



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

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 1993

Christmas Bird Count 1992

Bermuda took part in the 93rd North American National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count - the 18th CBC for Bermuda. To be held on one date between 17th December and 3rd January, we opted for 17th December and eleven of us tried to record every single bird we saw. Blessed with a warm, dry day and only light easterlies, we managed a total of 92 species.

Many records were broken - not least the total number of birds counted on the day - 10,222 - even though this may be largely explained by an increasing number of observers. For the first time we had six groups, enabling greater coverage of all areas. Therefore, it wasn't a surprise that the highest counts were made for nineteen species (see Table).

Highlights included the first winter record for Scarlet Tanager, found by Andrew Harford and Paul Watson at Admiralty Park. Eric Amos's American Woodcock at Paget Marsh was also an extremely good find. Of twenty warbler species recorded, five had their highest ever counts, including an astonishing 96 Northern Waterthrush.

Most disappointing was the failure to see Gryffalcon or Ruby-throated Hummingbird - both would have been new CBC records for Bermuda. More alarming is the continued decline of water species, notably ducks and coots.

Andrew Dobson

(* = highest CBC)

TOP SPECIES	NUMBER
European Starling	2688 *
House Sparrow	2102
Great Kiskadee	1214 *
Mourning Dove	820 *
Eurasian Goldfinch	430 *
Rock Dove	299
Mallard	264 *
Grey Catbird	228 *
Yellow-rumped Warbler	212
White-eyed Vireo	206 *
Northern Cardinal	175 *
American Crow	170
Common Ground Dove	145
Ruddy Turnstone	144
Eastern Bluebird	111
Ring-billed Gull	110
Northern Waterthrush	96 *

Other species with highest CBC counts:

Cape May Warbler	23 *
Northern Parula	23 *
Belted Kingfisher	21 *
Prairie Warbler	17 *
Orange-cheeked Waxbill	16 *
Wood Duck	5 *
Yellow-throated Warbler	5 *
Northern Oriole	4 *
Spotted Sandpiper	3 *
Scarlet Tanager	1 *

The 1992/ 93 Winter in Bermuda

The period up to Christmas was very quiet, however, the inclement weather of January and February brought us increased numbers of seabirds. Seasonal highlights included Gyrfalcon, Brown Booby, Iceland and Franklin's Gulls.

Small numbers of Double-crested Cormorants have been roosting at both the east and west ends of the island. A Cormorant roost on Gurnet Rock was recorded for the first time. Small numbers of visiting herons and egrets have been present, only one Cattle Egret, and Green-backed Heron was totally absent. Yellow-crowned Night Herons have been doing very well with as many as 18 and 15 in roosts at Spittal Pond and Waterville Park respectively. The two Glossy Ibises, which arrived in 1991, never migrated in 1992 and are still with us. They have now been joined by a third bird and it will be interesting to see whether it persuades the other two to migrate in the spring!

This has been another disappointing winter for wildfowl. No geese have arrived, and the total number of visiting ducks is probably less than fifty, of which half are Blue-winged Teal.

Birds of prey have included one or two Ospreys and Kestrels, a single Northern Harrier and several Merlins. But THE bird of the winter was undoubtedly the Gyrfalcon, an Arctic breeder (see separate article), which incredibly was viewed on the same day as a Brown Booby (normally found in the tropics).

Shorebird species have been dominated by the usual wintering Black-bellied Plovers, Killdeer (over 100 at the airport) and Ruddy Turnstones. Only one Piping Plover (an increasingly endangered species) has wintered at Dockyard. Two Least Sandpipers have been seen at the east end, and an American Woodcock has been present, but elusive, in Paget Marsh.

Gull numbers have continued to increase with storms in January and February. Of about 300 gulls present, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls dominate, but good records this year have included Iceland Gull, Franklin's Gull (only the 4th record) and at least three Black-legged Kittiwakes. The Royal Terns and a Forster's Tern have been seen regularly fishing from the Dockyard jetty.

Of the passerines, there have been few surprises, although the birds need searching out - such as Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Dark-eyed Junco, Snow Bunting and Northern Oriole. Jeremy and Leila

Madeiros were thrilled to see a Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding in their garden the day after they returned from the Antarctic!

If you or one of your friends sees a hummingbird in their garden - call the Audubon Hotline (293-7394) and ask to

borrow the hummingbird feeder. With more birders on the island seeing an increasing variety of birds (there were even reports of a Bald Eagle and Mockingbird this winter) - feel free to phone in your sightings to the Hotline or call me at:

238 - 3239.

Andrew Dobson

Gyrfalcon 92!

A story of coincidence, luck, cooperation, determination and reward ...

