



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

Fall/Winter 2018

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Devonshire Marsh Fire Prevention Forum

Karen Border

Fire prevention in Devonshire Marsh was the subject of a forum for stakeholders organised by the Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda Fire Service in November. The forum, held at Hamilton Fire Station, followed up on the major wildfire in the marsh on 17 March this year which burned 30 acres of the 40-acre east basin of the marsh.

The event brought together landowners and business owners/managers in the marsh, including residents, industrial and commercial operations, and the two environmental organisations which own nature reserves in the marsh basin



– the Audubon Society and the Bermuda National Trust. Attendees learned how the changing ecology of the marsh has made it more fire-prone.

Alison Copeland, Biodiversity Officer at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, gave an overview on the ecology of the marsh and its importance as Bermuda’s largest wetland that was never used as a garbage dump. She explained that it was originally forested with cedars and palmettos, much like Paget Marsh. However cattle grazing, a major fire in 1914 and the cedar scale epidemic in the 1940s decimated the forest, changing the habitat of the central marsh to bracken and saw-grass savannah, which is very fire-prone. The last major fire prior to 2018 was in December 1996, which burned 20 acres.



Despite historic changes, Devonshire Marsh is still a vitally important wetland habitat for native and endemic plants, including the critically endangered endemic Ten Day Fern, and for birds such as herons, ducks, egrets and owls.



Showing drone footage taken soon after the fire (see left), Alison said that much of the vegetation had re-sprouted quickly and only a limited number of native specimens had been lost.

Fire officers spoke about the 17 March fire, how it progressed and how it was controlled, and went on to discuss fire prevention and what to do in the event of a fire. Local businesses have been offered on-site risk assessment and advice from the Fire Service.

Among the fire prevention options discussed was the reopening of the open-water ditch system through the marsh, which used to be maintained by the Department of Health for mosquito control. This would help to provide a fire-break and source of water for fire-fighting. Culling of invasive vegetation such as cow cane and Napier grass, especially in the vicinity of the buildings, was also advised.

Paget Island Bird Camp - October 12 -14

Paul Watson

Anticipation in advance of the annual bird camp is always thrilling - what will the weather bring? The week before was solid high pressure with a trickle of migrant birds, however the increase in winds on the Friday and an expected cold front on Saturday night trailing Hurricane Michael was expected to provide a good number of birds. We were not disappointed!

On Friday night the boat departed St Georges with seven members, with me and David Wingate attending in small boats. We were greeted on the island with purple martin and barn swallow flying around before dusk. Two hardy groups pitched tents on the lawn, the rest using the dormitories.

Saturday morning started off beautifully with a gorgeous sunrise, with Tree Swallow and Cedar Waxwing being the first migrant birds seen. A walk around the island produced six species of warbler, and great views of Northern Harrier. Having placed mist nets, the group got great views of Northern Waterthrush, the fall's first Blackpoll Warbler, Cardinal, Catbird and six Bluebirds, including one bird previously banded as a nestling in St. George's in May 2017. All were banded and released.

Ashore in St George's the group was joined by three more birders and started with great views of seven shorebird species including a lovely juvenile American Golden Plover, several Barn Swallows and Blackpoll warbler. The golf course was fairly quiet with 10 species of warblers being seen, but good views of Blue Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting were a highlight for many. Sitting outside for dinner back on the island we were rewarded with Common Nighthawk flying over the island, and a crystal clear night with lovely views of Mars, shooting stars and a near satellite which was likely the International Space Station. A total of 53 species was our second day tally.



The rain arrived, and boy did it arrive at 3:30 am Sunday, and continued through daybreak when buzzing Blackpoll Warblers(*photo left*) could be heard everywhere, then seen in every bush and tree, with an estimated 300 birds (likely undercounted) on the island alone. I had opened the mist nets for birds but was catching more than I could handle alone and had to close them

to stop being overwhelmed. An astounding three Connecticut Warblers were in the same net (*right, below*), six species of warbler, Indigo Bunting and 12 Blackpoll Warblers being caught immediately after opening the nets.

A walk around the island after breakfast just made the day better, with Summer Tanager, Peregrine Falcon, Philadelphia Vireo, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush and a likely Acadian Flycatcher. Warblers were literally everywhere especially Blackpoll. Eleven species of warbler, up to seven Eastern Wood Pewee, three Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager were amongst the 35 species seen on Sunday with the bird tally climbing to 67 species. A last opening and check of the mist nets before departure gave great views of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo in the hand which was then banded and released (*below*).



The return boat dropped the group back in St George's. Erich and I decided to check the golf course again and were astounded that Blackpoll warblers again were present in their hundreds, with 300+ in the area around the old Club Med hotel alone. An additional seven species were added to the tally, including a lovely Clay-coloured Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, four Northern Oriole, Bobolink, and Black-throated Green, Yellow, Nashville and Cape May warblers. All the bird sightings were recorded on e-bird.

Participants: David Wingate, Paul Watson, Karen and Alistair Border, Erich and Janice Hetzel, Joanne Smith, Claire McAndrew, James Keyes. Joined on Saturday by Lisa Greene, Devika and Peter Mather.

Bird Report August-November 2018

Janice Hetzel

Highlight birds include:

Marsh Wren (*photo right: Neil Morris*) seen first at Spittal Pond (17/11) by visiting birders, Nick Bonomo(NB) and Allison Black(AB). Eric Amos found the first (and only previous) record on January 24, 1996.

