



Bermuda Audubon Society

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING JUNE 8TH, 2022

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

I am honoured to be presenting our report for June 2021 to June 2022. The Society successfully continues its work to conserve Bermuda's special bird life and habitats for the benefit of all, and it gives me great pleasure to share our progress with you this evening.

My sincere thanks go to a superb committee of management whose indispensable expertise and outstanding voluntary effort is the mainstay of our achievements. The contributions and sacrifices made by these individuals, who have a myriad of commitments and full-time jobs outside the society, is truly remarkable.

Nature Reserves

A tremendous amount of work has been accomplished in our Nature Reserves, yet we find our work is never done.

Much focus went into the restoration of Eve's Pond in partnership with the Bermuda National Trust. The transformation of Eve's Pond was carried out by an army of workers including countless volunteers. The nature reserve was enhanced with interpretive signage, a fabulous bird hide funded by Mr Eddie Wright in memory of his wife Yvonne, benches donated by the Garden Club of Bermuda and hundreds of native and endemic plants.

Earth Day 2022 was indeed very special with the official opening of eve's Pond and Buy Back Bermuda now looks toward its next project.

Buy Back Bermuda has acquired its fourth open space property that will, in due course, be opened as a nature reserve. It is a magnificent 10-acre property in Southampton that consists of woodland, arable fields and spectacular coastline. The purchase of this stunning piece of land was possible thanks to a major gift from a private anonymous donor and some funds from our acquisition account.

The Vesey Nature Reserve received a much-needed facelift with a replacement bridge, replacement signage, repaired steps and plant management.

The Planning Department finally approved our Conservation Management Plan for erosion remediation at Somerset Long Bay East and a generous support from the Centennial Foundation will ensure we are able to make good this beautiful reserve and the neighbouring beach.

Work defining the new lower trail path at the Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve continued during the winter. Our reserve volunteer warden, Robert Chandler has been busy clearing several hundred casuarinas on the hillsides above the cliffs. Over 100 hours of labour have gone into the site in an effort to produce a landscape many of us will remember prior to the introduction of the problematic casuarina tree.

In October Stokes Point East Nature Reserve received approval from the Planning Department for a Conservation Management Plan for Stokes Point East Nature Reserve. In November and December trails were blazed, signage installed, and natives and endemics planted making another beautiful open space available for public enjoyment.

We are pleased to have a twenty-year lease renewal on the Freer Cox reserve and look forward to developing a management plan for the site.

The society donated the funds for a new wheelchair access gate at Paget Marsh which was installed by the Bermuda National Trust. Issues with a decaying boardwalk continue with quotes for repair and replacement escalating. The Bermuda National Trust is working hard to raise funds and find solutions that Audubon, in partnership, will support.

Conservation

The Society continues to take the lead on Bluebird conservation ensuring adequate supplies of Bluebird nesting boxes. Huge thanks to our bluebird box and kit builders this year: Danny Greene, Tyrone Webb, Cole Steinhoff and Hubert Watlington. Because of their hard work we can supply boxes and kits to Aberfeldy Nurseries who kindly sell them for us with all proceeds coming back to the Society.

We have been promoting Nest Watch, an online app available for Bluebird monitoring and research and we encourage anyone with a bluebird box or trail to sign-up to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch database. Our thanks to committee member Joanne Smith who provided online training for Bluebird Society trail monitors wanting to sign up. The future of bluebird conservation in Bermuda may well depend on good data.

The move from imported Styrofoam longtail igloos to local production started three years ago when Alistair Border fashioned a mould from a water pressure tank and a buoy! The concept was further refined by Erich Hetzel making a positive and negative mould of an igloo. After some further refinements we now have a mould that works and

can turn out three to four igloos and hour. The society continues to sell Longtail igloos which are now required by Planning for most coastline developments.

The Society also continues to support the research and conservation of the Cahow. Bermuda now has 155 pairs, and this year has produced 78 chicks, 5 more than the previous record high in 2019.

2021 was another dismal year for the Tern Recovery Project. One pair of Roseate Terns settled on Worlds End but had two failed clutches. For the Common tern there was an abandoned nest on Pearl Island, failed clutches on Worlds End, 5 females nesting on Collins and one tern on the St Georges buoy which we hope hatched and successfully fledged, the single chick for the season. The dominating factor for Common terns is the continuing decline in the number of male birds. It is very likely that Hurricane Humberto in 2019 resulted in the death of additional male and fledgling terns. The increasing number of hurricanes due to climate change has decimated Bermuda's tern population.

