



WINGBEATS

Audubon Society of the Capital Region



Seabird Restoration on Bermuda

by David Gibson



As we prepared for a short holiday in Bermuda, Susan coaxed me to pick up the phone and do something interesting with Bermuda Audubon Society. I phoned the number. None other than Dr. David Wingate answered. Dr. Wingate is renowned as Bermuda's first-ever conservation officer who has devoted the past 50 years to restoring the endangered Bermuda petrel, or cahow and Bermuda's pre-colonial ecology. He is written up in all the Bermuda travel guides, and his life's work to bring back Bermuda's national bird, the cahow, was also featured in the September '07 issue of *Audubon*. Identifying myself as a member of Capital Region Audubon Society, Dr. Wingate graciously offered to show me some local natural history.

Bermudians are among the most spontaneous, welcoming people we've ever met. Therefore, Susan and I particularly like to ride the bus or take a taxi ride to engage in conversation. In-

variably, the name Dr. David Wingate elicits immediate name recognition among taxi drivers. Bermudians have long followed his work and eagerly wait for their seabirds, particularly the white-tailed tropic bird, or longtail and, of course, the native and critically endangered cahow or petrel, to return from long sojourns at sea to nest. This awareness and enthusiasm for nature is a gift ordinary Bermudians give to the world – from their shrinking island to our shrinking globe.

Dr. Wingate agrees to pick me up at our hotel on his way to a half-day's work clearing exotic vegetation from an island sanctuary he began to establish more than 30 years before. Wingate's small car is loaded with machetes, root pullers and chainsaws – and a potted cedar tree. He has worked nonstop to restore the native cedar after a deadly blight killed all the trees in the 1940s. At age 72, he dons boots, grabs machetes and with a 20-something protégé rows out to the island, flushing a small colony of yellow-crowned night herons – a species he also helped to reintroduce to Bermuda in the 1960s. All morning, they cut exotic and invasive fan palms to make room for native palmetto and cedar. Their morning's work done, Dr. Wingate is excited as a schoolboy. Tonight, the cahow or Bermuda petrel is likely to be back in numbers to feed their young amidst the rocky limestone of the Castle Harbour islands. He is going to investigate in his Boston whaler.

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Audubon Society of the Capital Region



**Cordially Invites You To Attend Our
Year 2008 Programs & Field Trips**



ASCR Programs

**Unless Otherwise Specified,
Programs To Be Held At:**
*William K. Sanford
Colonie Town Library*

New York's Plant Explorers
Thursday, April 10, 2008 @ 7:00 p.m.
Speaker: Steve Young

Botanists from the NY Natural Heritage Program have been exploring every region of the state in their quest to provide the most accurate information about our state's rare and endangered plants. Join Steve Young on a vicarious foray into the natural areas of NY in search of our state's botanical rarities, from tiny ferns no bigger than your thumbnail to majestic oaks hidden away among the concrete and asphalt of metropolitan NY City. Steve Young is the Chief Botanist of the NY Natural Heritage Program, where he oversees the collection, organization, and dissemination of NY's rare plant information.

Saving Special Places:
The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy
Thursday, May 8 @ 7:00p.m.
Speaker: Jill Knapp

In the past 15 years, the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy has worked with local landowners and municipalities to help protect 1700 acres of open space, special places that showcase the natural and working landscapes which define our region. Join Jill Knapp for an overview of MHLA, highlights of past projects such as Wolf Creek Falls, and a peak at exciting initiatives currently on the front burner such as the long-awaited Rails-To-Trails project. Jill Knapp is the Director of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy.

Wildlife of Northern Tanzania
Thursday, June 12 @ 7:00p.m.
Speaker: Sue & John Adair

Two million wildebeest, dozens of other mammals and

hundreds of species of birds call Northern Tanzania home, at least for part of the year. Join Sue and John Adair for an eye-popping pictorial of one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on earth as they relive their recent tour of the shores of Lake Victoria, Serengeti National Park, Ngorongoro Conservation Area (including the Garden of Eden like Ngorongoro Crater), and Arusha, and Tarangire National Parks.

