



**Bermuda Audubon Society**  
**NEWSLETTER**

**Fall**  
**1998**

**P O Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.9 No.3**

## **Paget Marsh Pond Nearly Completed**

Audubon's contribution to the Bermuda National Trust boardwalk project has been the creation of a pond (to feature open water habitat) in an abandoned dumpsite area adjacent to the proposed parking and entrance to the boardwalk. This work was carried out by an Island Construction track-hoe during the 'long hot summer' months of July and August. The somewhat elongate pond is approximately one acre in area and has two small islands in its eastern half. Almost from the moment it was excavated, this pond has been attracting migratory waterbirds. Its instant success can be attributed in part to the mature stand of mangroves that abut against the southern (marsh) side of the pond, but also because it was connected into the existing perimeter ditch and was immediately colonised by top-minnows, other invertebrate life and duckweed, which was already established in the marsh. The small islets have proven to be extremely attractive to shorebirds, herons and ducks and about thirty other species of migratory birds have been recorded there so far, including a new Bermuda record (see below).

Those who have visited the pond site (accessible via the farm road opposite the dry cleaners on Lovers' Lane), or who have looked down on it from the main road adjacent to Paget Pharmacy, have all commented how attractive the landscape design is, even in its present raw and uncompleted stage. This was our goal for the entrance to the boardwalk.

Now that the excavated material has had a couple of months to drain and dry out, the heavy equipment will return to complete the surface grading. Over the course of the next month all remaining surface trash and stones will be hand-raked and cleared from the berm, and rye-grass seed sown to provide a green cover which can be mown temporarily until the landscaping with native and ornamental trees is complete. Volunteers are much needed and welcomed for this phase (see EVENTS), which we hope to have completed by the end of November. Meanwhile, the Trust has selected a contractor for the boardwalk and the materials are on order. They hope to begin construction before Christmas.

David B. Wingate

## President's Message

It seems strange to report that in May of this year I was elected President of the Bermuda Audubon Society for the coming year. I can hear people saying, "How can David Saul become President, I thought David Wingate was the President?" The constitution of the society requires anyone who has been President for two years to automatically step down, and that is how it happened. Happily, David Wingate is staying on the executive, so we will have the benefit of his experience for the coming year. For so many years the name "Bird" Wingate has been synonymous with the Audubon Society and I guess it would not be too far fetched to state that whenever anyone thinks of David Wingate, one would automatically think of birds and the Audubon Society.

For over 25 years I have followed David, whether it has been on bluebird trails, Nonsuch tours or birdwatching trips. So it is only second nature for me to follow him as President – indeed, I consider it a single honour.

As I look forward to the coming year, I can see that one of the highlights will be the completion of the new pond at Paget Marsh. There is no doubt that it will become one of the most popular birding spots in Bermuda, as it will (1) be centrally located, (2) be right on the edge on the large and densely wooded Paget Marsh, and (3) be enhanced by the "Dennis Sherwin Boardwalk" which will cross the pond. The Audubon Society and the National Trust can be proud of the new facility. Mr. Dennis Sherwin deserves a special thanks for his generous financial donation which will make the boardwalk over the pond and through the marsh a reality. Thanks must also go to the Island Construction Company, and to Allan DeSilva and his staff, for the care and concern they have put into the creation of the pond. The creation of the pond is largely due to the vision, determination and enthusiasm of the immediate past President and current Government Conservation Officer, David Wingate.

Our society can take a special pride in the fact that we have committed some \$60,000 towards the excavation and landscaping. Needless to say, this has depleted our nature reserve fund substantially. If you are impressed by what we are doing, now is the time to make a donation so that we can restore our revolving fund towards our next project – and David assures me he has several in mind!

The Paget Marsh pond restoration is just one aspect of what I hope will be an interesting year ahead for the Bermuda Audubon Society. Your continued support will do much to contribute to the society's success and help Audubon to make Bermuda a better place for present and future generations.

