

Bermuda Audubon Society

# NEWSLETTER

Summer 2004

P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.15 No.2

[www.audubon.bm](http://www.audubon.bm)

Email: [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)

## First Record of California Gull in Bermuda

Paul Watson



Finding a rare bird in Bermuda is a real thrill for a birder, but finding a new species for Bermuda makes it a real gem. However, sometimes you find a real 'gem' and can't put a name on the bird! That's what happened to me on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. I work in the Marine Police Department, so I spend a lot of time on the water (not as much as I would like to!) I was off Dockyard at about 9.00am and decided to check the gulls on the jetty. My attention was drawn to a

gull I thought was a Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. However, on closer inspection I noticed the mantle colour was too light and the bird appeared too slender. I took a look at the bill and realised I had a good bird but couldn't put a name to it. The bill was yellow with a red spot and black band nearer the tip - an unusual combination. I also noted a dark eye - unusual amongst our *Larus* gulls. The legs were a greenish-yellow. I made a few phone calls to alert local birders, but no-one was home! Not until I got home in the early evening was I able to open Sibley to identify the bird. As soon as I turned the page to California Gull *Larus californicus* I knew what I had seen. Calls were made and emails sent. One or two birders 'scrambled' to Dockyard in the fading light but the bird wasn't present. However, it remained in the Dockyard area for most of its stay, providing good views and comparisons with other gull species. It was last seen on 9<sup>th</sup> May. (Photo: Andrew Dobson)

California Gull breeds from northern California east to Colorado, and north to the Canadian Prairies. It winters in the western US, especially on the Pacific Coast from British Columbia to Mexico. It is prone to wander and there are accidental records on the east coast of North America from New Brunswick to the Gulf Coast.

## Audubon Lecture - Monday 31 May

Mr Nicholas Carlile, a seabird specialist with the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) Australia, will be speaking at a Bermuda Audubon Society lecture at BUEI on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> of May at 7:30pm. The lecture, '**Lord Howe Island Australia: A seabird paradise and the rediscovery of the world's rarest insect**', provides some interesting parallels for Bermuda.

"Lord Howe Island has some of the most spectacular seabirds and scenery on offer anywhere on the planet" Mr Carlile said. "Unlike Bermuda, Lord Howe developed in isolation for some 6.5 million years giving rise to many endemic species. However, like Bermuda the hand of man has created a few challenges to the survival of many of its species" Mr Carlile said. A highlight of the talk will be the recounting of the discovery and bring into captivity of the world's rarest insect. Mr Carlile was part of a team of scientists who rediscovered a giant flightless stick insect thought to be extinct for the past 80 years. The story of the logistical difficulties of finding and retrieving these animals from the world's tallest sea-stack (1800 feet) make for a compelling evening. "To rediscover these amazing animals, that look like they were out of the time of the dinosaurs, has certainly been a highlight of my years working on islands." Mr Carlile said.

Nicholas Carlile has been working with endangered seabirds for much of the last 15 years. He specialises in island ecology restorations and has been responsible for the first ever down-listing of a formally endangered species, the Gould's petrel. Initially trained as an actor, Mr Carlile, 40, was drawn to work in conservation ecology as a means to have a direct impact on the survival of our more threatened fauna. Mr Carlile has carried out research throughout the Pacific and is currently in Bermuda to assist in the conservation of Bermuda's national bird, the Cahow.

Tickets are available at the door on the night at \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. For further information - call 238-3239

## Annual General Meeting

Notice is given of the AGM of the Bermuda Audubon Society which will take place on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> June 5.30 pm at Government House. Our patron, Lady Vereker, is hosting the meeting. The meeting will include an illustrated review of Audubon's year by outgoing president Jennifer Gray and an illustrated review of the birding year by Andrew Dobson. For security purposes, please confirm your intention of attending the AGM by email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) or 238-323

## Bermuda and Caribbean Bird Festival Andrew Dobson

Conservation organizations throughout Bermuda and the Caribbean have just completed a month-long celebration of the unique birds found in the region. The Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival which started on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, "Earth Day", and ended on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, "International Biodiversity Day", was coordinated by the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB). The SCSCB is the largest single regional organization devoted to wildlife conservation in the Caribbean. It is a non-profit organization whose goals are to promote the scientific study and conservation of Caribbean birds and their habitats, and to promote greater public awareness of the bird life of the region. <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/SCO/index.html>

Speaking at the launch, Eric Carey, President of SCSCB, said "This Festival is a celebration of the spectacular bird life found throughout the Caribbean - more than one in five bird species is found nowhere else on earth. Thanks to this annual Festival, people will learn to appreciate the value and global significance of our region's birds and other wildlife and join us to help conserve them for future generations to enjoy."

