

Bird Observer

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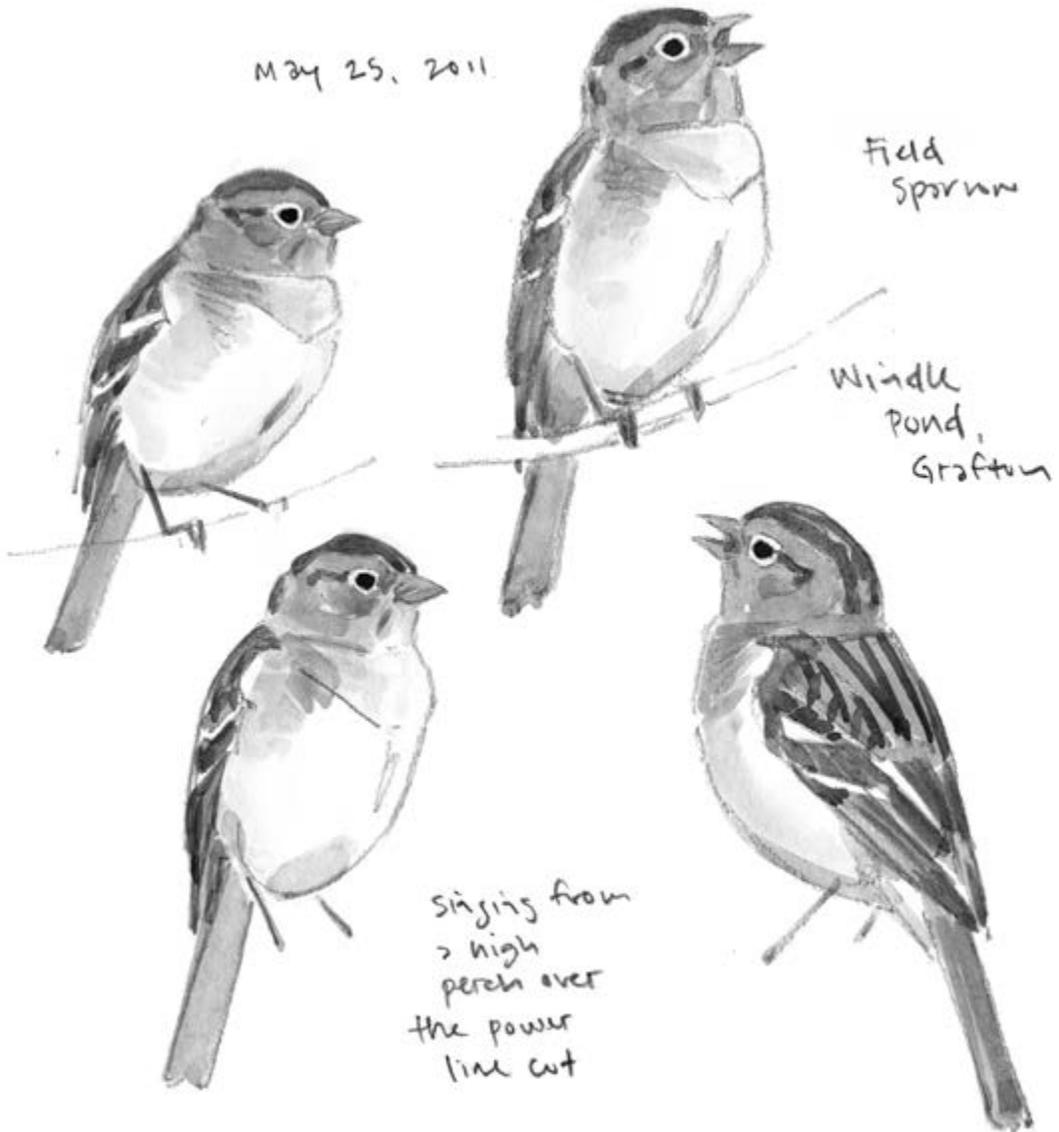
JUNE 2014

May 25, 2011

Field
Sparrow

Windle
Pond,
Grafton

singing from
> high
perch over
the power
line cut



HOT BIRDS



May 13 was rocking with migrants, but nothing compared to the **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** that was discovered by Alan Troutman at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge. David Bernstein took the photo on the right, as well as the one above, of the Fork-tailed that appeared in Connecticut in December 2013.



On May 14 Keenan Yakola was surveying shorebirds on South Beach in Chatham with Matt Malin when he heard an unfamiliar call note. He turned around and was surprised to see a **Wilson's Plover**. (It is his photo on the left.) On May 22, Amanda Spears discovered another Wilson's Plover at Sandy Beach Reservation on Plum Island.

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Bird Observer

A bimonthly journal—to enhance understanding, observation, and enjoyment of birds
VOL. 42, NO. 3 JUNE 2014

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Birding Tyringham Valley

Ed Neumuth

In south-central Berkshire County in far western Massachusetts lies the quiet community of Tyringham. Blessed with few roads and lacking the popularity of the Berkshire's more traditional breeding bird hotspots, Mount Greylock (Blackpoll Warbler, Swainson's Thrush), Cheshire (Cliff Swallow), Lenox Post Farm Marsh (Least Bittern, Common Gallinule), or October Mountain State Forest (Mourning Warbler), it can easily be overlooked as a prime birding destination. But rest assured, if your birding enjoyment goes beyond listing, once you've experienced this peaceful valley from May through October, its woodlands, wetlands, and expansive meadows will draw you back with their charm. This account takes the reader on a simple vehicle route around the perimeter of the valley with occasional diversions to access the habitat around its main waterway, Hop Brook. Additionally there are hiking trails—including the Appalachian Trail—that will enhance the experience.

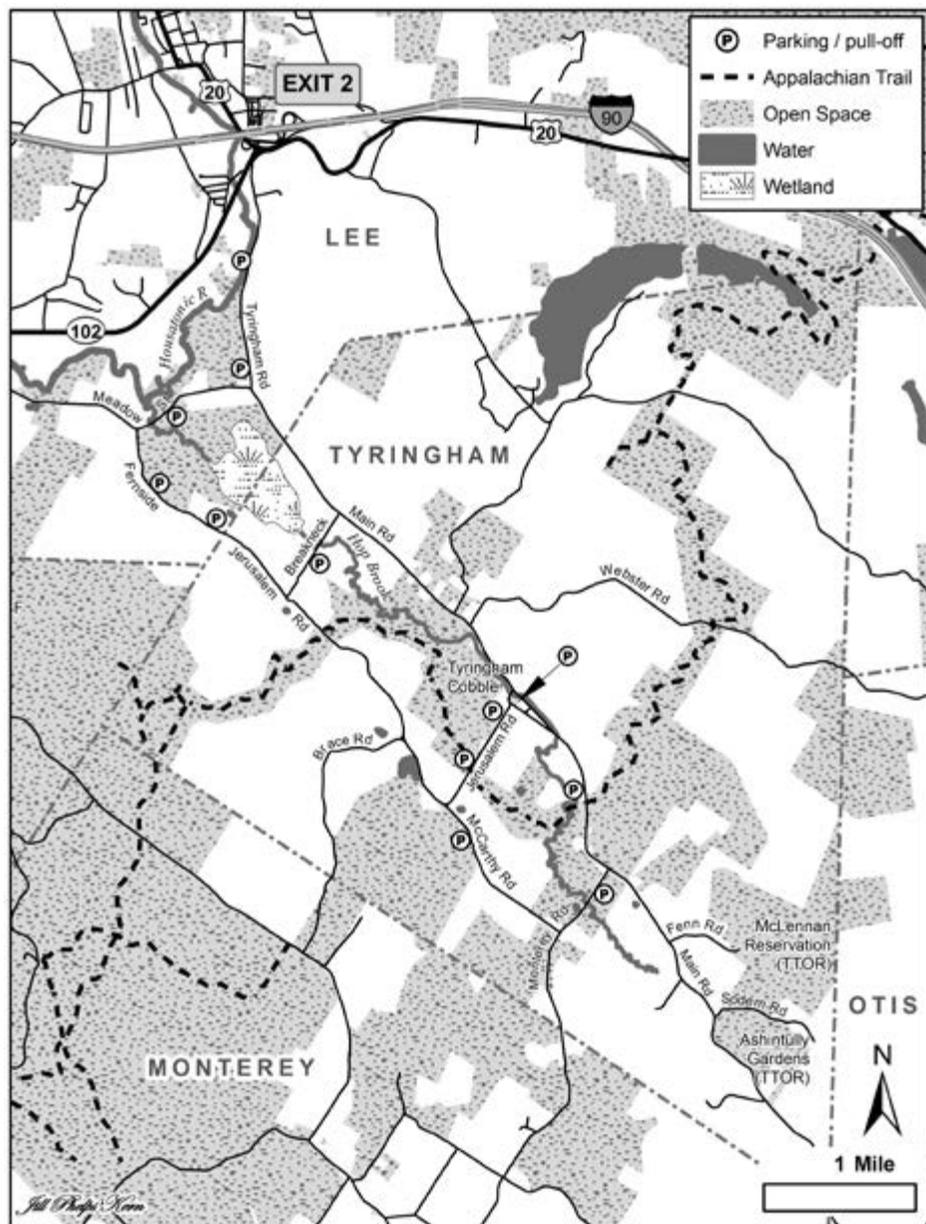


How to get there

Conveniently, Exit 2 off the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) in Lee offers easy access to the north end of the valley. Because a few of the back roads on our route are narrow and opportunities to pull off scarce, it is well to minimize the number of vehicles when traveling with a group. You can carpool from the ample parking lot of the Big Y supermarket just off Exit 2. Exit the Mass Pike in Lee, bear left off the ramp, and turn left at the traffic light at the foot of the exit ramp (U.S. Route 20). Immediately turn right onto Route 102 in the direction of Stockbridge and Great Barrington. At the entrance to the Big Y on the right there is another traffic light. Here you turn left onto Tyringham Road (slated for repairs sometime in 2014) or right into the shopping center as a meeting place to carpool.

Birding the Valley

Set your odometer to 0.0 miles and proceed on Tyringham Road. At approximately 0.6 miles, pull off on the right along the Housatonic River. The power line clearings across the road offer a break in the wooded hillside. Listen for Indigo Buntings and Chestnut-sided Warblers and check the river for Belted Kingfishers or the occasional Bald Eagle. Proceed to a clearing on the right at mile 1.3, where you can view the north end of the valley from a slight elevation. Check the fields for Wild Turkey and raptors. From here you can see Meadow Street, a right-hand turn off Tyringham Road at mile 1.4, the first of four roads that cross the valley. Turn right onto Meadow Street, pull over at the bottom of the hill where the fields open up to view, and walk back a short way to bird the area around an old barn and silo from the road. Check the fields on both sides of the road for grassland species and for shorebirds in season if the fields are wet.





Tyringham Cobble in the distance, looking south from Meadow Street. American Kestrel perched on one of the author's nest boxes. (All photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.)

Continue on Meadow Street past an auto salvage yard to mile 2.0. There is a parking area on the left with a kiosk introducing the Hop Brook Wildlife Management Area (open to hunting in season). With the kiosk on your left, head south on an ill-defined path into an open, occasionally wet, meadow. There will be a wooded area on your right before you come to Hop Brook. In spring this wet meadow abounds with cuckooflower (a mustard, *Cardamine pratensis*). American Bittern is regular here and in the wetland across the road from your vehicle. The small depression on the left of the path retains enough water, even in a dry spring, to frequently host a few Solitary Sandpipers or yellowlegs.

Return to the car and bird the road ahead on foot until you come to a small bridge where Hop Brook enters the Housatonic River. This brief walk with its nice mix of woodland, wetland, and open fields can be surprisingly productive. Listen for Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Bobolink, Willow Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole, and Eastern



Eastern Bluebird on Hop Brook Wildlife Management Area sign.

Kingbird, to name a few species usually seen here. Return to the car and continue along Meadow Street across the bridge to mile 2.2, where Fernside enters on the left. If you have a special interest in wetland birds you may want to bypass Fernside for the moment and proceed straight ahead for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to a small pond on the left at the base of Beartown State Forest. Here you might find Wood Ducks, Swamp Sparrows, and Green Herons. Listen for woodland species from the hillside and be sure to check the wetland across from the pond.



Tyringham valley view from Breakneck Road.

Return to Fernside and reset the odometer to 0.0 miles. Fernside in Lee will become Jerusalem Road in Tyringham as it runs southeast midway along the hillside on the southwest side of the valley. This road is narrow, and although you can drive slowly to listen, be considerate of the locals by taking advantage of the few pulloffs to bird on foot or by pulling over carefully to allow vehicles to pass. The first pulloff is at 0.4 miles on the left (according to the new odometer setting). This area is particularly good for Blue-winged Warblers, and in late May 2005 I observed both hybrids, Lawrence's and Brewster's warblers, in this immediate vicinity. The wooded hillside across the road and the clearing on the left add some habitat diversity. There is a second pulloff at mile 0.9. Before you get to the intersection with Breakneck Road at mile 1.5 (closed in winter for obvious reasons), it's worth noting that your GPS is correct—you are now on Jerusalem Road in Tyringham, the continuation of Fernside in Lee.

Breakneck Road, the second road to traverse the valley, is steep and unpaved, but by traveling slowly you can safely negotiate it. As a bonus, stop to enjoy a magnificent

stand of large-flowered bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*) on the right before you reach the level area at the bottom, where you can park and walk the remaining distance to the bridge over Hop Brook. Be sure to check the pond on the right for Kingfishers and Green Herons; the fields for swallows, Savannah Sparrows, and Bobolinks; the trees bordering the brook for Warbling and Yellow-throated vireos; and the drainage ditch running through the meadow for bitterns and snipe. From the bridge, enjoy the Scottish Highland cattle in the wet meadow ahead. This is one of the most reliable spots in the valley for breeding Wilson's Snipe, often seen calling from a fence post or winnowing over the open fields.



Tyringham Cobble as seen from the parking lot on Jerusalem Road.

It's best now to return to the car and renegotiate the Breakneck Road hill back to Jerusalem Road, where you should reset your odometer once again to 0.0 miles. Turn left onto Jerusalem Road and continue in the direction you were going, taking note of the Appalachian Trail crossing at 0.4 miles (new setting). The AT traverses the valley (more on this later) and offers one opportunity to explore some off-road habitat. There are a few crab apple orchards and a number of vistas opening up to view the valley and the opposite hillsides along this stretch of Jerusalem Road. Enjoy them on foot, with appreciation of the fine stonework. At mile 1.3, Brace Road branches off to the right. Remain on Jerusalem Road, but stop at mile 1.4 to check the pond on the right and the fields on the left. The pond empties into a hemlock grove on the left just before you reach the intersection with McCarthy Road. At this intersection, Jerusalem Road turns left and heads down into the valley to the village center and McCarthy Road heads

straight ahead. We will bear left here and explore Jerusalem Road before heading back up to this intersection and McCarthy Road. Stop briefly at the intersection, mile 1.7, to check around the dairy farm buildings and the small brook you passed on the right before heading down Jerusalem Road.



Black-throated Green Warbler. (Photograph by Sandy Selesky.)

