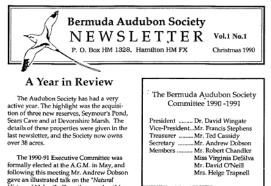


In this issue:

- Audubon at 60 Andrew Dobson
- The Bermuda Audubon Society 1954-2014 Karen Border
- Arctic Warbler new to Bermuda and the east coast of North America Andrew Dobson
- Confirmation of the Common Raven as a new record for Bermuda David B. Wingate
- Bird Report January to May 2014 Andrew Dobson
- Society News

## Audubon at 60

I was lucky enough to be present at the Society's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1994 when American ornithologist Kenn Kaufman addressed a large gathering at the Hamilton Princess Hotel. Ten years later we celebrated once again in style at Horizons with a fascinating talk presented by Australian ornithologist Nick Carlile who worked closely with Jeremy Madeiros in the Cahow translocation project. For the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary we also produced a special magazine which includes a detailed history of the Society (and available on the BAS website under 'Newsletters). In the introduction to his article, David Wingate wrote, "In 1954, a small group of local naturalists got together to address 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 establishment of the starling as another nest site competitor along with the sparrow, was threatening the imminent demise of the native bluebird. There was also a government policy of filling in the marshes by using them as garbage dumps. But it was a time of hope too, because the Cahow had just been rediscovered in 1951."



History of Malawi\*. Our other speaker this

How quickly another 10 years have passed. The Society is as active as it ever has been with a dedicated committee and loyal membership. Despite the ever present threats to our local environment and global environmental concerns, we have much to be proud of through our 60 year existence. We now have 16 nature reserves providing vital habitat for fauna and flora in an increasingly urbanized Bermuda. Within the next few months we hope to announce an additional reserve which will be a fabulous 60<sup>th</sup> birthday present. I took on the role of producing an Audubon newsletter in 1990. I enjoy the task but had no idea that I would still be doing this in 2014. One of the

projects I set myself this year was to make all 25 volumes available on the Society's website. They provide a record of not only our activities and achievements over the past 25 years, but also the change in communication technology – more of that in the next newsletter – but I do hope most of you are reading this online and keep in touch with current events by looking at our Facebook page.

I hope many of you will be able to join us for our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner at Newstead on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June when we will be joined by His Excellency Mr George Fergusson, Governor of Bermuda & Mrs Fergusson and special guest speaker Dr Nigel Collar of BirdLife International. Time 7:00 PM Price: \$95 including welcome drink and dinner with wine. All reservations to <u>info@audubon.bm</u>

Andrew Dobson, President

# The Bermuda Audubon Society 1954-2014

### Karen Border

**1954:** Bermuda's first environmental charity was started by a small group of local naturalists and named in imitation of the American Audubon Society. Two of the driving concerns were the threatened loss of the native Bluebird, due to the widespread death of Bermuda cedars due to a scale epidemic, and the Government policy of filling in marshes by using them as garbage dumps.

**1955-1984:** American Audubon Wildlife Screen Tours visited Bermuda annually. Hosted by the Society these educational films were shown in schools and to the general public.

**1960:** The Bermuda Audubon Society Act was passed, incorporating the Society with the power to hold land in trust for conservation.

**1963:** The Society purchased its first nature reserve – Seymour's Pond – through a public fundraising appeal.

**1966:** Eight-acres of Paget Marsh were purchased with a second fundraising appeal.

**1967:** The Society was gifted the Firefly Nature Reserve in Devonshire Marsh by Kitty Zuill.

**1971-73:** Somerset Long Bay West nature reserve was purchased and the pond restored.

**1972:** Nonsuch Natural History Camp was initiated. A residential camp on Nonsuch Island for high school students, the camp continues to this day in conjunction with Bermuda Zoological Society.

**1980-1986:** Stokes Point Nature Reserve was purchased and its mangrove pond restored. **1985:** Lambda Island was bequeathed by Gladys Collison.

**1988:** The northern part of Seymour's Road up to Middle Road was gifted by the Masters Estate. **1990:** Sears Cave, a large limestone sink hole in Smith's Parish, was donated by the Trott family. **1992:** The Watlington Reserve, in Devonshire Marsh, consisting largely of wet pasture, was acquired by bequest.