Red-breasted Nuthatch first seen by PW in St. Georges (29/10)

Northern Wheatear found by PW in his garden in St Georges (15/10)

Little Egret astutely identified by PW during our Spittal Pond (6/10) Field Trip.

Cedar Waxwings an impressive 49 were counted in Jennings Land by JM (18/11).



The fall migration was quite productive with Shorebirds and Terns continuing to arrive from July onward. These included Sandwich Tern (RD), seen off the north shore by a cruise ship passenger; Black Tern (AD), Common Tern (DW), White-rumped Sandpiper (IP), Piping Plover (NM), Ruff (PW & EH), and Buff-breasted Sandpiper (IP). Mid September brought a variety of flycatchers including Olive-sided



(NM), Yellow-bellied (PW), Acadian (PW) and several Willow/Alder. Sparrows arrived in September/October with Chipping (NM), Clay-colored (EH), White-crowned (PW & EH), Lincoln's (PW), Swamp(PW & EH) and White-throated (PW).

*Little Egret, seen on Spittal Pond field trip on 6 October.
Photo: Tim White*

We had a fortuitous fallout of Fall Migrants on 14/10 during our annual Paget Island Bird Camp. Over 250 Blackpoll warblers were seen on Paget Island and a similar number in St. Georges. On the same day a group of 26 Great Egret were photographed at Spittal Pond (TW).



Late October brought in a Red-breasted Nuthatch (PW) seen in St. Georges and another later in the Arboretum (**photo left: Tim White**).

Bermuda Petrels began to return to Bermuda one week early (26/10) for nest preparation and breeding. JM reports that we may have 131 pairs compared to the record breaking 124 breeding pairs of the last season. Numerous Cahows visible from Cooper's point

with a single sweep high count of 31 by DW (8/11). November's other notable sightings include Kingbird (EH), Yellow-breasted Chat (NM), Golden-crowned Kinglet (BD) and a Wilson's Warbler(BD). On 18/11, 10 Whimbrel were spotted at the airport (NB&AB)

Additional sightings from DW include: 1 Swainson's Warbler, Tudor Hill, (22/10); 4 migrant Common Tern, Harrington Sound (2-10/11); 1 Bonaparte's Gull, Harrington Sound (3/11); 1 Black-crowned Night Heron, Cloverdale (10/11); Black-bellied Whistling Duck, still at Somerset Long Bay Pond (13/11)

JM reports a Swainson's Thrush and Hermit Thrush first seen in his garden on 17/10 . Both still seen on 10/11. Hermit Thrush remains in garden currently (18/11). A Piping Plover was seen on Nonsuch beach 6/11 and 8/11.

Observers included Nick Bonomo (NB), Allison Black (AB), Paul Watson (PW), Rob Dickerson (RD), Anna Dobson (AD), Ingela Persson (IP), Neal Morris (NM), Erich Hetzel (EH), Tim White (TW), Jeremy Madeiros (JM), David Wingate (DW) and Bob Dawson (BD).

Society News

Bermuda's future energy plan submission

The Bermuda Audubon Society submitted a response to the Regulatory Authority of Bermuda consultation, supporting the Bermuda Better Energy Plan, as its focus on increased energy generation from renewable resources is a sustainable and environmentally responsible approach. However, we expressed concern about the potential negative impact of offshore wind turbines on bird life. Our support for the BBEP is provisional upon a comprehensive environmental impact survey being conducted for the proposed offshore wind farm, with the input of local and international seabird experts. We suggest a much greater focus on encouraging use of solar panels on Bermuda homes and businesses, while accepting that a small number of carefully sited offshore wind turbines may prove to be an environmentally tolerable addition to meet Bermuda's energy needs.



World Shorebird Day Field Trip to Spittal Pond, 8 September

Bluebird Boxes make great gifts!

Bluebird nest boxes (\$35) and kits (\$25) are available at Aberfeldy Nurseries. They kindly sell these for us and all of the proceeds go to Bermuda Audubon Society. For information on how to set up and manage your nest box go to: <http://www.audubon.bm/conservation/bluebird>. You can also contact Stuart Smith at the Bermuda Bluebird Society: smitty@logic.bm or 777-9856. Stuart offers a free service to install boxes on your property. He can also provide the pole (\$35) and the box (\$35).

Membership Renewal

It is renewal time! This year we changed our membership year to the calendar year. Everyone has had an extra six months for free and it is now time to renew. Consider giving your friends and relatives an Audubon Membership as a holiday gift. Membership information can be found at www.audubon.bm/join. If you are unsure of your membership status or have any questions, please contact us at info@audubon.bm or call Janice Hetzel on 236-4527.

Future Events

Christmas Bird Count

Saturday 29 December 2018

Count week is 26 December - 1 January. If you see any unusual birds during this time, please call 735-0441 or send an email to info@audubon.bm.

Volunteer Work Party and Nature Walk

Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve

Saturday 12 January 2019, 9:30 - 12:30

Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve

Bermuda Tern Recovery Project - Lecture by David Wingate & Erich Hetzel

Monday 28 January 2019, 7:30pm

BUEI Auditorium

Tickets - \$20 Members \$25 Non-Members

Sears Cave Tour and bird-watching field trip

Sunday 10 February 2019, 2:00pm

St. Mark's Road, Smith's Parish

Photography Club

Saturday 8 December 2018 Somerset Long Bay - 8:00am

Sunday 13 January 2019 Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve - 8:00am

This is a great opportunity to meet fellow photographers, share ideas, learn some tips and enjoy nature and birds. No photography experience necessary.