

Bermuda Audubon Society NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX

SUMMER
1993

Vol. 4 No. 2

White Ibis in Bermuda

On 30th March 1993, David Wallace was out birding along Wreck Road when the Davidson family asked him to look at an Ibis-type bird in Pilchard Bay, adjacent to their house. It was indeed an Ibis - an adult White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*, and the first recorded in Bermuda since 1972 (when separate birds were seen in March and October respectively).

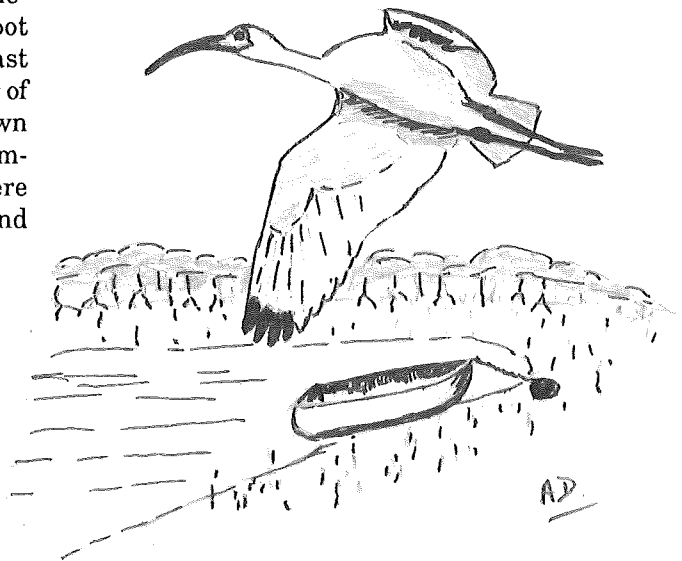
The Ibis was seen throughout April, feeding actively at low tide in exposed mud, and then roosting in Pilchard Bay's mangroves. It paid little attention to several Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Great Blue Herons which were also feeding in the same area. It was occasionally harassed by crows and sometimes flew short distances, revealing a 3-foot wingspan with striking black tips to the last four primaries of each wing. The remainder of its plumage was white, apart from a few brown smudges (remnants of its immature plumage). Standing two feet tall, the pink legs were matched by a long de-curved pink bill and pink skin on the face.

The White Ibis is found in coastal south-eastern USA from S. Carolina to Florida and Texas. Its range continues through the West Indies, Central America and northern South America. In the US coastal marshes, they eat crayfish, which eat large quantities of fish eggs. Therefore, by reducing crayfish numbers, fish populations rise.

Also, their droppings help fertilise the water, increasing plankton growth, benefitting marsh life.

The White Ibis should not be confused with the Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, which is a more frequent visitor to Bermuda. It is found along the US coast from Maine to Texas, and has also spread inland. Two Glossy Ibises arrived in Bermuda in November 1991. A third arrived in October 1992. It found the other two a month later, and all three birds are still present - feeding in Devonshire Marsh during the day, and roosting at Cloverdale at night.

Andrew Dobson



White Ibis at Pilchard Bay

Society News

The Society is most grateful to the Bank of Bermuda for its continued support of conservation groups in Bermuda. At a special presentation at the National Trust's "Waterville" headquarters, the Bank presented large cheques to seven conservation charities, including \$9,000 to the Bermuda Audubon Society.

Audubon volunteers have been involved in two projects on our nature reserves.

Despite the abundance of poison ivy, volunteers cleared large amounts of unwanted guava and ardesia from Paget Marsh (see separate article).

The Society has recently acquired some very effective weed wrenches - which not only made the job much easier - but were capable of removing small guava trees. At our Stokes Point nature reserve, volunteers made a good start on creating a freshwater pond on the island at Bartram's Pond. Special thanks are due to students from St. George's Secondary School.

Our spring field trip to Paget Marsh was extremely well attended. Sixty people were led in two groups by Jeremy Madeiros and Andrew Dobson. For many, it was the first time they had experienced a walk through this gem in Bermuda's landscape. Sadly, a theft of cedars was discovered on the walk - mature, live trees with branches stripped and trunks waiting to be removed. The police are carrying out enquiries. The loss of most of our cedars during the 1940's to the scale insect was bad enough, but the spate of cedar thefts from many of Bermuda's nature reserves is quite sickening.

Jeremy and Lella Madeiros presented our March lecture - a fascinating account of their trip to the Antarctic. The slides provided an insight into the Earth's last unspoilt wilderness.

And so to the future...

A number of events are planned, so make a note in your diary!

Many events require that you use the Audubon's Society's answering service.

This is located on Nonsuch Island (Dr. Wingate) - so please do not be put off by the introductory message.

