



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

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Audubon News

Andrew Dobson, President

The first few months of 2006 have been active ones for the Society. **January:** The official handover of Pearl Island to the Society took place in January. We are very grateful for the generosity of the Butterfield family in donating this small island in the Great Sound. The good news is that Common Terns appear to be nesting on the island this year, the very reason that the Society has been involved with the island for more than 30 years.

February: Our natural history documentary film *Bermuda's Treasure Island*, made in partnership with Castletown Productions, had its premiere 3-5 February. About 500 people saw it that weekend, while 250,000 watched the Irish version *Sceilligs and Bermuda* on RTE (Irish TV) on Easter Monday. The film has been extremely well received and it is particularly pleasing to report that both films gained awards at the 29th International Wildlife Film Festival in Missoula, Montana. More than 300 wildlife films were entered this year, and both of our films were finalists - competing amongst box office hits such as *March of the Penguins* and *Parrots of Telegraph Hill* and the latest Attenborough series *Life in the Undergrowth*. *Bermuda's Treasure Island* received two merits awards for 'Strong Main Character' and 'Positive Message'. *Sceilligs and Bermuda* also received Honourable Mentions for 'Inspiring Message' and 'Photography'. DVD sales have been going very well and are helping to fund a free DVD to every school in Bermuda to assist in environmental education. You can obtain copies from the Society or buy them locally. Price at \$20, they are available from the Body Shop and Leisure Time (Hamilton), Aquarium Giftshop, Bermuda Memories (St. Georges) and Audio Visual Electronics (Somerset). Also in February - a fieldtrip aboard Michael Hayward's 'Explorer' produced some notable bird sightings in and around the Great Sound, including Great Cormorant, Common Merganser, Bonaparte's Gull and Barn Owl. **March and April:** Honorary President of BirdLife International, Queen Noor visited Bermuda. Audubon and BirdLife members Andrew Dobson and Jeremy Madeiros had the honour of meeting Queen Noor who has a particular interest in birds and the

environment. Andrew and Jeremy also serve on the board of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds. The SCSCB may well become the BirdLife partner for our region. Our bluebird nest box workshop at Government House was once again well supported with about 50 boxes made and this year the Society also promoted a bluebird nest box category at the Annual Show in April. The winner was from Elliott School, and he will be receiving a special trophy to be awarded annually. The cedar trophy has been made by Audubon member Fred Phillips. A 'thank you' also to Penny Hill who provided a fascinating lecture in April on her recent trip to Botswana.

May: The Society was thrilled to be selected as a beneficiary of this year's End-to-End walk. Many thanks to the volunteers from the Society who helped on the day - and to all the walkers and sponsors. Most recently, Andrew Dobson presented the Education Minister, Mr. Terry Lister, with DVDs of *Bermuda's Treasure Island* for every school in Bermuda. The stated aim was to produce a DVD to assist environmental education in our schools. The documentary 'Bermuda's Treasure Island' focuses on Nonsuch Island in particular and includes some extraordinary footage of our endemic national bird, the Cahow. As President of the SCSCB, Andrew Dobson also presented Mr. Lister with a set of new seabird posters produced by the SCSCB. These will also be distributed to schools. The poster illustrates the three species of seabirds which breed in Bermuda, the Cahow, Longtail and Common Tern, as well as 16 other species which have occurred in Bermuda as rare visitors or vagrants.

Throughout the year, the Society has been particularly grateful to the volunteers who have manned the stall at the Farmers' Market. It has provided the Society with an opportunity to sell nest boxes, DVDs and anniversary magazines. Meanwhile, work at our new Somerset Long Bay reserve continues. The Buy Back Bermuda campaign committee is working hard to restore the area. After the removal of invasives and redesigning the pond area - replanting can begin!

I do hope you will be able to attend the AGM which will include a full review of the year's activities. Our next big event is an art show being held at the Bermuda Art Centre at Dockyard 3-16 September. Please contact the Society for details if you are interested in exhibiting. The theme is 'birds' and we encourage all styles of art.

Annual General Meeting and Film Show

Wednesday 7th June 2006 - BUEI Auditorium 6.30 pm

Nominations are required for the executive committee. The Society needs to fill the position of secretary in particular. Please contact the Society if you require more information. At 7.30 pm, following the AGM, there will be the first showing in Bermuda of *Scellig & Bermuda - A Last Refuge* (see details below). This film will be free to members attending the AGM - but you need to call 238-3239 in order to reserve a seat. There is limited seating. Remaining seats will be \$10 to members and non-members available from the Body Shop on Reid Street, Hamilton.