We remain hopeful that the 2022 breeding season will produce tern offspring, as well as the return of banded terns, both of which are necessary for Bermuda to once again be home to a stable population.

We continue to be concerned about the local Barn Owl population and have been collecting records on sightings for two years now. The value of the Barn Owl as a pest control agent in Bermuda is considerable when you consider a breeding pair can consume more than 3000 rats and mice annually. The continued decline of suitable hunting habitat because of development and the increased use of rodenticides, gives cause for concern. If you see an owl, please let us know at info@audubon.bm

Advocacy

Advocacy continues as an important arm of the Society. It takes a lot of work and sadly can be disheartening when our government ignores legislated planning regulations. We focus on objecting to planning applications that threaten conservation areas including woodland reserve, agricultural reserve and coastal reserve. As an example of the effort nearly 600 planning applications were advertised during 2021. BAS submitted 26 objections and 2 letters of concern thanks to the hard work of Janice Hetzel. We hope that the collaborative effort of the PART team that Janice serves on will bring advocacy strength to all organisations involved and to the overall effectiveness of our efforts. Of major concern to us has been the Motorcar Liveries Amendment Act 2021 which could open the door to allow ATVs and other vehicles on the Railway Trail and in Parks and the Development and Planning Amendment Act 2021 that will allow for special development orders to be passed by negative resolution procedure in Parliament.

Education & Outreach

Our greatest education and outreach success this past year was the launch of our new website. We hope our audience will find it inspiring and easy to navigate. While many committee members worked hard to refresh old content and build new, we must

extend our sincere thanks to Janice Hetzel and Joanne Smith who did the lion's share to get the new site launched.

Outreach has also been enhanced through our promotion of several online lectures, informative newsletters, Instagram posts and a very active and popular Facebook page. The popularity of our Facebook page is boosted by the proliferation of birding reports and photographs shared in the local birders WhatsApp group. This very active group includes several outstanding photographers who share their work allowing Audubon to further inspire the community.

Bermuda Birders are also jumping on the Cornell eBird App. eBird makes it easy to record the birds you see in the field, and seamlessly link these observations with a global online database of bird records used by hundreds of thousands of birders around the world. This year there were 84 contributing observers from Bermuda, up from 48 in the previous year.

Events

Events were back in full swing this past year and I think everyone was happy to be outdoors and socializing again.

In June we were lucky to get a beautiful day for a snorkel trip to North Rock on board the Aquarium's Endurance.

Also, in June enthusiastic birders enjoyed a sea watch for migrants off Coopers Island.

July blessed us with another gorgeous evening for a sunset harbour cruise onboard Explorer with Captain Michael Hayward gifting us a free ride.

An amazing field trip to Spittal Pond in September was led by Neal Morris and Miguel Mejias with David Wingate providing an understanding of the history and importance of the Spittal Pond Nature Reserve.

October saw a good showing for the October Big Day where sixteen birdwatchers turned in 45 checklists and reported 62 different species.

Another October event had local birders racing to hot spots around the island and manoeuvring complicated competition rules to get the win.

We are pleased that Deloitte have renewed their sponsorship of Seymour's Pond. In November they joined us clearing invasive trees, collecting trash, and opening the trails. Alistair Border proved he is a monkey, climbing the bird hide with a chain saw and removing the thick tangle of Brazil Pepper.

In December, a team of 12 students from Warwick Academy and a few of their parents, came together to plant native trees at the new Stokes Point East Nature Reserve. The group planted Olivewoods, Palmettos, Cedars, and Hackberries. In torrential rain, on

slopes of slippery mud, the students tackled the task of getting the trees planted, and as the rain eased, they spent another 40 minutes touring the walking trails and culling invasive jumby bean and Brazil pepper seedlings.

A November Cahow Watch at Cooper's Point was a big success. Birds were visible the entire time with a high count of 24 Cahows seen in a single scan over the water.

The Society had a presence at the Environmental Youth Summit in December hosted by the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute.

