



# Winggin' it!

The **WHAT**,  
**WHY** and  
**WHERE** of our  
Flying Friends

A Bahamas National Trust IBA Project

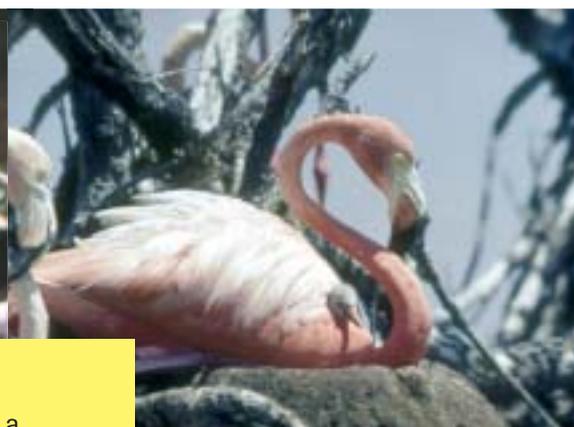


## May Day Bird Walk at BNT

On Saturday May 1, the BNT Ornithology Group will host a morning birdwalk at BNT headquarters on Village Road from 7:30 to 10:30 am. Coffee and refreshments will be available after the walk.

This event is part of the month-long Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival sponsored by the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds. The festival begins on Earth Day (April 22).

A special philatelic exhibit showcasing birds of the Bahamas will be displayed at the Main Post Office downtown from May 10-17.



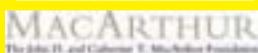
## Want to Learn More?

The BNT Ornithology Group has formed a beginners group which includes monthly birdwalks. If you have a desire to learn about birds and become a member of the Bahamas National Trust, you can join. A pair of binoculars and a willingness to get up early are also helpful.

**For more information contact the Bahamas National Trust at 393-1317, email: [bnt@batelnet.bs](mailto:bnt@batelnet.bs), website: [www.bahamasnationaltrust.com](http://www.bahamasnationaltrust.com)**

## What's Inside:

- What is a bird?
- Birdwalks
- Eat like a bird
- Rare ducks
- Birds with a Bahamian passport
- Birds of our national parks
- Puzzles & Jokes
- Birds to colour



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# All About Birds!

Birds are warm-blooded, vertebrate animals that have wings, feathers and a beak with no teeth.

Most birds can fly. To do this they have strong hearts, powerful flight muscles and an efficient breathing system.

Birds use a lot of energy while flying and need to eat a lot of food to power their muscles.

**Ornithology is the study of birds. A scientist who studies birds is called an ornithologist.**

Not all flying animals are birds; and not all birds can fly. The ability to fly has

developed independently many times throughout the history of the Earth. Bats (flying mammals), pterosaurs (flying reptiles from the time of dinosaurs) and flying insects are not birds.

## How Birds Move

Bird locomotion is varied. Most can fly, some can run well, some can swim, and some do a combination of these.

A flying bird's wing is shaped to provide lift. These lightweight animals have adapted to their environment by flying in order to hunt more effectively, as well as to escape predators and harsh weather conditions.

The falcon is one of the fastest birds. It has been clocked at 90 miles per hour in a dive.

## Feathers

Feathers are modified scales. There are different types of feathers that have different uses.

Feathers are used for flying (in the wings and tail), for thermal insulation (down that grows close to the skin), and courtship displays (which vary tre-

**Male birds are usually more brightly coloured than females in order to attract females. The females are more dully coloured, providing camouflage when caring for the young.**

Although males often assist in the rearing of the young

mendously from species to species.

## Diet

Modern birds do not have teeth (although ancient birds did). Birds have a tongue, but unlike ours, it has a bone in it.

Birds spend most of their time looking for food. Some - like owls - are carnivores (meat eaters). Some - like the hummingbird, grassquit or white-crowned pigeon - are mostly herbivores (plant eaters). Others - like woodpeckers - are omnivores (which eat plants and meat).

Birds use their keen eyesight to find food. They use their beak and their claws to eat insects, worms, small mammals (like mice), reptiles (like lizards), fish, fruit, grain or nectar.

Birds play a very important part in the natural control of insects and in the dispersal of seeds. Some, like the nectar-eating hummingbird, are important pollinators of flowering plants.

## Nesting

Birds bear their young in hard-shelled eggs which hatch some time after they are laid. Some, like chickens, lay eggs each day. Others, (like the Maleo) may go years between laying eggs.

Birds build nests in trees, on cliffs, or on the ground. Most chicks are taken care of by at least one parent until they are able to fly and find their own food.

The incubation period of eggs varies from species to species. There is also some variability due to the temperature.

Some birds, like cuckoos and cowbirds, lay their eggs in other bird's nests. The non-related adult bird takes care of the cuckoo's egg unwittingly. Some cuckoos even kill the other eggs in the nest to ensure that their offspring gets enough food.

## Migration

Many birds migrate to a cooler climate for breeding and then return to a warmer climate in the winter. It is unknown exactly how birds are able to

navigate accurately, but many people are studying this mystery.

## Bird Songs

Birds sing beautiful and diversified songs. Unfortunately, many songbirds are becoming scarcer every year.

Songbirds have a vocal organ called the syrinx that has two halves that vibrate to produce songs, so the bird can sing two notes at a time. To sing, a bird blows air from the lungs through the syrinx.

## Do Birds Have Knees?

Yes, birds have knees (they are often under the feathers and not easily visible), and they bend the same way our knees bend. The part of a bird's leg that bends backwards when it walks is the ankle.

