



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

---

Department of Communication and Information

Contact:  
Magnus Henagulph  
[rmhenagulph@gov.bm](mailto:rmhenagulph@gov.bm)  
(441) 294 2780  
April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **Cahow chick first to be born on Nonsuch Island since 1620**

The Department of Conservation services within the Ministry of the Environment and Sports today announced the first recorded Cahow (*Pterodroma Cahow*) fledgling on Nonsuch Island since at least 1620.

The fledgling is a major triumph for the team involved in the Cahow Recovery Programme that aims to save the critically endangered sea bird from extinction.

While the Cahow was believed extinct since it was last seen in the 1620s, when it was “rediscovered” in the 1950s only 17 nesting pairs were found on several rocky islands in the east end of Bermuda.

Since there is not enough soil on most of the nesting islands for the Cahow to burrow in, 100 artificial concrete burrows were constructed and almost three quarters of all Cahows now nest in this ‘Government housing.’

Hurricanes and sea-level rise are the most urgent threats to the Cahow as recent hurricanes have severely eroded these islands and destroyed nest burrows. Rising sea level is causing more flooding of nests on these low-lying islands.

Nonsuch Island has not had any nesting Cahows since the 1620s as it has long been used by man, and had rats and other domestic animals which would kill the Cahow chicks.

Since restoration as a ‘living museum’ Nonsuch has had all the predatory animals removed and now closely resembles the habitat the early settlers described the Cahow as nesting in. Nonsuch has the potential to support far more Cahows than would ever be possible on the present eroding nesting islets and has enough soil for them to dig their own burrows.

One aspect of the Cahow Recovery Programme involved establishing breeding pairs of the birds on Nonsuch Island which is much less vulnerable to storms and rising sea levels.

Between 2004 and 2008 a total of 105 Cahow chicks were moved, or translocated from the tiny nesting islets to Nonsuch Island when they were two-thirds grown. Here they were fed squid and fish, fitted with tags and monitored until they flew to sea. 102 chicks successfully fledged to sea.



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

---

Department of Communication and Information

In 2008 the first of these now fully grown Cahows returned to nest burrows on Nonsuch having spent the first years of their life living far out in the ocean. Four Cahows, identified as leaving from Nonsuch in 2005, were recaptured prospecting new nests.

In 2009 the first breeding pairs of Cahows began preparing burrows on Nonsuch with at least 7 pairs of translocated chicks from 2005 and 2006 identified. Although Cahows usually do not produce their first chicks until they have nested for about two years, one pair on Nonsuch produced their first chick in 2009 – the first Cahow chick to be hatched on Nonsuch in almost 400 years!

The Hon Glenn Blakeney, Minister of the Environment and Sports, said: “The birth of this Cahow chick is an extraordinary achievement for those who have dedicated their lives to saving this rare bird from the brink of extinction. I and indeed everyone in Bermuda and the worldwide Audubon community should celebrate this environmental success story. And to be born in the year of Bermuda’s 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary is beyond what anyone could have hoped for.”

Jeremy Madeiros, the Conservation Officer (Terrestrial) for the Department of Conservation Services within the Ministry of Environment and Sports who has been overseeing the Cahow Recovery Programme for nine years said: “Quite simply I am thrilled. Over the moon! I never expected that we would see a nesting pair produce a chick so soon. While the translocation plan seemed simple in theory, it was difficult to carry out and we were never quite sure it would be successful – until now. I’m hopeful that next year we will see more chicks born on Nonsuch and we will then truly have secured a major victory in ensuring the future survival of this most extraordinary bird. This project has only been possible through the assistance of Australian seabird researcher Mr. Nicholas Carlile and the support of Mr. Jack Ward and a number of staff from the Dept. of Conservation Services and volunteers who have assisted me in Monitoring, moving and feeding Cahow chicks over the last five years. My wife, Leila and family have also been incredibly supportive during this long process.”

World renowned conservationist and former Government Conservation Officer Dr. David Wingate was involved in the Cahow recovery Programme beginning in the 1950s and has dedicated much of his life to saving the Cahow.

Dr. Wingate’s interest in the Cahow began in 1951, when the species previously believed to be extinct for 300 years was rediscovered. He was just a schoolboy at the time, but when he returned from Cornell University in 1957 he took charge of the Cahow conservation programme on grants from the New York Zoological Society and the Bermuda Government, and wound up devoting 50 years of his life to preserving the species.

Dr. Wingate said: “I can not think of a more perfect success story appropriate to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement of Bermuda as the Cahow practically saved the early settlers but then they almost became extinct because of them!”



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

---

Department of Communication and Information

Dr. Wingate said Dr. Madeiros' translocation efforts are crucial to reestablishing the birds on Nonsuch island and added: "I extend my hearty congratulations to Jeremy for his dedication and a job well done."

Named "Somers" in honour of Sir George Somers whose fateful shipwreck marked the beginning of permanent settlement of Bermuda, Mr. Madeiros is monitoring the chick daily and said it is gaining weight and growing in size exactly as it should be.

The parents take turns feeding the chick and will fly hundreds or even a thousand miles or more round trip to catch squid, krill and small anchovies returning to the nest to feed the hungry chick.

The chick is expected to be ready to take flight and leave the island within eight to nine weeks. The bird will then spend three to four years at sea before returning to the exact spot on Nonsuch from where it left to begin building a nest and looking for a mate. Within five years, Somers should be ready to start his own family from the safety and security of Nonsuch Island.

