



Bermuda Audubon Society
NEWSLETTER

Fall
1997

P O Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.8 No.3

Audubon Society to Take Over Assets and Functions of the Bermuda Bluebird & Longtail Society

In May this year, we received a letter from Tommy Outerbridge, president of the Bermuda Bluebird & Longtail Society, advising that his on-going health problems, following his accidental fall which led to quadriplegia, were obliging him to relocate to England and he no longer felt able to serve the society efficiently as president.

As he was unable to find a willing successor to maintain the society as a separate charity, he felt it would be more expedient if its assets and specific roles were taken over by the Bermuda Audubon Society. As the Audubon Society was the first to initiate a bluebird nestbox campaign anyway, and has always considered bluebird and longtail conservation as a part of its mandate, this proposal was readily approved at the AGM in June.

While there are still certain obligations to the Bluebird Society membership and some technicalities to iron out to conform with the provisions of the Charities Act, we expect the process to be completed during the fall. Meanwhile, we are offering all registered members of the Bluebird Society at the time of this decision, a free membership in the Bermuda Audubon Society for the remainder of their dues period, and invite them to renew as members of the Bermuda Audubon Society.

In honouring our commitment to the goals of the former Bluebird & Longtail Society, your executive committee has already agreed to schedule a workshop on bluebird and longtail nestbox management in the spring of 1998.

David B. Wingate

Two Honorary Life Members Elected at AGM

The society is pleased to report that two new honorary life members were approved by the membership present at the AGM in June. R. D. 'Tommy' Outerbridge was elected because of his outstanding contributions as founder and president of the Bluebird Society. Tommy succeeded in greatly increasing public participation in the conservation of the bluebird from the narrow base of a few dedicated bird lovers to a community-wide programme involving a large percentage of private property owners. In making the nomination, the president said it was especially appropriate to make Tommy an honorary life member since the society had agreed to absorb the assets of the Bluebird Society and to perpetuate its goals as part of Audubon's conservation mandate.

Dennis Sherwin was elected for his major financial contributions to open space purchases and conservation projects. A few years ago Dennis single-handedly purchased the Warwick Pond and surrounding woodland as a nature reserve for \$200,000, and just this year he has donated another \$350,000 for the construction of a boardwalk through Paget Marsh. As most of that boardwalk will actually run over the Audubon Society owned portion of the marsh, we feel it is fitting to elect him to honorary life membership.

Progress Report on Grant to Develop Artificial Tropicbird Nest-sites

In our previous newsletter (Vol.8 No.2), we reported on the development of an artificial nest for White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* using styrofoam hemispheres coated in fibre-bond cement, using the SKB roofing process. A total of 20 of these were cemented out on appropriate clifftops and ledges before the longtail nesting season got underway, and we are delighted to report that at least 15 were prospected by nest-seeking longtails during the summer.

As newly prospected sites are rarely successful in their first year (it sometimes takes 2 or 3 years for a prospecting bird to attract a mate and begin successful breeding), we are extremely encouraged by the results so far. One of the 20 nests did, in fact, produce a fledgling successfully but in this case the artificial nest was placed over a previously unsuitable nest-site under vegetation, where a displaced pair of longtails had been trying to nest unsuccessfully since hurricane Felix. Installation of the remaining 18 experimental nests will be completed this winter.

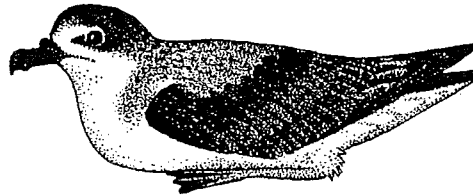
David B. Wingate

Another Prematurely Abandoned Cahow Chick Successfully Reared Through to Fledging

As I was preparing to go on summer leave to Madeira to consult with Dr. Frank Zino, who is in charge of the closely related and even more endangered Madeira (Zino's) Petrel *Pterodroma madeira*, I agonized over the fate of the last cahow chick which was still nowhere near ready to depart and obviously abandoned by the time I was due to leave. The offer of help came from my summer assistant on the conservation crew, Andre Raine, who is pursuing a degree in environmental sciences.

