

# Bird Observer

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VOLUME 42, NUMBER 2

APRIL 2014



# HOT BIRDS

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On March 3 Cheri Ezell called Mass Audubon with a report of a **Barnacle Goose** at Maple Farm Sanctuary in Mendon. Justin Lawson took the photograph above.

Outside of Massachusetts, hot birds included a **Northern Hawk Owl** in Waterbury, Vermont, (see photograph on page 94) and a **Spotted Towhee** in Rye, New Hampshire, photographed by Steve Mirick.



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## Correction

The photographs that accompanied the article “Ernst Mayr: Building on Charles Darwin’s Legacy in the Twentieth Century” by William E. Davis Jr. in *Bird Observer* February 2014 were incorrectly captioned as provided by the author. All three photographs were provided courtesy of the Ernst Mayr Library, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University.



# Bird Observer

A bimonthly journal—to enhance understanding, observation, and enjoyment of birds  
**VOL. 42, NO. 2 APRIL 2014**

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# Birding College Conservation Area, Weston, Massachusetts

*Michele Grzenda*

The rich variety of open and forested wetlands, streams, fields, and forest make College Conservation Area (CCA) an ideal spot for spring birding. Although you probably will not find rare or unusual birds while touring this area, the property may surprise you with one or two less common species. Adjacent to Weston's most heavily used recreation facility, Burchard Park, CCA contains an extensive network of trails and is a popular destination for families, dog walkers, trail runners, hikers, and cross-country skiers. College Pond, eight acres in size, is the most notable feature here. This man-made pond was created when an earthen dam and spillway were constructed along the northeastern edge.



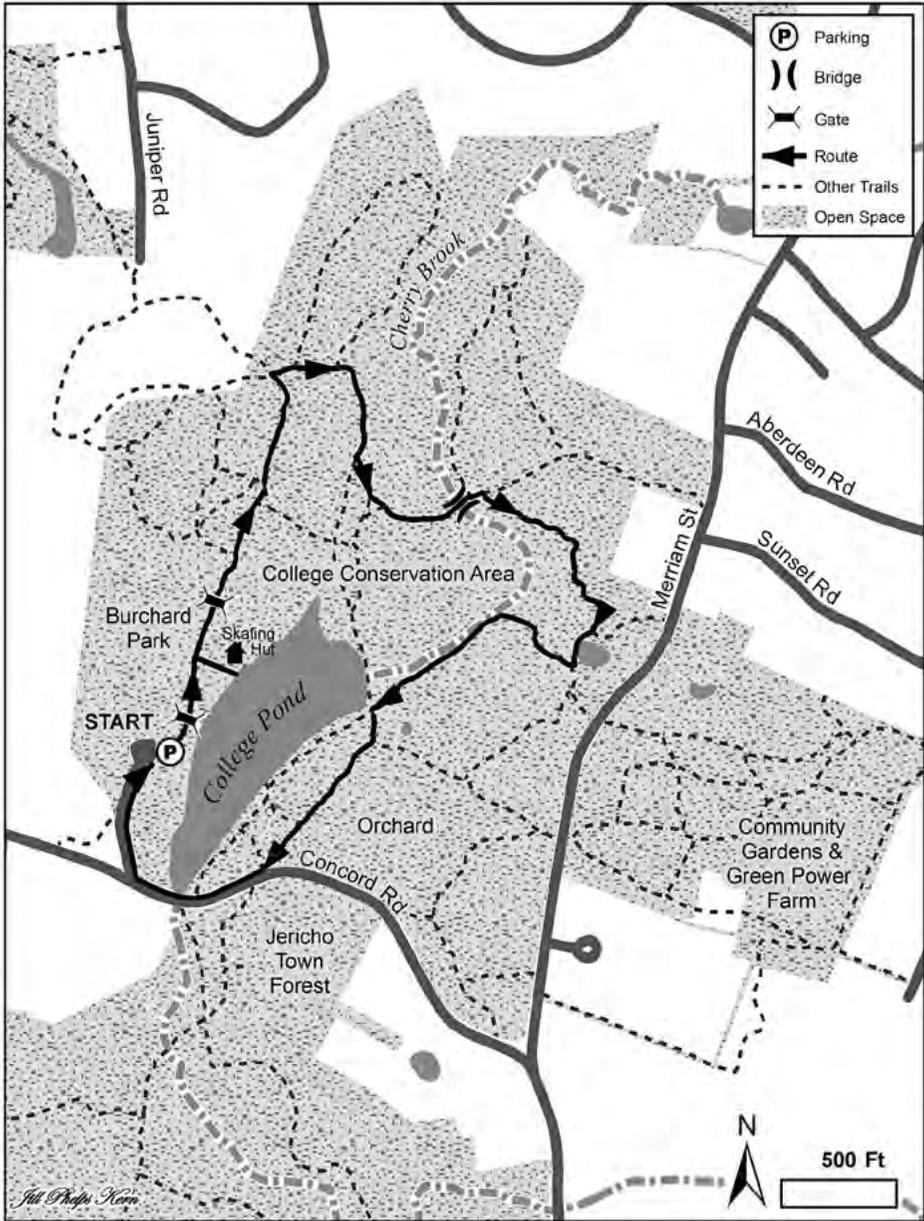
Cherry Brook, a perennial stream and tributary of the Cambridge Water Supply, flows in a northerly direction through the pond.

CCA is on my walking commute to work (when I can leave my car behind), and as such, it's often the first place I hear the *konklaree* of the Red-winged Blackbird each spring. During the spring and summer months, the observant birder will be rewarded in any number of ways: flushing a sleeping owl from a large white pine tree, spying an Indigo Bunting from the apple orchard, or hearing the *paint* of an American Woodcock at dusk along a wetland edge.

## **History**

The Town purchased College Conservation Area in 1977, funded in part by the Massachusetts Self-Help Program. This 146-acre property is managed for conservation and recreational purposes and is often referred to by the locals as the Weston College Land. In 1921, the two estates found here were purchased by the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits built Weston College, a seminary for the training of priests. In 1978, the seminary program moved to the Harvard School of Theology and became the Weston School of Theology. The former Weston College became the Campion Center with a Jesuit infirmary for retired priests and a retreat house.