The Bermuda Audubon Society and Castletown Productions (New York & County Limerick, Ireland) have collaborated with wildlife filmmaker Eamon de Buitlear, to create *Sceillig and Bermuda - A Last Refuge*. Filmed on location – at two remote islands separated by three thousand miles of Atlantic Ocean – Éamon de Buitlear walks the shores of one and the craggy peaks of the other with two men who have spent their lives as naturalists – one man, David Wingate has spent over forty years in the resurrection of one of the world's rarest seabirds, the Cahow, thought to be extinct for three hundred years: the other man, Oscar Merne has worked to ensure the resurgence of seabirds off Ireland's west Kerry. Two islands where time stops, beauty is abundant, and where isolation has served the most ancient of mariners, the seabird.

Grey Heron - First Live Record in Bermuda

Andrew Dobson



In the last newsletter I reported that on 7th October 2005, David Wallace found a dead heron at Kindley Field, St. Georges. It proved to be the first record of Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* in Bermuda. With occasional sightings and much debate concerning another possible record over the last year, David Wingate confirmed the first live Grey Heron at Spittal Pond on 22nd April 2006. David managed close views and I was able to take photos that day and on the following day in mangroves at Compston's Pond (see photo). It has not been seen since 27th April when it returned to Spittal Pond. Adult Grey Herons differ from Great Blue Herons *Ardea herodias* (our regular large heron) in being slightly smaller and lacking any rufous in the thighs or wings. This species has long been expected in Bermuda with a number of records from the West

Indies, including Barbados, Martinique and Montserrat. The first record of Grey Heron in the West Indies (1959) had been banded in France four months earlier. It is assumed that these vagrant herons flew across the Atlantic from Africa under favourable wind conditions. No records are included for the North American continent in the A.O.U. Checklist (1998). However, a recent email from Paul Linegar informed me of the following: in 2002, a Grey Heron labeled as a Great Blue Heron was discovered in a small collection of birds at Memorial University of Newfoundland's biology department. The bird had been found alive on 11 October 1996 but died a few days later.

Red-tailed Hawks breeding attempt in Bermuda

Andrew Dobson



For those of you who have been following the saga of the Red-tailed Hawks appearance in Bermuda, it will not come as a surprise to know that they have tried to breed. David Wingate wrote a fascinating account of the former occurrence of Red-tailed Hawks in Bermuda and their likely status as breeding bird. (BAS 50th Anniversary Magazine). In the 20th century, there were single records of the hawk in 1903, 1909, 1929 and 1983. The next one was to turn up on November 25th 2001 and amazingly it was joined by another in the late fall of 2003. Last year the birds were often seen circling together over Morgan's Point but there was no hint of

possible breeding activity. The birds sometimes strayed as far as the Harbout Islands and would even roost there. This year, courtship activity was much in evidence and tumbling dives were often witnessed. In the second week of April, fisherman Alan Card reported a large nest at Morgan's Point about 25 feet high in a casuarina tree. Having seen an Osprey in the area during recent weeks, he assumed that it was nesting (Ospreys have yet to breed in Bermuda). The nest was indeed that of the Red-tailed Hawks. On 23rd April, the Barton family saw one of the hawks take a small rodent to the nest. There was no evidence of young, and it may simply have been a gesture by the male to the female. At the time of writing, the two hawks are still to be seen circling over Morgan's Point, but there is not evidence of any breeding success yet. The photo of one of the Red-tails was taken on April 23rd 2006.

Bird Report January to May 2006

Andrew Dobson

The first five months of the year have once again provided some fascinating records. Bermuda's first record of a live Grey Heron was confirmed (following the discovery of a dead one last year). The pair of Red-tailed Hawks attempted to breed. Meanwhile, a number of species lingered in Bermuda following the effects of Hurricane Wilma last year, notably Magnificent Frigatebird, Laughing Gull and Royal Tern.

Grebes to Birds of Prey



A pair of **Pied-billed Grebe** once again bred at Somerset Long Bay. Since the setback in **Cahow** breeding success following Hurricane Fabian in 2003, this year's total of 38 chicks is most promising. This year also witnessed the return of the first chicks to have been banded as fledglings, 6 from 2002 and 2 from 2003. Other than **Manx Shearwater**, few shearwaters were seen before late May. **Wilson's** and **Leach's Storm-Petrels** were

