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Caribbean and Bermuda Bird Festival

Andrew Dobson

Beginning on Earth day, April 22nd, and ending on International Biodiversity Day, May 22nd, the Society of Caribbean Ornithology (SCO), the largest single regional organisation devoted to wildlife conservation issues in the Caribbean, will draw attention to the region's unique bird life. The Bermuda Audubon Society has close links with the SCO, and the Bird Festival will also be celebrated in Bermuda. The Festival is a major initiative of the SCO to draw attention to the region's unusually high rate of endemism in bird species. The SCO notes that an impressive 22% of the birds within the region are to be found nowhere else in the world. Furthermore, according to the international Union for the Conservation of Nature, many of these unique avian treasures are more threatened than they have ever been in history. In Bermuda, there are great threats to the survival of the endemic Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) and the endemic sub-species of White-eyed Vireo (Chick-of-the-village). Local people also need to recognise threats to native species like the White-tailed tropicbird (Longtail) and Eastern Bluebird.

The initiative is to be spearheaded across the Caribbean by a variety of organizations including non-governments organizations (NGOs), government conservation departments, educational establishments and concerned citizens. It is expected that the major outcome of the Bird festival will be a greater public awareness and pride in the region's internationally significant bird life. According to Eric Carey, President of the SCO, "only when local people recognise the value and significance of their legacy of native species can they be expected to care about and take action to preserve them". In Bermuda, the Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda Zoological Society have planned

a number of activities. The Environmental Youth Conference being organized by BZS (May 1st to 3rd) will include: a presentation on endemic species; a bluebird nest box workshop; and the installation of Longtail 'igloos' at BAMZ. The Audubon Society has arranged another working party to carry out woodland restoration near Coral Beach, which will improve the habitat for resident birds. The publication of 'A Birdwatching Guide to Bermuda' has been timed to coincide with the Festival. The book highlights a number of conservation and biodiversity issues as well as generally promoting birding in Bermuda. Finally, the Society has arranged a field trip to Blue Hole Park on May 19th.

Book Review

'A Birdwatching Guide to Bermuda' by Andrew Dobson

Three weeks after my arrival in Bermuda, I had the pleasure of meeting Andrew Dobson. Prior to that I had been staggering around the island in search of green patches shown on my *Handy Reference Map of Bermuda*. Needless to say I only saw 30 species during this period. If only I had a copy of 'A Birdwatching Guide to Bermuda', I would have seen so much more!

Andrew's aim was two-fold: to provide a guidebook for visiting birders and to open the eyes of local people to the wonderful opportunity to watch birds in Bermuda. These aims have been successfully achieved. This book is everything a bird-finding guide should be, very informative and extremely detailed. The quality of the book is first rate. The text is clearly laid out and the two sets of bird and habitat photos add to its visual appeal.

The bulk of the text focuses on the birding locations. Seventy-five sites are described. Detailed notes are given about the most likely species to be seen, birding highlights, rarities, access, amenities and other attractions. Clearly drawn maps also show the location of every site. Two chapters that will be particularly useful to both local and overseas birders are 'Birding through the seasons' and 'Finding sought after birds'. This information will enable birders to plan excursions more efficiently and home-in on those tricky species that too frequently elude us.

As a result of this book, birders will find that there are fantastic opportunities to see birds in Bermuda. It puts Bermuda on the global bird map! Andrew should be congratulated on producing such a splendid book and I thoroughly recommend it, not only birders, but also to anyone who has an interest in learning more about Bermuda's natural history.

Steve Rodwell

**A Birdwatching Guide to Bermuda
by Andrew Dobson
Published by Arlequin Press
176 pages including 32 colour photos
ISBN 1 900159 71 6**

Available May 2002 - Pre-publication price \$19.95 (Bermuda only)

This guide has been written for both Bermuda residents and tourists. In his foreword, Dr. David Wingate says, "Andrew has also unveiled the extraordinary diversity of bird life and birding opportunity that awaits residents of Bermuda who have any inclination to become interested in natural history. I would venture to say that it is probably the most comprehensive guide to bird finding for any area outside Great Britain". The main section of the book describes birding localities found in each parish with accompanying maps. Birding is described through the seasons as well as by habitat. Detailed accounts and descriptions are provided for Bermuda's breeding birds. A conservation section focuses on ways in which we can all help the breeding success of longtails and bluebirds. For the visitor there is advice on travel and accommodation. A full annotated bird checklist is provided as well as information on other wildlife species. Superb colour photos compliment the text. The book forms part of a highly acclaimed series by Arlequin Press.

To order from Bermuda - print the form below and complete your details

In North America - contact
American Birding Association Sales
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Colorado Springs, CO 80934
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Email: _____ Tel. No. _____

The Bermuda Audubon Society will benefit from the book sales. Mail your order to:
Mr. A. Dobson, Bermuda Audubon Society, P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX

If you have any questions regarding the book, please
email:info@audubon.bm

Society News

Fieldtrips

Please try to join us on the field trip we have arranged for this month. We will be walking through the area of Walsingham. Meet in the Blue Hole Park car park at 1.00 pm on Sunday 19th May. We will stop for lunch en route – so bring a picnic!

