Bird Observer

VOLUME 49, NUMBER 3 JUNE 2021

HOT BIRDS

A **Varied Thrush** that was reported from Carver on March 23 continued an influx of the species into the Northeast.The landowner there did not allow visitors, but in West Brookfield a property owner allowed a few birders to enjoy a male Varied Thrush that appeared at feeders April 5–6. The female that overwintered in Sudbury was last seen a month earlier, March 5. Since February 1, birders also photographed two Varied Thrushes in Rhode Island. Justin Lawson took the photo on the right.

Sean Williams observed perhaps the most remarkable bird of the season—a **Great-tailed Grackle** in Plymouth on April 10. An April 9 observation by Leslie Gomes was subsequently made. This is only the second known record for the Atlantic Coast, the first bird having spent the winter of 1983-1984 in in Nova Scotia. Our state has two previous records of grackles that were either Great- or Boat-tailed but could not be identified; recordings of its vocalizations clinched the identification of this bird.Sean Williams took the photo on the left.

On April 13, Frederick Bowes photographed a shorebird at Duxbury Beach that he suspected was a Pacific Golden-Plover, only the fourth Massachusetts record. However, when he circulated the photo to other birders, it turned out to be even rarer, a first state record **European Golden-Plover**. Upon reviewing his photos, Frederick discovered that he had encountered the bird on April 5 but had not recognized its rarity at the time. Neil Dowling took the photo on the right.

On May 8, Amasa and Genlyne Fiske-White found an apparent **Golden-winged Warbler** in Montague. It was still present on May 17. The bird has been singing a Blue-winged Warbler's song nearly all of the time, raising some question about its parentage. A few days later, Bob Zajda encountered one in Warren, singing a slightly more typical Golden-winged song; Bob subsequently reported a female with it. Julie Blue took the photo on the left.

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Bird Observer

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Birding the Eastern End of Nantucket

Skyler Kardell

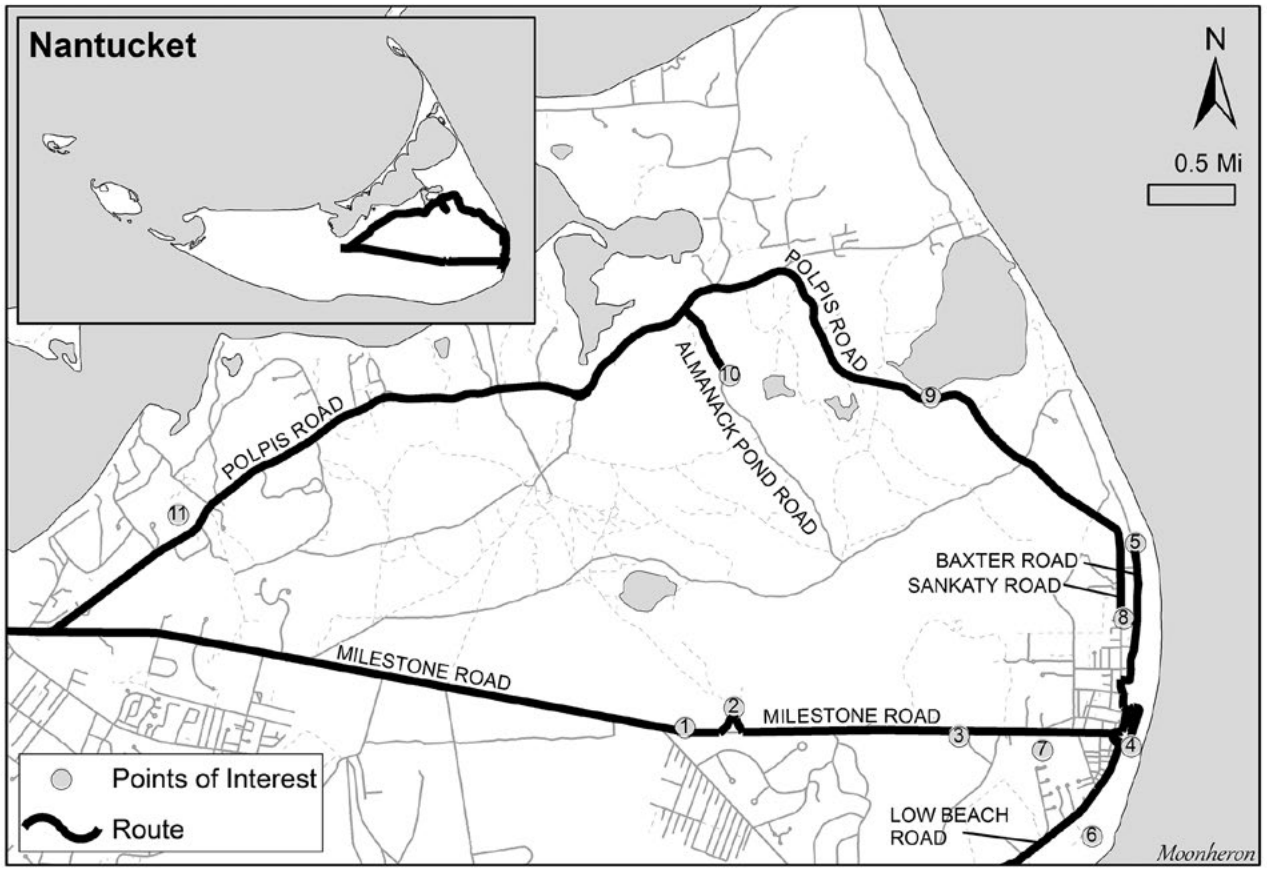
Nantucket—my home birding patch—is the name of the county, the island, and the town—which comprises all of the island's villages and hamlets. The two offshore islands of Tuckernuck and Muskeget also fall under the jurisdiction of Nantucket.

The Steamship Authority, the island's main lifeline to the rest of the world, provides ferry service to Nantucket. In 2021, a round-trip ticket between Woods Hole and Nantucket Island costs $19.00 for adults and $10.00 for children 5–12. Between Hyannis and Nantucket, the fare is $39.00 per adult and $20.00 per child. If you are looking to cover Nantucket on a budget— whether you are trying to pick up Barn Owl for your state list or chasing some far-blown vagrant—taking your bike is definitely the way to go. You can stow your bike for $8.00 from Woods Hole and $14.00 from Hyannis. In-season round-trip rates for automobiles are $192–$250 from Woods Hole and $492–$600 from Hyannis; reservations fill early, and standby is not guaranteed. Off-season rates are lower, and bringing a car is less of a hassle. Nantucket via bike is an appealing mode of transportation and gives you the ability to explore more of the island. Birding on foot is another option. Nantucket is at its best when enjoyed at a leisurely pace with the wind at your back. This mentality is best reflected in some of the bumper stickers you are bound to see, such as "20 is plenty in 'Sconset" and "What's the rush? You're already on Nantucket."

"East or west?" is a question familiar to every Nantucket birder. To the west is the tiny seaport of Madaket, with the associated neighborhoods of Dionis, Fisher's Landing, and Jackson Point. To the east, one finds the historic beachfront hamlet of Siasconset or 'Sconset—few locals actually refer to this place by its full name—and the villages of Wauwinet, Quidnet, and Tom Nevers. My answer is unwaveringly "east."

Heading west is a promising endeavor as well, and hitting it right during spring or fall can reap a terrific morning flight over Millie's Bridge or a plethora of migrants working their way through the pine expanses. With Madaket and Jackson Point in the west, birding is intuitive; everywhere you want to bird is basically within biking or walking distance, and it is easy to cover plenty of ground using a vast network of quaint avenues and side streets. However, there is a certain cachet that is lost when going that route.

On the east side of the island—in stark contrast to the compact layout of the west— the places for "good" birding are spread out over a much larger area. In the realm of the under-birded destination of Nantucket, the east is the road less traveled. This is not due to a lack of avian biodiversity, which is consistent throughout the island, but due to a lack of knowing how to bird the east end thoroughly. In this article, I discuss how and where to bird the east side of Nantucket. I recommend a personal



Map of Eastern Nantucket.

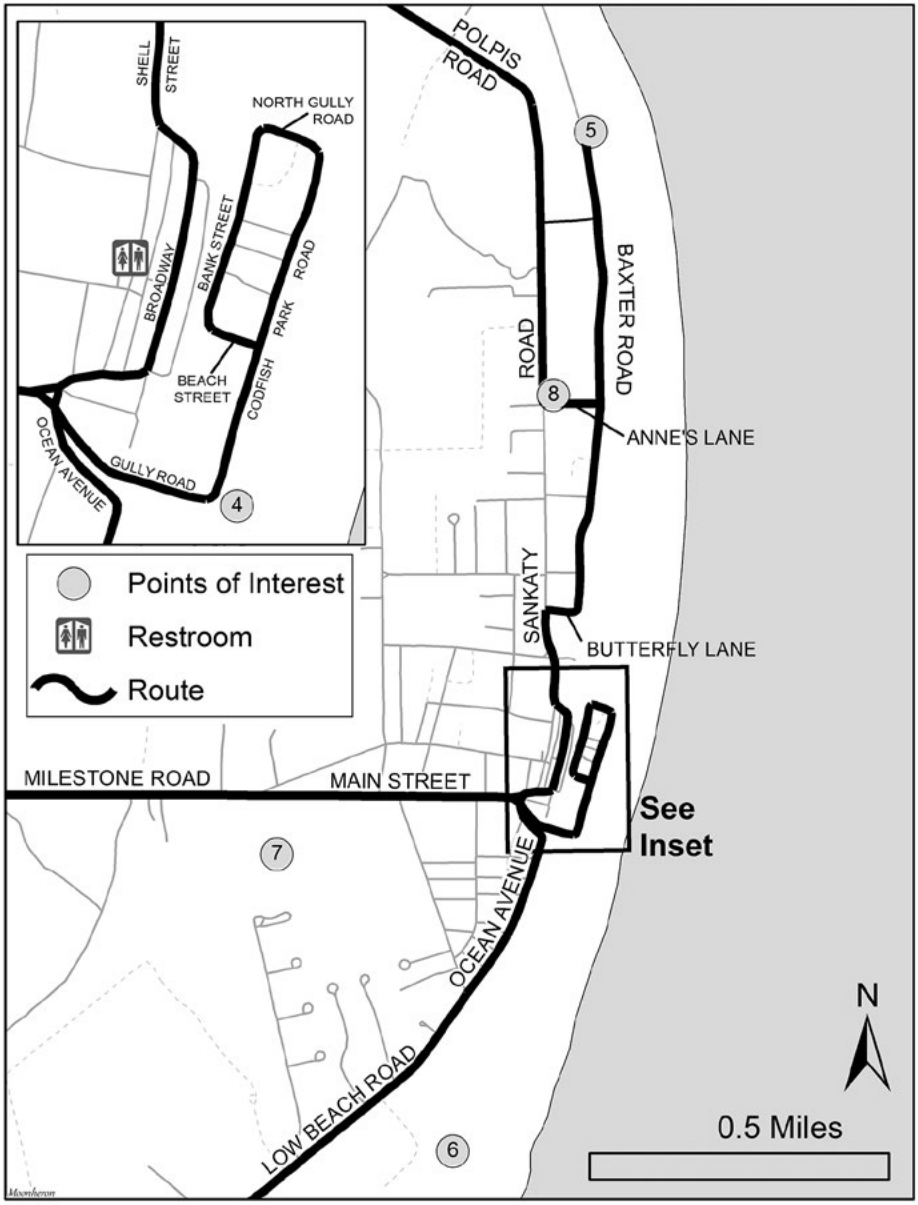
Ring-necked Pheasant is an uncommon and local breeding species deep within the eastern moors, although the cock's rooster-calls can be heard early mornings from places like Altar Rock or Folger's Hill. All photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.

vehicle, but it is not a must; many visitors take the bus that leaves from town and drops them off in the middle of 'Sconset village. Unfortunately, this is a seasonal prospect; the Nantucket Regional Transit Authority has scheduled the route between June 14 and September 6 in 2021. The bus runs every hour on the quarter hour, beginning at 7:45 am. The charge is a modest $3.00 fare each way and includes the option of bringing a bike with you.

Heading east from town is as simple as knowing which direction the beach is. Before embarking down Milestone Road, consider stopping at either the Stop & Shop or Cumberland Farms on Sparks Avenue to load up on food; this will be the last reasonably priced food for miles. Restrooms, water, and the sweet smell of salt air are the only things you will find free to enjoy on this end of the island, so take advantage of all the facilities that mid-island has to offer before you get started. Indeed, the only public toilets in 'Sconset are located at the corner of Shell Street and New Street at Pump Square.

Once you pass the rotary on Milestone Road, you begin the six-mile trek toward Siasconset. On either side, you will see miles upon miles of pitch pine that has invaded the grasslands and heathlands, recalling Outer Cape Cod more than Nantucket. Some of these pine stands will be opportune spots for owling in the winter months, so any of the dirt roads off Milestone Road are worth checking. If you are on this road in the spring, keep one eye on the road and one eye to the sky for Swallow-tailed Kites. On your way back, whether in spring or late summer, look for Common Nighthawks overhead.

The first stop along Milestone Road is the Milestone Overlook (1) just about 4.0 miles from the rotary and 0.25 mile before the must-see Milestone Cranberry Bog (2). As soon as you pass the turnoff for Tom Nevers on the right, there will be a pullout on your left that overlooks the entire bog complex. It can be quite good for skywatching and is a fine place to scan the bogs with a scope. I like to try to get a read on water



Map of Sconset

American Woodcock breeds almost exclusively on the east end of the island, with the farm fields of Polpis and the moorlands being particularly good spots for hearing this bird's haunting display noises.

levels from here in order to select the fields around the bogs that look like they could hold the most ducks or shorebirds, depending on the season. If you visit the island in summer, venture west from here on foot into the appropriately named Nantucket Serengeti, which can host nesting Merlin and Ring-necked Pheasant. One of my favorite memories from here is flushing a whole family of pheasants— a mother and a few of her chicks—from along the path.

Once you have had your fill of the vast, rolling Nantucket landscape, drive east 0.25 mile to Milestone Cranberry Bog —until 1964 the oldest and largest contiguous cranberry bog in the world, now a collection of separate bogs—owned and operated by the Nantucket Conservation Foundation. At the brown rock with the number 220 on it, turn left onto the dirt road that leads you through red gates. These gates will occasionally be closed in early spring for pesticide spraying (I can never remember the exact dates, but they seem to coincide with peak Pectoral Sandpiper season) and in fall for harvesting. Continue to a quaint little parking lot and a few trails that branch off in different directions. Take the trail that heads north until you reach a modest-sized compost heap, which has been known to hold Indigo Bunting, as well as several species of sparrows. From this spot, you will be able to see all of the bogs so you can plan your route. I like to make my way east first and circle back because I usually come here in the afternoon, and I want to avoid looking at the birds when they are backlit. More often than not, I bring a scope. Unless you plan on scrutinizing every mallard to check for Mottled Duck as I sometimes do, there is no need for one. The impoundments are sufficiently close together that you can cover each field by walking the perimeter. If you go through the fields, perhaps for a snipe hunt, make sure you are wearing your most durable pair of knee-high waterproof boots.

Northern Harrier is a quintessential bird of the sandplain grasslands of Nantucket, an endangered habitat, 90% of which can be found on Cape Cod and the islands.

My absolute favorite time of year to bird Nantucket is in late August. The weather is perfect, there is ample time for exploring, and by that time fall migration is well underway. Coming to the Milestone Cranberry Bog during this time is an experience I recommend to anyone, anywhere. There are many species of goldenrod that are in bloom—too many for me to identify—and often in the twilight the serenade of mole crickets emanates from the sides of the impoundments. Bobolinks begin descending en masse around this time, and waders of all sorts can be found here, too. Little Blue Heron is a frequent early disperser, and some begin to arrive as early as July. Great Egret and Snowy Egret also may be readily seen here.

Before this area was cultivated into commercial cranberry bogs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these fertile moors were prime hunting grounds during fall migration for Eskimo Curlew, American Golden-Plover, and other shorebirds that would be blown in from offshore following northeast winds. Now, although the former species is critically endangered and the latter is uncommon, these fields still yield good numbers of wind birds—perhaps the best on island that are not along the immediate coast. Stilt Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, as well as Greater and Lesser yellowlegs all can be found at Milestone Bog in late summer and early fall. The occasional oversummering waterfowl may come as a surprise to those who are unfamiliar with the reputation of southeastern Massachusetts for retaining these birds. Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and Hooded Merganser have been recorded here during June through August. Although you can thoroughly cover the entire bog complex in under two hours, it is easy to stay well past sunset. I often stay on still summer nights to listen for Sora or breeding rails.

Return to Milestone Road and continue east for another 1.25 miles. Overgrown farm fields dominated by scrub oak replace the stands of pine trees. There is a small patch of wetland to the south of Milestone Road, directly across from the Siasconset Golf Course parking lot (3). Although this parking lot is private, it is okay to idle on the side of the road and pace back and forth along the bike path. This is one of the most

Nantucket's outer islands are touted to be some of the southernmost breeding sites of Common Eider in the Atlantic, and it is possible to see family groups like this that have just dispersed from their nesting grounds.

reliable spots on island in February and March for American Woodcock, but unfortunately, witnessing their flattened remains along the median strip is not uncommon.

This wetland is unusually productive in spring for warblers and *Empidonax* flycatchers, even though Nantucket is one of the least diverse places in New England for neotropical migrants in spring. Although we are ideally situated in fall for collecting hundreds of thousands of these trans-Atlantic visitors, the situation is rather bleak in spring because we are quite far out of the way for a bird whose primary trajectory is a slingshot back to the same plot of forest in southern Quebec that it nested in the previous year.

Check across the street for geese or Sandhill Crane that might be lingering on the golf course. In winter 2017 there were two Ross's Geese here for an extended stay, appearing just in time for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Snow Goose has also been recorded at this spot in every month from December through May.

The next stop is Siasconset, better known as 'Sconset. The best birding in this tiny tourist village usually takes place in fall and in winter. Among the eight sectors of the island, 'Sconset often ranks high for total species during the CBC. Alas, in recent years an increase in development has eliminated some of our favorite birding stops here, but a lot of the good ones remain.

First and foremost is Codfish Park (4), which is not a traditional park, but rather a small collection of houses just below the bluff. To get here, follow Milestone Road from the wetland for 0.8 mile until you reach the Main Street Rotary. Take the first right off the rotary onto Ocean Avenue, then immediately—in 40 feet— take a slight left onto Gully Road, a narrow two-way street. Follow Gully Road—going under the 'Sconset Foot Bridge—for approximately 500 feet to the parking area for Codfish Park beach. If you park in front of the pitch pines, you may sometimes find a decent-sized mixed flock without moving far from your car. In spring, Summer Tanager has

been seen here along with a number of Baltimore Orioles, Pine Warblers, and Hairy Woodpeckers (still somewhat of a rarity on Nantucket).

During the winter, the sea watching from this spot can be excellent at first light. Codfish Park traditionally has been a spot to see tremendous numbers of gulls, including Little, Black-headed, Bonaparte's, and Lesser Black-backed—along with every Iceland Gull on the continuum from the white-winged *L. g. glaucoides* to the Herring Gull-like *L. g. thayeri*. Gull numbers peak sometime in late February to early March and last only a week at most. By mid-March and April, most have either gone to Quidnet or moved inland.

Continue along Gully Road as it curves parallel to the beach; it becomes Codfish Park Road at Beach Street. Follow Codfish Park Road to the end and curve left onto North Gully Road. In approximately 1,200 feet you will reach the intersection of North Gully Road and Bank Street. Yellow-breasted Chat was almost a guarantee here on any given CBC, but in 2019, a private developer tore up all of the thickets, and now only a bare plot remains. Beyond this plot is another large stand of pines that is slightly more productive than the pines at the previous stop. In fall, large numbers of migrants descend on these trees; counts of up to fifty Blackpoll Warblers have been tallied. The edge of the bluff supplies some meager undergrowth habitat, and given the right day, you may find warblers, orioles, and tanagers clinging to the sides of this cliff face on any bit of vegetation they can find. You can go back via Codfish Park Road, but consider returning by way of Bank Street. Amazingly, a homeowner along this street has had Black-chinned Hummingbird come to his feeders not once, but twice—first in November 2007, second in November 2010.

When you get back to the Main Street Rotary you have two options: continue north to the 'Sconset Erosion Viewpoint (5) for sea watching, or head south along Ocean Avenue for 0.8 mile to Low Beach (6). Both locations have held their fair share of rarities. The good news is, you can bird both spots, but if you have time for only one of these stops, here are some things to consider.

