



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER Summer 2010

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 15 June

Government House 6.00 pm

Followed by an illustrated review of the birds of the last 12 months by Andrew Dobson

Please RSVP to info@audubon.bm or 238-8628 for Govt House security clearance

Society News

Karen Border

Volunteers prepare homes for Longtails



Eight volunteers from Aspen Insurance did a fabulous job coating 50 Longtail igloos for the Audubon Society, as their contribution to Community Day on Friday 23 April. The Styrofoam igloos have to be coated with three layers of SKB fibrebond to make them strong and waterproof, before they can be installed. The igloos are an extremely successful artificial nest site for Longtails and can be easily installed on a waterfront or cliff-top site. They can be purchased from the Society for \$75, which includes advice on how to install them. Email info@audubon.bm to place an order.

Bluebird News



The annual Bluebird box building workshop at Government House in March was a huge success this year with many families turning out to build their own box. Bermuda is the only location outside North America where the Eastern Bluebird breeds. But over the last 50 years, a combination of factors has caused a severe decline in this population, including the loss of local cedar forests by scale insect in the late 1940s and 1950s. The Eastern Bluebird also has to compete with the invasive sparrow and starling, who are also cavity nesters. Bluebird chicks and often adult birds are killed when evicted from nests by these two species.

Erecting Bluebird boxes is the best way to help the species survive locally. Nest boxes can also be purchased from the Trustworthy store in Hamilton and the Aquarium gift shop, and kits can be purchased direct from the Audubon Society by emailing info@audubon.bm.

Forty students from Saltus Primary One and a group of eager preschoolers from First Steps Nursery learned all about Bluebirds at presentations given in April by Karen Border and David Saul. Kids also had the opportunity to learn about Bluebirds in the Royal Gazette's Green Pages, with fun games and facts supplied by the Society.

Annual Show



Many bluebird nest boxes were once again entered in the Annual Show at Botanical Gardens. It provides good publicity for our bluebirds. The Society's trophy was won by Addy Malpas, whose brother is a previous winner. Well done to Addy!

Buy Back Bermuda

Buy Back Bermuda (a joint venture between Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda National Trust) was one of the charities chosen to receive funds from the Round the Sound Swim-a-thon this year. Andrew Dobson, President of Audubon, and Jennifer Gray, Executive Director of the National Trust, received a cheque for

\$6,000 from Patty Hill of Round the Sound.

Nonsuch Camp

Preparations are well underway for this year's Nonsuch Natural History Camp for teenagers which will take place from June 19th to 26th. The Audubon Society joins forces with the Bermuda Zoological Society to hold the annual camp, which is based on Nonsuch Island. A dozen students from the island's public and private schools will have the chance to learn all about Bermuda's marine and terrestrial environment, with daily field trips and lectures. The camp is sponsored this year by the XL Foundation, PartnerRe, Catlin Insurance Company and Butterfield Bank.

Don't forget your dues!

Members are reminded that dues are now payable for the next year. Those who receive the newsletter by post will find their membership expiry date on the mailing label. Members on e-mail will be receiving notification of dues payable electronically.

Earth Day



The Audubon Society took part in a very successful Earth Day Festival organized by BASEC (Bermuda Association of Eco-Clubs) and held in Victoria Park. A big 'Thank You' to the volunteers who manned the stall – and well done Jennifer Gray as 'Earth Mother'.

2010 – International Year of Biodiversity

Andrew Dobson

Biodiversity is life. It is the variety of all life on Earth including all species of animals and plants, and the natural systems that support them. Biodiversity matters. It is hugely important, not just for its own sake but also because it underpins the vital benefits we get from the natural environment, because it contributes to our economy, our health and wellbeing, and because it enriches our lives. But human activity is causing the diversity of life on Earth to be lost at a greatly accelerated rate. 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity when everyone is encouraged to take direct action to reduce the constant loss of biological diversity worldwide.

"Since 1970, we have reduced animal populations by 30%, the area of mangroves and sea grasses by 20% and the coverage of living corals by 40%. These losses are clearly unsustainable, since biodiversity makes a key contribution to human well-being and sustainable development, as recognised by the UN Millennium Development Goals." This statement was made by United Nations Environment Programme's Chief Scientist Prof Joseph Alcamo.