The day before I left we retrieved the chick from the burrow and took it to the Aquarium, where the staff, especially Jennifer Gray, provided all the facilities and lots of helpful advice. Using the procedures spelled out in my paper on the "first successful hand-rearing of an abandoned Bermuda Petrel chick" (1972), and with the advantage of e-mail communication with me in Madeira, Andre and his girlfriend Giselle Laxalt devoted the next three weeks of near sleepless nights to feeding the chick a blended mixture of squid and shrimp and overseeing the nightly wing exercising routine.

The chick finally departed from a makeshift burrow on Nonsuch Island on the night of 23 July (nearly two months later than the norm), and was last seen flying strongly and gaining altitude rapidly over Castle Harbour!



Cahows Have Most Successful Nesting Season Since Their Rediscovery in 1951!

A total of 53 established breeding pairs of Cahow *Pterodroma cahow* hatched 31 chicks, of which 28 fledged normally and one fledged late after some artificial assistance (see above). This is the most successful year since 1989, when 28 chicks fledged. A major population collapse following that year reduced breeding success dramatically to 17, and it has taken 8 years for it to climb gradually back up to exceed the previous record.

David B. Wingate

Proposed Expansion of Equestrian Centre of Major Concern to Audubon Society

Anyone concerned about open space conservation in Bermuda should be prepared to make their voices heard when the latest Equestrian Federation proposal comes before Planning because it would guarantee the total obliteration of the magnificent Dunscombe Woods on Vesey Street, behind Devonshire Marsh - the last rural lane overshadowed by ancient cedar and other trees in all of Bermuda.

Our particular concerns with the application are that it challenges and defies once again - and this time without even a pretense of compromise - the fundamental environmental constraints of that site, which the Planning Department made abundantly clear when restricting the size of the harness track at the time the original application was approved: the existing site is simply too small and the surrounding wooded slopes too steep to accommodate an international standard track without an obscenely massive quarrying operation.

Nevertheless, they now propose a 3-year long quarrying operation, involving the removal of 200,000 cubic yards of rubble, on a scale equivalent to a major industrial quarry, which would destroy 4 acres of woodland, zoned as

woodland reserve, which is highly visible from Middle Road across the marsh, leaving an 80 foot high stepped quarry face in its place. Increased wind exposure and wind funnelling along the cliff would additionally degrade another 2 or 3 acres of adjacent woodlands, including land on the adjoining Audubon Society nature reserves! The biggest irony here is that this is the core of Bermuda's last large rural area bounded by Ocean View golf course on the north and west, and Devonshire Marsh with all of its established nature reserves on the south. As such it has the potential for a passive recreational parkland equivalent to, if not better than, Hog Bay Park. All that would be necessary to bring this concept together would be the closing of Vesey Street as a throughway between the existing equestrian centre and the society's Firefly Nature Reserve, and the creation of a trail into the railway right of way to the north and the nature reserves in the marsh.

David B. Wingate

**Bermuda Audubon Society's
first objective (see Newsletter
Vol.5 No.2) :**

**"To arouse through education,
public recognition of the value
of and need for protecting wild
birds and animals, plants, soil,
and water as well as the
interdependence of these
natural resources".**

WORLD BIRDWATCH '97

WORLD BIRDWATCH '97, the world's biggest event centred on birds, will take place on 4-5 October 1997. The event is coordinated by BirdLife International. The body is a global partnership of organisations working for the conservation of birds and their habitats and through that, for the diversity of all life.

Over 200 organisations in nearly 100 countries will take part. Participants will join thousands of people all over the world to watch, learn about, or simply celebrate birds on 4-5 October. The event follows the success of WORLD BIRDWATCH events in 1993 and 1995. In Bermuda, the Audubon Society will once again be running a weekend camp on Paget Island and visiting many bird habitats in St. George's Parish.

The aim of the event is to draw attention to the plight of the 1,111 bird species that are threatened with global extinction. This is nearly 11% of the world's bird species. The major problem facing these birds is the loss of their habitat, through the destruction of forest, drainage of wetlands and intensification of agriculture. The situation is only too acute in Bermuda where the once abundant Cahow is now limited to minimal habitat. Precious wetland and woodland habitat are under constant threat. Proposed

developments at Ship's Hill and along Vesey Street would result in a huge loss of woodland habitat for bird species.