To get to the viewpoint, exit the rotary onto Main Street, then turn left onto Broadway—which turns into Shell Street—turn right onto Butterfly Lane, turn left onto Baxter Road, and drive approximately 0.9 mile. 'Sconset Erosion Viewpoint offers considerable elevation, and you are bound to rack up a high species total. However, many of the birds are quite far from the shore, and a scope is a necessity. The birds tend to be sedentary here, rather than on the move, so they are easy to observe. If you have a scope and enjoy the challenge of squinting at far-out eider flocks, then the Viewpoint is right for you.

It is also my experience that birding at sunrise is much more manageable at the Sconset Erosion Viewpoint than at Low Beach, where you will probably find yourself looking into the sun for a solid hour. However, if backlit morning flights are not your thing, there are plenty of beaches along the south shore to cover, which some island birders swear by.

Low Beach is 0.9 mile from the rotary via Oceanview Drive. It is the southeasternmost beach on Nantucket. As the name implies, there is little to no

A view of Folger's Marsh from the top of Polpis Road in 1890 vs. 2020: on the right of this picture is where the University of Massachusett's biological field station now lies. The differences show the changes in vegetation that have occurred, most dramatically within the last half-century. Left photograph courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.

elevation here, and what you can see is basically right in front of you. Many of the birds here are close to shore, but they are also on the move, rarely staying long enough in the rip to feed. If you don't have a scope, Low Beach is the better option for optimal viewing.

The area by Low Beach is also home to a now semi-defunct sewer bed, which attracted Sage Thrasher, Cliff Swallow, and Lapland Longspur in the past. The new 'Sconset Water Tower (7) rises up west of this spot, and it is from this side of the tower that the pair of nesting Common Ravens is most easily viewed. Prior to 2019, Nantucket County possessed only a single confirmed raven record. Since then, this species has successfully nested along the back of the Water Tower in 2020 and looks to be on the same track again for 2021.

Before leaving Siasconset, be sure to check Anne's Lane (8) and the adjacent "trifecta thicket" for seasonal rarities. If you are returning from the viewpoint, drive south on Baxter Road, and just shy of 0.5 mile, take your second right onto Anne's Lane. From Low Beach, return to the rotary, take the second right onto Main Street, then turn left onto Broadway—which turns into Shell Street and then into Sankaty Road—for 0.5 mile, and turn right onto Anne's Lane. In spring, Anne's Lane comes alive with cherry blossoms that attract orioles, tanagers, and warblers. Indigo Bunting and blackbirds are also drawn to the nearby feeders. The "trifecta thicket" is named for a Bay-breasted Warbler, an Orange-crowned Warbler, and a Prairie Warbler concurrently found in this tangle at the corner of Anne's Lane and Sankaty Road on the CBC held on December 27, 2015. There is a piece of cocktail trivia associated with this corner as well; one of the thumbnail images for Bay-breasted Warbler on the Merlin app is of the bird found on the 2015 CBC.

Drive north on Sankaty Road, which turns into Polpis Road where it curves left. In 1.2 miles, you will pass Hoick's Hollow Road on your right and the entrance to Mass Audubon's Sesachacha Heathlands Wildlife Sanctuary on your left. Continue for approximately 0.7 mile along a beautiful scenic drive along Sesachacha Pond

(pronounced *sus-ack-a-cha*). Stop at the Sesachacha Pond pullout (9), which has been reinforced in recent years to prevent the road from collapsing into the pond, but a serious nor'easter is bound to wash over the pavement with a few inches of water. In winter, Sesachacha Pond, the largest of Nantucket's waterbodies, will often hold large numbers of scaup, scoter, Ruddy Duck, and merganser. Indeed, this is arguably the best place to score Common Merganser on the island. The Ruddy Duck count sometimes exceeds two hundred birds. At least one Tufted Duck has been seen here in early winter over the last few years, usually arriving with the first major flocks of Greater Scaup. The pond is also an exceptional spot for Great Cormorant on Nantucket and is likely the only place you will encounter this species outside the jetties of Nantucket Harbor. Sometimes they will perch on the large pine tree across the pond, but more often, they will be at the barrier beach that separates this brackish water from the sea. On a still, moonlit night in late May, listen for Chuck-will's-widow and Eastern Whip-poor-will; both species may have been nesting here regularly over the last five years.

Continue on Polpis Road for 1.9 miles, turn left onto Almanack Pond Road (10), and bird the road. This can be a choice spot in spring and summer. Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, and American Woodcock breed here. Some of the mainland species are quite at home in this still-maturing deciduous woodland, and rare nesters on Nantucket that are typically more abundant on nearby Cape Cod can be found here as well, such as White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Cooper's Hawk. Visitors to the Almanack Arts Colony have heard the whiny *too-too-too* of Northern Saw-whet Owl along the road. If you examine this habitat during the day, it would not seem too far-fetched to think that an Eastern Screech-Owl might reside here as well. This, however, is one of the great mysteries of Nantucket: there are none. Barred Owl and Great Horned Owl are also absent.

Return to Polpis Road and head west for 3.3 miles, where the visage of civilization begins to return as you leave country-style sheep farm estates for modern, affluent suburbia. Moor's End Farm (11), one of just a handful of commercial farms on the island, is located across from Kelley Road and can be a prime spot to look for gulls in the winter. It is also arguably the best overwintering spot for Palm Warbler in New England, which usually scores this sector at least a dozen on the annual CBC. During the winter of 2017–2018, at least one of the Ross's Geese spent a few weeks here. Glaucous Gull is reliable at the farm once the scallop pile begins to collect. In the spring, you may see Killdeer in the fields. Access the farm from a parking area at the intersection with Shimmo Pond Road and walk around the fields. However, it is always courteous to let one of the farmhands know; they will appreciate the heads-up.

When you finish birding and arrive back in town, you may want to celebrate your big day with a reasonably priced ice cream cone on Main Street, or a delicious cup of hot cocoa from the Corner Table Cafe at the corner of Broad and Federal Streets. After all, you deserve it.

This is the basic run-down of places to bird on Nantucket's east end. This is by no means a complete or substantial list, and I encourage you to do your own exploring while out here. There is so much left to be discovered on this island, and there are so

few pairs of eyes that are out looking. Consider posting your sightings on eBird and sharing them with the Nantucket Conservation Foundation if you observe anything on one of their many properties. Maybe you could be the one to discover Nantucket County's first Great Horned Owl.

Skyler Kardell *is a second-generation Nantucketer and a rising freshman at Connecticut College in New London. He is the Coastal Steward for the Tuckernuck Land Trust. Skyler is a regular participant on the Nantucket Christmas Bird Count and several local Bird-a-thons.*

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The Waterbird Society
Western Field Ornithologists
Wilson Ornithological Society

This article first appeared in the Winter '20 issue of Orion Magazine

9 Rules for the Woke Birdwatcher

J. Drew Lanham

1. **Lower your binoculars**. See bird and person in the full context of their being, feathers or skin. We all share the same air, same water, same earth, and same fate in the end. Don't just list and be done.
2. **Leave your assumptions behind**. Don't make snap ID decisions on birds or humans. A murmuration wheeling across a purpling sky may appear to be a single being but is in fact a collection of countless individuals in one movement. Admire the whole. Respect the one.
3. **List your privileges. Know your range**. Can you wander like a warbler without wondering who's watching you with suspicion?
4. **Be bold. Speak up.** Identify racism as you would call out a crow among snow buntings. Silence lets the oppression grow unchecked.
5. **Let history guide you.** John James Audubon didn't care about Black human lives. Harriet Tubman knew the woods and wetlands well—she even used an owl call to identify herself to freedom-seeking souls. Let her be your wild-bird liberty-loving hero.
6. **Form your own taxonomic committee.** A bird tagged with some slave owner's name had an identity long before that person claimed it for their ego's sake. Goodbye, Clark's nutcracker. So long, Bachman's sparrow. Let the birds speak for themselves. Try renaming by beak size or behavior, song sound, habitat ties, or color.
7. **Dismantle offensive monuments.** Watch the golden eagle soar over Mount Rushmore and think of what was stolen, what once rose there naturally sacred before chisels made men into gods. See the peregrine falcon circling Georgia's Stone Mountain, the world's largest shrine to white supremacy, then imagine that eyesore free of the treasonous rebels marring its granite face. Understand the power of exclusion.
8. **See color.** It's not recognizing a person's blackness or brownness that's the sin but using that different hue as leverage for oppression. Painted buntings don't want to be plain. Black birds aren't all the same. Neither are Black human beings. Respect and celebrate differences. Inclusion is protest.
9. **Keep your personal feel guide close**. Equity is a hard bird to find. Diligently search for it in places with common ground. Listen intently to the stories of others, just as you would strain, in the dim dawn hours, to discern the lisps of migratory birds overhead. Discomfort is growth.

J. Drew Lanham *is an author, poet, professor, and bird adorer living in Seneca, South Carolina. He is the author of* The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature *and* Sparrow Envy: Poems*. His essays have appeared in* Best American Essays*,* Vanity Fair*,* Oxford American*,* Terrain*,* Newsweek*, and elsewhere.*

The Status of American Oystercatchers in Massachusetts

Katharine C. Parsons,
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American Oystercatcher. Photograph by Lauren Miller-Donnelly**.**

Introduction

The American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus palliatus*) is a regular summer presence on a number of beaches, marshes, and islands along the coast where it nests and forages. It is a charmingly clownish shorebird with bright plumage and a relatively large size atypical of most shorebirds. Its large, emphatically orange bill is a trademark of the species. Often seen in pairs or small groups, it has a loud, heralding call and exaggerated courtship behaviors. When disturbed during incubation, it readily concedes the nest site and vanishes to a distant location to quietly wait out the threat.

American Oystercatchers are long-lived, migratory shorebirds. The Atlantic Coast subspecies breeds from Maine to Florida and winters from New Jersey south to Florida (Working Group et al. 2020). American Oystercatcher is one of only a few shorebird species that nest in temperate latitudes in the eastern United States and are thus, as ground nesters, vulnerable to human disturbance and predators along the heavily developed Atlantic coastline. The state population has been recovering over the past five decades and is currently stable, although not numerous. The opportunity to spot oystercatchers and observe their antics is a special summertime treat.

Information about American Oystercatchers in Massachusetts is available due to the dedicated and concerted efforts of many shorebird conservationists who monitor and protect nesting sites and provide data annually to MassWildlife's Natural Heritage

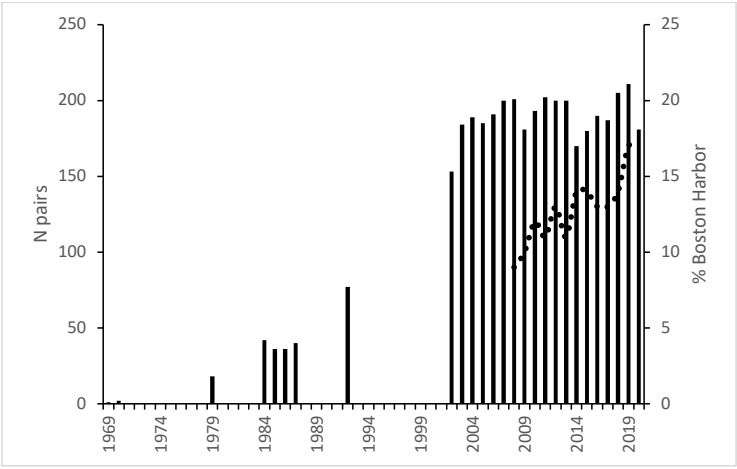

Figure 1. Abundance of nesting American Oystercatcher in Massachusetts, 1969-2020 (bars) and percentage of population nesting in Boston Harbor (●; MADFW 2016-2020; 2012-2020 data are preliminary).

& Endangered Species Program (see below). The purpose of this paper is to summarize information on the status, ecology, and conservation of American Oystercatchers in the state.

Status

The conservation status of American Oystercatcher globally is ranked Least Concern with a stable population trend (BirdLife International 2016). In the United States, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified the American Oystercatcher as a Focal Species and a Species of Conservation Concern (USFWS 2011). In Massachusetts, it is ranked as a Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need (S2B—imperiled due to low abundance, restricted range, declines, or other factors), and of very high conservation concern (MADFW 2015). Mass Audubon's *State of the Birds*, which analyzed population trends three times between the first and second state breeding bird atlases, reported a strong recent population increase and high climate vulnerability (Petersen and Meservey 2003; Walsh and Petersen 2013; Walsh and Servison 2017).

Although the record is incomplete, ornithologists think the breeding distribution of American Oystercatcher was significantly more extensive in the early nineteenth century than currently, possibly extending through the maritime provinces of Canada (Walsh and Petersen 2013). Range contraction occurred due to egging and market hunting. After extirpation from Massachusetts in the early 1800s, breeding American Oystercatchers reappeared in 1969, when a single pair was discovered nesting on Nantucket (MADFW 2015). Over the 1970s–1990s, the population increased to nearly 200 pairs (approximately 100 sites), where it has remained relatively stable for the past two decades (Figure 1).

American Oystercatcher eggs. Photograph by Beth Howard.

During each of the past five years, approximately 25% of the state's oystercatchers have nested on Nantucket, 20% on Martha's Vineyard, 15% on the Bristol County coast of Buzzards Bay, and 16% in Boston Harbor (MADFW 2016–2020). Similar to total abundance, distribution of nesting has been relatively stable with the exception of Boston Harbor, where nesting has increased by 125% since 2006 (Figure 1). The most important areas of the state for nesting American Oystercatcher, numerous small islands in Buzzards Bay and Boston Harbor and a depauperate predator community on the large islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, are characterized by relative isolation from ground predators.

Ecology

American Oystercatchers migrate from wintering grounds to breeding sites in Massachusetts during February and March. They are known to be highly site faithful and return to prior years' breeding locations (Working Group et al. 2020). During April through July, oystercatchers are engaged in nesting and brood-rearing activities. The adults and juveniles begin to gather at staging locations in August and September in preparation for migration and typically have left New England by late September (Petersen and Meservey 2003).

Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program has monitored and protected American Oystercatchers for 25 years. Shorebird biologists annually have documented nesting abundance, distribution, and productivity according to a standardized protocol (Melvin 2012) for 25%–35% of the pairs nesting in the state. Of 31 sites with active oystercatcher nesting monitored by Mass Audubon in 2019, 68% were on small islands, 22% were on relatively remote barrier beaches, and 10% were on elevated areas within extensive salt marsh.

American Oystercatchers begin arriving at Massachusetts breeding sites in mid-March, and earliest nesters are typically incubating eggs by the third week of April. The earliest hatching date recorded in 2019 was May 20 (43 pairs monitored by Mass Audubon); in 2020, the earliest date was May 13 (58 pairs). Oystercatchers that fail to hatch their first clutch are likely to relay once and possibly a second time. The latest hatch dates recorded in 2019 and 2020 were July 24 and July 14, respectively.

American Oystercatchers are known to lay a clutch of one to four eggs over a three-to six-day period and begin incubation after the second egg is laid (Working Group et al. 2020). Eggs are incubated by both male and female for 27 days, and

	2016	2017	2018	2019
n pairs (n sites)	29 (21)	33 (20)	42 (26)	52 (31)
n eggs (n clutches)	79 (36)	86 (38)	97 (42)	130 (54)
average clutch size	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.4
% hatching	23	31	53	48
n chicks (n broods)	18 (11)	27 (22)	51 (25)	62 (33)
average brood size	1.6	1.2	2.0	1.9
n fledglings (n chicks)	9 (17)	18 (27)	43 (51)	38 (57)
% fledging	53	67	84	67
% pairs hatching $\geq$ 1 egg	46	79	69	70
% pairs fledging $\geq$ 1 chick	19	35	59	49
average fecundity (fledglings/pair)	0.35	0.78	1.05	0.83

Table 1. Reproductive performance of American Oystercatcher at nesting sites monitored by Mass Audubon Coastal Waterbird Program, 2016-2019.

hatching occurs over a two-to-five-day period. Young birds are fed by their parents for approximately two months after hatching, and young also begin foraging on their own at approximately two weeks post-hatch. They typically attain the capacity for sustained flight at five to seven weeks after hatching (Working Group et al. 2020).

During 2016–2019, the clutch size of oystercatcher pairs monitored by Mass Audubon averaged 2.3 eggs (174 clutches; Table 1). The percentage of eggs hatching ranged from 23% to 53% and brood size ranged from 1.2 to 2.0 chicks. Fledging success ranged from 53% to 84% and was the strongest predictor of fecundity rate, which ranged from 0.35 to 1.05 over the four-year period (Table 1). In most of the past five years, fledging success documented in Boston Harbor was the highest of any region in the state (MADFW 2016–2020).

Relatively large post-breeding assemblages of American Oystercatcher have been documented at Monomoy and South Beach in Chatham (MADFW 2015). These locations with extensive mud flats, salt marshes, and natural inlets presumably provide oystercatchers with enhanced foraging opportunities as they prepare for migration.

Conservation

The primary threats to successful breeding by American Oystercatchers are egg and chick predators, and nest overwash. The cause of egg loss was not determined in a significant proportion of failed clutches in pairs monitored by Mass Audubon in 2016–2019 (Table 2); however, of those lost clutches where the causal factor was known, predation was the most important determining cause. In addition, it is likely that many of the lost eggs that could not be attributed to a known factor were taken by predators. Loss of clutches due to overwash was also significant in most years. In all years except 2018, the canid predators eastern coyote (*Canis latrans x Canis lycaon*) and red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) were responsible for most eggs lost due to predation. In 2018, avian

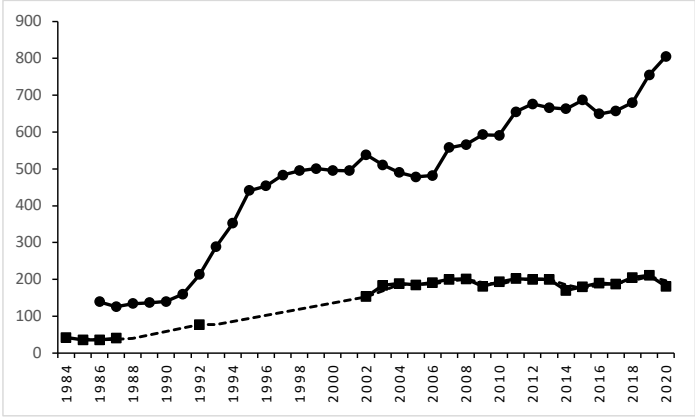

Figure 2. Population growth of nesting Piping Plover (●) and American Oystercatcher (■) in Massachusetts, 1984-2000 (MADFW 2020; plover 2018-2020 and oystercatcher 2012-2020 data are preliminary).

predators such as American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and gull species (*Larus* spp.) were responsible for most egg loss.

Losses attributed to human disturbance are relatively rare in pairs monitored by Mass Audubon. Shorebird conservationists throughout the state implement a standardized protocol for protection and monitoring that includes the installation of symbolic fencing of nesting habitat (posts, twine, and signs) or use of oystercatcher-specific signage. Additionally, because American Oystercatchers preferentially nest on islands and on elevated sites within salt marshes, their eggs and chicks are relatively isolated from human disturbance.

In nesting areas shared with Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*), it is likely that American Oystercatcher has benefited from conservation efforts for plovers. The Piping Plover was listed under federal and state endangered species laws in the mid-1980s; the increase in plover numbers over the next decade coincides with population growth of oystercatchers (Figure 2). However, as Piping Plovers have continued to increase in the state by exploiting marginal nesting habitat on hundreds of beaches, American Oystercatcher has apparently reached carrying capacity, and it is likely that the availability of island nesting sites is limiting further population growth.

Reliance on small islands and salt marshes for nesting sites makes American Oystercatcher one of the coastal bird species most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Walsh and Servison 2017; Working Group et al. 2020). Clutches lost to overwash as a result of storms and extreme tidal events accounted for an average 25% of egg failure at sites monitored by Mass Audubon in 2016–2020. Although subject to random occurrence and variable timing, the overall rate of clutches lost to overwash increased significantly over the past five years (Table 2).

Management recommendations for successful conservation of American

	2016	2017	2018
Predation	40	50	38
Overwash	12	25	17
Abandoned	12	10	4
Unknown	36	15	42

Table 2. Factors of egg loss of American Oystercatcher at nesting sites monitored by Mass Audubon Coastal Waterbird Program, 2016-2020. Numbers represent percent of all clutches laid (n clutches= 36 in 2016, 38 in 2017, 42 in 2018, 54 in 2019, 28 in 2020).

