



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2013-14

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In this issue:

- Snowy Owl in Bermuda *Andrew Dobson*
- Happy 60th anniversary *Karen Border*
- Expanding Cahow population naturally re-colonises Southampton Island *Jeremy Madeiros*
- Bird Report June to December 2013 *Andrew Dobson*
- Society News
- Christmas Bird Count *Andrew Dobson*

Snowy Owl in Bermuda

A photo taken by Tyler Fox of a Snowy Owl perched on a roof in St. David's at dawn on 27th November provided confirmation of a rumoured large white owl in the East End. A Snowy Owl was viewed by a number of Rubis workers at Ferry Reach on the 28th November, while it briefly sat on top of one of the oil storage tanks. On the 29th November a Snowy Owl was seen by Tim Brewer on a rooftop near Gibbs Hill lighthouse. He was alerted to its presence by a number of crows that continually mobbed it. It then relocated to Dockyard for the remainder of its stay. It delighted many lucky observers in Dockyard until it was discovered dead on the morning of 20th December. It had fallen from a roof beam in the old victualling yard where it had spent the previous day. An autopsy



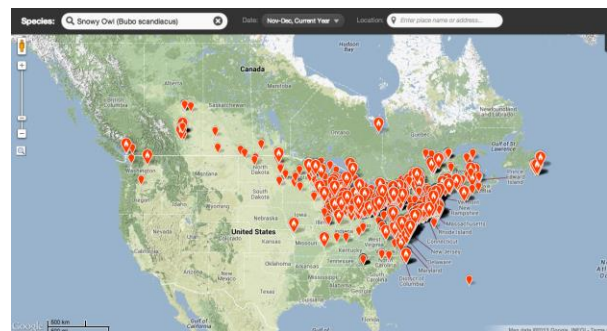
Snowy Owl
near Gibb's Hill
(Andrew Dobson)

has yet to be performed but it did not appear to be underweight. There was speculation as to the number of owls present but it would appear to have been the same owl moving westwards.

Snowy Owls breed in the Arctic and are forced south by extreme cold. Although there are a number of historical records, this bird is only the second since 1987. An invasion of Snowy Owls, one of the largest in recent memory, was first noticed in late November and continued throughout December.

The event has been most obvious in south-eastern

Canada, the north-eastern U.S., and the Midwest. Hundreds were found on one weekend on the Avalon Peninsula in south-eastern Newfoundland. Invasions of Snowy Owls are thought to be associated with lemming abundance (their main prey in the Arctic). The Cornell Lab offers the following thought, "Although lemming scarcity is often implicated in Snowy Owl invasions, a bigger driving force may be highly productive breeding seasons (with multiple young fledged per pair). Periods of summer lemming abundance thus may drive these invasions more than lemming scarcity." This map produced by eBird shows the location of Snowy Owls seen in Nov-Dec 2013.





**SAVE THE DATE!
SUNDAY 15 JUNE 2014
60TH ANNIVERSARY
DINNER
AT "BEAU RIVAGE",
NEWSTEAD**

The Bermuda Audubon Society celebrates its 60th anniversary this year and a number of projects and events are planned to mark the milestone.

'BERMUDA'S BIRDS ... YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING!'

The first event in celebration of the Audubon Society's 60th anniversary, Audubon Society President, Andrew Dobson, will deliver a fascinating and enlightening lecture on the birds in Bermuda that you may not know about!

Thursday 23rd January

6pm: Harbourfront opens for dinner; 6:30pm: Cash bar at Harbourfront (Happy hour prices);

7:30pm: Lecture starts. BUEI members \$20; Non-members \$25. Tickets available by calling #294-0204 or visiting Oceans Gift Shop. Ticket holders are entitled to **20% off dinner** at the Harbourfront before or after the lecture. Please call #295-4207 for reservations and be sure to mention the lecture.

Seymour's Pond working party – Saturday 25th January

Help us to clear invasives on the Audubon nature reserve in preparation for opening it for public access (see below).

Meet at 9.30 am – park at Barnes Corner.

Spittal Pond Fieldtrip for members – Saturday 1st February 8:30 am

The pond has hosted a good range of wildfowl and other birds this winter. Nearly 40 species were recorded at Spittal Pond on the Christmas Bird Count. Come and see for yourself.

