



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

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Western Marsh Harrier – New to Bermuda

Andrew Dobson and Paul Watson



On December 20th 2016 Paul Watson was making a routine marine check along the Morgan's Point coastline when he noticed an unusual bird. He reported the following, "I saw what I can only describe as a female Marsh Harrier on Morgan's Point at lunchtime. The bird was all chocolate brown above and similar below with cream head and throat and appeared to show a dark eye patch. It was definitely a harrier as I saw the bird hawking and watched dihedral wings whilst soaring. It appeared slightly shorter winged and tailed (inch or so) than the female Northern Harrier which was also present (not seen together though). I watched the bird over the hillside above George's Bay from my boat at a distance of about 400+ metres with 10X binoculars." PW was keen to get photo documentation and later that afternoon Erich and Daniel Hetzel were joined by Andrew Dobson and headed across the Great Sound in hope of re-locating the bird. Fortunately

photos were obtained in the fading light and confirmed the presence of Bermuda's first record of Western (Eurasian) Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. With Morgan's Point off-limits to the public due to the America's Cup and hotel development, tracking the bird became difficult. However, the harrier was last seen at Morgan's Point on January 23rd 2016. Despite extensive subsequent searches of the area it was assumed the bird had departed but it was relocated two months later over Hawkins Island on March 23rd by David Wingate. With construction work taking place on Morgan's Point, it was no surprise that the harrier moved on. However, it has not been seen since that date.



Western Marsh Harrier is also known as Eurasian Marsh Harrier with a wide breeding range throughout Europe, northwestern Africa to Central Asia. Most birds migrate to sub-Saharan Africa or the Indian sub-continent. Although there are records from the Azores and Iceland, there are very few records from the western side of the Atlantic. There are two records from Guadeloupe 14 Dec 2002 to 19 Jan 2003 (first hemisphere record – Levesque) and 14-17 Oct 2015 (Regis). There are two records from Puerto Rico 14 Jan to 30 Mar 2004 and 11 Jan to 11 Feb 2006 (Merkord, Rodriguez and Faaborg). There is one record from Barbados 8-14 Dec 2015 (Moore). A 1998 record from Virginia was rejected by the AOU due to lack of photographic evidence.

Photos: Andrew Dobson

Bird Report December 2015 to April 2016

Andrew Dobson

The highlight of the season was Bermuda's first Western Marsh Harrier.



The long-staying **West Indian Whistling-Duck** remained at Port Royal GC 1 Dec-9 Apr+ (AD). A **Canada Goose** arrived at Spittal Pond 21 Mar (AD). A **Eurasian Teal** was seen at various locations in Bermuda 10-24 Jan (DG). The first **Cahow** hatching of the year was confirmed on Nonsuch Island 26 Feb (JM). A probable **Trinidad Petrel** was seen off Cooper's Point 12 Apr (PW). **Manx Shearwaters** were passing Cooper's Point at about 90 per hour Apr 1 (PW). The imm. **Masked Booby** remained at Dockyard 1 Dec-23 Mar (PW). A wing-tagged **Great Egret** (*photo left*) seen at various locations 10 Nov-18 Mar was banded as a chick on 30 June 2015 at Nottawasaga Island, Ontario, Canada. Wintering **Glossy Ibis** increased to at least 7 individuals with six together in Paget 21 Mar (AD, DG). A **Swallow-tailed Kite** was seen over Stock's Harbour 19 Mar (PW). Bermuda's first **Western Marsh Harrier** was discovered on Morgan's Point 20 Dec-23 Jan (PW) and again

Hawkins Is. 23 Mar (DBW). There was another late winter arrival of **Purple Gallinules** with sightings at Jubilee Road 24 Jan (PW), Pitman's Pond 1-23 Feb (DBW) and Paget Marsh (two birds) 10-20 Feb (GB). A **Black-necked Stilt** was seen on Mid-Ocean GC 6 Apr (PW). A **Ruff** was at Spittal Pond 10-12 Mar (AD). An early **Common Tern** appeared at Dockyard 19 Mar (PW). A **Black Skimmer** (*photo right*) was at Cooper's Point 14-20 Feb (DBW). Two **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** (*photo below*) were discovered at Crystal Caves 31 Jan and another on the same day at the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences (AD, E&JH). Single **Yellow-throated Vireos** were discovered at Crystal Caves and the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences (AD, E&JH). The first **Purple Martin** of the spring was seen over Pembroke Dump 23 Feb (IF, PW). **Snow Bunting** were at Morgan's Point 21 Dec-23 Jan with maximum count of 12 birds 26 Jan (IP). Twenty-six species of wood warbler were seen during the winter season including a **Swainson's Warbler** at Botanical Gardens 9 Jan (AD), **Wilson's Warbler** at Crystal Caves 31 Jan (PW) and **Yellow-breasted Chat** in Jenningsland 3 Apr (JM). A **Swamp Sparrow** was photographed on Morgan's Point 17 Jan (AD, JM). A **Song Sparrow** was seen at Ruth's Point 27 Dec (PW).