Oystercatcher include continued nesting site protection and monitoring according to the standardized protocol currently in use (Melvin 2012). In addition, reducing trash on beaches that could attract predators, providing effective signage for kayakers accessing islands, and prohibiting dogs from nesting and foraging habitat are essential objectives for successful management. Outreach to the beachgoing public is a proven strategy for effective protection of beach nesting birds in the state.

State-wide data management and timely analysis are constrained by the lack of a system to streamline data submission to MassWildlife similar to online tools available for plovers and terns. A state-wide analysis of nesting site jeopardy due to climate change impacts would allow shorebird conservationists to pursue options for enhanced habitat protection and replacement.

Fostering the continued engagement of the dozens of organizations and individuals providing on-the-ground protection of American Oystercatchers throughout the state is of the highest priority. In particular, Shiloh Schulte (Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences), Karen Beattie (Nantucket Conservation Foundation), Luanne Johnson (BiodiversityWorks), Carol Trocki (Mosaic Land Management, LLC; Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park), and Carolyn Mostello (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife) have long championed the success of oystercatchers in Massachusetts. Support for these organizations as well as efforts by the Cape Cod National Seashore, Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, The Trustees of Reservations, and Tuckernuck Land Trust is key to maintaining a robust population of American Oystercatchers in the state and planning for their success in the future.

Acknowledgments

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American Oystercatchers. Photograph by Ben Carroll.

Squam Lake and Its Loons: Holding a Mirror Up to New Hampshire's Loon Population

Tiffany Grade and John Cooley, Jr.

Picture 1. Loon Preservation Committee works under state and federal permits to collect loon eggs from failed nests for research purposes. A nest camera shows one of the authors collecting an unhatched loon egg from Squam Lake. Photo credit: Loon Preservation Committee.

When Shakespeare famously wrote of actors holding a mirror up to nature, he could not have imagined how well the analogy would fit the Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) of Squam Lake, New Hampshire. In this case, it is the loons of Squam that hold a mirror up to loons elsewhere in the state, both in their challenges and in their successes. The Squam Lake loons have been monitored and documented since 1975 by the Loon Preservation Committee (LPC), a nonprofit organization working to preserve and protect loons throughout New Hampshire. For more information about LPC, please visit www.loon.org.

The 6,800-acre Squam Lake has been a microcosm for the state for at least the last 45 years. After all, LPC was founded by Rawson Wood, a resident of Squam Lake who was concerned about the declining loon population on the lake. These declines were mirrored throughout the state, leading to LPC's statewide efforts to protect this iconic bird. Shortly after LPC's founding, the first documented case of lead poisoning killing a Common Loon came from Squam Lake (Locke et al. 1982; LPC unpublished data). Today, LPC continues to work to understand the challenges facing Squam's loons.

Common Loons were listed as a state-threatened species in New Hampshire in 1979 after more than a century of population declines resulting from habitat loss, human disturbance of nest sites and breeding loons, and direct persecution. As LPC's efforts began to pay off and Squam's loons climbed out of the trough of those years,

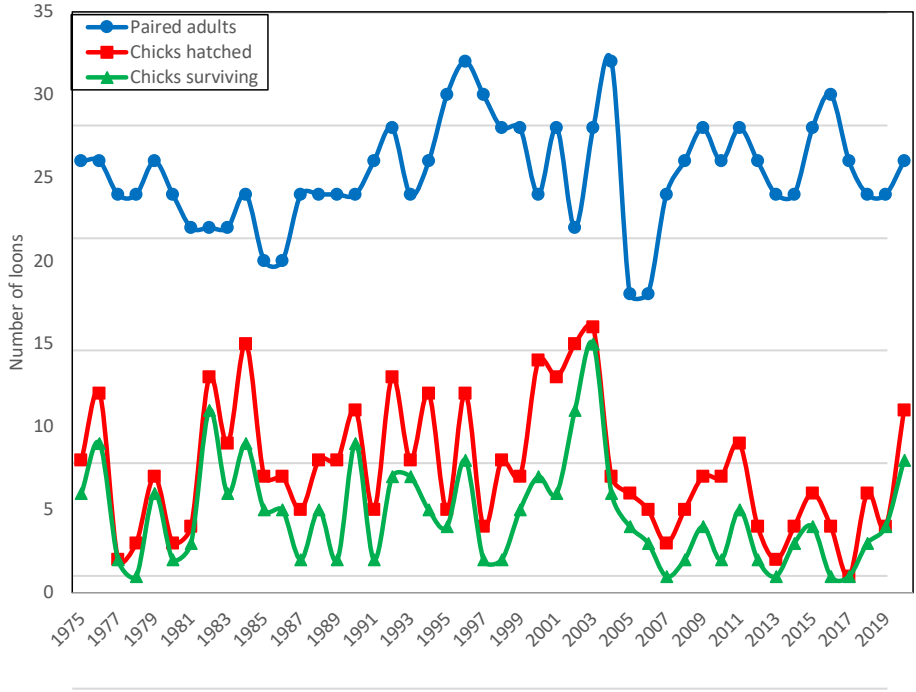

Figure 1: Loon population of Squam Lake, New Hampshire, 1975-2020.

Squam's loon population settled into the expected ups and downs that the vagaries of loon breeding success can bring (Figure 1). In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the Squam Lake population was averaging 14 pairs of adults, 10 hatched chicks, and 6.6 successfully fledged chicks each year. In the banner year of 2003, Squam fledged 15 loon chicks.

After having 16 pairs of loons on the lake in 2004, LPC had little reason to believe Squam's loon population would not continue to do well. But in 2005, the population dropped to only nine pairs of loons—an unprecedented 44% decline in the paired loon population, the largest single-year decline on a large lake that LPC has observed in its history. This was followed by the near-complete reproductive failure of the remaining loons, with only a single chick fledging in 2007. Although the adult population has rebounded to an average of 13 pairs since 2008, productivity has remained low. In several years in the last decade, only one chick fledged from the lake; in 2017, only a single chick *hatched*—a low not seen in the 45 years LPC has been monitoring Squam. Average productivity on Squam since 2007 is only half the statewide average and half the level needed to maintain a population (Figure 2).

So what happened on Squam Lake? Like loons throughout New Hampshire, Squam's loons are facing multiple co-occurring stressors, including habitat loss, increasing disturbance from recreational activities, increasing predator populations, and climate change. But there are two threats—chemical contaminants and lead poisoning, neither unique to Squam—that, combined with these other stressors, seem to have

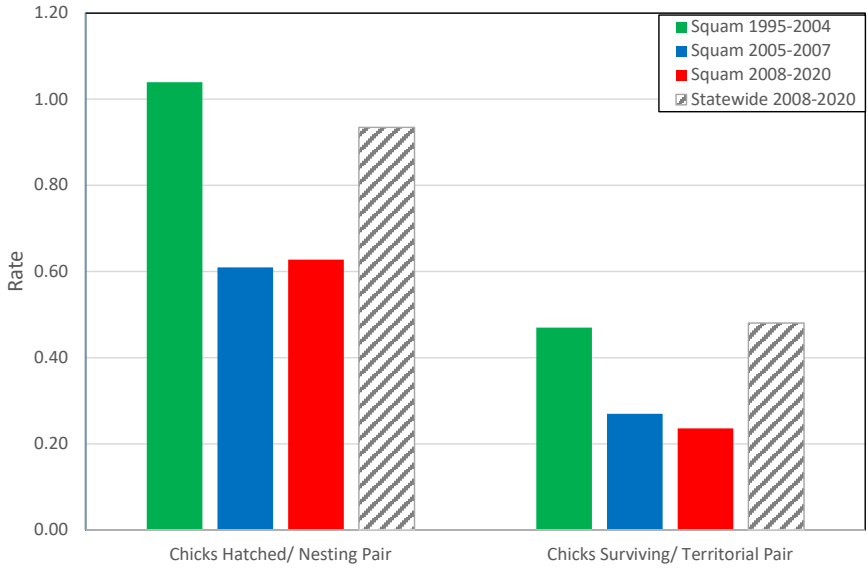

Figure 2: Productivity rates on Squam Lake (New Hampshire) compared with those for the rest of the New Hampshire loon population.

contributed significantly to the declines in Squam's loon population. As these threats have been identified, Squam Lake has provided a cautionary tale for New Hampshire's loon population.

An alphabet soup of contaminants

To all appearances, Squam is a relatively well-protected lake, with 35% of its shoreline and nearly 30% of its watershed conserved (B. Wymer, Squam Lakes Conservation Society, personal communication). There is no industry and minimal agriculture and commercial development in the watershed. In short, it is not the place to expect elevated levels of chemical contaminants.

But loon eggs have told a different story. LPC works under state and federal permits to collect unhatched loon eggs from failed or abandoned nests for research purposes (Picture 1). As part of LPC's investigation into the declines in the Squam loon population between 2005 and 2007, LPC submitted unhatched eggs for contaminant analysis—and the results were an alphabet soup of contaminants, with levels up to six times higher in eggs from Squam than in eggs from other lakes tested. Contaminants tested included polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), which are used as flame retardants; per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), used in stain guards and firefighting foam; polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), used in industrial insulating and cooling agents; dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), its breakdown product dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene (DDE), and the pesticide chlordane; and dioxins and furans, which are byproducts of industrial processes. Isotope tests indicated that the

Picture 2: Rafts like this one at Pleasant Lake protect nesting loons from fluctuating water levels and shoreline predators. Photo credit: Kittie Wilson.

contaminants primarily came from Squam Lake rather than from the loons' wintering ocean environment (LPC, unpublished data)—a result that was expected based on loon breeding biology and the fact that nutrients in bird eggs generally come from recent dietary uptake (Custer et al. 2010).

Further testing of eggs from the periods before and after the years 2005–2007 indicated there may have been a spike in PBDEs, PCBs, PFAS, and chlordane as well as dioxins and furans during those years, although the small sample size of eggs from this period, due to the loss of paired adults, complicates interpretation of these data. Increased runoff may account for a potential spike in contaminant levels, as LPC has found a correlation between elevated runoff and higher contaminant levels in loon eggs two years after the runoff event (LPC, unpublished data). The two-year delay makes sense, given that these contaminants bioaccumulate and biomagnify in aquatic food webs. Although overall contaminant levels on Squam Lake declined after 2007, some loon eggs from Squam continue to register elevated contaminant levels.

What does this egg contamination mean for loons? The effects of these contaminants on loons are poorly understood, although this question is an area of active research for LPC. For now, the best we can do is compare contaminant levels in loons to levels that affect health and reproductive success in other bird species. Approximately 70% of the eggs tested from Squam Lake from 1993 to the present contained levels of PBDEs and PFAS that approached or exceeded levels that are known to affect other bird species, and 41% of eggs had similarly elevated levels of DDE. Several eggs also exceeded effects levels for PCBs, and LPC is carrying

Picture 3: Loon nest rafts will be fitted with shade fabric and camouflage netting to cool the nest—a pilot version on Lake Winnipesaukee shown here. Photo credit: Loon Preservation Committee.

out further testing and research to understand levels of dioxins, furans, and dioxin-like PCBs in loon eggs. In combination with other stressors, the apparent uptick in contaminant levels in the years 2005–2007 may have contributed to the decline in Squam's loon population and productivity, but LPC is continuing its research to understand possible effects of the contaminants.

The question immediately arose as to the source of these contaminants within the Squam watershed. As mentioned earlier, Squam is not the lake on which one would expect to see elevated contaminants. To try to answer that question, LPC launched a sampling program focusing on areas of the lake from which the loons had disappeared between 2005 and 2007, and thus might have been expected to have had higher contaminant levels. Sampling first focused on crayfish, followed by sediments, as we worked into the tributaries that feed the lake. Realistically, this search was like looking for a needle in a haystack, so our surprise was great when we found three areas of elevated contaminants in the sediments: one for PCBs, dioxins, and furans and two for DDT. The first site was 2,900 times higher than background levels in sediments for PCBs and 140 times higher for dioxins and dioxin-like compounds. The two DDT sites were 16 and 430 times higher than background. These sites exceeded levels of sediment quality guidelines established by state and federal agencies (LPC 2017), and it is likely that there are additional contaminated areas or potential sources of contaminants in the watershed. From our initial discovery of these contaminants in loon

Picture 4: A nest camera shows a hopeful scene of a loon pair using one of Loon Preservation Committee's nesting rafts on Squam Lake. Photo credit: Loon Preservation Committee.

eggs, LPC has shared its results with state and federal agencies and local stakeholders, and we are working closely with the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and local organizations to find a solution to these contaminated sediments.

But there was one more sample type that needed to be tested: fish. Given that loons are a fish-eating species and that these contaminants move through the food web, fish are the bridge between the contaminated sediments and crayfish we found and the loons—and the immediate source from which loons are ingesting the contaminants (along with some crayfish). But there was one other potential risk: human health. As a species high on the aquatic food web, loons are an important indicator species of the health of the aquatic environment (Strong 1990, Evers 2006). If loons were acquiring the contaminants from fish, it seemed likely that there could be a risk to humans eating fish from the lake as well.

Sampling and testing fish from Squam Lake for PFAS and PCBs were carried out by NHDES. Early in 2020, the results came out: NHDES was issuing new, more stringent fish consumption guidelines based on elevated levels of PCBs (NHDES 2020). Like many lakes in New Hampshire, Squam already had fish consumption guidelines due to mercury contamination, but the PCB guidelines are much more restrictive. This outcome seems like the ultimate case of loons as indicator species—not just for the health of the aquatic environment and other wildlife, but for people as well.

Let's "Get the lead out!"

At the same time Squam's loons were dealing with a possible influx of chemical contaminants, they were also dealing with an increasing threat from another source—lead fishing tackle. As will be discussed below, lead fishing tackle is the leading

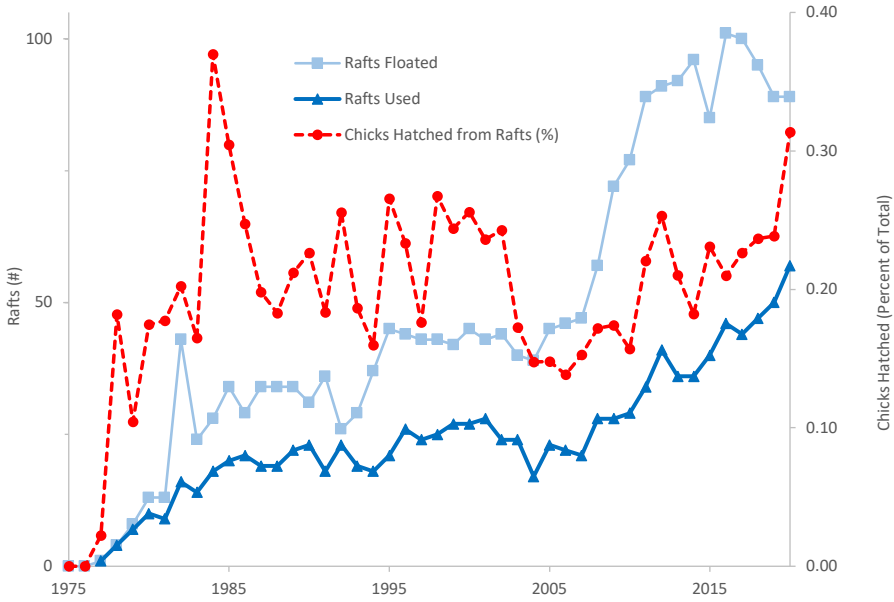

Figure 3: Over four decades of loon nest raft use in New Hampshire accounts for a fifth of all chicks hatched in the state, on average, and reached record levels in 2020. Note secondary vertical scale for the proportion of chicks hatched from rafts.

documented cause of adult loon mortality in the state (Grade et al. 2018). On Squam Lake, the rate of lead tackle mortality nearly doubled in the years after 2001—the year the public boat launch on Squam was refurbished, resulting in an increased number of boats and fishing tournaments on the lake. While correlation is not causation, this increased fishing pressure is a potential mechanism to explain the increase in lead tackle deaths among Squam's loons after 2001.

"Social chaos" among Squam's loons

A population can only take so much. The combination of stressors facing Squam's loons—from increased mortality due to lead fishing tackle to a possible influx of chemical contamination to increasing recreational and predation pressures to climate change—seems to have created the perfect storm on Squam, potentially leading to the population collapse in 2005–2007. But the effects were not isolated to those years. Loons are a long-lived species with a lifespan of at least 25–30 years and a protracted life history strategy (Paruk et al. 2021). Perturbations in their environment cast a long shadow over a loon population, and it takes them a long time to recover.

The loss of so many paired adults in 2005 created a vacuum in Squam's loon population, and elevated rates of mortality from lead fishing tackle and other anthropogenic causes contributed to losses in the population as well. These gaps were filled by loons from the floater population—loons from other lakes that did not have territories. While these new birds were necessary to restore Squam's adult loon population, the result was chaos in the loons' social structure, with loons fighting over

territories that either had chicks or had produced chicks the previous year. These fights disrupted incubation and often resulted in nest failures, and intrusions into territories with chicks sometimes resulted in the deaths of the chicks. This social chaos seems to have contributed to the poor productivity of Squam's loon population in the years after 2007.

A cautionary tale for New Hampshire's loons

Squam's situation may appear to be unique—the rare perfect storm. But the threats that shaped the storm are common across the state. While the concurrent uptick in lead tackle mortality and contaminant levels on Squam, in concert with other stressors, may have been the tipping point that contributed to the decline in Squam's loon population, these challenges are hardly unique to Squam's loons, and they threaten loons throughout the state.

The danger of lead fishing tackle to loons and the loon population in New Hampshire is significant. A single lead split shot sinker will kill a loon in two to four weeks after ingestion (Pokras and Chafel 1992, Sidor et al. 2003). In a study of lead tackle mortality between 1989 and 2012, LPC found that the state's loon population could have been as much as 43% higher at the end of the study period if the loons that died of lead poisoning had survived to continue reproducing. This study documented that mortality from lead fishing tackle has significantly inhibited the recovery of loons in New Hampshire (Grade et al. 2018).

As of 2016, New Hampshire law prohibits the sale and freshwater use of jigs and sinkers weighing ≤1 oz., and LPC has a lead tackle buyback program (see www.loonsafe.org) to remove lead from use and encourage anglers to make the switch to non-lead tackle. Reducing lead tackle mortality is critical for the recovery of the New Hampshire loon population—and for Squam's population as well.

Squam is also not unique in its cocktail of chemical contaminants. LPC has tested unhatched loon eggs from failed nests from 24 other lakes, encompassing 29 loon territories, in New Hampshire. With the exception of levels during the apparent spike on Squam in 2005–2007, these lakes have similar overall contaminant levels to eggs from Squam, although some contaminant classes, notably PBDEs, remain higher on Squam. Some other New Hampshire lakes also stand out for elevated levels of certain contaminants: Canobie Lake and Lake Winnipesaukee for PFAS and Lake Francis and Merrymeeting Lake for PCBs.

In short, Squam Lake holds up a mirror to other New Hampshire lakes for the challenges facing its loon population, and perhaps Squam has showed us how close to the tipping point the loon population may be. Squam Lake tells a cautionary tale for all of New Hampshire's loons.

Recovering New Hampshire's loon population

As we look outward to the rest of New Hampshire and beyond, lessons learned on Squam Lake are a source of caution but also a case study in resilience. The incremental, ongoing recovery of the state's breeding population since the 1970s has involved a

sustained effort of protection and outreach. Although loon abundance remains well below the natural upper limit of available habitat or carrying capacity, and depends on continued management, the population has more than tripled since the 1970s (LPC, unpublished data). After four decades, the biggest mysteries about loon biology and the threats affecting the population are still unanswered. Nonetheless, proven methods for mitigating some threats and boosting the pace of recovery are now well understood on Squam and elsewhere. When a local population approaches the tipping point, and as the fundamental threat of climate change becomes ever clearer, we now have the benefit of this knowledge to let us anticipate and adapt.

Beginning on Squam in 1977 and since then extending to over 100 other lakes, the most familiar way to help Common Loons in New Hampshire has been to float an artificial nest platform, or raft (Picture 2). These platforms mimic the loon's preferred natural nest on a tiny island or floating bog mat, locations that are buffered from shoreline predators and flooding. Rafts improve nesting success by as much as 50% at failure-prone sites (Desorbo et al. 2007), and raft deployment has become an annual ritual for a grassroots network of LPC field staff and loon volunteers throughout New Hampshire. As loons slowly recolonize suitable lakes and breeding sites vacant since the declines of the last century (Kuhn et al. 2011), the success-boosting fleet of nest rafts has also expanded to mitigate nest failures and degraded habitat. In 2020, for example, a record number of nesting pairs used rafts (57, including seven on Squam), and almost a third of loon chicks hatched in the state came from raft nests (Figure 3).

