since our last newsletter, 84 planning applications have been advertised, forty of which are on properties with protective zoning, and BAS has submitted 8 Objections. In the upcoming week alone, 11 more applications with protective zonings need to be reviewed.

These reviews reveal a steady threat to areas which are meant to be protected, with coastal development being most prevalent. Unfortunately, the Bermuda Plan gives the Development Applications Board (DAB) and the Department of Planning substantial discretion in Coastal Reserve which they've used to allow development where they might have used their authority to refuse. This results in continued loss of coastal habitat and the "concretification" of our coastline.

Notable applications to which we objected in the last few months include:

Objection No.	Brief Description	Application No.
REP0014-23	Massive Retail Building (35,000sq ft) and Branded Condo Hotel (55 units) 66 South Road just east of Bermudiana Beach Hotel - Tourism Submitted by George Grundmueller–President and CEO of Phoenix Stores	P0519-22
REP0214-22	Event Lawn and Parking Lot Southlands Park – Woodland Reserve Submitted by Bermuda Housing Corporation for Bermudiana Beach Hotel	P0339-22
REP0045-23	New Cottage and Dock Shark Hole – Harrington Sound shoreline – Coastal Reserve Submitted by Rosewood Tuckers Point Hotel (Gencom)	P0024-23
REP0233-22	Subdivision of Island Quarry to create 14 lots Cave Protection Area with known caves beneath proposed lots Submitted by Island Construction	S0043-22
REP0020-23	New Guest Cottage – third residence on the island Bethell's Island in Ely's Harbour – Coastal Reserve Submitted by JJ Soares	P0524-22

These applications and objections can be found on the Department of Planning Website:

https://planningenergov.gov.bm/EnerGov_Prod/SelfService#/search

Enter the application number or objection number in the search field, then open the attachments to see the details.

We encourage everyone to review the developments that are being proposed and let us know if you have any questions. If you would like to help us advocate for sustainable development in Bermuda and work to protect our natural and beautiful open spaces, please contact us at info@audubon.bm.

BIRD REPORT: NOVEMBER 2022 - FEBRUARY 2023

by Joanne Smith

With the amount of birding activity this period - the end of Fall Migration, the Christmas Bird Count, a record January for a number of our birders, and then the February Bird Contest - it's hard to believe a single bird visited our island without being seen and identified. Of particular note were a **Townsend's Warbler**, a **Bohemian Waxwing**, two **Sabine's Gull** and Bermuda's second record of **Hairy Woodpecker**.

Waterfowl that arrived earlier in the Autumn were joined by **Greater Scaup** at Mangrove Lake (AW/MM - 11 Nov), **Hooded Merganser** (MM - 12 Nov) and **Gadwall** (GH - 23 Nov) first seen at Pembroke Marsh. Three days in November (27-30) saw **American Wigeon** at four different locations on the same day (AW/PW/MM/NM), **Northern Pintail** at Mid Ocean GC (PW) and **Canada Goose** at Warwick Pond (LS), with a **Red-breasted Merganser** arriving later, just in time for the Christmas Bird Count (AD - 12 Dec). Before the multitude of photos at Botanic Gardens, a **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was first recorded at a private residence in Smith's (HM - 28 Nov). **Purple Gallinule** was first seen at Jubilee Road (PA - 1 Nov) and a **Virginia Rail** recorded at Pembroke Marsh (MM - 17 Nov).

Shorebirds seen in this period had all been recorded in September and October except for a **Dunlin** which was seen along the Causeway (AW - 31 Jan).



Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*)
Photo: Richard Brewer



Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)
Photo: Eva Bottelli



Ruby-throated Hummingbird
(*Archilochus colubris*) Photo:
LeShun Smith



Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) Photo: Tim White

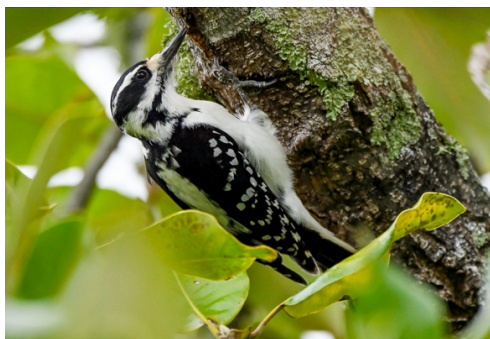


Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) Photo: Neal Morris

We had a good selection of sea birds – the first **Bonaparte's Gull** was spotted from the Causeway (MM - 2 Nov) and in February as many as 12 together were seen at Cross Island. A **Black-headed Gull** was first seen at Cross Island (HM/JS - 30 Dec). At the East End were seen a **Black-legged Kittiwake** off St. George's GC (PW - 7 Dec) and **Sabine's Gull** from Cooper's Point (PW - 29 Jan), where the earliest **Bermuda Petrel** was also spotted (PW - 24 Oct).