My story begins at a party for birders hosted by Peter and Felicity Holmes. Among other party games, we were asked what the next new record for Bermuda would be. The subject had actually been on my mind for some time because new records are few and far between for aging birders who have reached the 300 Club* on Bermuda. There just aren't many options.

**Those who have personally recorded over 300 species on Bermuda*

Nevertheless, one bird had been on my mind for some time. Back in the early '50's, when I was just a beginner, Louis Mowbray had told me about a wintering Gyrfalcon and I may actually have seen it over the Mid-Ocean Golf Course when a Merlin flew over followed by a huge falcon! Not only did this species seem a likely candidate for a repeat record, but 40 years later it seemed well overdue. Inspired by weather forecasts of a colder than usual winter, I focused on arctic vagrants and opted for Gyrfalcon. It was only a game after all!

November 25, 1992 was a landmark day because it marked the end of a major project of casuarina topping on Castle

Membership Application

Name

Address

..... Tel. No.

Adult\$ 10.00

Student\$ 5.00

Patron \$ 250

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

Gyr Falcon 92 cont'd.

Island. Steve DeSilva had spent most of the day swinging from a rope removing seedling casuarinas from the cliff and I broke off to make a check of the Cahow Islands.

For some reason I decided to return around the north side of Nonsuch Island even though it was not the most direct route back to Castle Island. As I passed under the cliffs, the silhouette of a large bird perched on the clifftop caught my eye. My first thought was pigeon -as they have begun to colonize the cliff and often perch there. But this was no pigeon! My next reaction was that this was very late for a Peregrine, the other cliff-rooster regularly seen on Nonsuch in October. Besides, it did not flush warily like Peregrines usually do. I circled back, drifted in for a closer view and gasped in disbelief. Had my prediction come true or was I hallucinating? It was a Gyr Falcon, alright: large size, uniformly pale grey plumage heavily speckled with white and bland head pattern lacking the Peregrine's black cheek patches but sporting a bold grey and white pattern on the back of the neck instead.

My first thought, as soon as I was satisfied of my identification, was to fetch Steven. By this time he was already heading ashore with the Conservation Crew but I caught up with him at Tuckers Town dock just in time. It took little persuading to get him to accompany me back to Nonsuch! This time we drifted in

for a really close view and got to see the broad wings and stiff slow-motion wingbeat as the bird flushed and flew around the corner of the island to land again on the northern extremity of the island. It seemed very tired as if just arrived and, hoping that it might settle for the night, we decided to hold back and observe it by telescope instead, hoping that we might be able to notify other birders to come right away. As it happened I was only able to contact Eric Amos immediately and with great care we were able to fetch him by boat without flushing the bird. We watched it until dusk, satisfied it was going to remain overnight.

Now the telephone began in earnest. There were at least 10 keen birders on the island who, we knew, would give anything to see such a rarity. By 10 p.m. all had agreed to meet the boat at Tuckers Town dock well before sunrise.

As dawn broke the next morning, no less than 4 telescopes and 10 pairs of binoculars were straining into the blackness from Nonsuch dock. There were several false calls as patches of white began to resolve themselves on the face of the cliff, but finally the real thing was visible exactly where we had last seen it the night before. As the first rays of sun began to cast a pink glow, our magnificent prize began to wake up, preen and stretch its wings. At 7:30 a.m. precisely it took off and flew directly north to the

Base, landing for a while in a tall casuarina. Ten happy birders re-grouped at Nonsuch house for coffee and doughnuts. It was a birding experience none of us will ever forget!

As it turns out, we were incredibly lucky. While I had hoped and expected that this bird would stay for the winter, it proved to be extraordinary elusive. After three days without further sightings, Eric and myself followed a hunch based on habitat preferences and relocated it sitting on a bunker on a remote part of the airport on November 19. That same afternoon Penny Soares saw it

soaring over Spittal Pond. It was back on Nonsuch cliff again on December 10 when I was able to point it out to a Canadian naturalist tour group from the 'Northern Ranger.' Incredibly, a Brown Booby flew by at the same moment. Since then there have been two further unconfirmed sightings: A golfer reported a large falcon which snatched a Kiskadee off Castle Harbour Golf Course on December 13. It may have moved to Hamilton Harbour Islands because Peter Holmes reported a large falcon, probably this species on December 26.

David B. Wingate

Proposal for a Pond within a Pond!