In Bermuda, the Cahow and White-eyed Vireo are unique to our country. This is indeed a cause for celebration, but it is our responsibility to look after these birds and cherish this valuable asset. These species are an irreplaceable part of our natural heritage and given the global trends in species extinction we must ensure the education of everyone to safeguard their existence. Events here have included nestbox construction for bluebirds and longtails; a bird lecture by Prof. John O'Halloran and spring bird migration observations. Audubon members have been busy recording spring migrants which have not only included the hoped for swallows, tanagers, grosbeaks and orioles but some unusual visitors too. A California Gull, the first for Bermuda, turned up at Dockyard!

The month-long annual Festival highlighted the fact that the Caribbean islands are recognized as one of the top three areas on the planet for biodiversity conservation, because of the high number of endemic plant and animal species. But according to BirdLife International, the birds of the Caribbean are today more threatened than they have ever been in their history. BirdLife International data shows that 56 species of bird found in the Caribbean are at risk of global extinction, 11 of them are Critically Endangered. More information, including background information on all of the Caribbean's threatened bird species, can be found at:

[www.birdlife.org/datazone/search/species\\_search.html](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/search/species_search.html) Other countries taking part included: The Bahamas, St. Lucia, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Bermuda, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Antigua, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Montserrat, Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos. According to Conservation International, the islands of the Caribbean are now recognized as one of the top three areas on the planet for biodiversity conservation action, given the immense species richness of the islands combined and the high risk of extinction many of them face.

[www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/strategies/hotspots/hotspots.xml](http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/strategies/hotspots/hotspots.xml)

## Solving the lizard threat to bluebirds Helge Trapnell Wingate

After being involved with Bermuda's bluebirds in one way or another for the past 35 years, I have discovered another new problem, but don't despair because I have found a relatively simple solution. Since the loss of three broods in two successive seasons I became even more vigilant and devoted more time than ever to the subject of observing our resident pair. Each time I noted that they had built fine nests, defended their territory against any number of pestbirds especially the male house sparrow (which presents the biggest problem of all, because the male systematically kills the chicks and females on the nest). I had noticed that our garden harboured some new recent invaders namely the Antiguan anole *Anolis leachii* commonly known as the Warwick Lizard. However, now they seem to have become an island-wide invasive. I kept seeing one particularly large specimen near our bluebird box. This is a fairly secretive species and individuals run away swiftly if one chances upon them, but the behaviour of that monster was also different, he was standing his ground, eyeing me as if to challenge my presence. He had definitely aroused my suspicion, but I assumed him to be an insect-eater, or at worst an egg thief.

When the first clutch of eggs was laid in early April of 2003, I made it a point to keep track of the approximate hatching date. I also checked the box daily and the female became totally accustomed to my opening the door. One fine morning 4 tiny pink chicks were in the perfectly clean nest, so I assumed that all was well. By noon I heard plaintive calls from our bluebirds and I knew that something was wrong. When I went to open the box I saw the "monster lizard" running down the pole. As I had feared, the nest was empty and I could not find any of the chicks in the vicinity of the box. To me that was finally proof of the fact that this lizard has become habituated to stealing and eating the chicks. I immediately tried to grease the pole, especially near the bottom, but neither Vaseline nor Crisco worked because the heat of the sun melted everything. So I searched among the automotive lubricants and I believe I have found the ultimate solution. It is heatproof up to 350 deg F, inexpensive and readily available. The brand name is LubriMatic and it is a multi-purpose lithium grease. I did purchase a 14 oz. cylinder-shaped container for under \$3.00 and since this is normally used with a grease gun it is easy to open the top. I spread the grease on the pole starting about a foot above ground level for about 18". It solved the lizard problem, because the second brood in 2003 was successful.

*If you have any questions or problems concerning bluebirds, contact Mrs. G. Gierlinger at 238-0168, Stuart Smith at 238-1868 or email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)*

# Bird Report January to May 2004

Andrew Dobson

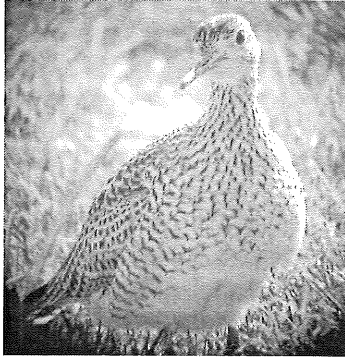
January and February were particularly stormy, with frequent low pressure systems moving off the East Coast. As a result, the range of northern species occurring in Bermuda has been noteworthy. March and April remained cool, but the lack of any strong south-easterly winds so far this season and a huge high pressure system sitting over Bermuda for much of May, prevented the influx of most spring migrants and put paid to any chance of sea-watching for pelagic migrants. Highlights have included: Three Northern Gannets (a maxima); twenty species of wildfowl (including 10 Snow Geese, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon and two White-winged Scoters - Bermuda's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>); Glaucous Gull; 3 Short-eared Owls (a maxima); Bohemian Waxwing (Bermuda's 2<sup>nd</sup> record); Lapland Longspur. From the south, we've had Glossy Ibis and Purple Gallinule. From the east a Little Egret (Bermuda's 3<sup>rd</sup>) and a possible Grey Heron (a potential 'first'). Finally, another new species for Bermuda, an adult California Gull, a species that should have been wintering on the Pacific Coast.