**1993:** The Winifred Gibbons Reserve in Devonshire Marsh was donated by the Gibbons family. **1998:** The Bermuda Bluebird and Longtail Society became part of the Audubon Society.

**2000:** A boardwalk and interpretive nature trail were created at Paget Marsh in conjunction with the Bermuda National Trust.

**2002:** The Alfred Blackburn Smith Nature Reserve west of Coral Beach was donated by Elfrida Chappell.

**2003:** The Longtail "igloo" (an artificial nest burrow) was developed.



**2004:** Buy Back Bermuda, a joint venture with Bermuda National Trust to save threatened open space, was set up and purchased Somerset Long Bay East nature reserve through public fundraising. The Audubon-sponsored film Bermuda's Treasure Island was released, featuring Nonsuch Island and the Cahow. Pearl Island was donated by the Butterfield family (photo left).

**2008:** Buy Back Bermuda '2' was launched to acquire the Vesey Reserve in Southampton and Eve's Pond near Shelly Bay.

**2013:** The Vesey Reserve opened to the public.

**2014:** The Society celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Commemorative postage stamps are issued.

### Arctic Warbler – New to Bermuda and the east coast of North America Andrew Dobson



An 'Old World' warbler was discovered by Wendy Frith and David Wingate in the Port Royal/Pompano dump area of Bermuda on 18 February 2014. Their initial thoughts were that it was a *Phylloscopus* warbler, perhaps an Arctic Warbler. The following day, Andrew Dobson was lucky enough to get some photos (left). These photos were insufficient to determine which species of *Phylloscopus* warbler it might be. It was hugely frustrating because not only had there never been a record of *Phylloscopus* warbler in Bermuda but none on the east coast of North

America. Photos were sent to ornithologists on both sides of the Atlantic and Marshall Illiffe at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology kindly posted to birdingfrontiers.com. Martin Garner led an online discussion which generated divided opinions between Arctic Warbler and Willow Warbler, with one or two suggesting Greenish Warbler. The identity could be clinched with a sound recording. WF spent hours each morning in the hope of making a recording but it didn't respond to recordings of various *Phylloscopus* warblers played by AD. Through sheer persistence, WF obtained a first recording on 3<sup>rd</sup> March when the bird called about 20 feet away while gleaning in sparse *Clerodendrum* foliage about 7 feet above ground in the company of a Northern Parula *Parula americana*. A second recording was made on 6<sup>th</sup> March about 10 feet away while feeding in the same area. The recordings were then submitted to the excellent xenocanto website which shares bird sounds from all over the world. We now knew it was an Arctic Warbler, but which taxon?

There are proposals to split Arctic Warbler into three separate species (Alström.P, 2011) 1. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* (continental Eurasia and Alaska) 2. Kamchatka Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus examinandus* (southern part of Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Hokkaido and Kurile Islands) 3. Japanese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthodryas* (Japan except Hokkaido). With further help from Martin Garner and David Cooper at birdingfrontiers they began to compare the Bermuda bird with other 'Arctic Warbler' taxa. They began by considering the 3-way split including *P.borealis, P.examinandus* and *P.xanthodryas*. It sounded closest to *P.examinandus*, but not quite right. The Bermuda bird was then compared with calls of the Alaskan form of Arctic Warbler *P.b. kennicotti* and there was the match. The warbler's underparts and supercilium are yellowish, suggesting it is a first-winter bird.

Prior to this discovery, one of the most extraordinary Bermuda records concerned a Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica* collected by DBW on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1980. One can only assume that the flycatcher and the warbler, both very small passerines, must have taken a Great Circle route in the wrong direction during migration to reach Bermuda. To read more on this remarkable occurrence, go to <u>www.xeno-canto.org</u>; <u>www.birdingfrontiers.com</u>; and <u>www.ebird.org</u> where AD has photos and audio links in his <u>eBird checklist</u>.

