

# Bermuda Audubon Society NEWSLETTER

Fall  
1996

P O Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.7 No.3

## World Birdwatch '96

The Bermuda Audubon Society participated in World Birdwatch '96 held from 28th September to 13th October. Organised by BirdLife International, this year's theme was "Threatened Birds". As part of the event the society aimed to increase general interest in birds and birdwatching. The weekend birdwatching camp on Paget Island was attended by 20 members. Species recorded during the camp were included in a total of 119 species noted during the Birdwatch period. This figure represents nearly one-third of the species ever recorded in Bermuda. It is an ideal time to undertake a bird count as it is in the middle of the fall migration, when birds are moving south from their nesting areas to their wintering regions in Central and South America.

A keen incentive to find as many species as possible was provided by NTT, a Japanese telecommunications provider, which has offered to pay US\$10 for every species recorded worldwide. The money will be used by BirdLife International to fund bird conservation projects. Our efforts in Bermuda have ensured \$1190 is raised towards the total. NTT has created a Bird Count Homepage on the internet. It is packed full of information and gives the latest total of species seen. It can be visited on

<http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-n/w-bird/>

Recent data shows that 1,111 species of the world's birds are threatened with extinction. Of these, 327 live in the Americas. The main problems these birds face is the loss of habitat due to diverse human activities, and although this situation gets worse every day, it is particularly alarming for those species whose populations are small, or restricted to small ranges. Other factors threatening the survival of these birds, although to a lesser degree, include hunting, commercial trade and the introduction of non-native species.

The Audubon Society was particularly pleased to be able to record the endangered Cahow during the count. One bird returned to its nesting burrow on the 7th October - equalling the earliest return date. Other birds of note were a Lark Sparrow (only the third recorded in Bermuda), five White Ibis (only single birds have ever been recorded in Bermuda before) and a rare Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

Andrew Dobson

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**INTERNATIONAL**

## 1995-96 Cahow Nesting Report

1996 was a landmark year in the recovery programme of the Cahow *Pterodroma cahow*, in that for the first time the breeding population exceeded 50 established pairs, 52 to be exact. Although breeding success continued lower than normal, the fledgling crop continued its trend of slow increase since the setback of 1990. The total of 26 which fledged was just short of the record in 1989. It would have been better but for the disastrous effects of Hurricane Felix's massive groundswell in 1995. The conservation crew were able to repair the damage to cahow nests in time. There was no time to deal with the massive destruction of longtail nest sites (White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*). So many longtails were displaced that in their desperate search for new nest sites they put extraordinary pressure on the "baffle system" and forced entry into two cahow burrows with fatal results for one cahow chick. The only recourse was to reduce the size of the baffles by a further one-eighth of an inch which became a very tight squeeze for some cahows and required closer monitoring of the nest sites. Hopefully a project to alleviate the nest site shortage for longtails (see below) will solve this problem by next year.

### Conservation Grant from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office for Longtails (White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*).

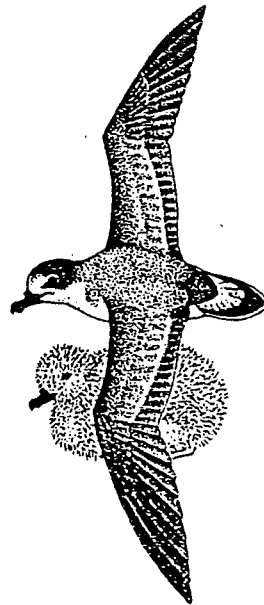
At the instigation of the Bermuda National Trust an application was made for an F.C.O. grant used for conservation in the dependent territories, to assist the Bermuda Government Conservation Unit in developing efficient techniques for making longtail nest-sites. In

July we learned that that a £2,000 grant was awarded. It will be used to research two alternative strategies.

- 1) The most efficient and portable drilling equipment for drilling hole in coastal cliffs.
- 2) A mass producible nesting box for longtails which can be cemented in place on cliff ledges. Thanks to the interest and cooperation of SKB roofing we are investigating the possibility of fabricating these out of new styrofoam and fiberglass cement roofing materials. Prototypes should be available for testing by November.