But this tried-and-true technique now has a new, forward-thinking design twist. Rafts are exposed to the full extent of summer sun, so the incubating loon and eggs are especially vulnerable to heat stress. To mitigate, in 2021 raft nests on Squam and other lakes will feature an added layer of shade fabric and camouflage netting over the nest to keep it cool (Picture 3). The added shade may lower the temperature by only a few degrees, but that difference could give raft-nesting loons a few more decades, on average, of suitable climate at the southern edge of their breeding range as summer temperatures continue to warm. As the complex of loon stressors on Squam has made clear, even modest measures to alleviate individual factors such as heat stress are worthwhile in the effort to stave off more catastrophic tipping points.

Hope for the future

The year 2020 brought encouraging news for Squam's loon population: eight loon chicks fledged from the lake, the highest number since 2003. All eight hatched from nesting rafts floated by LPC and were protected by LPC's ropes and signs (Picture 4). Early summer on the lake brought very little fighting among the loons, as many of the pairs settled quickly and quietly onto their nests. We hope the loon population is stabilizing after the long shadow cast by the perfect storm that overtook Squam, and that LPC's efforts to support and recover Squam's loons will continue to pay off with increased adult survival and successful nesting. With these efforts, we are working to ensure that Squam will reflect a recovering and successful loon population across New Hampshire, resilient to both familiar and emerging threats.

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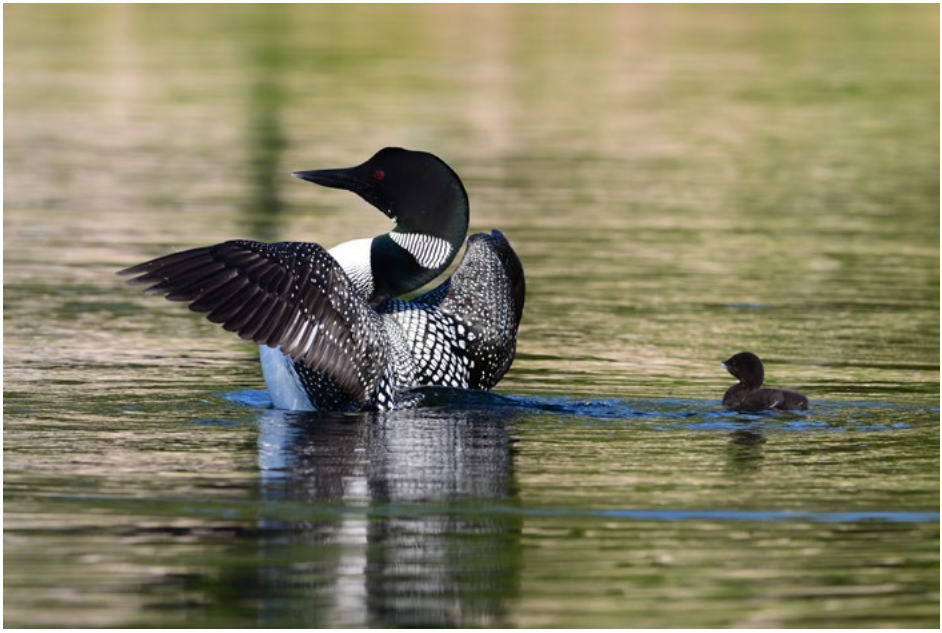
After earning a Ph.D. in medieval history, ***Tiffany Grade*** *realized bird conservation was her real passion and completed a master's degree in conservation biology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She began working for the Loon Preservation Committee in 2008 as Squam Lakes Biologist, leading LPC's intensive research, monitoring, management, and outreach efforts to understand the causes of the declines in Squam's loon population and restore a healthy population of loons to the lake.*

John Cooley, Jr. *is a senior biologist with the Loon Preservation Committee and has coordinated LPC's field program since 2005. After a first encounter with loons on a canoe trip in Quebec, his introduction to their ongoing recovery in New Hampshire came through a graduate program in conservation biology at Antioch New England in Keene, New Hampshire.*

PHOTO ESSAY

Common Loons

Kittie Wilson



Common Loons. All photographs by Kittie Wilson.

MUSINGS FROM THE BLIND BIRDER

Bird-Related Idioms

Martha Steele

I frequently use idioms involving birds and often introduce into my conversation bird-related phrases, the meanings of which we all understand, thanks to common usage, but which we could not infer from the words alone. For example, my husband Bob and I sometimes explain to friends that our nearest neighbors in Vermont live nearly three quarters of a mile away by car but only a few hundred yards "as the crow flies" if we bushwhack through the forest that separates our homes. In the fictitious story that follows, I have a little fun with bird-related idioms, embedding as many as I can into the narrative.

Bob and I are early birds year-round, but especially during migration. Indeed, so convinced are we that the early bird catches the worm, that we usually rise between 4:00 and 5:00 am to get ready for whatever awaits us outside. One recent spring morning, we decided to kill two birds with one stone by heading to a wildlife management area to bird and then to visit friends who lived nearby.

We headed out in the early dawn light, and eagle-eyed Bob spotted a Ruffed Grouse camouflaged along the side of the dirt road about 50 yards ahead. We crept slowly forward hoping that it might announce its presence to me by flushing with its characteristic explosive whirring sound. But alas, the grouse just walked into the forest and disappeared. I muttered that he was a bad egg, being so uncooperative.

We peregrinated our way to our destination, stopping several times to look and listen for birds. Bob asked for my prediction of how many species we would see that day. Being an optimist, I predicted 100 species; Bob laughed and said I would be way off. One of us would be eating crow before the day was out.

When we arrived at our destination, Bob noticed a snake at the edge of the grassy parking area. After gently poking with a stick what turned out to be a garter snake, he pronounced it dead as a dodo. Alvin and I kept our distance. We started our walk and soon came to the edge of a small cliff where we had a bird's-eye view of the forest below us. Bob scanned the sky and exclaimed, "Black Vulture!" This species has been slowly expanding its range northward and was a county life bird for Bob. Meanwhile, I heard what I thought was a Brown Creeper and called to Bob to confirm my identification. He smiled and said yes. Because for many years I had struggled to connect the song with the creeper, I felt as proud as a peacock.

We continued our walk and soon broke out into an open field. A Song Sparrow sat atop a small bush but was suddenly swooped up by a Cooper's Hawk that came out of nowhere. Goodness, he sure was a sitting duck for the swift raptor. The trail started to descend more steeply, becoming much narrower and rockier. I could tell that it would pose a challenge for even the most agile sighted person, never mind a blind person and her guide dog. But Bob could see a wetland ahead and wanted to investigate for a possible American Bittern. I told him that I was too chicken to risk falling and hurting myself and added that I thought he would be going on a wild goose chase, because bitterns are so secretive and hard to find. Upon reflection, Bob agreed that it was a birdbrained idea, so we turned around to retrace our steps. At that moment, on a beautiful day with bird songs enveloping us, I felt truly as free as a bird, reveling in the

here and now in the company of Bob, Alvin, and our avian friends.

Once back in our car, we took off down the road to visit our friends. Martin was a rare bird, having left a lucrative law practice to live a simpler, albeit hard-working, life in the northern woodlands. He often described his previous profession as an albatross around his neck, weighing him down with pressure, stress, and worry. He and his wife, Phoebe, had two young adult children who had flown the coop several years earlier to strike out on their own. We all sat outside on Adirondack chairs and were soon joined by their neighbors, Jay and Robin, who are no spring chickens. Phoebe served muffins she had made that morning. Jay, Robin, Martin, Bob, and I devoured the muffins, but Phoebe, who eats like a bird, took only a bite out of Martin's muffin.

Martin was eager to show us some owl pellets that he had found several days earlier while walking in his woods. He handed them to us to examine, noting that on several occasions he had heard a Barred Owl in the vicinity where he found the pellets. Even a full handful of the pellets were light as a feather and nearly disintegrated as I held them. We agreed that the pellets could be from a Barred Owl roosting or nesting in a tree above where Martin found them. When it came to interest in birds, Martin was really beginning to get his ducks in a row by taking online birding courses, getting out early to listen to song, absorbing behaviors that he observed, and always carrying binoculars and a field guide with him.

Time flew over the next two hours, full of laughter and stories about life in the rural Northeast. Martin played the part of a wise old owl, sharing his experiences and thoughts on how to live well. After leaving the quartet of friends, Bob and I talked about how they were birds of a feather that flock together, similar in personality, lifestyles, and opinions.

Before returning home, we decided on a lark to explore a small dirt road that headed up a slight hill. We followed the road, moving slowly and listening for any new species for the day. Majestic sugar maple trees lined the road with meadows beyond. We were soon rewarded with the beautifully melodic song of a Field Sparrow. We sat for a long time, just letting the song wash over us in the approaching darkness.

Back home after a satisfying day, we compared notes on what we had heard and seen. It turned out that the Black Vulture was Bob's 200th species on his life list for the county, a real feather in his cap. But I had to eat crow because we got only 75 species for the day's efforts, far short of my predicted 100.

Bob reviewed reports posted on eBird to see if there was somewhere we might go the next day. Two Sandhill Cranes had been reported a few days earlier in the neighboring county but had not been reported since. We debated whether to look for them but wondered whether it would require too great an investment of our time, because it was at least an hour's drive each way. Besides, newly arriving migrants were being reported locally every day. So we decided a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush, and made plans to visit local haunts where we knew we would have a much better chance to see returning migrants. Not being night owls, we hit the sack early, excited about the prospects of what the next day might bring.

Martha Steele, *a former editor of* Bird Observer, *has been progressively losing vision due to retinitis pigmentosa and is legally blind. Thanks to a cochlear implant, she is now learning to identify birds from their songs and calls. Martha lives with her husband Bob Stymeist, in Arlington. Martha can be reached at marthajs@verizon.net.*

Birdability announces nonprofit status to continue much-needed diversity and inclusion work in the birding community and the outdoors

Austin, Texas. January 21, 2021

Travis Audubon is proud to serve as the fiscal sponsor for Birdability, allowing Birdability to continue much-needed work in diversity and inclusion in the birding community and the outdoors for people with disabilities and other health concerns.

- Birdability focuses on removing barriers to access for birders with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, intellectual or developmental disabilities (including autism), mental illness, being Deaf, deaf, or Hard of Hearing, and other health concerns.
- Birdability addresses physical barriers at birding locations through education, documenting, advocating for, and improving the accessibility of trails, bird blinds and other outdoor spaces.
- To address social, cultural and institutional barriers, Birdability works to educate and advocate around inclusion and diversity in the birding community and the outdoors for people with disabilities and other health concerns.
- Birdability works to ensure that birding really is for everybody and every body, and is excited to inspire and provide resources to bring the many joys of birding to future birders with disabilities.

The resources on the Birdability website (birdability.org) include guidance documents about accessibility of birding locations, steps to implement inclusive and accessible bird outings in your community, and the crowd sourced Birdability Map, with detailed accessibility information for birding locations. Ongoing virtual programs highlight accessible trails and birders who experience accessibility challenges, and engagement via social media continues to demonstrate the need for this work. Use the hashtag #Birdability on your social media platforms to join in on the conversation.

Birdability is a registered nonprofit in the State of Texas. Travis Audubon Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization that serves as Birdability's Founding and Fiscal Sponsor, providing fiduciary oversight, financial management, and administrative services to help Birdability grow and build capacity. Birdability is now seeking corporate sponsorships, grants, collaborative opportunities, and donations to continue their work to ensure that birding really is for everybody and every body.

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Listen. Look. And Learn.

FIELD NOTES

An Eastern Phoebe Dips for Minnows

Dennis Durette

Eastern Phoebe. Photograph by Dennis Durette.

Allens Pond in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, is an estuarine, coastal salt pond affected by tidal cycles. Over the past 12 years, I have observed a variety of species such as Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Rusty Blackbird, and Yellow-rumped Warbler in small groups winter here, along with the resident Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Belted Kingfisher, and Great Blue Heron.

During the winter of 2021, a lone Eastern Phoebe wintered at the northwest part of the estuary where fresh water enters the marsh from Zylfee Brook, a perennial stream. I have observed Eastern Phoebes during some years, but I have never before seen one dipping for minnows.

I first saw the Eastern Phoebe on the morning of January 9 and again on January 10. January 10 was an unseasonably warm day, with temperatures rising into the high 40s, and both the Eastern Phoebe and five Yellow-rumped Warblers were feeding on

insects. At this time, the marsh was starting to flood; the pond's opening to the sea was closing as it periodically does, and without tidal drainage, the pond was filling like a bathtub with fresh water delivered by several streams in the watershed.

The following weekend, the temperatures soared into the 50s and the Eastern Phoebe was still present, along with numerous other species. The marsh water level had risen high enough to force me to retreat from my usual observation area. My main focus during the long winter hours I've spent at this location are the minks that hunt for minnows; Zylfee Brook has its share of predators. In the following weeks, the water level approached the scrub brush of the marsh. My minks were more difficult to observe as they hunted in areas deeper in the brush where the minnows got stranded in small pools. While trying to get a glimpse of the minks, I noticed the Eastern Phoebe struggling to devour something that I could not yet identify. The bird was smashing it on branches, as phoebes do with dragonflies to discard the wings, but to my knowledge there are no dragonflies in January.

I was flooded out of that section of the marsh until February 20 and 21. The outlet of the pond had been reopened to the ocean and the tidal fluctuation returned to normal. The area where the brook drains into the pond is lined with stones, and when the tide recedes, predators take advantage of the minnows trapped in the pools between the rocks. There is an old cedar post that stands in the marsh, a place where the kingfishers often perch between diving for fish. I witnessed the Eastern Phoebe on the kingfishers' perch. I then watched it hover over the stream as if it were going to pick up an emerging insect from the water, only to see it grab a small minnow, bring it to the brush, and struggle to turn it headfirst and swallow it. It was the only successful capture I saw that morning, although the bird did hover again several more times with no positive results.

The following weekend I returned but no Eastern Phoebe was in sight. I wondered to myself: Was this learned behavior from the kingfishers? I have no doubt that birds react to other birds feeding.

The Eastern "Kingfisher" Phoebe

Shawn Carey, Migration Productions

For the past 20 years, I have spent a week or two during the summer on Cape Cod, usually in Wellfleet or Truro. For many years, I have taught a nature photography class for the Summer Field School at Mass Audubon's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. It is one of my favorite Audubon properties, where I have seen and photographed many interesting subjects including Peregrine Falcon, Belted Kingfisher, Green Heron, Eastern Box Turtle, Fowler's Toad, and Spadefoot Toad, to name just a few.

In August 2011, I witnessed something that I had never seen or heard of before. While sitting in the small observation blind that overlooks Goose Pond, I watched as a first-year Eastern Phoebe flew from a perch down to the ground multiple times and

Eastern Phoebe. Photograph by Shawn P. Carey.

caught some very small fish as if it were a kingfisher. At first, I was stunned by what I was watching, but I managed to get a few photos of this unusual feeding behavior.

The young phoebe was able to catch these small fish because by early August, Goose Pond had lost most of its water, and all that remained were a few meager stream-like areas that could support only the smallest of fish. The rest of the pond was either dried out or a mushy mix of mud and wet sand. However, these few pockets of water were just enough to supply the Eastern Phoebe with the opportunity—at least that day—to pick off a few fish and pretend it was a flashy kingfisher. This went on for about 45 minutes as the phoebe darted from its perch to the ground and back again, most times missing its target. But on few occasions, it did nab a fish and fly back to the same perch, as phoebes tend to do. After a quick shake of its prey it would swallow the fish whole. To me, this seemed like a rather large prey item for a phoebe. Needless to say, I was thrilled to be able to document this unusual feeding behavior, and I shared my experience with several people, including the late Betty Anderson, who was most interested in what I had witnessed—so much so that she went on to do some research on Eastern Phoebes catching and eating small fish that she later shared with me. So now every time I see a phoebe near any body of water, I look to see whether that bird is possibly catching fish.

Bathing by Double-crested Cormorants

William E. Davis, Jr.

Figure 1. (left). A bathing cormorant beat its wings furiously in the water.
Figure 2. (right). This bathing cormorant flapped its wings until the head and upper body were clear of the water.

For all of March and most of April 2020, I was situated in an oceanfront house on Big Pine Key in Florida, where I had ample opportunity to watch and photograph Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) on the tidal flats, in shallow and deep water, and on our long dock. I recorded their behavior in my journal. The comments on Double-crested Cormorants bathing that follow are taken from my journal notes.

Double-crested Cormorants Bathe

On March 26 at 6:02 pm, I noticed a commotion out in the deeper water beyond the dock and found that a Double-crested Cormorant was bathing. With its body half-submerged, it ducked its head under water and rapidly flapped its wings, creating a substantial disturbance to the surrounding water. The bathing bout lasted 2–3 seconds and was repeated multiple times. The initial phase of bathing, submerging the head, looked very similar to the shallow-water foraging behavior that I had been watching closely (Davis 2021). A second cormorant surfaced about 20 feet from the bathing bird and began to bathe as well. Two days later at 6:34 pm, a cormorant was bathing out beyond the dock, putting its head completely under water and then flapping furiously with both wings. It repeated this bathing bout every few-to-10 seconds. A second cormorant swam in close to the first bird and did the head submerging routine. The first cormorant flew off and the second cormorant proceeded to flap its wings and do the normal bathing routine. The first cormorant returned and then both flew off and alit on rocks exposed by low tide at the water's edge. The two birds faced into the wind and repeatedly flapped their wings and fluffed their feathers while remaining perched. At 7:08 pm, I saw another cormorant bathing in the same area. The following day at 6:10 pm, I saw a cormorant bathing out beyond the dock, with 2–3 second bouts of splashing followed by up to 10-second intervals between bouts.

On April 5 at 5:12 pm, I saw another bathing cormorant by the end of the dock and was able to photograph it as it bathed, beating its wings furiously in the water (Figure 1). On April 8 at 4:38 pm, a cormorant looked like it was shallow-water foraging,

dipping its head under water, but it quickly burst into a frenzy of wing beating and shaking, bathing. After several bouts of bathing, it leapt ashore, opened its wings, and began preening. At 4:59 pm, another cormorant bathed, dipping its head under water followed by wildly flapping wings that caused the head and front part of the body to rise out of the water (Figure 2). At 5:04 pm, it flew to shore, joining other cormorants, flapped its wings, shook its tail from side to side, and shook its head before beginning to preen. At 5:28 pm, a cormorant bathed, bringing its head and the front of its body out of the water as the result of the wing-flapping. It sometimes flapped its wings with its head under water. It had been quite a cormorant show with lots of data recorded. On April 10 at 12:12 pm, I watched a cormorant bathing near the end of the dock. It was the earliest time of day that I had seen a cormorant bathe. Of the 12 cormorants that I observed bathing, 11 were seen after 3:00 pm, suggesting that bathing in cormorants is generally a late afternoon behavior. On two occasions, two cormorants bathed together or one immediately after the other, suggesting a tendency towards group bathing behavior.

The Double-crested Cormorant account in *Birds of the World* (Dorr et al. 2020) describes the bathing procedures, quoting Van Tets 1959, but does not describe any tendency towards group bathing.

Conclusions

I conclude: bathing is common in Double-crested Cormorants; the tendency towards group bathing exists and watching other birds bathe is an incentive to bathe; cormorant bathing is primarily an afternoon or end-of-day phenomenon; and, as with bathing shorebirds, gulls, and terns, preening normally follows bathing and can be considered a stage in the bathing process.

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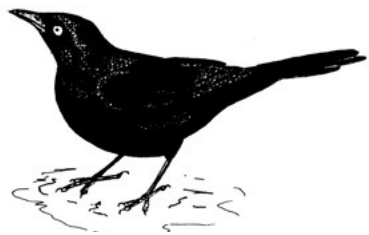


ABOUT BOOKS

Celebrating Spring in the Year of the Plague

Mark Lynch

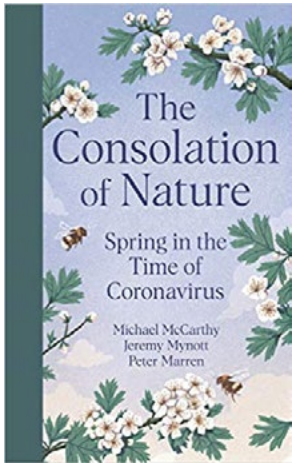
The Consolation of Nature: Spring in the Time of Coronavirus. Michael McCarthy, Jeremy Mynott, and Peter Marren. 2020. London, United Kingdom: Hodder Studio.

