

Bermuda Audubon Society
NEWSLETTER
P. O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX

Vol.3 No.1
SPRING
1992

Sears Cave Nature Reserve

Sears Cave Nature Reserve is a small but interesting reserve in Smith's Parish. It forms the remains of a large cave chamber in which the roof has collapsed, exposing it to the elements. The resultant deep, steep-sided depression is an ideal habitat for ferns, being sheltered, shady and humid.

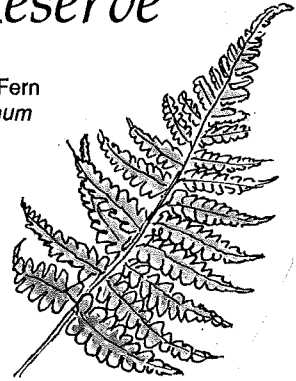
It is the location of the largest remaining colony of Cave Fern *Dryopteris speluncae*, a species found in only three other tiny locations on Bermuda. The Long Spleenwort *Asplenium heterochroum* is also present in small numbers. Large amounts of garbage dumped in the cave in the past have now mostly been removed, making the site an ideal location for establishing a botanical reserve containing many of Bermuda's upland fern species.

Ferns which could be re-introduced into the cave include the endemic Bermuda Shield Fern *Dryopteris bermudiana* and Governor Laffan's Fern *Diplazium laffanianum*, and the native Toothed Spleenwort *Asplenium dentatum* and Plume Polypody *Polypodium plumula*.

Sears Cave is also interesting in that it may have been a roosting or nesting site for Bermuda's only resident breeding bird of prey, the Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. At present, a wild hive of honey bees *Apis mellifera* make their home in the upper reaches of the cave.

Jeremy Madeiros

Governor Laffan's Fern
Diplazium laffanianum



Sears Cave is a gift from the Trott family in memory of Sir Howard and Lady Trott.

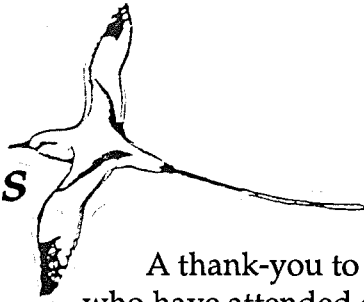
It will be opened officially on

Sunday

5th April at 2 pm.

All members are cordially invited to attend the opening. The reserve can be reached from South Shore Road, turn onto St. Mark's Road and take the first right only 100 meters after St. Mark's Church. The reserve is another 100 metres on the left.

Audubon News



Much management work has been carried out on the Society's reserves over the winter months. Conservation crews from the Dept. of Agriculture & Fisheries have carried out much clearance work at Stokes Point Reserve, where new planting has been undertaken, including ten Yellow-woods (See Audubon Newsletter Fall 1991). The Sears Cave fencing work was finally completed and all members are invited to the official opening of this new reserve on Sunday, April 5th (see article by Jeremy Madeiros). The greatest face-lift has occurred at our Somerset Long Bay Reserve (see article by David Wingate).

A thank-you to those members who have attended our functions this year. Twenty-five members explored Walsingham on a field trip in January - a fascinating look at its flora, but the highlight was a Northern Harrier (bird of prey) flying overhead.

In February, four Audubon members treated an audience at Horticultural Hall to a slide show featuring at least 150 species of birds that visit Bermuda.

We hope you will join us at our forthcoming events later in the year.

Bermuda Audubon Society

HOTLINE

236-6483

to report any environmental problems especially in relation to birds.

Bermuda Audubon Society Committee 1991 -1992

PRESIDENT

David Wingate

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Ted Cassidy

SECRETARY

Andrew Dobson

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Jeremy Madeiros

David O'Neill

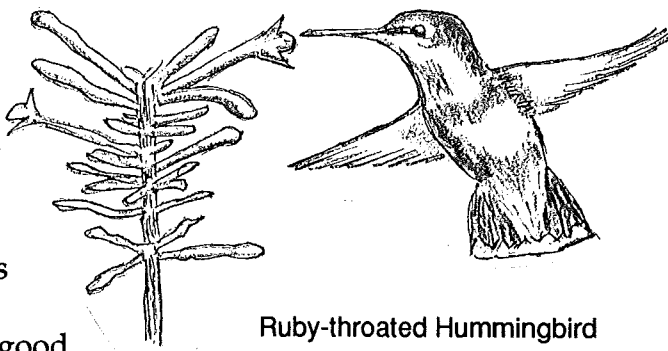
Jean Pennington

Helge Trapnell

Christmas Bird Count

The 17th Bermuda CBC was held on December 14th, with Eric Amos organising twelve observers into five groups, each covering a separate part of the Island. With a good number of birders 'out in the field', it is not surprising that the large total of 9,329 individual birds (of 94 species) was well above the 17 year average of 5,700 birds (of 85 species).