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NNT), a leading telecommunications company from Japan, are also sponsoring the 3rd NNT "World Bird Count" in association with WORLD BIRDWATCH '97. For every species identified during WORLD BIRDWATCH '97, NNT will make a donation to support the global work of BirdLife International. During the 1996 NNT World Bird Count, 80,000 birdwatchers reported over 5,000 species in 81 countries, raising \$43,500 for conservation. The Bermuda Audubon Society aims to beat the 119 species it recorded last year.

Andrew Dobson



Bird Highlights

It would be an understatement to say that 1997 has been a wet year. Record amounts of rain were recorded in both May, 11.7" (av. 3.2") and August, 12.23' (av. 5.1") and September's figure of 9.2" was well above normal (av. 5.1"). The northward Spring migration is never well observed in Bermuda and the high rainfall is unlikely to have had much effect on birds visiting our island. It is not obvious whether the wet weather has had much effect on the breeding success of our resident birds. Unusual summering birds included a long staying White Ibis at Jubilee Road and An American Wigeon at Waterville Park. Ten stunning Black-necked Stilts graced North Pond on June 8th - a new maxima for this species. Two Gull-billed Terns in late June provided Bermuda with another maxima, as less than ten individuals have been recorded in the last 25 years. Peter Holmes discovery of a Yellow-rumped Warbler at Devonshire Marsh on 11th June was the latest date for any Spring migrant warbler , while

..... a Louisiana Waterthrush found by Andrew Dobson on 8th July at Compston's Pond was the earliest Fall record for any warbler species. The wet early Fall produced a wide variety of shorebirds with many

favouring grassy areas that are not usually flooded. No real surprises amongst the shorebirds, but at least 26 species have put in an appearance so far this Fall. Over 140 American Golden-Plover at the airport provided another Bermuda maxima.

A Grey Kingbird found by Paul Reed at Coral Beach Club on 19th September may have been the same one seen by Eric Amos the following day at Spicelands. One small field at Hog Bay Park provided a bonanza for birdwatchers during the last ten days of September. On the 21st September an Olive-sided Flycatcher found by Andrew Dobson and Paul Reed was the first since 1985 and only the sixth in the last 30 years. While Jeremy Madeiros was searching for this bird he discovered a Great Crested Flycatcher. The following day David Wallace and Paul Reed recorded a Clay-coloured Sparrow and Yellow-breasted Chat in the same field. Over 30 species were noted in this pumpkin field, attracted by the numerous weeds, bugs and moths. They included Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Empidonax flycatchers, Red-eyed Vireos, Nashville, Cape May, Blackpoll and Mourning Warblers, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted and Blue Grosbeaks, Dickcissel, Bobolink and Baltimore Oriole, not to mention our resident species such as Great Kiskadee and Northern Cardinal.

Andrew Dobson

Natural History Camp 1997

Thirteen students headed for Nonsuch Island on Saturday 21st June. Many of us had never met before but by the end of the week we had all grown very close. The camp provided us with a great opportunity to learn more about Bermuda's ecology. The first day consisted of setting up camp and with the help of Dr. Wingate, familiarizing ourselves with the island, which proved interesting and educational. Every evening we gathered outside the lab to 'cram' for a test on the things we had seen that day. Everyday was packed with activities and I must say, even though we were eating big meals, I came back very fit.

We visited Spittal Pond and learnt about its history and plants as well as observing its unique rock features. Hungry Bay was a muddy experience as we battled spiders, mangroves and mud in order to conduct a transect through the mangroves. Paget Marsh was another fascinating outing where Dr. Wingate had us all looking for whistling frogs but we were disappointed only to find young toads. The visit to Tom Moores Jungle and Admiral's Cave was a fun day. Everyone enjoyed the experience of swimming in the cave as well as the bit of abseiling we performed in order to get down into Admiral's Cave. Here we learned more about man's impact on Bermuda. Exploring Harrington

Sound and Devil's Hole and having lunch on Cockroach Island was a wonderful experience. Learning how to navigate ourselves in flippers and a life jacket, as well as seeing many extraordinary things that live in the water, such as giant fire coral. I think everyone enjoyed the day at North Rock the best.

Although the weather was not the greatest, we still participated enthusiastically in the transects along the reefs and in the collection of data. I feel that our presentations that evening about each of the different three sites, comparing and analysing data, proved how much interest people found in the reefs.