In 2002 leaders around the world signed onto the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – making a commitment to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss around the world by 2010 – has that happened? In a paper just published in the journal *Science* – an assessment of the current state of biodiversity has been undertaken by more than 30 institutions around the world. Their evidence is that governments have failed to meet the targets or the commitments they had made.

How important is biodiversity – the variety of species – to the world – to us?

- Huge economic benefits and services e.g. clean drinking water, pollination of our crops, climate regulation, healthy soils, raw materials such as fish and timber – estimated to be worth \$33trillion or 10 times the UK's GDP.
- Do we have the right to drive species extinct and deny them from future generations – to benefit from and to appreciate the species around us?

How can that be measured or analysed? It's pretty tricky. There are over 30 indicators measuring different aspects of biodiversity – such things as trends in species, extinction risk, extent and condition of habitat, pressures on biodiversity - such as alien invasives spreading worldwide, impacts of climate change, levels of pollution, over-fishing – as well as the responses governments have put in place – the extent of protected areas, national parks, as well as funds devoted to these projects.

Bermuda has certainly faced these problems – we've observed a falling trend in the number of breeding pairs of Longtails (White-tailed Tropicbirds); we've seen an extinction risk with the Cahow (Bermuda Petrel); we've witnessed massive reduction in the extent and condition of habitat - of open space, mangroves, wetlands and woodland; we've experienced the impact of climate change with the increasing intensity and frequency of major storms; we've studied the effect pollution has had on amphibians; we've monitored the huge impact alien invasive species have had on native animal and plant species; and we've seen the collapse of some local fish species due to over-fishing. What effects will the Lionfish have on marine life? In Bermuda we have some protected areas and national parks, but inadequate financial resources have been devoted to protecting our biodiversity.

The pressures on biodiversity have continued to increase. Dr. Stuart Butchart, from BirdLife International – the lead author of this report in *Science*, said that "Although nations have put in place some significant policies to slow biodiversity declines, these have been woefully inadequate, and the gap between the pressures on biodiversity and the responses is getting ever wider".

It's not all bad news. The study recognised that there have been some important local or national successes in tackling biodiversity loss, including the designation of many protected areas (e.g. in 2006 the 20,000 km² Juruena National Park in Brazil – the size of Wales), the recovery of particular species (e.g. European Bison – extinct in the wild in 1927) and the prevention of some extinctions such as the Black Stilt in New Zealand. The inspiring and sensational success story of the Cahow in Bermuda is an example for the rest of the world. But all these efforts need resources and real political will.

The greatest threat to world-wide biodiversity is habitat loss – unsustainable farming and unsustainable forestry, pollution, and increasingly – climate change. But of course it is man's impact that is the reason for these effects. And it couldn't be better illustrated by the oil rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico which threatens the biodiversity of several Gulf States. Halting the loss of biodiversity has widespread public support and a great deal of biodiversity conservation is achieved by enthusiastic, passionate volunteers. But we need to engage more people in taking action to look after biodiversity as part of their everyday lives.

Here are some ideas for things you can do to help:

- Create, or encourage others to create, wildlife friendly spaces – at home, in your local community and through work. For example, plant native trees and wild flowers in your garden.
- Enjoy - and value - your local wildlife friendly space and share this enjoyment with others. How many of you have been to Hog Bay Park, Spittal Pond, Ferry Point Park or Coopers Island?
- Support the work of wildlife conservation organisations. This might be through volunteering or membership. How many of you are members of Audubon, the National Trust or the Zoological Society?
- Think before you buy – don't buy wildlife-based products or souvenirs from overseas trips; buy wildlife/environmentally-friendly and sustainably-sourced products
- Record what you see and send results to citizen science. There are opportunities to record bird species through projects run by the Bermuda Audubon Society or fish surveys with BREAM (Bermuda Reef Ecosystem Assessment and Mapping).
- Exercise your civic duties to ensure those that represent your views, your local MP, reflects your environmental concerns.
- Other environmental behaviours, such as greater energy and water-efficiency, can have indirect benefits to biodiversity too. Eat less meat! – ammonia from livestock and nitrogen compounds are the key components affecting biodiversity (the result of modern intensive farm production) – plus the loss of woodland areas for farming.
- Responsible pet ownership. 'Cats Indoors' programme is a widely advocated programme in North America. There are about 10,000 feral cats in Bermuda – a real threat to our biodiversity – not to

mention feral chickens, feral pigeons and rats. Don't release terrapins, guinea pigs and other pets into the wild.