## Heart Rate And Breathing

In order to fly, birds need a lot of oxygen, which they get by breathing air through their lungs. They also need a strong circulatory system, including a powerful heart to circulate the oxygen. A bird's heart beats much faster than our heart does. A hummingbird's heart beats about 1,000 times each minute; a human's heart beats about 60-90 times each minute.

Birds breathe using a unique system in which air follows a one-way route through the respiratory system. This system of respiration (breathing) is very efficient - much more efficient than ours.

Birds have two relatively small lungs (where gas exchange occurs), but these are augmented by bellows-like air sacs (where no gas exchange occurs.) The air sacs keep the lungs perpetually inflated, even when the bird is exhaling, whereas our lungs alternately fill and empty. The bird's respiratory system takes up 20% of the volume of its body. By comparison, our respiratory system takes up only 5% of our volume.

**The fastest running bird is the ostrich, which cannot fly. The ostrich is also the fastest two-legged runner of all animals on earth, as well as being the largest bird.**

**The ostrich lays the largest eggs - up to 4.5 x 7 inches across and weighing 3 pounds.**

jokes! jokes! jokes!

Q: What figure is like a lost parrot?

A: A polygon!

Q: What do you get when you cross a parrot and a shark?

A: A bird that talks your ear off!

Q: What do you get if you cross a cat with a parrot?

A: A carrot!

Q: Why do hummingbirds hum?

A: Because they forgot the words!

Q: What do you get if you cross a canary and a 50-foot long snake?

A: A sing-a-long!

Q: Where does a 500-pound canary sit?

A: Anywhere it wants!

Q: How do you get down off an elephant?

A: You don't, you get down off a duck!

Q: How does a chicken mail a letter to her friend?

A: In a HEN-velope!

Q: What does a duck like to eat with soup?

A: Quackers!

Q: Why did the owl say, "Tweet, tweet."?

A: Because she didn't give a hoot!

jokes! jokes! jokes!

# Eat Like a Bird?

When we tell someone they eat like a bird, we mean that they pick at their food and barely eat anything at all.

This is a misused phrase. To really eat like a bird, you would have to spend all your time shamelessly stuffing your face. Birds have enormous appetites.

The word ravenous, which means absolutely starving and ready to eat everything in sight, comes from the eating habits of the raven, a hungry relative of the crow. Hummingbirds eat every 10 minutes, slurping down twice their body weight in flower nectar every day.

In fact, most birds eat one quarter to one half of their body weight daily. To keep up with that, you'd have to munch your way through 175 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches a day.

There are almost as many bird diets as there are birds. Mockingbirds eat worms, grassquits eat seeds, owls eat mice, herons eat frogs and fish, sandpipers feed on small insects, the West Indian Whistling Duck eats corn and royal palm berries and the White Crowned Pigeon loves poisonwood berries.

## Hummingbird Feeders

Hummingbirds sip sugary nectar from flower blossoms, but they also like home-made sugar syrups. To make your own hummingbird food, mix 1 part white sugar with 4 parts water in a saucepan. Boil for one or two minutes. Cool the mixture and pour into your hummingbird feeder.

If you don't have a feeder, you can make your own. Fill a small jar to the top with the nectar

and hang it from a tree branch or stake. Tie a red ribbon around the jar to get their attention. Hummingbirds love red.

**WARNING:** Be sure you clean and refill your hummingbird feeder every two or three days, to prevent contamination with bacteria. If your nectar looks cloudy get rid of it: it's contaminated. You do not want your hummingbirds to get sick.

## The All-Purpose Beak

It is often possible to tell what a bird eats by the shape of its beak. Bird beaks are collectively like a biological Swiss army knife. Look at enough of them, and you will see every kind of tool, from sledgehammers to spoons, harpoons and needle nosed tweezers.

The pelican has a natural fish net – a big pouch that stretches from the front of its bill to its neck. With it, the pelican catches fish about once out of every three tries - which is better than most human fishermen. Parrots and their relatives are living nutcrackers; and their hooked upper beaks do double duty as fruit slicers.

Seed eaters, such as grassquits and buntings have short, solid cone shaped beaks that are tough enough to crack open crunchy seed coats. Insect eaters, such as warblers, have longer thinner beaks, suitable for picking meals out of the crevices in bark and leaves.

Meat eaters such as hawks and eagles have powerful hooked beaks that operate like scrapers and steak knives. And fish eaters like herons and

egrets often have long, spear-like bills for grabbing or stabbing scaly swimmers.

Hummingbirds have long hollow beaks that they use to probe flowers for nectar. The beak protects their long tongue which slurps up the nectar. Flamingos and some ducks have bills that act like strainers to filter tiny plants and animals from the water. Night-hawks and swallows have large gaping mouths that act like nets to trap insects. These birds catch insects on the wing.

## The Upside-Down, Filter-Feeding Flamingo

One of the strangest of all bird beaks belongs to the flamingo, our national bird. Flamingos feed with their heads upside-down in shallow water – and their beaks therefore operate upside down.

Most bird jaws operate pretty much like humans. Our upper jaw is fixed to our skull. When we eat, our lower jaw drops open allowing us to bite and chew. Most birds operate in the same way: a smaller lower beak moves up and down against a stationary upper beak.

In the upside-down flamingo, however, it is the other way around. The upper jaw does the moving, and the lower jaw stays still. With this upside-down beak the flamingos – like blue whales - are filter feeders. Their beaks are lined with rows of horny plates that work like sieves, straining yummy little edible creatures out to the water.

