



**Bermuda Audubon Society**

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## **State of the World's Birds**

**Andrew Dobson**

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species reveals that unprecedented numbers of species are now threatened with extinction. For birds, the Red List is maintained by BirdLife International, who report that 1,221 species are considered threatened with extinction. The overall conservation status of the world's birds has deteriorated steadily since 1988, when they were first comprehensively assessed. I was present at the British Birdwatching Fair in August when BirdLife's 'Species Champion' programme was launched. The aim is to save the world's rarest birds - 189 birds are now listed as Critically Endangered - the highest threat category. Yet even among these severely threatened birds is a small number whose survival odds are improving, providing case-studies to others for how species can be successfully saved. The most encouraging recovery seen in the 2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is Mauritius (Echo) Parakeet, once dubbed "the rarest parrot on Earth".

New research from the National Audubon Society (BirdLife in the US) has revealed that populations of some of America's most common birds have plummeted over the past forty years, with some down by as much as 80% - not just rare birds, but common birds that visit bird feeders. The study is based on 100 years of Christmas Bird Count data (Bermuda Audubon has contributed to this for over 30 years) and the annual Breeding Bird Survey conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey. Twenty different common bird species (with populations over half a million and wide ranging) have seen populations fall at least 50% since 1967. The dramatic declines are attributed to the loss of grasslands, healthy forests and wetlands, and other critical habitats from multiple environmental threats such as urban sprawl, energy development, and the spread of

industrialised agriculture. Widespread species in which declines have occurred include: \*Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna* (71% decline), \*Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (78%) and Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus* (82%), listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife. Climate change is a widespread and growing problem. Among Audubon's list of declining common birds is \*Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*, which breeds in Alaska and northern Canada and has declined by 64%; largely due to loss of fragile tundra habitat thought to be induced by climate change. Similarly \*Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* has declined by 75%, an indicator of induced melting of permafrost and invasion of formerly-southern species, the researchers claim. (\* All of these species occasionally visit Bermuda – but their future sightings are looking less promising).

So what can we do? People (you) can still make a difference. Habitat needs to be protected if we are to save bird species. We can all change our habits to help reduce the effects of global warming. One immediate action you can take is to support the efforts of organizations like BirdLife International by becoming a member - see [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org) for more details.

## President's Report 2006-2007

Jennifer Gray

I am honoured to be presenting here tonight our report for June 2006 to June 2007. It has been a year of achievement for the Bermuda Audubon Society and it gives me great pleasure to share our progress with you. I would first like to recognize the tremendous efforts of our committee of management, Fiona Doe (Vice President), Leila Madeiros (Treasurer), Tarita Cartwright (Hon. Secretary), Andrew Dobson, Annie Glasspool, Jeremy Madeiros, David O'Neill, Paul Watson, David Wingate and Katherine Nisbet (Membership Volunteer). Through many hours of commitment and dedication to the mission of the society our accomplishments have been many, our society strengthened by their passions, our island certainly a better place for all life and my job made easy. Truly you have been a wonderful committee to work with.

Following last year's commitment to focus on a management plan for our nature reserves we have indeed made improvements to many of these special places. Both the Freer Cox and Firefly reserves in Devonshire have had extensive dredging and re-grading of the surrounding areas to enhance the reserves for wildlife and also to help with the control of invasives. An Audubon Society field trip and work party at Stokes Point Nature reserve was well attended and good fun. This effort resulted in the clearing of a vast amount of Brazil pepper from the site and additional work was undertaken to clear casuarinas on the road side of the reserve. In April we were pleased to receive the benefit of a "Day of Giving" offered by Horsfield Landscaping Company. Kevin Horsfield and his crew did a wonderful job clearing casuarinas on the cliff top of our beautiful Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve. We look forward to engaging similar corporate groups in the coming year. We are pleased to report that longtail igloos installed on Cockroach Island in the previous year have been colonized this year and for reasons of safety and a concern over a number of fires on the islands we have removed the rickety landing dock from the north side of the main island. The return of the dreaded Taro plant in Sears Cave led to another culling event in the cave. We are indebted to Jeremy Madeiros and his conservation crew for taking on this task.

In appreciation of gifts in kind we are also grateful for the support offered from the Department of Conservation Services for both assistance with nature reserve management and for administrative support with printing and office supplies. XL is also appreciated for their support with the printing and mailing of our recent newsletter and a very special thank you goes to William Manuel for once again auditing our financial records. Our thanks are offered to the families of Louise Marsland Taylor, Bert Gierlinger and Nella Astwood for selecting the Bermuda

Audubon Society as recipient of donations in memory of their loved ones. Bank of Bermuda employees Geoff Usher and Wendy McLeod have donated their Employee Environmental grants of \$550.00 each to the Society for longtail nest restoration. Donations such as this and the many others we receive each year, allow the Society to continue its good work.



Under the direction of our dynamic Buy Back Bermuda team an incredible amount of effort went into implementing the management plan to restore the old Pitman's Pond site into the new Somerset Long Bay East Nature Reserve. Truck loads of bottles and trash and invasive species have been removed, the pond has been dredged and expanded to create a healthier environment for biodiversity and plantings of native and endemic flora abound across the landscape. Special attention was given to creating a mudflat to encourage shorebirds and islands for breeding resident birds. Finishing touches included the addition of a small dock where school groups can better view pond life, a bird observatory and educational interpretive signage. Earth Day

2007 was a memorable day indeed as the reserve was officially opened to the public. On the heels of this very successful campaign we are now ready to launch our second campaign in the fall and our target is not one but two parcels of land. We do hope that you will all support once again this very meaningful effort. Photo shows the Deputy Premier, The Hon. Paula Cox planting an endemic cedar tree during the opening of the reserve (*photo by Anna Dobson*).