At mile 2.0, the AT crosses Jerusalem Road. On the left is a place to pull off the road and enjoy a most pleasant hike to the rocky outcrop of Tyringham Cobble, a Trustees of Reservations property, overlooking the village and offering a lovely view of the southern part of the valley. For those inclined to stretch their legs a bit, this is a perfect place to pack in a picnic lunch. To walk to the rocky outcrop, pass through the cattle gate and enter the woods directly off the left side of the road as you proceed downhill, just below where you parked. This 15-to-20-minute hike up the cobble might reward you with Blue-winged Warblers, Indigo Buntings, Field Sparrows, Towhees, Hermit Thrushes, and Golden-crowned Kinglets. You are on the AT, and when it levels off in the hemlock woods, look right for a break in the woods that leads immediately to the rocky outcrop. Sufficiently refreshed, head back to the car and continue down Jerusalem Road.

If the hike to the cobble outcrop is not in your plans, bypass the above pullover and continue down Jerusalem Road to mile 2.4, where the official parking lot for Tyringham Cobble is on the left. This is an excellent spot to watch for Bobolinks and Eastern Bluebirds and search the cobble hillside for Brown Thrashers. Across the street



View of Tyringham Cobble from Main Road.

from the parking area, it's worth checking the fence posts along the field and cemetery for Eastern Meadowlarks. There is a picnic table at the parking area, along with a kiosk showing the route of the AT over the cobble. A loop trail branching off the AT may also interest hikers.

The last leg of this trip begins back up Jerusalem Road at the intersection with McCarthy Road. Reset the odometer to 0.0 miles and go left on McCarthy Road for 0.3 mile (new setting) to a brook crossing and a spot on the right to park. Listen here for Louisiana Waterthrush and Winter Wren before continuing down McCarthy 1.1 miles to Monterey Road. McCarthy Road is forested on both sides with a mixed-woods hillside on the right and a fine stand of hemlock on the left. Expected along this stretch are species such as Brown Creeper, Black-throated Green Warbler, Winter Wren, Blackburnian Warbler, and Blue-headed Vireo.

Turn left on Monterey Road, cross the bridge over Hop Brook, and park on the right at mile 1.5. This is the last road crossing the valley and takes you back to Main Road in Tyringham, which eventually becomes Tyringham Road in Lee, our starting point. This stop on Monterey Road is another regular Wilson's Snipe locale, and walking back to the bridge may produce Alder Flycatchers and Warbling Vireos as well as the ubiquitous Yellow Warblers along the brook.

When you are ready to proceed, you have two options. If you go to Main Road and turn right, proceed 0.7 mile to Fenn Road on the left. Turn onto Fenn Road and park. You can walk half a mile up the road to access the McLennan Reservation, a Trustees of Reservations property of 491 acres of forested hills and wetlands with a trail system. If you continue on Main Road past Fenn Road for another half mile, you can visit Ashintully Gardens, another Trustees of Reservations property at the intersection of Main Road and Sodem Road.

The second option is to go left on Main Road when you leave Monterey Road and head northwest up the valley on the northeast side. The AT will cross Main Road 0.4 mile from the Monterey/Main Road intersection; there is a parking area on the left just after the crossing. Park here, check the kiosk trail map, and walk back to the crossing to access the trail, now on your right. The trail drops down into a small wooded area before opening up on a boardwalk that takes you across Hop Brook and into a large wet meadow. This is worth the short walk to view. Were you to continue on the trail, you would eventually cross Jerusalem Road, go over the cobble, and re-cross Jerusalem Road before heading south all the way to Georgia.

The last stop on Main Road before going back to the Big Y is the parking area by the maintenance building just after the Tyringham Post Office on the left. This offers a slightly different view of the cobble and a second chance for Brown Thrasher. Carolina and House wrens may be heard in the village, and Chimney Swifts should be present. It's an easy matter to continue on Main Road back to Tyringham Road and the original starting point.

Before closing, a few brief notes:

Observe the speed limit on Main Road in Tyringham. There's really no place else for the only police car to patrol.

You can kayak Hop Brook from Breakneck Road downstream to Meadow Street, but there is a fair amount of beaver activity, which means portages, and you will get wet.

Walter Howard, a former owner of the Jersey dairy farm on the corner of McCarthy and Jerusalem Roads, was a talented writer. His collection of essays titled "Sisyphus in the Hayfield" gives an entertaining account of the frustrations of trying to run a dairy farm in the Berkshires as well as a host of other eclectic topics. 🦋

Ed Neumuth is a retired veterinarian, having lived and practiced in the town of Washington in Berkshire County over the past 40 years. He is currently president of the Hoffmann Bird Club, a former compiler for the Central Berkshire Christmas Bird Count, a contributor to the Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas, and an instructor for a beginning bird course that he teaches for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. He divides much of his local field time between neighboring October Mountain State Forest (Bird Observer 38:3, June 2010) and the Tyringham Valley.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions to this article by Mary Bedient and Abigail Polidoro.

A Natural and Political History of Belle Isle Marsh

Barbara Bishop and Soheil Zende



Egrets in puddle at Belle Isle Marsh. Photograph by Barbara Bishop.

In The Beginning Was Ice

A million years ago a continental ice sheet two miles thick covered most of New England. Glaciers covered a significant portion of northern latitudes. The earth's crust was deformed and pushed down under the mass of ice. With ocean water locked up in huge ice caps, sea level was lower and the edge of the ocean was hundreds of miles east of Massachusetts Bay.

Between 1.6 million and 10,000 years ago, ice cover expanded and receded periodically. Then, 10,000 years ago, the ice began to melt and its water refilled the oceans. Land began to rebound once the weight of the ice was removed.

The rising ocean level flooded Boston Basin 2500 years ago and turned glacial drumlins into what we now call the Boston Harbor Islands. Originally, there were many more islands with tidal channels running among them. Areas like Winthrop, East Boston, Beacon Hill, Bunker Hill and Breeds Hill were drumlin islands. Ocean currents and wave action due to tides and storms eroded the drumlins and filled in low areas with glacial remains—sand, gravel, mud. Shallow spots became marshy, especially if

protected from further erosion by the formation of barrier beaches. From the shore, the drumlins looked like isolated islands at high tide and were connected to the mainland by salt marshes during low tide. Slowly, salt marshes grew to become the great sponges of tidal action and storm surges that have protected us from flooding for the past few hundred years.

Organisms adapted to salt marshes; shallow seas spread into the region; and migratory waterfowl, gulls, herons, and shorebirds began to use the relatively shallow and protected harbor as a stop-off place, a place to nest or a place to winter. Humans coming on the scene, either Native Americans or European settlers, found Boston Harbor and its marshes overflowing with seasonal wildlife—shellfish, fish, birds everywhere.



Great Egret at Belle Isle Marsh. (Photograph by Barbara Bishop.)

Second Battle of the Revolutionary War

The salt marshes of Boston, particularly those around Chelsea and East Boston where Belle Isle Marsh is situated, played an important role in the early days of the Revolutionary War. Salt marsh hay (*Spartina patens*) and saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) were a valuable resource because upland grasses were barely available along the rocky shore and were not as nutritious as salt marsh hay. Thus, 18th-century colonists grazed

their livestock out in the marshes. Ian Ogilvie, in *The History of Belle Isle Marsh* (1987), wrote:

Hog Island (Orient Heights and Belle Isle) was important to the British because of its location in strategic Boston harbor. It was also vital for its livestock fattened on salt marsh hay. The British obtained fresh meat and produce on Hog Island, Noddle's island (East Boston), Snake Island and coastal Chelsea (Winthrop and Revere). If farmers could not sell it, the British took the meat.

In order to cut off this food source, on May 14, 1775, the [revolutionary] Committee of Safety ordered (actually "resolved that it be recommended to Congress") that all stock be removed from or destroyed at these coastal locations. Accordingly, on May 26, 1775, Colonel John Stark, on orders of General Artemas Ward, set out from Cambridge with approximately 400 men. They were joined at the old town meeting house close to the old church in Chelsea by Captain Samuel Sprague, the commander of the Chelsea company. Hog Island was their nearest destination, since "it was nearest of these islands to this part of Chelsea; and of all the surrounding waters, the only fordable place was across the marshes lying between it and Sale's Farm . . ." (now Beachmont).

On May 27, Colonel Stark ferried 400 sheep from Hog Island across Chelsea Creek to safety. The colonials then crossed to Noddle's where a few British guarded the stock. After the colonials had seized some cattle and killed many more, the British, alerted by burning marsh hay, sent the schooner *Diana* around the bend of East Boston and up Chelsea Creek. The ship dispatched 11 barges of marines to supplement the small force already on Noddle's and sent 400 regulars across the harbor to attack the patriots from the rear. The colonials, who could not advance amid *Diana's* fire, hid in a ditch on the marsh at Noddle's and fired on the British, then retreated to Hog Island under fire.

The patriots then went over to Chelsea Neck where they were met by General Israel Putnam; their number was now about 1000. Putnam, Stark's senior, took command on shore against the British, who all the while had been fortifying the open water and Noddle's with more barge loads of marines. For two hours *Diana* fired on and withstood fire by the patriots, after which the British still left on the schooner fled in small boats down the creek. The barges tried to tow *Diana* down the creek, but the incoming tide thwarted them. The abandoned ship was later looted by a band of patriots led with Isaac Walton, then burned. The battle continued until noon the next day, with gunfire illuminating everything around.

The Battle of Chelsea Creek claimed no American lives, while British losses were said to be heavy. This, the second battle of the American Revolution, is largely overlooked by history books, but historians agree that there

were few if any battles where the patriots fought with more courage and determination.

This battle was fought because of the location and productivity of the marsh.

For centuries, coastal salt marshes and estuaries were considered natural resources of crucial importance to neighboring communities. Native Americans and European settlers took fish, shellfish, and birds that came into the wetlands and also used salt marsh grasses for construction, mulch, or animal feed. With urbanization, humans have degraded and destroyed salt marshes on a vast scale, threatening the livelihoods of marsh-dwelling animals and migrating birds.

Filling of the salt marshes in order to make new land usable for humans accelerated exponentially when Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) took over operations at Logan Airport in 1961 in order to facilitate the building of an international airport in Boston. Belle Isle Marsh in East Boston, Revere, and Winthrop is but a remnant of the vast marsh system that used to dominate the islands and estuaries of Boston Harbor. Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM), formed in the 1980s as an all-volunteer, community-based nonprofit organization, first began as an informal group of nature lovers—advocates who wanted to protect the area as a home for wildlife and save it from further development by Massport officials.

The Taking of Wood Island Park

The history of FBIM goes back to the 1960s and reflects the turbulent times when Massport planned a major expansion for Logan Airport and was also interested in the Port of Boston's fuel off-loading facilities. On the morning of April 23, 1969, residents of East Boston were taken by surprise when they awoke to learn that their beloved Wood Island Park had been bulldozed—destroyed by Massport to make room for a guidance system for the runway, a system that was never implemented. Massport employed 36 teams with chainsaws to take down 90% of the trees in the park, all in one night. Former Secretary of Transportation Fred Salvucci described it as an act of terror. He said, "It was like a military operation. They came in with 36 men with chainsaws and massacred 36 trees in five minutes. It was terrible. I still get angry today when I think about it. Neptune Road used to be the most prestigious street in East Boston."

Frederick Law Olmsted, a leading landscape architect in the late 19th century, designed the 46-acre Wood Island Park. It was Olmsted who designed Boston's park system known as the Emerald Necklace. His activism in the area of conservation is considered one of his achievements. He saw the need for open space and urban parks where city residents could go to rest and renew their spirits. He saw parks as "bastions of the democratic ideals of community and equality." The word "Olmsted" translates to "place of the Elms." It's interesting to note that Neptune Road, the central avenue of Wood Island Park, was lined with elms.

Beautiful tree-lined Neptune Road was often compared to Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. Wood Island Park was not just a great park for kids to play baseball, track, and tennis and for older men to play bocce, it was a social center for young women with small children. At a time when they didn't have cars, mothers pushed their



British Airways jet and cruise ship seen from Belle Isle. (Photograph by Barbara Bishop.)

baby carriages to the park. On Sundays, entire families headed to the park for a day of swimming and fun. Around the turn of the 20th century, more than 30,000 people attended family events at Wood Island Park.

The close-knit community of families of East Boston was outraged by the loss of its park. The destruction of Wood Island Park had an unintended consequence: the beginning of a widespread protest movement in East Boston, led by a new class of activists, East Boston mothers!

Back in the 1960s, Edie DeAngelis had a dream. Her dream was that the community of East Boston would have more open space and a walking path along the water. Edie and other members of the Church of the Holy Redeemer conducted a walking tour of East Boston to identify vacant and underutilized sites. After they completed the survey, Recreation and Land Use councils were formed under the auspices of East Boston's Little City Hall. Edie served on these councils. After years of effort or, as Edie describes, "plugging and fighting," Edie was instrumental in the acquisition of Belle Isle Marsh Reservation by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC).

According to State Representative Gus Serra, Massport had a master plan that would have flattened roughly two-thirds of East Boston and built an oil refinery in Belle Isle Marsh. In 1974 when Michael Dukakis became Governor, he replaced

Massport's Executive Director with David Davis, who was considered a good friend of the East Boston Community.

In the early 1970s, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) had two million dollars for land acquisition and the development of recreational facilities in East Boston. Representative Serra hoped to deed the entire 160-acre Belle Isle Marsh property to the MDC for protection as a natural preserve. But in 1978 Governor Mike Dukakis lost his primary re-election bid to Edward J. King of Winthrop, former Executive Director of Massport. Governor King opposed Serra's Belle Isle plan and refused to fund it. In a political rematch four years later in 1982, Dukakis defeated King in the Democratic gubernatorial primary, and then defeated John Sears in the general election. Funds for Belle Isle Park were finally included in the Dukakis budget after a delay of more than six years.

Belle Isle Park and Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Before Belle Isle Marsh Reservation existed, a drive-in movie theatre was built on the site. The drive-in opened in 1952 and closed in 1971; according to some reports the reason was increased airport traffic. Large concrete blocks that held up the screen still remain.

In 1978, birder Craig Jackson saw an article in *The Boston Globe* reporting that the MDC was going to create a new park in East Boston at Belle Isle Marsh. He organized a small group of opponents, including Soheil Zendeh, to attend a meeting of the East Boston Land Use Council, chaired by Anna DeFronzo, to oppose MDC Landscape Architect Jim Falck's plan for the park. Although they liked Jim, they feared that the natural area would be destroyed forever. Soheil later said, "It took us a while to catch on that he was on our side." Jim Falck designed the park with hills, an island, an observation tower, a bridge over the channel, and walking paths.

Craig Jackson saw the Harborside Community School people as key partners in the effort to save Belle Isle Marsh from development. He signed up to teach an adult education course in bird study and began a series of nature walks in the park. In 1978 at the Harborside Community School he had on display some photos of egrets and other birds that he had taken in the park. Gail Miller, from East Boston, saw the display and asked him where the great photos had been taken. He told her "Belle Isle Marsh" and she replied, "Belle Isle Marsh. Where's that?"

One day in the early 1980s a small group of birders had gathered on Palermo Street in East Boston. They were looking at hundreds of Snowy Egrets in the channels and pools of the marsh near the MBTA yard. With their binoculars and scopes, they must have been an interesting group of people because a neighbor came over to see what they found so captivating in the swamp, as she called it. Rose Corrado took a look through a scope and saw what everyone was so excited about. She immediately became a friend of the birders. Birders Barbara Gard, Craig Jackson, Kermit Norris, and Soheil Zendeh were founders of the Friends organization. Rose offered her home and heart to the group, and became a valuable and beloved member of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM).



Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, 1982. (Photograph courtesy of Soheil Zende.)

On March 13, 1983, FBIM held an introductory meeting to bring together people in the community who were interested in preserving Belle Isle as open space and a nature preserve and to kick off a membership drive to raise funds for publication and mailing of the FBIM newsletter.