#### References

Alström, P, Saitoh, T, Williams, D, Nishiumi, I, Shigeta, Y, Ueda, K, Irestedt, M, Björklund, M and Olsson, U. 2011. The Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* – three anciently separated cryptic species revealed. *Ibis* 153: 395-410.

### **Confirmation of the Common Raven as a new record for Bermuda** David B. Wingate

Prior to this winter the only mention of Common Raven *Corvus corax* as a possible vagrant to Bermuda was a brief annotation in "A list of birds recorded from Bermuda" by Thomas S. Bradlee and Louis L. Mowbray with additional notes compiled by Warren S. Eaton, published in the Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History Vol. 39 No. 8 in 1931. The note was included in the hypothetical list on the basis of "lack of collaborative evidence" and says simply that "Dr. George Rankin, of St. Georges, stated to Mr. W.F. Eaton that he had found this bird at least once. This observation is recorded in the *Royal Gazette*, Hamilton, Dec 28, 1918 – E"

As ravens look very similar to the American Crow, *Corous brachyrhynchos* (which was already common on Bermuda in 1918), and as there were no subsequent records up until this winter, the hypothetical status of that record was never questioned and the general consensus was that ravens are unlikely to occur, being for the most part non-migratory. This situation has now been turned around completely by the record(s), which have been confirmed by multiple observers and with photos since mid-January.



A "large black bird fitting the description of a raven" was first reported near Heydon Trust estate on or about 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2014 and again six days later by Mr. David Barber. This bird was later confirmed as a genuine raven by Dr. Eugene Harvey, who saw it being mobbed by crows on Heydon Trust estate on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan. Harvey described it as in a tattered condition. Several attempts were made to find it there by other birders but it was not seen again until 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. when Steven Desilva, (who was not previously aware that a raven had been reported in Somerset), found it on Westover Farm near

Daniel's Head and recognized it immediately as a raven by its size and calls. He also commented on its tattered plumage condition. It soon became apparent that this was where the bird had settled in for the winter because it was found there by other observers up until early April. In addition to feeding on the muddy pastures among the sheep and cattle it often perched in tall casuarinas between the "Penguins" property and the Bermuda Audubon nature reserve at Somerset Long Bay, where it could be heard uttering its full repertoire of croaks, squeaks and gurglings so characteristic of ravens. It also foraged in the big arable fields of the Felicity Hall estate.

Subsequently there was good evidence of a second raven, this one in good plumage condition. It was first seen by Sarah Gosling on the playing field of Shelly Bay park at 0730 hrs on 28 Jan. and then by Paul Watson over Audubon's Alfred Blackburn Smith nature reserve, Paget, on 30<sup>th</sup> Jan. A second bird may not be surprising because although ravens generally live solitarily they are known to fly in flocks when they *do* migrate. Paul thought he saw the bird again at Abbots Cliff and I finally got to see it flying up the Ferry Reach peninsula from Atlantic Explorer as I was leaving for an oceanographic cruise on 4<sup>th</sup> March. There have been no further reports since 4<sup>th</sup> April.

The foregoing records prompted me to ask retired librarian Penny Hill to search out the actual account of the 1918 raven report in the Royal Gazette of 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 1918 in the archives at the Hamilton library. To my amazement that account not only provides adequate evidence that the record was genuine rather than hypothetical but also matches the date and circumstances of our 2014 record almost precisely - a case of history repeating itself nearly a hundred years later! For this reason I feel it is worth quoting the exact wording of that original report. Under title "East End News" it reads:

"On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> inst. A Northern or American raven *Corvus corax principalis* the first of its kind to be reported at Bermuda was seen at the Kington House and Floral Park grounds. The bird was weather beaten, perched low and when disturbed flew only a few yards before again resting and could be approached to within a few yards of its perch before putting up. It was much larger in every way than our crow *Corvus americanus*. The pointed neck feathers could be easily distinguished. He was noisy: his hoarse rolling "er-r-r-uck" being again and again repeated; other noises also noted. The coast range of this raven extends as far south as North Carolina."