This is an appropriate time in my report to acknowledge the many volunteer hours and the ongoing dedication and commitment to bluebirds shown by Stuart Smith and his posse of bluebird trail monitors. A special mention goes to dedicated monitors; Bill Black, the Brewers, Rebecca Browne, Christa and Gertraud Gierlinger, Susan Harvey, Felicity Holmes, Chloe Mckee, Katherine Nisbet, Douglas Outerbridge, the Riihiluomas, Keith Rossiter, Sarah Tomlinson, Sonia Whayman, Kevin Winter, and the Wrights. Special thanks go to Bob Steele and Roy Matcham for providing woodworking skills. The Bluebird society web site is up and running now and filled with useful information regarding bluebirds. We hope that all private box owners



will go online and register their boxes. Bluebird box making workshops were held once again this year with Stuart Smith conducting several in schools and the society holding one at Government House, one at the Save the Gardens Celebration and another at the aquarium. The Society Bluebird Box Trophy (*photo Jennifer Gray*) was awarded for the second time this year at the Annual Exhibition and was won, hands down, by Nicolas

Barton, for his fine production in the woodwork category of a Bermuda Bluebird Box. Society members and crew from the Department of Conservation Services worked hard at the invitation of Lady Vereker to establish the Audubon Grove on the grounds of Government House. Many of the trees damaged and felled by hurricane Fabian were cleared and a host of wonderful new plantings established. We thank Lady Vereker for this opportunity to enhance the grounds for our wildlife and can say that she has truly left a meaningful mark on Bermuda (*photo Anna Dobson*).

The society continues to address the housing crisis with the installation of longtail igloos. We have installed igloos at the ABS reserve and on private lands in Devonshire, Somerset and Shelly Bay. We made a considerable donation of our longtail igloos to the Department of Conservation Services who have installed dozens on the Castle Harbour Nature Reserve islands. A second donation of \$12,000 was made to the Bermuda Zoological Society to support the Cahow Management Programme.

Field trips this year took our members and friends on the annual Christmas Bird Count, out to sea and to Cooper's Island to view Cahows and other birdlife, through the Botanical Gardens woodlands and many other places of beauty. The Paget Island bird camp was again a success, despite an onslaught of rain, and our committee assisted with the National Trust Children's walk teaching the children how to use binoculars and telescopes to get a closer look at the birdlife of Spittal Pond. We were pleased to sponsor a free public viewing of *An Inconvenient Truth* at the Little Theatre hence raising the awareness of the fragility of our environment in today's world. Member and friends were also delighted with our lectures Birds of the Turks and Caicos by Richard Ground and the Monarch Butterflies by Tom Pawlish.

The Bluebird education programme was another new initiative this year and our thanks go to Kay Latter and my daughter Michelle Conklin who worked with me to put together a Power Point presentation, activity sheets and information documents to be distributed in schools. Huge thanks are due to Karen Border who then took on the programme and coordinated volunteer presenters and the visits to schools. Visits have been made or scheduled to over 17 school groups and by the end of this term will have reached some 2000 children. Thank you to our teacher volunteers, Karen, Penny Hill, David Saul, Andrew Dobson and Kay Latter. Without a doubt you all will have been impressed with the wonderful series of articles that have appeared recently in the Mid Ocean news. Thanks to the excellent quality provide by our writers and photographers these articles have received repeated front page coverage and will enhance greatly the awareness of our birdlife in Bermuda. A special thanks to Andrew Dobson for coordinating this effort.



In this past year the society held its first ever art show. The Birds of a Feather art exhibition featured over 100 pieces of artwork and raised more than \$3,000 for the society. (*Photo show artwork by Wendy Frith*). We are extremely grateful to the exhibition team including Lady Vereker, and to all the artists who contributed. We were also the recipient of a beautifully carved bluebird by wood carver Larry Weston. In collaboration with the BUEI who will hold and exhibit this fine piece of work we look forward to the next in a series of local bird carvings which Mr. Weston has offered to our society.

The society is also well underway on a television series called *EnviroShorts* which is due to air in the fall on the Bermuda Broadcasting Company station. Sangita Iyer has been busy filming our experts and friends in the field for this environmental series which will run in two back-to-back fifteen minute segments. Most of the segments have already been filmed and we look forward to seeing the finished product once editing is complete. We are grateful to The Bank of Bermuda Foundation, ACE, Butterfield and Vallis and Watlington Waterworks for the financial backing we have received for this programme.

Two research initiatives were introduced in this period. Through the Buy Back Bermuda campaign toxicology studies conducted by Dr. Jamie Bacon of the Amphibian Project before, during and after the dredging of Pitman's Pond were supported by the society. We are also very excited to have initiated a study of the local bluebird population. After reviewing a number of proposals we have selected scientists from Rutgers University to conduct the studies and I am happy to say that Julian Avery and Blake Mathys are in the midst of their first round of research this month and are both with us today should you be interested in chatting with them. We certainly look forward to hearing about their findings and to return visits and ongoing research on the coming years.

The society continues to forge partnerships with local and international organizations. Locally: Bermuda Government Ministry of the Environment, Department of Conservation Services, Biodiversity Action Plan, Parks Commission, Bermuda Aquarium Museum and Zoo, Bermuda Broadcasting Company, Bermuda National Trust, Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute, Bermuda Zoological Society, and Environmental Coalition (ECO). Internationally: BirdLife International, Earth Charter, Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Rutgers University, and U K Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. The society continues to serve as environmental watchdogs and advocate strongly for resolution on issues that threaten our environment. Included in the topics addressed this past year were the; Placement of the proposed new hospital - Save the Gardens, Development of Open space and coastal cliffs - Southlands, continued encroachment on Devonshire Marsh and Long Lining as a threat to local biodiversity.

