



# NEWSLETTER

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## A NEW RECORD FOR BERMUDA: HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER

by Luke Foster

It has been my goal since I started birding to find a new record for Bermuda, and on Tuesday 5 October 2021, I found one. Mission accomplished!

That day I decided to birdwatch at Port Royal Golf Course after school to see what fall migrants arrived with some passing rain. Initially, I hadn't found much, only Ovenbirds and Black-and-white Warblers seemed to be out and about. That was, until I began to walk back to my car, and in an oleander bush right on the bottom branch, I spotted a small bird sitting quite upright.

I first assumed it was just a White-eyed Vireo (aka, "chick-of-the-village"), as I didn't have my binoculars at the time, and it was quite far away. Thankfully, I snapped two shots of it just in case it was something different (Fig 1). I checked my photos and realized it was a flycatcher! Unfortunately, by the time I realized this, it had flown away.



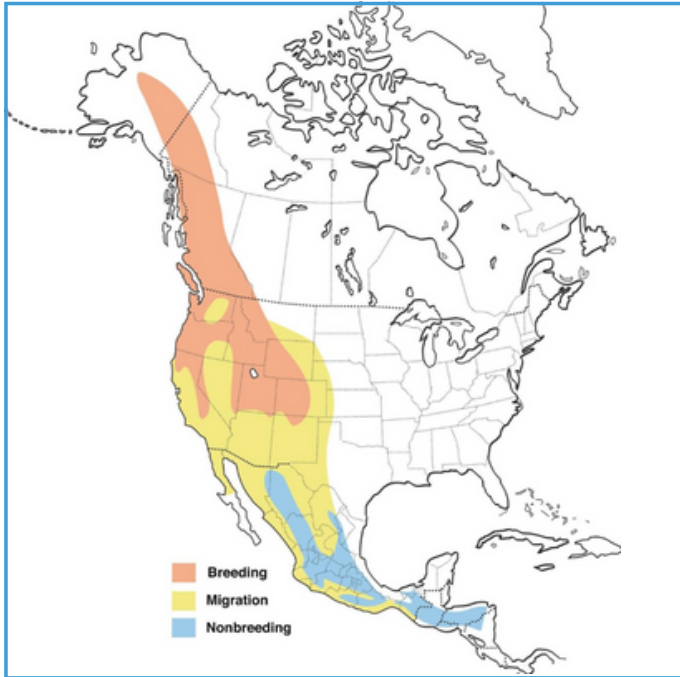
**Fig 1.** Photograph of Bermuda's first confirmed Hammond's Flycatcher at Port Royal Golf Course. Photo by Luke Foster.

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I originally thought it was a Least Flycatcher, which is an uncommon vagrant to Bermuda, but I wasn't fully convinced as it didn't have a complete eye ring; Empidonax Flycatchers are some of the hardest species to ID, especially in Bermuda, because these look-alike species seldom vocalize here. So, I decided to post my pictures on a bird identification Facebook group, just to be sure I didn't have something rare, and lo and behold, it was a Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*), a new Bermuda record, and life species for me!

Dozens of international birders all agreed with this identification and eBird (Merlin) and iNaturalist also gave my pictures the identification of Hammond's Flycatcher. Physically, the Hammond's Flycatcher is a very small songbird species in the Tyrant Flycatcher family. They are mainly olive-green/gray on the back and head with two distinct white wing bars, a light yellowish breast, a white, diamond shaped eye-ring and long primary projection past the vent, making the bird appear quite short-tailed.

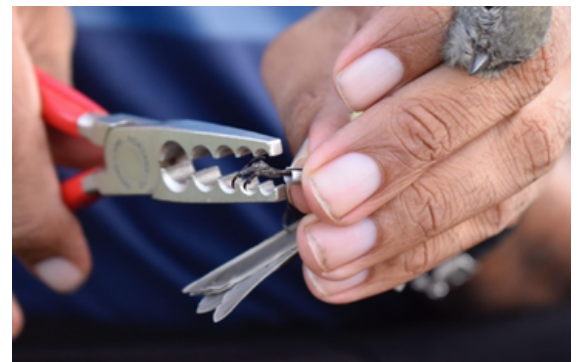


Native range of Hammond's Flycatcher. Photograph taken from Cornell Lab, All About Birds.