The first **Cory's Shearwater** was seen on an offshore pelagic trip (EB - 22 Nov), and a visiting birder captured photos of a **Black-capped Petrel** on a similar excursion (1 Dec). Our first **White-tailed Tropicbird** of the year was seen by a visiting birder near Bailey's Bay/Wilkinson Park (25 Jan). A cruise ship passenger reported a **Magnificent Frigatebird** at Dockyard (15 Jan) and a **Brown Pelican** was seen at Grace Island (CW - 5 Jan).

All the usual herons and egrets remained, with a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** added to the list with first sighting at Coot Pond (PW - 2 Nov). **Osprey** and **Northern Harrier** were both seen again in this period at Mid Ocean GC (GB - 20 Nov) and Morgan's Point (PW - 23 Nov), respectively, while a **Barn Owl** was reported only a few times, firstly in Paget (HM - 30 Nov).



Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus*)
Photo: Miguel Mejias



Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) Photo: Miguel Mejias



Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*)
Photo: Herb Marshall

Woodpeckers were a popular draw throughout this entire period as all the local birders tried to record them. A **Northern Flicker** remained at Ocean View GC (MM – 26 Oct) for just over a week – long enough for most locals to see it. An infrequent **Downy Woodpecker** was first reported anonymously from Daniel's Head Farm (3 Nov) then one was seen frequently at the Botanic Gardens, and a very rare visitor, the **Hairy Woodpecker**, was first spotted in the Botanical Gardens (MM – 21 Dec). The only past record of this species in eBird for Bermuda was in October 2011.

An **Eastern Phoebe** was seen at Cloverdale (HM/JS – 17 Dec), as well as a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** at St. Georges GC (PW – 8 Nov). Two new thrushes turned up – a **Gray Cheeked Thrush** at St. Georges GC (PW – 9 Nov) and a **Hermit Thrush** at Ferry Point Park (EB – 19 Jan). A surprise sighting of a **Bohemian Waxwing** along Orange Valley Road (MM – 28 Jan) one morning also brought out all the birders but unfortunately no others were to record this one. **American Pipit** first appeared at Pembroke Dump (MM – 5 Nov), a **Common Redpoll**, last recorded in 2019, was first seen by visiting birders out at Coney Island (BF – 29 Nov), the first **Snow Buntings** out at Morgan's Point (PW – 23 Nov), the first of two **Chipping Sparrows** at Mid Ocean GC (MM – 11 Nov), and a **Song Sparrow** at Morgan's Point (SD – 1 Dec).



Townsend's Warbler (*Setophaga townsendi*)
Photo: LeShun Smith

Only one new Warbler paid us a visit which hadn't been seen in the previous period – but it was a rare one. A **Townsend's Warbler** was first seen and identified by visiting birders at the Arboretum (various – 23 Nov) but not recorded again until 1 Jan – after which everyone came out at some point to record and/or photograph this lovely bird which had last been recorded here in October of 2020, and before that in 2005.

Observers: Peter Adhemar, Geoff Bell, Eva Bottelli, Alex Davidson, Steven DeSilva, Bob Flood, Gareth Hughes, Herb Marshall, Miguel Mejias, Neal Morris, Joanne Smith, LeShun Smith, Paul Watson, Andrea Webb, Chris Woolgar.

SOCIETY NEWS AND EVENTS

Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve Volunteer Day -
8 November 2023



Cahow Watching - 13 November 2023



Seymour's Pond
Deloitte Volunteer Day - 17 November 2023



Somerset Long Bay West
Warwick Academy Tree Planting - 19 February 2023



Eve's Pond Tour and Volunteer Day - 18 March 2023



Southlands Walk - 28 March 2023



UPCOMING EVENTS

Whale Watching - Saturday, 8 April 2023

Earth Day Activity - Saturday, 22 April 2023

Annual General Meeting - Thursday, 11 May 2023

Pelagic Bird Watching Boat Trip - Saturday 27 May 2023

North Rock Snorkel - Saturday 8 July 2023

Cahow Watching Boat Trips - Saturday 11 & 18 November 2023

Email us at info@audubon for more details or to reserve your spot

Annual General Meeting

Thursday, 11 May

6 pm

Government House

President's report on the year's events
Treasurer's report and approval of financials
Election of Committee of Management

Please email info@audubon.bm if you plan to attend

In Memoriam

We were saddened to hear that Stanley Ingham had passed away earlier this year. He was a kind man with a ready smile and a lover of birds and nature. Our Seymour's Pond Nature Reserve was one of his favorite places and he would often send in pictures of his latest bird sightings. The birds there will miss him and so will we. We extend our heartfelt condolences to Stanley's wife Carron, daughters Jenny and Michelle, and to his extended family and friends.

Photos by Stanley Ingham



White-eyed Vireo in Nest



Bay-breasted Warbler



Northern Waterthrush



Eastern Kingbird