Meet at the eastern car park

Introduction to Birdwatching Course

Wed 19th February and Wednesday 26th February 7.00-8.30 pm BAMZ (Education Room)

Lecturers – Andrew Dobson and David Wingate

The course will also include a fieldtrip to Spittal Pond and the Arboretum on Saturday 22nd February Cost \$50. Sign up at the Aquarium front desk or by email to info@audubon.bm. **Ideal for beginners.**

Cooper's Island history/nature tour – Sunday 9 March 2:30pm

Join the Bermuda National Trust and the Bermuda Audubon Society for an informative walking tour of the Coopers Island Nature Reserve. Guides will chat about the creation of the base lands, the NASA tracking station and the beach preservation area for green sea turtles. Bird experts will be on hand to identify and talk about birds seen on the tour. This may be a rare opportunity to see our elusive national bird, the Cahow, at the end of the afternoon.

\$25 for members, \$30 for non-members, \$5 for kids. Wear comfortable shoes, bring water & flashlights as will finish after sunset! No dogs allowed.

Bluebird Nest Box Workshop at Aberfeldy Nurseries – Sunday 23 March 1:30pm

Learn about Bluebirds and make your own box (kits \$20). All are welcome – bring the family.

Nature Reserve Upgrades



The Society's Committee of Management decided to mark this anniversary by focussing on improvements to two of our nature reserves, to make them more accessible and appealing to visit. Seymour's Pond in Southampton Parish and Stokes Point Nature Reserve in St. George's Parish were chosen as both have interesting woodland and pond habitats, they are at opposite ends of the island and are visible from the main road. **Seymour's Pond N.R.**, just before Barnes Corner on Middle Road, is a particularly fitting choice as it was the Society's very first nature reserve. Major restoration work to restore and enlarge the pond was carried out in 2011. The plan for 2014 includes creating a nature trail through the woodland south of the pond that will also take in part of the Government-owned Barnes Corner Nature Reserve to the west, building a bird blind beside the pond and installing some interpretive signs. **Stokes Point N.R.**, west of Mullet Bay Road, will also be upgraded with a bird blind and interpretive signs. It is hoped that an extended nature trail can be created to take in both the Audubon reserve and adjacent Bermuda National Trust land. Subject to planning approval, both projects should be completed by the end of the year. Look out for updates via email and in the next newsletter.

Bird Identification Cards

A set of laminated bird identification cards, handy for local bird watching outings and field trips, is currently in production. The two back-to-back cards will cover: Breeding Birds of Bermuda; Visiting Landbirds; Visiting Wetland Birds; Seabirds.

Secondary Schools Bermuda Bird Art Competition

An art competition featuring Bermuda birds and open to all Middle and Senior School students on the island will be held in the spring, with an exhibition in the Bermuda Society of Arts Edinburgh Gallery planned from 6-24 June 2014.

Other events

Watch out for other advertised fieldtrips, lectures, boat trips, reserves working parties, natural history camp for students, bird camp and more. Check 'Events' at www.audubon.bm and join our Facebook page for immediate news.

Expanding Cahow Population Naturally Re-colonises Southampton Island

Jeremy Madeiros



The endemic Cahow, or Bermuda Petrel *Pterodroma cahow*, is Bermuda's national bird and is also one of the rarest seabirds on Earth. *Photo left Jeremy Madeiros.* Originally thought to have become extinct through over-hunting by the early British settlers and the impact of introduced mammal predators by the 1620s, it was dramatically rediscovered in 1951 and has been the subject of a conservation and recovery program ever since. With a total population of only 17-18 breeding pairs by 1960, producing a

total of only 7-8 fledged chicks annually, the Cahow seemed poised on the brink of oblivion; however, intensive management, control of predators and the provision of artificial nest burrows have enabled the Cahow to carry out a slow, but accelerating increase to a total of 105 breeding pairs in 2013, producing a total of 53 fledged chicks. This increase has enabled a new breeding colony to be successfully established on the Nonsuch Island Nature Reserve. This was done by translocating Cahow chicks there from the original nesting islets, and hand-raising them to enable them to imprint on, and return to Nonsuch instead of their natal islets. This was also backed up with a sound attraction system. This new colony has reached 13 breeding pairs by the 2013-2014 breeding season, and a second translocation project to establish a second colony at a different location on Nonsuch began in 2013.