Until this course, I had never been aware of all the different creatures that live in Bermuda, such as the 'dive-bombing' Common Terns, the baby Longtail sitting on its nest at Spittal Pond and the glorious display performed by mating Fire Worms. The morning spent turtle tagging was a unique experience, swimming with the Green Turtles. None of us had ever seen Skinks before and we were surprised by their appearance and even more amazed to see a Giant Land Crab at Hungry Bay wandering through the mangroves like a giant white ghost.

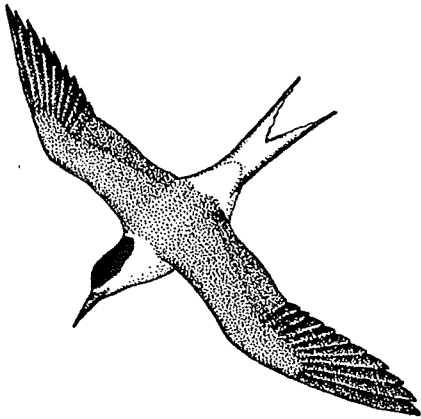
We met many knowledgeable people during the week and were greatly educated by them. Everyone had lots of fun learning and experiencing the true wonders of our island and for the first time really having our

eyes opened. I personally feel I gained a lot from the course, as well as a new understanding and appreciation for this 'island in the sun' and I am thrilled that I had the opportunity to experience the camp. I wish to thank Dr. Wingate and all the counsellors for providing us with a wonderful week and to thank the participants too for making it a fun week.

Jessica Waltham

(Jessica was the top student on the camp and received the Mervyn White Memorial Shield. Ed.)

The Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda Zoological Society, joint organised of the camp would like to thank the volunteers who ran the camp - Duncan Ashworth, Andrew Fields (Director), Andrew Dobson, Annie Glasspool and Marie Newby - and the many others who helped make this year's camp so successful.



Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*

Joint Planning Application with the Bermuda National Trust for Boardwalk and Pond is Imminent

Over the summer significant progress has been made in mapping the route for the boardwalk across the Audubon portion of the Paget Marsh Reserve, and finalising the plans for an open water pond at the boardwalk entrance. This task required a fairly detailed survey carried out at a generous discount by Jones Waddington before final plans could be submitted to Planning jointly with the National Trust.

As soon as planning approval is obtained, we will put the contract out to tender for the pond excavation, which we will fund. We hope to begin this as our next major project by winter. The pond will be approximately 60 feet wide by 200 feet long, with two small islets and bordered by tall red mangrove swamp on one side. At either end it will link into the perimeter mosquito control ditch that encircles the marsh.

The boardwalk will begin as an enclosed bridge over the north-west corner of the pond which will also function as a rain shelter, interpretive exhibit and bird observation hide, the pond itself being the first of five different habitats that will be featured along the route of the boardwalk.

David B. Wingate

Membership Renewal/Application

(see address label for expiry date)

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

Address.....

Adult.....\$10.00

New Member

Student.....\$ 5.00

Renewal

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

Please return to Bermuda Audubon Society

P.O.Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX

Bermuda Audubon Society Committee 1997/98

President	David Wingate
Vice-president	Peter Holmes
Treasurer	Ted Cassidy
Secretary	Penny Hill
Officers:	Bruce Lorhan
	Jeremy Madeiros
	David O'Neill
	David Saul
	Stuart Smith
	Helge Wingate

Newsletter	Andrew Dobson
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Bermuda Audubon Society

HOTLINE

235-5513

OR

297-2623

Bird News

Society Business

Environmental Concerns



If undelivered please return to:

Bermuda Audubon Society
P O Box HM 1328
Hamilton HMFx

Future Events

**Wednesday 29
October**

**"On the Trail of the Blue-footed Booby:
Ecuador Rainforest and Galapagos Islands"
A talk and slide show by Penny Hill
BUEI Auditorium 7.30 pm
Admission \$10 (students \$5)
Proceeds towards Paget Marsh Pond**

**Saturday or Sunday
8/9 November
and
Saturday or Sunday
15/16 November**

**Pelagic Fieldtrip on RV Henry Stommel
"In Search of Cahows"
Depart Biological Station on the first fine
weather day of each weekend at 2.00pm
\$15.00 Reservations - call 292-1920(after 6 pm)**

December/January

Christmas Bird Count (to be arranged)