



Bermuda Audubon Society NEWSLETTER

Spring
1995

P O Box HM 1328, Hamilton HMFx

Vol.6 No.1

TRUMPETER SWAN - NEW TO BERMUDA

by Andrew Dobson

At 9.30 am on Sunday 27th November 1994, I had just completed a check of Spittal Pond and was climbing the path back to the east end car park. On glancing back down the pond I noticed a large white bird in the distance with a long narrow neck! I quickly assembled my telescope and tripod and there was an immature swan, certainly not a Mute Swan, but was it a Tundra or Trumpeter? I knew that Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus* had been recorded here before (in 1945 and 1985) and was the more likely species as it breeds in the North American tundra, with one of its main wintering areas along Atlantic coastal marshes from Maryland south to the Carolinas. Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator* would be an outrageous claim as it breeds in Alaska and winters along the Pacific coast. However, the bird and noticeably its bill did look extremely large, and there were extensive areas of black at the base and bill tip. The swan immediately began searching for food and was presumably feeding on aquatic vegetation. It was surrounded by about a dozen Pied-billed Grebes, and even Blue-winged Teals and American Coots swam over to get a closer look at this new arrival.

With no field guide to consult and only a quarter in my pocket, I thought it best to phone Katrina and ask her to contact as many birders as possible! Loathed as I was to leave, I had a game of

field hockey to play and I hoped it would be there on my return.

When I returned at 12 noon, several birders were still there - all happy with its identification as a Trumpeter Swan. The occurrence of any swan in Bermuda is exceptional - which probably explains why Eric Amos rushed from his breakfast still wearing pyjamas! He did manage to obtain video footage while Penny Soares and I took photos, which should satisfy the sceptics! The swan spent much of its time harassing the two resident Greater Flamingos, giving a good comparison of a larger body size for the swan. Quite astonishingly, a Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* was also on the pond at the same time.

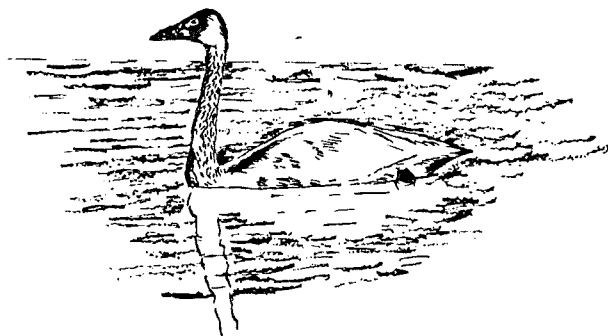


Illustration by
Andrew Dobson

The swan flew from from Spittal Pond by early afternoon and it was also seen in Harrington Sound on the same day. It failed to settle in one place, with sightings from the US Naval Air Station to Belmont Golf Course and Warwick Pond over the next few days. The final sighting was on Thursday 1st December 1994 when I saw it flying south over Warwick Academy at 8.45 am.

The Trumpeter Swan breeds in Alaska and winters along the Pacific coastal areas from south-eastern Alaska, British Columbia to the mouth of the Columbia River. Occasional vagrants have turned up as far south as California. A few groups of resident Trumpeter Swans are found in the Great Basin region of the U.S.A. The first year Trumpeter Swan present from 27th November to 1st December 1994 is the first record of this species in Bermuda

Society News

Walsingham Reserve

Fifteen volunteers from the Society and the National Trust's A.N.T.S. spent a very productive Saturday morning in January culling invading non-native species from the attractive sink hole ponds area of Walsingham. A variety of trees were then planted, including Bermuda Cedar, Palmetto and Southern Hackberry. The morning was both hard work and fun. The added satisfaction comes from watching these trees grow in this popular picnicing spot. Many thanks to those who helped.