# Fill the Bill.

## What food do we eat?

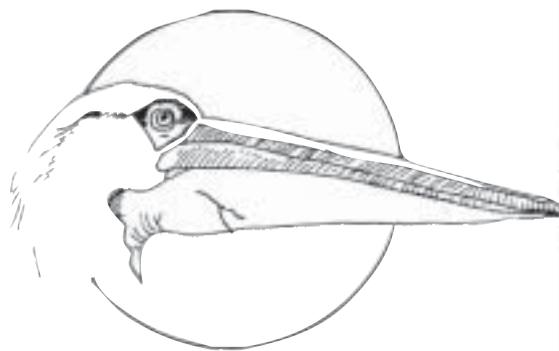
Read the story at left and fill in the right number that describes the type of food eaten by these birds



Hummingbird \_\_\_\_\_



Flamingo \_\_\_\_\_



Pelican \_\_\_\_\_



Swallow \_\_\_\_\_



Snipe \_\_\_\_\_



Warbler \_\_\_\_\_

1 insect larvae and small crustaceans	2 flying insects caterpillars and other insects
3 mice	4 nectar
5 fish and other water animals	6 brine shrimp

Answers to Fill the Bill: Hummingbird - nectar; Flamingos - brine shrimp; Pelican - fish and other water animals; Swallow - flying insects, caterpillars and other insects; Snipe - insect larvae and small crustaceans; Warbler - flying insects, caterpillars and other insects

# In your garden...

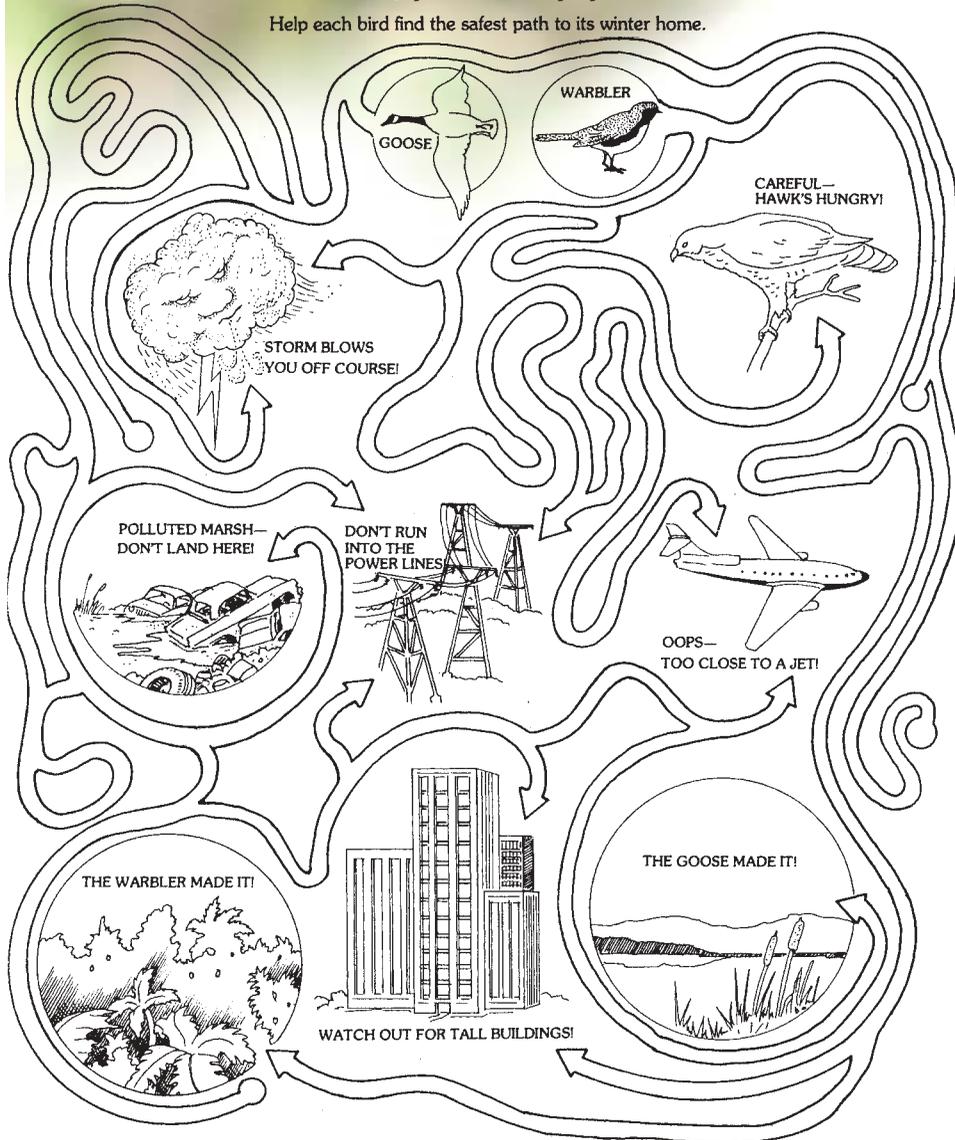
## Migration Maze

Most people, when they think of the Bahamas, think of sun, sand and sea. But we have much more to offer – forests, reefs, marine life and, of course, birds!

Some 300 species of birds have been recorded in the Bahamas. More than a hundred breed here and are either permanent residents or summer visitors. Another 169 are migrants that either pass through or winter here. And 45 are vagrants that have occurred occasionally.