These raven records cause me to wonder whether the American Crow or the American Fish Crow, *Corvus ossifragus*, might also occur as very rare vagrants to Bermuda. While vagrant American Crows would be masked by the presence of our introduced resident population, the occasional raven or fish crow record might easily have been overlooked in the past because of their close similarity to the American crow, given that size differences are extremely hard to judge in the field unless the species are seen side by side. Local birders should now be alert to this possibility.

## Bird Report Jan to May 2014

Andrew Dobson

**January to February 2014 -** Highlights in this period included: Bermuda's first records of Common Raven and Arctic Warbler; a rare January record of Western Sandpiper.



A Horned Grebe was seen at various West End locations 5-13 Jan (PW). Two White-tailed Tropicbirds were off Spittal Pond 31 Jan (KR). A Northern Gannet was diving off Cooper's Point 4 Jan (E&JH). Four Gadwall, including three males were at Spittal Pond 1 Feb (AD). A Eurasian Wigeon was on Spittal Pond 19 Jan (TW). A Common Merganser (*photo left*) was at Ireland Island to 28 Feb+ (WF). Both Red-tailed Hawks were over Port's Island 9 Jan (KD). A probable Yellow Rail was on Mid-Ocean GC 14 Feb (PW). A Virginia Rail was on Mid-Ocean GC 21-22 Feb (AD). An unusual influx of

**Purple Gallinules**, with singles at Flatts Inlet 10 Jan (AC), Spanish Point 13 Jan (AD), South Pond 26 Jan (PW) and two at Somerset Long Bay 1 Feb (PW). Two **Piping Plover** at Warwick Long Bay 13 Jan (DBW) may have been the same ones seen at Cooper's Is. to 26 Jan (AD). A **Western Sandpiper**, the first January record for 43 years, was at Cooper's Is. 26 Jan (AD). A **Black-headed Gull** in Harrington Sound remained to at least 1 Feb (JM). An **Iceland Gull** was in Hamilton Harbour 11 Jan-25 Feb (PW). A **Black-legged Kittiwake** was off Cooper's Point 11 Jan (DBW). A **Forster's Tern** was at Spittal Pond 8-16 Feb (KR). A **Pomarine Jaeger** was off Cooper's Point 14 Feb (PW). A **Common Nighthawk** was over Khyber Pass 22 Jan (NM). An imm. male **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was seen at Wreck Road 16 Feb (DBW). Bermuda's first **Confirmed Common Raven** was at various locations in Somerset 1 Jan-28 Feb+ (DB). Bermuda's first **Arctic Warbler** was on Pompano Road 16 Feb-9 Mar (WF, DBW). **Cedar Waxwings** (40) were in Botanical Gardens 23 Feb (TW). A **Wilson's Warbler** was on the Heydon Trust 20 Jan (AD). A **Chipping Sparrow** was at Ocean View GC 31 Jan (AD). **Snow Buntings** (max 11) were at the Airport and Cooper's Is throughout Jan to 16 Feb (AD). A **Summer Tanager** was in the Arboretum 1 Jan (AD).

March to May 2014 - Highlights in this period included: the second confirmed record of Wilson's Plover since the 1960s



A **Canada Goose** that appeared to be blind in one eye was on Mid-Ocean GC 1 Apr to 10 May (AD). Wildfowl arriving in May included an **American Wigeon** on Mid-Ocean GC 3-10 May (PW) and a **Ring-necked Duck** at Spittal Pond 3 May (AD). A **Common Merganser** (*see above*) in Mangrove Bay 27 Apr is the latest date recorded (AD). **Manx Shearwater** were passing at about 30 per hour off South Shore 29-30 Mar and past Cooper's Point at 108 per hour 8 Apr (AD). A **Magnificent Frigatebird** was reported from St. George's Harbour 1 Mar (per PW). A **Masked Booby** was photographed on Challenger Banks 18 Apr (RL). An adult **Brown Pelican** (*photo left*) was in the Great Sound 14-16 Mar (AD). *Trip report* (*DBW*)