In 1985 Belle Isle Reservation was officially dedicated and opened as a public park, with Governor Mike Dukakis presiding at the ceremony. Hundreds of people attended the event including elected officials, leaders of nonprofit organizations, and many individuals who spoke about the taking of Wood Island Park. They regarded Belle Isle Reservation and Park as symbolic of a victory by the community opposed to further expansion by Massport.

Birding at the Marsh

Belle Isle Marsh is part of the Rumney Marshes complex that includes Pines River Marsh on Route 107 in Revere and Saugus, the Lynn and Saugus marshes, and the marsh behind Northgate Shopping Center in Malden. Colonial maps of the area show the extent of the marshes before the area was developed. Together with Belle Isle Marsh, the Rumney Marsh area contains about a thousand acres of salt marsh, tidal flats, and subtidal channels. Salt marshes are called nature's nurseries because nearly 70 percent of all commercial fish and shellfish resources are dependent on these areas for spawning. Flounder, alewife, smelt, blueback herring, and American eel are a few of the species that these marshes support. Additionally, clams, mussels, and snails attract birds to the area.



Birders on the boardwalk at Belle Isle Marsh. (Photograph by Barbara Bishop.)

The upland part of Belle Isle has an interesting variety of wildlife—snakes and snails and muskrats and owls. In early October you can see thousands of monarch butterflies on the milkweed and goldenrod, preparing for their trip to Mexico.

Hérons and Waders

Historically, one of the most productive salt pans in Belle Isle Marsh is a place that Bob Stymeist referred to as “the old salt pond in East Boston,” one of his favorite places in Greater Boston to bird. Later, the pond (or salt pan) was named Rosie’s Puddle, after Rose Corrado who lived on Palermo Street and was an immediate abutter to the pond.

In the spring of 1975, astonished birders watched as 37 Glossy Ibises winged their way and settled into Rosie’s Puddle. In 1975 Glossy Ibis was still a relative newcomer to Massachusetts, as were some of the other southern herons such as Snowy Egret and Great Egret. Although we now expect to see Glossy Ibis on most birding trips to our coastal wetlands, Glossy Ibis sightings at Belle Isle are still sporadic. The white egrets have become regular and nearly ubiquitous visitors to the area during the warmer months of the year. And with them come the occasional Little Blue Heron (probably annual) and Tricolored Heron (at least 4 records since 1977).

Over the years, most of the herons and related waders on the Massachusetts list show up on a regular basis at Belle Isle. American Bittern is best seen on mild fall

evenings; Least Bittern, though cryptic and retiring, may be a nester here. Great Blue Herons are regular and sometimes abundant during passage months; sometimes one or two linger deep into the winter. Black-crowned Night-Herons use the sumac bushes in the deep tangles of the bermed area for daytime roosts; there is at least one record of a Yellow-crowned (July 9, 2000, Dana Jewel).

The abundance of white egrets—Snowy and Great—on certain mornings of the summer raised questions. Why were they here and what were they doing? How many? Where did they come from and where did they go? Frequent observation revealed a pattern. Although their numbers are sparse during the early part of summer, by the third week of July dozens arrive at the salt marsh—sometimes well over 200 Snowy and Great egrets—in the early morning, but only when that time of day coincides with relatively high tide. The egrets disperse in the early weeks of August, but toward the end of August and in early September they are present again in large numbers at the marsh. The majority of these birds flew in and out of Rosie’s Puddle around dawn. However, as of a dozen years ago, Rosie’s no longer retains water as the tide rises and falls so it is no longer a significant salt pan. Now the egrets congregate in the salt pans around the boardwalk east of Rosie’s Puddle.



Egrets and herons on Rosie’s Puddle (1982).
(Photograph by Soheil Zende.)

These egrets are breeders on the Boston Harbor islands; their precise breeding island has shifted a number of times over the past 30 years. They come into the city’s marshes to feed and catch prey to bring back to their nests. Once the young have begun to fledge, many accompany the parents to their favorite feeding spots. That accounts for the sudden increase in numbers of herons in late July. The late August and September population bulge is due to the fact that herons disperse northward and in other directions after the breeding season and they begin to stage along coastal spots for their fall southward migration in late August.

Shorebirds of Belle Isle

Through the late 1970s and well into the 1980s, Belle Isle Marsh offered great birding during the height of fall shorebird migration, which started in July and brought hundreds of Short-billed Dowitchers, Red Knots and yellowlegs to Rosie’s Puddle and to the other salt pans at high tide. A favorite observation place was an extensive



Shorebirds at Marshhenge (1981). (Photograph by Soheil Zende.)

filled area that housed the defunct drive-in theater. The vehicle parking lanes and loudspeaker posts were still there in rows; the scaffolding for the movie screen was still atop four concrete pillars and was named Marshhenge by Leo Rogers, one of the early local birders and a musician and poet. The entrance to the drive-in was still lined with straight-as-an-arrow poplars, but weeds were growing in the car lanes. Walking to the back of the drive-in and climbing on top of one of the Marshhenge pillars provided an excellent view of yet another salt pan, which was an isolated salt pan, and possibly the best spot for seeing aggregations of migrant shorebirds. Many years later the Sireen Reinstein Memorial Boardwalk was constructed overlooking this pan.

It is difficult to gauge the effect of a boardwalk that brings visitors right out to the edge of a salt pan. There are now far fewer shorebirds to be seen at this pan, but then there are far fewer shorebirds, period. In 2000, when the boardwalk was constructed, the decrease in many shorebird numbers continent-wide had already been detected and, sadly for some species, this decline has by now become a population collapse of serious proportions, e.g., Red Knot. So one cannot say that fewer shorebird sightings are caused by the presence of people here.

In the early mornings in August, if the tide is right, it is still possible to see many dozens of Snowy and Great egrets in the pans around the boardwalk, but they are often



A flight of Black-bellied Plovers at Belle Isle Marsh (1984). (Photograph by Soheil Zende.)

gone or dispersed by the time regular visitors begin arriving. Geoff Wood, long-time supervisor at Belle Isle, believes that once birds and other wildlife become used to a regular flow of people traffic along a path or at lookout point, they lose their wariness and simply take the people as part of the landscape. The problem is that many people use Belle Isle now as an off-leash dog park and dogs run into the salt pans and chase the wildlife. It is not pretty.

Another salt pan with historical significance was in an area in Revere referred to as The Key because it is in the shape of an old-fashioned key when viewed from the air. The Key Marsh, accessible via Summer Street, Revere, had substantial areas of *Phragmites*, but also salt marsh grasses and salt pans. Shorebird flocks shuttled among the three main pans—Key Marsh, Marshhenge, and Rosie’s. In the 1980s birders had to chase back and forth among the various puddles to get a good handle on the shorebird numbers at the marsh. The Key Marsh salt pan gradually lost its ability to hold much water and shorebirds haven’t roosted at high tide for the past decade and a half. It is currently under consideration for restoration, but, of course, that does not mean the shorebirds will come back when the work is finished.

The highlight of the shorebird season used to come in mid-August with the highest counts of Hudsonian Godwits. The peak all-time count was 53 on August 15, 1982. By the late 1990s godwit numbers had slowed to a trickle and by the 2000s even one sighting per year at Belle Isle was considered a big deal.

Another numerous shorebird in the early years of our birding at Belle Isle was the Black-bellied Plover. For this bird, the big numbers came in spring migration when they roosted on the salt marsh grasses at the edge of Belle Isle Creek. For a few days during the second of half of May one could see clouds of calling Black-bellies—accompanied by a few dowitchers, Dunlins, turnstones and the occasional Willet—wheeling over the creek and landing among the grasses, blending in unobtrusively with the landscape until they took off again. The peak estimate of Black-bellies during this period was 1200 on May 21, 1982. They could only be estimated when in flight because they roosted in the grasses and were hard to see. Since then, the numbers have fallen for this species as well. A sighting of 30 or 40 Black-bellies at Belle Isle is now a good count.

Currently the best salt pan to find shorebirds at Belle Isle is about ¼ mile southwest of the boardwalk. A place to see it without having to walk through the marsh is on a platform built at the end of a dirt path that starts at Lawn Avenue, East Boston.

Osprey Nest

In spring of 1985 members of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh erected the first Osprey platform at Belle Isle in the middle of the salt marsh on an old berm. The pole was snapped in two within a week—no doubt a case of vandalism. Later that year, the MBTA used heavy equipment and manpower to set up an Osprey platform close to the edge of the MBTA yard at Orient Heights Station. The support for the platform was a nearly indestructible telephone pole, so there was virtually no danger of vandalism. The pole and platform sat there unused by Ospreys for 20 years.

In April 2005 three Ospreys showed up out of the blue and began to scout the nesting platform and build nesting material on it. For reasons that are not clear, the tradition of three Ospreys hovering about a nest has persisted to this day at Belle Isle, despite the fact that in that first month one of the three Ospreys—presumably one of the males—was struck and killed by a plane. There was soon another individual there to complete the troika.

That first Osprey troika courted and fished and built the nest throughout April and May. By June and well into July a silence had fallen over the platform. Occasionally an Osprey head could be seen poking up above the edges of the nest, but there was little sign of any other activity. Birders were delighted, therefore, when in late July a couple of little heads began poking above the edges of the nest. Soon young Ospreys were flying about the marsh. They have become a staple at the marsh during the summer months.

The Osprey platform was directly underneath one of the landing patterns for Logan Airport, which was a problem according to Geoff Wood, the DCR supervisor for Belle Isle Reservation. He was concerned because Ospreys perform high aerial displays above their nest during courtship. One Osprey had already been killed by a plane collision. Geoff worried about the safety of other Osprey but particularly about the possible negative outcome to a plane that collided with an Osprey.

In spring of 2009 Geoff constructed an alternative site for the Ospreys. He built a substitute Osprey nesting platform at a location in Belle Isle that was hidden from view to foil vandals and far enough away from the Logan landing pattern to be considered somewhat safe for planes and birds. He then cut down the old telephone-pole platform.

Unfortunately, the Ospreys were not interested in relocating. They proceeded to use the power-line poles in the MBTA yard, building their own structure on top, where they return every year to nest. Geoff's lament is that the Ospreys at Belle Isle now have the opportunity not only of disrupting flights at Logan but also of shutting down the MBTA by shorting out its power!



Threats to Belle Isle: Landscaping businesses leave barrels and debris at the edge of the marsh. (Photograph by Barbara Bishop.)

Probable and Potential Breeders

Swallows are among the more common passerines seen at Belle Isle every summer. Barn Swallows used to nest in the MBTA car barns and also build nests under the bridge in the center of the park. Geoff Wood set up nesting boxes for Tree Swallows on the high marsh and they were vandalized almost immediately. Geoff now has the boxes well hidden in secret spots, but the Tree Swallows are almost always visible cruising the marsh during the warmer months.

Yellow Warbler and Willow Flycatcher are present and breeding in the thickets near the Park.

Virginia Rail has been a regular breeder at the Marsh over the last decade. On stormy June days it is possible to find young Virginia Rails running about the park,

having been evicted by high water from brackish ponds in the middle of a sea of *Phragmites*.

Sora, Clapper Rail, and King Rail have been seen and heard during the summer months, but there has been no evidence of breeding. Similarly, Least Bittern has been observed nearly every summer for half a dozen years, but proof of breeding is lacking.

In June it is common to see and hear Willets carrying on courtship; often this display is seen from the boardwalk. In recent years American Oystercatchers have also appeared and displayed at the Marsh. So far, there is no evidence of nesting by either of these shorebirds.

Saltmarsh Sparrow is a regular breeder in the marsh, quite conspicuous around the boardwalk in midsummer when the young are being fed. On two occasions over the past 30 years Seaside Sparrow has attempted to breed. In 1985 one parent was seen carrying food, but there were no further sightings.



Birders assembled to see the Black-necked Stilt in 2006.
(Photograph by Alan Akers.)

Belle Isle the Hot Spot

April 1, 2006, the day that Linda Ferrarresso found a Black-necked Stilt at the boardwalk, marked the moment that Belle Isle officially became a birding hot spot. Twenty years before, Conal Foley, a local birder and former President of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, had reported a stilt, but that was a one-off sighting and the bird departed as Conal watched it. The 2006 bird stayed for a week and many people came to see and admire it, in the process discovering the birding potential of Belle Isle.

In the years since, many people including Ryan Schain, Marshall Iliff, Paul Peterson, Matt Garvey, George Cumming and Eric Labato have been reporting bird sightings regularly and irregularly from Belle Isle.

Bird sightings at Belle Isle are tabulated by Soheil Zendehe. You can access the bird list at <<http://bit.ly/1nqBPsX>>

ACEC

In 1988, thanks to the efforts of the Revere Neighborhood Coalition, the Secretary of Environmental Affairs James Hoyt designated Rumney Marsh as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Today, the park is protected by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Boston, Revere, and Winthrop Conservation Commissions, the Department of Environmental Protection, and many other state agencies. The Boston Natural Areas Network and The East Boston Greenway Council are actively working to create a walking path from Piers Park on the East Boston waterfront through the Bremen Street Park, along the Wood Island Bay Marsh to Constitution Beach, and from there to Belle Isle Marsh. The Greenway would be part of a system that would make Frederick Law Olmsted proud.

After more than 30 years of advocacy, we hope that no one asks the question, “Belle Isle Marsh. Where’s that?” 🐦

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Barbara Bishop saw Soheil's egret photos on display at a Winthrop Town Meeting about 1984 and immediately fell in love with Belle Isle Marsh. As a past president of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, she continues to be an active member and helps organize programs in the marsh throughout the year, including Monday Night Forums and the annual Harvest Festival. She has been photographing and videotaping events at Belle Isle for many years. She is a Legislative Aide to Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo and loves living in Winthrop near Belle Isle, Winthrop Beach, and Lewis Lake.

Soheil Zendehe, born in Tehran, grew up in Tehran and Tangier, Morocco, arrived in Cambridge in 1961 as a college freshman and later started an auto repair shop first in Cambridge, then in Watertown. He began birding in 1973, never got a good look at the Newburyport Ross's Gull, got sick of driving to the North Shore for birds, and began checking out local Boston spots in 1975, whereupon Bob Stymeist guided him to the “old puddle in East Boston.” This turned out to be Rosie's Pond at Belle Isle Marsh. He founded the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh with Craig Jackson in 1978, then cofounded TASL with Craig Jackson, Dave Lange, Wayne Petersen, Leif Robinson, Bob Stymeist, and many others in 1979. He has edited and published Belle Isle News and TASL OnLine. From 2000 to 2005 he assisted Dick Veit and Ian Nisbet with Muskeget Island tern restoration. Since 2009 he has been guiding bird tours at Bear Creek Sanctuary in Saugus. Soheil lives in Lexington with his wife Christine.

PHOTO ESSAY

Historical Images of Belle Isle Marsh

Soheil Zendeh



Morning flight of Great Blue Herons.



Egrets at Rosie's Puddle, 1982.



Hudsonian Godwits once were a regular presence at Belle Isle.



Shorebirds at Marshhenge, 1981.

Hunting for Habitat: Concord Birds 2013

Cole and Jalen Winstanley



Jalen (left) and Cole (right) Winstanley. (All photographs courtesy of the authors.)