In closing I would like to thank my incredible executive committee. The accomplishments of this organisation are largely due to their undying devotion to our goals and their incredible support every step of the way. Serving for the Bermuda Audubon Society ranks amongst the most enriching experiences of my life and I look forward to exciting years ahead with friends on the committee and within our membership. This is truly a wonderful organisation and I feel very privileged to be a part of it. A special thank you is due to our Patron Lady Vereker who I believe, like me, has caught the "birding bug." Your support has gone far beyond any call of duty and you are a pillar for the organisation. Thank you once again for opening your home to us for this occasion and for all your support throughout the year.

## **Report of the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the SCSCB 19-23 July, Puerto Rico**

**Andrew Dobson**

As President of the SCSCB, it was a pleasure to welcome about 125 delegates to the Society's conference in Old San Juan, in the delightful surroundings of the Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe. The Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) is the largest single regional organization devoted to biodiversity conservation. The 5-day conference focused on the impact of global climate change on Caribbean birds and its people, and the increasingly politically charged threat of hotel development to native biodiversity, among other issues. In response, leading organizations represented described the state of affairs

as a crisis. The meeting was stunned by reports of what appears to be an unprecedented move by some Caribbean governments to change the legal status of previously protected remnant conservation sites in order to facilitate development. Chief among these examples were two cases both involving the high-end luxury hotel chain - Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts Group. In Grenada, the government is in an advanced state of plans to sell that nation's Mount Hartman National Park to the Group. The Mount Hartman National Park, established in 1996, was created to safeguard that island's critically endangered national bird, the Grenada Dove. Studies have shown that approximately a quarter of the pre-hurricane Ivan estimate of just 180 remaining individuals of this species are restricted to the small coastal Mount Hartman property, making the conservation of this area vital for the species' survival.

The situation is a massive leap backwards at a time when the conservation of both forest and coastal areas, especially mangroves, is critical to mitigate climate change impacts. The trend will only undermine the Caribbean's reputation as an environmentally friendly destination, and set the region up for an intensive battle with global conservation advocates. Caribbean forests will suffer significantly more from climate change if catalyzed by short-sighted development, and the biodiversity they house will be among the greatest casualties because over 85% of Caribbean's natural forests have already been destroyed by human action. In the latest and most decisive report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released this summer, the Caribbean islands are at great risk from both the short and medium term projected impacts of global climate change.

In a plenary address, ecologist Dr. Lisa Sorenson described the projected impacts of global warming in the Caribbean region. These include warmer ocean temperatures, more intense storms and hurricanes, sea level rise, and increased summer drought. Sorenson noted that the Caribbean's coral reefs, coastal mangroves and forests provide the region with goods and services valued at billions of dollars from fisheries, dive tourism, erosion control, carbon storage, and shoreline protection services, to name but a few. "Widespread, poorly informed development for tourism and the early stages of global warming have already diminished these important resources" said Sorenson. The meeting was also attended by Jeremy and Leila Madeiros. Mr. Madeiros, Bermuda's Government Conservation Officer delivered a paper on the present status on the Cahow.

The meeting, attended by participants from twenty-two countries, included scientists, university professors, eco-tour operators, environmental educators, foresters, NGOs, government agencies, and the US Department of the Interior, was hosted by the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society (SOP). Major sponsors of this year's meeting were the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, Instituto de Cultural Puertorriqueña, Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, BirdLife International, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and RARE Species Conservation Foundation.

## **Assistance for Unusual Longtail Nest**

**David B. Wingate**

The Society received an emergency call in mid-September from Susan Aldridge who had discovered a Longtail nest with a downy chick under a dense clump of Aloes in her waterfront garden below Tamarind Vale. The problem was that the adult was having difficulty accessing the chick on its feeding visits and would often come out on her lawn behind the Aloe clump to take off. She was afraid that her dog would intercept and kill the adults.

I went to investigate and discovered that growth and sagging of the aloes down over the retaining wall behind which the nest was located was preventing the adults from landing and taking off directly from the seaward side. The problem was easily rectified by trimming back the overhanging stems. Normal feeding visits to this otherwise very safe nest site have resumed since.

There are three important lessons to be learned from this:

1. Firstly, there is no part of our lengthy coastline where tropicbirds won't colonize provided that a predator or disturbance free suitable nest site can be provided. And by suitable I simply mean a sandy-floored cavity protected from the sun and rain and visible on approach from the water. **This is why we have developed the artificial igloo nest and encourage all waterfront property owners to install them.**
2. Dogs have always been the most serious potential predator of accessible Longtail nests and waterfront house owners should always be alert to this. Thanks for your intervention to prevent disaster Susan!
3. The entrances of many natural and even man-made Longtail nests can be overgrown by vines or sagging bushes between one nesting season and the next, so if you have Longtail nests on your property make sure the entrances are not blocked by vegetation overgrowth at the beginning of each season. Several ornamental species popularly used as ornamental plantings in waterfront gardens are notorious for doing this. The worst offenders are Brazil pepper, *Wedelia trilobata*, Ice plant, Night blooming Cereus and Spanish Bayonet. Now we can add Aloes to this list as well.

Good luck with your Longtail baby, Susan, and let us know if and when it fledges successfully