North of the Campion Center is the Weston Observatory, Department of Geology and Geophysics, Boston College. The Observatory was founded in 1930 and operates the 29-station New England Seismic Network to monitor regional earthquake activity. The Observatory records, locates, and computes the magnitudes of more than 50 regional earthquakes annually.



## Parking and Directions

Ample parking can be found at the Weston Recreation Department's Burchard Park, off Concord Road. Look for an inconspicuous sign at the entrance across from 268 Concord Road (GPS coordinates: 42.379,-71.318). Proceed down the access road approximately 300 yards and park in front of the tennis courts.

## Birding Route

The birding route described below circumnavigates College Pond and travels through several different habitats. From the parking lot, proceed around the gate and onto the fire road to the right of the tennis courts. Almost immediately, you will come to Weston's skating hut (shed) on the right. Take the small trail on the right, just before this shed. This short trail leads down to a viewing area along the west side of the pond. Take a moment to scan the pond for Wood Ducks, Mallards, Great Blue Herons, Tree and Barn swallows, Canada Geese, and other waterbirds. Mating calls of the green frog and bullfrog are sometimes heard here. The shallow depth of College Pond makes it quite eutrophic. As spring turns into summer, College Pond transforms from a clear, transparent pond into a green weed-choked water body. Invasive water chestnut, native fragrant water lily, pickerelweed, and duckweed blanket the surface.



Cattails and duckweed are common plants observed during late summer and early fall at College Pond. All photographs by Michele Grzenda.

Once you have completed a brief scan, retrace your steps to the gravel fire road. Proceed north (right) and pass a ball field on your left. Walk around another conservation land gate and proceed straight into the pine forest. In spring you will be rewarded with a cacophony of sounds from many common forest-breeding birds such as Scarlet Tanager, Brown Creeper, Pine Warbler, Ovenbird, Hermit and Wood thrushes, and Eastern Wood-Pewee. Ignore the inviting trail to the right and continue straight into a small field. This is one of 20 fields mowed annually by the Weston Conservation Commission. Although the field is too small to provide suitable habitat for grassland birds, common edge species such as American Robin, Blue Jay, American Crow, Northern Flicker, and Red-bellied Woodpecker are often seen flying across the field from the surrounding forest patches. Listen for the *drink-your-teeeee* of the Eastern Towhee.



This bridge over Cherry Brook washed away during the 2010 March rain storms.

About halfway through the field, look for a trail on the right that leads back into the woods. Take that trail and continue along it for approximately 300 yards. Birds such as Common Yellowthroat, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Black-capped Chickadee are common in this patchwork of forested wetland and upland habitats. During the first half of the 20th century, this area was the site of a piggery. Before 1965 Weston was the site of many piggeries. As these pigs were fed garbage from Waltham and Weston, the piggeries gave the town a distinctive bouquet in summer.

Take your third left, after a big sweeping right-hand curve, and proceed down a trail that gradually descends toward Cherry Brook. Cross over a small wooden bridge, which was reconstructed after the March 2010 floods washed the former bridge downstream. Take your first right and head east, then south along a forested wetland. Listen here for Eastern Phoebe and Pileated Woodpecker. This stretch of the trail brings you close to the eastern portion of the property.

### **Weston Community Gardens and Green Power Farm**

If time permits, you could take a trail on the left, which brings you to Merriam Street. Cross the street and enter Weston's Community Garden and Green Power Farm. Although these properties are for municipal purposes, the Weston Conservation Commission oversees their management and stewardship. Land's Sake, a nonprofit

community service organization, manages the Community Farming and Education Program on town property through a contract with the Town. Its services include operating an organic farm, providing produce for the Hunger Relief Fund, and providing education and employment for young people in Weston. The Commission supports Land's Sake's involvement with environmental education projects, which are conducted in partnership with the School Department. Many resident children and teenagers participate in Green Power Farm Summer Camp. These young people receive a practical introduction to organic farming and gardening.

The Weston Community Gardens, located east of Merriam Street, began in 1973 and has expanded from 15 to approximately 55 garden plots. The plots are available to residents and other locals for an annual fee. Only a portion of this property is currently maintained for plots. The remainder is abandoned pasture, woodlands, and marsh. Look for nesting Eastern Bluebirds and House Wrens in the birdhouses located in the garden's common area.



View of College Pond from Dam.

### **Back to the Birding Route**

If you don't have time to cross Merriam Street, take the trail to the right and follow this narrow path back toward College Pond. It is along this trail, during the 2012 and 2013 nesting seasons, that the remarkable and continuous high-pitched song of the Winter Wren was heard. This persistent songster let his presence be known despite

competing sounds from babbling Cherry Brook on your right. Other species heard here include Veery, Red-eyed Vireo, Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, and many other forest birds mentioned previously.



The apple orchard provides wildlife habitat for numerous insects and arachnids like this Orb Weaver Spider

Soon thereafter, the trail comes to a T as you arrive at the earthen dam of College Pond. Take a moment, head right, and go 50 yards to the pond's concrete spillway. Here, Beaver Solutions, Inc. has installed a fence and pipe-flow system to better manage beaver damming. The fence is constructed so that beavers can dam against it but cannot get into the culvert, which remains unobstructed. When the fence was constructed, a flexible pond leveler pipe was also installed and set at the desired pond level. Even though the beavers can dam against the fence and hold back some water, the pipe allows water to move freely out of the pond.

Vegetation is maintained here for dam maintenance but allows an unobstructed view of the entire pond to the south. The shrubby and herbaceous vegetation along the earthen dam comprises silky dogwood, American alder, cattail, and highbush blueberry and provides good cover for

Gray Catbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Yellow Warblers, and Song Sparrows. Scan the pond again for any waterbirds you may have missed while viewing the water body from the skating hut earlier in your walk. Be on the lookout for Baltimore Orioles, which nest almost annually in a weeping willow above the downstream side of the spillway.

