



Bermuda Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER Winter/Spring 2020

P.O. Box HM 1328, Hamilton HM FX Vol.31 No.1

www.audubon.bm Email: info@audubon.bm

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Restoration of Somerset Long Bay Nature Reserve

Karen Border

A major restoration project is underway at the Society's Somerset Long Bay Nature Reserve (West) to remove invasive vines and cow cane, which had over-run the south and east portions of the reserve in the last decade. Sadly, the vines had completely smothered and killed a number of mature trees on the south side of the reserve, including black mangrove, red mulberry and



hackberry. In phase one of the project, the vines and dead trees have been removed, surviving trees have been cleared of vines and the cow cane has been cut down. A number of other invasive species such as Chinese fan palms and Pride of India, have also been removed. (continued on Page 2)

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The first phase of the project was carried out by Horsfield Landscaping. Many thanks to those who came out for a volunteer work party on 1 February where great progress was made clearing bottles and trash churned up by the machines and clearing vines from trees.

Phase two of the project will involve the removal of the cow cane tubers, to prevent regrowth, followed by extensive replanting. A maintenance program will be put in place to ensure the invasive species do not take over again. The Society will be looking for a sponsor to meet the costs of maintenance. The reserve will remain a wildlife refuge, with restricted access, but the pond can be viewed from the perimeter fence.

Somerset Long Bay Nature Reserve (West) was purchased by the Audubon Society in two parts, in 1971 and 1972. The 2.71 acres of land were originally a marsh behind the beach but had been filled in with garbage in the early 20th century. After it was purchased, the



Society re-excavated the pond, leaving islands where healthy stands of mangrove had survived. After the pond was deepened in 1979 to prevent it being choked by Sheathed Paspalum grass, it developed a rich freshwater marsh community.

Because of its location on the north-west tip of Bermuda, newly arrived migrants, including rarities, are often first spotted here. Moorhens, Coots, Pied-billed Grebes and Yellow-crowned Night Herons have all nested here and Purple Gallinule have often been seen.

We are seeking a volunteer "warden" to keep an eye on the nature reserve on a regular basis. If you live in the West End and would like to do this please email Karen at info@audubon.bm.

Get Ready for Bluebirds!!

Jennifer Gray

Have you been listening? Birds are beginning to sing. They know spring is fast approaching. It's apparent Eastern Bluebirds have already begun searching for potential nest-sites. In the third week of February a pair of bluebirds were inspecting my box, hanging out in a nearby cedar tree and chasing off any bird that came near. Their biological clocks are telling them the breeding season is almost here.

Although most Bluebirds won't begin their first nesting until early to mid-April, their search for nest sites will typically intensify in the last weeks of February and into March. Some eager Bluebirds may get on nest as early as mid-March. So,



Ready-made boxes cost \$35 and kits are \$25. All proceeds come to the Bermuda Audubon Society.

Don't wait! Bluebirds need your help and will return the favour by bringing joy and happiness to your home. Visit our website (www.audubon.bm/conservation/bluebird) where you can find much more information and download printable instructions for making and managing a bluebird nest box. Also visit <https://nestwatch.org/> to learn how to register and monitor your Bluebird Boxes.



now is a good time to put up a bluebird box or make sure your bluebird boxes are cleaned out and free of old debris left over from last year's nesting's.

Greasing the pole will ensure Warwick lizards and other vermin can't get to the nest.

The Bermuda Audubon Society sells bluebird boxes and kits through Aberfeldy Nursery in Paget (Tel: 236-2927).