on BIOS 'Atlantic Explorer 10-15 Apr south of Bermuda White-tailed Tropicbird(2), Pomarine Jaeger (5), Parasitic Jaeger (2), Arctic Tern, Leach's Storm-Petrel (33), Manx Shearwater (6), Sooty Shearwater (6). A Glossy Ibis was at Somerset Long Bay NR 27 Apr to 9 May (RB). At least three Swallow-tailed Kites were seen at various locations 5-17 Mar (RH). A Northern Harrier was still present at the Airport 21 Apr (PA). Single Purple Gallinules were photographed at Somerset Long Bay NR 27 Apr (RB), Rural Hill 30 May (WS) and Hamilton 30 May (TAW). A Virginia Rail was at North Pond 4 Apr (AD, DBW). A Piping Plover was still present at Cooper's Is 11 Apr (AD). A Wilson's Plover at Cooper's Island 1 June (AD) was probably present on the Castle Harbour islands since 22 May (JM) (photo left below). A Red Knot (photo right below) was at Cooper's Point 31 May-1 June (PW).



Daniel's Head Farm hosted Least Sandpipers on 4 Apr (3) and 7 May (2) (DBW). Three White-rumped Sandpipers were roosting on Pearl Island 26 May (PW) with 33 Ruddy Turnstones. The first returning Common Tern was noted in Harrington Sound 6 Apr (AD). A Royal Tern was off Daniel's Head 15 Apr (MM). A Yellowbilled Cuckoo was noted at the Airport 21 Apr (NM). A Northern Shrike was discovered at Cooper's Point 9 Mar AD, R&KL, PW). A Yellow-throated Vireo was seen at Stokes Point NR 13 Apr MM). One Common Raven was still present at Daniel's Head Farm until at least 3 Apr (DBW). The first Purple Martin (2) was noted at East End Dairy 16 Mar while the first Tree Swallows (5) were seen at Horseshoe Bay 15 Mar (PW). An Arctic Warbler, a first for Bermuda, was still at Pompano to 9 Mar (WF, DBW). Warblers arriving in May included: a Cape May Warbler at BIOS 3 May (MM), an American Redstart (singing male) at Stokes Point NR 9-10 May (DBW, MM), and a Blackpoll Warbler (singing male) at Shorelands 4 May (AC). A rare MacGillivray's Warbler was seen on Morgan's Point 28 Mar (EN, MM). A fine male Scarlet Tanager was in a Hungry Bay garden 28-29 Apr (EH). A Lincoln's Sparrow was seen on Morgan's Point 29 Mar (AD).

Observers: Peter Adhemar, David Barker, Richard Brewer, Alison Copeland, Andrew Dobson, Wendy Frith, Eugene Harvey, Erich and Janice Hetzel, Robert Hollis, Ray & Kay Latter, Richard Lee, Jeremy Madeiros, Miguel Mejias, Neal Morris, Erica Nol, Keith Rossiter, Wendy Soares, Paul Watson, Tricia Walters, David Wingate.

Bird photos: Andrew Dobson

# **Society News**

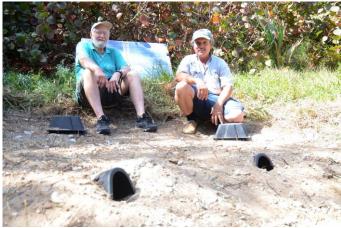
#### Audubon donates 50 homes for Cahows

The Bermuda Audubon Society has decided to donate all the recently delivered seabird nest boxes to Conservation Services for the Cahow Recovery Programme: 25 of them were covered by a grant from BirdsCaribbean and the other 25 will be the gift of Bermuda Audubon Society directly. The following report was released to the press:



Fifty new homes are ready and waiting for our endangered national bird, the cahow. The artificial nest boxes were donated to the cahow recovery programme by the Bermuda Audubon Society. The nest boxes were designed by former conservation officer Dr. David Wingate, who worked with cahows for 50 years. "Cahows are soilburrowing birds and in pre-colonial times they would have dug their own burrows, but for hundreds of years they had to survive on rocky little islands where that was impossible," he explained. "As the numbers increased under the restoration programme, we started building artificial burrows out of cement, which was laborious, backbreaking work. I saw the need for a mass-produced surrogate which was durable, light and compact enough to transport to remote locations." Conservation Officer Jeremy Madeiros tried some artificial burrows from Australia, but they were designed for a smaller petrel and were not ideal for the cahow, so Dr. Wingate decided to design his own. "These meet all the requirements of our picky national bird a long, curved tunnel and a nest chamber that is in total darkness.