The Bermuda Audubon Society has been one of the leading organisations in efforts maintain biodiversity since it was founded in 1954. As an NGO run by volunteers, its mission "To conserve Bermuda's special bird life and habitats for the benefit of all" has biodiversity at its core. In 1954, a small group of local naturalists got together to address the growing environmental concerns in Bermuda. The tragic loss of the once dominant Bermuda Cedar due to the scale epidemic of the late 1940s, and the threat to the native Bluebird population with the colonization of starlings and sparrows. The Society began promoting a successful nest box programme for bluebirds and lobbying for a revision of the Protection of Birds Act, which still allowed the killing of hawks and owls at that time. It also mounted a vigorous campaign in the press against the government policy of garbage disposal, which was rapidly filling in our biologically rich wetlands by using them for dumpsites. However, this small membership group quickly realized that the urgent battle to save Bermuda's wetlands was going to require something stronger than just lobbying. Most of the marshes were privately owned and the general mindset was still for filling them in. The Society decided that the only sure way to prevent this destruction of the marshes was to buy the land and manage it for conservation. Bermuda Audubon was the first environmental NGO to adopt the procedure of negotiating a land purchase and then launching a public fund-raising drive to raise the money to buy it for a reserve. Our first project was the Seymour's Pond reserve at Barnes Corner in Southampton Parish. Then in 1965 we were able to move right on to a second project involving the 8-acre central portion of Paget Marsh, the rest already having been acquired by the Bermuda Historical Monuments Trust. Once again the public support was generous and the money rolled in. In 2010, we have 16 reserves – the latest two being the reserves bought in partnership with the Bermuda National Trust the phenomenally successful 'Buy Back Bermuda' campaign.

Key activities of the Society remain the acquisition and maintenance of open spaces and the Bluebird nest box programme. In recent years the provision of igloos (nest boxes) for Longtails has become an additional focus of attention. Education is also a key objective of the Society and many lectures, fieldtrips and courses are organised. The annual natural history camp for students will be running again on Nonsuch Island next month.

The Bermuda Audubon Society values its links with other organisations. As a former President and current board member of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB), I am particularly pleased that this year's Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival (CEBF) focuses on the 'Power of Partnerships' (specifically for bird conservation). The SCSCB is the largest organization devoted to wildlife conservation in the Caribbean, and has coordinated month-long Caribbean-wide activities in more than twenty countries, which began on Earth Day 22 April, and conclude on International Biodiversity Day on 22 May.

Although the Caribbean is recognized as one of the richest areas on the planet for biodiversity, especially birds—some 150 bird species are only found on Caribbean islands—an unsettling 56 of these species are globally threatened with extinction, due to destruction of habitat for development, pollution, mining, and other unsustainable uses. In addition, some birds are threatened with poaching or capture for the pet trade. Conservation organizations, government agencies, educators, and individuals have shown that they can make a real difference when they work together. The purpose of the month-long Festival over its 9-year history has been to increase public awareness of the region's exceptionally rich and threatened bird life, using the Caribbean's celebrated endemic birds as flagships of conservation.

One such success story is the Cahow, thought to be extinct for over 350 years until the re-discovery of breeding pairs in 1951 – and following more than 50 years of conservation effort, there are nearly 100 pairs today. This conservation success is a cause for celebration and reason for hope for other threatened species. Biodiversity, the great variety of living organisms, is the basis of more economic activity than most people recognize. Our natural world provides not only the raw material but the inspiration for a host of goods and services that contribute to humanity's basic needs and general well-being. Biodiversity is the natural capital which has underpinned the development of all human societies. Aided by new technology that lets us peer

into the organisation and operation of the natural world, scientists and engineers are continuing to draw inspiration and materials from biodiversity. Biodiversity is the critical resource on which we all depend: Nature has evolved some highly efficient ways of moving objects and information around. Human designers can learn from this. Japan's Shinkansen trains are modelled on the aerodynamic shape of the common kingfisher.