Telephone: **293-6153**

FIELD TRIP (Cooper's Island)

There is a field trip on Sunday, 30 May to Cooper's Island. If you wish to join us, give your named to Security at the front entrance of N.A.S. Bermuda to travel to McDonald's Restaurant.

You can drive by car or bike (as long as you have a visor). If you do not have your own transportation, take the NAS Shuttle bus.

Be there by 2 pm (visit McDonald's first if you like!) In order for us to have permission to go beyond MacDonal'd's - we must have a list of names for security reasons.

Please phone your name(s) to our answering service 293-6153 before Saturday 29th May. Cooper's Island has some of the best beaches and scenery on Bermuda. (Feel free to have a swim!)

AGM (June 10)

Our Annual General Meeting is at the Horticultural Hall on Thursday 10th June at 7:30pm. Speaker to be announced.

There are vacancies for Committee members, so if you wish to make a nomination, please phone the Audubon number:

293-6153

AUDUBON CAMP (June 26 - July 3)

I am pleased to report that the annual Audubon Natural History Camp is fully subscribed and set to take place at the end of the school term. We are very pleased that the Bermuda Zoological Society is jointly organising the camp and offering a number of specialist instructors. A report of the camp will appear in the next newsletter.

NONSUCH FIELD TRIP (September 12)

The annual field trip to Nonsuch Island has become so successful that we have had to re-think the day. We simply cannot cope with the large numbers and the arrangement this year is as follows:

DATE: Sunday, 12th September

CHOOSE the morning or afternoon

excursion. Both trips start and finish at the Bermuda Biological Station. **COST \$10**

EITHER ...

Depart BBSR 8:45am - Return 12:15pm
OR ...

Depart BBSR 12:45pm - Return 4:15pm

Each trip will be limited to 40 people.

Reservations can be made from 1st September by calling **293 - 6153**

(Bring your own snack if you wish - and swimming gear)

NEWSLETTER

The newsletter has been in its present format since 1990. To help catalogue articles, 1990 is deemed to be Volume 1, and so 1993 is volume 4. This format will make it possible for us to prepare an index of articles in a future issue.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Finally, a reminder that annual membership fees are due in May for 1993-94. If you have already renewed - thank you. If not, please complete the membership form in this newsletter.

*Andrew Dobson
President*

MARCH MADNESS

Many unusual birds were recorded following "The Greatest Storm of the Century" which moved up the east coast of the US on the weekend of 13/14 March.

The anti-clockwise movement of winds around the storm must have thrown thousands of birds into the Atlantic Ocean, especially early migrants and encouraged those wintering in the southern US to move early. Some of the lucky ones made landfall on Bermuda.

Swallow-tailed Kite is a rare visitor, so two individuals and a possible third later on in the month were exceptional. Shorebird arrivals broke many records:-

Black-necked Stilt (15/03/93) was early by nearly a month. Three of these beautiful stilts arrived during March.

Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Snipe - there was a small influx.

Willet (18/03/93) one was only the second spring record and early by two months.

Western Sandpipers (15/03/93) - three and a fourth later in the month are the only spring records other than one individual in May 1990.

Least Sandpipers (15/03/93) - two were ten days ahead of the previous early record.

Pectoral Sandpipers - up to twenty were the most recorded on a single date in March, and the earliest Spring record by two weeks.

Stilt Sandpiper (15/03/93) - a single bird was two months earlier than the previous record.

March Madness Cont'd...

Bermuda has regular wintering populations of gulls (mainly **Ring-billed** and **Herring**) - so the arrival of **Laughing, Common, Black-headed, Bonaparte's** and **Iceland Gulls**; **Royal, Sandwich** and **Forster's Terns** after the 14th March may well have been due to birds being displaced by the storm. Most of these birds created early spring arrival records, but pride of place must go to the summer plumaged **Little Gull** - only the second Bermuda record - so we are all envious of Steven DeSilva's sole sighting!

There was no obvious influx of passerines (perching birds) following the storm, and it wasn't until the 30th March that THE bird of the month was discovered - a **White Ibis** - (see cover article). To cap an outstanding month, I was lucky enough to see all the regular migrant swallow species in the air together at St. David's - **Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow** and **Bank Swallow**. All the species together may indeed have created a record - but the latter species certainly did - being two weeks earlier than the previous record.

*Andrew Dobson
President*

Society Nature Reserves PAGET MARSH

Anyone who has ever travelled along the busy Middle Road in Paget near the traffic lights has probably noticed the large area of lush vegetation between St. Paul's Church and Lover's Lane. This is Paget Marsh, one of the last surviving fragments of the endemic forest which covered the island prior to colonization in 1609.