One surprising and unexpected development during the 2012-2013 Cahow breeding season was the discovery that Cahows had succeeded in naturally re-colonizing one of their original nesting locations, Southampton Island (identified in some early maps as Brangman's Island). This 2.36-acre island is located only 80 meters to the south of Horn Rock, which has the largest current number of nesting pairs of Cahows, with 37 nesting pairs in 2013. Southampton Island has been highlighted as a potential future site for a breeding colony of Cahows several times during the course of the present recovery program. A small number of Cahows may have survived on Southampton Island as late as the 1940s to 1950s, as Dr. David Wingate recalled finding Cahow remains, probably rat-predated and still fresh enough for some tissues to remain on the bones (D. Wingate, pers. comm.). These remains were found in rock crevices and caves on the north side of the island when he carried out a systematic search of all the Castle Harbour Islands upon returning to Bermuda from university in 1960. However, all subsequent searches of the island after that time right up to 2010 turned up absolutely no evidence of Cahows nesting on Southampton Island, although the island was annually baited with rat poison as part of the overall management objective to keep as many of the Castle Harbour Islands rat-free as possible.

The first evidence that something unusual might be happening came to light on 6th August, 2012, when the carcass of a nearly fully-fledged Cahow chick was found on top of Southampton Island. There were only two possibilities as to how this could have gotten there, (1) that a large raptor had predated the bird on nearby Horn Rock and carried it over to be consumed, or (2) that the bird came from an previously undiscovered nest on Southampton Island itself. As a result of this find, several night-watches were carried out from a boat just off the northern shoreline of Southampton Island and Horn Rock during January and February, 2013, during which Cahows were seen flying repeatedly low over the northwest side of the island. This resulted in a search of the island by the Terrestrial Conservation Officer on the 7th February, 2013, during which at least 3 and possibly 4 Cahow nesting sites were confirmed by external evidence in deep rock crevices on the northern side of Southampton



Island. Specially made tropicbird exclusion baffles were made and fitted to the entrances of these burrows to prevent nest takeovers by White-tailed Tropicbirds when they returned for their own nesting season in April. The nests were monitored for the remainder of the nesting season, and it was possible to confirm that a Cahow chick fledged successfully from one of these burrows, whereas nesting was unsuccessful in a second nest. At the

third nest, a check on June 15th found a nearly fully-fledged Cahow chick freshly dead just outside the baffle entrance. This chick weighed only 168 grams, which is far too low for the chick to survive and fledge successfully, and it was obvious that this chick had died due to parental neglect. The bird was collected to be preserved and used as a specimen for the Bermuda Natural History Museum.

Future plans for this newly establishing Cahow colony include monitoring to attempt to catch and band the adult Cahows nesting here, and the installation of new artificial nest burrows close to the existing nest sites. NOTE: Like all of the Cahow nesting islands, Southampton Island is a designated Critical Habitat Area and is closed to all public access except by special permission. It is the most important single location for the critically endangered Bermuda Skink *Eumeces longirostris*, and is also an important nesting site for the Longtail, or White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus catsbyii*. (Photo – Cahow climbs onto Jeremy Madeiros' head prior to take-off!)

Bird Report June to Dec 2013

Andrew Dobson



June to July 2013

Paul Watson reports on 'Sea Dragon' trip up to 200 miles south into Sargasso Sea 1-6 June. Highlights included: Masked Booby, **Red billed Tropicbird** (2 June about 120 miles south of Bermuda), four shearwater species (Great, Cory's, Sooty and one unidentified Manx/ Audubon's Shearwater), Wilson's and Leach's Storm-Petrel, **Band-Rumped Storm Petrel** (5 June 64 miles south of Bermuda), South Polar Skua (5), three jaeger species. Two **Masked Boobies** were seen off Bermuda on the BIOS 'Atlantic Explorer' 14 Jun (DBW). A possible **Band-rumped Storm-Petrel** was seen off Bermuda on the BIOS 'Atlantic Explorer' 17 Jun (DBW). Two **Wood Duck** summered on Tucker's

Point GC (AD). The long-staying **Long-tailed Duck** was last seen on Tucker's Point GC 8 Jun (AD). A male **Ruddy Duck** summered on Cloverdale Pond (AD) – photo above Andrew Dobson. A **Black-necked Stilt** was last seen on Mid-Ocean GC 8 Jun (AD). A **Spotted Sandpiper** was on Mid-Ocean GC 8 Jun (AD). Three **Whimbrel** were in Stock's Harbour 7 Jun (PW). A **Willet** at Spittal Pond 19 Jul was joined by a second 20 Jul (AD). The first returning shorebirds, **Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper and Least Sandpiper** were noted at Spittal Pond 10 Jul (AD) and a Spotted Sandpiper at Cooper's Island (MM). A **Wilson's Phalarope** was on Mid-Ocean GC 2 Jul (AD). A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** summered in St. George's Harbour (PW). A **Roseate Tern** was seen in Castle Harbour 9 Jul (JM). An

