

Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

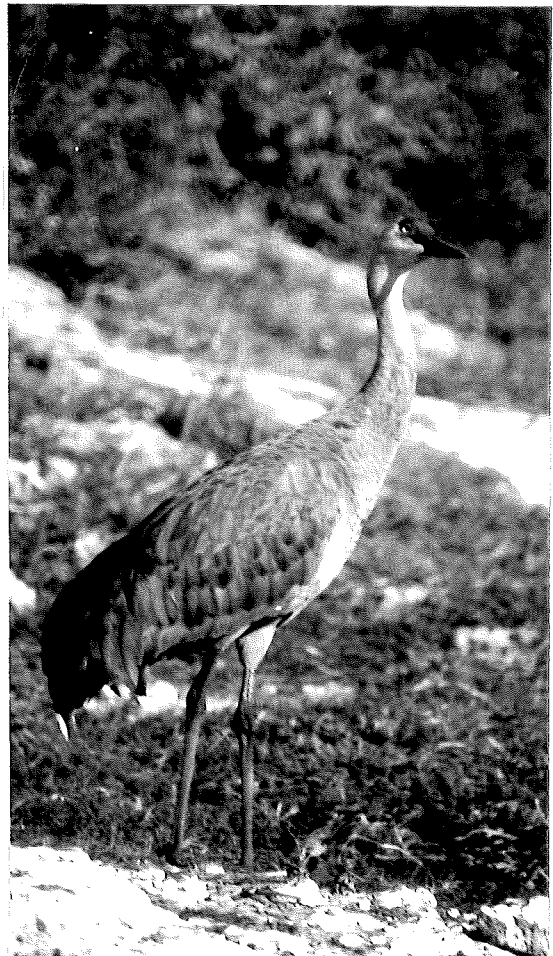
P. O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.4 No.3

FALL
1993

Sandhill Crane - New to Bermuda

The weekend of 9-10 October had been designated by BirdLife International as "World Birdwatch '93". The purpose of the organisation, formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation, is to conserve threatened species and their habitats. The aim of the weekend was to get one million people around the world out birdwatching and increase public awareness of bird conservation. More than 50 countries are known to have taken part.

The Audubon Society had already arranged a birding weekend based on Paget Island. Twenty members of the Society managed to see 47 species around the East End. The 9th October was a day to remember. As the group returned to Paget Island for lunch, Helen Armitage and Katrina Dobson casually enquired what the large heron-like bird was that had appeared from the centre of the island just above the trees. As I focused my binoculars I could scarcely believe the bird I was looking at - I simply shrieked "Sandhill Crane", hoping that no-one would miss what I knew to be the first record of the species for Bermuda.



*Sandhill Crane in Devonshire Parish
Photo - Andrew Dobson*

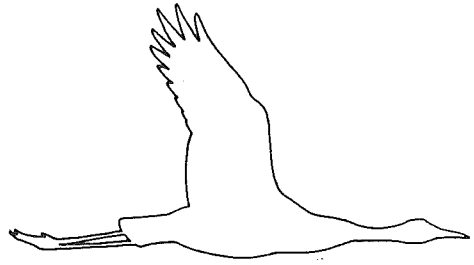
Sandhill Crane cont.

Close enough to see its red cap, it was obviously an adult bird. It flew with its bill constantly opening and closing as it headed towards Smith's Island and then off to St. David's before being lost from sight - perhaps never to be seen again! Fortunately it was relocated a few days later by Dr. Neil Burnie, feeding well on farmland adjacent to Devonshire Marsh. There is always the chance that it might stay for the winter.