A few species such as the Double Crested Cormorant, Yellow-throated Warbler and American Kestrel fall into more than one category, having both wintering and permanent populations on our islands.

Help each bird find the safest path to its winter home.



The Bahama Yellowthroat, Bahama Swallow and Bahama Woodstar are the only living species endemic to the Bahamas (i.e they breed only on these islands).

A fourth endemic species - Brace's Emerald - is extinct, known only from a single specimen collected in 1877.

Many breeding seabirds (terns, gulls, tropicbirds, shearwaters and boobies) are spring and summer residents – rarely being seen in other seasons.

The following are birds which many of us see every day in our gardens, local lakes and seashores:

### Red-legged Thrush, *Turdus plumbeus*

This is a striking bird, predominantly grey with a reddish bill and legs. It is common on the northern islands and can be seen on lawns and in gardens as well as more natural areas.



### Smooth-billed Ani, *Crotophaga ani*

This is a long-tailed, glossy black cuckoo. Distinguished from other black birds by its extraordinary bill. This bird is common throughout the Bahamas, except for Bimini and Cay Sal. It is easily seen in suburban yards and around settlements.



### Bananaquit, *Corereba flaveola*

This small bird is one of the most common resident species. It feeds mainly on nectar and can be found in gardens where there are flowering shrubs. It is extremely active and acrobatic, often hanging upside down in order to feed.



### Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*

This bird is more common than the Bahama Mockingbird. In general, the Northern Mockingbird is found in "town" whereas



the Bahama Mockingbird is the bird of the "country". One often sees this bird in the garden raising its wings upward and forward in an umbrella like fashion while on the ground. The purpose of this behavior is to disturb insects, which are part of its diet.

### Bahama Mockingbird, *Mimus gundlachi*

The Bahama Mockingbird is slightly larger than the Northern Mockingbird. It does not show the flashing pattern of the Northern Mockingbird.



### White-crowned Pigeon, *Columba leucocephala*

This dark grey pigeon gets its name from the white marking on the forehead and crown of adult birds. It is a common summer resident throughout the Bahama Islands but few individuals remain during the winter. It nests in the summer on remote cays and flies daily to larger islands to feed on the fruit of native trees, including the Poisonwood tree. White-crowned pigeons are the premier game bird of the Bahamas. Hunting season for this bird opens on September 29 and closes on March 1.



ern Bahamas. The rapid spread of this species prompted the Bahamas National Trust to recommend that they be added to the official gamebird list. These birds can be hunted from September 15 to March 1.

### Common Ground Dove, *Columbina passerina*

This is a very small dove that is an abundant permanent resident throughout the country. These birds are usually found in small groups or pairs feeding in open areas. They will congregate at bird feeders and are commonly known as a tobacco dove.



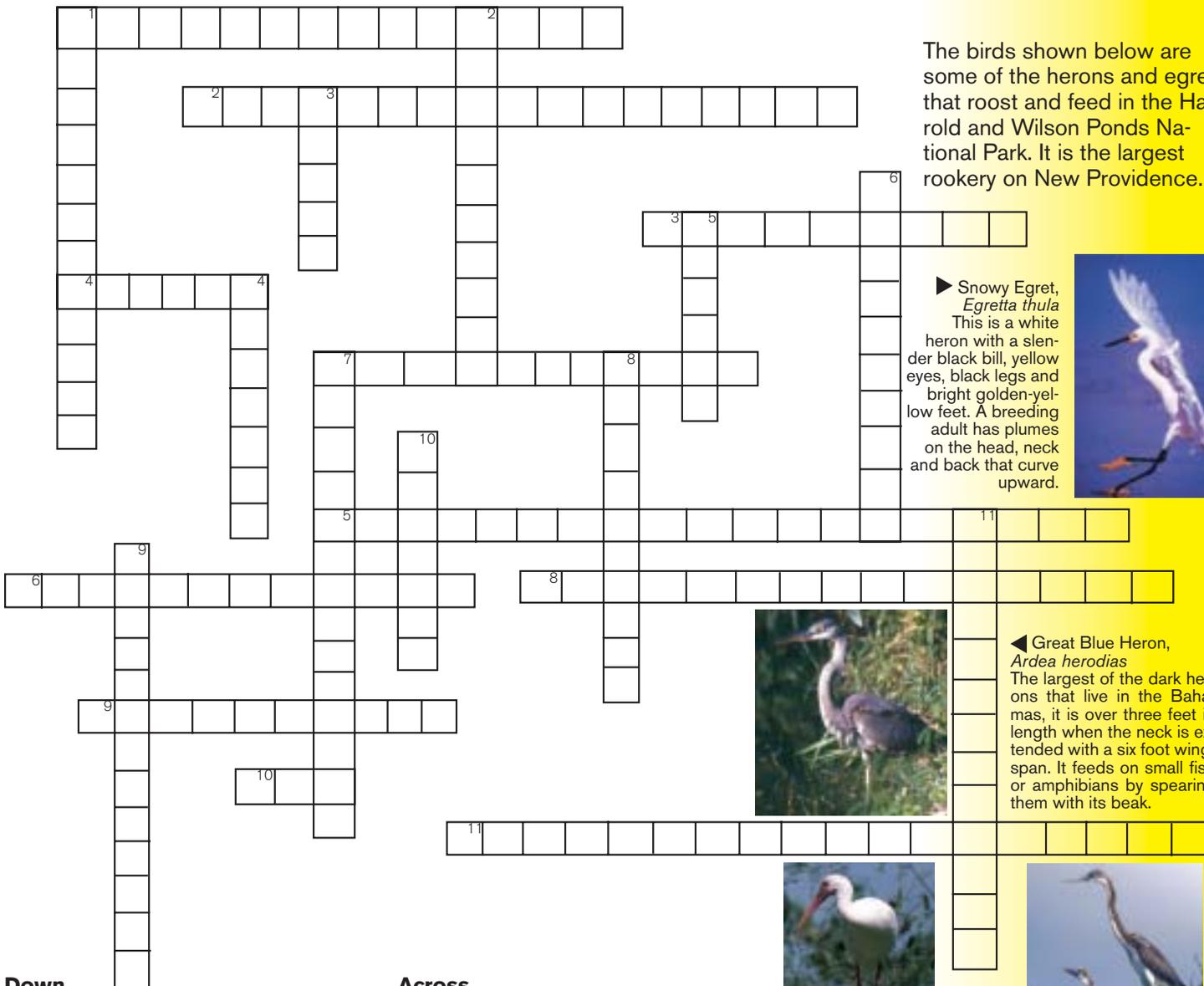
### Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*