commonly seen well off-shore in Apr and May (AD). A very early **White-tailed Tropicbird** was seen at Spittal Pond 30 Jan (PW), but did not return in significant numbers until late February. Two immature **Northern Gannets** were regularly seen 9 Dec to Mar (PW). A **Great Cormorant** that wintered in the Great Sound was last seen 11 Mar (AD). Sightings of **Magnificent Frigatebirds** around the coastline continued until 5 Apr with two over St David's (GA). A **Grey Heron** at Spittal Pond 22-27 Apr (DBW) was the first live record for this species in Bermuda. **Green Herons** are once again actively breeding. A flock of 30 **Cattle Egrets** were feeding at the Airport in Mar (PW). Several imm. **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were seen at various locations during the winter months (AD, DBW, PW). **Least Bitterns** were seen during mid-Apr at Pembroke Marsh (K&RL) and Paget Marsh (DW). Two **Glossy Ibis** were seen flying over Warwick 8 May and settled at Devonshire Marsh (AD). A **Canada Goose** was seen over Pembroke Marsh in Mar (TW). Seymour's Pond hosted a pair of **Gadwall** 24 Mar- 4Apr (DBW) and a pair of **Eurasian Wigeon** 29 Dec-11 Mar (AD). A **Greater Scaup** was on Tucker's Point GC Pond 13 Mar (EA). A **Common Merganser** was in Mangrove Lake 13 Jan (JM) and then the Great Sound to Mar (DW). A **Red-breasted Merganser** was seen at Somerset Long Bay 12 Feb (DW). A **Ruddy Duck** wintered on Parson's Road Pond (AD). A **Swallow-tailed Kite** (*see photo AD*) was regularly seen over Gibbs Hill 7-11 May (TW). Wintering **Northern Harriers** were last seen at the Airport 5 Apr and Great Sound 7 Apr (AD). The **Red-tailed Hawk** nest at Morgan's Point was first noticed in early April (AC). Single **Peregrine Falcons** were noted 3 May over Flatts Hill (JM) and 15 May over Morgan's Point (AD).

Shorebirds to Terns

An **American Golden-Plover** was on mudflats at Stocks Harbour 29 Apr-11 May (EA, PW). Three **Semipalmated Plovers** and two **Piping Plovers** wintered at Grape Bay with a **Willet**. This is the second wintering record of Willet in Bermuda. Three **Piping Plovers** were at Grape Bay 1 May (PW). Single **Black-necked Stilts** were seen at North Pond 23 Mar-5 Apr (GB) and Spittal Pond 22-27 May (PA). A **Solitary Sandpiper** seen at Jubilee Road 24 Jan (DBW) provided the first winter record for Bermuda. A **Red Knot** was at Riddell's Bay GC 4 Dec- 17 Jan (DW). A **Long-billed Dowitcher** was at S.Princess Pond mid-Dec to 2 Jan (AD). A smattering of spring shorebirds arrived in May, including a **Stilt Sandpiper** at North Pond 6 May and single **White-rumped Sandpipers** at North Pond and Jubilee Road 21 May (AD). At least 20 **Laughing Gulls**



wintered in Bermuda, mainly in the Hamilton Harbour area. Some were still present into May. A **Franklin's Gull** was seen on 11 Feb in Castle Harbour (JM). A **Black-headed Gull** was last seen 7 Apr in Hamilton Harbour (AD). There was a movement of **Bonaparte's Gulls** in March with 17 seen in Hamilton Harbour 20 Mar (PW). Five **Royal Terns** wintered, most often seen at Dockyard (AD) with at least three remaining into May. Two **Sandwich Terns** remained in the Hamilton Harbour area until early February. Three **Forster's Terns** remained in Hamilton Harbour throughout the period (PW).

Nighthawk to Waxbills

A **Common Nighthawk** was over Nonsuch Is. 23 May (PW). A **Northern Flicker** was at Devonshire Church 1 Mar (SD). A **Grey Kingbird** was found at Brighton Hill 23 May (DW). A Red-eyed **Vireo** was at Somerset Long Bay 7 May (EA). A **Barn Swallow** over Pembroke Dump was unusual 28 Dec-8 Jan (DBW). Flocks of up to 14 birds were noted at several locations 20 Apr (AD, PW). A **Veery** came to a bird bath in Jenningsland 16 Apr (JM, LM). A **Wood Thrush** near the railway trail in Somerset provided a rare wintering record 31 Jan- 23 Mar (DW). Two **American Robins** were seen at Wreck Road 31 Jan (DW). **American Pipits** have been scarce on the Airport with eight 22 Jan (AD). Few migrant warblers were recorded in the spring, but notable sightings included a **Blue-winged Warbler** 20 Apr on Paget Is (AD) and **Bay-breasted Warbler** 7 May on Wreck Road (EA). A **Summer Tanager** seen in Dec and 24 Feb-12 Mar (SR) certainly over-wintered in the Arboretum. A male **Scarlet Tanager** was at Somerset Long Bay 2-7 May. A **Snow Bunting** was present on the Airport 12 Dec-18 Feb (PW). The largest flock of **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** reported was six birds at Emily's Bay Lane 20 Apr (EA). **Indigo Buntings** were also common spring migrants in Apr. **Bobolinks** were scarce migrants with singles at Pitman's Pond 26 Apr (PJH) and Brighton Hill 20 May (DW). An escaped **Black-rumped Waxbill** (*see photo AD*) was seen in Devonshire Marsh 24 Feb-12 Mar (SR)

Observers: Eric Amos, Gerry Ardis, Peter Adhemar, Geoff Bell, Alan Card, Steven DeSilva, Andrew Dobson, Peter Holmes (PJH), Peter Hopkin, Kay & Ray Latter, Jeremy Madeiros, Steve Rodwell, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, Tim Wershler, David Wingate (DBW).