Turn back in the direction you just came from, with the pond on your right. Proceed past the pond edge and take your second right into the apple orchard. Winter moth outbreaks have affected the fruit production of these trees. Because the town does not wish to apply pesticides here, the trees are fruitless most years, but nevertheless provide shade and wildlife habitat. In addition, the Commission maintains patches of milkweed within the field in the hopes of attracting nectaring and egg-laying monarch butterflies. In 2009, with help from volunteers and an Eagle Scout, several new fruit tree seedlings were planted. In addition, birdhouses were installed along the western edge of the orchard.

While walking through the orchard, listen and look for Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, American Goldfinch, Cedar Waxwing, and Chimney Swift. A narrow shrub/forest edge lies to your right, between the orchard and pond. Here, listen for Indigo

Bunting, Warbling Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Great-crested Flycatcher, Chipping Sparrow, and House Finch.

Continue south along the path, which takes you gradually up the meadow to Concord Road. If time permits, you can cross Concord Road and enter Jericho Forest, Weston's largest continuous conservation land with over 570 forested and non-forested acres. Otherwise, turn right at the sidewalk, proceed down the road, and return to the access road of Burchard Park. 🐦

### **Additional Information about Weston Conservation Organizations**

Weston Conservation Commission Website: <<http://www.tinyurl.com/WestonConservationLand>>

The Commission owns and manages approximately 2000 acres of Conservation land. Approximately 90 miles of trails, fire roads, and hilltop outlooks have been maintained for public use and enjoyment with most of the funding provided by the Weston Forest and Trail Association (WFTA). In 2013, WFTA published a revised trail map in commemoration of Weston's 300th anniversary. This new colored map shows all town trails and can be purchased from the Conservation Department in Town Hall for \$10.00. Professor Elmer E. Jones describes the history and ecology of the conservation areas in his book *Walks on Weston Conservation Land*. It is available for purchase at the Conservation Office in Town Hall. The \$15.00 price helps cover the cost of printing and distribution.

Weston Forest and Trail Association Website: <<http://www.westonforesttrail.org>>

Land's Sake, Inc.: <<http://www.landssake.org>>.

### **Sources**

Jones, Elmer E. 1999. *Walks on Weston Conservation Land*. Weston Forest and Trail Press. Available for purchase; see above.

**Michele Grzenda** is the Conservation Administrator for the Town of Weston, where she administers the Wetlands Protection Act and helps manage over 2000 acres of Conservation Land. She has over 20 years of experience working in and often uniting the fields of environmental regulation, land management, and education. Prior to municipal work, Michele was a Teacher/Naturalist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society and conducted several breeding bird surveys throughout the east. She often commutes to Town Hall by running, skiing, birding, or biking through Weston Conservation Land. Outside of work, she shares her passion for all creatures great and small by leading nature trips and classes for the Appalachian Mountain Club, Sudbury Valley Trustees, and other non-profits. Michele's hobbies include trail running, kayaking, backpacking, and traveling.

# An Accidental Big Year

*Neil Hayward*



Sandy Komito (left) and Neil (right). July 28th, Half Moon Bay Pelagic, California.  
Photograph by Debi Shearwater.

I shift my weight cautiously from one frozen limb to the other in a futile attempt to keep at least some of my blood circulating. It's bitterly cold, and the morning sun, hiding behind some unseen horizon, seems already to have given up for the day. The ground is hidden beneath a layer of loud crunching snow, and the surrounding woodland strains under the weight of sugarcoated branches.

The distant *caaaws* of American Crows pull me back from my mental wanderings. Why do I never seem to have enough clothes for this ridiculousness? Why didn't I come yesterday? Did I forget to turn my headlights off? The crows provide an eerie soundtrack to what could easily be the setting for some Scandinavian crime noir novel except that there are too many witnesses with too many optics. Ten other brave, shivering, stupid souls also seem to think this was a better idea than staying in bed. And that's when it happens—the magic (not the Swedish murder). Three words beloved by birders, "There it is!"

A single bird flaps high above the tree line crossing the wide forest clearing. The anticipation momentarily arrests my breathing. With a sense of fear—Will I miss it? Will this be the only view? Did I really leave my headlights on?—I lift my binoculars, lock onto the bird, and see the diagnostic flash of white on the underwings. That's it! Fieldfare!



Red-billed Tropicbird. June 24th, Seal Island, Vinalhaven, Maine. All photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.

The collective sigh of relief is audible as is the patting of backs. The brief appearance of this lost Eurasian bird has warmed the hearts of this morning's unusual rural gathering, more than payback for the early and chilly start. And although I've seen Fieldfares many times in the English winters of my childhood, there's something special about seeing it here in Massachusetts.

As I watch the bird hop around, hungrily seeking out the blood-red bittersweet berries, I have little idea that this is anything other than an exciting new state bird. I do not know at the time that it would be one among 750 species, bounty from a madcap adventure that would come to be called an Accidental Big Year, a quest that would take me to the cardinal points of the continent: Barrow in the frozen north, Newfoundland poking out to the east, the Dry Tortugas dangling off the Florida Keys, and tiny Adak adrift in the volcanic Aleutian chain. And pretty much everything in between. It was a year that was as surprising as it was unplanned, and as rewarding as it was physically exhausting, and one that might just have put this local birder into the record books. But I'm getting ahead of myself. What is a Big Year? How much is the prize money? How do you do one accidentally? And why would you ever want to? Hint: you probably wouldn't.

A Big Year is perhaps the birding equivalent of climbing all 14,000-foot peaks, sailing around the world single-handedly, or taking a class at one of those CrossFit gyms. Well, perhaps without any of the beneficial calorie burning. A Big Year ought to come with a label warning of potential cash burning and relationship loss, and I'm sure I have less hair than when I started. And no, there is no prize money.