This is a small, chunky heron with short legs. When it is excited the Green Heron is capable of raising the feathers on the crown of the head giving it a crested effect. Commonly called a "Poor Joe", it is seen around lakes and marshes and often in gardens with swimming pools.



# BIRD CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Submit your completed puzzle and you could win a PRIZE!



## Down

1. This tunneling bird of prey is a hoot (12)
2. White wetland bird with yellow slippers and black bill (10)
3. Of or relating to birds (5)
4. Only found in a certain areas and nowhere else (7)
5. Fish hawk (6)
6. Small dark wetland bird, "Gaulin" or "Poor Joe" (10)
7. I come from your Spanish neighbour to the south, and I have given up playing on your lawn (14)
8. Tiny land dove, "Tobacco dove" (10)
9. Bird with green upperparts and deeply forked tail that lives in the pine forest (13)
10. Nocturnal bird of prey whose name sound like he sleeps in hay (7)
11. White-cheeked duck, *Anas bahamensis* (13)

## Across

1. Local "star" hummingbird (14)
2. "Native repeater" (17)
3. Black glossy coastal bird (9)
4. Local Native (6)
5. Bird from the "north" that mimics other birds occasionally (19)
6. White-headed squawker (12)
7. White bird with yellow bill found among livestock (11)
8. Slate grey bird with red eye ring and feet (15)
9. Name sounds like a yellow fruit that has resigned (10)
10. Smooth billed black bird, "Crow" (3)
11. Bird with black mask bordered in yellow around the throat (18)

The number in brackets after each clue is the number of letters in that answer. Attach a card with your name, address and phone contact with your completed entry.

The birds shown below are some of the herons and egrets that roost and feed in the Harold and Wilson Ponds National Park. It is the largest rookery on New Providence.

▶ **Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula***  
This is a white heron with a slender black bill, yellow eyes, black legs and bright golden-yellow feet. A breeding adult has plumes on the head, neck and back that curve upward.



◀ **Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias***  
The largest of the dark herons that live in the Bahamas, it is over three feet in length when the neck is extended with a six foot wingspan. It feeds on small fish or amphibians by spearing them with its beak.



▲ **White Ibis *Plegadis albus***  
The adult's have white plumage with black markings on their wing tips, pink facial skin and blue eye colour. When breeding its long curving bill turns brilliant red during the breeding season. The Ibis roosts in large inland rookeries with herons and egrets.



▲ **Great Egret, *Ardea alba***  
is a large white heron with a yellow bill and blackish legs and feet. When breeding, long plumes known as "aigrettes" trail from the back extending beyond the tail. This common wetland bird, stalks its prey along the waters edge.



▲ **Tri-colored Heron, *Egretta tricolor***  
This bird has a thin, long neck which is slate grey on the upper parts and white on the under parts. The legs are greenish yellow and the bill is long and slender and dark at the tip.



▲ **Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus***  
This is large bird of prey, some two feet in length with a wingspan of up to four and a half feet. Two types of osprey are found here - the West Indian and North American.

## BNT Starts Important Bird Area Programme

The survival of neotropical migrant songbirds, shorebirds, seabirds, and wading birds is threatened by many factors.

Although the causes of population declines are complex, there is a consensus among scientists that habitat loss and degradation is the most important threat to breeding grounds, migratory pathways and wintering areas.

The Bahamas National Trust has entered into a three-year partnership with BirdLife International to coordinate the Important Bird Areas (IBA) Programme for the Bahamas.

This is part of a global effort to identify areas that are critical for maintaining bird populations in order to focus conservation efforts on protecting those sites.

The programme is supported by a grant from the John D. MacArthur Foundation. Other partners in the Caribbean include Jamaica, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

An essential step in conserving bird habitats is the identification of those places that provide the greatest habitat value, and which support significant populations of an exceptional diversity of birds. These Important Bird Areas (or IBAs) are strongholds of avian abundance and diversity.

The BNT held an IBA workshop last year for representatives of government agencies and conservation groups, as well as local ornithologists and scientists conducting avian research in the Bahamas.

The workshop identified a number of priority sites throughout the Bahamas.

A listing of the Bahamas IBA's has been published and made available to government agencies and the general public. This listing will become a blueprint for bird conservation in the Bahamas.

