

Bahamas/TCI Bird Report Fall 2008

It was a quiet season except for Hurricane Ike. Two potentially new species, Ruff and Canada Warbler, were reported in the Bahamas. Hurricane Ike, a Category 3 storm, passed directly over American Flamingo colonies in the Bahamas and Cuba on 7 and 8 Sep. The flamingos at Great Inagua, Bahamas had completed breeding and most left the area before the storm. A check after the storm found about 30 birds that had suffered broken legs and had to be euthanized (TR). In October the feeding areas still had natural food supplies and flamingos were feeding in these areas. The birds were observed courting two weeks earlier than usual, and they are expected to breed on Inagua in 2009 (NC). In Cuba's Rio Maximo Refuge hundreds of fledglings and adults still sitting on nests were killed. The field center and other infrastructure were also destroyed. A preliminary report stated that "The destruction was so severe that it has been impossible to estimate the effects on the breeding colony." (JML, MT). (This report was taken in part from Flamingo, Bulletin of the IUCN Flamingo Specialist Group #16). Great Inagua is also home to a large population of endangered Cuban (Bahama) Parrots. The parrots appear to have survived the direct impact of the storm and resorted to eating fallen fruits off the ground and later fresh growth among the branches. Seven weeks after the storm most plants had grown new leaves, and flowers and fruits were starting to emerge, but there must have been a period of food shortage. In November the low density of parrots observed precluded making a population estimate. Another threat to the parrots is the loss of nesting trees. Eight of 21 (38%) nesting trees visited were damaged so badly they could no longer be used for nesting. The Bahamas National Trust is installing nesting boxes on the island, but there is no assurance that the parrots will use them (CS). The Turks & Caicos Islands Government declared 2007 the Year of the Environment, so it was surprising that 2008 has produced an unprecedented number of complaints from citizens and NGOs about unbridled development. The list of projects and abuses to the environment is too long to cite here, but can be found in the U.K. Overseas Territories Conservation Forum's latest newsletter (www.ukotcf.org). TCI is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom, and a committee of the U.K. House of Commons is already expressing concern.

Bahamas/TCI Observations

A Canada Goose arrived at Lyford Cay GC the last week in Nov (BPA fide TW); Another was reported from the northern end of Cat I, near Dickies Rd. No date was given (fide PM). A Hooded Merganser was at Rock Sound, Eleuthera 20 Nov (EC), and three were at Harrold and Wilson Ponds NP, New Providence 28 Nov (TW, PD).

On 4 Aug EB and BB saw a Brown Booby over Abaco Sound near Treasure Cay, BP saw one off the northern tip of Long Island 7 Aug, and 5 were on Booby Rocks, east of Rose Island 23 Aug (P&OS). An immature Red-footed Booby circled BP's boat off Hogsty Reef 5 Aug. A "Great White Heron" was at West End, Grand Bahama 13 Sep (BP, EB). One, possibly two, American Bitterns were at Rock Sound 15-20 Nov (JW, JDW, EC, AD, JT, SJ), and one was at Reef GC, Grand Bahama 22 Nov (BP).

Two years ago there were four Osprey nests on New Providence; this year there was none (TW, PD). A Northern Harrier was at Bahamas Youth Camp, New Providence 1 Nov (OG).

Two Piping Plovers at Treasure Cay, Abaco 1 Aug (TH) were the earliest reported; the high count was 74 Piping Plovers found along the beaches between Stafford and Cargill Creeks, North Andros 24-25 Nov (CW, PM). There were 5 at Green Turtle Cay, Abaco 8 Oct, 10 there 18 Oct (both EB), and 8 at South Beach, New Providence 28 Nov (TH). American Golden-Plovers usually overfly the Bahamas on their way south. They normally are reported about once every four years, so reports of five birds this year was truly exceptional. Two were at Southwest Ridge, New Providence 1 Sep, two others there 10 Sep (separated by photos) (PD, TH ph, WP), and one was at the egg farm on Grand Bahama 13-16 Sep (BP, EB ph.).

An Upland Sandpiper was at the Treasure Cay dump, Abaco 2 Aug (TH). A radio-tagged Whimbrel left Virginia 17 Aug and landed on Mayaguana I. 3 Sep. It stayed until 26 Sep, surviving Hurricanes Hanna and Ike there, and reached Guyana 30 Sep (nature.org/magazine). Over 15 Red Knots were at Green Turtle Cay 29 Sep (EB). Thirty White-rumped Sandpipers were at Southwest Ridge 1 Sep (PD, TH), and over 500 Pectoral Sandpipers were at Reef GC, Grand Bahama 22 Aug (BP). A Stilt Sandpiper 28 Nov at Harrold and Wilson Ponds NP was late (PD, TW). A Ruff was reported at the egg farm, Grand Bahama 12 Sep (BP). Unfortunately there is no supporting photo or documentation.

