



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2000

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The New Millennium

Like thousands of others, my family and I spent New Year's Eve at Dockyard but we didn't linger long after midnight with our two small girls in tow. As we drove home I hoped that my first bird of the new millennium would be a barn owl – just wishful thinking of course! So what was my first species? A kiskadee, what else! Probably the same bird I hear every day before sunrise. Then followed a short burst of bluebird song, a real treat any time in the winter – but only because the weather was exceptionally mild. I then pondered the question as to which birds would still be around in the next hundred years, let alone the next thousand.

Although extinction is a natural process, the fossil record shows that on average only one species dies out every 100 years. However, in the last 200 years the rate of extinction has been phenomenal. Of 35 species of birds that became extinct in the twentieth century, most were island endemics. Forest clearance and urbanization have resulted in habitat loss. The introduction and cats and rats have decimated bird populations. Bermuda knows these problems only too well. *BirdLife International** has estimated that about 1,200 bird species face extinction in the next 100 years! Why does it matter?

- About half of all plant species, including many food-producing crops, are pollinated by animals, including birds.
- Birds are a natural control over pests. The alternative is more pesticides.
- Birds are indicators of the state of the environment.
- Societies increasingly value birds for economic, cultural, ethical and spiritual reasons. There are over one million members of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in Britain.
- Birdwatching is a huge part of the eco-tourism industry and growing rapidly. Millions of birdwatchers have travelled abroad on birding trips generating enormous revenue to the countries visited.

Bird species cannot survive unless there is a sustainable use of resources. So how can you help? You can support local conservation groups like the Bermuda Audubon Society, Bermuda National Trust, Bermuda Zoological Society, Friends of Fish, Keep Bermuda Beautiful and Save

Open Spaces in their efforts to protect our fragile environment. At an international level, please consider supporting organizations like BirdLife International, which has conservation partners all over the world.

**BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, U.K.*

Andrew Dobson

Winter Bird Report 1999-2000

by Andrew Dobson

December and the first half of January saw very dry conditions with above average temperatures. January 1st hit 75.4 deg. F (24.1 deg. C). Since mid-January, temperatures have been below average with above average amounts of rainfall. The temperature on January 15th fell to 44.9 deg. F (7.2 deg. C) – the lowest for 50 years. There have been some unseasonal and unusual reports – birds normally found further north or to our south, as well as some arrivals from the other side of the Atlantic.

Petrels to Wildfowl

The first **Cahows** of the new millennium have already hatched. The exciting news concerning Cahows is the increasing frequency with which they are being seen during the late afternoon from vantage points such as Cooper's Point. A **Brown Pelican** has spent much of the winter here, delighting many observers. First seen in the Great Sound on March 29th (MW) it has favoured Harrington Sound and the vicinity of Spanish Point. A **Magnificent Frigatebird** can pass through Bermuda at any time, but one seen on Jan.8th (AD, KD) at Dockyard was unusual in that it stayed for at least five days. Two European ducks arrived this year. A female **Eurasian Wigeon** appeared at Camden Marsh on Jan.28th (EA) - present into March, while a much rarer **Tufted Duck** was identified at Warwick Pond on March 5th (AD). This bird is still present at the time of writing and the handsome black and white duck is the first adult male to be recorded in Bermuda. There have only been three previous records, all in the 1990's, involving brown females or immatures.

Shorebirds to Terns

Unusual wintering shorebirds included a **Greater Yellowlegs** and a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at Pitman's Pond in Somerset. A single **Dunlin** was regularly seen at Spittal Pond or at the airport. **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** are now regular each winter with a high count this year of at least seven individuals on Feb.13th (IF, PW) at the West End. A **Forster's Tern** graced Great Bay St.David's on Jan.28th (DW) where it remained to be joined by another on Feb.2nd.

Owls to Pipits

While scanning for Cahows off Cooper's Point on Jan.30th, SD and DW stumbled upon a **Short-eared Owl** and **Northern Shrike**. That presumed same shrike stayed in the East End into March and was heard singing at Lover's Lake on Mar.9th (WF). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** was an unusual winter sighting on Jan.5th at Ocean View GC (WF). A **Horned Lark** was amongst a flock of Snow Buntings at the Civil Air Terminal on Feb.12th (IF). Kinglets are always few and far between. The **Golden-crowned Kinglet** is not recorded every year, so one at Port Royal GC on Jan.23rd (AD) was a good find. **American Pipits** always seen to favour the short grass of the airport. Three on Dec.4th (DW) had increased to nine by Jan.16th.