Tagged "Snowbird" visits from Northern Canada

Paul Watson



The term "snowbird" usually conjures up images of retired North Americans who "migrate" south to Florida for the winter and return north in the summer months. In the birding world, "snowbird" is a name often given to the Dark-eyed Junco (a small sparrow) or the Snow Bunting, as they are often seen feeding in the snow during the northern winters. A true "snowbird" arrived in Bermuda around Christmas 2019 - a Greater Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*). Snow Geese are regular winter visitors to Bermuda, sometimes in small flocks. This winter's arrival favoured the National Sports Centre cricket field and Pembroke Marsh, even spending some leisure time doing laps of the pool at the National Sports Centre, as featured on the Audubon Facebook page! What also made this Snow Goose special was that it arrived sporting a metal leg band. With

the use of digital photography, Erich Hetzel managed to compile the band number 1937-32240. A check with the Bird Banding Lab (BBL) revealed that this bird was an adult female banded in Bylot Island on the Northern tip of Baffin Island in Nunavut, Canada on 7 August 2010. Bylot Island is some 4634km (2879 miles) north of Bermuda. This bird surely has a good number of "air miles" under her wings, likely flying between northern Canada for summer breeding and north-east America in winter, prior to visiting our little rock in the sun. A check with BBL revealed this bird has not been recorded anywhere in the 10 years since it was banded, likely remaining within large Snow Goose flocks, where the band would go unnoticed.

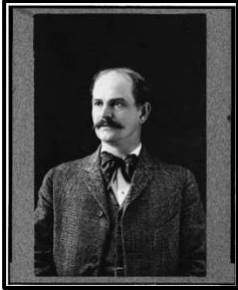
Snow Geese range throughout the North American continent, breeding in the high arctic and wintering as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. They also winter in small numbers in the UK and western Europe. They have two forms: "Greater" and "Lesser" Snow Goose, and three plumage morphs, white, blue and intermediate. More information on this species can be found with the following link: <https://ebird.org/species/snogoo>

As a foot note, a Lesser Snow Goose hybrid with Ross's Goose showed up at Port Royal Golf Course for a few days in December 2019.

Bermuda Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count 2019

Janice Hetzel

At first light on December 29, 2019 seventeen intrepid observers spread out across Bermuda and began the hunt for birds as part of the



annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. The idea was conceived 120 years ago by Frank Chapman, an ornithologist with the Museum of Natural History in New York. As

an early conservationist, he was concerned about over-harvesting of birds and proposed that hunters count birds instead of shooting them on Christmas day – and so the tradition began. The annual bird census has been conducted ever since, providing critical longitudinal data about the status of bird populations and informing conservation efforts. Bermuda's first count took place in 1974.

Highlights:

A Townsend's Warbler on Ocean View Golf Course, an extremely rare sighting for Bermuda as it is typically found in western North America.

A Snow Goose enjoying the fields near Frog Lane (see our article "Snowbird")

A Northern Mockingbird on St. Georges Golf Course – a rare visitor and last recorded in a Christmas Bird Count in 2006.



A Trindade Petrel was seen in the vicinity of Tee Street in Paget. This is likely the same bird seen in this area last winter. The Trindade Petrel is related to our own Cahow, though it is known to breed only on two groups of islands off the



coast of Brazil. It is a pelagic bird which means it lives at sea and only comes ashore to breed. What is it doing in Bermuda?

A possible Corn Crake was flushed from the grass at Morgan's Point. The Corn Crake is related to our more common Sora. Because this was a rare sighting, a group of observers returned to the

area the next day and walked the fields in a line to try to flush it and get a positive ID. The first bird that flew out of the grass was an American Bittern, which was an addition to our count week list, but alas, no further views of the Corn Crake. Additional birds of note included two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and an American Robin.



Each year, Bermuda's results are submitted to the National Audubon Society in the US who compile data from North America, Central America and much of the Caribbean. (A participation map is available on their site at the link below). Citizen science initiatives like this provide fun activities through which people can connect with the natural world while generating vital information for the conservation of birds. This partnership benefits

us all: observers learn about birds, Audubon staff gain invaluable information and most importantly, the birds benefit because it helps us focus on those birds and habitats which most need our help. Count results, current and historical, and much more information about this annual event are available on the National Audubon website at: www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count.

Want to Participate?