After my discovery, several birders flocked to Port Royal to find this bird, and everyone managed to see it and get hundreds of photographs. On 8 October, 2021, myself, Richard Brewer, and Miguel Mejías successfully captured this rare vagrant! It flew into our mist net before we had even finished securing it between two poles! I was then able to photograph the bird while it was being weighed, measured, and colour-banded (**Figs 2, 3, and 4**). The bird was banded with a red plastic band on one leg, and a metal band with a serial number on the other leg; this was done so that if it gets caught in another bird banding net elsewhere, the bander will be able to search up the serial number and see that it was banded in Bermuda. I was even able to hold my incredible record in the hand before finally releasing it back into the wild.



**Fig 2.** Recently captured Hammond's Flycatcher in the hand. Photo by Luke Foster.



**Fig 3.** Recently captured Hammond's Flycatcher being ringed. Photo by Luke Foster.



**Fig 4.** Recently captured Hammond's Flycatcher having its wing measured. Photo by Luke Foster

# THE FOUR ERAS OF BIRDING IN BERMUDA

by David B. Wingate

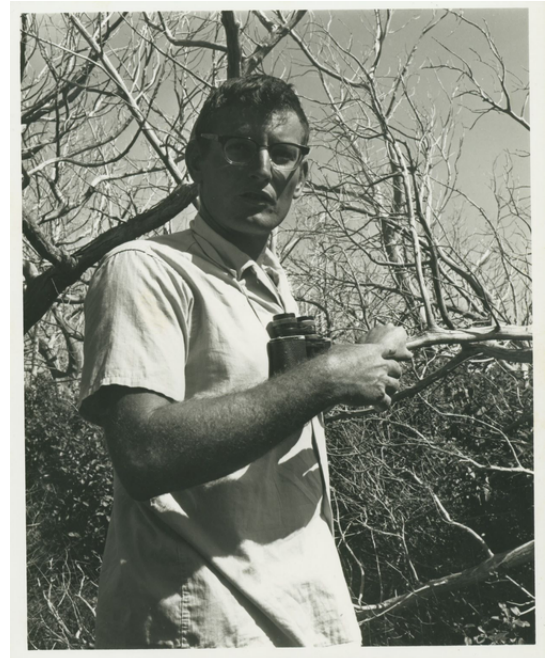
As the oldest living birder on the island my experience has spanned all four of these eras, and I can fairly confidently assume that they are common to all other first world countries too.

The tools of the first era were naked-eye vision (in the absence of binoculars), the shot gun, and proficiency in the skill of taxidermy to preserve collected specimens for scientific research. It mainly involved the shooting of birds for sport, food and museum collections, and generally applied only to larger edible species such as wild ducks, snipe, sora and shore birds, but most specifically on Bermuda to the abundant Eskimo curlew and golden plover. In the absence of binoculars and colour-illustrated field guides, the whole realm of small passerines was ignored or unrecognized. Any concern for conservation

was lacking because of the continuing abundance of all except a very few species, like the Eskimo curlew, the Carolina parakeet, and the Ivory-billed woodpecker. This era can be said to have spanned the entire era of civilization up until the late 1930s and 1940s, and I experienced the tail end of it in my formative years as I was growing up.

The second era enjoyed the benefit of increasingly available wide-angle binoculars and the first colour-illustrated field guides which opened birders to a better awareness of the whole range of smaller passerine birds. This era began in the late 1940s and reached its full expression by the 1960s. The art of “pishing” to attract birds closer for identification, and the use of Japanese Mist Nets to capture birds for identification in the hand, also came into use at this time.

Because I was the first resident birder to enjoy the benefit of all of these new tools, I was adding new species to the Bermuda list at a rate of about ten a year (!) and I still hold the title for the most first records for Bermuda. Nevertheless, in the absence of enough other birders to accept and help verify my records, this era still involved the regular use of a shotgun and the skill of taxidermy for the confirmation of hard to identify species like most of the wood warbler family in their fall plumages.