This project has already attracted interest from other conservation organisations in the US and a larger grant is being sought to aid cavity-nesting seabirds on a global scale.

David B. Wingate

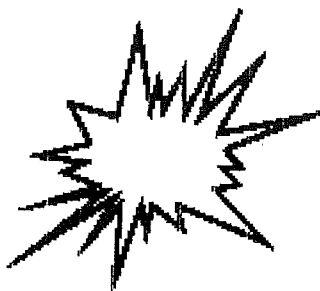


## Helium-filled Balloons - Deadly Celebration

"In 1985, a young sperm whale was found dying on the shores of New Jersey as the result of a mylar balloon lodged in its stomach and three feet of purple ribbon wound through its intestines. In 1987, a necropsy of a half ton leatherback turtle revealed that its digestive tract was blocked by a latex balloon and three feet of ribbon. Much attention has been focused upon plastic trash in the oceans and its danger to wildlife, yet most people fail to recognise that balloon releases contribute to the problem. There is really no difference between releasing 250,000 balloons and tossing 250,000 plastic bags over the side of a ship." (*A Citizen's Guide to Plastics in the Ocean: More Than A Litter Problem*, Center for Marine Conservation, 1988)

The ZBM-TV news on 11 September, featured a heartening report about a celebration at the Victor Scott Primary School. During the report, it mentioned that the teachers had decided, "for environmental reasons", not to release balloons as part of the celebration.

The May 1996 issue of *Science Scope* (a journal for secondary school science teachers), featured an article on helium balloons, which said, in part, "Helium-filled balloons that are released into the atmosphere eventually burst and fall to the Earth's surface. Animals, particularly those in aquatic environments, are vulnerable to lethally ingesting latex balloons."



Because of growing concern about this danger to fish, marine mammals and, particularly, marine turtles, school students in some parts of the USA have been instrumental in getting helium balloons banned.

Helium-filled balloons that are released in Bermuda are one hundred per cent sure to end up in the ocean, where they not only add to the enormous amount of man-made litter already floating there, but may become a fatal meal for creatures such as our green turtles. When a dead turtle is recovered locally, and taken to the Aquarium, it is nearly always found to have a stomach full of various kinds of plastic - including plastic bags and bits of balloon. With so many people working for the conservation of marine turtles through the Bermuda Turtle Project, it is sad to realise that turtles continue to die because of our carelessness.

The staff and students of Victor Scott Primary should be very proud of their balloon-free celebration, knowing that it did not endanger any of our precious marine life. When it comes to balloons, clearly it's time to go back to good old air.

**Penny Hill**

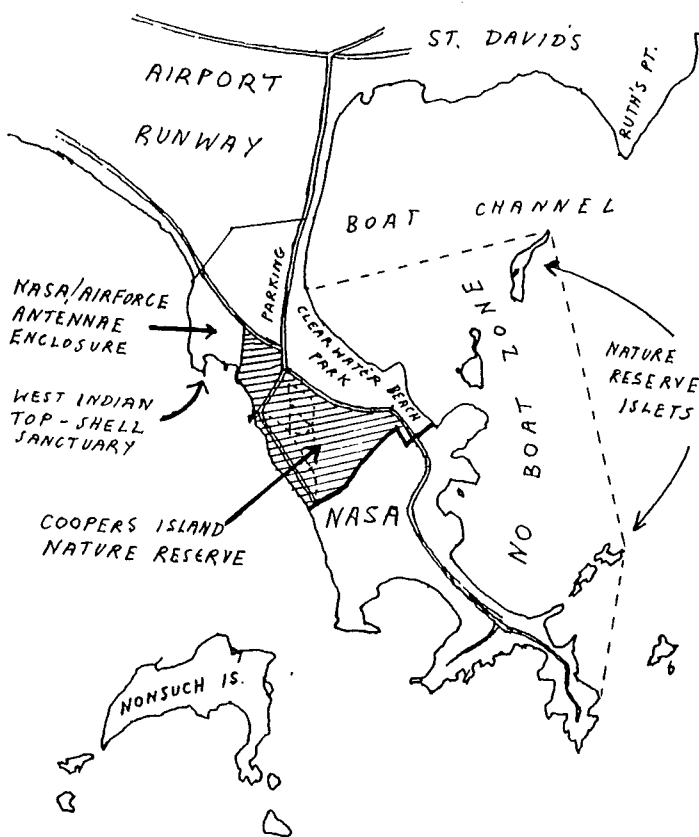
# Cooper's Island - New Government Nature Reserve