If you are interested in being part of next year's count, now is the time to start learning more about our birds and improving your bird identification skills. The best way to hone those skills is to get out in the field and make your own observations. Join a friend or come on one of our birding/photography walks. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has plenty of resources to help, including their online bird guide 'All About Birds', both browser and mobile versions of "eBird", the "Merlin Bird ID" App and online courses through their Bird Academy. We are also happy to help with bird identification questions; just email info@audubon.bm or message us via our Facebook page.

Happy Birding and hope to see you out there with us for the Christmas Bird Count 2020!

Bermuda's 45th Christmas Bird Count data:

- 80 species of birds on count day (94 in 2018, 85 in 2017, 93 in 2016 and 93 in 2015)
- 10 additional species observed during count week (December 26th - January 1st)
- 7,919 individual birds counted
- Most common species: European Starling (23%), House Sparrow (22%) & Great Kiskadee (12%). Unfortunately, these invasive species make up over 50% of our count total.
- Two globally endangered species: our own national bird, the Bermuda Petrel and the Piping Plover, a small shorebird which breeds in the eastern US and Canada.
- 17 species of warbler
- 13 species of waterfowl



Work Begins to Restore Eve's Pond

Jennifer Gray

Buy Back Bermuda, a joint initiative between the Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda National Trust, purchased 3.5 acres of land along the Shelly Bay stretch in 2012 and we are now in a position to restore the land and open it to the public.

Hidden beneath large casuarina trees, bushes, grass, soil and layers of sand lies the remnants of Eve's Pond which was a tidal, saltwater pond that rose and fell with the tide through a cave system connected to Harrington Sound. In 1941 the pond was filled via a pipeline with dredging's from Flatts Inlet. It is Buy Back Bermuda's vision to reinstate a pond and

provide a sanctuary for wildlife and public enjoyment.

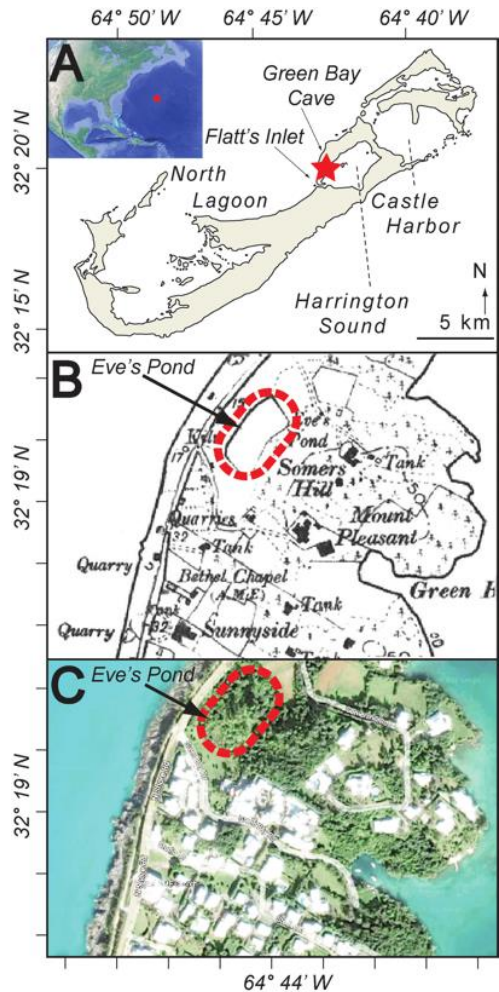
Over recent years extensive research has been done on the cave system both leading to and under Eve's Pond to ensure our restoration project would not cause damage to the sensitive habitat beneath ground level. Below this site are caverns and cave connections that lead to the longest cave that has been mapped in Bermuda. At great expense a team of specialists and their state-of-the-art equipment were brought in to detect voids under the surface such that the sub-surface terrain was well understood.

Some of the rarest fauna on earth live in the marine cave systems around Bermuda and to ensure their ongoing protection Eve's Pond will be restored without connecting to the cave system below but rather into a shallow brackish pond suitable for migrating and wetland birds.