If anyone is to blame for the Big Year, and I'd like to think there is, it would probably be Roger Tory Peterson. Apparently not satisfied with the trivial task of inventing the first modern field guide in 1934, he must have made the inevitable leap

in a moment of sheer delirium, “Wouldn’t it be fun to drive across the country and actually see all those birds?” In 1953 he did just that. The experience was eye-popping enough to become the subject of a book and a movie, both called *Wild America*, with the 572 species seen relegated to a mere footnote. But with that footnote a new challenge was set. And if there are two things most birders are good at, it’s counting and driving. Getting up early also helps. And so, a new hobby was born—the Big Year.

Many have since fallen for the lure of the Big Year, perhaps none so eloquently as Ken Kaufman in 1973, whose riveting memoir *Kingbird Highway* recounts the 666 species that he saw. Benton Basham, a nurse from Tennessee, was the first to break the 700 barrier in 1983 with 711 species. The most famous Big Year of all was waged in 1998, the year of El Niño and the best birding that Attu, hanging precariously at the western end of the Aleutian chain, had ever seen. That year was immortalized in Mark Obmascik’s excellent book, *The Big Year*, and in the less-than-excellent movie of the same name. The star was Sandy Komito, a rough-around-the-edges birding machine. He smashed the previous record of 721, which he had set in 1987. His astounding new record of 748, which included 3 species new to the American Birding Association (ABA) region, stands to this day. He saw close to 30 Asian vagrants on Attu. When the U. S. Coast Guard abandoned the island at the end of the century and decommissioned the runway, ending future access to Larry Balch’s famous Attours birding group, it was widely considered that Sandy’s record was out of reach.



Least Auklet. May 27, St. Paul Island, Pribilofs, Alaska.

Although Attu was off the map, there was a lot of Alaska left. Birders migrated to the western outposts of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island and to St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs. With an increasing number of exotics being added to the ABA list, coupled with up-to-the-minute electronic data such as eBird and state listservs, Sandy’s record of 748 was starting to look shaky. In 2011, the birding community collectively held its breath as Colorado birder John Vanderpoel put the record to the test. Going into December, Vanderpoel was sitting on 734 birds. Although he ultimately fell short—ending the year with 743—he showed that Komito’s record, in a post-Attu, electronic world, was most definitely in play.

## WINTER

Finding the Fieldfare, like much in birding, was good timing. For a start, I was lucky to be home, having spent much of the winter out of town. A two-week reading vacation in January in Arizona turned into a birding binge. The distances were small,

the weather great, and the birds spectacular. While the birds back home were sensibly few and far between, here in the lush desert and the thickly forested canyons of the sky islands they were abundant. And boy, were they colorful: Vermillion Flycatcher, Acorn Woodpecker, Magnificent Hummingbird, Painted Redstart, and the newly recognized Rosy-faced Lovebird. The birding meccas of the southeast corner of Arizona are familiar to many readers: Madera Canyon; the Chiricahuas; Miller, Huachuca, and Ash Canyons; Lake Patagonia; and the delightful feeders at the Paton's House, which was recently purchased by Tucson Audubon Society. I picked up some decent rarities too: Nutting's Flycatcher at Bill Williams NWR (a confirmed breeder for 2013!), a frustratingly secretive Ruddy Ground-Dove at Whitewater Draw, and the now regular Rufous-capped Warblers chipping at the top of Florida Canyon. I didn't know it back then, but I'd return another nine times during the year; in terms of diversity and ease of pace, Arizona would remain my favorite birding destination.



Nutting's Flycatcher, January 18, Bill Williams NWR, Arizona.

Meanwhile, the big news was from across the continent. Birders were flocking to Vancouver for the metropolitan double whammy of Red-flanked Bluetail and Brambling. As the reports mounted, so, too, did the temptation. I eventually caved in, seeing both on a leisurely and predictably rainy morning on the last day of January. Canada was also the destination for some local driving sorties. My girlfriend Gerri and I spent a long weekend in Ottawa, which was Owl Central in the winter of 2012-13. We were treated to multiple Great Gray Owls, a hunting Northern Hawk Owl, and a secretive and very sleepy—but importantly alive—Boreal Owl. And so, when the Fieldfare eventually flew into my binocular view on March 18th, I'd already clocked over 300 species.

## SPRING

One of the great wonders of the modern age—apart from the Internet, wrinkle-free shirts, and the widespread availability of cafe lattes—is the Top 100 listing on eBird. You can see how you're doing compared to other birders in a particular region. Of course, if you're competitive, it's also one of the most dangerous and addictive inventions of the new millennium. A month or two into 2013, I noticed that I was doing pretty well. By the time the Fieldfare was alternately pleasing and frustrating local and visiting birders, I was doing well enough to attract the attention of others. I started receiving emails, "Are you doing a Big Year?" My standard answer to this, after calming down and deleting the expletives, was, "No. Because that would be insane."

But having bagged a string of pretty classy rarities, including Thick-billed Vireo and Western Spindalis in Florida in addition to the local Fieldfare, I started to think that maybe a Big Year wasn't such a crazy idea. Actually, that wasn't me thinking at all; it was Gerri, who has the annoying ability of making me think whatever she wants me to think. I think she wanted me out of the house. I'd recently resigned from a job that I'd loved into a less social consulting role and missed the excitement of being out of the house. I suspect Gerri thought a Big Year would do me good. I think she was right, but after I'd traveled almost 250,000 miles and been away for more than half the year, she probably regretted not suggesting golf.



Northern Pygmy-Owl, May 30, Miller Canyon, Arizona.

The drive home gave me plenty of time to reflect. Why was I so upset about a single bird? Is it normal to drive 14 hours in a day? How much does a portable toilet cost to rent? And, more relevantly, did this mean I was doing a Big Year? Partly to avenge the Bahama No Show, and because of Gerri's brainwashing, I finally came out of the birding closet and admitted that I was doing a Big Year. This meant three things. I'd have to go to Alaska—a lot. I'd have to write a blog, because apparently you can't do anything these days without writing a blog about it. And I'd have to track down all of those annoying grouse species at the front of the field guide. Moreover, I didn't have a goal. In April, if asked what my target was, I'd have told you, "Umm...to see some birds," not an actual number.