Conservation feasibility assessments will be undertaken for the highest priority sites, to identify and fill information gaps.

This is an important effort being undertaken with global, national and local support to conserve birds and their habitat throughout our country.

# These Ducks are Special!



## White Cheeked Pintail

This duck's crown and back of the head are a dark mottled brown with cheeks, chin and upper fore-neck a pure white. The bill is dark bluish gray with a brilliant red spot at the base. The body plumage is medium brown with black spotting and a pointed fawn coloured tail. The eyes are red to red brown and the legs and feet are dark gray. The females are similar to the males and only slightly smaller. These birds can be seen on the ponds on Paradise Island. They are commonly known as the Bahama Duck, Bahama Pintail or White Jaws. This duck is totally protected by law - no hunting year-round!

## Ruddy Duck

This is a small duck with a squat compact silhouette. Both males and females have white sides up to the head and a dark cap to the head. At breeding time the males have a dark brown cap and the remainder of the body is a rich reddish brown, the bill turns a light blue. When breeding season is over the males look more like the females and their bills fade to a grayish blue. These ducks can be found on lakes and ponds and are often seen on Paradise Island. This duck is totally protected by law - no hunting year-round!

## West Indian Whistling Duck

This duck is the largest and rarest of the eight species of whistling ducks found in the tropics and live near fresh and saltwater lakes, ponds and mangrove wetlands.

It is a large goose-like duck with relatively long legs that extend beyond the tail in flight.

The West Indian Whistling Duck is nocturnal (active at night) and feeds mostly in the evenings. They are generally seen at dusk flying in flocks to feed on their favorite fruit from the Royal Palm. Their diet is made up of fruits, seeds, grasses or grain crops such as rice or corn.

These ducks are not quackers, but make an eerie whistling sound. Once common and widespread throughout the region, their numbers have grown smaller. In The Bahamas it is considered rare, but is still seen on Inagua, Long Island, Andros, and Abaco.

This duck is protected by law - no hunting year-round!

# Why Birds?

One might ask, "Why all the fuss about birds?"

Well, birds have been used to monitor the environment throughout history. Aristotle in 340 BC, described how the behavior of cranes could be used to forecast the weather. And fishermen from the 17th century onwards have used flocks of seabirds as indicators of fish concentrations.

Birds are one of the best, and in some cases the only, monitors of environmental change. Ornithologists (scientists who study birds) have used changes in bird populations and behavior to:

- examine the long term effects of habitat fragmentation and introduced species
- monitor water quality
- monitor the health of fish stocks
- identify environmental pollutants

It is easy to see why we can use birds as indicators of changes in our environment. Birds are easy to study, so large amounts of data can be reliably gathered by scientists.

The longest running data gathered on wildlife populations over time comes from Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, providing nearly 100 years of data on changes in North American bird populations.

The BNT Ornithology Group began participating in the Christmas Bird Count in 1994 and has recently begun a Christmas Count on Grand Bahama. The group hopes to one day have Christmas Counts on all the major islands of the Bahamas.

Because the biology, ecology, behavior and evolutionary histories of many birds have been studied extensively, scientists have a foundation on which to ask the most pertinent questions, and develop solutions.

This background knowledge allows scientists to use birds as a measure of environmental change. Studies using other animals often require years of basic data gathering before monitoring can begin.

Birds also accumulate environmental stresses over time because they are usually high in the food chain and have relatively long life spans. So they can tell us about unexpected environmental problems, as when declining numbers of birds like the Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Brown Pelican revealed that DDT was a pollution hazard.

Bird behavior and reproductive success often reflect closely the stability of an ecosystem. So long-term monitoring programmes like the Christmas Bird Count help to reveal environmental changes caused by humans.

Birds hold widespread interest. Nearly 60 million people in North America have made birding the second most popular outdoor activity after gardening, spending billions of dollars on birding supplies.

Volunteer birders participating in citizen science programmes like the Christmas Count help to gather data about population trends over a broad geographical range.



Staple each foot to the bottom of one side of the paper plate, right inside the fold line of the foot. You now have a cute duckie that will stand up.

## Make your own special duck

Supplies needed:

- Paper plate
- Scissors
- Glue
- Stapler
- A pencil
- Yellow and orange construction paper
- Crayons, paint or markers
- Googly eyes (optional)



Trace your hands on yellow construction paper, then cut the hands out. If you don't have yellow construction paper, use stiff white paper, then paint it yellow (or use markers).



Staple the hands near the fold on one end - these will be the tail feathers.



Fold a paper plate in half. Paint it yellow and let it dry



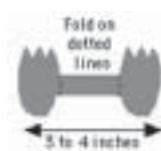
Using yellow construction paper, cut out a circle (about 3 inches across or a little bigger) -- this will be the duck's head. Using orange construction paper, cut out an elongated oval with one end cut off -- this will be the duck's bill. Fold the end of the beak over, making a small tab (this is where you will put the glue).



Glue the bill onto the circle (put the glue on the small tab that will be folded under the bill). Draw eyes above the bill (or glue on small googly eyes).



Staple the head to the paper plate (near the fold line, opposite the tail feathers).



Using orange construction paper, cut out the duck's feet - they should be connected by a short strip of paper. To draw each foot, start with an oval, then draw a zigzag on one end. Fold the paper where the feet meet the strip of paper.

# Bahama Parrot

*Amazona leucocephala bahamensis*

This is a subspecies of the Cuban Amazon parrot, whose scientific name means "white headed Amazon parrot from The Bahamas." Its white head and mostly green body make this parrot easily recognized.