David Wingate – early 1960s

	DATE	LOCATION	
1. Common Yellowthroat	01 Jan 1953	Aldie Smith's Parish	<a href="#">View all</a>
2. Palm Warbler	01 Jan 1953	Aldie Smith's Parish	<a href="#">View all</a>
3. Belted Kingfisher	02 Jan 1953	Flatt's Inlet	<a href="#">View all</a>
4. Green-winged Teal	04 Jan 1953	Spittal Pond NR	<a href="#">View all</a>
5. Common Goldeneye	04 Jan 1953	Spittal Pond NR	<a href="#">View all</a>
6. American Coot	04 Jan 1953	Spittal Pond NR	<a href="#">View all</a>

Part of David Wingate's Life List of 359 species for Bermuda, shown in eBird



The second era lasted up until the late 1960s, when the growing number of birders, such as Eric Amos and Keith Pellow, caused me to take birding ethics into consideration: what right did I have to deny other birders from seeing new records alive before they were collected? In any case, with better and better field guides and growing numbers of birders with skills for identification to verify new records by majority agreement, there was far less need to collect specimens for identification. The only exception at that point, was the collection of hard to identify and unlikely records (such as the Siberian flycatcher which came from the the exact opposite side of the planet), and could only be confirmed by comparison with other specimens in museum collections, because no professional ornithologist would have been prepared to accept the record without tangible proof. This third era, spanning from the late 1960s to the end of the 20th century, involved more concern for conservation, because more and more species were declining in numbers, resulting in the first bird protection legislation.

The fourth era of birding began in the early 21st century and was made possible by the advent of computer technology. This enabled more easily accessed digital field guides and rapidly improving digital cameras capable of taking numerous rapid-fire photos, and digitally enlarging them even more for record confirmation. There is no longer that lingering doubt about the reliability of another birder's improbable claim of some rarity! It also made possible greatly improved audio recording equipment, which now enables better attraction of birds for field identification by playing their species specific songs or chip calls. Field identification of even the most obscure and improbable records like the Arctic warbler, (which also came from the opposite side of the planet), is now possible without the need for collecting.

Most constructive as a scientific tool for easy bird record keeping, however, has been the creation of the eBird application by the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University, motivating birders from all over the world to boast of their birding skills by submitting them online, where everyone can see them, enabling them to be universally available for ornithological research as well.



## eBird

**Interested in eBird?**

**Want to learn more?**

Simply go to [eBird.org](http://eBird.org) & start exploring birds seen recently in Bermuda ... or anywhere in the world!

Once you've created your account, you can start contributing yourself. They've got super-helpful articles to get you set up and recording in no time.





On the downside, however, this era has been characterised by more and more birders who can potentially harass rarities as they all attempt to get close enough for identification; and fewer and fewer birds, such that many species that were common earlier in my birding career are now considered scarce enough to be advertised on the birders' hotline.

Will there soon be a fifth birding era, in an age when climate change and rapid environmental deterioration is resulting in the extinction of more species? Will more and more future birders become resigned to sitting indoors at their computers, enjoying photographs of these extinct species, instead of being able to enjoy watching them for real in the great outdoors?

This future is entirely up to us, and will inevitably happen unless we can change our environmental ethic very rapidly and universally, paying vastly more attention to the need for environmental conservation by establishing and restoring nature reserves on a large enough scale for bird survival.

The Bermuda Audubon Society and numerous other conservation entities all over the world invite your financial donations for future nature reserve acquisitions on a much larger scale, and volunteering donations of labour on them for their restoration and maintenance. Only this will make the survival of most bird species possible into the future.

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**REPORT YOUR BARN OWL SIGHTINGS**

**CALLING ON MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND FAMILIES TO HELP AS 'CITIZEN SCIENTISTS AND REPORT ANY BARN OWL THAT YOU SEE**

**LET US KNOW WHERE, WHEN, TIME OF DAY AND BEHAVIOUR**

**[info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)**

# BIRDING OPTICS

by Paul Watson

I have been asked a few times about which binoculars or telescopes are best for birding and I have decided that the best answer is “what suits your budget.”

There are many great manufacturers out there and some great new products with an astronomical price tag. Swarovski, Zeiss and Leica are amongst the top contenders. Their high-end binoculars retail around \$3030, \$2750 and \$2850 respectively. There are, however, a lot of excellent quality binoculars out there without their 4-digit price tag.

## **BINOCULARS**

All of the binoculars I talk about are ‘roof prism’ which I prefer over the old fashioned ‘porro prism’ binocular which are very easy to knock out of alignment causing a double image.

I am a little biased, as I do begrudge paying thousands of dollars for binoculars when I can purchase a very good pair at a reasonable cost.