ASCR Treasurer Sue Adair and her husband John are long-time Auduboners and inveterate eco-tourists whose interests in birds and butterflies have taken them far and wide.

ASCR Field Trips
Birding Vischer Ferry
Saturday, May 17 @ 9:00 a.m.

Join ASCR president Craig Thompson on a field survey of spring migrants at Vischer Ferry Preserve, one of the Capital District's premier birding destinations. Suitable for the birding novice, this "citizen science" outing will continue our chapter's "Adopt An IBA" initiative at this site. Bring binoculars. The program is free, but please contact Craig at president@capitalregionaudubon.org or 756-3610 by Wednesday, May 14 to register and get directions.

Fourth of July Butterfly Count
Saturday June 28, 2008, Trip Leader: Sue Adair

Join butterfly expert Sue Adair for the annual Heldeberg Butterfly Count. The count, part of the North American Butterfly Association's annual Fourth of July Count, will visit 3 venues: Five Rivers Edu. Ctr.; Thompson's Lake/Thacher State Parks; and Partridge Run Wildlife Management Area. We will be out all day identifying and counting every butterfly we find. Our cumulative 5-year total is 33 species! If rainy or heavily overcast, the count will be held on Sunday, June 29. For more information or to register, please call Sue at 355-8008 evenings before 9 PM.

Pine Bush Butterfly Walk
Saturday July 12, 2008, Trip Leader: Sue Adair

Join butterfly expert and ASCR Treasurer Sue Adair for a 2 hour butterfly field trip in the Albany Pine Bush (rain or overcast date: Sunday, July 13). We can expect to see up to four species of hairstreaks at this date, including the stunning Coral Hairstreak, as well as a variety of other butterflies. Call Sue at 355-8008 evenings before 9:00 PM for time and place details.

Refreshments will be served. As always, we encourage you to bring your friends and family. For directions or details, call Greg Rucinski at the Colonie Library at (518) 458-9274.

12th Montezuma Muckrace

September 12-13

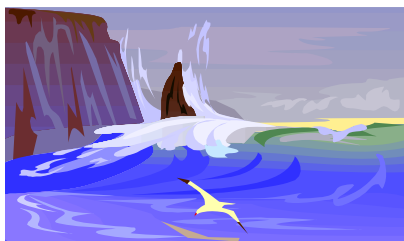
Audubon New York and Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex will conduct the 12th annual Montezuma Muckrace on September 12-13, 2008. This 24-hour birding competition raises funds to support conservation projects within the Montezuma Wetlands Complex.

This year our goal is to raise \$11,000 to fund a shorebird habitat restoration project in the North Montezuma area. Money is raised through sponsorships, registration fees and pledges sought by participants. Prizes are awarded to the team that raises the most money and to those teams that record the highest number of species. The 2007 competition raised over \$10,000, which is funding an eBird Trail Tracker for the Montezuma Audubon Center. The ASCR team, the Capitol Cuckoos, which includes Board members **Jane Graves, John Hershey, and Alison Van Keuren**, was one of top 2007 fund-raisers.

For 2008, the Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex has pledged to match dollar-for-dollar funds generated by the top three money-raising teams. Please consider pledging support to your local team! For more information about participating, becoming a team sponsor, or to be added to the mailing list, contact Jane Graves at jgraves@skidmore.edu

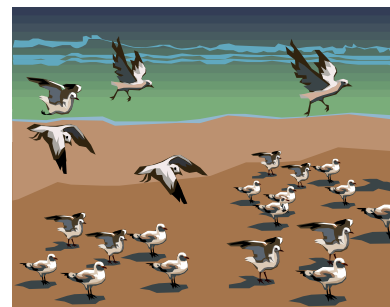
The registration deadline is August 25. For information on the Muckrace, visit:

<http://FriendsOfMontezuma.org/>



Seabird Restoration Continued from page 1 ...