The **Sandhill Crane** *Grus canadensis* is a commonly observed bird in many parts of North America. Thousands of them breed as far north as the Arctic tundra and winter in the southern U.S. and Mexico. A few are resident in Florida and along the Gulf Coast. The bird is 4ft. tall with a 7ft. wing-span! Our adult crane was generally grey in colour with a red cap and white face. Although the amount of brown on its plumage suggests that it may yet to have lost all its immature plumage, many cranes show considerable staining on their plumage. The body and lower neck plumage often appears rusty because of iron stains from the muddy water of tundra ponds. The ferrous solution is transferred to the plumage during preening. Its sizable bill is used for catching and eating insects, frogs and small rodents. Many people often misidentify herons as cranes, but unlike herons which have their necks folded in flight, cranes fly with their necks outstretched.

A report of a Sandhill Crane in August 1974 could never be confirmed and so the sighting on 9 October 1993 represents the first confirmed record of the species in Bermuda. Sandhill Cranes have been recorded four times on the other side of the Atlantic - in northern Scotland (twice), Ireland and in the Faeroe Islands, so perhaps an appearance in Bermuda was somewhat overdue!

Andrew Dobson



Membership Profile

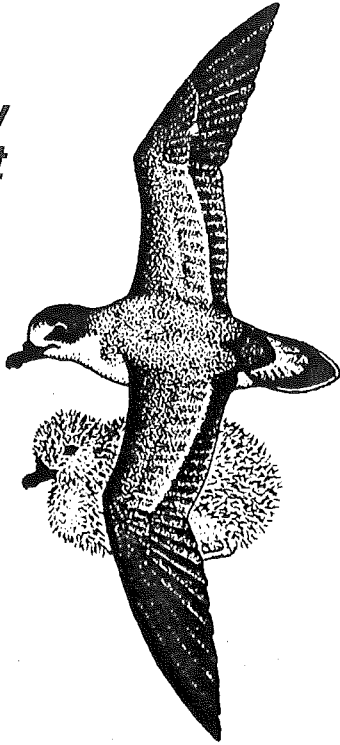
David B. Wingate

It is appropriate to feature David in this newsletter as he has just been honoured with another prestigious award. He has just returned from the Colonial Waterbird Society's conference held at Arles in France, the first time it has been held outside the U.S. He was the first recipient of the Kai Curry-Lindahl Award for "a life-time outstanding achievement in conservation of an endangered species." As well as being given a monetary award, he was asked to give the plenary lecture. David naturally chose to speak about the Cahow and Nonsuch Island.

David played a key role in the incorporation of the Audubon Society in 1960. This enabled land to be held and reserves were quickly established at Seymour's Pond, Paget Marsh and Somerset Long Bay. Today, the society boasts eleven reserves, many of them former garbage dumps, and David has already been awarded the M.B.E. for his conservation efforts. He has been President of the society on many occasions since its formation.

An avid birder, David has had the opportunity to birdwatch in many parts of the world, but his "Bermuda List" takes pride of place. Being in France when the Sandhill Crane appeared, rumour has it that David suffered a sleepless night before seeing the bird on his return!

Cahow Report 1993



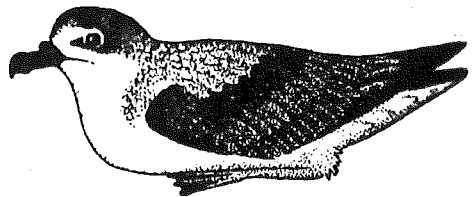
Breeding success of the **Cahow** *Pterodroma cahow* peaked in 1989, with 45 pairs raising a total of 28 young. It is thought that Hurricane Hugo was responsible for a crash in numbers in 1990, but there has been a gradual improvement since. In 1993 there were 44 pairs, almost back to the 1989 level and prospects looked good. However, only 21 chicks successfully fledged, two less than in 1992. The number of hatchlings was up on last year, but sadly there were more deaths. One chick died on hatching, another died a few days after hatching, and a third was killed by a **White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*. This was a bitter blow, bearing in mind the baffles used to keep tropicbirds out. A chick had not been killed by a tropicbird since 1961. A fourth chick was found starved, having been deserted by its parents, and a fifth chick had to be put down with a badly deformed wing.