Steven DeSilva and Roger Simmons, covering the Port Royal/Hog Bay area, found the bird of the day, and a new species for the Count - a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, which had delayed its migration southwards for long enough to be counted! The Pectoral Sandpiper at Warwick Pond, seen by Eric Amos, was also new for our CBC. Eric's sighting of a Piping Plover at Dockyard was an addition to the two seen at the eastern end of the Island by David Wingate and Jeremy and Leila Madeiros. Like the Cahow, it is also an endangered species of bird in the world. Bermuda used to be an important wintering ground for the Piping Plover, but now they are few and far between. The same story is also true for another shorebird, the Sanderling. Penny Soares, Andrew and Katrina Dobson managed to find one Sander-



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

ling amongst the Ruddy Turnstones along South Shore. The fifth group of Paul Watson, David and Valerie Wallace also turned up some good birds including the only sightings of our two feral populations of Common Waxbill and Orange-cheeked Waxbill.

The results of our CBC are sent to the National Audubon Society in New York. With similar counts being carried out in Northern, Central and even South America, trends in bird populations can be monitored. The latest CBC in Bermuda revealed that House Sparrows, Starlings and Kiskadees are the most common birds. Although that was of no surprise, it was pleasing to see that record CBC Counts were made for Bluebirds and Chick-of-the-Village (White-eyed Vireo). Some birds were notable by their absence this winter - no Great Egret or Cattle Egret.

Unfortunately, a rare Ruby-throated Hummingbird seen at Wreck Road a few days before the Count, failed to show up!

CONTINUED....

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Cont'd.

Even Audubon members who know their garden birds might find it hard to believe that over the seventeen CBCs in Bermuda, a total of 182 species have been recorded.

Andrew Dobson

The 1991/1992 Winter in Bermuda

A mild December brought very few wildfowl or gull species to Bermuda, but there were one or two, or should I say, three surprises.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird is a very rare visitor to our islands, with only about eight records before 1991. On 2nd November, twelve year old Alex Smith convinced his parents that he had seen one in the garden of his Paget home. Although elusive, it returned to feed regularly on a bush of Red Justicia and gave very good views to quite a number of people. The appearance of a second at Wreck Road and a third in Paget Marsh has prompted the Audubon Society to buy a hummingbird feeder - a common sight in American gardens. So if you see a hummingbird - give us a call and borrow the feeder!

Three Northern Gannets were equally unexpected. This North Atlan-

tic seabird rarely travels this far south in the winter (only five previous records). All the birds were young ones, and unfortunately two were picked up ill and later died at the Aquarium. The third was frequently seen diving for fish along the North Shore and has hopefully returned northwards by now.

Our third surprise, but only one individual, was our first wintering Brown Pelican - featured on the front page of the 'Royal Gazette', but very elusive until it was found using a regular buoy to perch on in Jews Bay and was still present in early March.

Stormy weather in January brought an influx of gulls, especially Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, but did little to increase a very poor season for duck species. The only goose of the winter was found on Mid-Ocean Golf Course, a Canada Goose. Small numbers of most heron and egret species were supplemented by two Glossy Ibises, which roosted regularly at Cloverdale. A single Northern Harrier and Short-eared Owl were the highlights amongst the birds of prey. Lucky sightings for some included Western Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Flicker, Northern Shrike and Pine Siskin. More than twenty species of warbler have remained in Bermuda this winter, in fact, twenty-one were recorded on the Christmas Bird Count.

Andrew Dobson

SOMERSET LONG BAY RESERVE

gets some much needed attention

The Somerset Long Bay Nature Reserve is one of the Society's more challenging, but successful accomplishments in wetland restoration. The project was initiated in 1971 when an abandoned garbage dump site behind Somerset Long Bay beach was offered to the Society on very generous terms by Mr. Harvey Gilbert. At the same time adjacent land to the East was being acquired by Government for use as a public beach park. Harvey Gilbert's land included only half of the abandoned dumpsite and beach, however.

