

MRS. ABUSAMRA AND THE TROPICBIRD

In the words of Chris Leahy, in "Field Notes" in the December 1985 issue of M.A.S.'s *Sanctuary* (25: 20), Hurricane Gloria produced some "'good birds' in listing jargon, but they represent[ed] a rather meager assortment compared to the anticipatory daydreams of windmills of noddies lined up on the sand at Plum Island, or a frigatebird coming to roost on the Custom House Tower in Boston."

However, the day after the hurricane, a German professor at Dummer Academy walking his dog at 7 A.M. observed on the school soccer field in South Byfield what he shortly thereafter described as an "injured seagull" to ten-year-old Ilse Abusamra. Ilse quickly reported this to her mother, Laurel Abusamra, a French teacher at the academy, and they went out to search for it. After some looking about, Ilse spotted a smallish white bird (much smaller than they had expected) sitting quietly on the ground. As they approached, it made a "few little sounds," but seemed unalarmed, and Laurel was able to pick up the bird and carry it back to her home on the school's campus. Realizing that the creature was exhausted and famished from battling the storm, Laurel offered it some frozen catfish from her freezer, which it ate eagerly. Later that day and the next, alerted by Steve Moore, a Byfield birder whose neighbors knew the Abusamras, the birders began to arrive. But, alas for the listers, the bird was securely ensconced in a box on the sunporch of the Abusamras' home (later taken indoors) and could not be "counted."

By Sunday, the bird had been identified as an immature Long-tailed Tropicbird (probably from Bermuda) and had been christened Kim. Because the bird was so beautiful and graceful, Laurel chauvinistically decided that it must be a female, and thereafter, Kim was referred to as "she." Fortunately for the tropicbird, the Abusamras provided the perfect sanctuary. According to husband David, also a language teacher at Dummer, Laurel is always very softhearted about wild creatures. So for the next two weeks, the Abusamra family cared for and fed the Bermuda stray and lived with the pervasive odor of fish. They took Kim to the Tufts Veterinary Hospital in Grafton where the bird was examined by the chief-of-staff, Dr. Charles Sedgwick and given two X-rays (the skeletal structure proved to be intact). A diet of vitamins, calcium powder, and live fish was recommended. The problem of providing the latter item was immediately solved by a contribution of live minnows from the S. P. Engineering company of Salem, and later, the ever-resourceful fosterparents were able to obtain live fish from a bait store in Salisbury.

The intention originally was to release the bird (in favorable weather) at Plum Island as soon as it had gained sufficient weight and strength. David Wingate, Bermuda's Conservation Officer and expert on Bermuda birds, was consulted by phone. Finally, thanks to the generosity of the Governor Dummer Academy, who underwrote the costs of the expedition, it was decided to fly Kim, accompanied by nurse-protector Laurel, to Bermuda to release the bird on its home territory.

On October 4 (five days before release), up to which time Kim had fed eagerly every day, she suddenly ceased to eat voluntarily, to Laurel's consternation. From then on, Laurel inserted food in the bird's bill, whereupon Kim would swallow it. On Wednesday, October 9, the bird was given its last meal in Massachusetts and promptly regurgitated it. Laurel had been briefed by the experts that this might happen. It was a signal that Kim was ready to be on her own! Mrs. Abusamra and the tropicbird caught the 9:00 A.M. plane for Bermuda. Despite all appeals, all the way up to the airline's corporate officers, Kim had to ride in the cargo bay but arrived safely in Bermuda shortly before noon.

Laurel and the bird were met and escorted by Elizabeth Wingate to a cliff at Warwick Long Bay, a nesting site for tropicbirds, where David Wingate awaited them. Thereafter, a short interval was allowed for the press people to arrive and do their stuff (ABC filmed the release and aired it on the evening news on October 14). After Kim had been duly photographed, the carrier was set upon the sand and the door opened. The bird left the cage without hesitation, looked about for a number of moments, and then began to preen industriously, but did not fly. She was then moved to another spot on the cliff and still another - more preening and more looking about. David Wingate then stepped forward, picked up the tropicbird, held her up in the air, and she took off - flying straight to the horizon.

Dorothy R. Arvidson



Laura Abusamra and David Wingate release the White-tailed Tropicbird in Bermuda. Photo courtesy of the Governor Dummer Academy.