

Caribbean BIRDWATCH

Expert advice to help you appreciate our region's beautiful birds.
In this issue we focus on Barbados

My best birding moment

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"I had been searching for some time, unsuccessfully, for the *Masked Duck* in various ponds around Barbados. Then suddenly, one morning, I discovered four males in their full breeding plumage, with their striking blue bills, relaxing peacefully on the pond at Bayfield, St Philip.

I was thrilled to have finally located them, but there was not a female in sight. I took many photos of the males and went home with the determination to return to seek out the female. Next morning by 6am I was on site. As I drove up, I spotted a hen with a brood of newly hatched ducklings. She quickly led her young charges into and through the maze of water lily leaves and flowers and disappeared from sight! Therein, started a game of cat and mouse. I

knew the duck and her brood were on the pond, and that she would not fly away and leave them... I just had to be patient and wait!! After over an hour, through careful observation, I discovered the hen's location and carefully and quietly moved closer, in order not to startle her, until I could literally peep through the grass at her and her brood... a typical stalker! Eventually she trusted me and allowed me to approach to within ten feet, while she tended her little ones, and bathed and preened herself. Several hundred photos later I quietly slipped away, with a great sense of satisfaction, having been able to observe and photograph a rarely seen event."



Masked Duck female with a brood of downy ducklings on Bayfield Pond in Barbados

BIRD OF THE ISSUE:

MASKED DUCK

(*Nomonyx dominicus*)

HOW TO SPOT IT: This small, chunky, 'stiff-tailed' duck is well known for its ability to hide in the vegetation in ponds. The male, in full breeding plumage, is quite distinctive and beautiful, with a black-tipped, brilliant blue bill on a black masked face with a thin white eye-ring. The head and body are reddish-brown with black streaks on the back and sides. White wing patches are visible in flight. The female is a mottled brown overall. She has a blue-grey bill on a buffy face, with a dark cap, black eye stripe and cheek stripe. Both sexes have a long, wedge-shaped tail, sometimes held upright. Tail feathers are black in the male and brown in the female.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Masked Ducks are usually found in shallow freshwater ponds with reeds and rushes, and other dense and low aquatic vegetation. Males can sometimes be seen sleeping in open areas of the pond with their heads tucked into a wing. Females, however, are more secretive, particularly if they have a brood of ducklings, and tend to conceal themselves among the vegetation. They are usually most active in the dawn or dusk hours.

WHAT DOES IT EAT? They are diving ducks and dive frequently when feeding, to seek out vegetative material such as leaves, roots and seeds with their stout bills. They will also feed on small insects and crustaceans.

GLOBAL THREATS: The Masked Duck is found in northern South America, Central America and the Caribbean. It is known as a rare, but regular, vagrant in the southern United States. Whereas the global population of this bird has not been

precisely determined, it does not show signs of decline and is considered stable.



Masked Duck male on Bayfield Pond in Barbados. Note that the male is 'moulting' his tail feathers, i.e. growing new ones, which happens on an annual basis.

PHOTOS OF MALE AND FEMALE MASKED DUCKS, ALL BY JOHN WEBSTER

CARIBBEAN BIRDING TRAIL

TOP 3 HOTSPOTS: BARBADOS

The location of *Barbados*, 100 miles to the east of the Caribbean archipelago, places the 166 sq mile island closer to the Southern Flyway of shorebirds migrating annually from North to South America. It also makes it the first of the islands in the chain that vagrant birds from Europe, Asia and Africa will encounter. This therefore accounts for the 265 bird species recorded on the island, whereas there are only 46 resident species.

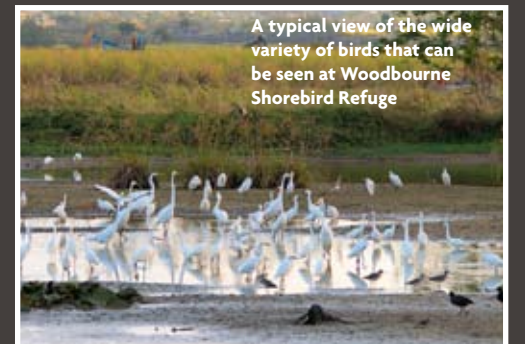
View of Bayfield Pond, home of the Masked Duck in Barbados.



IMAGES: JOHN L WEBSTER

1 WOODBOURNE SHOREBIRD REFUGE:

Located at Woodbourne in the parish of Christ Church in the SE of the island, and surrounded by the 'oilfields' of Barbados, Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge is the first Shorebird Refuge of its kinds established on the island. The site of a former shooting swamp, the area has been leased by Birdlife International and rehabilitated as a refuge for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, which use the site as stopover and wintering habitat during their long migrations. A great variety of shorebirds, waterfowl, herons and egrets can be observed at this location, dependent on the time of the year. It is also the only location at which night herons have been known to breed in Barbados. ★ Ref: <http://shorebirdconservationtrust.wordpress.com/>



A typical view of the wide variety of birds that can be seen at Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge

Overlooking the Chancery Lane Swamp wetland area



2 BAYFIELD POND: This is a small pond, located in the heart of the village of Bayfield in the parish of St Philip on the east coast of the island. It is considered the home of the Masked Duck in Barbados. It is surrounded by reeds and grasses and has a substantial growth of water lilies covering much of the pond. Green Herons, Common Gallinules, Snowy Egrets and various shorebirds can also be seen at this location.

3 CHANCERY LANE SWAMP: Located on the SE coast, this is one of only two natural wetlands remaining on Barbados. Various migrating shorebirds, waterfowl, herons and egrets can be seen here. Several resident species including Yellow Warblers and Yellow Grassland Finches are also found in surrounding grassland areas. It's the only location in which a Smooth-billed Ani has been seen, two years ago.

MANY THANKS TO JOHN WEBSTER AND LISA SORENSON, BIRDSCARIBBEAN (FORMERLY THE SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF CARIBBEAN BIRDS) WWW.BIRDSOFBARBADOS.ORG WWW.CARIBBEANBIRDINGTRAIL.ORG FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK (SEARCH FOR 'CARIBBEAN BIRDS')