## Petrels to Ducks

A shearwater sp. (probably Manx) crossed the Causeway during a gale on 28 Jan (EA). **Manx Shearwaters** were passing Elbow Beach 16 Mar (AD), but the subsequent shearwater passage has been very sparse due to unfavourable winds. An early **White-tailed Tropicbird** was seen off the east end of Bermuda 2 Jan (GA). A **Northern Gannet** at Ferry Reach 8 Jan (PH) was the first of three immature birds to appear in Jan. There are only a handful of previous records for this species. One of the immature Northern Gannets seen during the winter months was still present in Bermuda waters up to at least 18 May. The long-staying **Snow Goose** remains at Outerlea Farm despite the other six geese leaving in mid-March. A possible **Grey Heron** has sparked much debate since being noticed at Spittal Pond 7 May (EA). If consensus can be reached on separating it from Great Blue Heron, it will be another new record for Bermuda. Bermuda's third **Little Egret** was discovered at Spittal Pond 5 Feb (IF) and again present in mid-May despite wandering the island. A **Glossy Ibis** was present at Kindley Field to at least 19 Mar (AD). Five wintering **Canada Geese** was a record high for Bermuda, with four at Spittal Pond and one at Jubilee Road 11 Dec-Mar (AD). A female **Eurasian Wigeon** was at Warwick Pond 1 Feb (EA). Between 30-40 **American Black Ducks** arrived following a storm on 15 Jan (AD). A male **Eurasian Teal** stayed on Warwick Pond 25 Jan-Mar (SR). A female **Northern Pintail** was still at Spittal Pond 8 May (AD). A **White-winged Scoter** was found at Fairylands Creek 22 Jan (DW) but was picked up dead on 24 Jan. Another White-winged Scoter (1<sup>st</sup> winter male) appeared at Somerset Long Bay NR 25 Jan -29 Mar (AD, SR). These two birds represent only the third and fourth records for Bermuda. Fourteen wintering **Hooded Mergansers** is a Bermuda record, with 12 at Spittal Pond and 2 at Warwick Pond (AD). A female **Common Merganser** was at Watford Bridge 25 Jan (PJH).

## Hawks to Puffins

A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was a surprise over the Hamilton Harbour Islands 9 May (PW). The second *buteo* hawk reported in the last newsletter was confirmed as another **Red-tailed Hawk**.



Much excitement has followed with the two birds seen displaying together regularly over Morgan's Point since mid-March. A **Purple Gallinule** was on Paget Marsh Pond 6 Jan-Mar (AD). A migrant **Killdeer** was at Outerlea Farm 8 May (JO, DBW). Two **Black-necked Stilts** arrived at Spittal Pond 7 May (EA) increasing to a maximum of 8. An **Upland Sandpiper** (photo left) at East End Dairy 25 Apr (DBW) was a nice spring surprise. A flock of 18 **Sanderling** at Marley Beach 6 Jan was unusual (AD). Few other migrants shorebirds were recorded, but included **Solitary, Semipalmated, Least and Pectoral Sandpipers**. A **Red Phalarope** was picked up injured from Point Finger Road 31 Jan (JG) and died shortly after. The paucity of shearwaters so far this spring has also been mirrored by jaegers. Both **Pomarine and Long-tailed Jaegers** were seen past Elbow Beach 27 Apr (AD). An adult **Laughing Gull** was seen in various parts of the island in early May. Of the smaller gulls to arrive, a first-winter **Black-headed Gull** was at Rockaway 28 Jan (IF, PW) and a flock of 15 **Bonaparte's Gulls** was over Spittal Pond Jan (JM, SR). but the gull of the season was Bermuda's first **California Gull**, an adult, at Dockyard 1-8 May (PW). A first-winter **Iceland Gull** was in Hamilton Harbour 3-8 Mar (AD, PW, DBW). A **Glaucous Gull** flew along North Shore on 15 Jan (JM). A dead **Atlantic Puffin** was discovered on the beach at Tobacco Bay 14 Mar (PW).