"Everything is the same, but nothing is the same." (p. 16)

When it became apparent by early March of 2020 that the coronavirus pandemic was going to change everything, how did it affect your birding? That sounds like a ridiculous question, and it should. How could you possibly think about chasing birds when businesses were closing down, when going to a grocery store became an expedition that needed advanced planning, and the economy was heading to the Antipodes? Suddenly the schools closed, and the kids were at home, and you had to learn how to Zoom, a word you had never heard used that way until the pandemic. Quickly, the hospitalizations and death tolls began to rise alarmingly, and the refrigerator trucks filled with bodies were on the national news. Hospitals were overloaded with patients needing extreme care, and there were not enough respirators. Doctors and nurses were overtaxed and understaffed. The dying were unable to be comforted by loved ones and passed on horribly alone. It was obvious that this was no typical flu. It was starting to feel like a medieval European plague. All our lives were thrown into a strange reality where social distancing and wearing masks became a way of hopefully staying alive. We washed our hands like germophobes, which is what we all became. Our national government sent out confusing messages telling us everything would be back to normal by Easter. But disease experts were telling us *maybe* by the end of summer, if we all did the right things, then maybe we could start to return to normal. When wearing a mask became a political issue, a palpable feeling of dread became the norm. Here in Massachusetts, we were *supposed* to minimize our time outside of our homes.

How did birders react to these restrictions? Apparently, nothing stops us from chasing birds. Speaking for myself, I ended up craving some time outside just to escape the claustrophobic shelter that my home had become. I also needed to escape the endless alarming news reports. I longed for the comfort of nature. It was less about birds and more about keeping my sanity. I laid down some rules to minimize the impact of being outside. I would stay within the county, making it less probable I would bump into anybody. I would avoid any place that had people, even if it was only a single person. This means that my wife Sheila and I stuck to remote dirt roads in wooded areas. I would not chase birds, because any rarity meant there would be a crowd. People, non-birders who also needed to just get out, began to flock to parks and other green spaces. This meant that some popular birding areas became crowded and therefore off-limits to me. All the time I kept a low profile. I have to admit I felt

guilty enjoying spring migration while many others were suffering. But I did consider it a personal health issue.



Apparently many other birders were doing the same, as bird reports were listed on all the usual websites as if nothing unusual was going on. Many birders were still ticking rarities, hopefully socially distancing and wearing masks. Sheila and I, like so many others, began to feel cut off from the birding community at large, as we were cut off from our children and grandchildren. As the pandemic spread, spring migration unfolded like any normal year. "The Covid-19 virus had wrecked, if only temporarily, so many human artifacts; it had stopped business, trade, travel, sport, education, entertainment and social gatherings of all kinds—*but it hadn't stopped the spring.*" (p. 9)

The Consolation of Nature perfectly captures this cognitive dissonance of deeply enjoying spring while the rest of humanity floundered. Three of Britain's top natural historians decided to keep a journal of that unique Covid spring. Michael McCarthy is one of Britain's leading writers on the environment and the natural world. Jeremy Mynott is a well-known historian who has written books like *Birdscapes: Birds in Our Imagination and Experience* (2009 Princeton University Press). Peter Marren is the author of over 20 books on natural history, the countryside, the military, and entomological history. These three authors of *The Consolation of Nature* recognized the uniqueness of this Covid spring and decided to keep a running journal of what it was like to enjoy spring while Britain wrestled with how to deal with the deadly pandemic.

Michael McCarthy:

> If there was one mitigating circumstance about the coronavirus pandemic that hit Britain and most of the world in 2020, killing thousands of people, imprisoning millions more in their own homes and devastating national economies, it was that the virus struck in the early part of the year. It hit when the world, at least in the northern hemisphere, was entering springtime. (p. 1)

And it wasn't just any spring either: "It was in Britain, the loveliest spring in living memory." (p. 1) This point is mentioned by all the authors. The weather that spring was near perfect. "You almost felt that nature should have switched off out of sympathy. Yet nature went blithely forward, as nature has always done." (p. 4)

The Covid restrictions placed on the British people were stricter than here in the States. That spring, people were allowed *one* walk a day outside their homes for exercise purposes. There was no birding by car; you had to hoof it. That meant that each author was left exploring their "home patch."

This tradition of exploring the small green spaces within walking distance of your home has a long tradition in Britain. Legendary natural historian Gilbert White explored his home patch for years and carefully noted the changing of the plants and

birds with the seasons. He wrote the classic *The Natural History of Selbourne* in 1789. Published originally by his brother Benjamin, it has been in print since then. The concept of "your home patch" is still important in British birding culture. Even today, there is an occasional column in *British Birds* titled "My Patch" in which different authors detail the birds found in their nearby locations. Jeremy Mynott quotes "our patron saint" Gilbert White: "Men that only undertake one district are much more likely to advance natural knowledge than those that grasp at more than they can possibly be acquainted with." (p. 192) Local patches can lead to interesting discoveries.

Michael McCarthy lives in London, and his home patch was to include the wonderful Kew Botanic Gardens. But soon the Gardens were closed as part of the tightening British Covid restrictions, and therefore ended his access to this choice spot. McCarthy was left exploring smaller urban green patches and even discovered a small woods hitherto unknown to him.

Jeremy Mynott's patch was in West Sussex between the villages of Little Thurlow and Great Thurlow. Here there is a small river and a number of footpaths.

Peter Marren's home patch was in the Wiltshire village of Ramsbury and included a valley of the River Kennet and the North Wessex Downs.

As they ventured out, the personal value of their daily walks soon became obvious. Michael McCarthy writes: "What we all three could see, initially, was solace: it was clear that nature at its loveliest and most inspiring, in springtime's wondrous transformations, could offer people comfort at a moment of tragedy and great stress." (p. 5)

The other aspect of experiencing nature in the time of Covid was that, for the first time in their memory, it was atypically quiet. The constant human made din had been turned way down. As Peter Marren described it:

> The strangeness of the situation takes a while to sink in. It has never been this quiet, not even at night. The background noises—the distant rumble of the motorway, the aircraft in the sky, the more proximate sounds of traffic—are gone, and I can hear a wren singing in the churchyard, the hum of mining bees on the verge, blackbirds quarreling from behind a wall. … The sound of England before the internal combustion engine. (p. 28)

The realities of the pandemic are never far from the authors' minds. Their daily entries wax rhapsodic over some new bird, bloom, or butterfly, only to then describe the latest scary Covid news. Michael McCarthy notes on March 12: "The Covid-19 virus is now spreading rapidly in the UK, with confirmed cases standing today at 5,018 and, even worse, deaths up by 56 to 233. In Italy, 793 people died today—terrible—and in Spain, 324. I'm keeping a tally." (p. 13)

The effect on the reader is to experience the emotional whiplash of that unique spring. As Jeremy Mynott describes it: "Delight morphing into horror and back again, like one of those visual illusions you can view two ways but never both together." (p. 16) In one entry, Peter Marren grimly notes: "Brits dying at the rate of 500 per day.

That's what is so frightening. Covid will find you out. If there's a chink in your armour, it will find a way in. It will know what to do." (p. 59) That entry captures the fear we were all experiencing that spring, the nagging feeling "it" could be coming for us any day. Yet in the very next paragraph, Marren excitedly declares: "I spot my first orange-tip!" (p. 59)

The day to day petty inconveniences of living during a lockdown are not lost on the authors. Peter Marren described a routine all of us are now familiar with:

> The shop has also run out of loo rolls and soap. You wonder: can one catch it from newsprint, from unwrapped bread? You return thinking, don't touch your face, *don't touch your face*. And then rush upstairs to wash your hands while singing "Happy Birthday" twice (the recommended time indicator for the washing). (p. 28)

They each await their first cuckoo, swallow, Chiffchaff, as well as the emergence of the typical early spring butterflies and the blooms of flowers and trees. Michael McCarthy recorded on April 9, Maundy Thursday:

> A day of almost dreamlike loveliness on the borders of Richmond and Kew: soft warm air and blue skies, and the quiet streets filled with blossom: the choisya, the wisteria and the ceanothus are out now, decorating the front gardens alongside the later cherries, the ones with the big fat pendulous pink and white blooms. In Ennerdale Road, the green of new leaves, especially the horse chestnuts, is so iridescent and lustrous that they seem almost blossoms themselves. And meanwhile, 881 more people have died in hospital, I imagine most of them in great distress away from their loved ones. What a conjunction." (p. 79)

While Peter Marren writes: "To stand among the cuckoo flowers and hear the eponymous bird calling feels like an immersion in springtime." (p. 129)

The almost absolute absence of people in cars and planes encouraged some species of wildlife to appear in places where they have been absent for decades. Jeremy Mynott asks: "Is this the lockdown dividend for nature? Red kites back in London, like the wild goats that have appeared in the streets of Llandundo, and the fish which have returned to canals of Venice now that the cruise liners have gone?" (p. 49) Some of these reports may be apocryphal, but there is little doubt that the natural world responded to our absence.

Some of their discoveries seem more modest but are no less important. On April 8, Michael McCarthy writes: "Because of the quiet of the lockdown, I have discovered a local colony of house sparrow here in the streets of Richmond, and I am elated." (p. 74) House Sparrows may not seem like something to get excited about on this side of the Atlantic, but they have been rapidly declining in the urban areas of Britain. Why they are declining is not certain. Quite a number of formerly common bird species in Britain are now in decline, something Jeremy Mynott describes in detail:

> Birds like the turtle dove, cuckoo, tree sparrow and corn bunting, all once part of my landscape here but now gone, are also unique carriers of

> meanings: through their associations with seasons, places and times; through their interactions with other species; through their voices and behavior; and so through their roles in our own lives. Each one we lose drains the landscape of some part of its significance. We turn out to be the only species with the power to make a dead planet or to create meanings in a live one. (p. 198)

Part of the reason for these species' decline has to do with changes in farming practices, especially the taking down of the important hedgerow habitat that ran between fields. Dramatic changes in habitat are key to understanding the decline in certain species. Humans worship change, while wildlife like stability. Peter Marren: "Most wildlife, on the other hand, prefers things to stay as they are. That is one reason why progress and conservation are in permanent collision, and always will be." (p. 105-6)

The tragic way that the Covid-19 patients die, denied the comfort of the touch of family, friends, and even the medical staff, affects the writers in the way they are now experiencing spring. Jeremy Mynott:

> It's a reminder of how important our sense of touch is in navigating the world and sensing it, a crucial faculty turned against us as a weapon in these extraordinary circumstances. Ironically, I've been finding a new pleasure in touching leaves this year, comparing the rough felting of the wayfaring tree's leaves, for example, with the softness of the emerging horse chestnut ones, just like floppy little lamb's ears. (p. 77)

At least one of the writers notes hopefully a change in the way that every day people are appreciating nature during the Covid spring. Jeremy Mynott:

> Here in rural Suffolk, people are quite quickly changing the habits of a lifetime, however. I wasn't the only one enjoying the butterflies in this sunny spot today. Parents and children were pointing them out to each other, while maneuvering to maintain a careful distance as they passed me, with many an apologetic smile and friendly word. The need for social distancing seems at this stage to be bringing communities together rather than dividing them, and encouraging, amongst other things, a shared interest in nature. (p. 27)

> All too quickly, spring begins the transition into summer. Peter Marren on May 4:

> As deaths pile up, this locked down spring rolls remorselessly on. When spring began this year the landscape of the valley was still wintry and wet. But after five weeks of near-continuous sunshine, the spring is now fast advancing into summer. It has happened so fast. (p. 145)

As the spring ends and hopes begin to rise that the pandemic will end soon, these writers speculate on what we have learned. It is sobering that the natural world rebounded rapidly once humans were taken out of the picture. The natural world in *The Consolation of Nature* is almost celebrating that humans are restricted in what they

can do and where they can go. This was sobering to witness. Jeremy Mynott wishes that those that fortunate to have survived will now look differently at the green spaces that gave them so much comfort in such dark times. “Hopefully knowing more, caring more, and more deeply grounded and connected with the only world we have.” (p. 205)

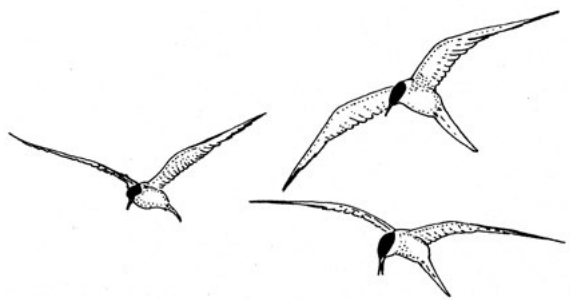
Michael McCarthy doesn’t just want a rapid “return to normal,” to the way things were before the pandemic, but a rebuilding of something deeper and more aware of our natural environment: “Can we put things back together in a manner that will ease the terrible pressures on the natural world, from climate change to wildlife destruction? Will we realize we are not the masters of nature that we think we are?” (p. 213)

The Consolation of Nature is an example of British natural history writing at its finest. Like Gilbert White’s book, it deserves to become a classic. The pages are filled with the joy of observing the first appearances of spring. The authors often digress into some tidbit of local lore or story about what they witness. Jeremy Mynott is privileged to get an all too quick glimpse of a weasel. This leads him to describe the derivation of the nursery rhyme “Pop Goes the Weasel.” It is because of this enthusiasm that, despite its grim backdrop, this book is always entertaining. You will feel the joy of being outdoors in every page. And perhaps because the authors are British, there are numerous literature references and excerpts of poetry. There is a depth of familiarity with the birds, butterflies, insects, flowers, and trees that is expressed so effortlessly in these pages that the reader is transported to those sunny days of April when the first cuckoo arrives. Still, despite all the wonderful sightings and visual beauty captured in the writing, it will hopefully be a time that will not be repeated anytime soon. Michael McCarthy:

> In the end, it was almost like an act of faith—faith in the natural world, in its ability to console us, to repair us and to recharge us; most of all, its ability simply to be there, often unrecognized and unacknowledged, but giving life to every one of us, even as human artefacts are crumbling all around. (p. 214)

To hear Jeremy Mynott talk about this book, here is the link to my interview with him on WICN:

https://www.wicn.org/podcast/jeremy-mynott/



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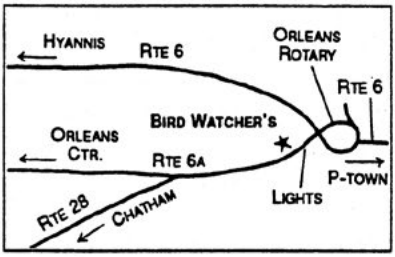

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- • Work with authors and ensure that they meet deadlines.
- • Review draft articles for accuracy and content before submitting them to the editor.
- • Assist the mapmaker with creation and review of maps.
- • Check all directions for accuracy.

This is a position that requires communication and organization skills, as well as great attention to detail. The WTG editor must be able to work independently to recruit authors, maintain schedules, and keep contact with authors prior to deadlines, as well as work collaboratively with the author, editor, and mapmaker from draft article to publication. Knowing birders throughout the New England area is helpful, but not a prerequisite.

To inquire about this position, contact Marsha Salett at msalett@gmail.com.

Bird Sightings Compiler for Bristol County

Our long-running Bird Sightings column relies on data from compilers around the state. The compiler for Bristol County:

- Would be responsible for sending in reports every two months of species seen in that county for the previous two months.
- Reports species in a spreadsheet template and includes sightings that are representative of high counts, early/late dates and anything rare or unusual.
- Should be familiar with the birds (and birders!) of Bristol County.
- Should be comfortable with using a spreadsheet and
- Is able to use eBird.org to query sightings.

Interested candidates should contact Bird Sightings Editor, Neil Hayward at: neil.hayward@gmail.com.

Bird Observer is Looking for a Digital Editor

Bird Observer, Inc. is a New England-based nonprofit organization that publishes a bimonthly journal and a corresponding website to support and promote the observation, understanding, and conservation of the wild birds of New England.

Overview:

The digital editor creates and collects from other sources web content specifically for *Bird Observer*'s online audience with the goal of producing engaging material for *Bird Observer* subscribers. This content may be based on current or past issues of *Bird Observer* and will be unique to the website—interviews, videos, blog, etc.—and will include postings to social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Skills:

- Experienced with writing, researching and producing web content.
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- Must be able to set and meet deadlines, sometimes at short notice.

The digital editor will:

- Plan, research, and generate copy for posting.
- Write, research, find, and produce web content.
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    - the proper spelling of place names.
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- Submit a proposed item(s) prior to publication to the president for approval of content and to the clerk for review for possible legal issues. The president will forward material to a proofreader for review.
- Report to the president and prepare reports to be shared with the Board.
- This is an unpaid position.

To inquire about this position, contact Eric Swanzey at eric@swanzey.com.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

January–February 2021

Neil Hayward and Robert H. Stymeist

The exceptionally mild weather between Christmas and the New Year continued well into January. The temperature was above average for 16 days in January, with a high of 52 degrees recorded on January 16. A winter storm brought a mix of rain and snow and bitter cold on January 27—prior to which Boston had only recorded three-tenths of an inch of snow for the month. Snow totals from the storm were 4.4 inches at Logan Airport in Boston, 5.3 inches in Worcester, 2.5–4.0 inches on Cape Cod, and 13 inches in the town of Savoy in Berkshire County.

A nor'easter rolled across Massachusetts on February 1, dumping up to a foot of snow in central and western parts of the state. Farther east, Lowell topped the list with 24 inches, Wilmington recorded 20 inches, and Athol measured 22 inches, which was the highest total for Worcester County. Greater Boston received far less as the warm front turned snow into rain along the coast; Logan Airport recorded just 1.2 inches of snow compared to 3.8 inches in West Roxbury, only a few miles inland. Within a week, another snowstorm and cold front hit the region. Boston recorded a low temperature of 7 degrees on February 7, and an additional 3–6 inches of snow. More snow arrived on February 19–20, bringing another 3–6 inches throughout the state, with higher amounts in southeastern Massachusetts—Barnstable measured 7.7 inches and Dartmouth had 7.5 inches. Total snowfall for the month recorded at Logan Airport was 15.3 inches, 4.4 inches above normal.

R. Stymeist

GEESE THROUGH HERONS

Bristol County has become one of the most reliable places to find rare geese in North America. This period, a **Pink-footed Goose** was present in Dartmouth, marking the fourth year in a row that the county has hosted this rare goose. **Cackling Geese** were reported from three counties, which is below average for the period.

Blue-winged Teals were reported from two locations on Cape Cod, where the species has been wintering annually since 2012. A count of three **Eurasian Wigeons** on Nantucket is the highest in the state since 2016. Redhead numbers have been increasing in Massachusetts in recent years, and a count of 39 on Nantucket is the highest period count for the state since 1997. The 12 Redheads at Waltham is the highest count for Middlesex County since 2006. A female **Tufted Duck** at Eastham from mid-February was the first record for Outer Cape Cod. **King Eiders** were reported from three counties, which is about average for this species. Two hybrid ducks made the news this period. A Common Goldeneye X Hooded Merganser hybrid at Chatham on January 24 is the first eBird record for Barnstable County. This hybrid taxon has previously been reported from Essex, Plymouth, and Middlesex counties. An American Wigeon X Mallard hybrid was reported from Sandwich on January 14, one of about 10 records in the country this period. Apart from one record in Connecticut, all the New England eBird records for this taxon have come from Massachusetts, where it has been annual since 2016.

An **Eared Grebe** was discovered at Marblehead on January 11 and stayed throughout the period. In February 2020, a bird was present for two weeks in nearby Beverly, about five miles as the grebe flies.