Concurrent with the opening of Clearwater Beach to the public on May 24th, the Castle Harbour side of Cooper's Island was designated as a nature reserve (it was already developed as such before the US Navy left). This has proved to be a complementary companion to the beach park by providing a traffic free area for family and nature lovers to get away from the crowds that flock to the beach all summer. The Parks Department spent most of the spring getting this new park ready and erecting fencing to separate the NASA base areas on Cooper's Point. As an added benefit, the large intertidal West

Indian Top-Shells were protected. (They were reintroduced as part of the Nonsuch Living Museum project).

There was some concern that public access might pose a threat to nearby cahow islets, but the declaration of a "no boat zone" over the southern half of Annie's Bay in front of Clearwater Beach and around the outer (NASA Base) half of Cooper's Island, and "No Landing" signs on the beach and the islets seem to be working well. Lifeguards were also on hand over the summer to ensure compliance.

David B. Wingate



## Fall Bird News

As it is still in the middle of the fall migration, I should really be out birding rather than spending time at the computer. However, its dark so there's not much to be seen outside. That's not to say you can not carry on birding through the night. Birds on migration can often be heard making contact calls during their night migration - so why not enjoy your after dinner drink outside and see what you can hear!

Fall migration promised much with a good range of shorebird species and a burst of early warblers in August. Since then, although we've had most of the expected migrant species, the number of individual birds has not been great, but perhaps that's a sign of the times! Bird species in good numbers have included **Prothonotary Warbler**, **Northern Waterthrush** and **Baltimore Oriole**. The later species was until recently known as Northern Oriole. It certainly made its presence felt this fall, with parties of birds throughout the island and probably more than 100 birds in total. Rare vagrants from the south have included a **Brown Booby**, taken into care at BAMZ only to discharge itself a few days later! ; five **White Ibis** at Devonshire Marsh (exceptional in that only single birds had ever been seen before and then very rarely); two separate **Grey Kingbirds**; but most tantalizing of all a **Swift** (*Cypseloides sp ?*) seen over Fort Scaur

## Birding the Internet - in Japanese (English is also available). See p.1



アメリカ合衆国  
エイミー・ブラウン

私の住まいはニューヨークのダウントウンなので普段見られる鳥はムクドリやカラスの類ばかりですが、郊外に外出すると面白い鳥を目にすることがあります。街の中で猛禽類が見られたこともありますし今回はどんな報告ができるか、私も楽しみです。この企画はとて素晴らしいものなので、わたしもぜひ貢献したいと思っています。

ハクトウワシ  
*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

during a reggae concert (so that's why Eric Amos and David Wingate were there).

At the time of writing (mid-October), as many as five **Peregrine Falcons** may be on the island, probably a record number. Other good sightings have included **Black Scoter**, **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Clay-coloured Sparrow** and **Lark Sparrow** (the 3rd record for Bermuda). 36 of the 38 species of warbler ever recorded here have already been seen this fall. A full report of the fall migration will appear in the next newsletter. Members are urged to send in details of their sightings.