Paget Marsh was the second nature reserve acquired by the Bermuda Audubon Society, and is jointly owned with the Bermuda National Trust. Two separate areas of the marsh had already been acquired by the Trust (then the Historical Monuments Trust) in the 1950's. The key 8.2 acre central portion of the marsh was obtained by the Society from the Mary Gray estate following a fund raising drive launched in 1965. The purchase price was £800 per acre, with the Society managing to raise the full amount in two years.



The combined marsh area totals over 20 acres, and is managed cooperatively by the Bermuda National Trust/ Audubon Society with assistance from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Parks Conservation Division.

Paget Marsh is the least disturbed of Bermuda's peat marshes, most of which have either been completely destroyed by rubble/garbage dumping, clearance of tree cover or burned. It's most unique feature is approximately 14 acres of endemic Bermuda Cedar/Palmetto 'hammock' forest, which once covered pre-colonial Bermuda. This is the last place where a large sample of the original primeval forest cover of the island remains intact. In the shade of this forest survives a variety of native and endemic sedges, shrubs, and ferns which are dependent on the particular conditions found in this habitat. The rare endemic Bermuda Sedge *Carex bermudiana* and St. Andrew's Cross *Ascyrum hypericoides* are examples of plants which are now almost confined to Paget Marsh.

The marsh is particularly important and interesting in that it contains a wide variety of wetland habitats, ranging from open water ditches and saw-grass savannah, to hammock forest, wax-myrtle thickets and pure stands of Red Mangrove *Rhizophora mangle*. This diversity of habitats makes Paget Marsh especially interesting and important as a biological and educational resource.

Man's impact on Paget Marsh has mainly come through the digging of drainage ditches around the periphery of the marsh in the 1940's, and the introduction of aggressive acid soil-loving plant species. The most aggressive of these non-native plants to gain a foothold in the marsh are the Guava

Psidium guajava and *Ardisea Ardisia polycephala*. By the mid 1970's they had become so dominant in places that they formed dense thickets, overshadowing and destroying all but the cedar/palmetto canopy. As of this writing, *Ardisea* has been almost completely controlled in the marsh, and Guava is being reduced by block clearing of one acre at a time, followed by reforestation with Bermuda Cedars and other native plants in the resulting clearings. These cedars have grown extremely well, in some cases reaching 10'-15' in 5 years.

More worrying has been illegal timber stealing of large cedars in the marsh. One large theft in 1987 heavily damaged a one acre area of the marsh, although the timber thieves were intercepted and successfully prosecuted. More recently, four large cedars were discovered cut down not far from the main entrance during an Audubon field trip on April 18th of this year.

Future management plans for the marsh include eventually culling out all non-native plants. The marsh can then be maintained by regular culling out of non-native seedlings, relying heavily on volunteer help. Volunteers have already removed many thousands of seedlings, most recently on May 1st when a small group of intrepid volunteers from the Audubon Society culled through the central part of the marsh.

The culling to date has resulted in a dramatic recovery of the understory ferns and other plants, making the marsh an interesting area for tours by school study groups and conservation organisations.

Today, Paget Marsh forms an important 'green lung' in the middle of densely populated Paget Parish. Accordingly, it is home

Paget Marsh cont'd....

to many local woodland birds, such as Cardinals, Catbirds and White-eyed Vireos. Orange-cheeked Waxbills are often seen in the grassy margins of the marsh, and Barn Owls frequently roost in the Palmettos and hunt along the ditches. During autumn and winter, these ditches often support Snipe and Wood Duck, and even a Woodcock this winter. Last but not least, the marsh can often host various warbler species, in particular the Yellow-rumped or Myrtle Warbler. As many as 100 of these striking birds have been known to spend the winter among their namesake Wax Myrtle bushes in the marsh!