Paget Marsh

There is another opportunity to visit this secluded reserve on Sunday 5th March. If you have never seen the azaleas in bloom, this is the time to see them. It is frequently wet underfoot, but it enables a great variety of ferns and unusual plants to grow. A walk through Paget Marsh is how the first settlers must have found much of Bermuda - so why not come and see it for yourself. Meet at St.Paul's car park at 2.00pm.

Antarctica Slide Show

Audubon Society member Penny Hill will be showing slides of her recent trip to Antarctica. The event is on Wednesday 29th March at Horticultural Hall - 7.30pm.

Whale Watch

The Spring migration of humpbacked whales past Bermuda takes place in April. If you have never had the chance to see these marvellous creatures, why not join us on Saturday 8th April. There is also the chance of seeing oceanic seabirds. Phone 292-0707 after March 8th for details and reservations. The cost will be \$50 per person.

Earth Day 1995

Cooper's Island Nature Reserve

Society members are cordially invited to the official opening of a new nature reserve on the US Naval Air Station near Clearwater Beach on Sunday 30th April. You will be able to walk through the re-planted and restored section of woodland and see an impressive bluebird trail. The opening is timed to coincide with this year's Earth day celebrations. Meet at the beach car park at 2.00pm.

South Shore Dunes and Beaches

As part of this year's Earth Day celebrations, we will be organising a guided walk through the South Shore dunes and along the beaches. There is much fascinating fauna and flora to be seen at this time of the year. The dunes plants are particularly interesting and there are always some critters to be found on the beach. So why not join us on Sunday 21st May and you can always have a swim afterwards! Meet at Horseshoe Bay car park at 2.00pm.

Blue Hole Park

by David Wingate

The Society helps Government finance the restoration of a new mangrove pond.

When Government acquired 14.58 acres at Blue Hole Park in 1992, they faced three major clean-up tasks - the demolition of a derelict house at the entrance to the park, the removal of old bleachers from the former dolphin show, and the restoration of a former mangrove pond which was filled in as a garbage dump between the 1930's and 1970's.

The Audubon Society has considerable experience in restoring former garbage sites to wetland habitat (Somerset Long Bay and Stokes Point reserves being good examples). So we offered to assist the Parks Dept. with the planning and financing of the project. In late September a contract was signed with Island Construction Services for the use of their large track-hoe which is normally used for rock-breaking in Wilkinson Quarry. This machine was rarely available. Heavy rain and high water levels caused further delays. However, with the machine's huge bucket capacity and reach, it was able to dig out the old dump site and re-open a half acre pond in only eight working days between 29th August and 7th January 1995. The excavation produced a large quantity of useful rubble and peat soil mix. It also exposed and released thousands of glass bottles into the water, which had to be collected by boat afterwards. The

plan is to create a low bank between the park entrance trail and the pond which will be densely covered with vegetation except for a small bird blind. This will enable park users to view the pond without disturbing any bird life on it.

The new pond adjoins a small grove of very tall red mangroves in a drowned sinkhole which was not encroached upon by the dump. In time the mangrove will self-seed around the edge of the pond to create a fringing mangrove swamp. The pond is saltwater and tidal via submerged caves and averages about three feet deep at medium tide. A large species of mullet has already been seen in it and the Parks Conservation Division plans to introduce an endemic Killifish *Fundulus sp.* from a population recently discovered in the West Walsingham ponds. Other plant and invertebrate introductions such as wigeon grass and pond snails should attract herons, egrets, waterfowl and kingfisher.

An opening ceremony for the new park is planned for the spring, when the Audubon Society's contribution will be acknowledged by Government.

The 1994/95 Winter in Bermuda *by Andrew Dobson*

The winter has provided avian delights and surprises for local birders, including two new species for Bermuda. The early winter was mild with few storms, and it was not until late January-early February that we got a real taste of winter storms with cool temperatures, heavy rain and gale-force winds. (Dates show the first time the species was seen.)