The rich tradition of naturalists in Concord is well known. Concord is often used as a study area because it is easy to determine changes that have occurred here from Henry David Thoreau's recordkeeping to the data of the current naturalists who are constantly observing the area. The interest of so many naturalists is no surprise, as the high quality of the natural landscape was recognized as early as 1635, when Simon Willard saw the vast lowland swamps as potentially arable. Later, the same areas would inspire Henry David Thoreau as noted in *Walden*, which influenced Teddy Roosevelt to establish the National Wildlife Refuge System. In 1944, Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge was established, including the Concord unit, which arguably hosts better numbers and diversity of wetland and marsh birds than anywhere else in Massachusetts away from the coast.

Growing up in Concord, we have found it easy to become involved with the seemingly endless world of nature and ecology, surrounded by other naturalists in an environment so rich in nature. We take birding on with a local basis, thoroughly scrutinizing specific patches and documenting the everchanging species and habitats. We have found that, in a day and age when reports spread through the Internet within five minutes of a sighting, the method of Thoreau-ly examining a specific area or habitat and making inferences often takes second place to the popular habit of chasing vagrant or semi-vagrant birds around the state at the first alert. Although we enjoy seeing the rarities, we prefer to see them locally, so that there is greater context around the sighting. For example, the Fieldfare in Carlisle was found barely within the area



Estabrook Woods, near the remains of the saw mill where Thoreau's father worked.

where we bird on a regular basis, and although we both saw it, we agreed that had it not been in our patch, the effort wouldn't have been worth it.

Another important aspect of our birding style is studying the variety of local habitats within a suburban area of the country. The opportunity to formulate hypotheses on how these habitats affect species composition has led us to a great deal of success in Concord. Understanding a bird's habitat, especially breeding habitat, leads to an understanding of how to locate sparse or selective birds. As birding becomes more and more withdrawn from other natural observations, birders think less and less about how birds relate to the environment around them. However observing birds while understanding how and why we are seeing them is one of the most enjoyable parts of birding for us. We especially love to find scarce, habitat-specific birds such as breeding Winter Wrens in obscure wooded wetlands, Bay-breasted Warblers using the canopy of large tracts of woods during fall migration, or Clay-colored Sparrows and Dickcissels that show up in the fall in a semi-wet, weedy habitat. Birders tend to bird where birders have birded before, so new areas, even ones with excellent habitat, are often obscure and underexplored.

From Thoreau to Sibley, Concord birders have displayed an exploratory mentality that has led them to uncover various hotspots in the town that could easily have been overlooked, for example, Kaveski Farm. New locations and unique areas are constantly being uncovered,



Black-billed Cuckoo at nest near Estabrook Woods.

some small and others large, which lead us closer and closer to the birds we have tracked down for countless hours in the field. Our exploratory area is Estabrook Woods, a huge and often overlooked tract of forest in the northern sector of Concord. These woods are sparsely birded due to inaccessibility and the well-known lack of trail maps. Birders surveyed the area frequently in the late 20th century, but now it is only us and a few other Concord birders who consistently uncover new breeding grounds, rare flora that harbor some of the more elusive species—for example Louisiana Waterthrush—and unknown areas such as the multiple springs within the densest areas of the woods. The people who join us in our surveys are locals who, like us, are committed to a heightened understanding of our town and region, how all the pieces of such fragile ecosystems fit into place.



Louisiana Waterthrushes breed in at least three separate locations in Estabrook Woods.



In the summer, Ovenbirds are the most common bird in Estabrook Woods.

These birders were also some of the most valuable contributors to the 2013 Ludlow Project. The project was a yearlong attempt at fully examining Concord as a town, 65 years after Ludlow Griscom—one of America's most influential birders of the 20th century—intensively birded Concord. The project collected all Concord eBird checklists during the year to produce a more comprehensive database than any single observer could achieve.

We'd like to thank David Swain for tirelessly organizing the project; the local experts for their advice, contributions, and for sharing their knowledge; and most importantly, the birders who collectively spent many hours in the field, contributing invaluable to the success of the project. This was a great way to continue Concord's tradition in nature, and we look forward to what Ludlow G. sees in 2014! 🐦

Cole and Jalen Winstanley are teen birders, ages 16 and 14 respectively, who live in Concord. They are focused on birding as locally as possible, and have found over 155 species in their yard alone. As such, they were an integral part of Concord Birds 2013, contributing about a third of the almost one thousand eBird reports. They also had the sole records for a number of species during 2013, such as Sandhill Crane, Louisiana Waterthrush, and the rare Cave Swallow in May at Great Meadows, among others. They frequently discover new areas to bird and share them with the local community; their favorite patches in Concord include Estabrook Woods, Great Meadows NWR, Barrett's Mill Conservation Land, and the Massport 13C trails. More information about the Concord Birds project, including the 2013 results, is available at birdingwithludlow.blogspot.com.

FIELD NOTES

Red-Tail Dilemma

Anonymous



Red-tailed Hawk mantling a Gray Squirrel. (Photograph by the author.)

I write this anonymously because I'm embarrassed. I understand natural selection, and I believe that humans shouldn't interfere with nature. But one time I just couldn't help but give it a little nudge.

In late June, I received a phone call from a friend who said she saw two Red-tailed Hawk fledglings in a nearby cemetery and she thought they were in trouble. I tried to reassure her; young Red-tails can be loud and their calls sound desperate to the human ear.

It's always fun to watch young birds, so I went to the cemetery to check out my friend's report. I was surprised to see the two young birds huddled together side by side on the ground. It seemed odd; I usually see them perched in a tree, and not typically together. It puzzled me, but I wasn't alarmed.

The next day I drove to the cemetery to see if I could find the young hawks again. They were in the same location. One had died, and the other was eating the carcass.

It was a disturbing sight. It seemed that the adults had not properly cared for their young—perhaps something had happened to one or both of the parents.

I left, but the image of the hungry fledgling haunted me. Later that day, I saw a fresh road-killed squirrel. What a shame for it to go to waste. I picked up the squirrel and drove back to the cemetery.

I had the best intentions. Wild animals shouldn't associate humans with food, so I planned my approach carefully. Hidden in the car, I would drive by and toss the squirrel out of the window onto the lawn. The young bird was where I had last seen it, and the carcass of its sibling was picked to the bone. I drove slowly, picked up the dead squirrel by the tail, and threw. There was an unexpected thud as the squirrel ricocheted off the top of the window frame and plopped onto the middle of the road. The young Red-tail saw the dead squirrel land, leapt onto it, and promptly mantled it.

My plan was blown. The cemetery was fairly busy and I couldn't leave the bird in the middle of road. I got out of the car and tried to flush the bird off the road but it turned its back to me, its wings protecting its prey. I moved closer and closer until I was beside the hawk. I waved my hands; I yelled; I stamped my feet. The hawk ignored me. I realized that the only way to get the hawk safely back on the grass would be to move the squirrel. I leaned over and picked up the squirrel by the tail. Suspended upside down in the mantling position, the Red-tail clung to its prey as I carried the squirrel to the grass and dropped it. Unfazed, the young hawk righted itself to continue mantling.

When I went to the cemetery the next day, I saw no sign of the young hawk—a good sign, I hoped, that it was able to behave normally. I like to think that my interference may have bought it enough time, energy, and even reinforced the behavior it needed to get acclimated to hunting on its own. 🦅

Red-tails Not So in Love

Marsha C. Salett

On a sunny, cold afternoon in late February, I visited the Paintshop Pond restoration area at Wellesley College looking for patches of open water and ducks. Just about everything was frozen, and the ground was covered with more than a foot of hard, icy snow. I was watching the water rushing over the reconstructed dam of the former paint factory when something caught my eye. A Red-tailed Hawk flew over the pond and landed on a horizontal branch of an oak on the opposite shore.

Always appreciative of an opportunity to watch raptors, I watched the motionless hawk through my binoculars for a couple of minutes. I was going to leave when I saw a second Red-tail circling the pond with something in its talons—a dead gray squirrel. The second hawk landed beside the first. Aha, courtship behavior, I thought, and decided to stay. The male placed the squirrel on the branch between himself and the female. Barely moving her head, the female glanced first at the male and then at the

squirrel. Suddenly, the squirrel hit the ground with an audible *thwack*, and the female flew away, landing on a branch several trees to the left.

The male swooped to the snowy ground, picked up the squirrel in his talons, flew over to the female, and deposited the squirrel on the branch between them. Without a moment's hesitation, the female Red-tail flew off to the left but landed in a nearby tree. The squirrel thudded to the ground.

For the second time, the male retrieved the dead squirrel, which I decided to examine carefully through my binoculars. I have no idea about the timing of rigor mortis in squirrels, but this did not appear to be a fresh kill: the body was flat and rigid; the tail stuck out straight behind and didn't flop when the hawk carried the squirrel up to the female again.

Yes, the male Red-tail offered the same stiff gray squirrel to the female one more time, skillfully balancing it on the branch between them yet again. Third time a charm? Hardly. This time, the female hawk flew high over the trees and disappeared. The male did not follow her. 🦉



BARN OWL © DAVID BERNSTEIN

GLEANINGS

Genetics of Social Behavior in White-throated Sparrows

David M. Larson



White-throated Sparrow, white-striped. (Photograph by the author)

Rarely are close linkages between social behavior and genetics well described in vertebrates, due to the myriad confounding factors in both disciplines. In the publication featured in this issue, Horton et al. (2014) have investigated the involvement of a genetic variant of an estrogen receptor in the different behavioral patterns of White-throated Sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*).

As birdwatchers well know, White-throated Sparrows exhibit two plumage morphs, tan-striped (TS) and white-striped (WS). Apart from the differences in plumage, WS males are more aggressive in defending territory and seeking mates than the TS males, whereas the latter engage in more nestling provisioning and mate guarding. These behaviors are linked to sex steroid levels; WS males have higher testosterone levels than TS males during the breeding season. However, experimental data indicate that the sensitivity to hormones in the brain is more important than the hormone levels and could be explained by hormone receptor distribution and abundance. Receptors are proteins on cell membranes that bind to hormones and mediate their effects on cells.

The two plumage morphs segregate absolutely with a mutation, a rearrangement of the normal sequence, on chromosome 2 of the White-throated Sparrow. All WS individuals have this rearrangement; none of the TS individuals do. Males and females are equally likely to have the rearrangement. Since the section of chromosome 2 that contains the information for building and regulating the estrogen receptor α is part

of the rearrangement, the authors hypothesized that regulation of this receptor could explain the different behaviors in the two plumage morphs.

The authors analyzed differences in the regulation of the gene for the estrogen receptor α in WS and TS morphs. They found that the rearrangement caused changes in the production of receptor mRNA—messenger RNA is produced from the gene and acts as the template for making the receptor protein—in lab experiments, and therefore could do so in birds.

Next the authors assayed for mRNA in brain samples from free-living White-throated Sparrows, collected during the breeding season, whose behavior had been characterized as either aggressive or nurturing. Levels of this mRNA varied consistently in several defined regions of the brain, being higher in some regions in TS and others in WS birds, regardless of gender. These results were consistent with differential expression of the receptor in different regions of the brain and with known relationships between those brain areas and behavioral patterns. Finally, statistical analyses indicated that the level of estrogen receptor α expression in two particular areas of the brain was predictive of territorial and parental behavior, corresponding to the two color morphs. That is, the level of expression of the receptor in certain areas of the brain, due to the chromosome rearrangement, is associated with changes in behavior.



White-throated Sparrow, tan-striped.
(Photograph by Matt MacGillivray, licensed under CC BY 2.0)

The authors have demonstrated a consistent, integrated model of how changes in genetic sequence have impacted the development of social behavior patterns. In short, the chromosomal rearrangement has led to two populations, WS and TS, in which the differential regulation of the estrogen receptor α in distinct parts of the brain has led to the evolution of different

behaviors—aggression vs. nurturing—in White-throated Sparrows. Importantly, almost all breeding pairs consist of one individual with and one without the rearrangement—one TS and one WS—maintaining the chromosomal rearrangement in the population. ♪

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David M. Larson, PhD, is the Science and Education Coordinator at Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center in Newburyport, the Director of Mass Audubon's Birder's Certificate Program and the Certificate Program in Bird Ecology (a course for naturalist guides in Belize), a domestic and international tour leader, and a member of the editorial staff of Bird Observer.

ABOUT BOOKS

Birds Without Birding

Mark Lynch

Ten Thousand Birds: Ornithology Since Darwin. Tim Birkhead, Jo Wimpenny, and Bob Montgomerie. 2014. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

You can know the name of a bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird.... So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing—that's what counts. I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something. (Richard Feynman, physicist)

Although bird watching was a precursor of scientific ornithology and many ornithologists began their careers as bird watchers, this book is not a history of bird watching. (p. xii)

Ten Thousand Birds is basically a textbook, but one with a difference. Reading most college-level textbooks is like watching an episode of the TV classic *Dragnet*. That realistic crime drama, which made its original run on television from 1952 to 1959, was an example of bare bones plotting at its most spare, best summed up by the catch phrase of one of the characters, Sergeant Joe Friday. The phrase was, "Just the facts."

Most college textbooks take a similar "just the facts" approach to their subject matter. They are a dry outline of the facts, practical but no fun to read. There seems to be an assumption that the professor will add color commentary to make the subject lively to the students. After a class, you would never think of sitting down in your favorite comfy chair and once again cracking open your *Intro to Psychology*. *Ten Thousand Birds*, however, is a textbook with a difference. It is a ripping history of a science that you will enjoy reading. In a recent conversation with author Bob Montgomerie, Professor of Biology at Queen's University in Ontario, he told me how important it was to all the authors to make this book interesting and enjoyable. Tim Birkhead, who has been described as committed to undergraduate teaching, has a long-standing interest in the history and philosophy of science. A recent issue of *British Birds* reprinted his Bernard Tucker Memorial Lecture titled "What It's Like to Be a Bird." This essay displays his interest in conveying complex scientific ideas in an interesting way to a more general public.

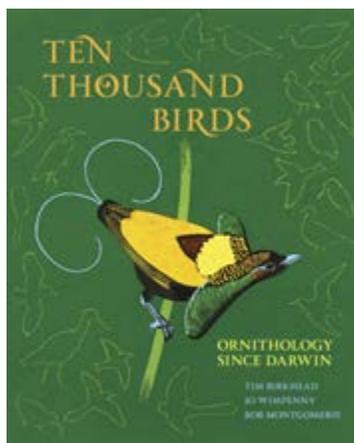
Each chapter in *Ten Thousand Birds* is devoted to a major area of ornithological research during the last 150 years. These include evolution, taxonomy, migration, sexual selection, instinct, ecological adaptation, and population studies. The book ends with the sobering chapter, "Tomorrow's Birds," a look into the challenges facing much of the world's bird population. It is the presentation of this material that makes *Ten Thousand Birds* such an interesting history of science.

Though the focus of ornithology is of course birds, the authors of *Ten Thousand Birds* have made every attempt to show the human face of this science by including intimate and telling glimpses into the personalities of the ornithologists. Charles Gald Sibley, the man who rewrote bird taxonomy, is described thus: “Sibley was larger than life—brilliant, mercurial, arrogant, tyrannical at times, driven and often difficult even to his close associates.” (p. 110) The authors then elaborate on this description with details on how Sibley baited critics with an “acid tongue” and how he could be a “cruel mimic.”

Ten Thousand Birds even dishes some juicy dirt on certain ornithologists.