Arctic Tern was seen off Bermuda on the BIOS 'Atlantic Explorer' 15 Jun and 17 Jun (DBW). A **South Polar Skua** was seen off Bermuda on the BIOS 'Atlantic Explorer' 17 Jun (DBW). A **Common Nighthawk** was seen over Admiralty Park 6 Jun (AD)

Observers: Andrew Dobson, Jeremy Madeiros, Miguel Mejias, Paul Watson, David Wingate.

August to December 2013

Highlights in this period included: Bermuda's 9th Black Scoter, 4th Caspian Tern, a Glossy Ibis banded in Spain and a Snowy Owl.

A **Horned Grebe** was seen near Ely's Harbour 21-31 Dec+ (AD, PW). The first returning **Cahow** was noted 24 Oct (JM). A **Leach's Storm-Petrel** was picked up exhausted 5 Oct and later released (JM). Two Leach's Storm-Petrels were seen off Bermuda 10 Nov (AD). An adult **Masked Booby** was seen off Fort St Catherine 8 Aug (per AD). A **Northern Gannet** was seen off Spanish Point 23-31 Dec+ (PW). A **Magnificent Frigatebird** was seen over Pompano Beach 30 Aug (PW). The first of 4 **Glossy Ibis** was seen on Bermuda Airport 7 Sep with one bird remaining to 31 Dec+ (AD). One of the four birds was banded in Spain (AD). A **Canada Goose** alighted on Riddell's Bay 26 Nov (RL). Twenty-three **American Wigeon** recorded at various locations 23 Nov was a high number in Bermuda (AD). A **Black Scoter** seen in Flatt's Inlet 26 Nov (JM) was probably the same bird found injured 21 Dec which died in captivity. A **Common Merganser** was seen at Bailey's Bay 26 Nov (PW) and various locations to 27 Dec. A **Common Goldeneye** was a Spittal Pond 14 Dec (E&JH). Two **Northern Harriers** were seen at Bermuda Airport 28 Nov (AD). Two **Piping Plover** were regularly at Cooper's Point 17 Nov-29 Dec (AD). An **American Avocet** was at East End Dairy 11-22 Sep (AD, PW). Another arrived at Port Royal GC 23 Oct. (AD). Three **Willet** were seen at Bermuda Airport 24 Aug (PW) with one still present at Stocks Harbour 30 Nov+(AD). A **Wilson's Phalarope** was in Southampton 27-28 Aug (AD). A first-winter **Black-headed Gull** was seen in various locations 11 Nov-29 Dec (TW). A **Roseate Tern** was seen in the Little Sound 30-31 Aug (WF, DBW). Bermuda's 4th **Caspian Tern** was taken dead to BAMZ 26 Oct (PT) and the 5th was seen at various locations 28 Oct-17 Nov (AD) – *photo left Andrew Dobson*. A **Sandwich Tern** was present at Spanish Point 16 Nov (TW). A **Snowy Owl** seen at various locations 27 Nov-20 Dec (TF) was only the 3rd



record in the past 30 years and part of an invasion of Snowy Owls along the US East Coast. The owl was found dead on 21 Dec. A flock of 15 **Common Nighthawks** were feeding over Port Royal GC 14 Sep (WF). **Eastern Kingbirds** (16) at various locations 8 Sep was a significant number (AD). A **Great Crested Flycatcher** was at Cemetery Hill 8 Sep (PW). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** was seen in St. Georges 29 Dec (PW). Single **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** were seen in the Siths Hills (JM) and Ferry Point Park (PW) 29 Dec. **Blackpoll Warblers** put in a good showing with hundreds arriving 19-20 Sep (AD). Rarer amongst 33 Species of wood warbler record this fall were: **Swainson's Warbler** at Pilchard Bay 6 Oct (DBW) and Tudor Hill 27 Oct (AD), **Connecticut Warbler** on St. Georges GC 26 Sep (PW) and **Canada Warbler** at Ferry Point 26 Sep (PW). A **Wilson's Warbler** was at Cooper's Is NR 7-8 Dec (PW). A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was seen at Spittal Pond 30 Oct (AD). Two **Snow Buntings** at Clearwater Beach 15 Nov increased to five by 31Dec (BF). A **Blue Grosbeak** was on Cedar Grove fields 27 Dec (DBW).