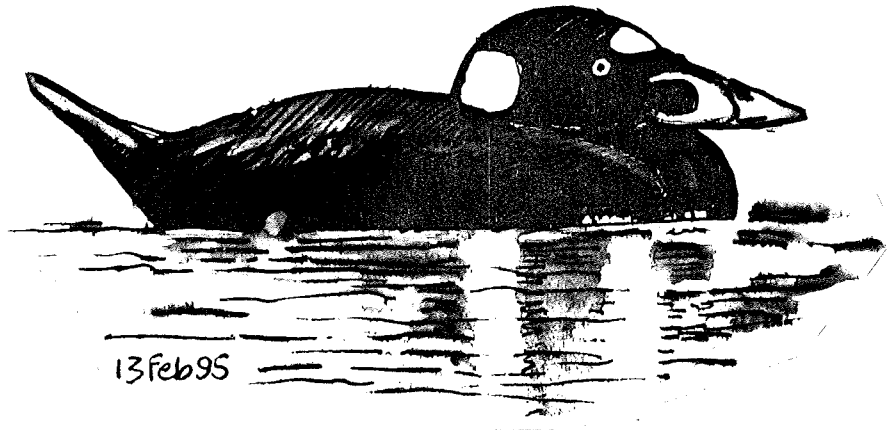
Least Bittern (16th Nov) has been occasionally seen at Cloverdale. Several duck species arrived during November including **Hooded Merganser** (9th) at Seymour's Pond and **Red-breasted Merganser** (18th) off Daniel's Head. **Lesser Scaup** (14th) and **Gadwall** (25th) at Spittal Pond. The most astonishing arrival in November was a **Trumpeter Swan** (27th) at Spittal Pond. (See separate article). November also recorded **Dark-eyed Junco** (10th) at Coral Beach Club, **Snow Bunting** (11th) over Hog Bay Park, **American Robin** (12th) in Jenningsland, **Forster's Tern** (15th) in Harrington Sound and **Fox Sparrow** (30th) in Hog Bay Park. Good finds in December included **Barn Swallow** (29th) over Daniel's Head Farm and **Golden-crowned Kinglet** (29th) on Port Royal GC. A **Solitary Vireo** (18th Dec) at the US Annex and two recorded on the Christmas Bird Count were the first ever wintering records for this species in Bermuda. This was also true for **Yellow-throated Vireo** probably seen (but not included in the CBC) but seen again (15th Feb) in the Botanical Gardens. An **Orange-crowned Warbler** (1st

Feb) at Shelly Bay Mangroves had almost certainly over-wintered.

Of the more unusual birds of prey, a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (29th Dec) was over the US Annex while a **Northern Harrier** (7th Feb) may have been a new arrival.

Late winter arrivals included another new species for Bermuda. David Wingate discovered a juvenile **Pacific Golden-Plover** (25th Jan) in a mixed shorebird flock at the US Naval Air Station. This very yellow bird was even with an **American Golden-Plover** for good comparison. Hopefully a full account will appear in the next newsletter. A **Horned Grebe** (1st Feb) on Castle Harbour which was the first for several winters. Our regular wintering gull species were augmented by **Bonaparte's Gull** (26th Jan), **Iceland Gull** (2nd Feb) and **Common Black-headed Gull** (12th Feb).

Finally, the first spring migrants have arrived at the time of writing. A **Cattle Egret** (6th Feb) appeared at Camden Marsh, a **Sora** (12th Feb) was new at Spittal Pond, while a **Greater Yellowlegs** (12th Feb) was at Marsh Lane. The storms of early February also produced a real rarity - a splendidly plumaged drake **Surf Scoter** (12th Feb) at Spittal Pond. This sea duck was obviously in a distressed state and was picked up dead on 16th Feb. When studied at the Aquarium, it proved to be extremely emaciated. **Manx Shearwaters** (16th Feb) were seen off the south shore.