## **Bird Report January to September 2007**

**Andrew Dobson**

### **January to February**

A **Pied-billed Grebe** seen with chick at Parson's Road Pond 9 Jan (PW). A **Horned Grebe** 20 Feb to 22 Feb was off Smith's Is. (PW). The long-staying **Grey Heron** was present to 28 Feb+ at Tucker's Town. A female **American Wigeon** arrived at Jubilee Road 24 Feb (AD). A drake **Northern Pintail** was on Warwick Pond 9-13 Feb (DW). The **Surf Scoter** remained on Mangrove Lake 27 Nov-12 Feb (EA). An imm. **Snow Goose** arrived on Port Royal GC 13 Feb (AD). Five **Merlins** were roosting together on Hawkins Is. 9 Feb (PW). Two **American Golden-Plovers**, three **Semipalmated Plovers** and two **Piping Plovers** were amongst the uncommon wintering shorebird species (AD). Two **Common Black-headed Gulls** were present 1 Dec-28 Feb+ while a flock of 12 **Bonaparte's Gulls** in Harrington Sound was noteworthy 24 Feb (AD). A **Royal Tern** was present at Dockyard to 20 Jan (PW). A **Long-eared Owl**, extremely rare in Bermuda, was photographed 1 Feb on Smith's Is. (BD). Two **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** wintered in St. David's (immature female) 9 Dec-18 Feb (LO, TM) and Botanical Gardens (adult female) 29 Dec-10 Feb (LC, AD). **Eastern Phoebes** were reported at Spittal Pond 1 Dec-12 Feb (KR), St. David's 20 Jan (G & SH), and High Point 8 Feb (DW). A **Western Kingbird** was at the Airport 22 Feb (DW). About eight **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** wintered (AD). A **Northern Mockingbird** remained at Boaz Island to mid-Jan (PH). Amongst more than twenty species of wintering warbler were **Blue-winged Warbler** seen 14 Jan Talbot Estate (AD) and **Nashville Warbler** at Lagoon Park 4 Feb (DW). Five **Baltimore Orioles** were in Botanical Gardens 30 Jan-28 Feb+ (DW).

### **March to May**

The highlights of the spring season in Bermuda came from both sides of the Atlantic. The third and fourth records of Garganey (a male and female) and a Eurasian Teal may well have come

from the east. The severe late winter storm that moved up the eastern seaboard in mid-April provided record number of Eastern Kingbirds, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers.

**Sooty Shearwaters** (17) passing Cooper's Point, Bermuda 17 Mar (IF) were at least 3 weeks earlier than ever recorded, but coincided with date of birds seen off US East Coast. **Manx Shearwater** passage was peaking on the same day at two per minute. A 2-hr seawatch at Cooper's Point, Bermuda 23 Mar (IF, PW) was very rewarding with **Cahow** (14), **Manx Shearwater** (72), a single **Audubon's Shearwater**, **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** (3), **Leach's Storm-Petrel** (3), **Parasitic Jaeger** (2) and **Long-tailed Jaeger** (2). A **Magnificent Frigatebird** was seen at Challenger Banks (off Bermuda) 24 Apr (CB). An **American Bittern** was moving between Nonsuch Is. and Cooper's Point, Bermuda 1-23 Mar (JM). A **Least Bittern** was at Firefly Reserve,



Bermuda 4 Apr (DBW). A **Great Blue Heron** with three immes. on Gibbett's Is. 16 May strongly suggested successful nesting in Bermuda (DBW). Bermuda's long-staying **Grey Heron** was present to 11 Mar (DBW). **Black-Crowned Night-Herons** were found in Bermuda at Spittal Pond 5 Apr (DBW) and Pilchard Bay Apr 15 (DW). A **Glossy Ibis** was on the Mid-Ocean GC, Bermuda 14 Mar-4 May (AD) and another at Ely's Harbour 24 Apr (CB). Two **Red-tailed Hawks** seen over Morgan's Point and Wreck Hill, Bermuda 2-9 May had built a nest on Morgan's

point earlier in year but no longer visiting it (DBW). An imm. **Canada Goose** was seen at Spittal Pond and Princess Pond, Bermuda 5-15 Apr (DBW, AD), while another flew over Spittal Pond 16 May (KR). An **American Wigeon** was on Port Royal GC, Bermuda 14 Mar (IF, PW). Bermuda's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> records of **Garganey** were recorded with a male at Jubilee Road 19-20 Apr (DW, *photo by Andrew Dobson*) and a female at Spittal Pond 7-26 May (EA & DBW). A drake **Eurasian Teal**



was at Jubilee Road, Bermuda 20 Mar (IF, PW). A **Red-breasted Merganser** was in the Great Sound, Bermuda 24 Apr (AD). A probably **Black Rail** was at South Pond, Bermuda 23 Mar (IF, PW). A **Virginia Rail** was last seen at South Pond, Bermuda 3 May (DBW). A **Black-necked Stilt** was at Spittal Pond 1 May-6 June (KR). A **Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* was discovered by IF at Stocks Harbour, Bermuda 17-20 Mar (*photo Andrew Dobson*). A **Red Knot** was on Cobblers Is. Bermuda 16 May (DBW). At least 24 **Bonaparte's Gulls** were in the Great Sound area of Bermuda 9 Mar (PW). A **Common Tern** was noted 23 Mar

on the coast at Spittal Pond, Bermuda (PW, IF). A **Black Tern** in Hamilton Harbour 20 Apr (WF, DW) was the only spring record in Bermuda. A probable **South Polar Skua** flew past Nonsuch Is., Bermuda 17 May (JM). Single **Parasitic** and **Long-tailed Jaegers** were seen off Cooper's Point, Bermuda 22 Mar (IF), the first of few jaegers reported this spring. A **Chimney Swift** was at East End Dairy, Bermuda 16 Apr (PW) with others observed through May. A wintering **Eastern Phoebe** was last seen at Wreck Hill, Bermuda 8 Mar (WF). The first of an influx of about 11 **Eastern Kingbirds** was reported 14 Apr at Jubilee Road, Bermuda. A record spring flock was at Bermuda Airport with 8 or 9 on the 20-25 Apr on the perimeter fence (GA, AD, DBW). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** was at Southside, Bermuda 22 Mar (IF). A **Tree Swallow** was at The Causeway, Bermuda on 4 Mar (AD, JEM). A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** remained at Wreck Road, Bermuda until 9 Mar (WF). A **Swainson's Thrush** was on Gwelly Lane, Bermuda 15 May (WF). A **Hermit Thrush** was in the Arboretum, Bermuda 15 Mar (IF). A **Northern Mockingbird** was in the Hamilton, Bermuda 19 Apr (GP), and another at Hungry Bay 21 Apr (DG). An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at Hog Bay Park, Bermuda 12-16 Mar (WF). A female **Cape May Warbler** 20 May (BM) at St. Georges GC, Bermuda was 9 days later than the previous spring record. A