Studies show people who live near green space are healthier, happier and cope better with life's challenges than people with less access to nature. As well as providing us with medicines – about half of synthetic drugs have a natural origin – biodiversity boosts our well-being.

Organisms in nature need energy just like human societies. Plants have been harvesting solar power for about 2.5 billion years longer than humans. By copying the microscopic bumps on plant leaves, designers have significantly improved the performance of solar panels.

African termites build structures that regulate the temperature of the nest below. Using the same principles architects have designed buildings that save a fortune in air conditioning costs. For any given environmental challenge some creature has usually already developed a solution.

Whether it is barley developed by selective breeding over thousands of years, berries collected on an outing in the woods, or beefsteak, biodiversity provides everything we eat. In addition biodiversity can provide answers to some of the challenges facing agriculture, such as pest control without resorting to toxic chemicals.

Huge pressures remain on Bermuda's remaining open spaces and therefore its biodiversity. A growing population naturally puts demands on the land for housing. Development needs to be managed wisely. Without our natural environment, our greatest asset, tourism will go into further decline. The natural charm of Bermuda to international business will be diminished, as will our own spiritual well-being.

This speech was delivered to Hamilton Rotarians by Andrew Dobson, President of the Bermuda Audubon Society on 4 May 2010.

Eric Amos and Bob Steele - remembered

A Tribute by David Wingate



Eric Amos was the birder and bird artist extraordinaire of Bermuda. Married to artist Diana, he began his birding career on Bermuda in 1969 and is one of the very few local birders who attained the 350 club (i.e. those who have recorded 350 or more species on Bermuda in their lifetime). The high points of his ornithological career were the publication of his delightfully eccentric but extraordinary comprehensive and informative book, "A guide to the Birds of Bermuda" in 1991 and again on the Christmas Bird Count of 2004 when he located and video-recorded a Kirtland's warbler, matter of factly presenting that video at the end-of-count gathering in the evening.

Eric was a private person who avoided organized birding tours like the plague, preferring to bird on his own or at most with one or two close friends. He had a most wonderful sense of humour and some of the happiest moments of my life were spent birding with him on pelagic trips in my small boat or on land during the height of the fall migration. Our birthdays were only a few days apart and fell at the height of the fall migration so we shared a tradition of having a birding birthday bash. On one occasion, back in the good old days when warblers were still common we recorded 29 species of warbler on Ireland Island and Dockyard alone in one day. At the end of that day Eric told me he was going to try for 30 species the next day and he succeeded! Eric leaves an extraordinary legacy, not only in his daughter Stacy who inherited the artistic traditions of her parents, but also in the art work that he and Diana featured annually in a published Bermuda calendar and in his meticulously kept ornithological records. Those records represent a major contribution to Bermuda's ornithological history. The Society offers its condolences to Diana and Stacey.

Dr. Robert B. T. Steele, veterinarian 1930 - 2009. Dr. Robert Steele came to Bermuda in the 1950's and founded the Endsmeet Animal Hospital which he owned and ran for many years. He was an enthusiastic early member of the Bermuda Audubon Society and served on the management committee for many years from 1964 to 1976, becoming Vice President from 1966 to 1968, President from 1968 to 1970 and thereafter serving as Hon Secretary until 1976.

During his tenure on the committee he was involved in the acquisition of our Paget Marsh and Firefly nature reserves and played a role in our lobbying to get Ferry Point saved as a park by Government. He also inspired the Society to produce an annual Christmas card as a fund raiser for several years and personally handled most of the logistics for that. Bob also played a key role as one of the founding members of the Bermuda National Trust and subsequent to its incorporation in 1970 he served as Audubon's first representative on its council.

