



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

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In this issue:

- Honour for David Wingate *Andrew Dobson*
- Cahow Breeding Report 2017 *Jeremy Madeiros*
- New hope for Bermuda's rarest bird – the Bermuda Tern *David Wingate*
- Bird Report May to July 2017 *Andrew Dobson*
- Society News
- Future events

David Wingate is honoured in Cuba



Dr. Wingate is pictured with BirdsCaribbean President Andrew Dobson and BirdsCaribbean Executive Director Lisa Sorenson

At BirdsCaribbean's 21st International Conference held at Topes de Collantes, Cuba, David Wingate was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his "exceptional knowledge and contributions to avian knowledge and conservation in Bermuda and the Caribbean".

Cuba for 150 presentations and workshops over five days. This year's theme "*Celebrating Caribbean Diversity*" was particularly appropriate given the huge variety of bird species in the region and the diversity of the members. Delegates attended from dozens of islands and nations, representing different cultures and languages, but all facing similar challenges such as habitat loss and climate change. Anna and Fiona Dobson were among the presenters, delivering a talk on the work of the Bermuda Audubon Society.

BirdsCaribbean is a vibrant international network of members and partners committed to conserving the region's birds and their habitats. It raises awareness, promotes sound science, and empowers local partners to build a region where people appreciate, conserve and benefit from thriving bird populations and ecosystems. As a non-profit organization, more than 100,000 people participate in its programmes each year, making BirdsCaribbean the most broad-based conservation organization in the region. You can learn more about its work, and how to join at: www.birdscaribbean.org

BirdsCaribbean, the region's largest ornithological society, meets for a conference every two years. Last month, 240 scientists, teachers and conservationists came together in

Cahow breeding season 2016-2017

Jeremy Madeiros

The 2016-2017 breeding season began in late October 2016, and ended on the night of 27/28th June, 2017, when the last Cahow chick fledged out to the open ocean. It nests on only 6 small islands totaling only 20 acres, in the Castle Harbour Islands Nature Reserve, where it is protected by wardens and is the subject of an intensive management program. The Cahow has continued its positive upward trend in both the number of established breeding pairs (117) and the number of successfully fledged chicks (61). In addition, a record number of over 10 newly prospecting pairs was recorded, most of which should produce their first eggs and come “on-line” as breeding pairs next season. When active management of the Cahow and its tiny offshore nesting islands began around 1960, the entire population consisted of only 17 to 18 breeding pairs, producing a total of only 7 to 8 chicks annually. The population faced many threats and challenges, including predation by introduced rats swimming out to the nesting islands, lack of suitable deep nesting cavities, nest competition by the larger White-tailed Tropicbird or Longtail, which took over nest burrows and killed the defenseless Cahow chicks, and light pollution from the nearby Naval Air Station (now Bermuda International Airport), which disrupts the night-flying Cahow and disorients the chicks when they depart to sea. Additionally, one of the major threats facing the Cahow has been erosion and damage to the breeding islands by repeated hurricanes. The islands’ small size also severely limits the number of breeding Cahows that can nest on them.

Jeremy Madeiros making a Cahow check at night on Nonsuch Is. *Photo Andrew Dobson*



To address this, one of the main objectives of the Cahow Recovery Program has been to establish new Cahow nesting colonies on larger islands that are safe from hurricane erosion and have more room to for Cahow population growth. Nonsuch Island was chosen as the site to establish a new Cahow nesting colony, as it is managed to exclude rats and other invasive species and is the site of a warden’s residence. Translocation is a technique in which chicks are removed from their original burrows on the

smaller islets and moved to artificial burrows on Nonsuch, where they are hand-fed daily and allowed to imprint on and fledge from their new site. Cahow chicks were moved for 5 years during 2004-2008 to Nonsuch and fed until they fledged to sea. This technique worked and almost half of the translocated birds returned 3 to 6 years later to choose nest burrows and mates. By 2017, the number of nesting pairs at this new colony site increased to 16, with 8 chicks fledging from this area. This project worked so well that in 2013 a second translocation program was started, to establish a second colony at a different location on Nonsuch. During the 2017 season, 14 Cahow chicks were translocated to Nonsuch, bringing the total number of chicks moved to this second site up to 65. In addition, during 2017 the first three Cahows moved to this site as chicks during 2013 and 2014 returned and started to occupy nest burrows at this second site, with one new pair confirmed. A second new colony is underway!