**Prothonotary Warbler** was at Hog Bay Park, Bermuda on 4 Mar (DW) and 16 Apr in Hungry Bay, Bermuda (GB). A **Swainson's Warbler** remained at Wreck Hill, Bermuda until 12 Mar (WF). A record number of spring **Summer Tanagers** occurred in Bermuda with 6 individuals Apr 18-21 Apr. The first of a record influx of **Scarlet Tanagers** was reported 14 Apr on Mid-Ocean GC (RC). By the month's end there had been at least 20 individuals reported, with 7 on the 19<sup>th</sup> Apr (Mult.ob.). A **White-throated Sparrow** was at Hog Bay Park, Bermuda on 4-5 Mar (DW). **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were recorded in above average numbers, seen throughout Bermuda, with groups of up to 5 birds visiting several garden bird feeders 20-30 Apr. Two **Bobolinks** were at Pitman's Pond 13-15 May (DBW)

## June to July

The big story of the summer is the first nesting attempt in Bermuda by House Wrens (*photo Andrew Dobson*)



The **Cahow** continues to make a strong recovery following the setback of hurricane Fabian (2003). A record 80 breeding pairs raised a total of 39 young (JM). Shearwater passage peaked 3 Jun in Bermuda with birds moving at about 150 per hour. The majority were **Greater**, but also **Cory's** and **Sooty** (JM). One **Greater Shearwater** arrived on a cruise ship in Bermuda 18 Jul (DBW). Over-summering heron species in Bermuda included **Great Blue** (10), **Great Egret** (1) and **Little Blue** (1) (DBW). The long-staying **Grey Heron** was present throughout the period (AD). One **Osprey** summered in Bermuda (GB). A **Black-necked Stilt** remained at Spittal Pond, Bermuda to 6 June (KR) and another bird seen at various locations in Jul may have been the same individual. A **Semipalmated Plover** 12 Jul at Whalebone Bay, Bermuda may have been a summering bird (AD).

Summering shorebirds in Bermuda included **Black-bellied Plover** (4), **Greater Yellowlegs** (1), **Whimbrel** (4) and **Ruddy Turnstone** (14) (DBW, PW). The first significant arrival of returning shorebirds in Bermuda was in the last week of Jul (EA). A **Royal Tern** was in St. Georges Harbour, Bermuda 15 June (PW). A **Sandwich Tern** stayed in the East End, Bermuda 23-25 June (PW). A **Roseate Tern** was seen in various locations in Bermuda 14 Jun-11 Jul (DBW, JM). The population of **Common Terns** devastated by Hurricane Fabian (2003) was hit again by Hurricane Florence (2006). Nevertheless, the breeding success improved. A population of 18 birds (8 pairs and two single birds) resulted in 4 pairs producing broods of 3,2,3,3 – all of which successfully fledged (DBW). In Bermuda two **Laughing Gills** were present throughout Jul and one **Greater Black-backed Gull** over-summered (PW). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was an unseasonal find at Spanish Point, Bermuda 8 Jul (JF). A single **Bank Swallow** was at Pitman's Pond, Bermuda 10 Jun and two **Barn Swallows** at Bermuda Airport 8 Jun (DBW). While checking a bluebird nestbox trail on 3 June, a pair of **House Wrens** was discovered to have made four nests and laid eggs in one box (which had been abandoned) and laid 7 eggs in another box (FH). A further two nests were made, with 7 eggs in one box. All eggs failed to hatch, but this was the first nesting attempt in Bermuda. Wrens were sitting on both nests and a minimum of three individuals were confirmed. The wrens made use of a trail of Eastern Bluebird nestboxes. (DBW, FH, AD). A **Blackpoll Warbler** 7 June at the Bermuda Institute for Ocean Sciences (JA, BM)) was the first summer record for Bermuda. A **Black-and-white Warbler** 19 July at Tom Moore's Mangroves, Bermuda was the earliest date by 7 days. A calling waterthrush at Robinsons Marina, Bermuda 26 Jul (PW) was probably a **Louisiana Waterthrush**.

## August to September

The early fall period was notable for the lack of migrant birds –largely due to the pleasant weather and lack of storms or frontal systems coming off the East Coast.

An early **Sora** was at Somerset Long Bay Res (East) 8 Aug (DBW). A **Black-necked Stilt** remained on Spittal Pond to at least 9 Aug (KR). Heavy rain on Sep 1 resulted in a significant fall-out of shorebirds. A record 100 **Semipalmated Plovers** were recorded with 75 at the Airport. There were also 300 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** at the same location. An **Upland Sandpiper** was at the Southampton Golf Range 2 Sep (AD). While about 10 miles off the west end of Bermuda on 14 Sep, PW noted **Arctic Tern** (perhaps the first fall record), **Sooty Tern** and four **Red Knot**. A **Willet** was on Nonsuch Beach 18 Sep (JM). Single **Baird's Sandpipers** were seen at Riddell's Bay GC 26 Sep-1 Oct (DBW) and St. Georges GC 28 Sep (PW). A **Dickcissel** was seen in Devonshire on 26 Sep (DW). A **Kentucky Warbler** was seen in the Riddell's Bay mangroves 7 Sep (DW).