Surf Scoter

Melanitta perspicillata

*Illustration by
Eric Amos*

Winter records kindly supplied by - Eric Amos, Steven DeSilva, Andrew Dobson, Peter Holmes, Andrew Harford, Jeremy Madeiros, Leila Madeiros, Penny Soares, David Wallace, Paul Watson, David Wingate.

PLEASE NOTE

Membership

On your address label you will notice an expiry date. If it reads Exp. June 94 - you still owe your 1994 dues. Please complete the enclosed form if you wish to remain a member.

**Bermuda Audubon Society
Committee 1994-95**

President	Jeremy Madeiros
Vice-President	Andrew Dobson
Treasurer	Ted Cassidy
Acting Secretary	Leila Madeiros
Committee members	David O'Neill Helge Trapnell David Wallace David Wingate
Newsletter	Andrew Dobson

Long-eared Owl in Bermuda — by David Wallace

To see any species of owl in Bermuda, other than the resident Barn Owl, is a rare treat indeed, so when I encountered a very alert and healthy **Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus* during my routine check of the Coral Beach Club property on the afternoon of the 4th November 1994, I was both surprised and excited.

Long-eared Owls are found north of the tropics throughout the northern hemisphere, but could not be considered common anywhere. They are active only at night and spend the days roosting in dense woodland, close to the main trunk of a tree, and often near the ground. This owl has a preference for coniferous trees, and the individual at Coral Beach Club had chosen a copse of casuarinas and baygrape trees as its roost. As such, it was well concealed, and initially appeared merely as a shadowy figure which only "turned into an owl" when I trained my binoculars on it. However, once the "ear tufts" became visible and it turned its head, my excitement level rose and I quietly left the area to contact other birders with this amazing find. The most conspicuous features of this species of owl are its "ears", which are in fact tufts of feathers. The actual ear openings are situated on the sides of the head. I described the find as amazing because this bird may be the first live Long-eared Owl seen in Bermuda this century. The museum has several specimens of dead birds

found in the recent past. Historical documents list live birds from the 1850's, but for all present Bermuda birders, this was certainly a new Bermuda "tick".

Long-eared Owls are migratory and generally move slowly south as the harsh continental winters reduce their food supply of small rodents. For a bird to venture over open seas would require considerable bad weather to

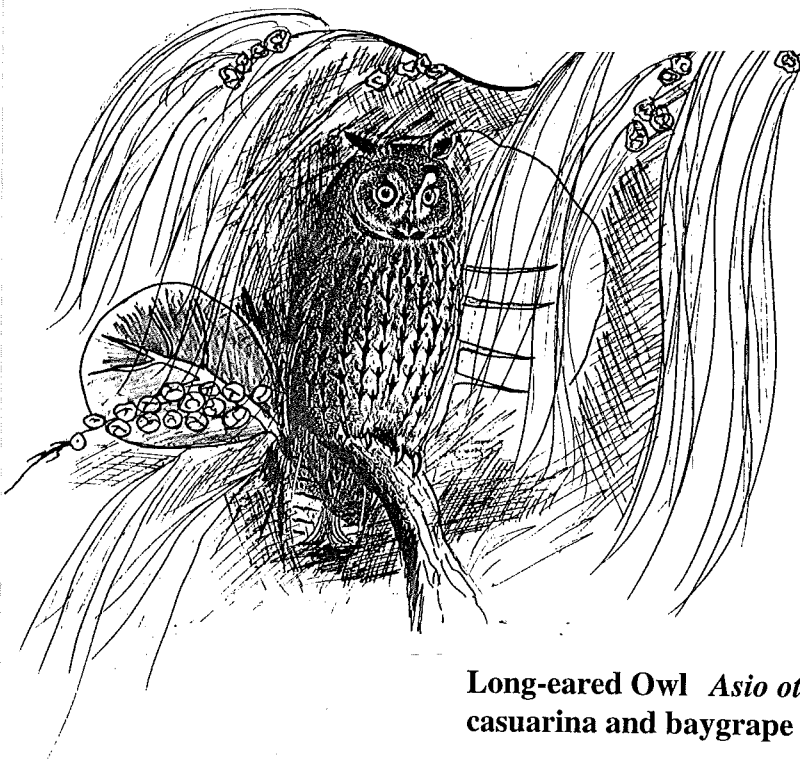


Bermud Audubon Society
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bird news
society business
environmental concerns

disorientate the owl. It seems likely that it arrived during the late October storms and was initially overlooked.

