



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

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The Value of Trees

Andrew Dobson

President, Bermuda Audubon Society

The most serious environmental problem facing the world is climate change – and the need to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases released into the air. What should be Bermuda's role? We may be a small population in the world, but that's no excuse for not doing our bit to solve the problem. Where do trees and hedgerows come into the picture? They take in carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. One acre of forest soaks up 5.5 tons of CO₂ per year! So both our Government and residents should be planting trees, not removing them. I would like to see a policy of two trees being planted for every one that is felled due to housing or commercial development. The pruning of trees and trimming of hedges along roadsides is necessary but it must be done with expertise and supervision. Some hedgerows and trees have been almost completely cleared along roadsides –the exposed soil will inevitably be washed away in heavy rain.

The benefits of trees and other plants are often under-estimated. Their benefit as a wildlife habitat is well known; as is the protection they afford us from strong winds. Roads that are attractively bordered by lush vegetation are a hallmark of Bermuda and an asset to tourism. Our quality of life and general well being are closely linked to the environment. Promoting the appreciation of Bermuda's fauna and flora by regular walking can help reduce stress, obesity, heart disease and other medical problems that could save Bermuda millions of dollars each year.

Rather than just trimming the hedgerows, perhaps the same work crews could become skilled planters, restoring areas of Bermuda now lacking tree cover. The benefits could be enormous: a boost for jobs in horticulture in order to supply and plant more trees and shrubs; a more attractive island encouraging tourism; a positive action by the Government in its support for biodiversity; and a better quality of life for local people.

I have just returned from California where my family and I had the opportunity to walk through the Giant Sequoia groves in Yosemite National Park. An incredible experience, a real privilege even though lingering snow necessitated a 2-mile walk just to reach the first tree. We may not have the majesty of these huge cypress trees in Bermuda, but we gain much pleasure from planting trees that we do have. A Bermuda Cedar we planted two years ago already has berries. The enormous Poinciana in our front garden dominated the whole neighbourhood until it crashed to the ground revealing a hollow trunk. The disappointment has been short-lived. A sapling soon appeared from the stump producing a tree that is already over 10 feet tall and a regular perch for bluebirds. Why not plant some (more) trees and shrubs in your garden, especially natives and endemics. Better still, create a wildlife garden as part of your garden where a far greater diversity of animal species can thrive – and you can enjoy.

Return of the Turnstone

Ron Porter

The Ruddy Turnstone with colour bands from New Jersey returned to the Aquarium for his second winter this year. Somehow he found his way across the vast Canadian tundra and then the trackless ocean to once again find the tiny speck that is Bermuda. Is this a unique individual (he does seem to wander the Aquarium grounds by himself), or do many Turnstones repeat this feat? Perhaps a random group visits Bermuda each year, which just happen to be passing the island on their migration South. Robin Marirea and I set out to see if the same birds come back next fall. 2001 would be a perfect year to band a few with "Bermuda Colours" since coincidentally, this year there are 50 researchers working in Delaware Bay, New Jersey, scanning the flocks for colour banded birds. They are studying the number and health of the birds using the bay as a "refueling" stop on their way to the arctic. If there would ever be a chance for re-sighting the Bermuda birds on their voyage, this would be it. With various designs of nets and baits we set about to carefully and safely catch a few of the 100 turnstones in the Aquarium flock. This, we imagined, would be the easy part of the study, since turnstones gathered anywhere we threw food, and were totally accustomed to having people around them. It was quickly obvious that what they were accustomed to, however, was being ignored, and they were magically aware of anyone who took interest in them. At the end of 4 weeks work, the score was Turnstones 6, Scientists 0. It wasn't until the end of April that we managed to net 20 birds, and install the Bermuda bands. These bands are actually "flags", which have a small numbered tab extending from the band. Each bird gets 2 flags, one directly over the other, on the lower left leg. The Bermuda flag colors (assigned by international organizations) are: Yellow (denoting the region including Bermuda and the Caribbean islands) above a second flag: Dark Blue (denoting specifically Bermuda). Anyone in the world reporting this combination will be referred to us by the band-tracking agency (currently Canadian). Right away patterns of activity became apparent. #4 and #8 could always be found near the flamingoes (and 4 has quite a temper). The grass near Shorelands was home to 3,6 and 9 while 13 floated between Shorelands and the flamingoes. 15 favours the edge near Flatts Bridge. The New Jersey turnstone that started the study hangs out near the "flyboard" and Quarantine area. None of these territories could be discerned until we could tell the birds apart. Each morning just before dawn, the entire flock trickles in a few at a time and lands on the Quarantine Dock for 15 minutes of preening and social activity. In the evening they all gather behind the Aquarium along Harrington Sound until just the moment before complete dark. Then simultaneously they rise up and disappear into the dark. Jeremy Madeiros reports that he sees a flock roosting on the boulders covering the old Navy dump below St. David's. Are they the Aquarium birds? Anyone with binoculars can read the number on the yellow flag, and Robin and I would certainly be grateful for any reports. Even without binoculars the flags are visible from a distance, and reports without flag number are just as welcome. We would like to know if the

turnstones range around Bermuda, or stay near the Aquarium. Perhaps they visit the Aquarium every few days to "tank up" on flamingo food. Or maybe the flock is only a random group that happened to stop at Bermuda last fall, and the yellow flags will not return. Who knows?