Observers:

Eric Amos, Gerry Ardis, Geoff Bell, Chris Burville, Rob Chandler, Lisa Clark Andrew Dobson, Bobby Doe, Ian Fisher, Jenny Flood, Wendy Frith, Derek Gibbons, Gene and Susan Harvey, Felicity Holmes, Jeremy and Leila Madeiros, Blake Mathys, John Meadows (JEM), Louise Olander, George Peterich, Keith Rossiter, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW)

## Local birders will have a new pond to check for waterbirds this winter

David B. Wingate

Over the summer months I have been over seeing the creation of a new pond on the Seaswept Farm estate owned by the French family. This project was conceived in 1998 as a solution to a chronic mosquito problem resulting from the gradual drowning of the lower farm field due to sea-level rise in the current era of global warming. With the support of the Environmental Health Department, Planning approval was obtained in 2000 to excavate a permanent pond in the lowest part of the field, using the excavated soil to raise the level of the rest of the field for continued cultivation as well as for re-contouring and landscaping the surroundings. Although work began in 2001 the boggy conditions prevented effective progress with the machinery then available. With the importation of the marsh dredger by Works and Engineering in 2004 it finally became possible to re-activate this project in June of this year. Unlike all previous pond-digging projects that I have been involved in, the substrate here consisted entirely of red clay soil rather than peat.

The new pond is approximately one acre in size and 4' in depth with two small islets for waterfowl to roost or nest on. The salinity is approximately 20 parts per thousand, roughly equivalent to Spittal Pond. It is also slightly tidal through a cave fed spring on the south side. It is intended to plant Red Mangroves on the west side where there is also a pre-existing hedgerow of ancient Bermuda Palmettos, and to maintain a shallow tidal mudflat for shorebirds on the east, or farm field side where machinery can access once each summer to clear the mudflat of encroaching sheathed paspalum grass. The submergent pondweed known as Wigeon grass, *Ruppia maritima*, a favourite food of ducks, Coot and Moorhens is already established in the pond so it should begin attracting these as early as this winter. Likewise, a large population of the mosquito controlling top minnow, *Gambusia Holbrookii*, has already built up, so it will also attract egrets and herons. There are plans by the Conservation Services department to introduce a population of the endemic Killifish, *Fundulus* spp. from nearby Evans Pond where it is critically endangered. While this new pond is on private property it can easily be viewed from the roadside at Franks Bay where there is ample parking on the railway trail and roadside verges.



## **Research on Bermuda's endangered Common Tern population suggests that it may merit recognition as an endemic subspecies** David B. Wingate

I have been monitoring the small summer breeding population of Common terns on Bermuda opportunistically for about forty years and banding most of the fledgling crop in most years. During this time I began to realize that they differed from the continental breeding populations in two ways. Most striking was the fact that they preferred solitary nesting, one pair per islet rather than the usual habit of nesting in dense colonies. Also, four band recoveries from the wintering grounds in South America differed from the norm in that they were spread right across the continent from Atlantic to Pacific whereas thousands of recoveries of eastern North American terns were exclusively on the Atlantic coast. A third observation during those forty years was that direct hit hurricane events on Bermuda always resulted in a decline in the population in the following year associated with abnormal double sized and infertile clutches in some nests for a year or so after.

The 70s and 80s were a period of little hurricane activity during which the population increased to 31 pairs, but the period of increased hurricane activity from 1995 saw a steady decline in the population again culminating in category 3 *Fabian* in 2003. The following year only 8 pairs returned, all laid double sized clutches and not a single chick hatched. This was when I decided to consult with America's foremost tern expert for an explanation. Ian Nisbet suspected that I was witnessing female/female pairs as a result of higher mortality of males in hurricane events. Perhaps the females head south early before the main part of the hurricane season leaving the males to rear the post fledged young. He suggested contacting Patricia Szczys, a DNA specialist to set up a study beginning in 2006. We began the project in May 2006 under the authorization of Conservation Services. Nearly all of the adults and chicks were trapped at the nest, banded and blood sample taken. The sex of each bird can be confirmed by the blood samples and quickly confirmed Ian's hypothesis: of 16 adults tested, only two were males!

This year we found it harder to trap the adults as they were becoming trap shy, but the fledgling crop increased to 11 as more young males (that were spared hurricane mortality because they stay on the wintering grounds through their first summer) returned to join the breeding population. We hope to continue the study for at least another three years to find a firm explanation for the skewed sex ratio and to answer the question whether the Bermuda population is reproductively isolated and genetically distinct by comparing the DNA with other tern populations in North America, the southern Caribbean and the Azores.

I owe special thanks to my sister Aileen and to Wendy Frith for housing and feeding the visiting scientists both summers. Wendy, in addition, provided much help in the field and Penny Hill and Chris Burville have provided photo documentation. I gave a lecture on this project at the Audubon AGM in June, and will be presenting two technical papers on it with my colleagues at the Waterbird Society annual meeting in Barcelona, Spain, in early November.

## **The Society promotes a new study of our local bluebirds** Jennifer Gray

It is known that Eastern Bluebirds pass through Bermuda; however, no one knows if any of these migrants join the breeding population. Indeed, such occurrences could explain the ultimate

origin of this isolated population. If migrants do stay and breed, this population is not as much of a conservation concern as previously assumed, as the population could be 'replenished' by mainland migrants. However, whether this actually occurs is unknown, and a new research study underway by scientists, Julie L. Lockwood and Julian D. Avery, from Rutgers University, would be an important part of determining the true conservation status of this population.

Bird observers visiting Bermuda have often commented that they believe the bluebirds are a different, brighter blue than those from mainland North America. Rutgers scientists conducted some preliminary research in the summer of 2006, taking feather samples from a small number of Bermuda bluebirds. They also examined this question by taking spectrophotometric readings of Bermuda and mainland bluebird specimens at the British Natural History Museum, Tring, England. Continued research in this area will allow us to determine if there is any colour difference. A colour difference may be evidence of divergence, which would indicate that the Bermuda population is a separate evolutionary unit and therefore in special need of conservation and monitoring.

Our visiting scientists will also endeavour to capture and colour-band as many individuals as possible. This will allow us to keep track of within-island movements, nest box fidelity, site fidelity, survivorship, and other life-history characteristics. These data will provide a clearer picture of the status of the bluebird on Bermuda and may suggest appropriate avenues of conservation focus. At present, little is known concerning the bluebird's demography or life history in this isolated population.