Other threats continue. Rats were eradicated by the use of rodenticide bait by November 2016, but this has highlighted the need for constant monitoring and vigilance to prevent further invasions by rats swimming out to the nesting islands. In addition, hurricane “Nicole” hit Bermuda directly in October 2016, submerging two of the smaller nesting islands but causing only limited damage. In early June 2017, one of the translocated chicks was stung to death by a swarm of honeybees that occupied its nest burrows, but this swarm was removed shortly after by the Government Agricultural Officer.

New hope for Bermuda's rarest seabird – the Bermuda Tern – following a 100% successful breeding season

David Wingate

Fourteen years after the disaster of hurricane Fabian in 2003, which nearly wiped out the local population of the globally distributed Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*, the continued impact of recurrent direct-hit hurricanes has prevented a recovery and reduced the population to a dangerous low of only three breeding pairs. This alarmingly small gene pool is especially worrying because intensive research including blood sampling and DNA analysis since 2003 has revealed that our population is in fact endemic and may even be regarded as a separate species because it differs in so many respects from other Common Tern populations. Therefore, it is a great relief to report a 100% successful breeding season this summer, thanks in large part to support and cooperation from Harbour Radio, the Marine Police and Bermuda's boating public who maintained a respectful distance from their vulnerable sign-posted breeding sites in St. Georges and Hamilton harbours and in the Little Sound. Two of these sites were abandoned ship-buoys dating from the period of U.S. navy occupation between 1941 and 1995, which had to be modified into mini islands by the addition of sand, perimeter rock barriers and shade covers.

Terns typically lay clutches of three eggs, and this summer a total of 9 young fledged successfully, all of which were ringed (banded) so that they can be individually identified in future if they survive, but sadly, unlike the situation with the Cahow, the matter of their survival is totally beyond our control. Every fall before they depart for their wintering grounds in South America they are subject to a game of Russian roulette, depending on how intense and how close each season's set of hurricanes comes to hitting us directly. Data from 45 years of monitoring has revealed that every time Bermuda is subject to a direct hit by a category 2 hurricane or higher, the entire fledgling crop and most, or all, of the male adults are wiped out. Partly for this reason the tern has never been very common on Bermuda. Over the last 50 years the maximum number of pairs was 35, attained in the early to mid-1980s at the end of a very long cycle of low hurricane activity in the Atlantic basin.

Interestingly, most of the adult females are spared because they migrate south before the main part of the hurricane season begins, leaving the task of feeding the fledged young to the males until they are strong enough to migrate south together in October. A few males always survive, however, because fledgling crops remain on the wintering grounds for their first summer. This was dramatically revealed in the nesting season a year after hurricane Fabian when 18 adult females from the previous season returned, but not a single male survived. A few males returned only in the second summer after Fabian. When males are absent, the females pair with each other, laying their three egg clutches together in one nest, but of course the 6 eggs are infertile and fail to hatch. As of this season there were still three infertile female/female pairs in the population on islets in Harrington Sound and only one new male returned to establish the new late-starting male/female pair that nested on the Little Sound ship buoy. Their chicks were the last to fledge just before the Cup Match holiday.



We can only pray now that no new hurricane will hit Bermuda this year to undo this small incremental step to recovery. It is quite possibly the last chance that this most beautiful and graceful addition to our summer harbour scene will have to survive. Each comprehensive survey of the widely scattered nesting terns on Bermuda involves more than 50 kilometres of boating in all kinds of weather, so as a Research Associate of the Bermuda Zoological Society I am grateful for their logistical support and especially grateful to Jessica and Will Cox of Pearman Watlington and company for donating the Boston Whaler, *Rare Bird 2*, that makes the monitoring surveys possible. Miguel Mejias and Lynn Thorne voluntarily assisted with most surveys and Lynn additionally documented the project with photographs. Miguel and his father also upgraded the St. Georges ship buoy to make it safe for nesting (See photo left. *Photo Lynn Thorne*)

Bird Report May to July 2017

Andrew Dobson

Highlights included the return of a Leach's Storm-Petrel to Nonsuch; the first July record of Killdeer; and the first May record of Iceland Gull.