Warblers to Redpolls

About 22 warbler species were recorded this winter. The most surprising was a **Yellow Warbler** seen at St.George's Cemetery on Feb.16th (PW, IF, DW). Also unseasonal was a **Summer Tanager** in the Arboretum from Dec.14th to 18th (IF, PW). There was a large influx of **Snow**

Buntings this winter. The highest count was 103 at Clearwater on Dec. 7th (SD). The rare **Pine Grosbeak** that arrived on Nov. 14th (JM, LM) was still present in the Somerset area in until January. **Common Redpolls** also arrived. A flock of 15 in St. David's on Dec. 6th (DW) was still present in January.

Many thanks to the following for their sightings: Eric Amos, Andrew and Katrina Dobson, Steven DeSilva, Ian Fisher, Wendy Frith, Jeremy and Leila Madeiros, Paul Watson, Mark Wood and David Wingate.

Christmas Bird Count

by Eric Amos

On December 30th, 1999, 9 observers in 7 parties set out for a dawn to dusk count of all the birds they encountered throughout the length and breadth of Bermuda. We were participating in the U.S. National Audubon Society's annual bird census which was celebrating its 100th count! During our quarter of a century of counts, 54 observers in 1050 hours have listed 221 species and 169,441 birds, while travelling 3138 miles. Although this year's count was done in excellent weather conditions, we actually had the lowest number of species - 87 (the average being 95) and the lowest number of birds (7341) since 1989. Indeed it was certainly uneventful and nothing unexpected was turned up. Only seven species reached new record totals, while two species were new to the count (Long-billed Dowitcher and the now famous Brown Pelican). In fact two of the species have been counted in previous years: the Canada Goose at Camden Ditch (for the 4th time) and the feral flamingo at Spittal Pond was censused for 11th time!. Another long-staying bird was also found for a 4th time -but sadly it was found dead at Devonshire Marsh - apparently poisoned (by chicken haters?). The count was however notable in that it was electronically sent to count HQ (via the Internet) and it was immediately published! For anyone interested the site is <http://www.Birdsource.org> where all the data for the USA, Canada, Bermuda, the West Indies, South America and many other worldwide places will eventually be published.

Reduce Resource Use - and SAVE!

By Penny Hill

For far too long, we have ignored the warnings of conservationists and environmental organisations, and have been using the earth's precious resources wastefully. As a result, broad opinion in scientific reports is that we have about thirty years to turn things around before the natural systems on which we depend will be damaged beyond repair. This is a soberingly short period of time for solving such huge problems as pollution, population and climate change. The UNEP's end-of-century review, *Global Environment Outlook 2000*, recommends that the developed world massively reduce its use of natural resources to give the rest of the world a chance of emerging from poverty. It predicts "full-scale emergencies" to come, including water shortages and reduced agricultural productivity.

But there are solutions out there - environmentally-friendly technologies that are up and running. Among these are the fleets of "Solar Baby" taxis that are helping reduce air pollution significantly in several Asian cities. It is clear that government-led initiatives are vital to change, but often the

political will is lacking until it is simply too late. Shockingly, the environment, central to our very existence, is still way down the list when it comes to political importance. Party politics are generally acknowledged to be a block to visionary thinking and innovative action in governments because short-term election goals usually take precedence. When it comes right down to it, it's up to individuals to push for change. So, what can we do? Here are a few ideas:

- Join organisations that are working to preserve the environment - the more voices, the more power a group has to lobby against entrenched views and detrimental special interests.
- Create a demand for more environmentally-friendly products in supermarkets and stores. They are available in abundance and suppliers will import them if they can sell them.
- Refuse to buy over-packaged products and make sure you let store owners know why.
- Take your own bags to the supermarket - the cost and waste of importing container loads of grocery bags is huge and unnecessary and most supermarket managers would be happy not to have to supply them.

While small in themselves, these things add up and demonstrate an environmental awareness, which can affect others too.

Energy use is another area where we can reduce waste. A few months ago, concerned about my high electricity bill, I finally sought advice from a local energy conservation company. By following some simple suggestions plus installing compact fluorescent light bulbs wherever I could, my electricity bill was cut almost in half!