While the construction phase of restoration may look unsightly with excavation of the pond and clearing of abundant invasive species, it will not take long for carefully planted native and endemic species to take hold and thrive in the new environment. Following this the wildlife will move in finding a safe and fostering habitat. The Eve's Pond Conservation Management Plan includes walking trails that meander around the edge of the pond and up into a woodland hillside. Trail markers and infographics will enhance the visitor experience along with a bird hide designed as a shelter to use for observing wildlife, especially birds, at close quarters.

We look forward to sharing our progress with you!



Bird Report

October 2019 - January 2020

Janice Hetzel

Overall the 2019 fall migration felt very quiet. We did not have any large bird fallout days as in previous years, waterfowl arrived late and in limited numbers, the number of overwintering birds appeared to be down; but, having said that, all of the usual migratory species were represented and we had a reasonable Christmas Bird Count with 80 Species on count day and 10 additional species during the count week.

Highlights of the period include the return of the **Trindade Petrel**. It was first seen on 23



Nov at Palm Grove Gardens and then noted on 23 Dec over private property near Tee Street. On 17 Jan the bird was found on the ground at the Parsons Road Playground and brought into BAMZ. It was in good health, was banded and released on 19 Jan. The last reported sighting was 23 Jan.

A **Peregrine Falcon** was found hopping on the ground at Spittal Pond on 10 Nov (EH, JH, TW).



This bird was also taken to BAMZ where she fared well in rehab and then was released with a tracker. "Millie" was then watched travelling around the Island, though mostly staying around Mid Ocean Golf Course and Harrington Sound. Hopefully we will be able to see where she



ends up when she leaves Bermuda and if she returns. Other notable sightings included a **Snow X Ross's Goose Hybrid** at Port Royal Golf Course 27 Nov (IP), a **Virginia Rail** at Ferry Point Park 26 Oct (IF, PW), a **Purple Gallinule** at Pembroke Dump 12 Jan (PW, JS) and one at Cloverdale 28 Jan (PA), a **House Wren** at St. Georges Golf Course 23 Nov (PW),

a **Northern Mockingbird** 27&29 Oct at St. Georges Golf Course (PW, IF, NM), and a **Northern Wheatear** at St. Georges Golf Course 4 Oct (PW).

Waterfowl seen over the period included **Black-bellied**

Whistling Duck, Snow Goose, Blue-winged Teal (max of 14) at Spittal Pond on 9 Oct

(PW, IF), **Northern Shoveler** at Mid Ocean Golf Course 23 Oct (IF), **Eurasian Wigeon, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail** on Coney Island 9 Jan (NM), **Green-winged Teal, Ringed-neck Duck**, possible **Greater Scaup** (based on head shape) at Pitman's Pond 29 Dec (DW), **Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser** and **Pied-billed Grebe**.

Additional sightings included a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** 2 Oct Spittal Pond (NM), a **Common Nighthawk** Grieg Hall St. Georges 1 Oct (PW), a **Ruby-Throated Hummingbird** 27 Nov Jennings Road (JM), the **American Avocet** which remained from earlier in the Fall with last

sighting on 8 Dec at Port Royal Golf Course, 57 **Black-bellied Plovers** at the airport on 16 Jan (PW), a **Piping Plover** banded 'AU' at Cooper's Island 17 Oct (IF) and an un-banded juvenile, also at Cooper's Island 10 Oct (IF, PW) later seen at Cross Island and Spanish Point, a **Magnificent Frigatebird** made a timely appearance on our monthly bird walk on 27 Oct in St. Georges, an **American Bittern** flushed on Morgan's Point 1 Jan as we tried to find the elusive **Corn Crane**, a **Least Bittern** Spittal Pond 26 Oct (PW, IF, JS), a **Veery** and a **Wood Thrush** were seen simultaneously on a path at the Arboretum 27 Oct and an **American Robin** was seen at Port Royal Golf Course 14 Nov and St. Georges Golf Course 23 Nov (PW). Also, 8 species of Sparrow and 28 species of warbler were seen.