Thirty to forty Lesser Black-backed Gulls were at the Freeport Dump 22 Nov (BP). Purdy visited remote Northwest Cay, Hogsty Reef between Acklins Island and Great Inagua, Bahamas on 5 Aug and found 1000+ pairs of Sooty Terns, 150+ pairs of Brown Noddys, and 10+ pairs of Brown Boobies. A few pairs of Roseate and Sandwich Terns were flying overhead. At Bird I. off the northwest tip of Crooked I. 6 Aug, he found 75+ pairs of Sooty Terns, 10+ pairs of Royal Terns, and 5+ pairs of Least Terns. A Caspian Tern first seen 24 Aug remained on New Providence through the fall (TH ph, m. ob.). The only Black Terns reported were 4 at Lake Killarney, New Providence 6 Sep (PD, TH). A Black Skimmer was at West End, Grand Bahama 2 Nov (BP).

CW found single Zenaida Doves at Coral Harbour, New Providence 16 Sep and Paradise I. 26 Nov. At least five Cuban (Bahama) Parrots are present in Nassau. They appear to be from the Abaco population and may be wild birds that flew to New Providence (CS, LG). Single Yellow-billed Cuckoos were noted on Grand Bahama 12 and 18 Oct, 1 and 6 Nov (all BP), and on Abaco 27 Oct and 8 Nov (EB).

Uncommon flycatchers in the Bahamas included an Eastern Wood-Pewee at Blue Shark GC, New Providence 4 Sep (PD, TH), one north of Treasure Cay 4 Oct (EB, BF), and one with an Eastern Phoebe at the cattle farm, Grand Bahama 8 Nov (BP). An Empidonax flycatcher, probably an Acadian, was seen north of Treasure Cay 25 Oct (EB). A Western Kingbird was at St. George's Park, Grand Bahama 28 Oct and 6 were at Reef GC 22 Nov (BP), while single Eastern Kingbirds were at Blue Shark GC 6 Sep (TH), Angel Fish Point, Abaco 24 Sep (EB), north of Treasure Cay 4 Oct (EB, BF), and at Lucayan GC, Grand Bahama 9 Nov (BP). Gray Kingbirds are staying later and later in the fall; In Nov they were found on North Andros, Eleuthera, Abaco, Grand Bahama, and New Providence (m. ob.).

Crows are very rare in the Bahamas, so a crow at Coopers Town, Abaco 20 Sep (SN, EB) was noteworthy. It did not call and could not be identified to species.

Two Purple Martins at Sandy Point, Abaco 6 Aug (EB, TH) were unusual. A Gray-cheeked/Bicknell's Thrush was at Rock Sound 5 Oct (JDW), and a Swainson's Thrush was there 30 Oct (JW et al). An American Pipit was at West End, Grand Bahama 19 Oct (BP). The only Cedar Waxwing reported was one at Rock Sound 20 Nov (JDW).

The warbler migration in the Bahamas was normal; 30 species (including resident species) were reported. Single Blue-winged Warblers were at Rock Sound, Eleuthera on four dates from 3 Oct to 2 Nov (JW, AD, JDW). Two Blackburnian Warblers were at Blue Shark GC 6 Sep (PD, TH), and one was at the Marsh Harbour dump 10 Sep (EB). Single Eastern Palm Warblers were seen at Rock Sound 3, 7, and 28 Nov (AD, JDW). The Bahamas' first documented Canada Warbler was photographed at Cable Beach GC, New Providence 8-10 Oct (PD, TH ph). A Swainson's Warbler was in EG's garden, Lucaya, Grand Bahama 5 Nov. The Kirtland's Warbler Research and Training Project on Eleuthera saw their first Kirtland's Warbler on 10 Oct. In Oct and Nov they resighted 6 banded warblers and banded 11 new ones. The oldest resighted bird was banded in 2002. They report that the number of unbanded birds seems to be higher than last year, suggesting a good breeding season (Fide JDW).

EB saw a Clay-colored Sparrow at the Coopers Town dump, Abaco 1 Nov and a White-crowned Sparrow there 27 Oct. BP reported 10 Savannah Sparrows on Grand Bahama 1 & 2 Nov. A Painted Bunting on Southwest Ridge, New Providence 6 Sep was early (PD). Bobolink migration extended over a month. Over 100 were at Gladstone Road Agricultural Centre, New Providence 10 Sep, and over 50 were at Harrold and Wilson Ponds NP 13 Oct (PD, TH, WP). Seven Shiny Cowbirds at the egg farm, Grand Bahama 12 Sep was a high count (BP).

Addendum: BNM found 7 dead or dying juvenile American Flamingos on North Caicos in the spring of 2008.

Observers:

Betsy Bracey, Elwood Bracey, Nancy Clum, Elise Corliss, Paul Dean, Alana Demko, Barbara Foreman, Lynn Gape, Erika Gates, Tony Hepburn, Scott Johnson, Jose Morales Leal (JML), Brian Naqqi Manko (BNM), Predensa Moore, Stewart Neilson, Bahamas National Trust Ornithology Group (OG), Bob Paisley (BPa), William Pinder, Bruce Purdy, Tamica Rahming, Caroline Stahala, Peter and Olga Stokes (P&OS), Melgar Tabasco, Jennifer Thieme, Carolyn Wardle, Jennifer D. White (JDW), Tony White, Joe Wunderle