Although a disappointing season, there has been a steady increase in pairs on the western islands where all the artificial burrows were used. As a result of this, 15 extra burrows have been constructed, requiring about 7 tons of concrete! All of the Cahow islands now have spare capacity to take the hoped increase in nesting pairs well into the next century.

Of great excitement is the possible sighting of two separate Cahows on 31 July 1993. Both were seen on pelagic birding trips in the Gulf Stream off Cape Hatteras and Charleston, respectively. The observers, Ned Brinkley, Todd Hass and Brian Patteson are planning to visit Bermuda in November for some further Cahow study in the hope of confirming their sightings. Having been involved in pioneer work on the distribution of seabirds off the east coast of North America, the Audubon Society is very pleased that they have agreed to give a lecture on their studies on **Monday 15 November, 7.30pm Horticultural Hall**. Try not to miss what should be a fascinating evening.

There may also be the possibility of joining them on one of the pelagic trips in search of Cahows. This is scheduled for the weekend of 13/14 November, lasting for the afternoon only, aboard BBS2. If you are interested in the trip, please phone 236-3737.

David B. Wingate.





Silhouettes of Sandhill Crane over Devonshire Marsh . Andrew Dobson.



Society News

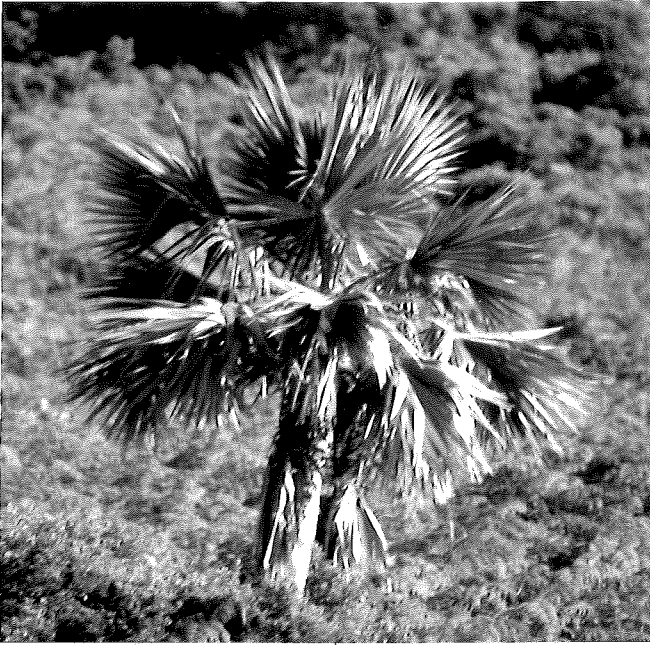
The most exciting news is the acquisition of a new reserve. The Gibbons family has very generously donated 3 acres of land in Devonshire Marsh to the Audubon Society. Members may have seen a photo and news item in the Royal Gazette covering the handover of deeds by Sir David and Lady Gibbons to the society. The area of marsh, to be called the **Winifred Gibbons Reserve**, is on the western border of the society's Freer Cox Reserve and is a most welcome addition to the existing wetland habitats held by the society. Members will have the opportunity of viewing this new reserve and the general area of Devonshire Marsh when the society unveils an official reserve sign during a fieldtrip there on December 5th. Members should meet at 2pm on Vesey Street, just to the west of the equestrian centre.

There have been a number of hummingbird sightings in recent years. Last year three birds were seen and this year two separate birds were seen in September. Hummingbirds readily fly to artificial feeders and so the Audubon Society has a number of feeders available if you or someone you know has one in their garden. It will provide them with much needed food and increase their chances of survival. Gorham's had quite a few for sale in their store, so perhaps there are more hummingbirds around than we know about! The species concerned is the **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, the only hummingbird which breeds in the eastern United States and Canada. Bad weather occasionally throws them off course during their southward fall migration. If you need a feeder, contact Andrew Dobson on 238-3239.

