

Bermuda Audubon Society

Vol.3 No.3

NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX

FALL

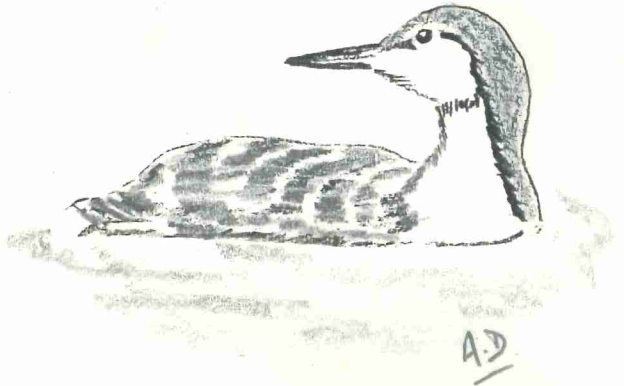
1992

New to Bermuda

PACIFIC LOON

A Loon species was first observed by Audubon member Emma Holmes (aged 11) close to the shore at Grape Bay on 21 August. Two days later, this obviously sick bird was taken from Ariel Sands beach to the Aquarium where it later died in captivity.

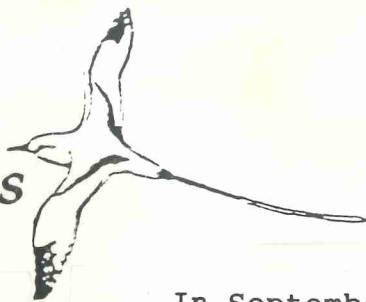
Initially identified as Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*) - this species has recently been split into Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) and Arctic Loon. The Arctic Loon breeds in northern Europe and Asia and the nearest population would be on the other side of the Atlantic. The Pacific Loon breeds on lakes of north Canadian woods and tundra. It winters on the Pacific coast as far south as Mexico. Individuals have been observed on the Atlantic coast of Canada and the U.S.A. and even as far south as Texas.



Both species of Loon are very similar in all plumages. Our Loon was in non-breeding plumage - a two-tone grey and white. The diagnostic 'chin-strap' marking on its throat almost certainly makes it a Pacific Loon (generally lacking in Arctic Loon). Only the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) had been recorded in Bermuda before, so the Pacific Loon is a new record for Bermuda, even if we can only speculate as to why it got lost!

Andrew Dobson

Audubon News



On 19th July, over 120 members and friends came to the annual Nonsuch Island Open Day - plenty of sun, swimming, food, tours of the island and great views of the 'Round-the-Island' boat race. A hearty thank-you to all the volunteers - Ted Cassidy, Jeremy Madeiros and David Wingate for boat transportation - David O'Neill and Ann Beaton for cooking over the barbecue - Jean Pennington for doing a great job in collecting just over \$1400 - and Penny Soares for helping me with the lunch. We couldn't have done it without everyone's help in making it such a successful fund-raiser. Special mention must also go to John Barritt & Sons Ltd., Lindo's Supermarket and J.S.Vallis for all their help with provisions.

At the end of August 30 members were up early to enjoy a Sunday morning walk around Spittal Pond. Our reward for missed sleep was a Wilson's Phalarope swimming near the round pond - not to mention the four dozen doughnuts, iced tea and juice!

In September our guest speaker was Steven DeSilva, local naturalist and member of the Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Parks conservation crew. He gave a delightful illustrated talk on his ongoing field study of Bluebirds in Bermuda. Steven and his wife, Donna, have since attended the annual North American Bluebird Society conference in Minnesota.



Black-and-White Warbler
- trapped at Paget Is.

Photo: Peter Holmes.

Most recently, 18 members enjoyed a 'Birders' Weekend' on Paget Island from 2nd to 4th October. Lovely weather gave us the opportunity of field trips to St. Georges Golf Course (to look for birds, not birdees!), Ferry Reach Park, Stokes Point Nature Reserve, and Great and Little Head Park at St. David's. Mist nets were erected on the island to catch birds. Three warbler species were caught - Black-and-white Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler and Ovenbird, which were studied in the hand and banded before being released. Birds of the weekend were undoubtedly Golden-winged Warbler and a

stunning all red Summer Tanager. Congratulations to David Wallace for guessing closest to the number of bird species seen - 54! Many thanks to Andrew Dobson for his terrific slide show on New Zealand and Paul Watson for his journey through British Columbia. A big 'thank-you' goes to Felicity, Peter and Emma Holmes for organising the catering. It was a great weekend and it's hoped to repeat it again next year - there are even demands for a birding trip overseas!

Leila Madeiros



Audubon members de-burr themselves after walking through a weedy field in successful search of Blue Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings and Bobolinks.

Photo: Peter Holmes.

SUCCESSFUL NESTING SEASON FOR THE YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

Jeremy Madeiros

In a time of often gloomy environmental news, it is encouraging that one bird species is doing quite well on Bermuda. The island's resident population of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax violaceus*) seems to have had a successful breeding season, and continues its westward expansion along the South Shore, with nesting being observed at new locations.

The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron is the only species of heron that breeds at present on Bermuda. It feeds primarily on Red Land Crab (*Gecarcinus lateralis*), which is very common along the south and west shores. These large birds are grey with black and white head markings as adults, and a mottled brown when immature. They are often seen standing or hunting for crabs on beaches, parkland and other open areas. Spittal Pond, Tucker's Town and the Castle Harbour islands are the best locations to observe these birds.

An endemic form of this heron once lived in Bermuda, as is evident from fossil remains found in caves on the island. It had either disappeared by the time of

human colonization, or more likely became extinct soon after the effects of hunting and introduced dogs, cats and rats.