We leave the harbor after sunset. The wind is steady, easterly. He cuts engine 50 feet from a 2-acre lump of limestone rock, sets anchor and we wait, rocking as darkness descends on Bermuda. After many minutes, against the glow of lights from the City of Hamilton, a silhouette



beats and vanishes above our heads, and familiar chirps bring Wingate to life. The cahow is back from vast oceans to feed squid to their growing young. 50 years of such waiting tells Dr. Wingate the birds require a hard onshore wind to come in, and complete darkness. He refuses to use even a flashlight on the boat. When he was a young man, he sought the birds when the moon was full – in vain. That was 1958. In the years since, he has “persuaded” the US Navy, NASA and the Bermuda airport to keep their lights off or low. Fifty years later, he tells me there are now some 80 pairs nesting on just four islands (perhaps one million cahows were here before man’s arrival as shipwrecks in 1612). Translocation of some chicks has become a necessity, as smaller islands are washed over by hurricanes like Fabian in 2003. Some fledglings are moved when they have gained precisely the right amount of weight onto larger Nonsuch Island, a 20-acre preserve established by Wingate and managed by him and his successor to restore the island’s pre-colonial ecology. Nonsuch is not so vulnerable to hurricanes and rising sea levels. For decades now, Wingate’s artificial horizontal burrows have greatly increased the breeding success of these birds. Solar powered recordings of breeding cahows (from the Cornell Lab) are amplified across the island to encourage returning cahows. National Audubon’s director of seabird restoration, Steve Kress, has been here to learn from Wingate.

Wingate leads us in the inky darkness out onto the rocks to listen or, in his case, feel for the cahows. His 6th sense brings him back into an interior marsh he has helped create, checking with flashlight on barriers to keep out a non-native toad. He pulls an invasive plant here and there. He checks on the old buildings where he kept watch as the island’s steward for decades past. He speaks with the urgency of a man closer to the end of his life’s work than the beginning: “every species now growing on this island was here in 1612.” The torch has been passed to a younger man to do this work, and Wingate hopes that baffles he created to exclude the aggressive longtail from the cahow nesting burrows are in place.

Back on the whaler at 10 pm, we head back to port. Midway across the bay, the engine cuts out. In his excitement, Wingate has forgotten the extra gas tank and his oars. All is not lost. He tips the tank, squeezes the bulb, the engine coughs back to life sufficiently to get us back. In 50 years, he has helped the cahow and many other species to return to safer harbors as well.

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Audubon News

Help Wanted: Pine Bush Woodcock Survey

Pine Bush Preserve Chief Scientist Neil Gifford is looking for volunteers to assist in American woodcock singing ground surveys in the Pine Bush this spring. Volunteers would spend ½ hour monitoring one or more of the 14 listening posts using simple US Fish and Wildlife Service protocols, marking down the number of woodcock heard "peenting" at each stop. A training session will be held on Saturday April 12 at 7:00 pm. The monitoring window is from April 20 - May 10. To volunteer, call Neil at 456-0655 x 1214 (w) or 522-0361(c).



Help
Wanted

ASCR Board in the News

ASCR Board Member **Jane Graves** was recently awarded the coveted Stuart Free Award by the New York Chapter of The Wildlife Society at its 2008 annual meeting. The award recognizes individuals or groups who have exhibited tenacious effort and diligent professional service in a manner that is inspiring to their peers, and a cumulative contribution that has been overlooked or taken for granted.



ASCR Treasurer **Sue Adair** won the North American Butterfly Association 2007 Artists Contest with her watercolor and colored pencil work, "Spreading the News," a portrayal of an Eastern Comma perched on a utility pole. This work was featured on the cover of the Fall/Winter 2007 issue of "American Butterflies." It can be seen at the "Artists for Conservation" website at http://www.natureartists.com/sue_adair.asp Sue's work will also be shown at the upcoming "Focus on Nature X" exhibition opening at the New York State Museum on April 17.



***** For Programs, Field Trip, & Further General
Environmental Information, Visit Us on the Internet at:
www.CapitalRegionAudubon.Org**



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