### **About the Cahow:**

The Cahow is Bermuda's National Bird and is one of the few birds which are completely unique to Bermuda, nesting nowhere else on Earth. It is also one of the rarest seabirds on Earth, with less than 100 nesting pairs. Following are a few facts about the Cahow:

- Cahows live almost all of their lives out on the open ocean, hundreds of miles from land, returning to land only to breed. They return to Bermuda every November to start courtship and nest-building.
- The eggs are laid in January, and take 53 days to hatch; the downy chick hatches in late February to early March, and flies out to sea by late May to early June. The chick will not touch land again until 3 to 4 years later when they return to their point of departure to find their own nest burrow.
- Each nesting pair of Cahows can produce only one egg a year; about 55% of eggs hatch to produce a downy chick, which takes over 3 months to mature and fly out to sea.
- Cahows nest in deep rock or soil burrows that have to be long enough to be totally dark at the end; almost 70% of Cahows now nest in artificial concrete burrows built for them on the nesting islands.
- Cahows are long-lived and may reach over 40 years in age. Nesting pairs usually use the same burrows for many years.



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

Department of Communication and Information

- Cahows are faithful partners, with the same pairs staying together for many years, and possibly their entire breeding lifespan.
- The Cahow is entirely nocturnal on land, returning to their nesting burrows only on dark nights; even the full moon can prevent them from approaching the nesting islands.
- Cahows do not feed around Bermuda, but instead fly hundreds of miles to the Gulf Stream and beyond to feed on Squid, Krill and Anchovies.

## **HISTORICAL FACTS ON THE CAHOW**

- The Cahow once numbered as many as half a million pairs before the island's discovery by the Spanish in the early 1500s, nesting over the entire island chain.
- The Cahow changed Bermuda's entire history, as the ghostly sounds made at night by the island's huge Cahow population so frightened the superstitious Spanish sailors that they thought the island was inhabited by devils and never settled the island. Without the Cahow, Bermuda would likely have become a Spanish colony, and the island's history, and that of every Bermudian now living on the island, would probably be much different!
- Although the Spanish did not settle Bermuda, they left Pigs (or Hoggs) on the island as food for shipwrecked sailors. Over the next hundred years, the pigs destroyed almost 90% of the Cahow population, rooting up the bird's nest burrows and eating eggs, chicks and adult birds.
- By the time the English settled Bermuda in 1609, the Cahows only survived on remote islands in castle Harbour that the Pigs could not swim out to, such as Cooper's Island and Nonsuch Island. Early accounts indicate that tens of thousands of Cahows still survived on these islands at this time.
- Due to predation by Rats, cats and dogs brought to Bermuda by the early settlers, and hunting by the settlers themselves, the remaining cahows were decimated very quickly, and were thought to be extinct by the 1620s.
- No Cahow was seen between 1620 and 1951, when a few breeding pairs were discovered nesting on some of the smallest and most remote rocky islands off the east end of Bermuda.

## **THE CAHOW RECOVERY PROGRAM –OVERVIEW**



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

Department of Communication and Information

The Cahow Recovery Program was created to address threats to the surviving Cahow population and to devise methods of helping this unique seabird to recover. The Cahow was on the very edge of extinction when re-discovered, with only 17 nesting pairs remaining on five tiny rocky islets.

- Under the Recovery program, the Cahow population has increased from 17 pairs in 1962 to 86 pairs in 2009.
- The number of Cahow chicks fledging successfully every year has risen from 8 in 1962 to at least 42 in 2009.
- Rats have been removed from Nonsuch Island and the other nesting islands to prevent predation and enable successful nesting; all the islands are checked regularly and additional rat bait set out as needed.
- Competition with the Longtail, which would enter nest burrows and kill the Cahow chicks, has been prevented with the use of special 'bafflers', which let Cahows enter but keep out larger Longtails.
- Since there is not enough soil on most of the nesting islands for the Cahow to burrow in, 100 artificial concrete burrows have been constructed; almost three-quarters of all Cahows now nest in this 'Government housing'.
- Hurricanes and sea-level rise are the most urgent threats to the Cahow, as recent hurricanes have severely eroded these islands and destroyed nest burrows; rising sea level is causing more flooding of nests on these low-lying islands.
- Nonsuch Island has had no nesting Cahows since the 1620s, as it has long been used by man, and had rats and other domestic animals. Since restoration as a "Living Museum", Nonsuch has had all predatory animals removed and now closely resembles the habitat the early settlers described the Cahow as nesting in. There is also enough room of Nonsuch to potentially support thousands of pairs of Cahows, and enough soil for them to dig their own burrows.
- Between 2004 and 2008, 105 Cahow chicks were moved, or translocated, from the tiny nesting islets to Nonsuch Island when they were two-thirds grown. Here they were fed Squid and Fish, fitted with tags and monitored until they flew to sea. 102 chicks successfully fledged to sea.
- In 2008, the first of these now fully-grown Cahows returned to nest burrows on Nonsuch. Four Cahows, identified by their tags as leaving from Nonsuch in 2005, were recaptured 'prospecting' new nests.



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

---

Department of Communication and Information

- In 2009, the first breeding pairs of Cahows began forming in burrows on Nonsuch; at least 7 pairs of Cahows, all translocated as chicks in 2005 and 2006, have been identified.
- Although Cahows usually do not produce their first chicks until they have nested for about two years, one pair on Nonsuch produced their first chick in 2009 – the first Cahow chick to be hatched on Nonsuch in almost 400 years!