



**Bermuda Audubon Society**

# **NEWSLETTER**

**Winter 2017-18**

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## **Northern Fulmar – New to Bermuda** by Kevin Winter



January 8<sup>th</sup> started with a dozen boats fishing on the northern side of Challenger Banks. Each boat had a few seagulls hovering overhead hunting for opportunities to eat. By 4 p.m. all the boats had left, and all the gulls came to us as the lone boat on the Banks. It was then that Chris Burgess noticed that one of the birds was very different (especially the bill) and when it finally dove down to feed it confirmed that this was NO GULL! We ran to get a few photos and it was soon gone as the gulls were very aggressive that day. Next day I looked through my photos before selecting Northern Fulmar as the best match by far, except for the fact that it had never been

recorded here! I then put it on eBird to see if others agreed with my identification. It is ironic that on a trip to Antarctica my favourite bird was the (Southern) Fulmars who were always visible gliding over the ship's slipstream as we crossed the Drake Channel from Tierra Del Fuego. I have however noted that all the seabirds that we see now are hungrier and more interested in the boat than in the past - perhaps indicating a growing trend of difficulty in finding natural food sources.



*This report from Kevin shows the value of digital photography and eBird.*

*The majority of the North American population of Atlantic fulmars breeds at 11 colonies in the e. Canadian Arctic above 65°N. Additionally, five small colonies are found in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is common to 43°N along the w. Atlantic Coast; regular in winter, but increasingly scarce south to Cape Hatteras. This species has been long-expected to occur in Bermuda. Ed.)*

*Photos: Chris Burgess*

## 2018 – Year of the Bird

This year marks the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, one of the most powerful and important bird-protection laws ever passed. In honour of this milestone, nature lovers around the world are joining forces to celebrate the “Year of the Bird” and commit to protecting birds today and for the next hundred years.

Over 100 conservation organisations that work to protect birds and their habitats are marking this anniversary including the Bermuda Audubon Society. These organisations are working together to increase the public’s awareness and appreciation for the importance of birds. Here are a few ideas:

1. **Learn your birds.** Having difficulty? Cornell can help! The Merlin app is free; it identifies more than 650 U.S. and Canada birds, with additional support for birds of Mexico, Central America, and Europe; it comes with photos, range maps, and sounds; and it works on both iOS and Android. Just download it and head out for a short walk. Go to <http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>
2. **Buy a set of Bermuda Audubon bird ID cards** – available in local bookshops and Aberfeldy Nursery.
3. **Record your sightings on [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org)** The eBird project provides a handy way to keep all your sightings in one place. You can even upload photos and sound recordings to remind you of what you found.
4. **Become a Bird Song Hero.** If there’s a bird song that has been bugging you, you’re not alone. Go to Cornell’s website: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/features/bird-song-hero/bird-song-hero-tutorial>
5. **Drink shade-grown coffee.** Why? Because it helps birds. Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fXBZ-a4ohk>
6. **Get a good pair of binoculars without breaking the bank.** There are lots of websites to help you decide like this one: <http://www.audubon.org/gear/binocular-guide>
7. **Construct and monitor a bluebird nest box.**
8. **Join a bird organisation.** Invite a friend to go birding with you. Join a bird watching trip. Join a local or national bird group, such as the Bermuda Audubon Society; BirdsCaribbean; the Cornell Lab of Ornithology; the National Audubon Society; or BirdLife International. You’ll also get some of the best magazines available!
9. Buy a bird field guide. Recommended: The Sibley Guide to Birds (2014).
10. **Don’t take bird migration for granted.** Next time you see that Ruddy Turnstone at Albuoy’s Point, a tern in Harrington Sound, a tiny warbler in the Arboretum, an egret at Spittal Pond, or an osprey overhead—any migratory bird—spare a thought for its epic and testing journey across the globe, and what it sees from up high in the sky. **Think about people** from other countries who will be watching the very same bird in just a few weeks’ time. **And think about the work** being done to protect habitat along the bird’s migratory flyway.