**Hawke:** I have been a fan of Hawke binoculars and owned several pairs over the last 10 years. Their latest Frontier HD and ED X ranges provide excellent optical quality at a reasonable price. HD start around \$330 for an 8X32 up to \$400 for 10X42 and the ED range runs from \$500 to \$530 for the same type. The APO model retails around \$680

**Opticron:** Similar optical quality can be found within the Opticron range of binoculars. Their mid-price Explorer model retails around \$290 to \$300, the Verano model \$599 to \$619, higher end DBA VHD around \$900 and their new top-end model, the Aurora BGA VHD, has crept into the 4-digit range retailing around \$1159.

**Vortex:** Vortex also offer a good quality mid-range binocular in the Viper HD, which retails around \$650.

I have birded with Hawke Sapphire ED Binoculars (now a discontinued model) for a good number of years and have been impressed by the overall optical quality. I've also tried newer Swarovski EL model binoculars. The light and image quality is excellent and notably brighter, but this should be the case for a binocular almost five times the price of my Hawkes.

I recently did a field review of several binocular models mentioned above at a shop in Bath, UK with views over the Avon river valley. In side-by-side comparisons with my Hawke Sapphires (now 6 years experienced) I was impressed with the new Hawke APO with good image quality and a flat field of vision. The Vortex Razor HD, retailing at \$1300, were also excellent. I was very impressed with a pair of Opticron Aurora BGA VHD, to the point of almost purchasing a pair, as the light transmission was phenomenal, the image quality awesome and at just over \$1000, the price not too unreasonable for an excellent binocular. But then, foolishly, I tried a pair of Swarovski 8x32 NL Pure, their top-end binocular range with an equally top-end price of around \$2700 for the 8x32 or \$3300 for the 10x42.



I literally said to myself "WOW!". In the short space of time I looked through them I could not fault these binoculars and loved every image I viewed. I am now in a serious quandry as to what binocular to purchase for my remaining birding adventures!



## TELESCOPES

When it comes to telescopes, on the other hand, I've gone the opposite way and opted for a very expensive high-end scope, the Zeiss Victory Harpia 95. I have used many different makes over my 40 years of birding and my favourite (until this recent purchase) was my Kowa TSN601. The majority of birding scopes come in either a 65mm or 85mm version which relates to the diameter of the exit lens. Obviously the larger the exit lens the greater amount of light comes through the scope, the offset being the extra weight involved whilst carrying it.

Another benefit of a larger exit lens is that the fixed eyepieces usually allow a larger magnification range i.e. average 15–45x with a 65mm lens versus 25–60x with an 85mm lens. Many of the high-end telescope manufacturers, notably Zeiss and Swarovski, now produce 95mm and 115mm lenses which has increased the magnification to an incredible 70x usually with excellent optical quality - if you're prepared to pay the \$4700 to \$6000 price.

**Hawke, Vortex, Kowa and Opticron** all offer excellent mid-priced telescopes. **Kowa** cover the mid- to high-end price range, with multiple models priced from \$1000 to \$3500. **Hawke's** Nature Trek spotting scopes range from \$250–\$300 and their Endurance range \$450–\$800. **Vortex** have three models, the Diamondback between \$500–\$600, the mid-range Viper between \$1050–\$1350 and the higher end Razor between \$1600 and \$2000. **Opticron** have multiple models across the whole price range. Their Opticron Adventurer II spotting scopes range from \$175–\$260, MM4 travelscopes between \$475 and \$1050, and several models of MM4 field scopes between \$900 and \$1400.

You can literally spend days reviewing each make and model, but what are you paying for? The more you pay for your optics the better the glass quality of the lenses. Manufacturers are also producing new and better coatings for the glass and the higher-end models will provide better image quality, therefore the image seen will be brighter and more 'true to life'.

Whilst it is often true that you get what you pay for, I still personally think that some manufacturers, whilst providing excellent optical quality, are a little overpriced. That said, a couple of Bermuda Audubon Society members have bought telescopes this year and after much discussion and consideration opted for the Vortex Diamondback and Razor models, respectively. If you are in the market for new optics, speak to other members and ask to try what they use. I have always found people are happy to let you look through their optics and this gives you a much better idea of what will suit you best.

The last question is where to purchase? If you decide to buy from the UK then you can get a VAT refund (20%) if exporting, however I have found that US prices are, by comparison, slightly less than the UK. I have quoted approximate prices in US Dollars for ease of comparison.