Its short rounded bill is a powerful tool for eating, climbing, defending, grooming and playing.

The Bahama parrot has two toes facing forwards and two facing backwards (a configuration known as zygodactylus). It grows up to a foot in length.

## Diet

This bird eats a variety of fruits from many shrubs, including wild guava, poisonwood, pigeonberry, gumbo limbo and pond-top palm. Bahama parrots in Abaco also eat the seeds from pine trees.

## Reproduction

Mating begins in early spring. The birds are monogamous and mate for life. In Inagua, they seek out cavities in large hollow trees. Abaco parrots nest in limestone cavities on the ground in the pine forest.

The female parrot lays two to four eggs and incubates them for 26 days while her mate collects food. The eggs hatch 12 -72 hours apart.

Parrot chicks are helpless, blind and bald. By three weeks their eyes open. The chicks are fed regurgitated food.

## Habitat

Historically, the Bahama Parrot lived on seven Bahamian islands. Today, they are found only on Abaco and Inagua.

## Status

The habitat of both populations fall within the boundaries of national parks. There are less than 3,000 of these birds remaining in The Bahamas and they are protected by law. It is illegal to harm or capture or offer this bird for sale.

## Threats

Their ground nesting behaviour makes them vulnerable to predation by wild cats, boar, crabs and snakes. Heavy rains can flood their nest holes, killing young chicks. Habitat loss is a constant threat. The pet trade is another threat.

## Interesting facts

- The Bahama parrot was recognized as the official mascot of the 1992 quincentennial celebration of Columbus' landfall in the Bahamas
- Bahama parrot bones found on New

Providence have been dated back to the Pleistocene era, more than 50,000 years ago

•Christopher Columbus was so struck by their numbers when he made landfall in The Bahamas in 1492 that he wrote in his log, "flocks of parrots darken the sun"

## Label the Parrot

Abdomen - the belly.

Auriculars (ear coverts) - the feathers that cover the bird's ear opening (located behind the eyes).

Breast - the area over the belly and under the throat.

Cere - the waxy-looking bumps on the upper beak of some birds (including the parrots, pigeons, and some hawks).

Claws - hard talons at the end of each toe.

Crown - the top of the bird's head.

Forehead - the area directly above the eyes.

Lore - the area on each side of a bird's face, between the eyes and the upper bill. lower mandible - the lower part of the bill.

Nape - the back of the neck.

primaries - the main flight feathers on the wings (they are located on lower [outer] parts of the wings).

Scapulars - feathers on the shoulder (also called lesser secondary coverts).

Secondaries - the smaller flight feathers on the wings, they are on the upper part of the wings (above the primaries).

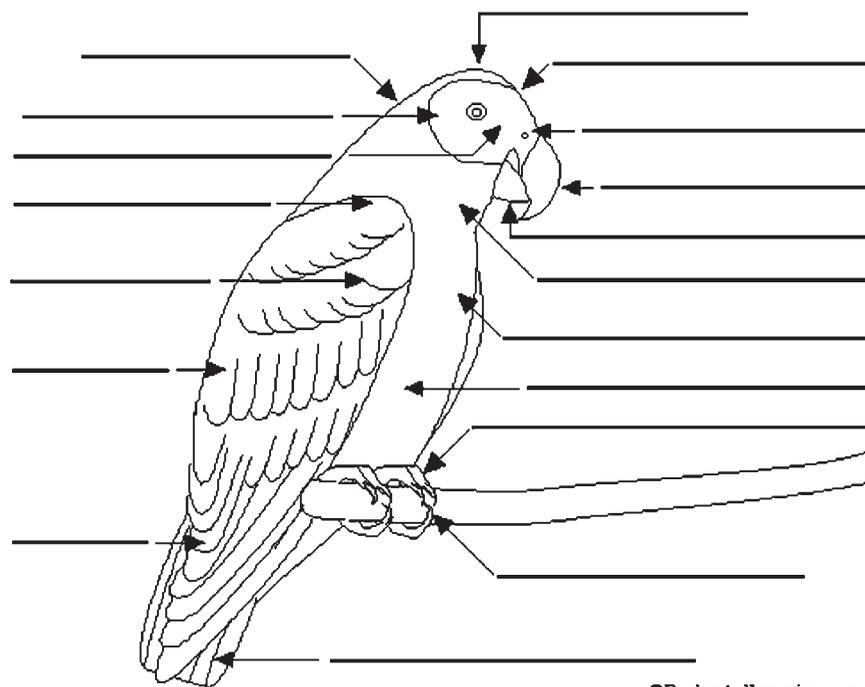
Tail feathers - flight feathers at the end of the bird (used for steering).

Toes - the digits of the feet.

Throat - the area under head and above the chest.

Upper mandible - the upper part of the bill.

Wing coverts - small feathers that cover the base of larger wing feathers (located at the top of the wings under the scapulars).



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# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

## West Indian Flamingo

*Phoenicopterus ruber*

The flamingo is the national bird of The Bahamas. And its long legs, long neck and bright pink colour make it a bird like no other.

## Diet

It eats the larvae of the salt marsh fly as well as brine shrimp, saltwater snails, and other forms of animal and vegetable life so small that they can be scarcely seen without the aid of a microscope.

The flamingo scoops its food from the bottom of ponds or bays and sifts it through its bill, separating the parts that can be eaten and getting rid of the mud and water with no trouble at all.