The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was re-introduced to Bermuda between 1976-78 by Government Conservation Officer - Dr. David Wingate. Some 40 juvenile Night-Herons were transported from a large heron rookery at Tampa Bay, Florida, and raised until self-sufficient on the Nonsuch Island Living Museum. Within three years nesting was observed at the Walsingham Reserve on the opposite side of Castle Harbour. By the mid-1980's they were also nesting on Nonsuch Island itself, which has since become the main focus of nesting in Bermuda. During 1992, active nests were observed in at least six different locations, including the mangrove forests surrounding Trott's Pond and Mangrove Lake. In addition, possible nesting activity was observed as far west as Hungry Bay and Grape Bay, Paget. Nonsuch Island was the site for at least 12 active nests. With an average of two or three chicks being raised in each nest, a large number of newly fledged juvenile herons could be seen around the two

ponds on Nonsuch by mid-summer. For example, on 8th August, a total of 28 Night-Herons were observed around these ponds, including 18 recently fledged juveniles!

The nesting season begins around the middle of March, when courtship "whoop" calls are first heard and nest building starts. Egg-laying and incubation begins around mid-April, and the first young fledge by the first or second week of July. Most of these young herons should survive, provided that regular rainfall keeps the Land Crabs active. Long dry periods can however contribute to increased

mortality. On the whole, however, the species seems to be doing well on Bermuda.

Most herons and egrets are colonial nesters, and many regularly visit Bermuda during the winter months. Some, such as the Great Blue Heron, even regularly spend the summer months on the island. It is hoped that the presence of nesting Yellow-crowned Night-Herons will eventually stimulate some of these other spectacular waterbirds to consider Bermuda as a nesting site. This would certainly be a real bonus to birding on the island!

Bermuda Audubon Society

HOTLINE

236-6483

to report any environmental
problems especially in relation to
birds.

**Bermuda Audubon Society
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The 1992 Fall in Bermuda

by Andrew Dobson

The fine summer weather that has persisted right into October, with temperatures regularly over 80 degrees, has not brought us the eagerly awaited large numbers of migrants. Few frontal systems moving off the States, light winds and a lack of rainfall have prevented drift migrants from reaching Bermuda. The regular migrants have simply flown directly south without the need for a breather! Nevertheless, most of the expected migrants have arrived, even if in smaller numbers.

Not until August was the shorebird migration really underway. Spittal Pond was a favoured location early on, but good numbers were also to be found on mats of floating algae at Bartram's Pond (Stokes Point Nature Reserve) and Belmont golf course pond. The small 'peeps' or sandpipers were represented by Semipalmated, Least, White-rumped and occasional Western Sandpipers. Pectoral Sandpipers were noticeably down in number, but at least four Willets gave people the chance to see this large shorebird with striking black and white wings in flight.

The lack of fresh water habitat makes even a temporary pond or puddle worth visiting. Golf course ponds provide an oasis for some birds, so it

was no surprise to see twelve species of shorebird at Southampton Princess Pond. Some shorebirds actually prefer large areas of cut low grass. The Civil Air Terminal is one of the few places that provides this undisturbed habitat (they get used to the aircraft!). Both of the hoped for species - Upland Sandpiper and Buff-breasted Sandpiper put in an appearance here, accompanying Black-bellied Plovers, Lesser Golden Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones and Whimbrels. (One of the Whimbrels had a white rump, showing it to be of the European race).

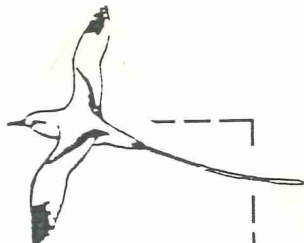


Wilson's Phalaropes were seen at Spittal Pond, Belmont G.C., and Southampton Princess Pond.

The main warbler migration starts in September - but although nearly all species have appeared, numbers have been very poor. By mid-October, 35 of the 38 warbler species ever recorded in Bermuda had been recorded. Most birders did see Golden-winged warbler, one of the most striking of our visitors. A female bird on St. George's golf course on 28 August proved to be the earliest record. A Kentucky Warbler, normally very secretive, showed well for over a week in Flatts. A confiding American Redstart spent the morning of 13 October flycatching in the biology laboratory at Warwick Academy. Despite all windows and doors being wide open, it preferred to stay in the confines of the room, giving classes a great opportunity for a behavioural study.

There has been a scattering of other usual migrants, including ospreys, peregrines, merlins, thrushes, tanagers, grosbeaks, orioles and bobolinks. The Fall always produces some surprises - and this year was no exception. Bermuda's first record of Pacific Loon (see separate article) and a Yellow-green Vireo (a sub-species of Red-eyed Vireo) which rarely ventures further north than Texas!

Late news once again concerns a lone Magnificent Frigatebird riding majestically on the wind over Hamilton Harbour on 18 October and a Brown Creeper at Port Royal Golf Course.



Membership / Subscription Renewal

Name

Address

..... Tel. No.

- Adult \$ 10.00
- Student \$ 5.00
- Donation \$

- Existing Member
- New Member

Please send to: *Bermuda Audubon Society, P.O. Box HM 1328 Hamilton HMFX*

DATE	EVENT	TIME	PLACE
NOV 15	FIELD TRIP Hog Bay Reserve	2.00pm.	Meet at reseve entrance (238-3239 for more details)
NOV 26	SLIDESHOW "ALASKA - WILDLIFE" by Jim Simmen	7.30pm.	Horticultural Hall (Botanical Gardens)
DEC	CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT	To be announced	
Jan 17	FIELD TRIP Stokes Point Reserve	2.00pm.	Meet at reseve entrance (238-3239 for more details)



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