Bob died of cancer on 29 Dec 2009 after a long illness. He is survived by his second wife Kay, and three children. The Society offers its condolences to Kay and family.

Bird Report late December 2009 to June 2010

Andrew Dobson

Highlights of the reporting period included Bermuda's first Eastern Towhee, the fourth record of Black Swift, an influx of Swallow-tailed Kites (which was mirrored in the Bahamas), a wreck of Atlantic Puffins and the fifth record of Garganey (one of three Old World duck species to be reported).

Geese to Puffins



Garganey Photo: Andrew Dobson

A record four **Canada Geese** wintered in Bermuda including one bird banded in Quebec 8 Jul 09 (AD). A **swan sp.** was seen flying over Sandys Parish 13 and 17 Dec (SR and PH). Four **Gadwall** were at Warwick Pond/Devonshire Marsh 18 Feb-21 Mar (AD). A female **Eurasian Wigeon** was at Marsh Lane, 31 Dec- 12 Jan (JM) and a male was at Spittal Pond 20-23 Feb (PW). A stunning male **Garganey** was on Warwick Pond 11-18 Apr (KK). A male **Eurasian Teal** was at Jubilee Road 5-12 Mar (PW). There is continued breeding success for the **Cahow** (Bermuda Petrel) with a record 93 pairs fledging 52 young of - record numbers! The first

returning **White-tailed Tropicbird** was noted at Spittal Pond 2 Feb (KR). A **Northern Gannet** was seen at various locations 18-31 Dec (RP, PW). A second immature gannet was on Spittal Pond 9 Mar (TW) but



Swallow-tailed Kite Photo: Andrew Dobson

was found dead the following day, while a third found at St. Davids 17 Mar (LG) later died. A **Great Cormorant** was in Castle Harbour 24-31 Dec (JM). Two **Glossy Ibis** arrived at Spittal Pond 7 Mar (AD) and one bird was seen in various locations to at least 1 June (DW). A **Swallow-tailed Kite** at Spittal Pond 2 Mar (KR) was to herald an unprecedented influx of up to nine birds to mid-May. A **Northern Harrier** was at Spittal Pond 21 Feb (AD). A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was over Port's Is. 6 Mar (AD). The two long-staying **Red-tailed Hawks** were present to 31 May+ (AD). A **Peregrine Falcon** was still at various

locations through the spring period (CB, JM et al). A **Purple Gallinule** was found at Pembroke Marsh and taken into care at BAMZ 13 Jan (AD). Two **Piping Plovers** wintered at Cooper's Point and one was present to 1 Apr (AD). A **Stilt Sandpiper** was at North Pond 6 May (PW). Single **Red Phalaropes** were seen off-shore 25 Apr (CB) and mid-May (DBW). A **Black-legged Kittiwake** was at Nonsuch Is. 21 Jan (JM) and another at Astwood Park 10 Feb (AD) was taken into care but died in captivity. A **Black-headed Gull** was in Hamilton Harbour 3 Jan-15 Feb (AD). Bermuda also had a record number of 53 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** 23 Jan (AD, PW). The first returning **Common Tern** was noted at Flatt's Inlet 30 Mar (AD). A flock of 20+ **Arctic Terns** was seen migrating off the South Shore 24 May (AD). A **Skua sp** was photographed off-shore on 17 May (AS). A **Pomarine Jaeger** was photographed off-shore 25 Apr (CB). Five **Atlantic Puffins** were washed up on beaches in the West End 7 Feb (JG et al) and a further three in late March, perhaps indicative of a serious die-off at sea.