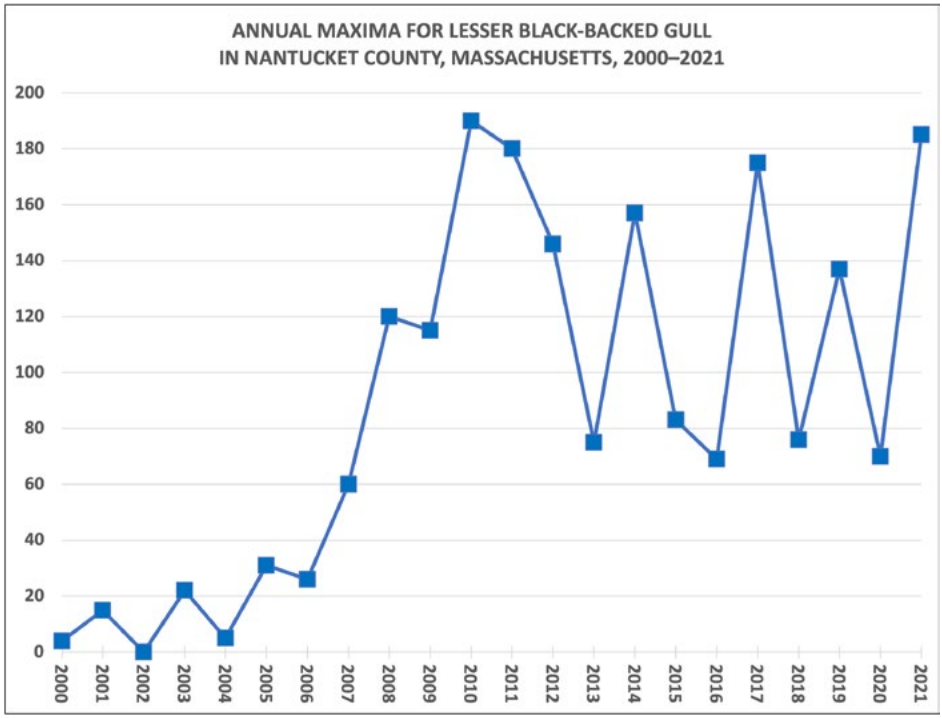


Figure 1. Annual high counts of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in Nantucket County, Massachusetts, for the period 2000–2021. Data from eBird.org.

The immature male **Rufous Hummingbird** in Orleans continued throughout the period. This bird was banded on December 2 after first appearing in mid-November.

An adult and immature **Common Gallinule** were present on Nantucket in January. This was the northernmost record on the continent, except for a bird in Newfoundland. A **Yellow Rail** was reported to the Bird Watcher's General Store in Orleans. It was found dead in the wrack line at Harding's Beach, Chatham, on February 5. This is the first record since November 2017, although given the cryptic nature of the species the majority of migrant Yellow Rails are undoubtedly overlooked. Most historical records are from the fall, peaking in October.

A number of shorebirds made unseasonal appearances this period. American Oystercatchers occasionally linger into January, and this year a pair at Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, on January 2–3 were the northernmost birds on the continent. A very late Piping Plover was found at Hyannis on January 5. This is the only eBird record for January in Massachusetts. There are, however, historical precedents, with at least January records on Cape Cod from the past century (Veit and Petersen, 1993). Long-billed Dowitchers are similarly rare in the winter. A bird at Plum Island on January 12 is only the sixth January record this century. Greater Yellowlegs were recorded from a record six counties this period. The previous high was four counties in 2013 and 2000.

An incredible 61 **Atlantic Puffins** were counted flying north past First Encounter Beach, Eastham, on January 7—an additional 12 southbound birds were excluded from the count to avoid potential double-counting. This count was the highest for the continent this period, beating the 19 recorded on a pelagic trip out of Hatteras, North Carolina, on February 21. It was also the second-highest count for Massachusetts, after the 104 birds logged at Andrews Point, Rockport,

on October 12, 2002. A count of 228 Common Murres past Andrews Point on January 16 is the highest period count for Essex County since 2007. Razorbill numbers this period were below average.

The larid highlight of the period was a one-person one-day wonder: an adult **Ivory Gull** observed by Rick Heil flying past Andrews Point on January 2. This sighting was nearly 44 years to the day since the only other record of this species from the same location—and by the same observer—on January 8, 1977. It is the first record of Ivory Gull for the state since January 2010, when birds were recorded at Race Point, Provincetown, and at Westport. An adult **Thayer's Gull**—now demoted to a subspecies of Iceland Gull—was photographed at Race Point on January 17, the first record of this taxon since May 2019, which was also an adult at Race Point. A **Mew Gull** was discovered on Nantucket on February 25. This species has been recorded almost annually since 1990, although the pattern is complicated by four subspecies that stretch almost circumglobally. Based on the primary pattern, the current record is thought to be of the Russian subspecies *Larus canus kamtschatschensis* and would be the only record of this taxon on the continent this year. A Bonaparte's Gull at Quabbin Reservoir on January 20 is the first eBird period record for Hampshire County. This species is rare inland, typically appearing in April and May and then again in October and November. Laughing Gulls are similarly rare in the winter. A single bird at Harwich on January 9–11 represents only the sixth January record this century and the first since 2016. A count of 185 Lesser Black-backed Gulls on Nantucket on February 25 is the third-highest count for the state (the highest is 207 at Monomoy NWR on September 17, 2018). The population of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the state—especially those in Nantucket—has been increasing steadily over the past two decades (see Figure 1).

Up to three **Pacific Loons** were reported from Race Point, Provincetown. Sooty Shearwaters are rare in the state after November. In recent years, single birds have been recorded in January, including two sightings this year on Cape Cod in mid-January.

Up to two Great Egrets lingered at Plum Island into January, the first January records for Essex County since 2012 and 1999.

N. Hayward

Snow Goose
1/1-1/9 Harwich 2 v.o.
1/1-1/11 Lenox 1 A. Morris + v.o.
1/1-1/2 Edgartown 1 A. Lamoreaux#
1/2-1/17 Rochester 1 C. Molander# + v.o.
1/14 Saugus 2 P. Vale
1/23-1/24 Melrose 2 J. McCoy#
Greater White-fronted Goose
1/2 Edgartown 2 ph W. Looney
1/24-1/31 Dartmouth 1 ph M. Iliff, J. Eckerson+v.o.
Pink-footed Goose
1/26-2/5, 2/28 Dartmouth 1 ph A. Rainville + v.o.
Brant
1/17 Plymouth H. 60 G. d'Entremont#
2/12 Orleans 260 N. Tepper#
2/28 Fairhaven 85 G. d'Entremont#
Cackling Goose
1/1 Danvers 1 ph S. McDonald
1/5-2/3 Longmeadow 2 ph max T. Gilliland+v.o.
1/17-1/29 Amherst 2 ph max J. Spool + v.o.
1/17-1/31 Sheffield 1 ph J. Pierce + v.o.
Wood Duck
1/2-1/28 Watertown 2 max J. Miller + v.o.
1/31 Boston (Olmsted Pk) 3 N. Hayward
2/26 Sheffield 2 J. Pierce
2/27 Turners Falls 2 V. Woodring
2/27 Belchertown 2 L. Therrien
2/28 Westborough 4 M. Lynch#
Blue-winged Teal
thr W. Barnstable 2 v.o.
1/3-1/14 Marstons Mills 2 G. Cooperman#
Northern Shoveler
1/1-2/23 Jamaica Plain 2 R. Doherty + v.o.
1/5 Stockbridge 1 J. Pierce
1/19 E. Boston (BI) 3 J. Smith
2/23 Yarmouth 2 P. Trimble
2/28 Nantucket 14 S. Kardell#
Gadwall
1/1-1/31 PI 14 max R. Heil + v.o.
1/2 Plainville 17 V. Zollo
2/1-2/28 Gloucester (EP) 16 max v.o.
2/26-2/27 Sudbury 7 max S. Miller + v.o.
Eurasian Wigeon
thr Fairhaven 1 m ph C. Longworth+v.o.
thr Yarmouth 1 m ph v.o.
1/3 Edgartown 1 m L. Johnson
2/10 Nantucket 3 m ph S. Kardell
2/17-2/24 Swansea 1 m ph Q. Corey
American Wigeon
1/1-1/20 Marlborough 3 max N. Paulson + v.o.
1/2-1/3 Worc. 2 max P. Morlock
1/3 Yarmouth 360 M. Kasprzyk

American Wigeon (continued)
2/26 Hadley 2 S. Surner + v.o.
American Wigeon x Mallard (hybrid)
2/14 Sandwich 1 ph P. Crosson
American Black Duck
1/1-1/31 PI 950 max R. Heil + v.o.
1/13 Rowley 1030 R. Heil
2/6 Salisbury 200 G. d'Entremont#
2/26 Quaboag IBA 84 M. Lynch#
Northern Pintail
1/1 Barnstable 17 M. Kasprzyk
1/2-1/18 Marlborough 6 max L. Oliver + v.o.
2/1-2/28 PI 45 max v.o.
2/28 Worc. 4 M. Lynch#
Green-winged Teal
1/1 Orleans 15 G. d'Entremont
1/3 P'town (RP) 26 B.Nikula#
2/28 Waltham 4 J. Forbes
Canvasback
1/3 Nantucket 97 T. Pastuszak
Redhead
1/1-1/11 Melrose 2 E. Labato + v.o.
1/1-2/14 Lakeville 2 m J. Sweeney + v.o.
2/4 Nantucket 39 S. Fea#
2/6 Waltham 12 max H. Miller + v.o.
2/8-thr Sandwich 11 M. Keleher#
Ring-necked Duck
1/1-1/31 Cambr. (FP) 50 max v.o.
1/12 Southborough 80 P. Morlock
2/19 Plymouth 350 J. Hare
2/26 Mashpee 265 P. Crosson
Tufted Duck
thr Nantucket 1 m ph v.o.
2/15-thr Eastham 1 f ph L. Waters#
Greater Scaup
1/1-1/18 Wachusett Res. 80 max J. Dekker + v.o.
1/2 Gloucester 25 R. Heil
1/5 Falmouth 1100 A. Burdo#
2/28 Fairhaven 160 G. d'Entremont#
Lesser Scaup
1/5 Falmouth 50 A. Burdo#
1/9 Plymouth 85 G. d'Entremont#
1/20 Westborough 13 M. Lynch#
King Eider
1/11, 1/15 PI 1,1 f,m M.Goetschkes#+v.o.
1/12 P'town 1 m ph A. Burdo#
1/16-1/22 Rockport (AP) 2 max 1pr ph R. Heil + v.o.
1/31-2/26 Bourne 1 f ph S. Arena + v.o.
2/4-2/6 Boston H. 1 m ph T.Bradford+v.o.
Common Eider
1/1-1/31 PI 3000 max S.Grinley#+v.o.
1/3 Salisbury 1250 G. d'Entremont#
Harlequin Duck
1/1-1/22 PI 1 f T. Wetmore# + v.o.
1/1-2/5 Millers Falls 1 A. Jemas + v.o.
2/13, 2/17 Nahant 1,1 m M. Padulo, F. Porter
2/16 Rockport (HPt) 91 J. Bock
Surf Scoter
1/11 PI 30 M. Goetschkes + S. Grinley
1/16 Mystic River (Somerville) 11 J. Forbes
2/9 Nahant 55 A. Sanford
White-winged Scoter
1/1-1/31 PI 750 max S.Grinley#+v.o.
1/5 Longmeadow 1 T. Gilliland
2/8-2/28 Mystic River 2 max v.o.
Black Scoter
1/1-1/31 PI 1000 max T.Wetmore+v.o.
1/2 Rockport (AP) 36 R. Heil
1/21 Quabbin Pk 1 J. Oliverio
2/1-2/28 Mystic River 3 max v.o.
Long-tailed Duck
1/1-1/31 PI 40 max S.Grinley#+v.o.
1/2 Edgartown 700 A. Lamoreaux#
2/15 Hadley 1 G. Brown + v.o.
Bufflehead
1/13 Marblehead 27 N. Hayward
1/13 Wachusett Res. 14 M. Lynch#
2/5-2/14 Agawam 8 max M. Moore + v.o.
Common Goldeneye
1/1-2/28 Turners Falls 130 max J. Smith + v.o.
1/1 Wachusett Res. 78 B. Millett
1/3 Lakeville 180 M. Faherty
1/11 Lowell 72 N. Hayward
Barrow's Goldeneye
1/1-2/15 Lowell 1 f J. Mott# + v.o.
1/1-2/28 Turners Falls 1 imm m J. Smith + v.o.
1/3 N. Andover 1 m J. Parrot-Willis
1/3-1/18 E. Boston 1 m J. Hanson + v.o.
1/3-1/24 Randolph 1 ad m R. Yuen + v.o.
1/9 Plymouth 4 2pr G. d'Entremont#
1/11-2/4 PI 1 m T. Wetmore# + v.o.
1/20 Quabbin Pk 1 L. Therrien + v.o.
2/11-2/28 W. Newbury 2 max D. Larson + v.o.
Common X Barrow's Goldeneye (hybrid)
1/17 Falmouth/Mashpee 1 N. Marchessault#
Hooded Merganser
1/1-1/31 Woburn (HP) 107 max v.o.
1/5 WWMA 72 N. Dowling
1/30 Boston (JPd) 75 G. d'Entremont
1/31 Mystic Lakes 232 N. Hayward
1/31 S. Dartmouth 60 G. d'Entremont#
2/1 Mystic Lakes 176 M. Rines
Common Goldeneye X Hooded Merganser (hybrid)
1/24 Chatham 1 L. Briggs
Common Merganser
1/31 Mystic Lakes 267 N. Hayward
2/21 Falmouth 13 G. d'Entremont
2/26 Quaboag IBA 73 M. Lynch#
Red-breasted Merganser
thr Mystic Lakes 8 max v.o.
1/2 Mystic River (Somerville) 11 N. Hayward
1/4-1/16 Wachusett Res. 1 B. Robo + v.o.
1/4-1/30 Quabbin Pk 1 L. Therrien
2/20 Waltham 1 J. Forbes
Ruddy Duck
1/1 Eastham 92 K. Griffiths
1/13 Wachusett Res. 2 K. Nickerson
1/30 Boston (JPd) 20 G. d'Entremont
2/21 Medford 8 J. Forbes
Wild Turkey
1/26 Woburn 44 M. Rines
2/27 Grafton 59 S. Williams
Ruffed Grouse
1/12 Sandwich 8 P. Trimble#
1/15 Williamstown 4 So. Auer
2/14 Quabbin (G40) 5 E. Abrams
Ring-necked Pheasant
1/1 Tyringham 2 L. Hertzog
2/21 Lenox 2 J. Pierce
Pied-billed Grebe
1/1-1/31 Cambr. (FP) 1 v.o.
1/13 Wachusett Res. 1 M. Lynch#
1/20 Ware 1 L. Therrien
1/21 Falmouth 9 N. Tepper#
Horned Grebe
1/1-1/26 Quabbin Pk 8 max J.Oliverio + v.o.
1/1-1/31 PI 11 max D. Prima# + v.o
2/4-2/5 Mystic River 1 C. Matheson + v.o.
Red-necked Grebe
1/8 PI 8 T. Wetmore
1/16-1/23 Cambr. (FP) 1 J. Trimble#
2/13 P'town (RP) 17 G. d'Entremont#
Eared Grebe
1/11-2/28 Marblehead 1 ph L. Curtis + v.o.
Rufous Hummingbird
1/1-thr S. Orleans 1 imm m ph b S. Finnegan#

Clapper Rail
1/13 Rowley 1 R. Heil
1/27 Duxbury B. 1 R. Bowes
Virginia Rail
1/1 Barnstable 7 P. Crosson
1/1 Peabody 4 R. Heil
1/3-1/18 W. Roxbury (MP) 1 M. Iliff + v.o.
1/9, 2/4 GMNWR 1 C. Kaynor, F. Porter
1/13 Woburn (HP) 1 C. Matheson
2/9, 2/19 Peabody 2 R. Heil
Sora
1/3-1/8 GMNWR 1 M. McCarthy# + v.o.
1/16 Ellisville 1 L. Schibley
Common Gallinule
1/7-1/31 Nantucket 2 ad+imm ph T. Pastuszak#
American Coot
thr Woburn (HP) 50 max v.o.
1/1 Barnstable 75 P. Crosson
Yellow Rail
2/5 Chatham 1 d ph L. Caruso
American Oystercatcher
1/2-1/3 Edgartown 2 M. Carman-Goeke
Black-bellied Plover
1/1 Chatham 17 F. Atwood
1/3-1/9 PI 1 M. Altieri + v.o.
1/4 E. Boston 1 S. Jones + v.o.
1/17 Ellisville 4 G. d'Entremont#
Killdeer
2/25 Hadley 3 M. Akresh
2/26-2/28 Somerville 3 J. Young + v.o.
2/26 Cheshire 1 C. Walz
2/28 Fairhaven 17 G. d'Entremont#
Piping Plover
1/5 Hyannis 1 P. Kyle
Ruddy Turnstone
1/2 Boston 3 N. Hayward
1/15 W. Dennis 10 P. Bono
1/30 Hyannisport 44 Anonymous
Sanderling
1/1-1/31 PI 240 max T. Wetmore + v.o.
1/4 W. Dennis 345 S. Finnegan
Dunlin
1/1 Chatham 510 F. Atwood
1/1-1/31 PI 200 max S. Babbitt + v.o.
1/2 Boston 19 N. Hayward
1/10 Hyannis 130 B. Nikula
2/15 Duxbury B. 800 L. Briggs
Purple Sandpiper
1/2 Boston 4 N. Hayward
1/6 PI 8 T. Wetmore#
1/15 Marblehead 30 J. Hoye#
2/1-2/28 Rockport (AP) 35 max v.o.
2/3 W. Dennis 4 P. Kyle
2/15 P'town 5 L. Waters
Long-billed Dowitcher
1/12 PI 1 max D. Larson
American Woodcock
1/1 Barnstable 1 M. Keleher#
1/14 Mashpee 2 K. Miller#
2/25 Eastham (FH) 5 J. Doyle
2/26 Longmeadow 3 M. + C. Moore
2/26 Cambr. (Alewife) 1 R. Weil
Wilson's Snipe
1/15 Hadley 1 M. Locher
2/9 Peabody 1 R. Heil
2/19-2/21 Salisbury 1 D. Graovac + v.o.
2/28 Ipswich 1 A. Sanford
Greater Yellowlegs
1/5 Rockport 1 T. Sackton
Dovekie
1/3 Jeffreys L. 11 L. McKillop#
1/7 Eastham (FE) 40 A. Burdo#
1/10 P'town (RP) 18 P. Flood#
1/23 Rockport (AP) 2 J. Trimble
Common Murre
1/3 Jeffreys L. 1 L. McKillop#
1/10 P'town (RP) 142 P. Flood#
1/10 Nahant 1 L. Pivacek
1/16 Rockport (AP) 228 R. Heil
Thick-billed Murre
2/1-2/28 Rockport (AP) 3 max C. Winstanley + v.o.
2/3 P'town (RP) 9 K. Yakola#
Razorbill
1/1-1/22 PI 35 max P. Vale + v.o.
1/1-2/5 Boston H. 5 S. Jones + v.o.
1/2-1/23 Rockport (AP) 48 max J. Trimble + v.o.
1/3 Jeffreys L. 3 L. McKillop#
1/7 Eastham (FE) 488 A. Burdo#
large alcid sp.
1/3 P'town (RP) 1445 B. Nikula#
Black Guillemot
1/1-1/31 Gloucester (BR) 5 max v.o.
1/2-1/7 Nahant 1 M. Padulo + v.o.
2/15 P'town 5 L. Waters
Atlantic Puffin
1/3 Jeffreys L. 1 L. McKillop#
1/7 Eastham (FE) 61 A. Burdo#
1/10, 1/18, 2/1, 2/3 P'town (RP) 1,1,1,1 P. Flood# + v.o.
1/16, 1/23 Rockport (AP) 5,1 R. Heil, J. Trimble
Black-legged Kittiwake
1/2 Rockport (AP) 27 R. Heil
1/3 Jeffreys L. 8 L. McKillop#
1/13 PI 3 T. Wetmore
2/3 P'town (RP) 102 K. Yakola#
Ivory Gull
1/2 Rockport (AP) 1 ad R. Heil
Bonaparte's Gull
1/2 Gloucester 2 R. Heil
1/20 Quabbin Pk 1 L. Therrien
Black-headed Gull
thr Gloucester 1 ad ph W. Klockner + v.o.
1/1-1/16 W. Dennis 1 W ph v.o.
1/4-1/22 Sagamore 1 ad ph v.o.
Laughing Gull
1/9-1/11 Harwich 1 C. Thompson#
Mew Gull (*kamtschatschensis/heinei*)
2/25-thr Nantucket 1 ad ph S. Kardell#
Iceland Gull (Thayer's)
1/17 P'town (RP) 1 ad ph B. Nikula, P. Flood
Iceland Gull
1/1-1/31 Lowell 5 max v.o.
1/14-2/28 Turners Falls 2 ph max J. Smith + v.o.
1/26-2/24 Agawam 4 ph max L.+A. Richardson + v.o.
2/1-2/28 Gloucester (EP) 11 max R. Heil + v.o.
2/15 P'town (RP) 30 L. Waters#
2/25 Nantucket 60 S. Kardell
Lesser Black-backed Gull
1/7-2/23 Turners Falls 1 ad G. Watkevich + v.o.
1/15-2/18 Medway 1 ad J. Bock
1/16 Sharon 1 ad W. Sweet + v.o.
1/20 Westborough 1 ad M. Lynch#
1/31 S. Dartmouth 1 ad G. d'Entremont#
2/18 Gloucester (EP) 2 ad R. Heil
2/25 Nantucket 185 S. Kardell
Glaucous Gull
1/1-1/11 Lowell 1 B. Lee + v.o.
1/1-1/31 Gloucester 3 max v.o.
2/5-2/28 Revere B. 4 M. Iliff + v.o.
2/11 Nahant 1 M. Padulo
2/16 Lynn 1 R. Heil
2/17 Salisbury 1 J. Oliverio + v.o.
2/21-2/23 Turners Falls 1 A. Richards + v.o.
Red-throated Loon
1/1-1/11 Mystic River 1 v.o.
Pacific Loon
thr P'town (RP) 3 max ph P. Flood#, B. Nikula + v.o.