Cahows still have the instinct to dig their own burrows and probably will start to do that now that they are nesting on Nonsuch Island, where there are appropriate conditions, but this could delay the start of breeding by new-formed pairs by several years. The provision of ready-made burrows not only results in much higher nesting densities within a restricted area but can also speed up population recovery in a restoration project," said Dr. Wingate. The nest boxes could be used by any mid-sized burrowing seabird, said Dr. Wingate. He believes that other seabird conservation programmes around the world could benefit from them.



Manufactured in kit form out of durable plastic, the nest boxes are easy to install and have a removable lid so that Mr. Madeiros can monitor the progress of chicks. He has already installed a number on Nonsuch Island. The Bermuda Audubon Society paid for the molds from which the kits are made and for the manufacture of 25 boxes. A grant from BirdsCaribbean paid for the other 25 boxes. "I have been following the design and development of these boxes with growing excitement," said Mr Madeiros. "The labourintensive and tedious mixing of tons of concrete over the years, and danger of

transporting and landing this concrete in buckets on the nesting islands, was something that has to be experienced to be believed. These new burrows will make the whole process much easier and safer. It also comes at a great time when the recovering Cahow population is almost growing faster than I could keep up with! On behalf of the Department of Conservation Services and personally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for this generous donation. This will be of great assistance in the recovery of Bermuda's national bird."

#### **Anniversary Postage Stamps**



THE BERMUDA PHILATELIC BUREAU

One of the main reasons the Bermuda Audubon Society was founded 60 years ago was to ensure the survival of the native bluebird. The loss of most of Bermuda's cedar trees due to a scale insect meant the bluebird had lost its main nesting habitat. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014 the Philatelic Bureau of the Bermuda Post Office issued four stamps to celebrate our 60th anniversary and our special bird. The stamps are available in values of 35 cents, 85 cents, \$1.10 and \$1.25. The 35 cent stamp shows a male bluebird – identified by its bright blue upper parts and rusty red breast – perching on a Bermuda cedar branch. The 85 cent stamp is represented by a female bluebird lying in its nest of dried grasses inside a nesting box and the \$1.10 stamp shows a male, probably encouraging a female to build a nest in the box. The \$1.25 stamp displays the differences between the male and female bluebird. The female on top of the box is much duller in colour. In contrast,

the male is more vibrantly blue. The stamp shows the male indulging in display behaviour to entice the female into using the box. The Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis* is called "Eastern" because

its habitat in North America is east of the Rockies. Bermuda has the distinction of being its only breeding location outside North America.



### **Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival**

The Society participated in the annual CEBF which runs from 22 April (Earth Day) to 22 May. Many events took place during the month including the release of a new set of bird stamps, a lecture on pelagic birds given by Dr. David Wingate at the BAMZ, a bluebird nest box competition for students at the Annual Show, a radio presentation by Andrew Dobson on Mix 106, and a fieldtrip to see our endemic Cahow.

Other events that have taken place this year include a very successful **Introduction to Birdwatching Course** run by Andrew Dobson and David Wingate; a **Bluebird Nest Box Workshop** led by Karen Border at Aberfeldy Nurseries (*photo left*)); two **Bermuda Birds lectures** presented by Andrew Dobson at BUEI and subsequently available on CITV; a **Seymour's Pond working party;** and a **Spittal Pond Fieldtrip** for members

## **Events – for your diary**

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June - Bermuda Bird Art Exhibition - An art competition featuring Bermuda birds and open to all Middle and Senior School students, with an exhibition in the Bermuda Society of Arts Edinburgh Gallery
Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June 60<sup>th</sup> - Anniversary Dinner, Beau Rivage, Newstead, 7pm \$95.00
Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June – BSOA bluebird box auction 5-7pm
Friday 10<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October - Paget Island Birdwatching Camp