Turtle-Dove to Cowbirds



Ring-necked Turtle-Dove
Photo: Andrew Dobson

A **Ring-necked Turtle-Dove** of unknown origin was seen at Cooper's Is. 17-23Apr (AD). Cuckoos are never common in the spring, but both **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** at North Pond (PW) and **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Spittal Pond 6 May (PW) were recorded. A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Bermuda Airport 9 Jan (AD). A **Common Nighthawk** was over Warwick 24 Apr (AD). Bermuda's 4th record of **Black Swift** was well observed at Prospect 31 May (PW). A single **Chimney Swift** was at Great Head Park 25 Apr (PW) with five over Spittal Pond 5 May (AD). A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**

was on Wreck Road 1 Dec-1 Jan (WF). A **Northern Flicker** was drinking at a garden birdbath in Tamarind Vale 13 Dec (A&SC). One **Eastern Phoebe** was at Coral Beach Club 31 Dec-1 Jan (AD). Two **Western Kingbirds** were at Spittal Pond 12 Dec- 4 Jan (TW). A **Grey Kingbird** was at Spittal Pond 2-5 May (KR). Two **Blue-headed Vireos** were on Morgan's Point 31 Dec (EA). The first **Purple Martin** of the spring was at Cooper's Is. 20 Feb (EA). A **Tree Swallow** over-wintered at Bermuda Airport (AD). Bermuda's first **Eastern Towhee** was seen at Ferry Point Park 4 Apr (PW), almost certainly the same bird that was thought to be a towhee near Fort St. Catherine in early Jan (PW). Two **Grey-cheeked Thrushes** were seen at Stokes Point NR 1-2 May (DBW) and another at the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences 2 May (AD, PW). A **Wood Thrush** was in Jenningsland 24 Dec-1 Jan (JM). An **American Pipit** was seen at Grape Bay 3 Jan (DW). A **Yellow Warbler** was seen at Pembroke Marsh 31 Dec (JTa, BL). A late **Prairie Warbler** 22 May (BL) was in the same Fairylands garden as one in June 2009. The (same) bird also attacked its reflection in a car wing mirror. A **Blackpoll Warbler** was at Fort Scaur 28 May (WF). A **Kentucky Warbler** was at Spittal Pond 31 Dec (AD). A **Yellow-breasted Chat** was on Morgan's Point 31 Dec (EA). A **Fox Sparrow** was at Morgan's Point 16 Jan (AD). Three **Snow Buntings** were on the Castle Harbour Islands 1 Dec-21 Jan (JM). A **Summer Tanager** was also on Wreck Road 1 Jan (AD). Single **Dickcissels** were at Cooper's Island 31 Dec (PW) and Ireland Is. 12 Mar (WF). Two **Bobolinks** were at Stokes Point NR 1 May (DBW). A **Brown-headed Cowbird** was at Spittal Pond 5-6 May (DW).

Observers: Eric Amos, Chris Burville, Andrew and Sonia Cox, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Jennifer Gray, Lisa Greene, Peter Hopkin, Karen Kardell, Bruce Lorhan, Jeremy Madeiros, Ron Porter, Keith Rossiter, Andrew Stevenson, James Tatham, David Wallace (DW), Paul Watson, Tim White, David Wingate

Important Bird Areas of the Americas

The new Americas IBA directory (2010) provides a concise summary of 2,450 Important Bird Areas described throughout the Americas through 2009. This inventory, prepared by BirdLife International, follows similar regional IBA directories developed this past decade for Africa (2001) and Asia (2004) and represents a powerful overview of the most important sites for bird conservation in our hemisphere. Starting with the beginning of the IBA Program in North America in 1994, sites have now been identified in all 57 countries or territories in the region. The results are impressive and are organized as free pdf downloads. Andrew Dobson and Jeremy Madeiros are both contributing authors to this huge publication. A copy of the book has been presented to the BAMZ library.

You can find summaries for all 57 countries or territories in the Hemisphere at:

www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/american_ibas/americas-ibas-downloads.html

Vanquishing the Deadly Mite



Male Eastern Bluebird
Photo: Andrew Dobson

Management of Eastern Bluebird boxes in the Botanical Gardens and Camden is fraught with problems from human predation and interference, rats, ants and the deadly mite. The former can be reasonably easily dealt with but the mite, which seems to blossom during the fledging period, has killed more young birds than I care to remember.

This year when Gene and I returned to the care of the Botanical Gardens and Camden Bluebird Box Trail, we decided to institute a programme of weekly inspection for all boxes and a bi-weekly inspection for boxes containing Bluebird nests with eggs or young. The boxes are padlocked against human intrusion and the

stealing of eggs; nests are lowered if necessary to prevent predation by Kiskadees and the poles are rubbed down to reduce rat incursion. (We will also be adding a collar of grease to limit ants and hopefully further deter rats).