Common Loon			
1/1-2/4	Quabbin Pk	2 max	L.Therrien+v.o.
1/13	Marblehead	3	N. Hayward
1/31	Wachusett Res.	10	M. Lynch#
2/1-2/16	Mystic River	4 max	J. Layman+v.o.
Northern Fulmar			
1/3	Jeffreys L.	8	L. McKillop#
1/16	Rockport (AP)	3	R. Heil#
1/17	P'town (RP)	1	B.Nikula#
2/3	Eastham (FE)	5	T. Spahr
Sooty Shearwater			
1/16	P'town (RP)	1	P. Flood
1/17	N. Truro	1	E. Goodman
Northern Gannet			
1/1	PI	8	R. Yuen#
1/3	P'town (RP)	160	B.Nikula#
1/9-1/22	Rockport (AP)	17 max	R. Heil + v.o.
Great Cormorant			
2/2-2/28	Medford	2 max	J.Layman+v.o.
2/20	N. Scituate	17	G. d'Entremont#
Double-crested Cormorant			
1/1-1/31	Medford	3 max	v.o.
2/20	Rockport (HPt)	2	D. Williams#
Great Blue Heron			
1/18-2/24	Sunderland	10 max	S.Griesemer+v.o.
2/20	Sandwich	17	L. Waters#
2/28	Worc.	3	E. Kittredge
Great Egret			
1/1-1/23	PI	2 max	v.o.
1/10-1/19	Edgartown	1	R. Culbert#
Black-crowned Night-Heron			
1/12	Eastham	3	A. Burdo#

VULTURES THROUGH DICKCISSEL

October raptor highlights during the period included continuing high numbers of Black Vultures, especially in southwest Berkshire County, where as many as 28 were counted in Ashley Falls. Twenty-six Black Vultures were tallied in Blackstone, along the Rhode Island border. **Golden Eagles** were noted from four locations, and the only Northern Goshawk reported during the period was an adult from Marlborough. Two Long-eared Owls were found at Salisbury and remained through the period to the delight of many birders, who observed from a safe distance. There were 12 individual Short-eared Owls reported including four in Hadley.

This season's winter finch irruption continued through the period in exceptional numbers. Large groups of Common Redpolls numbering well into the hundreds were noted throughout the state. Birders had wonderful opportunities to study, identify, and photograph many **Hoary Redpolls**. Both Red and White-winged crossbills continued throughout our area. The Campground at Salisbury State Park allowed close encounters with crossbills presenting excellent photographic opportunities. **Pine Grosbeaks** continued mostly in western Massachusetts and were entirely absent on the South Shore, Cape Cod, and the islands.

Among the vagrants were some holdovers from December, including the cooperative **Varied Thrush** from Sudbury, the **Sage Thrasher** from Hatfield, **Yellow-throated Warblers** from Lancaster and Hingham, and a **Western Tanager** in Brewster. An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was found in Sagamore. This is only the third record for the period within the past 10 years—the two previous records were from Cambridge and Manomet in January 2016. Birders in search of the flycatcher turned up a **Townsend's Warbler** in the same neighborhood. Cape Cod seems to be a hotspot for **Painted Buntings** during the winter months, as three different birds were noted during the period. Over the past 10 years, as many as 20 Painted Buntings have been seen during winter months on Cape Cod.

Other interesting reports during the period include a Cliff Swallow photographed on Nantucket on February 26 following strong southwest winds. This date eclipsed the previous earliest date reported for this species of March 8. Yellow-breasted Chats were noted from eight localities; many of them were present for several days. Unusual warblers found during this period included an Ovenbird in Woods Hole and a Tennessee Warbler coming to a feeder in Athol.

R. Stymeist

References

Veit, R. R., and W. R. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts.* Lincoln, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Black Vulture
thr Ashley Falls 28 max G. Ward, G. Hurley
1/1-1/18 Bourne 6 J. McCumber + v.o.
1/6-1/28 Greenfield 9 max B. Kanash + v.o.
1/7-2/22 Blackstone 26 max E. Kittredge + v.o.
1/31 Westport 14 G. d'Entremont#
2/26 Cambridge 4 C. Winstanley
Turkey Vulture
1/2 Edgartown 24 L. Johnson
1/20 Bourne 30 P. Kyle
1/22 Blackstone 22 M. Lynch#
Golden Eagle
1/17 Gloucester 1 ad S. Grinley#
1/27-2/14 Buckland 1 juv ph J. Smith + v.o.
2/17 Great Barrington 1 ph C. Schneider
2/24, 2/26 Quabbin Res. 1 juv M. Lynch#, L. Therrien
Northern Harrier
thr PI 6 max R. Heil + v.o.
1/13, 2/28 Rowley 6 R. Heil
1/24 Hadley 3 2ad m G. d'Entremont#
2/18 Barnstable (SN) 5 K. Dec#
Northern Goshawk
1/3 Marlborough 1 ad T. Spahr
Bald Eagle
1/2 Nantucket 2 T. Pastuszak
1/10 Lunenburg 5 T. Pirro
1/13 Rowley 3 R. Heil
1/31 Mystic Lakes 2 N. Hayward
2/24 Quabbin Res. 5 M. Lynch#
2/28 Dennis 4 R. Crosby
Red-shouldered Hawk
1/13 Rowley 1 R. Heil
1/22 Blackstone 1 M. Lynch#
1/24 Boston (FPk) 1 M. Kanarek
2/13 PI 1 M. Goetschkes#
Red-tailed Hawk
1/22 Blackstone 9 M. Lynch#
1/31 Wachusett Res. 6 M. Lynch#
Rough-legged Hawk
1/30 Egremont 1 lt Z. Adams
2/1-2/28 PI 3 max S. Babbitt + v.o.
2/20 DWWS 2 1dk+1lt G. d'Entremont#
2/22 Aquinnah 1 ad dk B. Shriber
2/25-2/27 Nantucket 1 imm dk J. Sherwonit
2/28 Rowley 2 lt R. Heil
Barn Owl
1/2 Chappaquiddick 2 A. Lamoreaux#
2/13 Nantucket 2 S. Fea#
Eastern Screech-Owl
1/1 Barnstable 6 P. Crosson
Great Horned Owl
1/25 Wellfleet 5 M. Harris
2/28 BFWMA 4 N. Tepper
Snowy Owl
thr Salisbury 1 N. Tepper + v.o.
1/1-1/19 PI 4 max v.o.
1/13 Rowley 2 R. Heil
1/17 Quincy 2 Anonymous
1/30 Orleans 2 S. Finnegan#
2/11 Nahant 1 N. Cantelmo
Barred Owl
2/13 Boston (FPk) 2 G. Exley-Smith + v.o.
2/27 Wompatuck SP 2 G. d'Entremont
2/28 Sandwich 2 P. Johnson-Staub
Long-eared Owl
1/22-2/5 Whately 1 J. Smith + v.o.
1/24-2/28 Salisbury 2 max C.Morgan + v.o.
Short-eared Owl
thr Hadley (Honeypot) 4 max L.Therrien + v.o.
thr PI 2 max S. Babbitt + v.o.
1/1-2/3 Nantucket 1 C. Winstanley
1/1-2/9 E. Boston (BI) 1 T. Carlile + v.o.
1/25-1/28 Egremont 1 C. Blake# + v.o.
2/3-2/28 Salisbury 1 v.o.
2/26 Rowley 1 R. Heil
2/26-2/28 P'town (RP) 1 K. Burke + v.o.
Northern Saw-whet Owl
1/1-1/14 Great Barrington 4 max Z.Adams#+v.o.
1/8 Wellfleet 4 K. Burke
1/12-2/23 Quabbin Pk 2 max M.McKitrick# + v.o.
2/25 Groton 3 S. Wilson#
Red-headed Woodpecker
1/1-2/11 Florence 1 ph L. Therrien + v.o.
1/1-2/21 Princeton 2 ad ph E. Kittredge + v.o.
2/20 Spencer 1 ad ph D. Therien
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
1/1-2/15 Jamaica Plain 2 J. Miller + v.o.
2/1-2/28 MtA 2 max v.o.
2/12 Orleans 2 L. Waters
Pileated Woodpecker
2/7 DFWS 3 P. Sowizral
2/28 Upton 3 T. Dodd
American Kestrel
1/21 Brookfield 2 D. Lusignan
Merlin
2/4 Eastham (FE) 2 N. Villone
Peregrine Falcon
2/15 Bourne 2 E. Hoopes
2/28 Fairhaven 2 C. + M. Molander
Monk Parakeet
1/29 Medford 1 M. Rines#
Ash-throated Flycatcher
1/10-1/25 Sagamore 1 ph R. Timberlake + v.o.
Western Kingbird
1/11 Eastham 1 ph R. Budnick#
Northern Shrike
thr Indiv. reported from 24 locations
2/26 P'town 2 1ad+1imm J. Taylor
Fish Crow
1/2 Falmouth 850 G. Hirth
2/1-2/28 Lawrence 250 max C. Gibson + v.o.
2/28 Plympton 156 T. Lloyd-Evans
Common Raven
1/21 Hardwick 7 M. Lynch#
1/22 Falmouth 7 P. Crosson
2/4 Athol 13 B. Mallet
2/20 Quaboag IBA 16 M. Lynch#
Horned Lark
1/1 Edgartown 125 A. Lamoreaux
1/3-1/31 PI 61 max M. Altieri + v.o.
1/12 Fitchburg 75 T. Murray
1/21 Easthampton 120 J. Harrison
1/24 Williamstown 125 max J. Pierce + v.o.
1/25-2/1 Egremont 100 max G. Ward + v.o.
Tree Swallow
1/3 Wellfleet 2 P. Henson
Cliff Swallow
2/26 Nantucket 1 S. Kardell#
Boreal Chickadee
1/1-2/27 Williamstown 1 ph L.vanHandel+v.o.
Red-breasted Nuthatch
thr Montague 40 max S. McGullam# + v.o.
1/2 Quabbin (G40) 31 M. Lynch#
Brown Creeper
1/3 DWMA 7 J. Bourget#
Winter Wren
1/1 Medford 3 M. Rines#
1/2 Quabbin (G40) 2 M. Lynch#
1/2-2/7 Medfield 2 J. Bock
1/15-1/20 Millers Falls 2 max J. Smith
Marsh Wren
1/3-1/14 GMNWR 3 max M.McCarthy#+v.o.
1/27 Eastham (FH) 1 T. Spahr
1/31-2/25 W. Roxbury (MP) 1 M. Iliff + v.o.

Marsh Wren (continued)
2/4 Truro 1 R. Sormani
Carolina Wren
1/22 Blackstone 12 M. Lynch#
2/21 Falmouth 23 G. d'Entremont
2/28 Fairhaven 23 G. d'Entremont#
Golden-crowned Kinglet
1/3-2/28 Longmeadow 3 max C.Hyytinen+v.o.
2/26-2/27 Windsor 6 max N.Henkenius+v.o.
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
1/8-1/9 Medford 2 max J. Layman + v.o.
1/11-1/22 Marblehead 2 max R. Heil + v.o.
Eastern Bluebird
2/1-2/28 DFWS 14 max P. Sowizral+v.o.
2/12 Athol 28 N. Gerry
2/26 Quaboag IBA 18 M. Lynch#
Townsend's Solitaire
1/7 Orleans 1 ph M. O'Connor
Hermit Thrush
thr PI 4 max T. Wetmore + v.o.
1/12 WWMA 2 T. Spahr
1/31 Wellfleet 6 T. Spahr
1/31 S. Dartmouth 2 G. d'Entremont#
2/18 Worcester 2 M. Lynch#
Varied Thrush
thr Sudbury 1 ph C. Goddard + v.o.
Gray Catbird
thr PI 2 max v.o.
1/1 Worc. 2 C. Liazos
Brown Thrasher
1/1-2/26 MNWS 1 J. Smith + v.o.
2/14 Leicester 1 G. Williamson
2/22 E. Bridgewater 1 J. Carlisle
Sage Thrasher
thr Hatfield 1 ph T. Gessing + v.o.
Bohemian Waxwing
1/8 P'town 1 ph P.Trimble,S.Williams
Cedar Waxwing
1/11 Athol 125 E. LeBlanc
1/24 Waltham (Cambr. Res.) 15 J. Forbes
American Pipit
1/4 W. Tisbury 25 B. Shriber
1/10 Saugus 4 G. Wilson + v.o.
1/29 Boston (FPk) 3 S. Jones + v.o.
2/28 Fairhaven 50 min G. d'Entremont#
Evening Grosbeak
1/3 S. Hamilton 4 M. Chuffnell
1/6 Ipswich 14 N. Hayward
1/12 Wellfleet 37 M. Harris
1/18 Royalston 120 J. Johnson#
1/19-2/27 Hingham 15 S. Avery + v.o.
2/20 New Braintree 8 M. Lynch#
Pine Grosbeak
1/1-2/26 Williamstown 30 max S. Keogh + v.o.
1/1 Rutland 9 M. Lynch#
1/2 Granville 3 D. Holmes
1/3 Pepperell 2 L. Ackerman
1/4-2/15 N. Adams 25 max V.Coleman+v.o.
1/7-1/8 October Mountain 10 max M. + E. Watson
1/15 Oakham 29 au T. Spahr
1/15-1/24 Boxborough 25 max L. Markiewicz + v.o.
1/20 Bolton 11 M. Lynch#
Purple Finch
1/2 W. Barnstable 34 P. Crosson
2/7 Athol 20 G. Watkevich
2/22-2/28 Sherborn 6 max K. Winkler
Common Redpoll
1/1 Burrage Pd WMA 75 P. McGovern
1/1-1/31 PI 160 max R. Heil + v.o.
1/5-1/6 Jamaica Plain 48 C. Hartshorn + v.o.
1/8 Sandwich 116 S. Williams#
1/9-2/3 Hadley (Honeypot) 140 max M. Chalfin-Jacobs#
1/12 Barnstable (SN) 89 J. Trimble#
1/15 Wellfleet 210 L. Waters#
1/15 Lenox 100 T. Collins
1/20-2/20 WWMA 110 max T. Spahr + v.o.
1/24 Hadley 75 G. d'Entremont#
1/26-2/1 Egremont 150 max Z. Adams + v.o.
2/1-2/28 Salisbury 60 max v.o.
2/5 Sunderland 80 A. Richards
2/7 Wachusett Res. 120 M. Lynch#
Common Redpoll (Greater)
1/9 Hadley (Honeypot) 1 ph S. Willliams#
1/22 Salisbury 1 ph D. Adrien
Hoary Redpoll
1/1-2/15 Wellfleet 1 ph K. Burke + v.o.
1/6, 1/15 PI 1 ph R. Heil, N. Tepper
1/8 Sandwich 1 ph P. Trimble, S. Williams
1/12 Barnstable (SN) 1 ph J. Trimble#
1/20-2/21 WWMA 2 max ph T. Spahr# + v.o.
1/21 Mystic Lakes 1 ph J. Layman
1/22-2/15 Quincy 1 ph E. Ross + v.o.
1/31 Salisbury 2 ph E. Zawatski
1/31 Buckland 1 ph J. Smith
2/10 Gt. Barrington 1 ph J. Pierce
2/28 Leominster 1 ph B. Robo
Red Crossbill
thr Montague 65 max S. McGullam# + v.o.
1/1 Aquinnah 70 B. Shriber
1/1 Chatham 40 1 Type 3 J. Trimble#
1/1-1/25 PI 80 max S. Babbitt + v.o.
1/3, 1/11 Ipswich (CB) 8,33 N. Dubrow
1/7 Sagamore 47 P. LoCicero
1/8-1/13 Marlborough 22 max Type 10 au T. Spahr
1/9-1/12 Concord (NAC) 25 max Type 10 D. Swain#+v.o.
1/10-1/16 Tidmarsh WS 18 K. Duggan
2/1-2/28 Salisbury 55 max v.o.
2/11 Worc. 40 S. Williams
2/28 Quincy 8 M. Perrin
White-winged Crossbill
1/1-1/31 Salisbury 15 max v.o.
1/3-1/12 Concord (NAC) 11 max P. Fitzgerald# + v.o.
1/7 Rockport 10 D. Peterson
1/7-1/8 Jamaica Plain 7 L. Eyster + v.o.
1/8-2/26 Windsor 7 max N. Henkenius
1/10 Milton 11 R. Schain
2/14-2/28 MtA 9 max J.Layman+v.o.
2/27 Mt Watatic 4 T. Pirro
2/28 Topsfield 10 J. Owens
Pine Siskin
1/5 Gardner 32 T. Pirro
1/7 Deerfield 20 D. Sibley
1/9 Ware 40 E. Abrams
1/14-2/21 Jamaica Plain 7 S. Jones + v.o.
1/29 Dalton 16 G. Hurley
2/14-2/19 Sudbury 7 max T. Stewart
Lapland Longspur
1/1-2/21 Hadley (Honeypot) 3 max L. Therrien + v.o.
1/10, 1/17 Saugus 2,1 G. Wilson + v.o.
1/12-1/13 Lanesboro 2 max L. Merry + v.o.
2/1 Newbury 2 M. Watson
2/3 PI 2 S. Babbitt
2/10 S. Boston 5 A. Martin + v.o.
2/12-2/15 Lynn/Nahant 6 max K. Hewitt + v.o.
Snow Bunting
1/12-1/13 Lanesboro 135 max L. Merry + v.o.
1/25-2/1 Egremont 200 max G. Ward + v.o.
1/27 Fitchburg 60 S. Miller#
2/1-2/28 Salisbury 90 max v.o.
2/4 Sunderland 37 A. Richards
2/6 Quaboag IBA 20 M. Lynch#
2/20 Sandwich 103 L. Waters#
2/28 DFWS 17 P. Sowizral
Field Sparrow
1/1-2/26 Hatfield 4 max J.Johnson#+v.o.
1/3 Concord 1 W. Klockner#