As we now know, in the absence of individual selection thinking, extra-pair copulations defy convincing explanation.... [Julian] Huxley believed that monogamy, exemplified by his seraphic symbol, the grebe....was the most harmonious system and that humans should model themselves upon it.... There’s a deep irony here, since Huxley’s own marriage was distinctly disharmonious. On his honeymoon in 1919 he built himself a one-man hide (blind) in which he sat alone each morning watching grebes while his wife, Juliette, bored, cold and hurt, waited for him outside (Juliette Huxley 1987). Then in 1931, Huxley began an affair with an American girl less than half his age that he met while traveling to Africa. During a subsequent lecture tour, he wrote to Juliette of his wish to continue seeing the girl: “I must confess that combination of adventureness and efficiency with femininity is extremely stimulating to me—and, my dear one, I can’t help it and you must make the best of it.” (pp. 334–335).

There is a welcome international focus on ornithology in *Ten Thousand Birds*, which should come as no surprise because ornithological field studies have taken place on every continent. For instance, the important work of Chinese paleontologists like Dong Zhiming, Xu Xing, and others in uncovering feathered fossils is described in detail. The discoveries of these scientists have added to our understanding of the evolution of feathers and flight and have fueled the debates about the relationship of birds to dinosaurs. False starts and missteps in ornithology are also reported in *Ten Thousand Birds* as well as all sides of hotly debated issues. Perhaps no topic in ornithology has generated more heat and name calling than whether or not birds are dinosaurs. The whole contentious debate and the mudslinging are described in detail. The authors deal with many unanswered questions in ornithology that remain challenges for future researchers. These include understanding why females of socially monogamous species engage in extra-pair copulation and what is responsible for the magnetic sense in birds.



Each chapter ends with a lengthy personal statement from one or more of the key ornithologists featured in that chapter. These are fascinating and often reveal how that scientist became interested in birds and how he thinks about his research. The reader is left with a dynamic view of ornithology as a lively and always evolving science as well as a better understanding of how science works. Like all sciences, ornithology can get messy, sometimes even rather cranky, but it always moves forward. Though it may lack the exotic scope and cachet of cosmology or particle physics, the science of ornithology has made some exciting discoveries about life on this planet.

Technological developments in the twentieth century have dramatically changed ornithological research:

Like many other areas of research during the twentieth century, the study of migration has been heavily dependent on technology: bird banding (early 1900s), orientation cages and radar (1940s–1960s), and satellite tracking (1980s), each of which has had a revolutionary effect on the types of information collected and its interpretations. The miniaturization of tracking devices that began in the 1990s is currently producing a further revolution in migration studies, by revealing both the routes and stopover locations of individual birds. (pp.154–155)

The molecular genetics revolution that began in the latter part of the twentieth century has also enabled ornithologists to use various DNA analysis techniques to tease out sophisticated information on systematics and behavior. How DNA analysis came to ornithology is dramatically described in *Ten Thousand Birds*:

It's late afternoon on a hot day in July 1986 when a tall, thin man in a brown suit strides through the new Ottawa Convention Center, a sheaf of computer printouts tucked under his arm. He's trying to suppress a grin—smug, arrogant, determined, and maybe a little fearful. He is Charles Gald Sibley, and he is about to present the pinnacle of his life's work to the Nineteenth International Ornithological Congress in a most dramatic and memorable way, with a presentation that has become the stuff of legend in the ornithological community. He has been working doggedly for more than a decade on a phylogeny of birds based on the analysis of DNA and he has it here on a twenty-foot-long sheet of computer paper. He is going to tape it to the wall of the poster session for all to see—a “tapestry” of bird evolution and systematics. (p. 108)

Birders saw the immediate effect of Sibley's presentation in the arrangement of their checklists and field guides, and to this day birders still have a tough time accepting that Turkey Vultures are not really vultures in the Old World sense. You can thank Sibley for changing systematics forever and making it a real science. If Sibley were still alive today, he would likely be amazed and probably a bit jealous to learn that his revolutionary techniques have already been surpassed by newer, better genetic technologies.

Major theoretical evolutions in ornithology during the twentieth century have included the development of cladistics and the rise and fall of the theory of ethology.

Ten Thousand Birds is beautifully designed. Each chapter begins with a full color plate that the authors thought would be interesting, beautiful, and inspiring. These illustrations range in style from two plates from the classic natural history book of my childhood, *The Wonders of Life on Earth*, to an anarchic expressive drawing of the extinct Guadalupe Caracara by Ralph Steadman. Large illustrations, color and black and white, are found throughout. Each chapter features a full-page color illustrated time line of the discoveries and publications concerned with that topic in ornithology. Every chapter ends with a “coda” section that nicely summarizes the major ideas discussed. The book ends with a list of five hundred important ornithologists.

Ten Thousand Birds is a landmark achievement: a serious and scholarly history of a science that is enjoyable, entertaining, and thoughtfully designed. A birder reading *Ten Thousand Birds: Ornithology Since Darwin* will gain a deeper, more scientific understanding of the objects of our passion. For some, this may lead to a humbling realization that despite a huge life list and the ability to spout out the plumage minutiae of larids, they may not really know birds at all. 🦅

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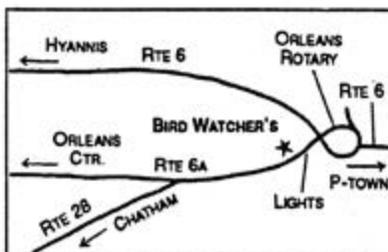
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BIRD SIGHTINGS

January/February 2014

Seth Kellogg, Marjorie W. Rines, and Robert H. Stymeist

The third month in a row, January was colder than normal, with temperatures in Boston nearly two degrees below average. The first ten days of the month were well below normal, but we got a reprieve in the next ten days with temperatures above normal. The last eleven days plunged again to below normal. The coldest weather in ten years arrived on January 4 after the first snowstorm of the year when the mercury fell below zero in most spots away from the coast. Boston recorded 2°, balmy compared with 16° below in Norwood and minus 12° in Taunton. Boston snowfall totaled 21.8 inches whereas Worcester atypically escaped with 14 inches. Another storm on January 21 dumped another eight inches in Boston but the Cape and the south coast were pummeled with high winds and drifting snow of over a foot. Rainfall for the month totaled 3.24 inches in Boston.

The colder than normal trend continued into February with an average temperature of 28.9°, almost 3° colder than average. A winter storm brought snow, sleet, and freezing rain on February 5–6, causing slick roadways. Another storm on February 15 delivered heavy snow to southeastern Massachusetts with nearly a foot on Cape Cod. Boston officially recorded 22.9 inches of snow for the month, 12 inches above normal.

R. Stymeist

WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

The **Ross's Goose** that was discovered in Ipswich on Christmas Day lingered just until New Year's Day so that numerous birders could add it to their 2014 year list. Single **Cackling Geese** were reported from three Essex County locations. A **Eurasian Green-winged Teal**, seen off and on in Newton since 2009, was undoubtedly a returning individual, but the report from Plymouth on February 24 concerned a new bird. Although sea ducks such as scoters and Long-tailed Ducks are regular inland visitors in the fall, they rarely linger into the winter, so two inland reports of White-winged Scoter and one of Long-tailed Duck were noteworthy.

A **Pacific Loon** was discovered on New Year's Day by an American Birding Association trip at Race Point in Provincetown; the bird continued through the middle of the month. Two Great Egrets were reported on Cape Cod; it is becoming more and more routine to see one or two on the Cape in winter.

On February 11 a **Golden Eagle** was spotted at the south end of Quabbin Reservoir and lingered in the area for two weeks so that many observers could catch a distant glimpse. American Oystercatchers occasionally are reported on the southern coast, but the individual flying over Plum Island on February 23 was an unusual sighting.

As usual, Nantucket was gull central. On New Year's Day three **Little Gulls** were discovered there, and the **Mew Gull** initially discovered on December 30 was also seen. Double-digit counts of Iceland Gull are regular there, but a count of 125 on January 1 ranks among all-time high counts. A count of 45 Lesser Black-backed Gulls on January 5 was good, but triple-digit counts have been tallied on Nantucket in the past.

On January 5 Blair Nikula described a huge movement of Razorbills in Provincetown: "In about two hours at Race Point Beach I counted over 13,000 birds flying west. They were accompanied by over 800 Black-legged Kittiwakes (all but one adults) and 5 Dovekies, among assorted other species . . . Later in the morning at MacMillan Wharf in Provincetown Harbor I noticed large flocks of Razorbills flying west over the outer harbor (i.e., beyond the breakwater). They would fly west toward the west end breakwater, before reversing direction to head back east along the Wood End/Long Point beach. After watching for a while from the end of the wharf, I relocated farther east along the harbor shore to get a better view of the outer harbor and spent about half an hour observing in front of the Harbor Motel. Although there was probably some repetition, my best estimate was another 3,500+ birds."

M. Rines

Greater White-fronted Goose	1/31-2/17	Chatham	1	M. Keleher + v.o.	Blue-winged Teal	1/1-8	Marstons Mills	3	v.o.
Snow Goose	thr	Reports of indiv. from 8 locations			Northern Shoveler	1/1-2/9	Marstons Mills	3-5	v.o.
	1/20	P.I.	2	T. Arsenault		1/1	Carver	1	T. Lloyd-Evans
	2/23	Nantucket	2	K. Blackshaw#		2/1	Marion	7	R. Sawyer
Ross's Goose	1/1	Ipswich	1	v.o.		2/9	Orleans	2	B. Nikula
Brant	1/5	Fairhaven	645	M. Lynch#	Northern Pintail	thr	Northampton	1-4	L. Therrien
	1/11	P'town	210	G. d'Entremont		1/20	P.I.	90	J. Berry
	1/12	Marion	191	M. Lynch#		2/1	Westport	61	G. d'Entremont#
	1/19	Boston H.	381	TASL (M. Hall#)		2/10	Marlboro	7	T. Spahr
	2/22	Chatham	116	J. Trimble		2/22	Seekonk	9	J. Sweeney
Cackling Goose	1/1	Ipswich	1	G. Gove#	Green-winged Teal	1/17	P.I.	30	T. Wetmore
	1/12	Newbypt H.	1 ph	F. Hosley		1/29	Plymouth	5	G. Gove#
	1/25	Gloucester	1	C. Ciccone		1/29	Newton	3	S. Hunt
Mute Swan	1/1	Acoaxet	179	M. Lynch#		2/22	Seekonk	8	J. Sweeney
	1/3	Watertown	39	D. Logan		2/23	W. Harwich	23	M. Keleher
	1/29	Turners Falls	61	T. Gagnon	Eurasian Green-winged Teal	thr	Newton	1	v.o.
Wood Duck	1/30	Jamaica Plain	10	P. Peterson		2/24	Plymouth	1 m	J. Kricher
	2/22	Revere B.	8	F. Lehman	Canvasback	1/1	Acoaxet	4	M. Lynch#
	2/23	Lowell	5	T. Spahr		1/1-26	Worcester	1	v.o.
Gadwall	1/1	Acoaxet	42	M. Lynch#		1/17	Wachusett Res.	1	A. Marble
	1/1	Plymouth	53	G. d'Entremont#		1/24	Newbypt H.	1	S. Mesick
	1/5	Salisbury	100	V. Zollo		2/thr	Falmouth	4	v.o.
	1/12	E. Gloucester	40	J. Berry#		2/23	Nantucket	8	K. Blackshaw#
	2/22	Seekonk	41	J. Sweeney	Redhead	1/1	Acoaxet	4	M. Lynch#
Eurasian Wigeon	1/1	Acoaxet	1	M. Lynch#		1/26	Falmouth	18	G. d'Entremont#
	1/1-5	Falmouth	1	v.o.		2/2	Agawam	1	S. Motyl
	1/5	Salisbury	1	V. Zollo	Ring-necked Duck	1/2	Bourne	232	D. Clapp
	1/5-2/15	Fairhaven	2	v.o.		1/5	Brookline	11	A. Morgan
	2/22	Nantucket	2	V. Laux		1/9, 2/7	Waltham	22, 47	J. Forbes
American Wigeon	1/5	Gloucester (E.P.)	4	P. + F. Vale		2/25	Groveland	10	D. Chickering#
	1/12	Nantucket	45	K. Blackshaw#	Greater Scaup	1/9	Somerset	80	J. Sweeney
	1/26	Falmouth	57	G. d'Entremont#		1/12	Gloucester	34	P. Brown
	2/1	Northampton	1	L. Therrien		1/12	Marion	762	M. Lynch#
	2/23	Swansea	76	J. Sweeney		2/8	Falmouth	550	J. Young#
American Black Duck	1/5	Fairhaven	590	M. Lynch#		2/23	Fairhaven	179	SSBC (GdE)
	1/13	Essex	240	J. Berry		2/24	Northfield	21	J. Smith
	1/19	Boston H.	414	TASL (M. Hall#)	Lesser Scaup	1/1	Wachusett Res.	4	J. Dekker
	1/20	P.I.	360	J. Berry		1/11	Plymouth	18	G. d'Entremont
	2/22	Cumb. Farms	250	J. Hoye#		1/26	Falmouth	19	G. d'Entremont#
Mallard	1/1	Ipswich	230	J. Berry	King Eider	2/7	Waltham	4	J. Forbes
	1/19	Boston H.	285	TASL (M. Hall#)		2/24	Agawam	2	M. Moore
	1/30	Jamaica Plain	300	P. Peterson		1/9	Rockport	1	J. Hoye#
	2/15	Charlton	300	M. Lynch#		1/18	Dennis	1	K. Yakola#
						1/20	Gloucester (B.R.)	2 m	W. Tatro