A **Hooded Merganser** was once again summering in Bermuda, seen at Port Royal G.C. 1-31 Jul+ (AD). A **Pied-billed Grebe** summered at Somerset Long Bay NR (AD, DBW). There was record breaking success for the **Cahow** (Bermuda Petrel) with 117 pairs producing 61 fledglings (JM). A **Leach's Storm-Petrel** once again returned to a vacated Cahow nest burrow, being captured on a webcam 13 Jun-17 Jul (JM). A **Brown Pelican** was seen over the Little Sound 10 Apr (PA). An unusually late **Sora** was seen at Spittal Pond 1 Jun (SB). At least five **Black-necked Stilts** were present at

various locations 26 Apr-18 Jun (AD). A highly unusual record of five **Semipalmated Plovers** at Spanish Point 16 Jun-1 Jul was most intriguing as all appeared to be young birds (AD, PW). A returning **Killdeer** at Spittal Pond 28-31 Jul+ (MM) was the earliest ever recorded and the first July record. A **Wilson's Phalarope** was on Spittal Pond 25-28 May (AD). An **Iceland Gull** (see above) was a surprise at Port Royal G.C. 28 Apr-13 May (AD), the latest spring record. A **Roseate Tern** was once again with the local Common Terns 12-27 June (DBW). A single **Royal Tern** was in the Great Sound 27 May-3 Jun and 30 Jun (PW). A **Sandwich Tern** (see right) was off Dockyard 30 Jun-1 Jul (PW). Two **Common Nighthawks** were at Astwood Park 12 May (DBW). Nine **Chimney Swifts** were over Spittal Pond Farm 13 May (AD, PW). A **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was in Smiths Hill 7-8 Apr (AD). A drumming **Downy Woodpecker** was captured on video in Devonshire Marsh 22 Apr (MT). A **Purple Martin** at East End Dairy 31 July was much earlier than expected (AD, AMD, FD). A **Grey-cheeked Thrush** was a window fatality in Hamilton 22 May (DBW). A **Swainson's Thrush** (below right) at Seymour's Pond NR 30 Apr (AD). The first fall warbler noted was a **Louisiana Waterthrush** at Walsingham Bay 29 Jul (JM). A **Summer Tanager** (below left) was at Elm Lodge, Warwick 29-30 Apr (DBW). A **Dickcissel** was on Wreck Road 2 Apr (AD).



Observers: Peter Adhemar, Scott Baron, Andrew Dobson, Anna Dobson (AMD), Fiona Dobson, Jeremy Madeiros, Miguel Mejias, Murray Terceira, Paul Watson, David Wingate.

All photos: Andrew Dobson



Society News

Membership

Summer is nearly over. Have you renewed your Audubon membership for this year? Our membership year starts June 1st. Please go to <http://www.audubon.bm/join> for the details. If you are unsure of your membership status, please contact us at info@audubon.bm. Thank you for your support.

Future Events

Spittal Pond Fieldtrip

Saturday 2 September.

A guided bird walk at Spittal Pond as part of the World Shorebird Count. Meet at the eastern car park at 8:00am.

Harbour Cruise

Sunday 10th September

Fund-raising cruise around the harbour and islands on Michael Hayward's 'Explorer' on 7:00-9:00 pm. Departure from The Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club Cost: \$25 - members, \$30 - non-members. Bring your own picnic supper, we'll supply the wine! If you want to swim - come prepared. Email info@audubon.bm for reservations.

Paget Island Bird Camp

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 October.

Email info@audubon.bm for more details.

Cahow Field Trips November 2017

Sat 4th, Sun 5th, Fri 11th, Sat 11th, Sun 12th

- Do you want to see the Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) on the open ocean?
- The birds gather a couple of miles off-shore prior to coming into their burrows under cover of darkness.
- The best place to experience this amazing opportunity is off Cooper's Point in the late afternoon.
- Why November? Pairs of Cahows are performing courting displays and laying claim to their nesting burrows.

In a joint venture between the Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda Zoological Society, a maximum of 24 persons will board the 'Endurance'. Departure: 2pm Aquarium Dock. Return: 6.30pm Cost: \$50 per person which will include a donation to the Cahow Recovery Programme

To make a reservation, email info@audubon.bm

What's been happening?



The annual fieldtrip to Nonsuch Island was fully subscribed. Many thanks to Jeremy Madeiros and David Wingate for guiding the tour and sharing their knowledge. The Cahow encounter with Jeremy is always a highlight (see above). A journey to and from the island by working barge was new for most people! (see below)



Seri Fisher from Somerset Primary School was awarded the Audubon trophy for the best bluebird nest box at the Annual Agricultural Show. She was presented with the trophy by His Excellency the Governor at the Society's Annual General Meeting



Anna and Fiona Dobson give a presentation about the work of the Bermuda Audubon Society at the 21st Meeting of BirdsCaribbean at Topes de Collantes, Cuba