Julian Avery was here in Bermuda for a month this summer and filed the following report: *We conducted preliminary work on the Eastern Bluebird in Bermuda from May 12 - June 10, 2007. We banded individual adult birds with a numbered aluminium band and a sequence of three colour bands. The colours for the bands are: red, green, orange, blue, yellow, black. Birds that had not fledged the nest were given an aluminium band and a single colour band to indicate banding location. Each major golf course was designated a base colour in order to trace juvenile birds. For instance, the base colour for boxes on the Southside bluebird trail was orange. We banded a total of 124 birds this year. Seventy five of these birds were adults and 49 birds were nestlings. Mortality of nestlings was very high and we were cautious when banding nestlings. We also collected blood samples from 29 birds for a comparative analysis between birds in Bermuda and birds in the United States. No birds were harmed during our work and all birds handled were observed for a period of time following blood collection to detect any adverse affects. We collected observations of foraging adults, nestling condition, nestling survival, nest-box trail condition, and general habitat characteristics. We will use this data to plan*



*subsequent field seasons and to identify specific questions about the bluebirds in Bermuda. It is early to begin making recommendations. There are many challenges facing Bermuda's bluebirds; factors such as nest parasites could play a major role in nestling survival. Mites were quite prevalent and we will attempt to determine how parasite loads in Bermuda boxes compare to mainland boxes. Vandalism, egg and nestling predation, and competition with House Sparrow were just a few of the factors affecting bluebirds. We will be taking a close look at the initial data to detect patterns and plot our course for subsequent field seasons*

Our researchers received the Bermuda Audubon Society "Raymond Smith and Bert Gierlinger Grant for Bluebird Research" awarded in memory of the above mentioned loved ones. The photograph shows Julian Avery receiving his check from Mrs. Audrey Smith and Mrs. Gertraud Gierlinger (*photo Andrew Dobson*). If you would like to support the continuation of this valuable study please send your donations to the Bermuda Audubon Society with a notation; Bluebird Research.

## Students learn to be friends to Bluebirds

**Karen Border**



Spring 2007 saw a major push by Audubon on the Bluebird Education front, with the start of a programme to teach primary school children about Bluebirds, and how they can help to ensure the survival of these beautiful birds in Bermuda. The programme ran from March to June and reached around 2,500 students from the ages of 5 to 11 years. In total, 10 Government primary schools and five private schools were treated to a 20-minute slide presentation, with a Q&A session afterwards. The slide show was put together by Kay Latter and Andrew Dobson, and the presenters were Karen Border, David Saul and Penny Hill.

The presentation tells the story of Bluebirds in Bermuda from the days of abundance in pre- and early settlement times, through the cedar scale (disastrous for Bluebirds), and up to the present. It explains how Bluebirds now face the challenges of overdevelopment and introduced rivals/predators such as Sparrows, Kiskadees, Starlings and cats. While it explains the threats to Bluebirds, it also tells the story of how people have tried to help, including Tommy Outerbridge, who started the Bluebird Society which is now part of the Audubon Society. The main emphasis of the presentation is teaching the children how they can help Bluebirds, by encouraging their parents and other adults to buy and put up Bluebird boxes, and to monitor boxes carefully during the nesting season.

As a result of the presentations, a number of schools have undertaken to erect boxes on school premises or, in a few cases, to revive "Bluebird clubs" to monitor existing boxes that have been neglected. The children's enthusiasm for Bluebirds was inspiring. They were very interested in the presentation and asked numerous questions afterwards. The threats to Bluebirds from Sparrows and other birds particularly troubled them. One child asked, sadly: "Bluebirds seem to have a lot of enemies – don't they have any friends?" The answer is, of course, that anyone who puts up and monitors a Bluebird box is a friend to Bluebirds. We hope to resume the presentation programme in the spring to coincide with the next nesting season, in order to reach children at those schools not yet visited.

Schools visited: Bermuda High School, Bermuda Institute, Elliot Primary, Francis Patton, Gilbert Institute, Heron Bay, Paget Primary, Prospect Primary, Purvis Primary, Saltus Junior School, Somersfield Academy, Victor Scott, Warwick Academy, West End Primary, and West Pembroke Primary

## **Cane Toads Eliminated from Nonsuch**

**David B. Wingate**

When the decision was made to create a freshwater pond on the Nonsuch Living Museum project in 1975 it was not anticipated that toads would be able to make the water crossing to colonize, but when they did about 1980 they inevitably began breeding in the pond and became superabundant. Apart from the fact that they are not native and do not belong in the restoration project it was surmised that they could pose a serious threat to the long-term goal of getting Cahows to recolonize the island. This because they are large and poisonous and would use the Cahow burrows for shelter in day time.

Before retirement in 2000 I devised a plan to eliminate the toads again by installing an uncrossable barrier around the pond to prevent their access for breeding. The barrier was finally installed in 2002 and the round up and removal of toads began in earnest - more than 2000 over the next three years! There was now a sense of urgency about this because of my successor, Jeremy Madeiros's decision to initiate the Cahow translocation plan in 2003.

There was one problem however: what to do about the toads trapped *inside* the barrier, which were able to continue breeding even though they couldn't disperse. It takes two years for toads to reach breeding age and the challenge was to collect and remove all the thousands of toadlets before they could do so. After two more years of night-time collecting within the barrier and missing my goal by just one or two breeding pairs (which would produce another 10,000 tadpoles!), I was determined to visit the island on every rainy (and usually stormy) night throughout last winter to achieve that 100% goal. As the new breeding season got under way in spring I watched anxiously for another tadpole crop that would indicate failure again, but this year there were none and I think we can safely say the battle is won.