King Eider (continued)				2/1	Medford	42	D. Williams
1/26	Sandwich	1	G. d'Entremont#		Red-breasted Merganser		
2/1	P'town H.	1	B. Nikula	1/5	Fairhaven	183	M. Lynch#
2/23	Marshfield	2	imm m B. Harris#	1/19	Boston H.	248	TASL (M. Hall#)
Common Eider				2/1	Scusset B.	111	M. Lynch#
1/1	Scusset B.	1350	G. d'Entremont#	2/1	Cape Ann	98	J. Berry#
1/12	Marion	878	M. Lynch#		Ruddy Duck		
1/19	Boston H.	3816	TASL (M. Hall#)	1/12	Gloucester	16	P. Brown
2/1	Cape Ann	220	J. Berry#	1/26	Nantucket	18	K. Blackshaw#
2/9	Nantucket	50000	K. Blackshaw#	2/22	Orleans	60	R. Hodson
				2/23	Swansea	113	J. Sweeney
Harlequin Duck					Northern Bobwhite		
1/5	Westport	11	E. Nielsen	2/15	P'town	4	G. d'Entremont
1/6	Orleans	2	M. Keleher	2/23	Falmouth	1	M. Keleher
2/1	N. Scituate	15	J. Young		Ring-necked Pheasant		
2/1	Cape Ann	149	J. Berry#	1/20	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1 m	A. Morgan#
2/23	Nantucket	25	K. Blackshaw#	2/1	Westport	1 m	G. d'Entremont#
Surf Scoter				2/20	WBWS	1 f	J. Hoye#
1/5	Fairhaven	92	M. Lynch#		Ruffed Grouse		
1/19	Boston H.	1315	TASL (M. Hall#)	1/1	Westboro	1	N. Paulson
2/1	Scusset B.	97	M. Lynch#	1/7	Bourne	2	J. McCumber
2/2	Cape Ann	74	J. Berry#	2/16	Sandwich	1	A. Dewald
2/8	Hyannis	200	J. Meredith		Wild Turkey		
White-winged Scoter				1/1	Osterville	27	K. Miller#
1/1	Westport	55	M. Lynch#	1/3	Hinsdale	22	E. Neumuth
1/19	Boston H.	1335	TASL (M. Hall#)	1/9	Wachusett Res.	49	M. Lynch#
1/28	Wachusett Res.	2	P. Morlock		Red-throated Loon		
2/1	Cape Ann	10,600	R. Heil	1/19	Boston H.	2	TASL (M. Hall#)
2/15	Wellfleet	150	M. Faherty	2/1	Cape Ann	4	J. Berry#
2/23	Holyoke	2	L. Therrien	2/15	P'town (R.P.)	34	L. Waters
Black Scoter					Pacific Loon		
1/12	Marion	37	M. Lynch#	2/1-15	P'town (R.P.)	1	W. Petersen + v.o.
2/2	Cape Ann	36	J. Berry#		Common Loon		
2/9	N. Scituate	11	BBC (GdE)	1/5	Sandwich	60	S. Kellogg
Long-tailed Duck				1/19	Boston H.	23	TASL (M. Hall#)
1/5	Fairhaven	27	M. Lynch#	1/22	Wachusett Res.	3	J. Bourget
1/12	P.I.	25	T. Wetmore	2/1	Cape Ann	98	R. Heil
1/19	Boston H.	21	TASL (M. Hall#)		Pied-billed Grebe		
2/1	Scusset B.	23	M. Lynch#	1/12	Nantucket	2	K. Blackshaw#
2/1	Cape Ann	40	J. Berry#	1/12	Winchester	2	R. LaFontaine
2/1, 8	Agawam	2, 1	C. Surprenant#		Horned Grebe		
Bufflehead				1/5	Fairhaven	68	M. Lynch#
1/1	Nantucket	300	V. Laux	1/5	S. Quabbin	6	L. Therrien
1/5	Fairhaven	993	M. Lynch#	1/17	Gloucester	28	M. Lynch#
1/17	P.I.	130	R. Heil	1/17	P.I.	21	R. Heil
1/19	Boston H.	841	TASL (M. Hall#)	1/19	Boston H.	80	TASL (M. Hall#)
2/1	Cape Ann	129	J. Berry#		Red-necked Grebe		
2/23	Westport	213	M. Lynch#	1/1	Quabbin Pk	2	L. Therrien
Common Goldeneye				1/5	P'town	24	B. Nikula
1/5	Fairhaven	817	M. Lynch#	1/12	E. Gloucester	7	J. Berry#
1/12	Marion	97	M. Lynch#	2/2	Waltham	2	J. Forbes
1/17	P.I.	135	R. Heil	2/8	Northampton	2	J. Drucker
1/19	Boston H.	428	TASL (M. Hall#)		Northern Fulmar		
2/23	Westport	101	M. Lynch#	2/12	Jeffries L.	28	S. Mirick#
2/28	Turners Falls	90	J. Smith		Northern Gannet		
2/28	Hadley	63	L. Therrien	1/5	P'town	95	B. Nikula
Barrow's Goldeneye				2/9	Nantucket	20	K. Blackshaw#
thr	Chatham	1-3	v.o.		Double-crested Cormorant		
1/1	Turners Falls	2	J. Smith	1/12	Lawrence	1	F. Hosley
1/9	Falmouth	2	G. Hirth	1/17	Cambridge	2	J. Thomas
1/12	Boston (Deer I.)	2	P. Peterson		Great Cormorant		
1/17	Wachusett Res.	2	D. Grant	thr	Medford	4 max	M. Rines
2/thr	Gloucester	2	v.o.	1/17	Rockport	32	M. Lynch#
Hooded Merganser				1/31	P'town	45	K. Yakola
1/1	Acoaxet	43	M. Lynch#	2/1	Cape Ann	53	J. Berry#
1/9	Dighton	20	J. Sweeney	2/9	N. Scituate	37	SSBC (GdE)
1/26	Falmouth	32	G. d'Entremont#		American Bittern		
1/30	Eastham	79	R. Merrill	1/1-17	Eastham	1	v.o.
Common Merganser				2/17	Edgartown	1	P. Thrush
1/1	Lakeville	47	G. d'Entremont#		Great Egret		
1/2	Bourne	153	D. Clapp	1/20	Orleans	1	P. Trull
1/5	S. Quabbin	120	L. Therrien				

Great Egret (continued)				2/23	Westport	2	M. Lynch#
2/1	Harwich	1	A. Curtis	2/23	Cumb. Farms	3	J. Lawson
Black-crowned Night-Heron				2/23	Fairhaven	3	SSBC (GdE)
1/13	Fairhaven	1	v.o.	American Oystercatcher			
1/20	Winthrop	1 ad	J. Young	2/23	Nantucket	1	T. Pastuszek
Black Vulture				2/23	P.I.	1	D. Sibley
2/1	Westport	4	P. Champlin	Greater Yellowlegs			
2/7	Sheffield	10	G. Hurley#	1/17	Chatham	2	P. Kyle
2/8	Blackstone	20	G. d'Entremont#	1/25	W. Harwich	1	E. Hoopes
2/22	Northampton	2	J. Drucker	2/6	Sandwich	1	P. Crosson
Turkey Vulture				Ruddy Turnstone			
1/19	Nantucket	15	K. Blackshaw#	1/16	Osterville	61	K. Yakola
1/20	Boston (A.A.)	3	P. Peterson	1/17	E. Boston (B.I.)	9	P. Peterson
2/8	Blackstone	55	G. d'Entremont#	1/17	Nantucket	35	K. Blackshaw
2/26	Worcester	9	S. Ricker	2/25	Marblehead	6	D. Noble
2/26	S. Quabbin	2	M. Lynch#	Sanderling			
Bald Eagle				1/5	Westport	235	E. Nielsen
thr	Medford	5 max	v.o.	1/12	P.I.	60	N. Landry
thr	Newbypt	7 max	v.o.	1/14	Duxbury B.	100	S. Van der Veen
1/25	Hadley	6	M. Lynch#	1/19	Squantum.	50	TASL (M. Hall#)
2/9	Sandwich	6	M. Keleher	1/26	Falmouth	145	G. d'Entremont#
2/26	S. Quabbin	7	M. Lynch#	Purple Sandpiper			
Northern Harrier				1/5	Westport	63	E. Nielsen
thr	P.I.	6 max	v.o.	1/26	Falmouth	14	G. d'Entremont#
thr	Hadley	2 max	v.o.	2/2	Gloucester (E.P.)	80	J. Berry#
thr	Cumb. Farms	8 max	v.o.	2/2	Salisbury	40	BBC (I. Giriunas)
1/19	Neponset R.	2	R. Donovan	2/9	N. Scituate	55	SSBC (GdE)
1/26	Saugus	2	S. Zende#	Dunlin			
2/1	Cape Ann	2	J. Berry#	1/5	Westport	220	E. Nielsen
Sharp-shinned Hawk				1/14	Duxbury B.	500	S. Van der Veen
thr	Reports of indiv. from 19 locations			1/17	Rockport	70	M. Lynch#
Cooper's Hawk				1/28	Mattapoisett	28	R. Sawyer
1/4	Hadley	2	M. Lynch#	1/29	Plymouth H.	193	G. Gove#
1/29	Quincy	2	R. Donovan	Wilson's Snipe			
Northern Goshawk				thr	Reports of indiv. from 7 locations		
1/4	Rowley	1	D. Anderson	2/9	Orleans	3	B. Nikula
1/20	Gloucester (E.P.)	1	S. Miller	2/16	Boston (A.A.)	2	D. + T. Sullivan
2/1	Rutland	1	B. Mulhearn	American Woodcock			
2/5	Amesbury	1 ad	K. Elwell	1/14	Squantum	1	R. Donovan
Red-shouldered Hawk				2/23	Falmouth	2	M. Keleher
1/1	Westboro	2	N. Paulson	Black-legged Kittiwake			
1/11	Mashpee	2	M. Keleher	1/5, 2/22	P'town	850, 75	B. Nikula
2/1	Westport	2	G. d'Entremont#	1/17	P.I.	35	R. Heil
2/1	Hinsdale	2	T. Begley	2/2	Jeffries L.	13	J. Berry#
Red-tailed Hawk				2/22	P'town	75	B. Nikula
1/4	Hadley	9	M. Lynch#	Bonaparte's Gull			
1/13	Essex	6	J. Berry	1/1	Nantucket	3000	V. Laux
Rough-legged Hawk				1/17	P.I.	1	R. Heil
thr	P.I.	3 max	v.o.	1/25	Newbypt H.	1	D. Swain#
thr	Cumb. Farms	3 max	v.o.	1/25	Winthrop	1	J. Johnson
1/7-21	Hadley	1-2	M. Moore#	1/25	Boston (Deer I.)	1	R. Schain
1/30	Northampton	2	D. McLain	Black-headed Gull			
Golden Eagle				1/1	Nantucket	4	V. Laux
2/11-26	S. Quabbin	1	T. Gagnon + v.o.	1/1	Salisbury	1	D. Anderson
Clapper Rail				1/10-25	Hyannis	1	R. Debenham#
1/10	Wellfleet	3	S. Broker#	1/12-19	Nantucket	1	K. Blackshaw#
2/1	Eastham	1	M. Keleher	1/13	Barnstable	1	J. Hoye#
Virginia Rail				2/22	Falmouth	1	G. Hirth#
1/19	Nantucket	1	K. Blackshaw#	Little Gull			
2/1	Barnstable (S.N.)	6	J. Trimble	1/1	Nantucket	3	V. Laux
Sora				Mew Gull			
1/1	Harwich	1	P. Bono	1/1	Nantucket	1	V. Laux#
American Coot				Iceland Gull			
thr	Medford	5	M. Rines	1/1	Nantucket	125	V. Laux
1/6	Jamaica Plain	36	P. Peterson	1/12	Boston (Deer I.)	34	P. Peterson
1/11	Plymouth	80	G. d'Entremont	1/12	E. Gloucester	12	J. Berry#
1/16	Watertown	4	R. Stymeist	1/13	Barre	3	R. Jenkins
Black-bellied Plover				1/15	Agawam	3	S. Motyl
1/30	Chatham	2	K. Yakola	1/16	Turners Falls	7	E. Dalton
2/23	Nantucket	25	K. Blackshaw#	1/19	Winthrop	34	TASL (M. Hall#)
Killdeer				1/20	Lowell	6	S. Sullivan#
2/22	Rehoboth	2	J. Sweeney	2/1	P'town (R.P.)	37	J. Trimble

Lesser Black-backed Gull				2/9	P'town (R.P.)	1	J. Young
thr	Reports of indiv. from 9 locations			2/12	Jeffries L.	1	S. Mirick#
1/5	Nantucket	45	K. Blackshaw		Thick-billed Murre		
Glaucous Gull				1/5	Gloucester	1	M. Brengle
thr	Reports of indiv. from 19 locations			2/8	Gloucester	1	BBC (I. Giriunas)
thr	Gloucester	4 max	v.o.	2/9	P'town H.	1	B. Nikula
1/4	Revere B.	3	P. Peterson	2/22	P'town (R.P.)	1	M. Faherty
1/12	Worcester	2	C. Bailey	Razorbill			
1/15	Wachusett Res.	2	B. Kamp	thr	P.I.	200 max	v.o.
1/20-2/23	Lowell	4 max	v.o.	1/5	P'town	16500	B. Nikula
1/26	Turners Falls	2	J. Smith#	2/1	Cape Ann	103	R. Heil
Great Black-backed Gull				2/2	Jeffries L.	3	J. Berry#
1/5	Revere B.	800	S. Sullivan#	Black Guillemot			
2/22	N. Truro	550	B. Nikula	1/5	P'town	1	B. Nikula
Dovekie				1/18	Boston H.	6	P. Peterson
1/5	P'town	8	B. Nikula	1/26	Nantucket	1	K. Blackshaw#
1/8	Gloucester	2	BBC (B. Volkle)	2/1	Marshfield	4	J. Young
1/11	N. Truro	1	B. Nikula	2/2	Cape Ann	12	J. Berry#
1/12	Rockport	1	D. Williams	2/4	P'town (R.P.)	2	J. Hoye
2/2	Jeffries L.	27	J. Berry#	Atlantic Puffin			
Common Murre				2/1	P'town	1	B. Nikula
2/2	Jeffries L.	10	J. Berry#				

OWLS THROUGH FINCHES

The invasion of Snowy Owls continued to be the big news for the period with reports from more than 50 locations. This has been the greatest explosion of the species in over 50 years, not only in Massachusetts but also in most of the eastern United States. At Plum Island as many as 14 Snowy Owls were recorded in a single day, and at Logan Airport, Norman Smith of Mass Audubon trapped, banded, and removed 50 individuals, including a recapture of a bird he had banded on January 3, 2011. Although Short-eared Owl numbers fluctuate from year to year, this period was especially productive. At Plum Island seven birds were counted, and six were tallied in one day at Cumberland Farms. Long-eared Owls were reported from Squantum and Amherst.

The **Red-headed Woodpecker** first noted at the end of December was present throughout the period on Argilla Road in Ipswich. For the first time in several years there were no reports of hummingbirds in the state during January and February. The prolonged periods of bitterly cold temperatures this winter evidently affected many of the semi-hardy winter birds such as Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, and Eastern Towhee, all of which had far fewer reports compared with the same period in previous years. Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings on the other hand seemed to thrive in the frigid weather; flocks of over 300 Horned Larks were counted in New Braintree and another 300 in Hadley, where as many as 275 Snow Buntings were noted. Other large flocks of buntings were observed in Northampton, Pittsfield, Plum Island, and Provincetown. The count of 30 Lapland Longspurs in Hadley was the most ever noted in western Massachusetts, surpassing the previous high of 25.

The **Harris's Sparrow** first noted on November 28 was last seen on January 11 in Wenham. Other interesting sparrow reports during the period included five Clay-colored, 19 Chipping, 25 Field, 7 White-crowned, and a count of 14 Nelson's Sparrows during a high tide at Fort Hill in Eastham. A **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was seen off and on throughout the period in the Cumberland Farm fields, **Western Tanagers** were reported from Gloucester and Truro, and the **Bullock's Oriole** first noted on November 15 was last seen on January 25 in Chelmsford. The winter finch flight consisted of a few Purple Finches, a single Red Crossbill, a single Evening Grosbeak, and two individual Pine Siskins!