We completed a successful Christmas Bird Count with 94 species seen and 6066 birds counted. Some of the highlight birds included a Marsh Wren, an American Woodcock and a Brown Pelican. We saw an additional 12 species during the count week. Bermuda has been collecting invaluable bird population data as part of this count for 47 years.

For the second time we held "The Great February Bermuda Birding Contest". Participants earned points for each day they entered an eBird listing and for each species seen. An added feature in the competition was a photo contest. This year's competition was won by Paul Wadson. Best record photo went to Erich Hetzel for his Cape May warbler and best artistic photo was awarded to Herb Marshall for a beautiful picture of a Green Heron.

It was a beautiful sunny cool day in February to enjoy a morning walk along the borders of our Devonshire Marsh nature reserves. Paul Watson provided all the tips on where to look for birds in the area, and what we might expect to find, and Alison Copeland shared her plant wisdom.

Later the same day volunteers gathered to clean up the roadside of our Freer Cox Nature Reserve along Middle Road.

In March we held a Bluebird box making workshop where our participants were inspired and entertained by Stuart Smith of the Bluebird Society.

With the pending opening of Eve's Pond Nature Reserve there was a great turnout for a March volunteer work party, including representatives from the Botanical Society. The group planted over 75 trees and shrubs, including mature cedars, yellowwoods, and palmettos.

Also in March we had a wonderful guided tour of Sear Cave where Alison Copeland gave a brilliant presentation on the flora and fauna at the site.

A corporate group from Liberty joined us in March at the Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve to clear the entrance path, pick up litter and cull invasives.

Audubon continued its tradition of assisting the Bermuda National Trust at their Children's Nature walk in April, teaching and inspiring our youth about bird life.

Thank you to the incredible team from Renaissance Re, who joined us at Eve's Pond Nature Reserve for a successful April volunteer day! The group planted over 100 native and endemic trees, shrubs and ground covers, removed invasive species and mulched trees to retain as much moisture as possible ensuring a better chance of surviving the hot dry summer months.

A pre-opening volunteer day saw the remaining trees and shrubs planted, rope fencing installed along the roadside and a complete tidy of the new staircase leading up to the woodland hillside trail.

In May Bermuda birders started the Global Big Day at Spittal Pond and travelled across the island all day in search of birds. Findings for the day were recorded online at eBird and contribute once again to the global wellbeing of bird species.

May provided the perfect day for our members trip to Nonsuch Island. Jeremy Madeiros spoiled us with longtail and cahow show and tell experiences and an island tour. There was plenty of time left to enjoy a picnic lunch, swim in the pristine ocean, or simply enjoy the peace, serenity and beauty of this very special.

Coming full circle to June again a pelagic trip took brave birdwatchers out to sea just a few days ago as Tropical Storm Alex was heading our way. The seas were tame enough for an enjoyable day and a close up look at the migrating seabirds.

It has been an eventful year for sure, made possible by an incredible team and a host of supporters.

Bird Records of the Year

It wouldn't be an Audubon AGM without mention of bird highlights of the year, and these might be different depending on who you ask.

Without a doubt the Bald Eagle that showed up in April has captured the attention of many in Bermuda but especially our birdwatchers and the golfers at Port Royal where this magnificent bird likes to hang out. This is the first Bald Eagle reported in Bermuda in 34 years. The last one stayed for four months.

In October Luke Foster, one of our youngest members, identified a new record for Bermuda with a Hammond's Flycatcher.

A Greater White-fronted Goose was first spotted at the airport pond in May. This species was last seen in Bermuda in May of 1998, exactly 24 years ago.

Brown Pelican's have also been popular this past year and especially excite and entertain the local community when they see them.

The Killdeer continued to reproduce at the new Airport pond and were also discovered reproducing at Port Royal so indeed it looks as though Bermuda has another breeding bird species.

These are just a few of the many bird sightings in the past 12 months and I encourage everyone to view the Birds of the Year presentation which will run at the end of the AGM. Thank you to all the birders who share their records and photographs.

Acknowledgements

Before closing tonight, I would like to acknowledge the organisations in Bermuda and abroad that we cooperate and partner with and to say THANK YOU to all our loyal members, volunteers and supporters. We could not do all that we do without your help.

I have no doubt you can all agree with me that the Bermuda Audubon Society is a wonderful and well deserving charity that is run on passion by hard working good people.

Thank you.

Jennifer Gray