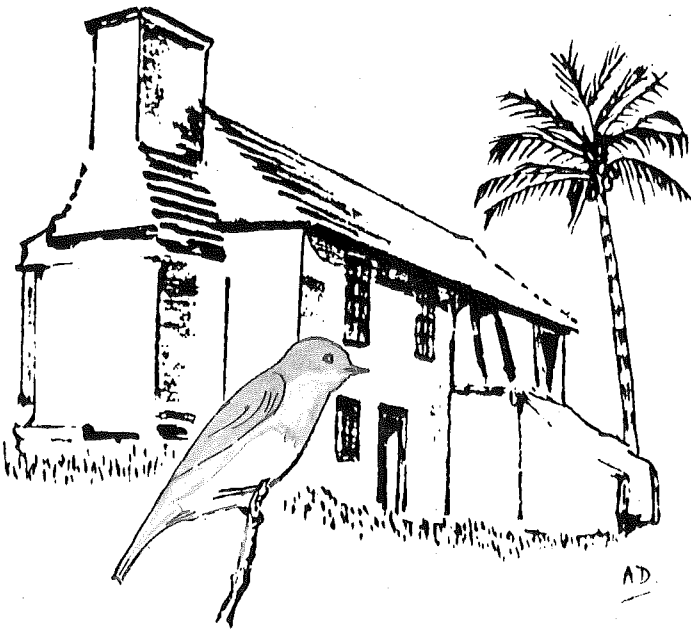
Jeremy Madellos

Bluebird Report

Our 1993 bluebird nesting season is well underway with nestboxes being actively tended in all nine parishes. Work continues on the banding regime implemented in 1992 as part of a 3-year study. It is quite a coincidence that the first chicks were banded that year in Somerset on the 12th of April and the Deputy Governor's residence at Montpelier was the site of 1993's first banding on - yes - 12th of April! Interestingly, I was able to band 14 chicks in April of '92, compared with 11 for April of this year.

To date, we have added nearly 50 more boxes to the survey, bringing the total to over 350. Nestboxes are quite evenly dispersed over Bermuda but Pembroke, understandably, is well below the parish average. All 8 golf courses will participate in this year's monitoring and banding. This should boost the total banded birds considerably, given that only 5 were on last year's schedule. This is not to downplay the role of nestboxes on private properties which totalled nearly 50% of last year's monitored boxes.

Projections for this year regarding the percentage of boxes on golf courses to private properties will favour golf courses with roughly 200 being monitored from Port Royal to the St. George's Golf and Tennis Club.



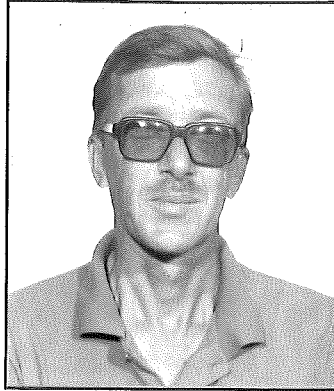
Eastern Bluebird at Carter House

We have already gained insight into individual Bluebird movement through observation of 1992 banded individuals. In some cases, a banded female has moved to the other side of the street, a male to the end of the parish he was born in; and in one of the most charming instances, a young gal from Morgan's Hill has taken up residence with a chap from Port Royal. It is a '90's type match-up as they have "met in the middle" but chosen to nest on the peninsula we call Cathedral Rocks at the entrance to the Scaur in Ely's Harbour !

Finally, we look forward to a visit from Dr. Patty Gowarty, the project designer, who will come to Bermuda in July to review our work and possibly initiate a next phase. In the meantime, let me know of any bluebird nesting you encounter, and equally important, don't allow house sparrows to nest in your Bluebird box. At the very least, collect all its sparrow eggs in order that they don't hatch.

Steven DeSilva

Membership Profile



*David
O'Neill*

Bermudian David O'Neill was educated in England at Merrist Wood Agricultural College, and is presently employed as a plant propagator at the Mid-Ocean Club. A faithful Audubon member, David has been on the Executive Committee for over 12 years. He became involved with the Society, having a genuine concern for Bermuda's open spaces and the conservation of native and endemic fauna and flora. He hopes that the environment can be maintained and improved for future generations to enjoy.

In his spare time, David is also an active ANTS member (Another National Trust Service) and Rockwatcher with K.B.B. Of the places he has had the chance to visit, he found Kenya the most fascinating.

Bermuda Audubon Society

**HOTLINE
293 6153**

to report any environmental problems
especially in relation to birds.

Membership Renewal / Application

Name

Address

Tel. No.

- Adult\$ 10.00 New Member
 Student\$ 5.00 Renewal

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

FUTURE EVENTS:

Sunday **Field Trip - COOPER'S ISLAND**
MAY 30 **TIME:** 2 pm (Call for reservations)
PLACE: Meet at McDonalds, NAS

Thursday **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**
JUNE 10 **TIME:** 7:30 p.m.
PLACE: Horticultural Hall (Botanical Gardens)

Sat **JUNE 26** **AUDUBON NATURAL HISTORY CAMP**
- Sat **JULY 3** Nonsuch Island and various habitats

Sunday **Field Trip - NONSUCH ISLAND**
SEPT 12 (Reservations from 1st September)
TIME: 8:45 am. OR 12:45 pm.
Depart from the Bermuda Biological Station

Friday **OCT 8** **BIRDING WEEKEND- Paget Island**
- Sunday **OCT 10** **TIME:** 6 pm. Friday - leave from Ordnance Island

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