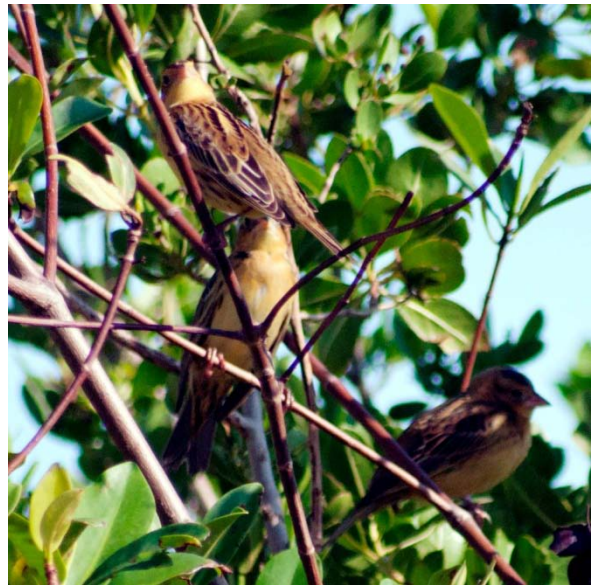


## DECR monitors Migratory Birds in TCI

The Turks & Caicos Islands lie at the end of the Bahamas Archipelago and close to the Greater Antilles. This strategic location means that islands in TCI are popular wintering grounds and travel stopovers for birds that migrate seasonally between temperate regions of North America, and the American Tropics. Many birds breed in the spring and summer in North America, when insects and fruit are plentiful to feed young. They escape the winter cold and associated shortages of food by flying south. While a few birds journey straight over water to their wintering grounds, the majority of birds from eastern North America “island hop” from Florida, through the Bahamas and Cuba, TCI, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, then on down the chain of the Lesser Antilles into South America. They retrace their migration in early spring, returning northward. Each island stop is necessary to the birds to provide food and rest during their journeys.

The Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) has been collecting data on just how important our natural habitats are to migratory birds. In partnership with the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) since 2010, bird monitoring has been carried out year-round, including migratory seasons. This migratory season, Fall 2011, has been especially well-monitored. On Saturday, 15 October, DECR led a migratory bird monitoring day, which documented birds at important sites on Providenciales including the Wheeland Ponds, Sandpits, and Provo Golf Course. On October 18 (Tuesday), migratory bird monitoring has also



been carried out in Middle and North Caicos, where this year, massive flocks of seed-eating songbirds called bobolinks *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* have appeared, descending by the hundreds on patches of guinea-grass and shepherd’s needle, eating the seeds to fuel their journey onward. Other migrants spotted have included blue-winged teal (*Anas, discors*, a species of duck), ruddy ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis*, American coots *Fulica americana*, and snowy egrets *Egretta thula*. Throughout October, DECR has led (and will continue to lead) primary and high school students and teachers on bird watching trips, which include training on how to use binoculars, spotting scopes, field guides, and species identification cards. The DECR also provided colouring books (supplied by SCSCB) featuring birds they may see in their field adventures while bird watching. Much of this educational work was made possible through the training and equipment grant by SCSCB to DECR over the last year.



The data generated while DECR conducts these activities is sent back to SCSCB, who will process it along with similar regional data. When combined, this gives us a good idea of which birds are moving

through which areas, when. This is especially important because many of these birds are under pressure in part of their range, either by habitat destruction or other danger. The sport-shooting of two radio-tagged whimbrels (large wading birds similar to a sandpipers), which survived hurricanes during their migrations from their summer homes in Arctic Canada, underline this importance. Both birds were shot in Guadeloupe, where sport hunting remains common. In TCI, where all birds are protected by law, they do not have to be fearful of humans and indeed many tolerate bird watchers quite well. Moreover, birds provide an excellent method of sustainable, low-impact income and employment – such as bird watching guides – to local communities, making them far more valuable when alive. As long as the TCI remains an alluring place for winter visitors – both feathered and human – this sort of ecotourism can continue to grow. The DECR is proud to support and encourage anyone in TCI to take up bird watching as a hobby or career to promote sustainable development and eco-tourism. The Amanyara Resort and Provo Golf Club have signified support to the bird monitoring activities of the DECR by recording any sightings in their respective premises. The Science and Environmental Club of the Raymond Gardiner High School in North Caicos have included wetland and bird monitoring as one of their activities.



For more information on migratory birds or bird monitoring, or to request a bird watching field trip for your school, club, or group, contact the DECR at 941-5122 or send an email to [info@environment.tc](mailto:info@environment.tc).





Photo Captions:

Photo 1: Bobolink found in Wheeland, Providenciales

Photo 2: American coot in Provo Gulf Course

Photo 3: Great Egret at the Bight Park

Photo 4: School Children are bird-watching

Photo 5: School children at Wheeland Pond

Photo 6: Bird watching mentors at Provo Gulf Course

Photo Credits: All photos taken by Eric F. Salamanca, DECR PLS