**To learn more about these ideas and much more about Bermuda’s birds – come to Andrew Dobson’s repeat lecture at the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February at 7:30 pm**



Audubon



## Summary of the 2017 Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) Breeding Season

Jeremy Madeiros, Cahow Recovery Project Manager, Senior Terrestrial Conservation Officer, Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources



The most recent nesting/breeding season for the critically endangered Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) began in late October 2016, and ended on the night of 27/28<sup>th</sup> June 2017, when the last Cahow chick fledged out to the open ocean, not to return for several years. The Cahow is endemic or unique to Bermuda, nesting nowhere else on the planet. It is pelagic, spending most of its life in the middle of the ocean, and returns to land only to breed, laying a single egg annually. It nests on only 6 small islands totalling only 20 acres, in the Castle Harbour Islands Nature Reserve, where it is

protected by wardens and the subject of an intensive management programme. Overall, during this breeding season, the Cahow has continued its positive upward trend in both the number of established breeding pairs and overall size of the population, and in the number of successfully fledged chicks being produced by the nesting pairs. When active management of the Cahow and its tiny offshore nesting islands began around 1960, the entire population consisted of only 17 to 18 breeding pairs, producing a total of only 7 to 8 chicks annually. The population faced many threats and challenges, including predation by introduced rats swimming out to the nesting islands, lack of suitable deep nesting cavities, nest competition by the larger White-tailed tropicbird (Longtail), which took over nest burrows and killed the defenceless Cahow chicks, and light pollution from the nearby Naval Air Station (now Bermuda International Airport), which disrupts the night-flying Cahow and disorients the chicks when they depart to sea.

The 2017 nesting season saw the Cahow nesting population increase to a record number of 117 established breeding pairs (those that produced an egg, whether it hatched or not). In addition, a record number of 61 chicks successfully fledged out to sea (the first time the number of fledged chicks has exceeded 60). These numbers have probably not existed since the 1600s, when the formally abundant Cahow was decimated by the arrival of human colonists on Bermuda, through overhunting and predation by introduced mammal predators such as pigs, rats, cats and dogs. In addition to the encouraging continued increases in breeding pairs and fledging chicks, a record number of over 10 newly establishing, prospecting pairs was recorded, most of which should produce their first eggs and come “on-line” as breeding pairs next season.

One of the major threats facing the Cahow has been erosion and damage to their original tiny breeding islands by repeated hurricanes, which produce huge waves that completely submerge the smaller islands and rip huge chunks of rock away. Their small size also severely limits the number of breeding Cahows that can nest on them. To address this, one of the main objectives of the Cahow Recovery Programme has been to establish new Cahow nesting colonies on larger islands that are safe from hurricane erosion and have more room to enable the Cahow population to grow. The islands also must be constantly managed and warded to eradicate predators such as rats, and control human access to prevent disturbance.

Nonsuch Island was chosen as the site to establish a new Cahow nesting colony, as it is managed to exclude rats and other invasive species and is the site of a warden’s residence. Cahows were eradicated by the early colonists on Nonsuch and had not nested on the island since the 1620s. Translocation is a technique in which chicks are removed from their original burrows on the smaller islets and moved to artificial burrows on Nonsuch, where they are hand-fed daily and allowed to imprint on and fledge

from their new site. Cahow chicks were moved to Nonsuch for 5 years during 2004-2008 and fed until they fledged to sea. This technique worked, and a number of these birds returned 3 to 6 years later to choose nest burrows and mates. By 2017, the number of nesting pairs at this new colony site increased to 16, with 8 chicks fledging from this area. This project worked so well that in 2013 a second translocation programme was started, to establish a second colony at a different location on Nonsuch. During the 2017 season, 14 Cahow chicks were translocated to Nonsuch, bringing the total number of chicks moved to this second site to 65. In addition, during 2017 the first three Cahows moved to this site as chicks during 2013 and 2014 returned and started to occupy nest burrows at this second site, with one new pair confirmed, and it seems likely that this signals the start of a second new colony.

Other threats to the Cahow include the invasion of Nonsuch by rats swimming over from the main island during 2016. These were eradicated by the use of rodenticide bait by November 2016. In addition, hurricane 'Nicole' hit Bermuda directly in October 2016, submerging two of the smaller nesting islands but causing only limited damage. In early June 2017, one of the translocated chicks was stung to death by a swarm of honeybees that occupied its nest burrow. This swarm was removed shortly after by the Government Agricultural Officer. Despite these threats, the Cahow population has continued to increase and recover from the edge of extinction. Due to the recovery programme and the intensive management and control of threats to the species, the future of Bermuda's unique national bird looks increasingly positive. (*Photo of Cahow chick – Andrew Dobson*)

## Christmas Bird Count 2017

**Andrew Dobson**

In conjunction with National Audubon in the US, the Bermuda Audubon Society held its 43rd CBC on 27th December 2017. Features of this year's count included:

- 7,012 individual birds were counted (down from last year)
- 85 species of birds (93 in 2016, 93 in 2015, 92 in 2014)
- Record counts of Osprey (3), Lesser Black-backed Gull (70) and Summer Tanager (3)
- European Starling was the most common species