During the last few months, the Audubon Society has been actively carrying out one of its main aims - environmental education. A special 'thank-you' must go to the Bank of Butterfield for helping to fund the annual Audubon Natural History Camp for students. Thanks are also due to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo for their help in making this year's camp such a success. Seventeen students from six different secondary schools did themselves great credit and made the most of the opportunities offered during the week long camp based on Nonsuch Island. A separate article appears elsewhere in the newsletter.

For the society's members, two recent fieldtrips have been a great success. Half-day trips to Nonsuch Island in September gave the opportunity for about 80 people to learn more about the island and enjoy the beach. Following the success of a birding weekend held on Paget Island last year, there was no hesitation in organising a repeat performance. A number of new faces signed up for the weekend and all enjoyed a great weekend's birding - not to mention the food!

Andrew Dobson



Palmetto growing above Wax Myrtle on the new Winifred Gibbons Reserve

Pat Benbow - a Tribute

Pat was a founding member of the Bermuda Audubon Society. As a school teacher and obsessive conservationist, she was probably the most dynamic force in establishing the Audubon Society. She became the Society's first secretary. One of her particular concerns was bluebird conservation and the provision of nest-boxes. When Pat died recently, Bermuda lost a committed and active conservationist. The Audubon Society offers her family our sincere condolences.

**Bermuda Audubon Society
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1993-1994**

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Bermuda Audubon Society

**HOTLINE
238-3239**

bird news
society business
environmental concerns

The Fall migration began with great promise. An early wave of warblers in mid-August produced a good number of **Kentucky Warblers** amongst the usual early migrants such as **Yellow** and **Prothonotary Warblers**. The weather patterns since then have been ideal for bringing us a good fall of birds as they head south - frequent frontal systems moving off the east coast of the United States and associated periods of wet weather. October was particularly wet with over 7 inches of rain. However, although there has been a wide range of species, including a number of rarities, the number of birds has been disappointingly low. Warbler highlights included a **Townsend Warbler** found by Paul Watson and numerous **Worm-eating Warblers**, but there have been no reports of **Orange-crowned** or **Wilson's Warblers** and only single reports of **Connecticut** and **Canada Warblers**.

A small number of **Least Terns** passed through in late August/early September but a **Black Tern** was a nice surprise on 5th Sept. feeding along the shore of Cooper's Island for several days. Few migrant thrushes have been seen this Fall but the **Veery** found by Steven Desilva on 12th Sept. was a very good find. There were two reports of **Hummingbirds** (presumably **Ruby-throated**) in September one in Jenningsland and another seen later on in the month by David Wallace at Spittal Pond.

Spittal Pond hosted a good number of shorebirds in the early Fall, but with a rise in water level, birds were forced to leave or find alternative feeding areas on wet fields, notably dairy farms. A **Hudsonian Godwit** was a good find at Dockyard on 2nd Oct. The first for several years, it was in the company of **Black-bellied Plovers** and a single **Piping Plover**. The latter species is classified as an endangered species with only about 4,000 birds in the world.

There have only been single sightings of **Willet**, **Red Knot** and **Wilson's Phalarope**, with two records of **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**. On the plus side, there have been quite a few **Sanderling** on the south shore beaches. A "petrel with a white rump" reported by George Peterich on 3rd Oct. two miles south of Elbow Beach was almost certainly a **Leach's Storm-Petrel**.