David Saul

## Varied Thrush - New to Bermuda

During the visit of Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Cook, of Wilderness Graphics, who were invited to Bermuda by the National Trust to advise on interpretive signs and materials for the boardwalk project, I gave them a thorough tour of Paget Marsh on 9th October. As we emerged from the marsh at the new pond site, a large passerine bird suddenly flew down and landed at the water's edge in front of me.

At first, I thought it was an early American Robin which is not an unusual species to occur in the marsh, but it took me only a few seconds to realise that this was no ordinary robin but its Alaskan equivalent, known as the Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*. It is distinguished by its bold criss-cross pattern of orange-red stripes and wing bars on otherwise brownish-grey upper parts.

Varied Thrushes are known to occur frequently as a long distance vagrant to the southern and eastern United States, and have therefore been anticipated to occur on Bermuda at some time, but this was the first ever recorded! Sadly, none of the other birders have encountered it up to press time for this newsletter. As Andrew Dobson remarked, it was poor timing because all the keener birders were convening that very afternoon for our annual Paget Island birding weekend so they were unable to start looking for it until the following week!

David B. Wingate

## Nonsuch Natural History Camp 1998

Some people spend thousands of dollars to come to Bermuda for just one week to see our beautiful island, swim in our clear waters, and dip their toes into our pristine sandy beaches. If you happen to be a senior fourth year student in Bermuda's schools, you can spend little more than \$100 for a week's Nonsuch Natural History Camp. Not only is this an extremely good bargain, but also an enjoyable academic and practical experience.

From learning about and seeing examples of how the island we call home was formed, to diving at North Rock, swimming in the caves at Walsingham, and hiking through Spittal Pond reserve, every day was a new and exciting experience. Of course it was not all fun and games. In the evenings we would have tests on information learnt during the day, quizzes on plant names, and group presentations on research we had done on such things as turtle tagging to coral reef and mangrove surveys.

After a week at the camp, all of us left Nonsuch with a helpful and working knowledge not only of Bermuda, but also knowledge of another sort. We had made some good friends, we had our share of responsibility, and each of us went away with newly acquired skills from how to tag a turtle or how to snorkel, to cooking peas! (Thanks Ros)

Once again, the Audubon Society is grateful to the Bermuda Zoological Society for their help in organising the camp, and in particular, to the unfailing energies on the camp staff: Andy Fields (Director), Duncan Ashworth, Ros Collins, Joe Furbert, Annie Glasspool and Leanne Hinton.

Darren De Silva

## Summary of the 1997-98 Cahow Nesting Season

The 1997-98 season once again broke previous records with 55 established pairs successfully fledging 29 chicks. It might have been even better because 32 chicks hatched successfully and attained fledging age. However, three late-season failures reduced the total at the last minute. One chick had a deformed wing and had to be euthanised for a specimen; one departed on 20-21 June after an unusually long exercising period but was found dying in Castle Harbour by Mark Whayman of the sailboat "Sand Dollar" on 23 June; and one never emerged from its burrow despite a perfectly normal feeding routine being recorded throughout fledging. This is the second year in a row that this has happened in that particular burrow. Unfortunately, the cause could not be determined because the burrow is so deep and curved that the nest-site has never been seen. I am currently investigating the possibility of mounting a fiber-optic scope on a small radio controlled robotic vehicle to try and see to the end of the burrow!

In addition to the established pairs, no less than 4 new pairs were prospecting on three different islets - another indication of an accelerating rate of increase in the population. In a previous newsletter, I have already indicated how this is being reflected by the increasing facility of seeing cahows at sea in daytime just off the breeding grounds. Our field trip to Cooper's Island on 15 November, is intended to give members another opportunity to do this from shore.