When the Society restored Bartram's Pond on its Stokes Point Nature Reserve in St. George's by dredging out the fill from an old garbage dump in the early 1980's, the salinity of the pond water turned out to be higher than expected. Although the food supply there is now excellent, the pond remains under-utilized by water birds because many species, especially ducks, require fresh water for drinking. How to solve this problem? After much thought we have finally come up with a solution. When the pond was recreated, we deliberately left an island in the middle to serve as a potential nesting site safe from cat predation. We are now proposing to make a small freshwater pond in the centre of this island by excavating a depression

and laying down an impermeable pond liner. Work began on this project in late December, when self-seeded casuarinas and other exotic vegetation were removed from the islet leaving only the two species of mangroves which have self-seeded around its shoreline. We are now proposing a work party of Audubon volunteers to complete this project. If the idea works, we will have achieved something truly unique in the field of wetland restoration.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
at Bartram's Pond on
Saturday, FEBRUARY 27
9 a.m. to 1 pm.
Tools provided. Wear old clothes

Audubon News

SLIDESHOW FALKLAND ISLANDS

and
ANTARCTICA

by Jeremy and Leila Madeiros
THURSDAY

4 MARCH

7:30 pm

Bermuda High School

Advance Tickets available from:

Bermuda Jewellery Centre

Washington Mall \$5

Bermuda Audubon Society

HOTLINE

293 7394

to report any environmental
problems especially in relation to
birds.

WANTED

The Society is in need of a

FILING CABINET

If you know of one being
thrown out - we would like
to re-cycle it!

Phone 293 - 7394

Bermuda Audubon Society

Committee

1992 -1993

PRESIDENT

Andrew Dobson

VICE-PRESIDENT

Jeremy Madeiros

TREASURER

Ted Cassidy

SECRETARY

Leila Madeiros

MEMBERS

David O'Neill

Jean Pennington

Penny Soares

Helge Trapnell

David Wingate

Meet Our Treasurer *Ted Cassidy*

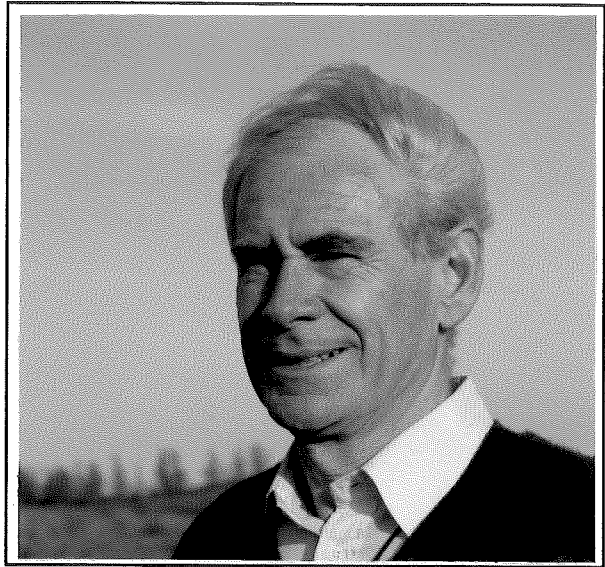
Ted Cassidy has been serving as the Society's Treasurer since May, 1969 that's right, 24 years!

Ted has been a member for even longer, and both he and his wife, Loretta, are wildlife enthusiasts.

One of Ted's fondest memories of his earlier days with the Audubon Society was the film series produced by the American National Audubon Society.

When Ted isn't busy balancing the Society's books, he's busy managing the Bermuda Mechanics Beneficial Association. His hobbies include boating and operating as an amateur ham radio buff! For those of you who are interested in making contact, his call sign is VP9KY.

When asked to recall a recent highlight, Ted said it would have to be the trip that he and his wife took to the Galapagos last summer. "It was a great nature encounter." From all of us, **THANKS TED FOR A GREAT JOB !!!**



Bermuda Audubon Society Treasurer, Ted Cassidy

*Leila Madeiros
Secretary*



*David Wingate leads
a group of Audubon
members on a tour of
Stokes Point Reserve
December 1992*

COMING EVENTS:

Saturday
FEBRUARY 27 **STOKES POINT WORKING PARTY**
TIME: 9:00 a.m. - 1 p.m.
PLACE: Stokes Point Reserve

Thursday
MARCH 4 **ANTARCTICA (plus Falklands & South Georgia)**
Illustrated Talk by Jeremy and Leila Madeiros
TIME: 7:30 p.m.
PLACE: Bermuda High School for Girls
TICKETS: \$5 from Bda. Jewellery Centre,
Washington Mall

Sunday
APRIL 18 **PAGET MARSH FIELD TRIP**
TIME: 2 p.m.
PLACE: Enter from St. Paul's Church yard

Tuesday
APRIL 20 **"CHINA" ILLUSTRATED TALK**
by Barry Phillips Time/ Place: to be announced

Saturday
MAY 1 **PAGET MARSH WORKING PARTY**
TIME: 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

OCTOBER 8-10 **BIRDING WEEKEND** Paget Island

If undelivered please return to:
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Hamilton HM FX