Two **Northern Wheatears** were found in different locations by Paul Watson (2nd Oct.) and Penny Soares (3rd Oct.) respectively. Five of these birds were seen this Fall. They breed in Arctic Canada and Greenland and would normally migrate southwards down the eastern side of the Atlantic! Early October also heralded the first arrival of such species as **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Cedar Waxwing** and **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, so having an enforced day off on Election Day, I was not to be deterred by the appallingly wet weather. Despite a thorough soaking I was rewarded with some good birds. The godwit and plovers I'd found three days earlier were still present but with three species of gulls and a **Royal Tern**. At Daniel's Head Farm I could see a large flock of swallows - one each of **Bank**, **Tree** and **Barn Swallow**, but an incredible 30 **Cliff Swallows** - the most ever recorded of this species in Bermuda. It has been something of a "Cliff Swallow" Fall, with unprecedented sightings in September and October. A female **Wood Duck** (Pitman's Pond) and the earliest record of a **Snow Goose** (Seymour's Pond) provided further election day vote catchers.

Towards the end of October a number of birds arrived that may well winter. A visit to Ferry Point on 23th Oct. revealed a **Chipping Sparrow** while there was a **Lapland Longspur** with eleven **Water Pipits** on the airfield. And then of course there was a **Sandhill Crane**.....

Audubon Natural History Camp '93 _____ by Niel Jones

As we gathered on Tucker's Town dock, there were familiar faces as well as quite a few new ones. These were the people I'd be spending the next eight days with on Nonsuch Island. There were two ways in which I viewed the coming week. It would be an intensive natural history course as well as a relaxing way to finish a strenuous school year.

We quickly adapted to our new home on Nonsuch. The supply of electricity caught my attention. The island operates solely on solar power. The main house was the first in Bermuda to rely entirely on Solar power. Our tour of Nonsuch was very impressive. The results of David Wingate's thirty years of work are extraordinary. That afternoon we familiarised ourselves with our snorkeling gear and searched for the infamous grey snappers of the wreck (which also forms the dock.) They were barely half the size Andy Fields had described them at our pre-camp briefing in June! Despite all attempts, we were unable to catch one all week. That evening we enjoyed our first cooked meal, supervised by chief chef Roz Collins. Following our first evening lecture, the girls chose to sleep out in the orchard under the stars, and the boys opted for the octagon building.

The following days passed very quickly. We had lectures every night and visited various places around Bermuda. We snorkeled in Harrington Sound, Walsingham Pond and ten miles out at

North Rock. We trekked through Paget Marsh and Hungry Bay mangroves and walked round Spittal Pond. We explored Admiral's cave and the Walsingham area and even caught a green turtle (part of BAMZ ongoing research programme), before touring the fisheries' facility at Coney Island. Each evening we would have a quiz on what we had seen or been taught that day. My biology GCSE was easier than some of the questions we had to answer!

On the final evening, Senator Hollis was invited to the island to make some presentations at an award ceremony. There were also some alternative awards reflecting each student's character or particular incident during the week!

The camp increased my knowledge of Bermuda's natural history and allowed me to experience places I had never visited before. The North Rock snorkel was the highlight of the week. One of the most important things I learnt was the value of David Wingate's work around Bermuda and on Nonsuch in particular. I feel very lucky to have been able to take part in the natural history camp and would like to thank the Audubon Society, Bermuda Zoological Society, the Bank of Butterfield, David Wingate and all the other lecturers and camp staff.

(Footnote - Niel received the camp's "outstanding student" award.)

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:

Saturday 13 Nov Field Trip - Pelagic Seabirds
 or Call 236 - 3737 for time and bookings.
Sunday 14 Nov Depart Biological Station (Afternoon)

Sunday 5 Dec Field Trip - Devonshire Marsh
 See the new Winifred Gibbons Reserve
 2 pm. Vesey Street (west of Equestrian Centre)

Dec/Jan Annual Christmas Bird Count
 Date to be confirmed

Wednesday 12 Jan Slide Show "Bermuda's Caves"
 by Robert Power - cave diver
 7.30 pm. Horticultural Hall.
 Don't miss a fantastic slide show!

February Boat Trip amongst the harbour islands.
 Look at roosting birds or just enjoy the cruise
 Details in next newsletter.

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