Observers:

Ian Fisher (IF), Erich Hetzel (EH), Janice Hetzel (JH), Jeremy Madeiros (JM), Neal Morris (NM), Ingela Persson (IP), Joanne Smith (JS), Paul Watson (PW), Tim White (TW), David Wingate (DW).

Society News

It's been a very busy few months for Audubon members. Unfortunately, high winds and rough seas cancelled our Pelagic boat trips in November but, not to miss out on the annual ritual, members persevered and met up at Cooper's Point for a land-based "sea watch" where they were rewarded with continuous views of about 15 Cahow (Bermuda petrel).



BAS participated in Cornell/eBird's global 'October Big Day' with our own birding walk at Spittal Pond NR led by Paul Watson.

Devika Mather hosted three photography walks: November at Somerset Long Bay, December at the Arboretum and



January at Spittal Pond. And committee members manned a station at the Bermuda National Trust's Children's Nature Walk at Spittal Pond in February helping youth spot, identify and appreciate some of our local birds. And thank goodness for our members and their willingness to volunteer. With your help we tackled invasives at the Alfred Blackburn Smith reserve in November, on a glorious day overlooking South Shore, and last month performed herculean efforts to clear trash and other debris, and unwanted trees and vines, to help transform Somerset Long Bay West as part of our longer term restoration there.



Alfred Blackburn Smith NR– 23rd Nov



Somerset Long Bay (West) NR – 1st Feb

Upcoming Events

BAS Members Whale Watching & Pelagic Bird Trip

Saturday, 21 March 11:00am- 5:00pm

Departure from BAMZ dock in Flatts on RV Endurance

Join us to see the amazing Humpback Whales that frolic off our South Shore on migration North to their feeding grounds while also watching for pelagic birds visiting our waters.

Cost: \$50 members

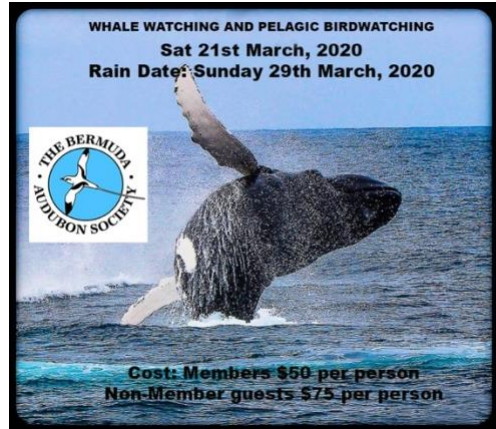
\$75 non-member guests (if space is available)

Members have priority. Minimum age 12 years. Please arrive at least 15 minutes prior to departure. *(Those prone to seasickness are advised to take preventative measures.)*

Reserve your spaces by emailing info@audubon.bm.

Payment to our Butterfield account: 20 006 060 055394 100

Rain date is Sunday, 29 March.



BAS Members Nonsuch Island Tour

Saturday, 2 May 10am-4pm

'Castaway' will leave from Tucker's Town Public Dock at 10am.

Join us for our annual members trip to Nonsuch Island. We will have guided tours of the island and may be lucky enough to have an encounter with a young Cahow chick. Bring your picnic lunch, plenty of water and come prepared to swim and snorkel if you wish.

Cost: \$50 members

\$75 non-member guests (if space available)

Members will have priority.

Reserve your spaces by email to info@audubon.bm

Payment to our Butterfield account: 20 006 060 055394 100

Rain date is Saturday, 9 May.

Bermuda Audubon Society AGM

Wednesday, 6 May 6:00pm

Government House

Please RSVP to info@audubon.bm

BAS Members North Rock Snorkel Trip

Saturday 13 June, 1:00-5:00 pm

Departure from BAMZ dock on RV 'Endurance'.

Cost: \$50 members

\$75 non-member guests (if space available)

Members have priority.

Reserve your spaces by email to info@audubon.bm

Payment to our Butterfield account: 20 006 060

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Rain date is Sunday, 21 June.