## WE ARE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

- organizing outreach and promotional materials for bluebirds
- bluebird education in schools
- bluebird nest box building
- communicating with and connecting bluebird box trail monitors

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Contact us at  
[info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)  
to learn more



## BIRD REPORT: MAY - AUGUST 2021

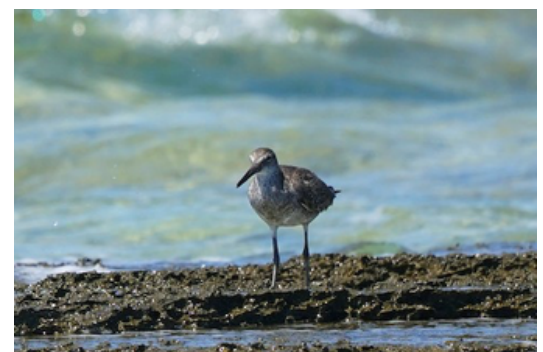
*Janice Hetzel*

A **Eurasian Collared Dove** was seen on Coot Pond 21 July (PW). **Chimney Swifts** were seen at East End Dairy 8 May (MM). We had a good variety of shorebirds over this period including a **Black-necked Stilt** at Spittal Pond 12 May (HM), up to 12 **Black-bellied Plover** on Lambda Island 2 May (EH), 2 **Semipalmated Plover** at Cooper's Island 7 Aug (NM), 2 **Piping Plover** at Coopers Island (AW) and 1 at Daniel's Head (LF), up to 12 **Killdeer** at the Airport Pond 22 May (TW), 1 **Whimbrel** at the Bermuda International Airport 14 May (PW), a **Hudsonian Godwit** at Bermuda International Airport 11 May (PW), 3 **Ruddy Turnstone** at the Airport Pond 1 May (NM), a **Stilt Sandpiper** at Spittal 24 July (NM), 3 **Sanderling** at Grape Bay 9 May (LF), a **Least Sandpiper** at St. Georges Golf Course 23 July (PW) and up to 16 seen at Spittal Pond, a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at Spittal 28 June (GC), a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Spittal 24 July (AW), a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** 12 May (JS), a **Short-billed Dowitcher** 14 May (AW), 2 **Spotted Sandpiper** 4 July (HM), a **Solitary Sandpiper** at the Airport Pond 11 May (MM), a **Greater Yellowlegs** at the Airport Pond 13 May (AW), a **Willet** at Spittal Pond 31 July (MM) and 2 **Lesser Yellowlegs** 2 May (NM).

Gulls seen over this period include a **Laughing Gull** at Eve's Pond 25 June (NM), 2 **Herring Gull** at Stock's Harbour 1 May (NM), 1 **Lesser Black-backed Gull** 1 May (AW) and a **Great Black-backed Gull** 25 August (AW). Of note a **Gull-billed Tern** was seen at Cooper's Island 14 June (AW).



Stilt Sandpiper - Neal Morris



Willet - Erich Hetzel

The **Roseate Terns** were last spotted on 14 August in Hamilton Harbour (AW). The last report of **Common Terns** was on 4 August at Cooper's Island by a visiting birder (GC) who reported 12 Common Terns. Other Terns spotted included an **Arctic Tern** at Cooper's Point 15 May (PW) and a **Forster's Tern** at Stock's Harbour 1 May (NM).



Little Egret - Luke Foster

Shore watches in May and June revealed a good variety of seabirds including **South Polar Skua**, **Pomarine Jaeger**, **Long-tailed Jaeger**, **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, **Bermuda Petrel**, **Cory's Shearwater**, **Great Shearwater**, **Sooty Shearwater**, and **Manx Shearwater**. Most notable were the 950 Great Shearwater seen during a single watch on 4 June (PW).

A **Double-crested Cormorant** appeared to stay through the winter and the summer. A **Brown Pelican** was seen in Little Sound 19 June (RB). We were visited by a **Little Egret** from 8 June until 3 August (MM). We also had a short visit from a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** in Flatts 18-27 July (LS). We had few raptor reports though a **Swallow-tailed Kite** was seen in Stock's Harbour 1 Aug (AW) and the **Short-eared Owl** was last spotted on 2 May (PW).