In order to obtain the ecological unit within which a comprehensive restoration could be initiated it was first necessary to acquire the remaining filled marshland. Thanks to the cooperation of Mr. Fred Yearwood, this was finally achieved by purchase in 1972.

Work on the restoration of the marshland which had once existed behind the beach began in 1973 under contract with Mr. Joe DeCosta. Over the course of several months a backhoe was used to excavate the pond, leaving islands where healthy stands of mangroves had survived. The excavated material, consisting of a mixture of bottles, rusted metal, rubble, soil and peat was reworked to form a level dyke

and field area north and east of the new one acre pond site. The end result brought several happy surprises. First, the open water and mangroves created an aesthetically pleasing landscape.

Secondly, the pond turned out to be a fresh rather than brackish water, despite its proximity to the beach, and soon developed the richest freshwater marsh community in Bermuda with abundant wigeon grass *Ruppia maritima*, fish and invertebrate life to support waterfowl. Moorhens colonized the pond within two years and began nesting in safety from predators on the mangrove islands. These were soon joined by nesting American Coots in 1983, and by 1985 there were three pairs of each species. Also in 1985 a pair of Pied-billed Grebe began nesting - only the second recorded nesting of this species on Bermuda!

Thirdly, even the field area created out of the re-worked fill turned out to be exceptionally good habitat for Grosbeaks, Buntings and Flycatchers. Some of Bermuda's most extraordinary records in the latter category have been made here vis. Dusky Flycatcher from Siberia, on September 29, 1980; Forktail Flycatcher from South America in May 1986 and a Western Kingbird wintering in 1990-91.

SOMERSET LONG BAY RESERVE cont'd.

This is not to say that there were no teething problems. Soon after its initial excavation by backhoe, it became apparent that the pond was too shallow and would soon be choked by the aggressive Sheathed Paspalum grass. We also received complaints from neighbours about mosquitoes, although it turned out the main source of these was a corner of the original dumpsite under the mangroves which had not been included in the pond. Within the pond itself the introduced top-minnow *Gambusia affinis* achieved total control except where the sheathed paspalum was too thick. In order to rectify this problem a decision was made to deepen the pond, using a crane and dragline instead of a backhoe. The work was carried out in August 1979. It was following this second stage of the project that the pond attained its maximum richness and diversity with three nesting species of waterfowl.

Unfortunately, despite these successes, some problems have defied us or have been beyond our control. Because of the location of the reserve between a public beach and a densely populated residential area, there is a lot of human activity, especially in the summer. Bottle collectors have been a thorny problem, continually digging up and exposing glass in areas which have been landscaped and planted. Illegal dumping especially of horticultural waste continues to be a problem; as is roadside littering. Just as bad is the trash which washes ashore as flotsam on the beach. It was in order to control illegal dumping in particular, that a perimeter chainlink fence was erected around the reserve in 1985.

On September 25, 1987 hurricane Emily overwashed the beach and flooded the pond with saltwater, knocking down the beachside fence in the process. The salination of the pond was a major setback for the waterfowl, eliminat-

ing the nesting Grebes and reducing the Coots to one pair again. It has taken several years for the pond community to recover again.

Over the years heavy pruning by Belco and Telco work crews to accommodate overhead wires along Daniels Head Road has caused serious damage to the Black Mangroves. In an effort to rectify this problem the Society persuaded Belco to relocate the wires which had been routed over the Audubon Reserve to the "Penguins" property in September 1989. In that same year a persistent problem from children building bridges across the water to one of the nesting islets induced the Society to widen the pond on the Southern side.

The public does not generally appreciate that more than two thirds of the length of Somerset Long Bay beach is owned by the Society, though maintained by Government as a part of the public beach park. As a result of this relationship with Government, the Society has recently benefitted from a Government employment-incentive work crew under the direction of the Conservation Division. Between early January and February of this year, the crew carried out a much needed fence repair and tidy-up operation on the beachside and roadside of the reserve. This work included the removal of a large clump of Scotsman's Purse hibiscus and other invading exotic species of vegetation and the removal of an enormous quantity of illegally dumped garbage and hurricane destroyed vegetation. This was followed up by extensive replanting with native and/or salt tolerant trees and shrubs, including Southern Hackberry, Cedar, Palmetto and Pittosporum as well as Natal Plum. Although the newly repaired fencing will look a little raw and ugly until the new plantings conceal it, the recent work has opened up a magnificent new vista of the pond from the road.