Having called around, I was able to show Jeremy and Leila Madeiros and Andrew Dobson my find, and as Andrew and I were leaving the area at dusk, the owl flew overhead with a mouse in its talons. The following day Eric Amos and I were able to find its daytime roost again, which was

different from the previous evening. We quietly observed while Eric made some sketches and took some video footage. Andrew returned later for some photographs, and at dusk Eric, David Wingate and myself settled down to witness its departure on its evening hunt - the most remarkable aspect of which was the complete silence of its wings as it ghosted overhead. At all times we moved as quietly as possible and attempted to respect the bird's privacy, which is really one of the essentials of successful and responsible birdwatching. The owl was observed several times during the following week, and I think most of the regular birdwatchers saw it. It was last seen on 11th November 1994, and although it now appears to have moved on, it may well have another hunting area in Bermuda.



Long-eared Owl *Asio otuin* in casuarina and baygrape thicket

The 1994/95 Christmas Bird Count

by Eric Amos

This year marked the 95th anniversary since 27 U.S. conservationists decided to protest the traditional bird shoot, and instead of killing birds, they counted them on Christmas Day 1900. The event originated as a protest to the traditional holiday 'side hunt' in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and animals in one day.

Today, birders from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America - (my oceanographer brother Tony did a count while crossing the Drake Passage, en route to the Antarctic), Bermuda, the West Indies, and Pacific Islands count and record every individual bird and bird species encountered during one calendar day. More than 1650 individual Christmas Bird Counts are held during a two and half week period. Each count group has a designated circle 15 miles in diameter - about 177 square miles — where they try to cover as much ground as possible within a 24-hour period. The data collected by each count group is then sent to the National Audubon Society headquarters in New York. Count data is published in a special book-sized edition of National Audubon Society Field Notes magazine and the long-time status and health of an areas local and wintering birds can be measured by analyzing the data using party hours and/or miles.

Extending the count to Bermuda in 1975 was the brainchild of the now legendary birder Keith Pellow, an English policeman with the local force. In the early days, Keith, David Wingate and I split the island into 3 parts and went out and counted from dawn to dusk, usually alone. Keith returned to the UK in 1979 and now works for the Cornwall police and is still an avid birder. 40 people have since participated in the Bermuda Christmas Bird Count, including

Sir Peter

Ramsbotham, the island's Governor in the late 1970's. On a couple of occasions it was just David and myself trying to cover as much of the island as possible as the precious daylight hours slipped away. During the 1990's we have been able to field 5 or 6 parties and the coverage has been much more complete.

The 20th Annual Bermuda Christmas Bird Count

On Thursday 29th December 1994, nine members of the Bermuda Audubon Society took part in the annual Bermuda Christmas Bird Count, joining more than 43,000 volunteers participating in America's Annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. The 6 local groups enjoyed very good weather (although it got windy in the afternoon) and counted a record 10344 birds.

With coverage this year extended to St. David's Island, St. George's Harbour, the islands off Castle Harbour, Hamilton Harbour and the Great and Little Sounds, the count was nearly 50% above the average of the last 19 years, and in the 94 species found there were three new count species, lifting the total species counted over the last 20 years to 192.