Thank you

Thank you to Steve Rodwell for his excellent lecture on the Wildlife of South Georgia. Thank you also to Stuart Smith and Ray Latter for their efforts at the bluebird nest box workshop.

Annual General Meeting

Nominations of members to serve on the committee should be sent to the secretary on emailed to info@audubon.bm before the meeting on Tuesday 11th June.

Bird Report Feb – Apr 2002

Andrew Dobson

Most observers agree that this has been one of the poorest early spring periods for bird sightings. Somewhat of a contrast to the excellent Humpback Whale migration that has been observed off-shore! One can only hope that the lack of birds is not reflected on the North American continent. Sometimes we forget that Bermuda is an isolated 21 square miles in the middle of the Atlantic. Most birds have no right to be here anyway and are only drift migrants many hundreds of miles off course. David Wingate suggests that we may never see the spring passage of birds that he can remember from the past – a probable result of global warming. Many of the frontal weather systems either pass well to our north or simply dissipate before they reach Bermuda. There is therefore less bad weather to bring us the birds. Oh for a return to the Ice Age! Highlights since the last report have included Northern Gannet, the reappearance of the Northern Goshawk, up to three Swallow-tailed Kites, a Ruff, wintering Blue Grosbeak and green parrots!

Shearwaters to Rails



Manx Shearwater by John Busby

A pair of **Pied-billed Grebes** bred very early at the Society's Somerset Long Bay reserve. Three chicks were observed on 12th Feb (DW). A nest has also been built at the nearby Pitman's Pond. Great excitement also centres

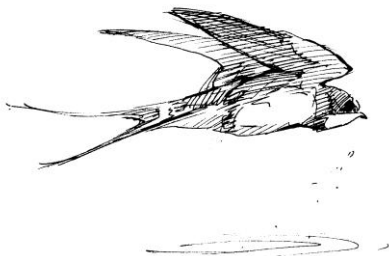
on the potential breeding success of this year's **Cahows**. At least 40 pairs have already hatched eggs, which is a dramatic rise on previous years. The first **Manx Shearwater** of the spring was noted off Elbow Beach on 16th Feb (SR), while the first **Cory's Shearwater** was seen off Nonsuch Island on 3rd Mar (JM, SR). **Northern Gannets** are uncommon visitors to Bermuda waters. An immature was spotted off Cooper's Point on 3rd Mar (JM, SR) remaining until at least 10th Mar. **Great Egrets** roosted this year at Waterville with as many as eight on Duck Island or the moored boats (AD). A wintering **Eurasian Teal** was last seen at Warwick Pond on 14th Mar (SR). One **Swallow-tailed Kite** was seen over Trimingham Hill on 27th Feb. and then remained in the South Shore, Warwick area until 15th Mar (RL). Two more Swallow-tailed Kites were seen together over the Smith's Hills on 7th Mar (JM). Two **Northern Harriers** remained in the Nonsuch area until mid-Mar (JM, DBW). Two *accipiter* species soaring together over Castle Harbour on 15th Apr (DBW) were probably the **Sharp-shinned Hawk** which has over-wintered and the **Northern Goshawk** which was also seen in on 21st Mar over Nonsuch Island (DBW) and Devonshire 24th Mar (AD).

Shorebirds to Terns

An **American Golden-Plover** was found roosting on Nonsuch Island on Mar 13 (JM). A **Black-necked Stilt** was seen flying past the Aquarium on 20th Apr (AD). It was re-located the following day at North Pond where it had joined the Ruff (EA). The female **Ruff** (a Eurasian shorebird) was discovered at North Pond (WF, SR) on 18th Apr. Eight **Sanderling** were at Grape Bay on 21st April (AD). Two **Least Sandpipers** were at Daniel's Head Farm on 17th Feb (SR). **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** continued to increase. A record 27 were counted at Dockyard on 10th Mar (WF) with a similar number roosting in the Great Sound the following day (SR). Four **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were observed moving northeast along South Shore at Elbow Beach on 16th Feb (AD, SR). A pair of **Common Terns** was back in Castle Harbour on 3rd Apr (DBW). Four **Long-tailed Jaegers** were seen from Cooper's Point on 9th Mar (AD, SR).

Passerines

Barn Swallow by John Busby



Eastern Phoebes were seen on Feb 24th at Spittal Pond (DBW) and on 23rd Mar at both Heydon Trust (DBW) and Kindley Field (SR). The first **Barn Swallows** were at Cooper's Point on 23rd Mar (PW), while the first **Tree Swallow** was over Spittal Pond on 21st Apr (DW) followed by the first **Purple Martins** in St. George's on 22nd Apr (DW). A **Golden-crowned Kinglet** (SR) was found at Compston's Pond on 23rd Feb (SR). A **Hermit Thrush**

was seen at Port Royal G.C. on 9th Feb (SR). A **Blue-winged Warbler** was a surprise at Coral Beach on 15th Mar (SR). What may well have been an early spring migrant, a **Prothonotary Warbler**, was seen at Paget Marsh on 20th Mar (AD, SR). No **Swainson's Warblers** had been recorded during the winter, but one at Devonshire Marsh in late Mar (DW) may well have over-wintered. A **Swamp Sparrow** was seen in Devonshire Marsh