David B. Wingate

## Update on Sears' Cave Forest Management Project

Ever since the society was given the Sears' Cave sink-hole in Smith's Parish by the heirs of Sir Howard Trott, it has been our intention to manage it as a sanctuary for endemic and native ferns. Our first step was to enclose the reserve with an 8-foot security fence to prevent dumping of trash or unauthorised access. Our next challenge was removing accumulated trash already in the sink which has been partly completed with an Island Construction boom crane and volunteers.

At present, we are working on the challenge of converting the forest cover around the top of the sink from a predominance of naturalized tree species (fiddlewood, allspice and surinam cherry), back to a predominance of native trees (southern hackberry, Bermuda cedar, palmetto and olivewood) because the latter will provide the ideal level of shade for fern growth in the sink. This project has proven to be much more challenging and long-term than we expected, but is inching forward. This winter we planted 30 scale-resistant 'clone' Bermuda cedars, but a massive problem with the introduced guinea-grass, *Panicum maximum*, and the native balloon vine, has required constant weeding. Now, thanks to a generous donation of chinchbug-resistant St. Augustine grass from Horsfield Landscaping & Design, we are trying to restore the original 'native' grass cover to suppress the weed problem. Once the cedars grow in and the new native forest canopy stabilises, we can concentrate on the re-introduction of the rare native upland ferns and *Peperomia*.

David B. Wingate

## Fall Bird News

The avian Fall (July to November) is the most active season for birds in Bermuda. Birds are migrating south, with thousands heading straight over Bermuda, while others are forced off the Eastern Seaboard by low pressure weather systems. Although some birds are deliberate migrants to Bermuda, others arrive by chance, temporarily displaced or taking a break from bad weather. The first southbound travellers are shorebirds, seen from July, while warblers are not really in evidence until mid-August. Things really hot up in September and October with more shorebirds and warblers, but also a whole range of other passerines (perching birds) such as cuckoos, flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, tanagers, sparrows, grosbeaks, buntings and orioles. Waterbirds are arriving too, grebes, herons and egrets and the first wildfowl. The best days to birdwatch are those immediately following bad weather.

This Fall there have been many highlights. Pride of place goes to David Wingate's Varied Thrush, the first record of this species in Bermuda (see separate article). A Swallow-tailed Kite over Walsingham on 23rd July was the latest ever record for this species which had previously only been observed in the Spring months. A Louisiana Waterthrush on the same day at Mid-Ocean Golf Course was the first Fall warbler to be recorded. Also in late July, an adult Pomarine Jaeger passed Nonsuch Island on the 31st. A Curlew Sandpiper, primarily a Eurasian species, stayed for a few days on Mid-Ocean GC from the 3rd Sept. A Wilson's Plover offered a brief appearance in St. Georges on 21st Sept. for Pat and Roger Pocklington, while sixteen Whimbrels at the airport the following day is probably a record number together. The rarest of the 38 species of warbler recorded in Bermuda - Townsend's Warbler, was seen by Eric Amos at Fort Scaur on 4th Oct. (This species mainly breeds from Oregon to Alaska). Eric saw a likely Black Rail at North Pond on 8th October. An extremely elusive species, the only other claim in recent years concerns a sighting by Jeremy Madeiros at Somerset Long Bay reserve in 1993. There was a very early record of a Black-headed Gull on 10th Oct. in St. George's. Hummingbirds, probably Ruby-throated, were reported from Jenningsland and the Botanical Gardens in October. A live Leach's Storm-Petrel in Hamilton Harbour was taken into care at BAMZ on Oct. 19th. where it subsequently died. Common Nighthawks really have been common this year, seen from August and into October, the highest count was 30 birds over Devonshire on 10th Sept. Magnolia Warblers and American Redstarts arrived in good numbers, but thrush species were hard to find. By late October, the first Least and American Bitterns were arriving on the island as well as more rarities - a female Surf Scoter at North Pond on 28th Oct. and a Lapland Longspur near Lover's Lake on 24th Oct. The only Bermuda record of Sabine's Gull was one in Castle Harbour in 1977, so thirteen seen together some 10 miles to the North-east of Bermuda on 27th October was quite a thrill for Paul Watson.