On the local scene

Bearing in mind the increased coverage this year, the record count is not particularly significant. **Bluebirds** with 44 more than the previous high count could reflect the continuing success of the nest box programme, but could also include migrants! Steven DeSilva had 14 bluebirds in his garden on Christmas Day and none were banded. Considering he has banded more than 600 nestlings since 1992, this

was probably a migrant flock. The surpassing of the local **White-eyed Vireo** maxima by 81 birds, **Cardinal** by 17 and **Catbird** by 21, certainly reflects the extended coverage and the fine weather during the count (the first two sung widely).

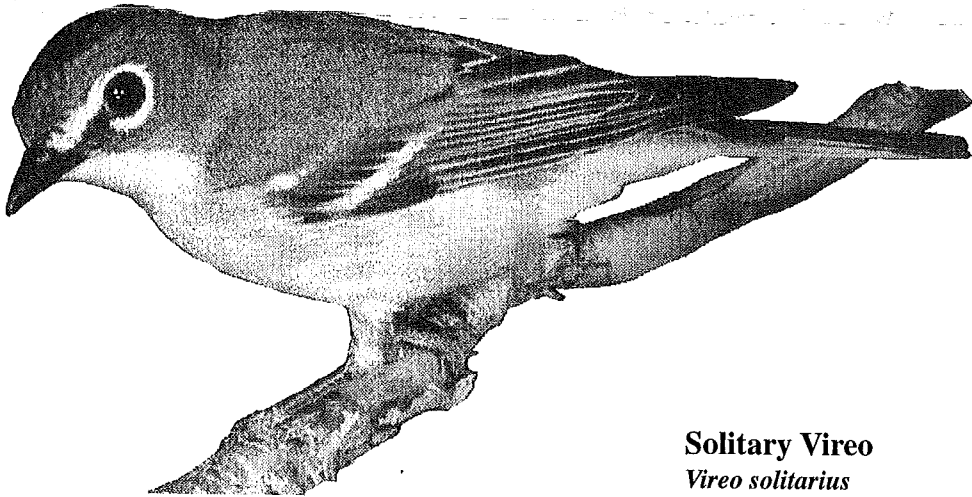
On the migrant scene.....

The high count of **Chipping Sparrows** mirrors the record fall influx of this species and if 9 were still on the Port Royal GC then no doubt many more are still scattered elsewhere. The continued increase in **Ovenbirds** is probably real although these being noisiest of the warblers, advertise themselves much more than other species. The **Belted Kingfisher** and **Great Blue Heron** count was good but as we had marine observers in sounds and harbours at both ends of the island for the first time, this was to be expected. This also allowed us to add the elusive **Piping Plover** and **Semipalmated Plover** to the list. The rather low numbers of gulls this year reflects the lack of cold weather and storms in the North East.

Wintering ducks and other waterbirds numbers continue to be disappointing. **Coots** extended their long-term slump and the once abundant **Sora** seems to be nonexistent this year.

Added to the CBC list were **Least Sandpiper**, **Solitary Vireo** (2!) and **Barn Swallow**. As the Least Sandpiper has been present during the count week three times previously and one of the vireos had been located just a week or so before the count, the "Bird of the Count" was undoubtedly the lone Barn Swallow at Daniel's Head Farm, probably swept in by a recent gale that raked the southern U.S. from the Gulf States to Florida.

Two of the three **Glossy Ibises** first recorded on the 1991 count seem to have finally departed, while one of the two **Spittal Pond Flamingos** has now been included on 9 counts!