Black-crowned Night-Heron - LeShun Smith



Eastern Kingbird - Tim White



Swallow-tailed Kite - Andrea Webb

We had a **Least Flycatcher** in Ferry Point Park 23 Aug (PW) and an **Eastern Kingbird** at Port Royal Golf Course 24 Aug (TW). Fourteen species of warbler were seen over this time period including **Ovenbird**, **Worm-eating Warbler**, **Louisiana Waterthrush**, **Northern Waterthrush**, **Black and White Warbler**, **Prothonotary Warbler**, **Kentucky Warbler**, **Hooded Warbler**, **American Redstart**, **Northern Parula**, **Magnolia Warbler**, **Yellow Warbler**, **Prairie Warbler** and **Black-throated Green Warbler**.



Louisiana Waterthrush - Neal Morris

**Observers:** Richard Brewer (RB), Gemma Clucas (GC), Luke Foster (LF), Erich Hetzel (EH), Herb Marshall (HM), Miguel Mejias (MM), Neal Morris (NM), Joanne Smith (JS), LeShun Smith (LS), Paul Watson (PW), Andrea Webb (AW) and Tim White (TW)



# SOCIETY NEWS

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

*Jennifer Gray*

On June 7th, 2021, The Bermuda Audubon Society AGM was held via ZOOM. We thank those members who attended and so look forward to meeting with you in person again soon. The Society was sad to see Karen Border step down from the role of President but also excited to be wishing her well in the particularly important and influential role of Executive Director of the Bermuda National Trust. I was reminded at the AGM of the outstanding work of Audubon which can only be attributed to a group of passionate and hard-working people. It is remarkable, especially when you consider that all Committee of Management positions are unpaid and there are no offices or support equipment. Every piece of administration is created on a personal computer and, if really needed, printed on a personal printer. My sincere thanks to all who have contributed to the success of our wonderful charity.

To those who have been elected to positions for the 2021 2022 year and to our dedicated membership, I look forward to working with you to maintain the ambitious standards we have come to expect from the Society.



Jennifer Gray



Zelia Amaral



Janice Hetzel



Devika Mather

### **The Committee of Management 2021 – 2022**

**President:** Jennifer Gray

**Treasurer:** Zelia Amaral

**Secretary:** Janice Hetzel

**Membership Secretary:** Devika Mather

### **Executive Committee Members:**

Karen Border

Paul Watson

Jeremy Madeiros

Andrea Webb

Miguel Mejias

**Honorary Member:**

Joanne Smith

David Wingate



Karen Border



Jeremy Madeiros



Miguel Mejias



Joanne Smith



Paul Watson



Andrea Webb



David Wingate



While the Covid pandemic has certainly curtailed our activities there have been a few opportunities to get together for the good of our charity between surges and outbreaks.

If there is one thing that has been highlighted repeatedly, it's that being in the great outdoors is safer and indeed good for our health. We encourage our members to get out into the nature reserves as often as you can. The Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve is one with stunning views where you are not likely to find a crowd. Earlier in the year volunteer Robert Chandler worked hard to open a new lower trail on the reserve. Committee members and spouses met on site in May for a final cleanup of the new trail so it could be enjoyed by you. Visit a reserve today!



Robert Chandler, on the newly cleared trail at our Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve.



A stunning view from the Alfred Blackburn Smith Reserve

On 14th August, some of our members enjoyed a sunset cruise around the scenic coast of Hamilton Harbour, the Great Sound and inner islands. We enjoyed birding commentary from Paul Watson and the sighting of a solitary Tern. Special thanks to Captain Michael Hayward for taking such good care of us on board his boat *Explorer*.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

**Guided Birdwatching Walk at Spittal Pond** (or maybe Ferry Reach depending where the birds are)

Sunday, 24 October, 8:00am

Meet at eastern car park. Sign up required - [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm).

**Photography Walk at Arboretum**

Saturday, 13 November, 8:30am

Sign up required - [info@audubon.bm](mailto:info@audubon.bm)

**Cahow Watching Boat Trips**

6 November and 20 November, 2:00pm

Members \$65 Non-members \$75

Sign up with Island Tour Centre ([www.islandtourcentre.com](http://www.islandtourcentre.com)) - registration will open in coming weeks.

**Christmas Bird Count**

End of December

Let us know if you want to join our bird count team. We cover the whole island and identify and count all the birds that we see. This will be our 47th year contributing data to this wildlife census that is used to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation action.



**DON'T  
DELAY**

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MEMBERSHIP  
TODAY!

<https://www.audubon.bm/join>