While I was driving home from Denver, Pennsylvania, Team Sapsucker had just set a new Big Day record of 294 species in the fallout of the decade. Obviously I

Was there a point during the spring when I realized I was doing a Big Year? I'd like to think it was a gradual descent into insanity, but April 25<sup>th</sup> is probably the day. A Bahama Woodstar had been confirmed the day before at a feeder in Denver, Pennsylvania. For many, this would be the most astonishing bird of the year—only five previous reports, four of them in southeast Florida, and none in the last 32 years. Such was the predicted hysteria that the owners had the foresight to order a portable toilet for the expected weekend crowds. And although many did predictably come, and the restroom facilities were indeed helpful, the lack of the actual bird was decidedly less helpful. It was my first miss of the year, and a sobering one.

The drive home gave me plenty of time to reflect. Why was I so upset about a single bird? Is it normal to drive 14 hours in a day? How much does a portable toilet

wasn't there. Despite missing most of the major fallouts of the spring, persistence paid off and I did pretty well.

As April turned into May, I headed back south, hoping to cut off the advance of the summer migrants. Spring is critical to any Big Year. It's much easier to see the hundreds of summer visitors when they're hungry and dazed migrants on passage than track them down individually in their summer homes, which are often inaccessible. A Big Year is a race against time. The time you save seeing birds in the spring at High Island, Key West, or Madera Canyon are days saved for later in the year to chase other birds.

Key misses for spring included: Kentucky, Swainson's, Canada, Cerulean, Connecticut, and Mourning warblers, all of which required dedicated days spent in their breeding grounds and evenings spent picking off deer ticks. And there were some surprises, too: Tropical Parula and Ruff in Texas, White-eared Hummingbird in Arizona, and Brown and Masked boobies and the surprisingly tough-to-find Black Noddy on the Dry Tortugas. The bird dial kept ratcheting up past each new target I set: 400, 450, 500, 550. By mid-May I was well on my way to 600.



Kirtland's Warbler. June 11, Grayling, Michigan.

Alaska, where spring comes late, is key to a Big Year, as Sandy's three weeks on Attu had proven. I took eight trips to Alaska, spent almost 60 days there, and saw more than 50 birds that I could find nowhere else. I flew into Anchorage in late May for the first time, my face stuck to the window, wide-eyed with wonder at the snow-clad mountains through which the plane was dodging. A week later, I was peering out on a fogbound Bering Sea from the tiny island of St. Paul in the Pribilofs. I knew I'd found something special, something remote. This was hard-core birding. In Mount Auburn Cemetery the trees had finally leafed out, creating hidey-holes for the migrating warblers, but there were no trees here—just snow, barren desolation, and an Internet connection the speed of dial-up.

The Pribilofs are the new Attu. Of the two main islands, St. Paul is where the action is. There's an airport and a hotel, bizarrely the same building; a small town, where there may be more cats than humans; and the Trident Fish Cannery, whose cafeteria provided our three daily meals. The cliffs on the island are famously piled high with breeding seabirds: Horned and Tufted puffins; Crested, Parakeet, and Least auklets; Common and Thick-billed murres; and are one of the few places to see Red-

headed Cormorants and Red-legged Kittiwakes. And the potential for vagrants is high. Within two hours of landing I added a subadult White-tailed Eagle returning for its second year, and over the next few days a Wood Sandpiper and another Brambling.



Bluethroat. June 9, Nome, Alaska.

However, in a classic example of bad timing—which would become a recurrent theme throughout the year—I read in frustration as excited reports came in of a Common Ringed Plover found by Suzanne Sullivan on May 21 on Plum Island. Instead of being the usual 45 miles away, I was over 4000 miles away in a cold and foggy land. Although an Alaskan breeder, it was a bird I would never see during my Big Year, the only non-rarity ABA code 1 or 2 bird that I missed.

Nome is considerably less remote than St. Paul, with multiple daily flights from Anchorage thanks to a large town, native villages, and a healthy gold dredging industry. Like many parts of Alaska, it's not connected to the main road network. There are roads though—three of them—and although they don't go anywhere, each forms the agenda for a solid day's birding. I was here, like many birders, to see the Trans-Beringian migrants: Arctic Warbler, White Wagtail, and Eastern Yellow Wagtail, and to witness the enchanting parachuting dance of the Bluethroat. The tundra was moist underfoot from the recent snowmelt, with stunted dwarf willows peeking through, and it was hopping with birds. Gray-cheeked Thrushes sang from every available perch. Long-tailed Jaegers cruised the hillsides. Willow and Rock ptarmigan buzzed around like giant soccer balls with wings.

After wasting 50 hours chasing the ghost bird in Hadley back in January, it felt wrong somehow to find a nest full of Gyrfalcons—two adults and three young—suspended a few feet below the road on a metal bridge. When it comes to the bright, buffy Bristle-thighed Curlew, there really is, as the only postcard in town states, no place like Nome; it's the only reliable place to see this species in North America. The scenery, almost 24-hour light, and the spectacular colors of breeding birds—Red-throated Loon, American Golden-Plover, Steller's Eider—instantly made Nome one of my favorite places of the year.

## SUMMER

If there's a lull in the normal birding year, it's summer, when chick rearing becomes a stealth operation. Returning from Alaska, after months on the road, I was looking forward to the expected respite. It never came. In some ways summer was

the hardest time for me. After the frenzied panic of spring, rarities that popped up, and missed migrants to track down kept me away from home. It was the pivot point to my year. I swapped birding places and states for the more risky business of chasing individuals. In one typical summer week, I flew to Florida for Fork-tailed Flycatcher, then to San Diego for Lesser Sand-Plover, then to Arizona for Slate-throated Redstart and Black-capped Gnatcatcher, and then back to California for Little Stint. All the while I wondered when I'd have time to find those ridiculous Himalayan Snowcocks.



Red-necked Stint. June 28, Plum Island, Newburyport, Massachusetts.