#### Passerines

A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was at Spittal Pond 18 Apr (DBW). At least three **Short-eared Owls** wintered, with three seen together at the Airport 2 Jan (PW). One of the Short-eared Owls was still at the Airport 18 Apr (Dwal). An **Eastern Kingbird** was seen at Parson's Road Pond 23 Apr (G&SH). Single **Yellow-throated Vireos** were seen at Botanical Gardens 13-21 Apr (AD) and AB Smith Reserve 14 Apr (SR). The first of 3 **Horned Larks** was at Bermuda Airport 31 Jan (EA). **American Pipits** (14) remained at the Airport 6 Mar (AD). A **Bohemian Waxwing** was an exceptional find on Port Royal GC 18 Jan (SR), the only record of this species other than a flock of five in 2001. A **Yellow Warbler** was on St. George's GC 10 Jan (PW). Few spring migrant warblers were recorded. A **Palm Warbler** at Marsh Lane 7 May (AD) was a notable exception. A **Swainson's Warbler** on Morgan's Point 4 Mar (AD, PS) had probably over-wintered. A **Wilson's Warbler** was in the Smiths Hills 4 Mar (Dwal). One **Summer Tanager** was recorded (DBW) 10 Apr at Pilchard Bay. Two stunning male **Scarlet Tanagers** were seen at Tamarind Vale 28 Apr (BH) and again in Warwick 6 May (WF). While scanning through a dozen **Savannah Sparrows** at Kindley Field 19 Mar, a **Vesper Sparrow** was heard singing and photographed (AD). The last date of the wintering **Swamp Sparrows** was one recorded at Spittal Pond 28 Mar (AD). A **Lapland Longspur** was at Bermuda Airport 7 Feb (AD). The first of a small influx of **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** was noted at Compston's Pond 25 Apr (AD). A **Blue Grosbeak** was at Spittal Pond 18 Apr (DBW). A **Bobolink** was singing from a fence post at Spittal Pond farm 8 May (SR). (Photos: Andrew Dobson - in colour at [www.audubon.bm](http://www.audubon.bm))

#### Escapees

The **Greater Flamingo**, 'Flo', has been sighted all around Bermuda, even making a low-level

**Membership Application/Renewal (Due in June – check expiry on address label) Date of application: \_\_\_\_\_**

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

pass along Front Street during the morning rush-hour 15 Apr (LM). A **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** was flying around the Bailey’s Bay area on 22 May (AD).

Observers: Eric Amos, Gerry Ardis, Andrew Dobson, Ian Fisher, Wendy Frith, Jennifer Gray, John O’Halloran, Gene and Susan Harvey, Peter Holmes, Peter Hopkin (PJH), Bertie Horsfield, Ray and Kay Latter (R&KL), Jeremy Madeiros, Leila Madeiros, Steve Rodwell, Keith Rossiter, Penny Soares, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW).

**Society News – view a bigger newsletter with colour photos at [www.audubon.bm](http://www.audubon.bm)**

**Longtail igloos**

The Society has ordered more igloos from the US and is also having some made locally. When the Styrofoam domes arrive, they will be coated in fiberglass and very quickly located in cliff sites around Bermuda. The Society is grateful to an environmental grant from the Bermuda Government and donations from a number of local companies and individuals, including Ministry of the Environment, Bank of Bermuda Charitable Trust, The ACE Foundation, FIL Foundation, XL Foundation, Barbour Butterfield Holdings, Mr. Richard Butterfield, Dr. David Saul, 1st Smiths Brownies, and 36th Bermuda cub scouts. **There will be a workshop to coat the newly arrived igloos at BAMZ workshop on Tues 15<sup>th</sup> June at 6.00 pm. All volunteers welcome.**



If undelivered please return to:  
Bermuda Audubon Society  
P.O. Box HM 1328  
Hamilton, BERMUDA

### Future Events

**Monday 31 May** - An illustrated lecture by Mr Nicholas Carlile  
"Lord Howe Island, Australia - a seabird paradise and home of the world's rarest insect"  
BUEI Auditorium 7.30 pm

**Saturday 5 June** - 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner - Horizons 7.30 pm  
Guest Speaker: Mr Nicholas Carlile "Biodiversity Conservation, a Petrel-led recovery"

**Monday 7 June** - Annual General Meeting, Government House 5.30 pm  
Including an illustrated review of Audubon's year by Jennifer Gray  
and an illustrated review of the birding year by Andrew Dobson

**Tuesday 15 June** - Longtail igloo workshop  
BAMZ workshop 6.00 pm

**Saturday 19 to Saturday 26 June** - Nonsuch Natural History Camp for students

**Sunday 18 July** - Nonsuch Island Field Trip. \$20 members \$25 non-members  
Reservations and information 238-3239

**Sunday 12 September** - Spittal Pond Field Trip  
Meet at eastern car park 7.30 am

**Friday 8 to Sunday 10 October** - Paget Island Birding Weekend

For more details: [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) or 238-3239