Ruddy Turnstone, Bermuda Aquarium and Zoo

Photo –A. Dobson

Spring Bird Report March to May 2001

Andrew Dobson

One of the highlights of this season has been the breeding success of **Pied-billed Grebes**, a rare event in any year. Two pairs raise three young at the Audubon Society's reserve at Somerset Long Bay while another pair raised two more at the adjacent Pitman's Pond. Hopes are high for this year's breeding population of **Cahows**. If the thirty-three hatchlings all survive, this would be a record number. How nice this would be as 2001 marks the 50th anniversary of the Cahow's re-discovery.

An immature **Masked Booby**, a very rare visitor to Bermuda's waters, was seen at Gurnet Rock on 21st March. So far this spring, scanning for pelagic species off South Shore has been disappointing with a lack of favourable on-shore winds. **Manx Shearwaters** were seen during March and late April did offer the chance to see Jaeger and tern species migrating northwards. Tern species of note included a **Royal Tern** at Watford Bridge on 29th April and a **Roseate Tern** off Nonsuch on 11th May. Most wintering ducks had departed by the end of April, so a male **Ring-necked Duck** on Spittal Pond in May was quite unusual. Not unusual, but never guaranteed in any year is **Swallow-tailed Kite**. Many people were lucky enough to enjoy views of this magnificent bird that stayed for at least a week, being first noted over Devonshire Marsh on 17th March. A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was seen near Watch Hill Park on 12th May. **The Ash-throated Flycatcher** first discovered in November of last year was still present at Southside on 11th May. One can only speculate as to where it will end up if and when it finally departs. Its breeding range is south-west USA. The first **Purple Martin** was reported from Stocks Harbour on 14th March,

but not many more have followed. A burst of swallows did occur in April but warblers have been few and far between. It is always a challenge to find warblers in May, but Nonsuch Island struck lucky with a male **Blackpoll Warbler**, female **Yellow-rumped Warbler** and two **female Common Yellowthroats** in mid-May. A **Magnolia Warbler** as also seen in Walsingham on 11th May. **Red-winged Blackbirds** are never common in Bermuda, but three males advertised themselves by singing in the Botanical Gardens, Nonsuch Island 16th April and Somerset Long Bay. Five **Bobolinks** were at Ruth's Point on 13th May.

Latest news: a **Red-billed Tropicbird** prospecting nest holes at Nonsuch Island from 18th May

Contributors: Andrew Dobson, Rory Gorman, Jeremy and Leila Madeiros, David Wallace, David Wingate and Paul Watson.

Book donations

The *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Vol. 6 (Mousebirds to Hornbills) has just arrived in the BAMZ library - also the recently published and excellent reference book, *Threatened Birds of the World*. Both of these are donations from the Society to the BAMZ library and members are most welcome to go in and take look at them. Just call Penny Hill at 293-2727.

Future Events - For information on any of the events: tel. 292-1920 after 6 p.m.

- **Sunday 27 May**
Blue Hole Park Field Trip
Meet at car park 2.00 p.m.
- **Monday 18 June**
Annual General Meeting
Horticultural Hall, Botanical Gardens 7.30 p.m.
Speaker to be announced
- **Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 June**
Nonsuch Natural History Camp for students
- **Sunday 8 July**
Nonsuch Island Field Trip. \$20 members \$25 non-members
Reservations and information 292-1920 after 6 p.m.
- **Sunday 9 September**
Spittal Pond Field Trip
Meet at eastern car park 7.30 a.m.
- **Friday 5 to Sunday 7 October**
Paget Island Birding Weekend

Membership Application/Renewal

Title (Mr. Mrs. etc) _____ Name: _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____

Tel. no. (H) _____ (W) _____

Email: _____

Please tick

- Student \$5
 Adult \$20
 Family \$30 (two or more persons)
 Life \$500
 Donation _____ (Cheques payable to "Bermuda Audubon Society")
P.O.Box HM1328 Hamilton, HMFx

Date of application: _____

Membership dues are payable in June each year.

Notice of Annual General Meeting Monday 18th June 2001 7.30 p.m. Horticultural Hall Botanical Gardens

There will be a speaker following the A.G.M.
If you would like to propose anyone for the Society's Executive Committee,
please contact the secretary at 292-1920 with your nomination.

Bermuda Audubon Society Committee 2000/2001

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