Every birder has a nemesis. Mine was Red-necked Stint. I'm not sure what birders did to incur the wrath of the goddess Nemesis, but divine retribution seems to be an accepted part of the hobby. I still remember vividly the drive to north Norfolk in the United Kingdom, arriving five minutes too late for the first of many Red-necked Stints. "Oh, it just flew off, mate, high to the east. Probably not a good sign, that." It wasn't. The stint was never seen again. In 2010, South Beach in Chatham, Massachusetts, offered further proof that I was destined never to see this bird. And so it was with some disbelief that I found myself on one sunny morning in June at Plum Island staring at a Red-necked Stint. Nemesis no more! Of course, you can never entirely defy Nemesis—my problem bird was then upgraded to a White-cheeked Pintail, a bird I would chase at least six times during the year, and never once see.

Chasing rarities makes a Big Year a lot more expensive. I kept track of a whole bunch of metrics throughout my year: 51,758 miles driven, 193,758 miles flown, 195 days away from home, 15 days on a boat, 15 days wishing I wasn't on a boat. I tracked everything except the cost for two reasons: (1) I was too afraid to know, and (2) I was

too embarrassed for anyone else to know. As the costs started escalating, so too did the nights spent sleeping for free in airports and rental cars. By the end of the year I was an expert in choosing cars not based on their looks, safety, or fuel efficiency, but on their ability to double as a bed. I quickly discovered this wasn't a popular thing to tell the rental car agent.



Buller's Shearwater. September 22, Half Moon Bay Pelagic, California.

The pressure of spending days in the field, driving road-trip distances, writing blog updates, booking flights, researching the next target, finding decent coffee, getting up for the first flight of the day, finding any coffee, all meant that I was perennially sleep-deprived. And although I'd always mocked those uncool fools you see on planes with the funny neck pillows, by the end of the year I was toting one everywhere. I greedily stole sleep wherever I could find it.

Summer birding also meant pelagics. I split my time between the excellent operations of North Carolina-based Brian Patteson in the Atlantic and California-based Debi Shearwater in the Pacific. Pelagic birding is simple: you turn up, pay your money, and immediately pray to the birding gods. It's a crapshoot: no two days are the same, and the effort never seems to correlate with the reward. Pishing never seems to work except for attracting raised eyebrows. It's like birding from

your car while both you and the birds are moving. No wonder so many people end up being sick. But there's no greater adrenalin rush than is experienced from birding on a boat. As you're scanning one part of the moving seascape, or opening another box of saltines, or being buffeted around inside the moving toilet, your ears are always alert. Not for bird song, but for a sudden shout: "Flesh-foot at 12 o'clock," "Trindade Petrel on the bow," "Craveri's Murrelet at 10 o'clock," and, most memorably, "Blue whale!" Although I spent six days on the Atlantic, and nine on the Pacific, I never did hear shouts of "White-tailed Tropicbird," "Guadalupe Murrelet," "Fea's Petrel," or "Cook's Petrel"—all of which ultimately ended up in the loss column for the year. As did White-faced Storm-Petrel after the unfortunate weather cancellation of the Cape Cod boat in August.

Big Years are spectator sports. I didn't know that at the beginning. I started a blog, *accidentalbigyear2013*, mainly for my own benefit to immortalize my own experiences and to remind myself in years to come with grainy, out-of-focus digiscoped pictures. I mean, who else would read this stuff and how would they even find it? But somehow

people did. I started getting comments, followers, hundreds of views per day, and when I was wearing my familiar Red Sox hat in the field, recognition. “Are you that guy doing the Big Year?” Or more worryingly, “Are you the accidental person?” Invariably, they were disappointed that I wasn’t as funny, as attractive, or as tall in real life.



Blue-footed Booby. August 19, Lake Patagonia, Arizona.

One of the reasons we bird is the sheer unpredictability. It keeps us on our toes. We never quite know what we’ll see each time we go out. And so it is, too, with Big Years. There were some amazing strokes of luck, like arriving at Anchorage Airport in the afternoon for the one and only day that a Siberian Stonechat was present. But birding luck comes in streaks. The rest of the time you’re swinging and missing. The summer was that slump for me—I was always in the wrong place at the wrong time. I flew to San Diego for a three-day pelagic because it would be my best chance for the recently split Guadalupe Murrelet. The night before, I was buying Dramamine at the boathouse and confirming the departure time for the following morning. “Oh, that boat was cancelled a month ago. Didn’t they tell you?” No, apparently they hadn’t. So while I was standing on a lonely, dark quay in San Diego, a Curlew Sandpiper had just been found 3000 miles away on Plum Island. And a very rare Blue-footed Booby had just been spotted on a lake in New Mexico.

Big years are all about choices—every day means making decisions. I figured the Booby would stay, so took the next flight home. Apparently Curlew Sandpipers can also use Expedia; when I landed it was gone. I would eventually catch up with one, quite possibly the same bird, a week later on Long Island. There was still the Booby, right? I landed at midnight in Texas several days later with a five-hour overnight drive to New Mexico ahead of me. As we taxied into Dallas airport, I stared in disbelief as the messages popped up on my phone that the Booby had gone into rehab. Zombie-



Neil after seeing Blue-footed Booby. August 19, Lake Patagonia, Arizona. Photograph courtesy of the author.

like, I shuffled off the plane, only to ask if I could get right back on the morning flight and go home. I'd hit rock bottom.

It was another night searching for elusive sleep in an airport blaring with 24-hour TV news, vacuuming cleaning crews, and arctic air-conditioning. This was supposed to be a Big Year. What happened to all the sex, drugs, and rock and roll?

While the New Mexico Booby would ultimately not recover, it presaged what would become known as the year of the Booby—the biggest invasion of Blue-footed Boobies in the US in at least 50 years. Most—over one hundred—were concentrated in California. I saw mine in Arizona on Lake Patagonia. Not only would this be my first life bird seen from a kayak, it was also my 700th for the year. For many, that's the Holy Grail of the Big Year. Only 12 people had seen more than

700 birds in one year. The date was Aug 19th, a full week ahead of John Vanderpoel's 700th. And so, with over four months of the year left, there seemed only one obvious goal left: Sandy Komito's 15-year record. But could that really be broken?