Andrew Dobson

## Paget Island Birdwatching Weekend 9 -11 October

Thirty people took part in this annual camp, now in its seventh year. It was held to coincide with the 4th World Bird Count, an event organised by BirdLife International and the Wild Bird Society of Japan. The main sponsor is NTT, a Japanese telecommunications company, who are donating 1,000 Japanese Yen for every species seen worldwide. Last year, over 180,000 people in 91 countries recorded 5,935 species and raised about \$52,000 for BirdLife International's work. This year, support will be given to the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) Programme that identifies the world's most important places for birds and thus biodiversity in general. Results of the World Bird Count and many interesting natural history topics can be viewed on NTT's World Nature Network internet site at - <http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-n/w-bird/>

So how did we do this year? Over the Paget Island weekend, we observed 62 species - our third best count over the past seven years. The avid group of birders covered most of St. George's Island, although Paget Island produced the best bird, a rare and elusive Swainson's Warbler, one of 19 species of warbler recorded. A Peregrine Falcon put on a superb display over St. George's Golf Course, but the best birding location turned out to be in the grounds of the Biological Station. In one tree alone (a fruiting Indian Laurel), there were three species of vireo, a Western Kingbird, Bay-breasted Warblers, Scarlet Tanager and Baltimore Oriole, as well as the ever present Great Kiskadees, European Starlings and House Sparrows.

The NTT World Bird Count lasted from 1st to 31st October. Bermuda managed to record an astonishing 158 species, including the Cahow or Bermuda Petrel, our own endemic species. Our efforts have ensured at least \$1500 towards bird conservation. Many of us are already looking forward to next year's camp and another bird count.

Andrew Dobson

### Bermuda Audubon Society Committee 1998/99

President	David Saul
Vice-president	Jeremy Madeiros
Treasurer	Ted Cassidy
Secretary	Penny Hill
Officers:	Peter Holmes
	Bruce Lorhan
	David O'Neill
	Stuart Smith
	David Wingate
Newsletter	Andrew Dobson

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Bird News

Society Business

Environmental Concerns



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## **BirdLife INTERNATIONAL:**

**Mission** *What is the overall purpose of BirdLife?*

**BirdLife International seeks to conserve all bird species on earth and their habitats and, through this, to work for the world's biological diversity and the sustainability of human use of natural resources.**

**Vision** *Where is BirdLife heading?*

BirdLife is the leading authority on the status of the world's birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting them. BirdLife aims to conserve the world's birds by empowering a global Partnership of national conservation organizations who share a priority based programme of conservation action.

This Partnership shares skills, achievements and information and strives to grow in size, ability, authority and influence.

### **Why Birds?**

Birds represent an irreplaceable asset to people because they:

- \* are sensitive indicators of both biological richness and environmental health;
- \* fulfil important ecological functions in the natural environment;
- \* have significance as a direct or indirect economic resource;
- \* contribute greatly to our understanding of functions and processes in nature and are of value for many scientific disciplines;
- \* have inspired and delighted the peoples of many cultures for centuries; and
- \* are important for recreational pursuits and promoting conservation awareness the world over.

*If undelivered please return to:*



Bermuda Audubon Society  
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### **Future Events**

Saturday 14 November Paget Marsh Pond. Tour and volunteer landscaping project. Bring gloves, rakes and bucket. Park on site or on Lovers' Lane 9.00 am to 12 noon.

Sunday 15 November Cooper's Island Bird Walk  
Meet at NASA Gate 2.00 pm followed by Cahow Watch in the late afternoon. Bring a telescope if you have one.

Sunday 29 November Abbott's Cliff Park - see new area purchased by Government. Entrance opposite Francis Patton School. Park on side of estate road. 2.00 pm

December (to be announced) Annual Christmas Bird Count