Seventeen keen birders were divided into seven areas, counting birds from dawn to dusk. Count day was on December 27<sup>th</sup> but additional species can be included during count week (3 days either side of count day). Highlights of the count included birds not usually seen in December, notably an immature Purple Gallinule in Devonshire Marsh, a Yellow-throated Vireo and Summer Tanager at the Arboretum with a further two tanagers at Ferry Point Park. Spittal Pond, widely regarded as the premier birding location in Bermuda, hosted an impressive 46 species, including a flock of twelve

Hooded Mergansers (*photo above – Andrew Dobson*). On the count day itself, 85 species were seen and over 7,000 individual birds recorded. This was slightly down on the 93-species recorded last year, but unsurprising in view of light rain during the day and one fewer recording group. Three additional species were seen in count week. The most numerous species was the starling, followed by House Sparrow and Mourning Dove. Over 1,000 individuals were seen for each of these species. Other highlights this year included the occurrence of two Snow Geese and two Brant Geese. The results are submitted to the National Audubon Society in the United States as part of a continent-wide study of birds that has been running for more than 100 years. Citizen Science provides a way for people to connect with the natural world through activities that generate vital information for the conservation of birds. Count results will soon be available as they are entered on to the National Audubon website, [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc).

## Bird Report November 2017 to February 2018

Andrew Dobson

Highlights of the season included: Bermuda's first record of Northern Fulmar; two Brant geese; Bermuda's 6<sup>th</sup> White-winged Scoter; and the biggest-ever arrival of Killdeer.



Two **Snow Geese** were present at Port Royal GC 19 Dec-10 Feb (AD). Another at Stocks Harbour 29 Dec (PA) moved to Spittal Pond 30 Dec-16 Feb. One **Brant Goose** was at Port Royal GC 17 Nov-10 Feb (AD) with another at Shelly Bay Marsh 28 Nov-4 Feb (LG). Highlights amongst the 17 species of duck recorded this season included a **White-winged Scoter** at Port Royal GC 8-10 Feb (AD) – *see photo left Andrew Dobson*, **Black Scoter** at Spittal Pond 31 Dec-18 Jan (AD, AMD, FD), **Common Merganser** at Port Royal GC 17 Nov-10 Feb (AD) and

**Ruddy Duck** at various locations 6 Jan-16 Feb (AD, AMD, FD). A **Horned Grebe** was in Harrington Sound 9-21 Jan (PW). Bermuda's first **Northern Fulmar** was photographed at Challenger Banks 8 Jan (CB, KW). The first **White-tailed Tropicbird**

bird of the year was seen at Challenger Banks 14 Jan (KW) and the first arrived along the coast at Port Royal GC 9 Feb (CG). A **Northern Gannet** was found alive on Wreck Road, Somerset 8 Jan (ADa). It was taken to the BAMZ rehab facility but died overnight. A second adult was in St. Georges 8-21 Jan (LG) *see photo right Andrew Dobson*. A **Northern Harrier** was hunting over Riddell's Bay GC 13 Jan (AD, EH, JH, JS). An **American Golden Plover** was extremely unusual at Spittal Pond 5-9 Dec (PW). An unprecedented arrival of up to 1,000 **Killdeer** occurred 5-6 Jan as a result of Storm Grayson in the northeast US. A flock of about 500 birds was at the Airport 6 Jan (AD) with individuals and small flocks now scattered widely in Bermuda. Single **Western Sandpiper** at Cooper's Is. 6-8 Jan (AD), Spittal Pond 8 Jan-1 Feb (AD) and Outerlea Farm 10-16 Jan (PW) were undoubtedly fallout from Storm Grayson. Single **Long-billed Dowitchers** were seen at Cooper's Point 6 Jan (AD) and Riddell's Bay GC 22 Jan (AD). An **American Woodcock** was a lucky find at the Arboretum 13 Jan (PF). One **Black-headed Gull** was at various locations throughout the season with two together at Spittal Pond 1-2 Jan (AD, PW). A **Sandwich Tern** made an unseasonable appearance 16-25 Dec (AD). A rarely seen **White-winged Dove** was in a Devonshire garden 29 Nov-6 Dec (EB). A **Peregrine Falcon** has been seen at various locations 11-23 (EH, JH). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** has wintered in the Arboretum seen to at least 12 Jan (EH). A steady build up **American Pipits** increased from 8 at Cooper's Is. 6 Jan to 78 at Kindley Field 5 Feb (PW). Of 20 species of wood warbler recorded during the season, **Tennessee Warbler** was the most unexpected, seen at the Arboretum until 21 Jan (PW). A record number of wintering **Summer Tanagers** (at least 5) were seen at the Arboretum (2) 9 Dec-23 Jan (AD), Ferry Point (2) 2-27 Dec (PW), Coney Is. 14 Jan (NM) and Warwick 25 Jan (SC). A **Red-winged Blackbird** was at Spittal Pond 6-14 Jan (TW). Three **Brown-headed Cowbirds** were at Outerlea Farm 9-17 Jan (MO) *see photo left Andrew Dobson*. A late **Bobolink** was on the Airport 6 Dec (PW).