In the early '90s, staff at Kempe & Whittle (now Ernst & Young) set up a 'green team' based on the strong belief that good environmental practices could be good business, too. So impressive was the programme they implemented, it was recognised with an award from the Bermuda National Trust. 'Green teams' can be set up in any work or school situation. Start by making small changes such as turning off unnecessary lights, using china cups and mugs instead of disposable ones, and trying to ensure that every sheet of copy paper is used on both sides. (This can cut your paper costs almost in half, and think of the space saved on shelves and in filing cabinets!)

A recent acquisition of mine is a windup and solar radio - no expensive and polluting batteries! Out of doors, it sits in the sun and plays powered by the sun's energy. Indoors, you wind it up. There are many similar products available - solar lanterns, flashlights, and ovens. Solar technology for lighting and water heating is widely available and constantly improving, yet so little used in Bermuda. Government incentives could certainly turn this around. In Wales (not exactly known for its sunny climate), many university, public and private buildings use solar power.

The recent ministerial car controversy prompted a friend to say, half-jokingly, "Now why couldn't they have brought in solar cars?" Why not, indeed? That would have been truly progressive - a step towards a solution rather than adding to an already chronic problem. This tiny dot in the ocean could be a model for the world. Can we meet that challenge?

(As well as being the Audubon Society's secretary, Penny Hill is librarian with the Department of Agriculture & Fisheries. She can be found at either the Botanical Gardens, tel. 236-4201, or the

Aquarium, tel. 293-2727. If you would like further information, please give her a call. This article was first run in the Bermuda Sun as part of the current Earth Day series.)

Audubon Society News

The Eden Project - On Sat. 26th Feb. an environmental trade fair, 'The Eden Project', was officially opened by the Premier, the Hon. Jennifer Smith, at No.1 Shed in Hamilton. The Bermuda Audubon Society's stand displayed a large map of Bermuda with photographs of the society's reserves. The society also promoted bluebird boxes and longtail igloos. I would like to commend the organisers of the event and hope that is repeated in two years time, as it was a good way to educate the public on environmental matters. A very special thank-you is due to Tim Viney and his staff at the Dept. of Works and Engineering for producing the excellent GIS-generated map showing the Audubon reserves. A thank-you also to the team of volunteers which put the exhibit together and manned it throughout the day. (Contributed by David O'Neill)

Birdwatching Course - The four-week course run by Andrew Dobson and David Wingate in January and February proved to be a great success. Twenty-five people attended the indoor lectures and two fieldtrips. Money was raised for both the Audubon Society and Bermuda Zoological Society. Such was the interest that it is hoped to run a similar course again soon.

Bluebird Boxes and Longtail Nest sites - Now is the time to clean out your bluebird box or consider purchasing one for your garden. Bluebirds will not only give you great pleasure to watch, but you will be aiding their survival as a species in Bermuda. If longtails nest on your property or you know of longtail nest sites, now is the time to check that those sites are free of trash. Potential nesting birds will also appreciate a small amount of sand placed in the base of the nest hole. If you would like to install a longtail igloo on your property - please contact the society. (See Fall 99 Newsletter Vol.10 No.3)

Aquarium gift shop sale – a ‘March Madness’ sale is being held with 20% off all items. You might be interested in a new stock of bird song CDs.

Fieldtrip – unfavourable weather on both 27th February and 5th March meant a cancellation of the Joffre Pitman boat cruise around the harbour islands. Joffre has offered to try again later in the year – probably October.

The Highlands of Scotland – Tom Sterling, wildlife photographer and film-maker, will be giving an illustrated talk on the Highlands of Scotland on Monday 3rd April, 7.30 pm at the BUEI Auditorium. Members \$7.50. Non-members \$10.00. Tom has visited Bermuda several times in the past, initially as a speaker on the National Audubon Society's wildlife lecture circuit. We are especially delighted to have him back again and welcome him warmly.

Bermuda Audubon Society Hotline	235-5513 or 297-2623
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Phone in Bird News or Environmental Concerns or Membership Matters
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Membership Renewal or New Applications

Send your name, address and phone number plus membership annual fee to:
Bermuda Audubon Society, P.O.Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX
Adults \$10.00 Students \$5.00

Bermuda Audubon Society Committee 1999/2000

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