Solitary Vireo
Vireo solitarius

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 1994

Pied-billed Grebe	46
Bermuda Petrel	CW
D.C.Cormorant	3
Great Blue Heron	38(record count)
Great Egret	9
Snowy Egret	2
Little Blue Heron	3
Green Heron	5
Y.C.Night-Heron	45(record count)
Glossy Ibis	1
Greater Flamingo	2
Green-winged Teal	12
Am. Black Duck	1
Mallard	177
Blue-winged Teal	25
Northern Shoveler	3
Eurasian Wigeon	1
American Wigeon	2
Ring-necked Duck	7
Lesser Scaup	5
Scoter sp.	2
Hooded Merganser	3
R.B. Merganser	1
Ruddy duck	1
Osprey	2
Accipiter sp.	1
American Kestrel	2
Merlin	9
Common Moorhen	67
American Coot	54
Caribbean Coot	2(record count)
B.B. Plover	133(record count)
Semi-P. Plover	2
Piping Plover	1
Killdeer	1
Spotted Sandpiper	2
Whimbrel	9
Ruddy Turnstone	233
Sanderling	9
Least sandpiper	2 NEW RECORD
Common Snipe	13
Ring-billed Gull	122
Herring Gull	30
L.B.B.Gull	2
G.B.B.Gull	17
Forster's Tern	1
Rock Dove	387
Mourning Dove	621
C.G.Dove	127

Barn Owl	2
Belted Kingfisher	33(record count)
Northern Flicker	1
Great Kiskadee	1136
Barn Swallow	1 NEW RECORD
American Crow	181
G.C.Kinglet	1
R.C.Kinglet	4
Eastern Bluebird	166(record count)
Hermit Thrush	1
Grey Catbird	255(record count)
American Pipit	1
Cedar Waxwing	31
European Starling	2753(record count)
White-eyed Vireo	287(record count)
Solitary Vireo	2 NEW RECORD
Blue-winged War.	2
Tennessee War.	1
Nashville Warbler	2
Northern Parula	18
Magnolia Warbler	1
Cape May War.	15
B.T.Blue Warbler	2
Yel-rumped War.	111
B.T.Green Warbler	1
Yel-throated War.	3
Prairie Warbler	2
Palm Warbler	125(record count)
Black&white War.	31
American Redstart	42
Prothonotary War.	1
Worm-eating War.	7
Ovenbird	101(record count)
N.Waterthrush	61
C.Yellowthroat	31
Hooded Warbler	4
Northern Cardinal	192(record count)
R.B.Grosbeak	CW
Indigo Bunting	35
Chipping Sparrow	10(record count)
Savannah sparrow	13
Fox sparrow	1
Swamp Sparrow	CW
W.T.Sparrow	5
Snow Bunting	2
Eur.Goldfinch	452(record count)
O.C.Waxbill	4
House Sparrow	2533(record count)

CW= count week only

Membership Renewal/Application

(see address label for expiry date)

Name.....Tel.No.....

Address.....

Adult.....\$10.00

Student.....\$ 5.00

Donation....\$.....

New Member

Renewal

(Please tick as appropriate)

Return to: Bermuda Audubon Society

P.O.Box HM 1328 Hamilton HM FX

EARTH DAY 1995

The Bermuda Planning Association

presents

“Charting a New Course - Sustainable Development in Bermuda”

Saturday 1st April 1995

Number One Shed

9.00am to 1.00pm

Displays of
Energy Saving Technology and Environmentally Friendly
Technology

Panel discussion at 10.00am

“Bermuda’s economic, environmental and social future”

Panelists

Mrs.Kendaree Burgess-Fairn (President KBB)

Mr.Donald Lines (Former President Bank of Bermuda)

Dr.Wolfgang Sterrer (Curator Aquarium Museum)

If undelivered please return to:



Bermuda Audubon Society
P O Box HM 1328
Hamilton HMFx

Future Events

Sunday March 5	Field Trip - Paget Marsh 2.00pm St.Paul's carpark
Wednesday March 29	"Antarctica" slideshow 7.30pm Horticultural Hall
Saturday April 8	Whale Watch - Tel. 292 0707 for details 8.30am Albuoy's Point
Sunday April 30	Cooper's Island Nature Reserve 2.00pm Clearwater Beach carpark
Sunday May 21	South Shore Beaches 2.00pm Horseshoe Bay carpark
Wednesday June 7	Annual General Meeting 7.30pm Horticultural Hall

Tel. 238 3239 For information on any event.