Observers: Geoff Bell, Andrew Dobson, Ian Fisher, Derek Gibbons, Erich & Janice Hetzel, Jeremy Madeiros, Ingela Persson, Paul Watson, David Wingate.

Photos Andrew Dobson

41st Christmas Bird Count

Andrew Dobson

In conjunction with National Audubon in the US, the Bermuda Audubon Society held its 41st CBC on 27th December 2015. Features of this year's count included:

- 8,068 individual birds were counted (up from last year)
- 93 species of birds (92 in 2014, 99 in 2013, 101 in 2012)
- 3 new records for count day: West Indian Whistling-Duck, Masked Booby and Western Marsh Harrier
- European Starling was the most common species (23% of the count)



Members of the Bermuda Audubon Society recorded three new count day species during the annual Christmas Bird Count. A long-staying West Indian Whistling-Duck (only the second ever seen in Bermuda) was recorded at Port Royal and a Masked Booby, rarely seen in inland waters was present at Dockyard. Most exciting of all was the occurrence of a Western Marsh Harrier which was seen by a team travelling by boat along the Southampton shoreline. This bird, the first ever seen in Bermuda was discovered by Paul Watson

on December 20th and fortunately stayed to be included in the count. In total, over 8,000 birds were recorded of 93 species on the December 27 count day. Three additional species were seen during the count week. This year's CBC compared favourably to last year when 92 species were recorded. The most numerous species was the starling, which combined with the kiskadee and sparrow, made up over 50 per cent of the birds seen. The continuing high temperatures along the eastern seaboard of the US may well have delayed the expected arrival of some wildfowl, finches and warblers. Other highlights this year included the recording of 19 species of wood warbler, with a record count of 57 Northern Parula. President of the Bermuda Audubon Society, Andrew Dobson said, "The results are submitted to the National Audubon Society in the United States as part of a continent-wide study of birds that has been running for more than 100 years. Citizen Science provides a way for people to connect with the natural world through activities that generate vital information for the conservation of birds". Count results can be viewed on the National Audubon website, www.audubon.org/bird/cbc.

Global Big Day - 14th May 2016



The Cornell Lab  
GLOBAL **BIG** DAY

A single day, uniting birdwatchers worldwide across political boundaries and language barriers, all brought together by our shared passion for birds. In 2015, 14,000 people from 135 countries took part.

It's simple to contribute: go birding and then submit your data to eBird—how easy and fun is that? You don't need to do a full day of birding; even an hour or 10 minutes makes a difference!

To have your sightings be included in the Global Big Day, they have to be entered in eBird as one or more checklists. Go to <http://eBird.org/globalbigday> to learn more.

Society News



Congratulations to Janice Hetzel, Audubon recipient at the Centre on Philanthropy's 2016 volunteer reception. Janice is the Society's membership secretary and ready volunteer at many Audubon events. Pictured here with the acting Deputy Governor David Arkley and Premier Michael Dunkley.



The Society is grateful to Deloitte who have offered to adopt our Seymour's Pond nature reserve and finance the maintenance over the next 3 years. L to R: Andrew Dobson (Audubon President), Margaret Fergusson, H.E. George Fergusson (Audubon patron), John Johnston (CEO Deloitte).



A thank you to everyone who made bluebird nest boxes at Government House on March 5th and to Mr & Mrs Fergusson for leading a tour of the grounds in which bluebirds have already made 3 nests on the bluebird trail of 11 nest boxes.



A very successful Spittal Pond fieldtrip on 12th March provided an impressive 38 species of birds including wigeon, pintail, glossy ibis, kingfisher, ruff, indigo bunting not to mention a breaching humpback whale!



Over 40 people came out to visit the society's Sears Cave nature reserve in Smith's Parish on 6 February. David Wingate explained the geological history of the sink hole formation and Alison Copeland gave a fascinating talk on Bermuda ferns and the work presently underway to save some of our rarest species, including Governor Laffan's Fern.

Finally, a big thank you to those who did the Argus Walks the Walk for Audubon and also to the Audubon volunteers who helped out at the Bermuda National Trust Children's Nature Walk at Spittal Pond in February, where the new bird identification cards proved very useful and popular.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 1 June 6:00pm at Government House

Please confirm your attendance at info@audubon.bm or call 238-8628 for security clearance.

Nonsuch Island field trip

Saturday 14 May 10:00am to 3:00pm

The trip will include a morning tour with Cahow encounter and time to swim & snorkel in the afternoon. Bring a picnic lunch and swim/snorkel gear if you wish. Boat leaves from Tucker's Point dock (details will be sent to those who sign up). Price \$40 members, \$60 non-members.

Spaces are limited. To sign up email info@audubon.bm or call 238-8628 with names and a contact number.