Observers: Peter Adhemar, Eva Bottelli, Chris Burgess, Sarah Cardwell, Alex Davidson (ADa), Andrew Dobson, Anna Dobson (AMD), Fiona Dobson, Paul Fisher, Lisa Greene, Erich Hetzel, Janice Hetzel, Jeremy Madeiros, Neal Morris, Mark Outerbridge, Paul Watson, Tim White, David Wingate, Kevin Winter.

# Society News and Future Events

## What has been happening:

- Audubon assisted the Bermuda National Trust by repairing fences at Spittal Pond nature reserve.
- Members have taken part in the Great Backyard Bird Count.
- Plans are well underway for the restoration of Eve's Pond and nature reserve near Shelly Bay (a Buy Back Bermuda project with the BNT).
- Audubon volunteers worked with KBB to clean up trash at Somerset Long Bay.
- Audubon members led a Spittal Pond guided bird walk for Garden Club members.
- The Society has purchased a new LCD projector to use for its educational outreach at schools, youth and adult organisations.
- Bermuda's 19<sup>th</sup> Cub Scout group helped Audubon construct bluebird nest boxes.
- A working party removed invasive vegetation from the Alfred Blackburn nature reserve
- Members took part in the annual Christmas Bird Count.
- Andrew Dobson gave a lecture at BUEI '2018 - Year of the Bird'.
- Audubon volunteers assisted with the National Trust's annual children's walk at Spittal Pond.

## Future Events

**BUEI Talks &  
BAS present:**

**2018 - Year of the Bird  
with Andrew Dobson**

**Thurs Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7:30pm**



The Bermuda Audubon Society has joined over 100 organisations including National Geographic, National Audubon and BirdLife International in declaring 2018 as 'Year of the Bird'. Audubon President Andrew Dobson will contribute to this event to heighten public awareness of birds because of their wonder and beauty and because they symbolize nature's inter-connectedness and the importance of caring for our shared planet.

**6pm:** Harbourfront opens for dinner

**7:30pm:** Lecture begins, Tradewinds Auditorium

**Members: \$20 Non-members: \$25 Students: \$10.** Tickets available by calling 294-0204 or visiting BUEI's Oceans Gift Shop.

**Ticket holders are entitled to 10% off dinner at the Harbourfront (food only) before or after the lecture. Reservations required. Please call 295-4207 for reservations and be sure to mention the lecture. Cannot be combined with any other special offers.**



## Bluebird nest box making

Audubon members will be on hand to tell you about bluebirds and assist in the construction of nest boxes at BAMZ on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> March. You need to register with BAMZ and chose either the morning or afternoon session.

## Bluebird nest box competition

This will take place at the Annual Exhibition in the grounds of the Botanical Gardens 19-21 April 2018. Entry deadline: Fri 15<sup>th</sup> March. The Audubon Society trophy will be presented to the best student box – so please encourage young persons to enter. The boxes must not be made from kits. Full instructions of how to make a box are available at

<http://audubon.bm/conservation/bluebird>

## Argus Walks the Walk with The Centre on Philanthropy- March 18! Register below!

We hope you join us on Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup> for the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Argus Walks the Walk with The Centre on Philanthropy. Warm up begins at 8:15am and walk starts at 8:30am from the Argus building on Wesley Street in Hamilton. Registration is \$25 of which \$5 goes to the Centre on Philanthropy and \$20 to a charity of your choice – so we hope you will choose the Bermuda Audubon Society

**Please see the following link below to register.**

<https://www.racedayworld.com/Race/BM/Hamilton/ArgusWalkstheWalkwithTheCentreonPhilanthropy?rsuSessionAttempt=1>

## Nonsuch Island Members' Fieldtrip

Sat 5 May. 10:00 to 3:00. The trip will include a morning tour with Cahow encounter and time to swim & snorkel in the afternoon. Boat details will be sent to those who sign up. Price \$50 members. \$75 members. Spaces are limited. To sign up email [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm) or call 238-8628.

## Membership renewal

Life Membership \$750.00 (\$500)

Adult 25.00 (\$20)

Family 40.00 (\$30)

Student 5.00 (\$5)

We hope that you will renew, and we appreciate your continued support. Your membership allows us to continue our efforts at bird conservation, education, habitat preservation and environmental advocacy as we fulfill our mission “to conserve Bermuda’s special bird life and habitats for the benefit of all.”

For payment details, see <http://audubon.bm/join>