on 24th Mar (AD). A single **Dark-eyed Junco** was at Spittal Pond on 12th Feb (JM, DBW). There have been very few records ever of wintering **Blue Grosbeaks**, so one at Cooper's Island 15th Feb (DBW) was a good find. Another Blue Grosbeak was caught by a cat on 2nd Mar and died in captivity at BAMZ. A wintering **Dickcissel** was last seen on Nonsuch Island on 16th Feb (WF). **Common Waxbills** escaped into the wild in 1975. A small breeding population remained until the mid-1990s when very few sightings were made. Its stronghold was Devonshire Marsh, so a flock of 12 birds on Jubilee Road on 20th Mar (MD) was not only a surprise but an indication of their continued existence.

While on the subject of escapees – a flock of six green parrots has been seen regularly in the Somerset area, occasionally straying into Southampton. In past years many individual parrots have survived for some time in the wild. It will be interesting to see how long this small flock remains 'at large'. Please report sighting of these birds or any other interesting sightings to info@audubon.bm

Observers: Eric Amos, Michael Darling, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Ray Latter, Jeremy Madeiros, Steve Rodwell, Paul Watson, David Wallace (DW), David Wingate (DBW).

Marsh Lane Concerns

The following letter was recently sent to the editor of the Royal Gazette:

March 2002

Dear Sir

A number of environmental and conservation organisations and individuals are extremely concerned about the illegal dumping of excavated rubble that is taking place on wet pasture that is zoned agriculture at the end of Marsh Lane in Devonshire. The illegal rubble dumping first began encroaching into both nature reserve and agricultural land setbacks in November 2001. The Department of Planning has said that a Stop Work Order was issued to Rodrigues Excavating and Trucking to discontinue any further dumping, encroachment or industrial work on the agricultural zoned area.

An immediate court injunction is now needed to prevent further encroachment and damage to the nature reserve area to the southwest (there should be no dumping within 15 feet of the boundary) and agricultural land to the northwest. Ultimately these protected areas should be rehabilitated to their original condition prior to the industrial works beginning in November. Apart from being illegal, this is a highly significant issue of blatant environmental degradation and impact upon Bermuda's small wealth of nature reserves and agricultural land. The agricultural wetland pasture, neighbouring marsh ecosystem and freshwater lens will be negatively affected by this increasing coverage by an industrial site, as a result of the burial, compression and risk of industrial contamination. Until recently, the wetland agricultural pasture was grazed by cattle and alternatively used for growing feed.

This is the worst current example of zoning abuse in Bermuda with the potential loss of at least two acres of significant wetland agricultural grazing land. We recognise that Government through the Ministry of the Environment is concerned about Bermuda's natural environment, and has shown strong commitment to biodiversity, thus we urge

the Minister to use his powers to act accordingly. The enforcement process needs to move decisively and efficiently to initiate actions that support the zonings and stop this and other abuses of ecologically significant conservation areas. We encourage Government and the public to support the consideration of purchasing this important agricultural wetland to protect it from further degradation. Incorporating the land into the network of nature reserves that already exist in Devonshire Marsh would be for the long-term benefit of all Bermuda. This area currently acts as a natural filter for Bermuda's largest freshwater lens, provides a valuable feeding area for more than 100-recorded species of resident and migratory birds and provides value to the island as a natural wilderness and agricultural area.

We implore concerned members of the public to voice their concerns to the Minister.

Yours sincerely

Bermuda Audubon Society
The Bermuda National Trust
Save Open Spaces
Stuart Hayward
David Wingate

If you have any questions regarding the book, please email:

info@audubon.bm

Future Events - For information on any of the events: tel. 292-1920

- **Sunday 28 April**
Working Party - vegetation clearance and planting
South Shore Paget, west of Coral Beach. 9.30 am to 1.00 pm
Contact Jennifer Gray - tel. 293-2727 ext.122 or Email:jgray.bamz@ibl.bm
- **Sunday 19 May**
Field trip to Blue Hole Park. Meet in car park at 1.00 pm
Bring your own picnic lunch.
- **Tuesday 11 June**
Annual General Meeting - Horticultural Hall 7.30 pm
Followed by an illustrated talk from Patrick Talbot
(BAMZ)
'Longtail breeding research on the Castle Harbour Islands'
- **Saturday 22 June to Saturday 29 June**
Audubon/BZS Natural History Camp for students
Application forms for Yr 10 students available through
schools.

(October 4-6 Paget Island Bird Camp)

Executive Committee 2001-2002

President Andrew Dobson
Vice-president David Wingate
Treasurer Ted Cassidy
Secretary Penny Hill
Officers: Richard Amos
Jennifer Gray
Peter Holmes
Jeremy Madeiros
David O'Neill

Newsletter Andrew Dobson

Membership renewals were due in June. Please check the address label to see if your membership has expired or email info@audubon.bm

Membership Application/Renewal

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P.O.Box HM1328 Hamilton, HMFx

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