## **First winter record of Seminole Bat**

**David B. Wingate**

On 8 February, thanks to a report from Lisa Greene who was leading a school tour through Walsingham I obtained the first confirmed winter record of a Seminole Bat on Bermuda. It was discovered by chance roosting at eye level in a Surinam cherry bush adjacent to the main trail leading in to the sinks from the Idwal Hughes reserve. As soon as Lisa informed me we returned with a jar and captured it for identification and photography. At first, in the very poor light of that cold overcast day I thought it was a Red Bat. Only later did I confirm it as the much darker mahogany red colour of the closely related Seminole Bat. The bat was so moribund when found that it offered no resistance to capture and never woke up that evening. It died sometime during the night.

In my paper on the bats of Bermuda I hypothesized that the Seminole Bat may have been resident before the scale epidemic killed the dominant cedar forest, but by the time I did my study I only obtained summer records. This record goes a long way to confirming that they still sometimes try to overwinter and might make it through in a mild winter. The densely forested area of Walsingham would seem a good bet for successful overwintering. Unfortunately we birders are seldom still out in potentially good bat areas by mid to late dusk when they usually emerge, but I would suggest that making the effort to monitor such areas at dusk could produce a lot of new information on bats in Bermuda. Records of successful overwintering would be of particular interest because bats usually mate in the late summer and give birth the following spring, usually in May or June. Thus overwintering Seminoles could give birth locally leading to a resident

population. A race of the Seminole bat is resident in the Bahamas and the Florida to North Carolina range on the continent matches Bermuda's latitude and climate better than the more northerly range of the Red Bat.

## **Wine consumption and birds**

**Andrew Dobson**

If you've got this far in the newsletter – you deserve a drink! Since I became aware of the problem some years ago – I always feel guilty when I uncork a plastic cork out of a bottle of wine. What's the problem you ask? In Britain (with the backing of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) there has been a campaign for a number of years to favour Iberian cork for wine bottles. The reason is simple: sustaining unique cork/oak forests will protect special birds and other wildlife. (Spanish and Portuguese cork plantations provide habitat for species such as Black-winged Kites, Booted Eagles, Hoopoes, Short-toed Creepers, Golden Orioles, and Hawfinches). In the US, a similar effort being promoted by the Rainforest Alliance, the Forest Stewardship Council, and at least one winery in Oregon, Willamette Valley Vineyards.

You can find fine details from Rainforest Alliance here:

[http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/cork\\_new.html](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/cork_new.html)

You can read why cork is renewable and reliable:

[http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/why\\_cork.html](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/news/2005/why_cork.html)

And you can also read about the Willamette Valley Vineyards:

<http://www.willamettevalleyvineyards.com/?s=fsc>

## **Society News**

### **Farewell to our patron, Lady Vereker**

His Excellency the Governor, Sir John Vereker and Lady Vereker left the island in October. Although we offered our official farewell and appreciation at the Annual General Meeting, we once again thank them both for the support they have shown the Society over the past five years. We are especially pleased that Lady Vereker will remain a patron of the Society. Such is Lady Vereker's passion for the environment and birds, that she has been appointed an Honorary Patron of BirdLife International's Rare Bird Club

[http://www.birdlife.org/how\\_to\\_help/rare\\_bird\\_club/index.html](http://www.birdlife.org/how_to_help/rare_bird_club/index.html)

### **Audubon Magazine**

*Seeking Higher Ground* – the feature article in the latest Audubon Magazine written by Rachel Dickenson ... The Bermuda Petrel was presumed extinct for more than 300 years until it was rediscovered a half-century ago on a cluster of tiny, low-slung islands. Now, with seas rising, an emergency rescue operation is racing the clock to prevent the last of its kind from becoming shipwrecked..... The magazine also features a Cahow on the front cover. If you are unable to purchase a copy – read the abridged article online

<http://audubonmagazine.org/features0709/globalWarming.html>

### **Otto Trott - Boats, Bays, Birds**

Local artist Otto Trott was a major contributor to our fundraising art show last year. An exhibition of his latest work, including bird paintings, will open at the Masterworks Gallery in the Botanical Gardens on Friday 26 October 5.30 pm

## EnviroShorts

Launching October 23<sup>rd</sup> ON TV9 AND TV7...a 13 week series...EnviroShorts with Sangita Iyer brought to you by Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda Broadcasting Company. Discover this island's priceless but dwindling natural resources...and find out how YOU can leave a positive ecological footprint behind. Join us on Tuesday nights at 8:30pm on TV9 and Wednesday nights at 6:30pm on TV7 for EnviroShorts - Title sponsor Bank of Bermuda Foundation, supporting sponsors Butterfield and Vallis, The ACE Foundation BELCO and the Bermuda Water works.

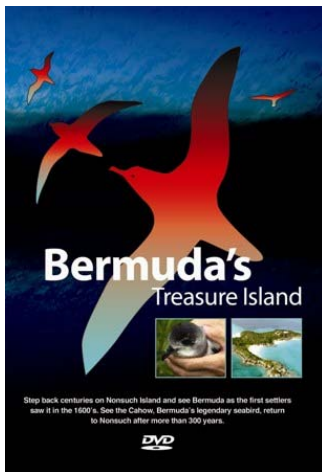
## Cahow Trip

Join us for a late afternoon trip onto the ocean off St David's Head in search of Cahows.

Sunday 11th November 2007 (Rain date: Monday 12<sup>th</sup>)

Meet Grotto Bay Hotel dock @ 2.15pm for a 2.30pm departure or 3.00pm at Market Wharf in St Georges Harbour.

Reservations at [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) or 238 3239



## Treasure Island DVD

The demand for our very special DVD featuring Nonsuch Island and the Cahow has been so great that we have had to order another batch. The DVD is available at many outlets in Bermuda for \$20. If you would like to order a DVD from the Bermuda Audubon Society, please send \$25 (to include post and packaging) to:

Bermuda Audubon Society  
P.O. Box HM 1328  
Hamilton HM FX  
Bermuda