## FALL

As summer cooled to fall, and birds started to pour south out of the country, I headed west—to Alaska. I spent almost the entire month of September out there, poised for Asian vagrants. Alaska is all about timing. Gambell, a tiny subsistence village on the northwest point of St. Lawrence Island, is typically best in the first half of September before the winds shift to the north permanently for the winter. And then St. Paul tends to do better. I followed this strategy, but somehow, I managed to be spectacularly in the wrong place for most of the month.

Gambell is famous for its pea gravel, which makes walking slow and frustration high. The lack of a bar, restaurant, or coffee shop together with a dreary kind of weather you'd only expect from the United Kingdom explains why the only tourists in "town" are birders. The accommodation is primitive, and despite being one of the few places in Alaska where you actually can see Russia, I'm pretty sure Sarah Palin never lived here. It's desolate, with only the shores of Troutman Lake and the wormwood-carpeted boneyards providing respite for lost birds. The latter are noticeably few in number, but when you do find one, there's a good chance it's something exciting. An hour or two off the plane, my group, Wilderness Birding led by the excellent Aaron Lang, spotted Baikal Teal, a first for the island. The rest of the day was spent picking through flocks of Red-throated Pipits, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and an obliging

Spectacled Eider. After our first day of triumph, the next four days of strong northerlies predictably produced nothing. I left Gambell with just four new birds. But the dinnertime stories of bygone years left me with a vivid awareness of what I could have seen.

I landed in Boston two days and four flights later only to hear of the mini-fallout back on Gambell: Yellow-browed Warbler, Siberian Accentors, and a Siberian Stonechat. Without unpacking my bags, or allowing enough time to sensibly talk myself out of it, I turned around and made the tortuous journey back. Another two days and four flights later, I found that the birds had, of course, sensibly gone. And with strong northerlies again, that second trip was a complete bust until the morning of my departure, when Californian birder and Gambell guru Paul Lehman flushed a Common Snipe—an ABA life bird for me. I can still hear the sound of the



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. September 10, Gambell, Alaska.

incoming plane above, desperately looking for a gap in the clouds to land, while I was running around hysterically below in the boneyards looking for the Snipe. It was eventually relocated—but only after I was miserably flying back across the Bering Sea. And although Gambell is typically quiet for the rest of the month, this year it wasn't; after I left for the second and final time, Gambell witnessed an astonishing end to the month: Common Chiffchaff, Lanceolated Warbler, Pechora Pipit, and another Siberian Accentor.

By that time, I was back on St. Paul, 450 miles farther south in the Bering Sea. The spring snow was gone, replaced by fields of celery, locally known as *putchkie*. The island was alive with seal pups—the Pribilofs are the largest breeding grounds for the Northern Fur Seal—and the offshore waters were red from the feeding orca pods. And though the week before had an impressive range of finds that had since disappeared: Asian Brown Flycatcher, Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler, Pacific Swift; I did manage to catch up with Gray-streaked Flycatcher, Common Rosefinch, Olive-backed Pipit, and finally a Gray-tailed Tattler. As I prepared to leave St. Paul at the end of September, there were predictions for a massive storm from the southwest. A storm like this in the first week of October could drop something pretty amazing. But I had a meeting with Ross's Gull in Barrow, and so I left.

Barrow reliably delivered tens of pink-flushed Ross's Gulls, migrating along the leaden coast of the Chukchi Sea of the Arctic Ocean. But my favorite bird wasn't even a bird, but a family of polar bears trekking across the frozen Elson Lagoon. Oddly



Polar Bear. October 3, Barrow, Alaska.

articulated, the long neck gave the impression of a fifth leg. Occasionally they'd pause and then jump, legs splayed, into an unfrozen patch of water. It was one of the undisputed highlights to my year. Less happily, for the first time in many years, there was not a single Ivory Gull. This is a bird whose breeding numbers in Canada have dropped by as much as 80% since the 1980s. Our miss seemed like another bad omen for this bird. It would end up being one of several birds on my Massachusetts life list that I wouldn't see during my Big Year, the others being Little Egret, White-faced Storm-Petrel, and Common Chaffinch.

Haunted by the predicted storm on St. Paul, I went back after Barrow. Maybe this time I could be in the right place at the right time? Two days of seeing no birds suggested, of course, that I couldn't. And then it happened. While walking along the sand dunes, we flushed a reddish-brown bird. It popped up on a celery head long enough to confuse the nine of us present. "Whatever it is, it's a first for North America," said our excited guide Scott Schuette. Despite seeing large numbers during my childhood, I was totally unprepared for its appearance in the United States: a Common Redstart. It would be the second of three potential new species for the ABA that year. The first was the widely reported and well-observed Rufous-necked Wood-Rail at Bosque del Apache, New Mexico, in July. My decision to return to St. Paul was also rewarded with two other new birds: Eyebrowed Thrush and Mottled Petrel.

## WINTER

One of the oddities of the Big Year is that there are five seasons—you get a second chance at winter. While that should be good news, the falling mercury was anything but welcome. It was a reminder to me that time was running out. By mid-November I'd seen 732 species, tantalizingly in sight of the Big Year record. And now, of course, the birding world was watching. What started as a personal accident, was now a public spectacle with near daily blog updates and Internet speculation. And that, for me, was the hardest part of the year—not the driving, flying, or sleeping in tiny, cold cars, but dealing with the expectation and the hope. Because now, for the first time, I could fail. Before, it was just about the experiences—the birds and the writing. Now, there was a binary result—I'd either beat the record, or I'd fail. I was in the unusual position of seeing almost 750 birds in a year, traveling the country, meeting some pretty cool people, and somehow failing at a public goal that I'd never really set myself.



Common Redstart. October 8, St. Paul Island, Alaska.