David B. Wingate
President

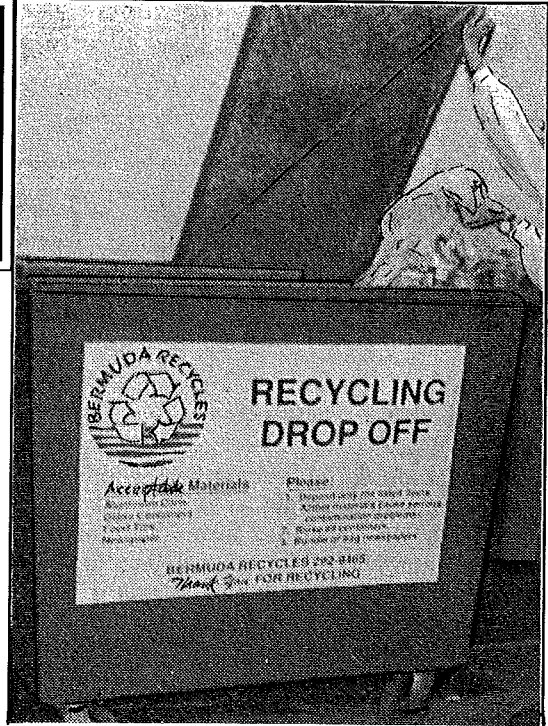
RECYCLING

The Audubon Society encourages you to recycle your waste products ...

RECYCLING BINS

for aluminium and steel cans (shipped to the US for recycling), glass (ground up for local use in construction material), and newspaper and cardboard (to provide livestock bedding or compost)
They are located at the following locations:

- ST GEORGE'S: Old Military Road bus depot
- ST. DAVID'S: Post Office
- SHELLY BAY: MarketPlace
- SMITH'S: A-One Supermarket
- DEVONSHIRE: Lindo's Supermarket
- PEMBROKE: National Tennis Stadium
- PEMBROKE: Miles Supermarket
- SPANISH POINT: Admiralty House Park
- PAGET: Modern Mart
- WARWICK: Giant Food Store
- SOUTHAMPTON: Heron Bay MarketPlace
- SOUTHAMPTON: Next to Port Royal Fire Station
- SANDYS: Somerset MarketPlace
- DOCKYARD: WEDCO entrance



HOW TO USE THE RECYCLING BINS:

GLASS: Glass jars, bottles and jugs of any colour and size are accepted. They should be rinsed and caps and lids should be removed. Paper labels may be left on but styrofoam wrap found on some drink bottles should be removed. **DO NOT** include window glass, light bulbs or ceramics.

CANS: Aluminium and steel cans from food and beverages are accepted. They should be rinsed and labels should be removed.

NEWSPAPER: Newspapers should be bundled with string or put in a paper bag. Do not include magazines or glossy paper

Membership Application

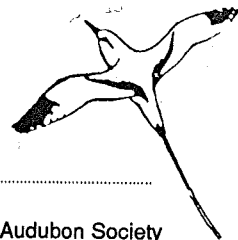
Name

Address

..... Tel. No.

- Adult\$ 5.00
- Student\$ 2.50
- Life \$ 100
- Patron \$ 250

Please send to: Bermuda Audubon Society
 P.O. Box HM 1328 Hamilton HMF



COMING EVENTS:

Sunday
APRIL 5

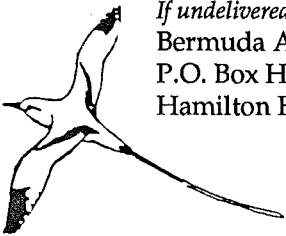
SEARS CAVE OFFICIAL OPENING AND TOUR
TIME: 2 p.m.
PLACE: Sears Cave

Wednesday
JUNE 10

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Followed by a slideshow on "Galapagos"
given by Patricia Allen and Paul Watson.
TIME: 7:30 p.m.
PLACE: Horticultural Hall (Botanical Gardens)

Sunday
JULY 19

NONSUCH ISLAND FIELD TRIP & BARBECUE
TIME: 9:30 a.m. or/1:30 p.m.
PLACE: Boat leaves from Tuckers Town dock



If undelivered please return to:
Bermuda Audubon Society
P.O. Box HM 1328
Hamilton HM FX