Nest material is collected during our rounds, sealed in a zip-loc bag and sterilized for 30 seconds in the microwave, then removed and dried. Sparrow nests serve just as well as bluebird nests and only about an inch of nesting material is needed. We tried various of the touted methods of mite control, none successful and finally came up with the following remedy. I found a product called Ultracare Mite and Lice Bird Spray, formulated for used on caged birds. It seemed to me that if it was tolerated by much loved budgies and canaries, it might be the answer to the plight of the Bluebirds. We test for mite by pushing a hand under the nest. The appearance of a single mite is enough to warn of trouble. From then on it is necessary to inspect on a two day basis. Treatment depends on the age of the nestlings. Where the birds are still immature and not fully feathered, the nest and small birds are removed from the box, the interior of the box is sprayed, also the underside of the new nesting material. The old nest is bagged and removed to be sterilised and reused. Mites are capable of extraordinary crescendos of reproduction and easily get out of control if neglected for longer than 2 or 3 days. In this case we sprayed both surfaces of the replacement nest, the interior of the box, and applied a very light spray to the fully feathered birds. In this way we reduced the parasite load from hundreds to 4 by the next inspection.

The reward: 3 strong, healthy fledglings left Box 11 on Saturday and 4 left our garden box this morning. With 14 eggs or newly hatched nestlings on the trail, we hope this year to increase the population of Bluebirds in this area.

35th Christmas Bird Count

Andrew Dobson

In conjunction with National Audubon in the US, the Bermuda Audubon Society held its 35th CBC on 31st December 2009. Features of this year's count included:

- 8,682 individual birds were counted (over 1,000 more than last year's total)
- 100 species of birds (96 in 2008, 95 in 2007 and 100 in 2006)
- One new species for count day
- House Sparrow was the most common species (20% of the count)

Bermuda had another successful count on the only calm day over the Christmas period. Twenty birdwatchers, including two young children and a visitor from the US, were divided into eight groups to cover an eighth of the island each. Organiser of the local count and president of the Society, Andrew Dobson, was accompanied by Sir Richrd Gozney on his section of the count. The Governor is patron of the Society and a keen birdwatcher. The participants counted every bird from dawn to dusk as well as adding any additional species seen during the week. Completing much of the census on foot, observers also used car, bike, boat and golf carts! Some unusual species were seen this year. One globally endangered Piping Plover was recorded – a small shorebird which occasionally winters in Bermuda. Other rare birds included a Northern Gannet which arrived from the North Atlantic coast, a Eurasian Wigeon from Europe, a tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbird from eastern North America and two Western Kingbirds from the western US. The kingbirds were a new Count Day species. Record counts of Bermuda Petrel (Cahow) and Green Heron are a reflection of the increasing breeding success of these species.

However, about 50% of all birds recorded were starlings, kiskadees or sparrows – all invasive species which shouldn't really be in Bermuda and they have certainly had an impact on our local birds. Few US counts, if any, can record as many warbler species as Bermuda does each year – remembering that Bermuda is on the same latitude as Savannah, Georgia. 22 warbler species were recorded this year and 332 individuals. The island provides the most northerly winter refuge for many of these species each year. Most warblers have migrated well to the south, wintering in Central or South America. However, this relatively low number of migrant warblers continues a depressing downward trend in the population of these species. It is a reflection of the loss of habitat in the summer (breeding grounds) and wintering areas and in some cases the effects of global warming. Citizen Science is a way for people to connect with the natural world through fun activities that generate vital information for the conservation of birds. This partnership benefits us all: observers learn about birds by taking part in these science-based activities, and National Audubon's science staff gain invaluable information. Most importantly, the birds benefit because it helps Audubon focus on those birds and habitats that need our help most.

CBC results are available on the National Audubon website www.audubon.org/bird/cbc

Working Parties

Thank you!

Seymour's Pond Nature Reserve
working party in March



Nonsuch Island Fieldtrip in May

Photos by Michael E. Jones