Observers: Andrew Dobson, Bob Flood, Tyler Fox, Wendy Frith, Erich and Janice Hetzel, Roger Hollis, Ronald Lines, Jeremy Madeiros, Paul Watson, Tim White, David Wingate

Society News

Right: Last night of the **Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp** (21-29 June 2013). Eleven campers are seen here with The Governor (Mr. Fergusson), Camp Director (Jennifer Gray), Student Counsellor (Anna Dobson - right) – with Kristina Grant, Fae Sapsford, Leandra Stracquadiano, Wojciechowski, Fiona Dobson, Ciara Burrows, Daniel Oatley, Joshua Stephens, Bryan Montgomery, Justin Fullerton, Anna Dobson and Marcus Smith.



Left: Nonsuch Camp Awards 2013. Marcus Smith (Saltus School) received the 'Camp Spirit' award and Fiona Dobson (Warwick Academy) received the Mervyn White Memorial Shield. Seen here with Audubon patron Governor George Fergusson and camp director Jennifer Gray.

Right: A big 'thank you' to Saltus students who assembled and painted 22 bluebird boxes and put together 76 kits. Thanks also to PartnerRe for supporting the Dollars For Hours initiative. You can buy ready-made nest boxes (\$30) and kits (\$20) from Aberfeldy Nursery – all proceeds come back to Audubon.



Left: Another huge 'thank you' to Deloitte staff members who did an outstanding job at the Seymour's Pond nature reserve in November, clearing invasive species.

National Volunteer Day

Every year in early December, the Centre on Philanthropy recognises volunteers nominated by many of the island's charities. This year's nominee from the Bermuda Audubon Society was Michael Hayward who has donated his time and his boat for fundraising events for a number of years. Well done Michael! And a big 'thank you' to the Centre on Philanthropy for arranging a special evening.

Paget Marsh Nature Reserve

The boardwalk at **Paget Marsh** has now been repaired and the old signs replaced, thanks to a grant from XL and the hard work of the Bermuda National Trust conservation officer. Paget Marsh is owned jointly by BNT and Audubon. If you have not visited recently, why not stop by at the newly renovated nature reserve.

Christmas Bird Count

Andrew Dobson

In conjunction with National Audubon in the US, the Bermuda Audubon Society held its 39th Christmas Bird Count on 29th December 2013. Features of this year's count included:

- 8,370 individual birds were counted (almost identical with last year's total)
- 99 species of birds (101 in 2012, 88 in 2011, 101 in 2010, 100 in 2009)
- Record counts for American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Semipalmated Plover and Mourning Dove.
- House Sparrow was the most common species (17.8% of the count)

Nineteen members of the Society counted every bird from dawn to dusk as well as adding any additional species seen during the week. Thousands of individual birds were recorded of 99 species. Additional species seen in Count Week (3 days either side of the count day) take the total to over 100 species. This year's CBC went very well and we recorded an above average number of species. Two globally endangered species of birds were recorded, our own national bird, the Cahow, and the Piping Plover, a small shorebird which breeds in the eastern US and Canada. However, over 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. Highlights this year included the recording of 20 species of wood warbler, 19 species of wildfowl (with record numbers of American Wigeon and Northern Pintail) and 11 species of shorebird (including a record 12 Semipalmated Sandpipers).

The results are submitted to the National Audubon Society in the US as part of a continent-wide study of birds that has been running for over 100 years. 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 Audubon's science staff gains invaluable information. Most importantly, the birds benefit because it helps Audubon focus on those birds and habitats that need our help most. Count results will be available as they are entered onto the National Audubon website

www.audubon.org/bird/cbc

Events – for your diary

Bermuda Birds lecture at BUEI – Thursday 23 January 7:30 pm

Seymour's Pond working party – Saturday 25th January 9:30 am

Spittal Pond Fieldtrip for members – Saturday 1st February 8:30 am

Introduction to Birdwatching Course – Weds 19 & 26 February (Fieldtrip 22 Feb)

Cooper's Island history/nature tour – Sunday 9 March 2:30pm

Bluebird Nest Box Workshop at Aberfeldy Nurseries – Sunday 23 March 1:30pm

60th Anniversary Dinner – Sunday 15th June

Nonsuch Island Natural History Camp for students 20-28 June

Paget Island Birdwatching Camp 10-12 October