R. Stymeist

Eastern Screech-Owl				Northern Flicker			
thr	Reports of indiv. from 13 locations			1/5	Barnstable (S.N.)	8	P. Crosson
1/1	Longmeadow	3	J. Young	1/23	Longmeadow	4	M. Moore
1/11	Foxboro	5	B. Cassie	2/3	Waltham	4	J. Forbes
Great Horned Owl				2/17	Dorchester	5	P. Peterson
1/11	Foxboro	3	B. Cassie	2/23	Fairhaven	5	SSBC (GdE)
1/12	W. Bridgewater	3	D. Cabral	Pileated Woodpecker			
1/13	Reading	pr	D. Williams	1/5	Douglas	pr	M. Sughrue
1/15	Ipswich	2	J. & N. Berry	1/17	Concord	2	J. Hoye#
1/25	Hadley	2	M. Lynch#	2/15	Hamilton	2	J. Berry
1/31	Stoughton	2	G. d'Entremont	Eastern Phoebe			
2/9	Cumb. Farms	3	B. Cassie#	1/18	Falmouth	1	P. Crosson
2/12	Methuen	pr n	C. Gibson	2/16	GMNWR	1	G. Perkins
2/17	Wayland	2	A. McCarthy#	2/23	Rockport (H.P.)	1	K. Elwell#
2/22	Mt.A.	2	E. Smith	2/23	Boston (F.Pk)	1	R. Schain
2/24	W. Boxford	pr n	C. Gibson	2/24	Nahant	1	L. Pivacek
Snowy Owl				2/28	Wellesley	1	K. Crispel
thr	Reports of 1-3 indiv. from 47 locations			Northern Shrike			
thr	Duxbury B.	6 max	R. Bowes	thr	Reports of indiv. from 18 locations		
thr	P.I.	14 max	v.o.	Fish Crow			
thr	Salisbury	4 max	v.o.	1/1	Framingham	40	N. Paulson
thr	Boston (Logan)	50 b	N. Smith	1/1	Mashpee	10	M. Faherty
1/1, 2/20	Orleans	5, 5	P. Trull	1/10	Tisbury	30	J. Normandin
1/1	Westport	4	M. Lynch#	1/10	Holyoke	2	L. Therrien
2/23	Nantucket	4	K. Blackshaw#	1/15	W. Roxbury	110	P. Peterson
Barred Owl				2/24	Natick	10	P. Gilmore
1/2	Natick	1	G. Dysart	Common Raven			
1/11	Washington	1	E. Neumuth	thr	Reports of 1-2 indiv. from 26 locations		
1/27	Stoneham	1	D. + I. Jewell	1/1	W. Tisbury	8	N. Monaco
2/8	Boxford	1	T. Martin	2/23	P.I.	4	J. Damian
Long-eared Owl				2/25	Rowley	3	P. Brown
2/1	Amherst	1	L. Therrien	2/26	S. Quabbin	6	M. Lynch#
2/11	Squantum	3	J. Young#	Horned Lark			
Short-eared Owl				1/4	Northampton	76	D. McLain
thr	P.I.	7 max	v.o.	1/5	New Braintree	375	W. Howes#
thr	Hadley	4 max	L. Therrien#	1/13	Egremont	150	G. Hurley
thr	Barnstable (S.N.)	2 max	K. Yakola#	1/20	Hadley	300	H. Galbraith
1/thr	Eastham	2 max	v.o.	1/25	Gloucester	80	G. d'Entremont
1/1	Sudbury	2	D. Henkels	1/25	P.I.	70	T. Wetmore
1/1	Rowley	3	G. Gove#	2/23	Cumb. Farms	75	SSBC (GdE)
1/1	Weymouth	2	V. Zollo	Tree Swallow			
2/8	Cumb. Farms	6	E. Giles#	2/22	Shutesbury	1	K. Weir
Northern Saw-whet Owl				2/22-23	Cumb. Farms	1	v.o.
1/1	Newton	1	H. Miller	Red-breasted Nuthatch			
1/12	Wellfleet	2	E. Hoopes	1/15	Mt.A.	2	R. Stymeist
Belted Kingfisher				2/4	Plymouth (MSSF)	7	B. Harris#
2/8	Sudbury	2	G. Freedman	2/12	Cheshire	2	G. Hurley
2/11	N. Woburn	2	R. Harrison	2/17	S. Quabbin	4	M. Lynch#
American Kestrel				2/20	Boston (A.A.)	2	P. Gilmore#
thr	Reports of indiv. from 14 locations			Brown Creeper			
Merlin	Reports of indiv. from 26 locations			1/4	Truro	4	J. Young
thr	Woburn (HP)	2	M. Rines	1/12	Marion	2	M. Lynch#
2/2				1/29	Westboro	3	T. Spahr
Peregrine Falcon				2/20	GMNWR	3	K. Dia#
1/11	P'town H.	2	B. Nikula	Carolina Wren			
1/17	Lawrence	pr	C. Gibson	1/5	Fairhaven	14	M. Lynch#
1/17	Haverhill	pr	S. Mirick	1/11	Washington	2	E. Neumuth
1/24	Brockton	2	J. Carlisle	1/26	Falmouth	10	G. d'Entremont#
Red-headed Woodpecker				2/1	Westport	15	G. d'Entremont#
thr	Ipswich	1 imm	v.o.	Winter Wren			
Red-bellied Woodpecker				1/9	Eastham	2	K. Yakola
1/17	Medford	5	R. LaFontaine	1/11	Lexington	2	J. Forbes
2/1	Westport	4	G. d'Entremont#	2/2	Newton	2	J. Forbes
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker				Marsh Wren			
1/1	Sheffield	6	G. Hurley	1/1	Centerville	1	M. Keleher
1/12	Mt.A.	2	R. Stymeist	1/12	Ipswich	1	P. Brown
2/10	Sudbury	2	A. Scholten	1/16	GMNWR	3	J. Forbes
2/18	Boston (A.A.)	2	P. Peterson	1/16	Harwich	1	B. Nikula
Hairy Woodpecker				1/17	W. Newbury	1	R. Heil
1/31	S. Quabbin	4	M. Lynch#	Golden-crowned Kinglet			
2/2	Royalston	3	M. Lynch#	1/12	Marion	11	M. Lynch#
2/9	N. Marshfield	3	SSBC (GdE)	1/13	Reading	7	D. Williams

Golden-crowned Kinglet (continued)			1/20	P.I.	8	G. Coffey	
1/17	Medford	4	R. LaFontaine	2/1	Scusset B.	16	M. Lynch#
2/17	S. Quabbin	5	M. Lynch#	2/23	Nantucket	15	K. Blackshaw#
Ruby-crowned Kinglet				2/23	Marshfield	8	B. Harris#
1/1	Ashland	1	N. Paulson	Yellow-breasted Chat			
1/1	Framingham	1	S. Sanderson	1/14	Chatham	1	R. Schain
1/13	Longmeadow	1	M. Moore	Eastern Towhee			
2/9	Squantum	1	A. Trautmann	1/1	W. Barnstable	2	M. Keleher
2/19	Watertown	1	D. Logan	1/1	Newton	2	T. Arsenaull
2/28	Rochester	1	M. LaBranche	1/3	Fall R.	2	L. Abbey
Eastern Bluebird				2/23	Fairhaven	3	SSBC (GdE)
1/1	Palmer	17	J. Young	Chipping Sparrow			
1/4	Northboro	20	J. + K. Hogan	1/1	Medford	2	M. Rines#
1/10	Southwick	18	S. Kellogg	1/1	Dighton	3	S. Whitebread
1/29	Westboro	14	T. Spahr	1/30	Scusset	7	J. Hoye#
2/22	Williamstown	19	J. Young#	2/2	Sandwich	7	J. Trimble
2/22	Sheffield	14	M. Lynch#	Clay-colored Sparrow			
Hermit Thrush				thr	Medford	1	R. LaFontaine#
1/1	Medford	2	M. Rines#	1/1	Westport	1	M. Lynch#
1/2	Groton	2	T. Murray	1/2	Hadley	1	P. Yeskie
1/4	Truro	4	J. Young	1/11	Edgartown	1	A. Walsh
2/17	S. Quabbin	2	M. Lynch#	1/11	Chilmark	1	J. Normandin
2/23	Sheffield	6	J. Young#	Field Sparrow			
Gray Catbird				1/1	Westford	3	B. Winn
1/1	Sandwich	2	M. Keleher	1/1	Westport	15	M. Lynch#
1/1	Lakeville	2	G. d'Entremont#	1/21	Bourne	7	J. McCumber
1/26	Falmouth	3	G. d'Entremont#	Savannah Sparrow			
Brown Thrasher				1/4	Hadley	3	M. Lynch#
1/3, 2/28	Watertown	1	D. Logan	1/8	E. Boston (B.I.)	3	R. Schain
1/26	Mattapoisett	1	J. Young	1/14	Duxbury B.	3	S. Van der Veen
American Pipit				2/22	Rehoboth	3	J. Sweeney
1/1	P.I.	4	M. Watson	Ipswich Sparrow			
1/5	Gloucester	4	P. Miliotis	1/8	E. Boston (B.I.)	1	R. Schain
1/5	Sandwich	3	M. Keleher	1/11	P'town	2	SSBC (Petersen)
1/12	Nantucket	25	K. Blackshaw#	1/19	Duxbury B.	1	B. Cassie
2/22	Seekonk	9	J. Sweeney	1/25	Revere B.	1	J. Johnson
2/22	Rehoboth	3	J. Sweeney	1/27	Duxbury B.	1	R. Bowes
Cedar Waxwing				2/1	Gloucester	1	O. Burton
1/9	Wachusett Res.	64	M. Lynch#	Nelson's Sparrow			
1/11	Sandwich	25	G. d'Entremont	2/1	Eastham (F.H.)	14	J. Trimble
1/23	Pittsfield	40	E. Neumuth	Saltmarsh Sparrow			
1/30	Waltham	22	J. Forbes	1/31	Eastham (F.H.)	3	K. Yakola
2/15	Hadley	150	B. Emily	Seaside Sparrow			
Lapland Longspur				1/31	Eastham (F.H.)	4	K. Yakola
1/14	Duxbury B.	8	S. Van der Veen	Fox Sparrow			
1/23	Salisbury	30	D. Larson#	1/19	Lakeville	3	J. Carlisle
1/27	P.I.	10	T. Wetmore	2/4	Jamaica Plain	2	T. Factor
2/7	Hadley	30	D. McLain	2/8	Sheffield	2	R. Wendell
Snow Bunting				2/14	Westport	4	P. Champlin
1/4	Northampton	250	D. McLain	2/23	Fairhaven	2	SSBC (GdE)
1/4	Pittsfield	300	G. Hurley	Swamp Sparrow			
1/5	Hadley	275	S. Motyl	1/1	Westboro	5	N. Paulson
1/5, 2/2	Orange	120, 120	B. Lafley	1/1	Lakeville	5	G. d'Entremont#
1/5	Cheshire	230	J. Pierce	1/5	Fairhaven	5	M. Lynch#
1/11	P'town (R.P.)	300	SSBC (Zollo)	1/17	P.I.	2	T. Wetmore
1/20, 2/25	P.I.	250, 200	v.o.	1/31	Eastham	3	K. Yakola
2/20	Orleans	220	P. Trull	2/11	Northboro	1	S. Moore#
Orange-crowned Warbler				White-throated Sparrow			
1/5	Falmouth	1	J. Partan	1/1	Westport	26	M. Lynch#
Common Yellowthroat				1/17	Rockport	16	M. Lynch#
1/1	Lakeville	1	G. d'Entremont#	1/25	Hadley	1	S. Motyl#
Palm Warbler				1/thr	Ipswich	max 11	J. Berry
1/1	Westport	1	M. Lynch#	2/thr	Ipswich	max 12	J. Berry
1/5	Fairhaven	1	M. Lynch#	Harris's Sparrow			
Pine Warbler				1/1-11	Wenham	1 ph	Bill Busby
1/2	Gloucester	2	D. Sandee	White-crowned Sparrow			
1/8	Sandwich	2	E. Hoopes	thr	Concord	2	v.o.
1/20	Holyoke	1	D. Tisdell	1/23	E. Bridgewater	3	J. Carlisle
2/4	Plymouth (MSSF)	5	B. Harris#	1/26	Fairhaven	2	J. Young
Yellow-rumped Warbler				Western Tanager			
1/5	Fairhaven	7	R. Sawyer	1/2	Gloucester	1 m	K. Limone
1/8	Longmeadow	10	M. Moore	1/30	Truro	1	K. Skowron

Red-winged Blackbird			2/25	Lexington	30	M. Rines	
1/25	Lynnfield	52		2/25	Millbury	16	S. LaBree
2/1	Eastham	113	P. + F. Vale		Brown-headed Cowbird		
2/3	Northampton	38	L. Therrien	1/13	Wayland	58	B. Harris
2/9	Saugus	62	S. Zende#	2/1	Westport	150	G. d'Entremont#
2/22	Cumb. Farms	1000	J. Hoye#	2/22	Rehoboth	300	J. Sweeney
2/25	Amesbury	300	K. Elwell	2/23	Fairhaven	242	SSBC (GdE)
Eastern Meadowlark				2/23	Cumb. Farms	130	J. Lawson
1/1	DWWS	18	S. Avery	Bullock's Oriole			
1/8	E. Boston (B.I.)	3	R. Schain	1/1-25	Chelmsford	1 m	J. Smith
1/14	W. Bridgewater	3	J. Carlisle	Baltimore Oriole			
1/19	Plymouth	5	M. Faherty	1/15	Centerville	1	J. Sanford
1/23	Hadley	8	E. Dalton	Purple Finch			
2/1	Eastham (F.H.)	16	J. Trimble	1/15	Windsor	7	T. Gagnon
2/9	Cumb. Farms	18	L. Waters	1/20	Washington	14	E. Neumuth
Yellow-headed Blackbird				1/31	Wendell	2	M. Lynch#
thr	Cumb. Farms	1	P. Hunt + v.o.	2/14	Dalton	3	G. Hurley
Rusty Blackbird				Red Crossbill			
thr	Wayland	17	A. McCarthy#	2/24	Gill	1	J. Smith
1/1	Sheffield	61	G. Hurley	Common Redpoll			
1/2	Hadley	6	P. Yeskie	2/21	Granby	1	L. Rogers
1/23	Nantucket	6	E. Ray	Pine Siskin			
2/5	Falmouth	8	P. Trimble	1/2	Belchertown	1	L. Therrien
Common Grackle				1/2	Sharon	1	C. Turnbull
2/18	Boston (A.A.)	35	P. Peterson	Evening Grosbeak			
2/23	Wayland	18	J. Forbes	2/14	Belchertown	1	L. Therrien
2/24	Ipswich	16	J. Berry				



MAGNOLIA WARBLER BY SANDY SELESKY

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIRD SIGHTINGS

Taxonomic order is based on AOU checklist, Seventh edition, up to the 53rd Supplement, as published in *Auk* 129 (3): 573-88 (2012) (see <<http://checklist.aou.org/>>).

Locations		ONWR	Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge
Location-#	MAS Breeding Bird Atlas Block	PG	Public Garden, Boston
A.A.	Arnold Arboretum, Boston	P.I.	Plum Island
ABC	Allen Bird Club	Pd	Pond
A.P.	Andrews Point, Rockport	POP	Point of Pines, Revere
A.Pd	Allens Pond, S. Dartmouth	PR	Pinnacle Rock, Malden
B.	Beach	P'town	Provincetown
Barre F.D.	Barre Falls Dam	Pont.	Pontoosuc Lake, Lanesboro
B.I.	Belle Isle, E. Boston	R.P.	Race Point, Provincetown
B.R.	Bass Rocks, Gloucester	Res.	Reservoir
BBC	Brookline Bird Club	RKG	Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston
BMB	Broad Meadow Brook, Worcester	S.B.	South Beach, Chatham
BNC	Boston Nature Center, Mattapan	S.N.	Sandy Neck, Barnstable
C.B.	Crane Beach, Ipswich	SRV	Sudbury River Valley
CGB	Coast Guard Beach, Eastham	SSBC	South Shore Bird Club
C.P.	Crooked Pond, Boxford	TASL	Take A Second Look, Boston Harbor Census
Cambr.	Cambridge	WBWS	Wellfleet Bay WS
CCBC	Cape Cod Bird Club	WE	World's End, Hingham
Corp. B.	Corporation Beach, Dennis	WMWS	Wachusett Meadow WS
Cumb. Farms	Cumberland Farms, Middleboro	Wompatuck SP	Hingham, Cohasset, Scituate, Norwell
DFWS	Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary	Worc.	Worcester
DWMA	Delaney WMA, Stow, Bolton, Harvard		
DWWS	Daniel Webster WS	Other Abbreviations	
E.P.	Eastern Point, Gloucester	ad	adult
F.E.	First Encounter Beach, Eastham	b	banded
F.H.	Fort Hill, Eastham	br	breeding
F.P.	Fresh Pond, Cambridge	dk	dark (morph)
F.Pk	Franklin Park, Boston	f	female
G40	Gate 40, Quabbin Res.	fide	on the authority of
GMNWR	Great Meadows NWR	fl	fledgling
H.	Harbor	imm	immature
H.P.	Halibut Point, Rockport	juv	juvenile
HP	Horn Pond, Woburn	lt	light (morph)
HRWMA	High Ridge WMA, Gardner	m	male
I.	Island	max	maximum
IRWS	Ipswich River WS	migr	migrating
L.	Ledge	n	nesting
MAS	Mass Audubon	ph	photographed
MP	Millennium Park, W. Roxbury	pl	plumage
M.V.	Martha's Vineyard	pr	pair
MBWMA	Martin Burns WMA, Newbury	S	summer (1S = 1st summer)
MNWS	Marblehead Neck WS	v.o.	various observers
MSSF	Myles Standish State Forest, Plymouth	W	winter (2W = second winter)
Mt.A.	Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambr.	yg	young
NAC	Nine Acre Corner, Concord	#	additional observers
Newbypt	Newburyport		

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE BIRD SIGHTINGS TO *BIRD OBSERVER*

Sightings for any given month must be reported in writing by the eighth of the following month, and may be submitted by postal mail or email. Send written reports to Bird Sightings, Robert H. Stymeist, 36 Lewis Avenue, Arlington MA 02474-3206. Include name and phone number of observer, common name of species, date of sighting, location, number of birds, other observer(s), and information on age, sex, and morph (where relevant). For instructions on email submission, visit: <<http://massbird.org/birdobserver/sightings/>>.