## Reproduction

Breeding begins in early March, when huge flocks gather and engage in

elaborate and loud courtship ceremonies. The chorus of courting birds can be heard miles away. When it is all over, the pairs are formed and the building of nest mounds usually begins in April.

Nests are built on the ground out of mud and are baked hard by the sun. They are 10 inches high with a shallow crater at the top where a single egg is deposited. Both parents share in incubation which takes about one month. Flamingo chicks are covered with white, downy feathers, have short legs and stunted featherless wings. The parents feed them predigested food. It takes 75 days for the chicks to be able to fly.

## Habitat

The flamingo prefers to live in remote places, where few other creatures can survive. Inagua fits that portfolio perfectly, and this is where most flamingos live in The Bahamas. The flock breeds around Lake Windsor in the Inagua National Park.

## Status

Although once on the verge of extinction, the Inagua population has grown to approximately 60,000 thanks to the Bahamas National Trust. But the flamingo is still threatened, so it is illegal to harm or capture this bird.

## Threats

Building nests on the ground makes flamingos vulnerable to predators. The eggs can be trampled by wild donkeys and boar that roam freely in the same area.

The flamingo was hunted for meat and for its big, pink feathers to decorate hats and other nonessential items. Low flying planes used to wreak havoc on the flamingo flocks.

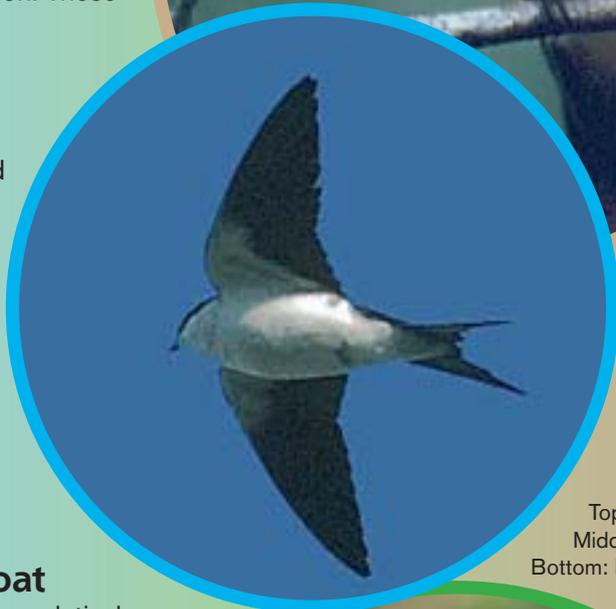
# These Birds Only Have A Bahamian Passport

Only three birds are **ENDEMIC** to the Bahamas.

ENDEMIC means that they are native or confined to a certain region. These birds breed only here.

## Bahama Swallow

The Bahama Swallow is a blackish blue and white bird about six inches in length. The head is a dark dull green with the back and wings becoming blue. The under parts are white and it has a deeply forked tail. They breed in pine forests on Abaco, Grand Bahama, Andros and New Providence.



## Bahama Yellowthroat

The Bahama Yellowthroat is a relatively large, slow moving warbler with a heavy bill. It is common on Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, and Cat Island. It is also sometimes found on Andros and New Providence. It hunts for insects in the thick scrub and undergrowth and is often called the "black-eye bird", as the males resemble small bandits with their black masks.



## Bahama Woodstar

A small (four-inch long) hummingbird, the Woodstar occurs on all the islands of the Bahamas. The males are green on the back and crown of the head and on the back and wings, while the upper parts are white on the breast and belly. The throat is an iridescent purple violet. Woodstars drink nectar from flowers, especially red and purple bell or trumpet shaped flowers. They have a long slender tongue that can reach inside flowers to lap up the nectar. They also eat tiny insects found in flowers or in mid-air. They

make a buzzing, humming noise caused by their rapidly beating wings. They are one of the only birds that can hover and fly horizontally, vertically and backwards.



Top: Bahama Woodstar  
Middle: Bahama Swallow  
Bottom: Bahama Yellowthroat

# BIRD LEGENDS...

Today the word halcyon means quiet, calm and peaceful. But to the ancient Greeks, the original halcyon was a beautiful girl named Halcyone, daughter of the wind god Aeolus.

Halcyone's husband was named Ceyx, and they were very much in love. One dreadful day, Ceyx was drowned at sea. Halcyone was so grief-stricken that she threw herself in the sea after him. The gods thought this so sad that they took pity on the lovers and turned them into a pair of kingfishers.

Zeus then ordered Aeolus to forbid the winds to blow for seven days before or after the winter solstice – the kingfisher's nesting season. These quiet, calm and peaceful days are known as the "halcyon days."

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The Kingfisher which is seen in the Bahamas around our lakes, ponds and seashores is the BELTED KINGFISHER.

As their name suggests, they eat mainly fish, although they may occasionally eat small birds, mammals and lizards.

They typically perch at the water-side searching for prey, usually small fish less than six inches in length, and dive head-first into the water to catch them. They will beat the fish on a perch to immobilize it, then toss it into the air and swallow it head first.

It is hard to confuse the Belted Kingfisher with any other bird. Their huge bill, large head with a shaggy crest, and coloring are distinctive. They are large (11 to 13 inches long) with a blue-gray head and under parts contrasting with the white under parts.

Both males and females have a white collar and a broad band of blue gray across the chest. Females have a chestnut band across their belly that is absent from the males. The large head and bill contrast with the tiny legs and short tail, making Belted Kingfishers look top heavy.