Andrew Dobson

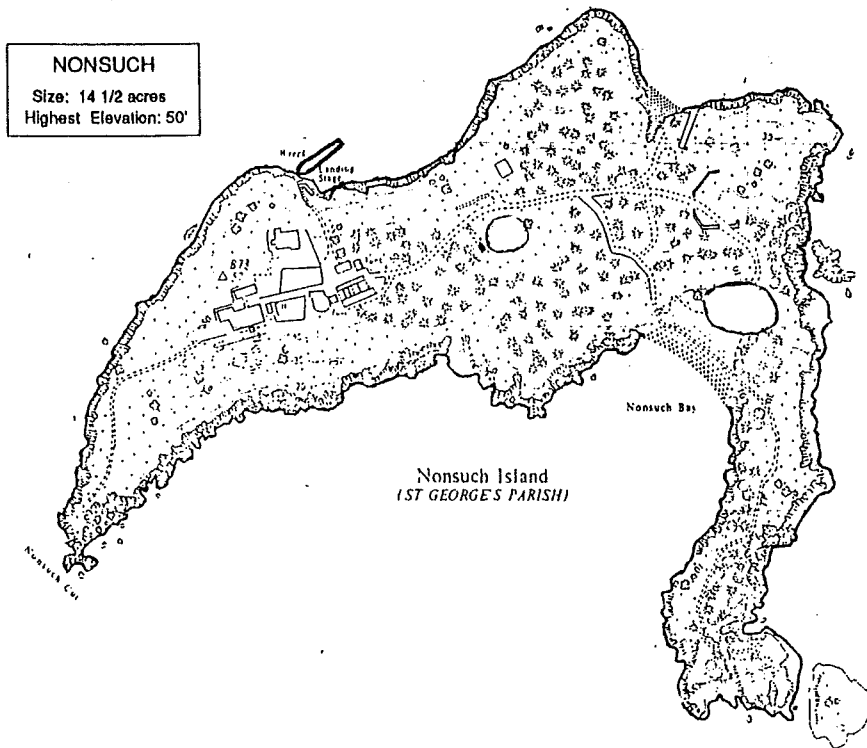
## Bermuda Audubon Society Natural History Camp 1996

The natural history camp for the island's 4th year students has been running for over 20 years. Run this summer in conjunction with the Bermuda Zoological Society, sixteen students from a number of Bermuda's secondary schools attended the week long course based on Nonsuch Island. Students received an intensive course in the island's ecology from professional experts in such fields as coral reef ecology, mangrove swamp habitat, turtle conservation and wetland management. Field trips took students snorkelling in Harrington Sound, Walsingham Pond and 10 miles to the north of Bermuda at North Rock. Studies were made in Paget Marsh, Hungry Bay and Walsingham Jungle. Students also had the

opportunity to take part in the international Green Turtle research programme.

Jahnika Simons had been looking forward to the Nonsuch Island camp since she was in the 1st year at Warwick Academy - reading the posters advertising the course. At last she had the opportunity to apply this year and was successful in her application. Such was her enthusiasm for the course that she produced some excellent written work and test scores during the week. In a very competitive field she was awarded the honour of top student. She received the Mervyn White Memorial Shield for 1996.

Andrew Dobson



## 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

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## Bermuda Audubon Society

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Newsletter

### Dr.David Lee

Curator of Birds at North Carolina  
State Museum of Sciences

presents

"How to screw up perfectly  
good islands"

A slide illustrated review of how the  
war and post-war influences on the  
U.S.Pacific Trust Territories have  
affected the people and the wildlife.

Monday 18th November

Horticultural Hall, Botanical

Gardens 7.30 pm

If undelivered please return to:



Bermuda Audubon Society  
P O Box HM 1328  
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## Future Events

**Monday 18  
November**

**"How to screw up perfectly good islands"  
An illustrated talk by Dr. David Lee on how war  
and post-war influences on the U.S. Pacific  
Trust Territories have affected the people and  
the wildlife.**

**Horticultural Hall, Botanical Gardens 7.30 pm**

**Saturday 9 November**

**Sunday 10 November**

**and**

**Saturday 16 November**

**Sunday 17 November**

**In Search of the Cahow - book a place on board  
RV Henry Stommel. Trips will leave from the  
Biological Station on the first fine weather day  
of each weekend. 2pm to dusk. \$15.00.  
Details and reservations 297 2623**

**Dec./Jan**

**Christmas Bird Count  
Date to be arranged**