Species on the Review List of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee, as well as species unusual as to place, time, or known nesting status in Massachusetts, should be reported promptly to the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee, c/o Matt Garvey, 137 Beaconsfield Rd. #5, Brookline MA 02445, or by email to <mattgarvey@gmail.com>.

Barry Van Dusen, Cover Artist for *Bird Observer*, to Receive Highest Honor for Bird Art

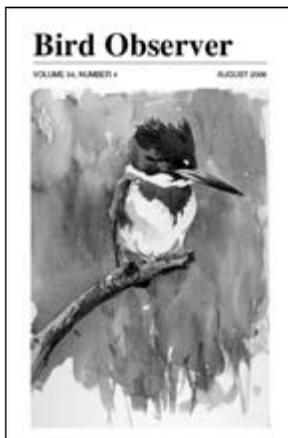
The Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin, recently announced Barry Van Dusen as its 2014 Master Wildlife Artist. Van Dusen has illustrated 63 covers for *Bird Observer*. The first was of a Cox's Sandpiper in December 1987; the most recent is the Field Sparrow that graces the cover of this issue.

Van Dusen, the Woodson's 34th Master Artist, will receive the prestigious Master Wildlife Artist Medal in September at the opening of the Woodson Art Museum's annual *Birds in Art* exhibition. Previous recipients of the medal include Roger Tory Peterson, Peter Scott, Don Eckelberry and Robert Bateman.

In announcing the 2014 Master, director Kathy Kelsey Foley said, "We are delighted to honor Barry Van Dusen and acknowledge his exceptional artwork. Barry's watercolors are remarkably luminous and sensitive, which is due in part to his preference for working in the field, a long-standing tradition among artists who look to nature for subject matter."



Van Dusen's work has been selected for inclusion in "Birds in Art" fourteen times since 1991, his first year in the exhibition. "The chain of Woodson Masters is forged by a common passion for birds and art," Van Dusen said. "I am honored to be a part of it!"



A blend of impressionism and realism, Van Dusen's watercolors begin with direct observation, fieldwork, and careful planning, but then are executed in a spontaneous, painterly style. Some of his watercolors are produced outdoors, directly from life; others are a studio synthesis based on fieldwork.

"Field sketching is at the core of my work as an artist," Van Dusen says. "It's an ongoing process of exploration and discovery that keeps me intimately connected to the natural world." He calls his sketchbooks his "science and art laboratories," adding that since 1983, he has filled more than eighty sketchbooks with thousands of drawings of birds, other animals, insects, plants, and landscapes.

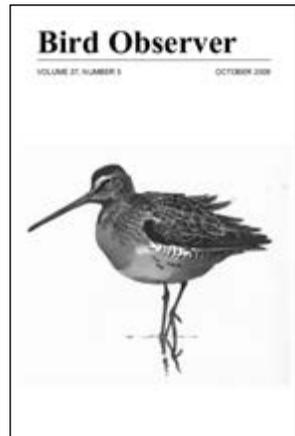
Van Dusen, who lives with his wife Lisa in Princeton, Massachusetts, also has a longstanding professional association with Mass Audubon, illustrating a wide

variety of publications, including natural history books, magazines, and pocket guides for the organization over a span of 27 years.



Van Dusen was born in 1954 and spent his childhood in the Sebago Lake area of Maine, where he first developed an interest in the natural world. Barry's father, a designer and skilled draftsman, encouraged Barry and his brothers to learn to draw at an early age. After graduating from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth in 1977, Barry worked as a commercial designer and illustrator. Since 1985 he has specialized exclusively in natural history art and illustration. In addition to his work for *Bird Observer* and Mass Audubon, Van Dusen's bird illustrations also have appeared in books published by the American Birding Association, HarperCollins, and both Princeton and Cornell University Presses. His articles and paintings have been featured in *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *Birding*, and *Yankee* magazines.

Van Dusen's published illustrations represent only one side of his artistic career. From the beginning, he has worked to develop skill as a painter, especially in watercolor. In the mid-1980s, Barry experienced an artistic turning point when he discovered the work of European wildlife artists who emphasized direct observation and field sketching. Van Dusen's skill as a field artist enabled him to participate in projects abroad sponsored by the Netherlands-based Artists for Nature Foundation. With this organization he has traveled to India, Peru, England, Ireland, Spain, and Israel and worked with some of the world's leading field artists to raise funds for conservation of threatened habitats. "These projects were vital to my continuing development as a field painter," says Van Dusen, "but they also have introduced me to other cultures, and shaped my outlook on worldwide environmental issues."



"I'm an artist first and a naturalist second," Van Dusen concludes. "Birds continue to fill me with awe and wonder, and I hope I can open other people's eyes to their beauty and why they need our protection."

ABOUT THE COVER

Field Sparrow

The Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) is a small, common, and dapper species. Its population swelled in the 19th century as forests were felled, but it recently has become a species in decline in many parts of the United States, including New England, as reforestation has progressed. The sexes are similar in plumage. The head is gray with a rufous crown and streak behind the eye. Field sparrows have a rufous back, light gray underparts, buffy flanks, and two whitish wing bars. Distinctive features include a pink bill and legs, and a prominent white eye-ring. Juveniles are duller with streaking below and on the crown. Regionally, some adults are much grayer and lack the buffy flanks and rufous stripe behind the eye. Despite geographic variation in size, tail length, and coloration, no subspecies are currently recognized. The Field Sparrow is closely related to Worthen's Sparrow of northern Mexico; some consider the two conspecific. It is also closely related to the Black-chinned Sparrow of the Southwest.

The Field Sparrow's breeding range encompasses most of the eastern half of the United States from Montana across the Great Lakes to central Maine in the north to just shy of the Gulf Coast in the south. They range as far west as central Texas. Field Sparrows are partial migrants; within most of their range, birds can migrate farther south or remain as residents. Most of the birds north of Massachusetts in the east and north of Kansas in the west migrate south in fall, wintering in central Florida, the Gulf Coast, western Texas, and northern Mexico. In Massachusetts, the Field Sparrow is considered a fairly common breeder, a common migrant, and a common winter resident in some areas. Most migrants arrive in April and depart by the end of October.

The Field Sparrow is a bird of scrubby old fields, overgrown pastures, and woodland gaps and edges. Power line cuts have become a preferred habitat in some areas. In general, Field Sparrows are seasonally monogamous and may produce two broods. Adults are faithful to their breeding sites, but juvenile birds tend not to return to their natal sites. Territorial chases sometimes result in fights with midair grappling and falling to the ground.

Field Sparrows have a variety of *chip*, *zee*, *eeee*, and *seep* calls and trills that function as contact calls or as warnings in the presence of a predator. Males have two song types. The simple song is the most common and begins with down-slurred notes followed by a trill. It primarily serves as territorial advertisement. The complex song is uncommon and consists of a different trill followed by slurred notes; it also serves as advertisement and signals aggressive tendencies. The birds sing from elevated song perches. Song is apparently largely learned, as isolated males do not develop a full song. One male was recorded singing the song of a Chipping Sparrow.

The female chooses the nest site, which is usually on or near the ground, either in grass or under a shrub. Later in the season, she may build a nest in shrubs or saplings. Only the female builds the nest, but the male may collect nest material. Nests are

constructed of coarse and fine grass and are lined with rootlets or hair. The female develops a brood patch and she alone broods the eggs for the usual 12 days until hatching, and she broods the chicks for the week to eight days until fledging. The clutch of four white or pale blue-green eggs is spotted with various dark colors. The young are altricial—helpless, nearly naked, and with eyes closed. Adults will give distraction displays if the nest is approached. Both parents feed the young mostly arthropods through the four to five weeks until independence. Young birds flock in late summer and, based on the recapture of adult birds banded as juveniles, may choose nesting sites for the following season before the fall migration (Adams and Brewer 1981).

Field Sparrows forage mostly in fields for seeds on the ground or in low vegetation. They usually eat fallen seeds but may also hop onto tall grass letting their weight bring the seed heads to the ground where they strip them. In breeding season, they also eat adult and larval insects. In winter Field Sparrows may form small foraging flocks.

Because nests are on or near the ground, Field Sparrows are subject to nest predation by a variety of predators including mammals, reptiles, and birds. Cowbird nest parasitism is highly variable, with different studies reporting from less than one percent to 80 percent of nests parasitized. The Field Sparrow population was probably highest in the late 19th century following the conversion of forests to agricultural lands. Although Breeding Bird Survey numbers from 1966-1991 reported a national decline of 3.4 % per year, Field Sparrow numbers did increase in the northern plains states. Reforestation removes suitable old field habitat, which is the primary predictor of population numbers in a locality. Field Sparrows are, nevertheless, still abundant in many regions, so despite the national declines there is hope for this lovely little sparrow. 🌿

William E. Davis, Jr.

Reference

Adams, R. J. Jr. and R. Brewer. 1981. Autumn selection of breeding location by Field Sparrows. *Auk* 98:629-631.

About the Cover Artist: Barry Van Dusen

Bird Observer offers a painting by the artist who has created many of our covers, Barry Van Dusen. Barry, who lives in Princeton, Massachusetts, is well known in the birding world. He has illustrated several nature books and pocket guides, and his articles and paintings have been featured in *Birding*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, and *Yankee Magazine* as well as *Bird Observer*. His interest in nature subjects began in 1982 with an association with the Massachusetts Audubon Society. He has been influenced by the work of European wildlife artists and has adopted their methodology of direct field sketching. He teaches workshops at various locations in Massachusetts. For more information, visit his website at <www.barryvandusen.com>. 🌿

AT A GLANCE

April 2014



WAYNE PETERSEN

The mystery bird in this issue is clearly a gull. Regardless of whether birders like gulls or not, gulls at least are easily recognizable at the family level. And there is more good news: when a gull has a pure white and otherwise unmarked head, there is a good chance it is an adult in breeding plumage as opposed to an immature or an adult in a more confusing nonbreeding plumage. Fortified with this information, it is possible to move forward with the identification process.

Where gull identification is concerned, there are several key features to consider before examining more subtle or obscure characteristics. The pictured gull provides a good look at several of these key characteristics. First, the mystery gull's bill is completely unmarked, rather pointy-tipped, and possesses a lower mandible that is practically devoid of a gonydeal angle. The eye of the mystery gull appears to be dark, and the wing tips look black, with only a slight indication of any white spots (i.e., mirrors) within the black primary tips showing at the ends of the folded wings. In a black and white photograph, the color tone of the bird's mantle is difficult to ascertain, but there is no sense that the mystery gull is pale as would be the case in a white-winged gull, e.g., Iceland or Glaucous, or dark as in a Great Black-backed or Lesser Black-backed gull.

When these features are taken together, there are only two possible gull species that need to be considered, Mew (including the Old World Common Gull and Kamchatka Gull) and Black-legged Kittiwake. Both Mew Gulls and Black-legged

Kittiwakes possess dark eyes. Mew Gulls of any race typically show at least a trace of a greenish or brownish spot on their relatively short, slim bill (a feature that at one time gave them the name Short-billed Gull). They also display conspicuous white spots (mirrors) in their black primary tips. When visible, the legs of a Mew Gull are yellowish or greenish-yellow.

By contrast, a Black-legged Kittiwake characteristically has a clear yellow bill with no trace of dark on it, as well as a relatively inconspicuous gonydeal angle on the lower mandible. Additionally, adult kittiwakes display a characteristic “dipped in ink” wingtip pattern, lacking the white mirrors that are typical of a Mew Gull. When visible, the kittiwakes’ legs are (not surprisingly!) black, not yellow. This combination of features makes the mystery gull an adult Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*).

Black-legged Kittiwakes are common to abundant winter visitors to the offshore waters of Massachusetts, typically arriving in mid to late fall and usually remaining until early spring. Severe nor’easters occasionally drive large numbers near shore. With a little patient panning with a telescope, you can often find small numbers almost any time in winter off Cape Ann or outer Cape Cod. The author photographed this kittiwake in Seward, Alaska, in June 2010. 🐦

Report Common Loon Sightings

MassWildlife

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is interested in receiving loon sighting reports this spring and summer. Reports of birds with chicks are of particular interest. For years, MassWildlife has been monitoring loons nesting in the state. Common Loons, listed as a Species of Special Concern in the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, returned to nest in Massachusetts in 1975 after being absent as a breeding bird in the state for almost a century. From 1975 to 1983 loon pair activity was only observed on the Quabbin Reservoir. In 1984, loon activity was also observed on the Wachusett Reservoir. By 1986, loon nesting activity began to spread to other water bodies in the state. In 2012, 35 territorial loon pairs were documented on 13 lakes and ponds in the state. Submit loon pair sighting reports via MassWildlife’s electronic Vernal Pool and Rare Species VPRS Information System, an online data submittal and mapping application, or email: mass.wildlife@state.ma.us, or send by postal mail to “Loon Survey”, DFW, Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, 100 Hartwell Street, Suite 230, West Boylston, MA 01583.

AT A GLANCE



WAYNE PETERSEN

Can you identify the bird in this photograph?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

IF YOU CARE, LEAVE THEM THERE!

LATE SPRING TO SUMMER IS BABY BIRD TIME.

REMEMBER:

- Only people who are licensed rehabilitators, or veterinarians who occasionally treat wildlife on an emergency basis, may legally care for wildlife.
- Many backyard birds leave their nests days before they can fly. The parent birds will continue to care for their young, even away from the nest, so leave the young birds alone.
- If you find a bird and have already handled it, place the bird back in the nest or in a tree or shrub close by. Birds lack a sense of smell and will not reject a youngster placed back in the nest.
- To protect the young birds, keep cats and dogs away or move the chick to the nearest shrub or natural cover. Then leave the area and allow the parent birds to respond to the food-begging calls of their young.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/fish-wildlife-plants/wildlife-rehabilitation.html> and <http://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/birds/baby-birds-out-of-the-nest>

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**PERIODICALS
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<http://massbird.org/birdobserver/>