

Fall Birding on Abaco is Fantastic!

August, September and October finds great numbers of birds move South for the winter. Many come through Abaco even though we're well East of the main migration route. It even begins in July when shorebirds finish breeding in the Arctic and begin to move - adults leave first with their young remaining several weeks to mature and feed on the dwindling food supply. How do they know where to go with no parents to show them the way? It's all in their genes-they just know!

The sandspit on the southern tip of Green Turtle Cay is one of the best shorebirding spots in the Bahamas. Endangered Red Knots and Piping Plovers are seen there regularly along with 24 other species of Sandpipers and Plovers if one includes the colorful American Oystercatchers. In mid-September I got a call from Bruce Purdy on Grand Bahama that two very rare shorebirds had landed there-American Golden Plover(only a couple of Bahamian records) and Ruff, a Eurasian stray. I flew over to Freeport in time to catch the Golden Plover but the Ruff had gone. Grand Bahama does better than Abaco during migration because they have more freshwater lakes (mainly as water hazards on the numerous golf courses) and because they're closer to mainland US and the mainstream of migration.

During migration and midwinter the total number of birds as well as the number of different species doubles in the Bahamas. Some are only here very briefly during passage and one must get out almost daily to have a chance of seeing all of these. This year I was fortunate enough to have three intense birders here from Scotland who pushed me to spend a lot of time in the field observing. As a result we saw all of the expected species and several of the more illusive ones. The wood warblers represent one of the most challenging families of birds this time of year because there are so many possible varieties and most are in confusing fall plumage as they go through. To date (10-11-08) 28 different species have been seen here this fall. Just today my wife Betsy and I found a few new ones -Chestnut-sided and Blackpoll warblers in Crown Haven- a special place where exhausted migrants first make land fall after their across -the -ocean trip. Five Bobolinks, a Blue Grosbeak a male Hooded Warbler (one of our most beautiful), 2 Zenaida Doves and a Merlin (midsized bird-killing falcon) were here also. Earlier in the morning the lush hardwood forest at Angelfish Point yielded 2 Magnolia, a Nashville, Prarie, Cape May, Yellow, Black and White Warblers, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Common and Bahama Yellowthroats and several Greater Antillian Bullfinches. This property and the one at Sunset Ridge and adjoining nursery owned and maintained by the conservation-minded Mr. Tom Roberts of Nassau are real magnets for migrating and wintering birds on Abaco.

The South of Abaco has some great birding spots as well. Hole-in-the-Wall with its lighthouse and Sandy Point serve as jumping off places for birds continuing their journey South and big populations build up here during inclement weather. On the way south Snake Cay, Bahama Palm Shores, Crossing Rocks and its ponds and shoreline, and Abaco National Park are other prime spots. Abaco Parrots breed in the park in summer but at this time of year are more easily seen at Bahama Palm Shores in the early morning and late afternoon feeding in the exotic fruiting trees. A most pleasant outing at this time of year is to start out at first light to reach Bahama Palm Shores between 7 and 8 am to see the Parrots, check the ponds and shore at Crossing Rocks, look into the Abaco National Park at the "Y" for migrants and pinewoods species and then proceed to Sandy Point and its tidal flats for wading birds. Flamingoes and Roseate Spoonbills have been seen here on occasion in addition to many wading birds at low tide. Nancy's restaurant is an excellent place for lunch before the long drive back to Marsh Harbor and other points north. Bird activity slows up during the hottest part of the day but resumes in the late afternoon.

Even the built up areas have avian surprises.

Red-tailed hawks commonly soar over Marsh Harbor and the woods around Treasure Cay teem with migrants during a "fallout" when the high flyers literally fall out of the sky to seek shelter from bad weather or unfavorable winds. Small birds usually migrate at night to avoid predators like Merlin and Peregrine Falcons. One can tell in the morning if such a fallout has occurred. Our Scottish friends were treated to such an event with hundreds of small birds flitting about in the trees close to the Treasure Cay town center busily feeding to refuel for their continuing voyage -some going as far as South America.

If one is serious about maximizing their total number of species to be seen, then dumps and sewage outfalls are a must. The flies attract warblers and other insect eaters and the worm and bug infested waters bring in such waders as Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers and White-rumped Sandpipers, the last migrating all the way to Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of South America. The scenery won't be pretty at the dump but the birdlife is amazing! The larger birds such as Hawks, Limpkins, Yellowlegs and Snipes are more easily seen in these wide open spaces. A spotting scope is most helpful in open locations like this as well as mudflats and marl overlooks. The field marks can be studied in this way and proper

identification made without disturbing the birds. The challenge of bird ID and appreciation of their beauty can be a lot of fun.

To share in this Avian Spectacle join me at the Jct. of Treasure Cay Rd. and the Bootle Highway at 7am the first Saturday of each month or The Friends of the Environment at their office in Marsh Harbor at the same time on the 4th Saturday.

What follows is a list of all the birds seen by myself and others with me so far this fall(145 species):

Least Grebe
Pied-billed Grebe
Brown Booby
Brown Pelican
Double-crested Cormorant
Magnificent Frigatebird
Great Blue Heron
Great White Heron-white morph of Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Reddish Egret-both white and dark morphs
Cattle Egret
Green Heron
Black-crowned Night heron
Yellow-crowned Night Heron
White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
White-cheeked Pintail
Blue-winged Teal
American Wigeon
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Clapper Rail
Common Morehen
American Coot
Limpkin,
Black-bellied Plover
American Golden Plover,
Wilson's Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
American Oystercatcher
Black-necked Stilt
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Solitary Sandpiper
Willet
Spotted Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
Sanderling
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Dunlin

Stilt Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Common Snipe
Laughing Gull
Gull-billed Tern
Royal Tern
Roseate tern
Least Tern
Bridled tern
Sooty Tern
Brown Noddy
Rock Dove-only at Sandy Point
White-crowned Pigeon
Eurasian-collard Dove-introduced species
White-winged Dove
Zenaida Dove
Mourning Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Key West Quail-Dove
Cuban Parrot-Abaco subspecies
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Smooth-billed Ani
Barn Owl
Antillian Nighthawk
Cuban Emerald Hummingbird
Bahama Woodstar
Belted Kingfisher
West Indian Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Cuban Pewee
LaSagra's Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Gray Kingbird
Loggerhead Kingbird
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Bahama Swallow
Bank Swallow
Barn Swallow
(Fish) Crow-Cooperstown Foreshore
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Red-legged Thrush
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Bahama Mockingbird
European Starling-introduced species
White-eyed Vireo
Thick-billed Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Black-whiskered Vireo
Tennessee Warbler
Nashville warbler
Northern Parula
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Magnolia warbler
Cape May Warbler
Black-throated Blue Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler

Blackburnian Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Olive-capped Warbler
Pine Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Palm Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
American Redstart
Prothonotary Warbler
Worm-eating Warbler
Swainson's Warbler
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush
Louisiana Waterthrush
Common Yellowthroat
Bahama Yellowthroat
Bananaquit
Stripe-headed Tanager(Western Spindalis)
Summer Tanager
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo BuntingBlack-faced Grassquit
Greater Antillean Bullfinch
Bobolink
Red-winged Blackbird
Shiny Cowbird
Baltimore Oriole
House Sparrow-introduced species