Field Sparrow (continued)
1/22 Falmouth 35 P. Crosson
Fox Sparrow
1/1-2/22 Woburn (HP) 3 max v.o.
1/3-1/5 Stow 2 max M. Liguon
2/6 Jamaica Plain 2 M. Iliff
American Tree Sparrow
1/21 Hardwick 17 M. Lynch#
1/24 Hadley 20 G. d'Entremont#
2/11 WWMA 150 C. Floyd
White-crowned Sparrow
1/1-2/25 Hadley 3 max B. Finney + v.o.
1/2-2/24 Sunderland 8 max Sa.Auer, K.Barnes+v.o.
Vesper Sparrow
1/6-2/5 Sheffield 2 max G. Ward + v.o.
Nelson's Sparrow
1/10 Gloucester 3 J. Trimble
Saltmarsh Sparrow
1/10 Gloucester 1 J. Trimble
Savannah Sparrow
1/3 Concord 7 S. Perkins#
1/28 Hadley 27 A. Richards
Savannah Sparrow (Ipswich Sparrow)
1/18 PI 2 S. Zhang
2/5 Hadley (Honeypot) 1 D. Allard
2/6-2/22 Salisbury 2 max v.o.
2/9-2/10 Revere B. 2 J. Layman + v.o.
2/16 Saugus 1 B. Burke
Lincoln's Sparrow
1/3-2/5 Hadley 1 M. McKitrick + v.o.
1/12 Hingham 1 P. Edmundson
Swamp Sparrow
1/1-2/2 Amherst 2 max T. Bombadil + v.o.
1/2 Woburn (HP) 4 M. Rines
1/4 WWMA 6 T. Spahr
1/9 Harwich 3 G. d'Entremont#
Eastern Towhee
1/1-1/3 Lincoln 1 N. Levey
1/3-1/16 Sharon 1 W. Sweet + v.o.
2/1 Wellfleet 3 J. Doyle
Yellow-breasted Chat
1/7-1/10 MNWS 1 D. Noble +v.o.
1/8-1/13 Nantucket 1 S. Kardell#
1/8-1/30 Harwich 1 J. Pratt# + v.o.
1/9-1/13 Nahant 1 L. Pivacek# + v.o.
1/12-1/25 Sandwich 1 M. West
1/13-1/28 Eastham (FH) 1 K. Dec# + v.o.
1/21 Orleans 1 N. Tepper
2/18 Medford 1 J. Layman
Eastern Meadowlark
1/3-2/28 Cumb. Farms 23 D. Furbish
1/12-1/26 DWWS 8 J. Frost# + v.o.
1/22 Falmouth 9 P. Crosson
Bullock's Oriole
1/14-2/13 Cohasset 1 ad m E. Freeda + v.o.
2/23-2/27 Wareham 1 K. Burke + v.o.
Baltimore Oriole
thr Indiv. reported from 9 locations
2/12 Orleans 2 Anonymous
2/14 Dennis 4 J. Stevens
Rusty Blackbird
thr Longmeadow 41 max M.Moore#+v.o.
1/1 Barnstable 7 P. Crosson
1/7 Medway 5 M. Pagliarini
1/9-2/27 Wayland 20 max J. Hoye#
1/26 S. Carver 5 3m+2f T. Lloyd-Evans
2/7 Sandwich 5 S. Finnegan
2/18 Hatfield 13 A. Hulsey
Ovenbird
2/5-thr Woods Hole 1 M. Tucker
Northern Waterthrush
1/1 Barnstable 1 P. Crosson
Tennessee Warbler
11/20-2/11 Athol 1 J. Johnstone + v.o.
Orange-crowned Warbler
1/3 Wellfleet 1 M. Iliff
1/6-1/26 Harwich 1 v.o.
1/17-thr Chatham 1 P. Gaines
1/21 Barnstable 1 N. Villone
Common Yellowthroat
1/1 Mashpee 1 J. McCumber
1/1-2/3 Deerfield 1 T. Greist, Sa. Auer + v.o.
2/13-2/21 Sandwich 1 L. Briggs + v.o.
Pine Warbler
1/1-1/5 S. Hamilton 2 max M. Chuffnell
2/20 Centerville 14 P. Trimble
Yellow-rumped Warbler
1/1-1/31 PI 2 max v.o.
1/1-2/15 Lexington (DM) 3 max v.o.
1/15 Waltham 2 J. Forbes
2/11 Ipswich 3 M. Watson
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)
1/8 Nantucket 1 ph T. Pastuszak#
Yellow-throated Warbler (*dominica/stoddardi*)
1/1-2/15 Lancaster 1 ph J. Paster
1/22-2/16 Hingham 1 ph P.Edmundson+v.o.
Yellow-throated Warbler (*albilora*)
2/26-2/28 Belmont 1 ph P. Cassidy
Townsend's Warbler
1/11-1/25 Sagamore 1 ph A. Sanford + v.o.
Western Tanager
1/1-1/17 Brewster 1 ph D.Desplaines+v.o.
1/8 Harwich Port 1 ph J. Hutchins
1/26 Chatham 1 imm m M. Rzasa
2/21-2/22 Harwich 1 ph M. Ford
Indigo Bunting
1/3 Wellfleet 1 M. Iliff
Painted Bunting
1/1 Chatham 1 ph F. Atwood
1/31 Westport 1 m A. Baptiste
2/5-thr Eastham 1 m ph R. Price
2/28 Orleans 1 f ph J. Taylor
Dickcissel
2/7-thr W. Dennis 1 B. Eastman
2/11 Rockport (HPt) 1 J. Mott

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIRD SIGHTINGS

Taxonomic order is based on AOS checklist, Seventh edition, 61st Supplement, as published in *Auk* 137: ukaa030 (2020) *(see <http://checklist.americanornithology.org/>).*

Locations	
AA	Arnold Arboretum, Boston
ABC	Allen Bird Club
AFB	Air Force Base
AP	Andrews Point, Rockport
APd	Allens Pond, S. Dartmouth
AthBC	Athol Bird Club
B.	Beach
Barre FD	Barre Falls Dam
BBC	Brookline Bird Club
BFWMA	Bolton Flats WMA, Bolton & Lancaster
BHI	Boston Harbor Islands
BI	Belle Isle, E. Boston
BMB	Broad Meadow Brook, Worcester
BNC	Boston Nature Center, Mattapan
BR	Bass Rocks, Gloucester
BRI Co. seas	Bristol County, offshore
Cambr.	Cambridge
CB	Crane Beach, Ipswich
CCBC	Cape Cod Bird Club
CGB	Coast Guard Beach, Eastham
Co.	County
Corp. B.	Corporation Beach, Dennis
CP	Crooked Pond, Boxford
CPd	Chandler Pond, Boston
C. Res.	Cambridge Reservoir, Waltham
CSpk	Cold Spring Park, Newton
Cumb. Farms	Cumberland Farms, Middleboro
DFWS	Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary
DM	Dunback Meadow
DWMA	Delaney WMA, Stow, Bolton, Harvard
DWWS	Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary
EP	Eastern Point, Gloucester
FE	First Encounter Beach, Eastham
FH	Fort Hill, Eastham
FHC	Forest Hills Cemetery, Boston
FP	Fresh Pond, Cambridge
FPk	Franklin Park, Boston
G#	Gate #, Quabbin Res.
GMNWR	Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
H.	Harbor
HCB	Herring Cove Beach, Provincetown
HP	Horn Pond, Woburn
HPt	Halibut Point, Rockport
HRWMA	High Ridge WMA, Gardner
I.	Island
IBA	Important Bird Area
IRWS	Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary
JPd	Jamaica Pond, Boston
L.	Ledge
MAS	Mass Audubon
MBO	Bird Observatory, Manomet
MBWMA	Martin Burns WMA, Newbury
McW	McLaughlin Woods
MI	Morris Island
MNWS	Marblehead Neck Wildlife Sanctuary
MP	Millennium Park, W. Roxbury
MSSF	Myles Standish State Forest, Plymouth
MtA	Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambr.
MV	Martha's Vineyard
NAC	Nine Acre Corner, Concord
Nbpt	Newburyport
ONWR	Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge
Pd	Pond
PG	Public Garden, Boston
PI	Plum Island
Pk	Park
PLY Co. seas	Plymouth County, offshore
Pont.	Pontoosuc Lake, Lanesboro
POP	Point of Pines, Revere
PR	Pinnacle Rock, Malden
P'town	Provincetown
R.	River
Res.	Reservoir
RKG	Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston
RP	Race Point, Provincetown
SB	South Beach, Chatham
SF	State Forest
SN	Sandy Neck, Barnstable
SP	State Park
SRV	Sudbury River Valley
SSBC	South Shore Bird Club
TASL	Take A Second Look, Boston Harbor Census
WBWS	Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary
WE	World's End, Hingham
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WMWS	Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary
Wompatuck SP	Hingham, Cohasset, Scituate, Norwell
Worc.	Worcester
WS	Wildlife Sanctuary
WSF	Willowdale State Forest, Ipswich
WWMA	Westborough WMA, Westborough
Other Abbreviations	
*	first state record (pending MARC review)
!	subject to MARC review
ad	adult
alt	alternative plumage
au	audio recorded
b	banded
basic	basic plumage
br	breeding
cy	cycle (3cy = 3rd cycle)
d	dead
dk	dark (morph)
f	female
fl	fledgling
h	heard
imm	immature
inj	injured
juv	juvenile
lt	light (morph)
m	male
MARC	Massachusetts Avian Records Committee
max	maximum
migr	migrating
min	minimum
n	nesting
nfc	nocturnal flight call
ph	photographed
pr	pair
r	rescued
S	summer (1S = first summer)
subad	subadult
v.o.	various observers
W	winter (2W = second winter)
yg	young
#	additional observers

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE BIRD SIGHTINGS TO *BIRD OBSERVER*

Sightings for any given month should be reported to *Bird Observer* by the eighth of the following month. Reports should include: name and phone number of observer, name of species, date of sighting, location, number of birds, other observer(s), and information on age, sex, and morph (where relevant). Reports can be emailed to sightings@birdobserver.org or submitted online at <http://www.birdobserver.org/Contact-Us/Submit-Sightings>, or sent by mail to Bird Sightings, Robert H. Stymeist, 36 Lewis Avenue, Arlington MA 02474-3206.

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 Sean Williams, 18 Parkman Street, Westborough MA 01581, or by email to seanbirder@gmail.com.

BYGONE BIRDS

Historical Highlights for January–February

Neil Hayward

5 YEARS AGO

January–February 2016

A **Pink-footed Goose** that was wintering in Connecticut made occasional visits to Agawam this period. A **Western Grebe** was discovered on Winthrop Beach on February 7. An injured **Purple Gallinule**, discovered at Hathaway Pond in Barnstable on January 11, was treated for anemia by a wildlife rehabilitator. A Barn Owl was found dead in Danvers. A **Hammond's Flycatcher** discovered in Fairhaven on New Year's Day was the third record for the state. Another third for the state was a **Smith's Longspur** found on January 17 at Bear Creek Wildlife Sanctuary in Saugus. **Ash-throated Flycatchers** continued in Cambridge and Manomet, and a **Mountain Bluebird** was present throughout the period at the Crane Wildlife Management Area in Falmouth.

Best sighting: a first-winter **Yellow-billed Loon** discovered at Race Point in Provincetown on February 27. This was the first state record.

10 YEARS AGO

January–February 2011

A **Ross's Goose** continued on Nantucket through February 17. A **Mew Gull** of the Asian *kamtschatschensis* or *heinei* subspecies was found at Lynn Beach at the end of February. The three Monk Parakeets continuing on Bremen Street, East Boston, were being fed suet and parrot food by local residents. This was a poor winter for Snowy Owls with no sightings during this period. A **Varied Thrush** was visiting a feeder in Centerville in February.

Best sighting: two **Harris's Sparrows**, one on Duxbury Beach, from January 9–February 27, another in Falmouth, February 1–26.

20 YEARS AGO

January–February 2001

A **Pacific Loon** was discovered along the Rowley Shore section of Gloucester on January 18, while the **Eared Grebe** continued in nearby Gloucester Harbor. A likely **Western Grebe** was a one-day wonder at Salisbury on January 14. Two adult **Greater White-fronted Geese** spent most of February in Fairhaven. A **Purple Gallinule** was rescued on Martha's Vineyard on January 1, and a **Sandhill Crane** was present in Fairhaven for the month of February. An impressive 520 Purple Sandpipers were counted in North Scituate on January 26. An adult European **Mew Gull** was present at Flax Pond, Lynn, in mid-February.

Best sighting: an invasion of White-winged Crossbills, including up to 140 birds in Savoy. Many were singing, and the first breeding record for the state was documented in Windsor.

40 YEARS AGO

January–February 1981

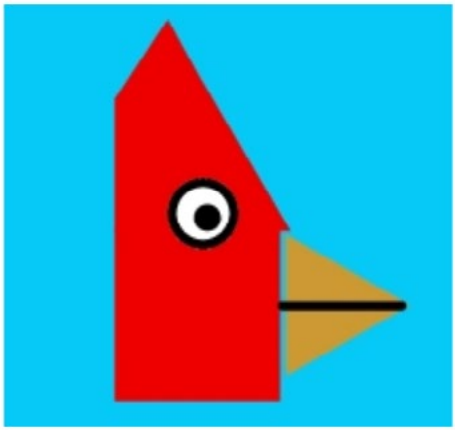
Iceland Gulls were much in evidence at Nantucket and Eastern Point, Gloucester, with 111 and 140, respectively. Nantucket also hosted a **Mew Gull** on January 3. A **Gyrfalcon** was reported from outer Cape Cod in January. Up to 22 Long-eared Owls were roosting at Dunback Meadow. A **Western Kingbird** was found in Chatham on January 2, and a **Sedge Wren** continued on Nantucket from December through early January. Six **Boreal Chickadees** were present during the period, and a **Hoary Redpoll** was discovered in a flock of redpolls at Plum Island on the last day of February.

Best sighting: Fifteen records of Goshawk, including three immatures in one tree in Framingham.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD BY ERIK NIELSEN (2016)

Ray Brown's Talkin' Birds

A Weekly Radio Show about Birds, Birding, and Conservation



Recent Guests and Topics -

Harry Vogel, Loon Preservation Committee

Jordan Rutter, Bird Names for Birds

Melissa Gonzales, Latino Conservation Week

Jeffrey Ward, co-founder of Black Birder's Week

Cliff Hawley, eBird reviewer

With us Every Week -

Mike O'Connor, Birdwatcher's General Store: Advice on Backyard Birding

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ABOUT THE COVER

Northern Waterthrush

The Northern Waterthrush (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) is a large, ground-dwelling warbler that constantly bobs its body and wags its tail and is rarely found far from water. The top of its head, back, and tail are dark brown. It has a narrow yellowish or white eye stripe, and it is yellowish to white below and densely streaked with brown or black, especially on the upper breast, and the throat is usually spotted. The sexes are similar in appearance. The Northern Waterthrush can be separated from its larger congener, the Louisiana Waterthrush (*P. motacilla*), by its smaller size, smaller and finer bill, the density of streaking on the upper breast, and the spotted throat. The legs of the Louisiana Waterthrush are a brighter pink. The Northern Waterthrush is easily separated from the Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*), which lacks an eye stripe and does not persistently bob its body or tail.

The Northern Waterthrush's breeding range extends from western Alaska in a broad band across Canada that includes the northern territories and the southern provinces from British Columbia through Ontario and Quebec to Newfoundland. It also includes the southern half of the Hudson Bay area. In the west, the range extends south into Idaho and western Montana. The range dips south again to encompass the Great Lakes and east to include New York and New England, extending south along the Appalachian Mountains to Virginia. Northern Waterthrushes winter from central Mexico throughout Central America, and in South America in Colombia, Venezuela, the Guianas to northern Brazil, northern Ecuador, and northeastern Peru. They also winter in Bermuda and in the Caribbean throughout the Bahamas and the Antilles and south to Trinidad and Tobago. The Northern Waterthrush is a long-distance nocturnal migrant, arriving on the breeding grounds from late April to mid-to-late May. In fall, migration often begins in mid-August and peaks in September. In Massachusetts, the Northern Waterthrush is considered a local and uncommon breeder, but a common migrant.

The Northern Waterthrush is usually monogamous, but occasionally may be polygamous. Pairs produce a single brood per year. The male's primary song consists of a series of loud, clear, ringing, chirping notes that fall in pitch and become more closely spaced. The call has been described as *sweet, sweet, sweet, swee, swee, swee, we, we, chew, chew, chew, chew.* This primary call is used to defend territory and to attract a mate. The flight song, which is often given while the bird flies nearly vertically, begins on the ground with loud chirps, and in the air consists of hurried bits of the primary song. They also utter *chink* calls throughout the year. Northern Waterthrushes defend territories on breeding and wintering grounds. Defense involves uttering the *chink* call and a crouched approach to the intruder with head, back, and spread tail held in a straight line, wings quivering. They may also use a wing-droop display from a perch with tail cocked and flicking. Chasing and fighting with intruders is not uncommon. Once the female arrives on territory, the male may court by perching above her with

wings vibrating, following her from perch to perch with wings buzzing, and circling above her.

Northern Waterthrushes nest in a wide variety of wooded wetlands, including forested swamps, bogs, lake and stream margins, and rhododendron, red maple, spruce, and cedar swamps and bogs. The female chooses the nest site, which is usually low in root systems of blown-down trees, the edges of clumps of ferns, or under the banks of lake or stream edges. The nest tends to be completely shaded and nearly invisible from above. The nest structure is a bowl of mostly moss and liverworts with a few leaves scattered about; an entrance to the bowl is constructed of leaves. The interior of the bowl is made of twigs and grass, pine needles, or rootlets and is often lined with mammal hair. Only the female develops a brood patch, and she alone incubates the usual clutch of five whitish eggs spotted or blotched with dark colors for the 12 days until hatching. The chicks are altricial—helpless with eyes closed —and usually have some black down. If disturbed, the female will leave the nest and move away with wings and tail spread, mouselike, drawing the intruder away. Both parents feed the nestlings, but only the female broods the young for the nine days until fledging. The young fly about a week after fledging. The brood is split between the parents who continue to feed the young for the four to five weeks until independence.

The diet of Northern Waterthrushes consists mostly of insects and insect larvae, spiders, beetles and, in some cases, snails or small clams. When foraging in water, they take aquatic insects and nymphs by wading and walking along branches or logs at the water's edge. They forage on the ground, taking prey from litter, moss, and mud by pecking, gleaning, or probing the ground and associated surfaces. They also glean foliage and hover and hawk insects, flies, and other flying prey. On the wintering grounds, Northern Waterthrushes may forage in foliage up to the subcanopy level.

Breeding Northern Waterthrushes are not severely impacted by cowbird parasitism, but pesticides are a threat, as is habitat destruction, especially on the wintering grounds in the tropics. Broad distribution on breeding and wintering grounds, however, and Breeding Bird Survey reports that generally show increases in population suggest that this delightful warbler species has a secure future.

William E. Davis, Jr.

AT A GLANCE

April 2021

TOM SULLIVAN

This month's mystery bird displays a somewhat exotic combination of distinctive patterns and colors—especially in the online version—that highlights its notably pointed wings and a prominently barred tail. Few Massachusetts species other than shorebirds and a select few raptors sport such an interesting combination of features and patterns, thus making the April puzzler less mysterious than a first glance might suggest.

The absence of long slender legs, combined with the stump-top perching location, strongly argue against the mystery species being a shorebird despite the bird's pointed wings. Similarly, there are few shorebirds that feature such uniformly strong checkered underwings. When these features are noted in the online color version, you will notice a unique combination of features: a pale blue banded tail with a distinct white-tipped terminal band, a colorful bluish lower back, and strongly checkered underwings.

By way of comparison, despite the fact that an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk is blue gray on the back, the obviously pointed wings of the mystery bird and the prominent checkering on the undersides of the wings readily serve to eliminate this species, as do the pale blue bands across the tail. Arguably, a quick look at the raptor about to launch itself into flight might briefly suggest a Mississippi Kite, but the same features that can eliminate an accipiter hold true for a Mississippi Kite. Also, the few rusty brown feathers visible at the sides of the tail base would unlikely be present or visible on a kite.

Ultimately, the distinct bluish dorsal coloration, the prominent tail banding, and the strongly checkered underwings unequivocally mark the mystery raptor as a male

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). The blue gray color on the back and rump are practically unique to a "blue Jack" male Merlin—a nickname often applied to the male of this lovely, animated little predator.

The Merlin is a fairly common spring and fall migrant in Massachusetts and is also a regular winter visitor in small numbers, especially near the coast. Of greater interest is its status as a slowly increasing rare and scattered breeder in the Commonwealth.

Tom Sullivan managed to secure this view of a male Merlin launching itself into flight at Duxbury Beach, Plymouth County, December 21, 2020.

Wayne R. Petersen

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Barry Van Dusen

An artist who has created many of our covers, Barry Van Dusen lives in Princeton, Massachusetts, and is well known in the birding world. Barry 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.* Barry's 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. Barry teaches workshops at various locations in Massachusetts. For more information, visit Barry's website at <http://www.barryvandusen.com>.

MERLIN BY SANDY SELESKY

AT A GLANCE

WAYNE R. PETERSEN

Can you identify the bird in this photograph?
Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

MORE HOT BIRDS

Brendan Burke spotted a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** by a roadside near Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, on April 28. Other birders saw it in the area through May 2. Ken Magnuson took the photo on the left.

When the cool weather concentrated dozens of swallows low over the water on April 18, Andy Sanford photographed an interesting one mixed in with the Cliff Swallows, which he later determined was a **Cave Swallow**. This species is found here occasionally in the fall and rarely in the spring; this was the first April record. Even more striking, the bird was identified to the Caribbean subspecies, the first documented in the state; all other Massachusetts records identified to subspecies have been from the southwest. Andy Sanford took the photo on the left.

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PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT BOSTON, MA

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