The final weeks of the year were a mad rush that took me from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia for Tundra Bean-Goose, Pink-footed Goose, and Yellow-legged Gull back to Alaska: to Anchorage for Dusky Thrush, to a frigid Nome for McKay's Bunting, and to Adak, in the Aleutians, for Whooper Swan, Whiskered Auklet, and my third provisional new ABA species—Eurasian Sparrowhawk. The pace was hectic; in one week I was in Humboldt County, California, for Little Bunting; Miami, Florida, for La Sagra's Flycatcher, which I'd missed in the spring; Homer, Alaska, for Rustic Bunting; and then home. With one week to go before the end of the year, I was on 746 species plus 3 provisionals.

In that last week, there were no more new birds left in the country. I'd seen them all. I kept checking listservs, eBird, and North America Rare Bird Alert (NARBA), all the while unable to make any solid plans for Christmas. During that restless week I had time to reflect on all the misses. My late start to the year had cost me some painful ones: Siberian Accentor, Citrine Wagtail, Common Crane, Gray Heron, Spotted Redshank. And if there's anything I'd have done differently in my Big Year, apart from not doing it, I would have started chasing at the beginning of the year. The "year" part of the Big Year really is pretty important. With those, I'd have beaten the record. But I did have one last trick up my sleeve, one last place to try. On December 29, on Brian Patteson's boat off the sandy Outer Banks of North Carolina, I saw the last bird in what

would be a very big year. With Great Skua, I ended the year on 747. I'd have to wait for the various records committees to decide on my three provisional species to know whether or not I'd set a new record.



Great Skua. December 29, Hatteras, North Carolina.

## SUMMARY

There's a short movie of me, shot by Nate Swick of the ABA on Brian's boat, appropriately called F/V Skua, as I'm watching the Great Skua. The event was billed as the record breaker and many people followed it live on social media. If it really was the record breaker, then I didn't look too pumped. I wasn't jumping up and down, or high fiving. Instead, I stood quietly captivated by the hulking bird circling the boat. I think that short movie summarized my Big Year pretty well. Although the numbers game was fun—and I'd certainly feel honored to break the long-standing record—it was more of a personal journey. It was a year of being silently moved by the wonders of our avifauna, of kicking the tires on a vast country in which I'd recently, and permanently, made my new home.

If doing a Big Year really were like climbing Mount Everest, it would be one where Everest was shrinking each year. The continual evolution of the ABA checklist means that the goalposts are frequently changing. And although the (unofficial) rules allow for provisional, ABA firsts, to be added if they're later accepted, future splits and exotics are not. Since Sandy completed his record Big Year in 1998, six new exotics have been added and one lost (Crested Mynah), and there have been nine new splits and only one lump, Black-backed Wagtail into White Wagtail. In the two years since John Vanderpoel's near-record Big Year, seven species have been added that

were available to me but not to him: Rosy-faced Lovebird, Nanday Parakeet, Purple Swamphen, Nutmeg Mannikin and two splits: Sage Sparrow into Sagebrush and Bell's sparrows, and Xantus's Murrelet into Scripp's and Guadalupe murrelets. And with more DNA analysis, the trend will continue to be splits over lumps. I can't wait for all those new crossbill species. Everest is indeed shrinking!

Is it possible then to compare Big Years? Probably not. It's like asking who is the best pitcher in baseball. Each year is so different. Many birders will remember 2013 for all of the Blue-footed Boobies—missed entirely on many previous Big Year attempts—and the ABA first, Rufous-necked Wood-Rail. But for me, 2013 will go down as a year of no Brown Jays, no Little Egret, no chaseable Smooth-billed Ani, and still no return of the Tamaulipas Crow. Each year is a crapshoot.

Sometimes the greatest adventures in life are unplanned. While my Big Year may have started off accidentally, it ended as one of the biggest years of my life. I travelled the continent, made some great friends, and saw a life's worth of amazing birds. With so much time alone in the field, driving the long roads, waiting for the next flight, it was equally a journey of self-discovery, an important midlife refueling. It was also a reminder that you see more when you slow down. One of my favorite days was sitting in front of Kubo Lodge in Madera Canyon, Arizona, waiting for a Berylline Hummingbird to appear. It eventually did—eight hours later. But the wait was spectacular. I was captivated the whole time by all of the other enchanting hummingbirds. Seeing newly arrived Bar-tailed Godwits in Nome was a heartening reminder of their amazing 7000+ mile spring trek from New Zealand. Sinaloa Wrens and a breeding Nutting's Flycatcher in Arizona were a sign that ranges are constantly changing, and the lack of a single Ivory Gull the sobering flip side. And as I think back to that lost Fieldfare and all the other birds I met struggling for survival in unique ways, I realize that maybe I wasn't the only one for whom 2013 was a Big Year. 🐦



Berylline Hummingbird. July 31, Madera Canyon, Arizona.

*Neil Hayward grew up near Oxford, England, where, at a young age, he first became obsessed with birds. After a PhD in genetics at Cambridge University, he moved permanently to the United States in 2005 to head up the US operations of the biotechnology company Abcam. He left in 2011 to pursue a consulting career as owner of Cambridge Blue Consulting. Neil is currently the Field Trip Coordinator for the Brookline Bird Club. He lives in Cambridge with his girlfriend Gerri and two cats, Sally and Khiva.*

## PHOTO ESSAY

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### Big Year Birds from Far Beyond New England

*Neil Hayward*



Crested Auklets. May 27, St. Paul Island, Pribilofs, Alaska.



Emperor Goose. December 7, Adak, Alaska.



White Wagtail. June 8, Nome, Alaska.



Nutmeg Mannikin. September 21,  
Huntington Beach Central Park, Los  
Angeles, California.



McKay's Bunting. November 30, Nome  
Alaska.



Rufous-backed Robin. November 30, Cameron Trading Post, Arizona.

# Update: Population Status of Breeding Ospreys in Essex County, Massachusetts, in 2013

*David Rimmer*



First-year Osprey, “Eben,” returning after a test flight. All photographs by Phil Brown.

The Essex County Greenbelt Association’s Osprey Program has a goal of managing and monitoring breeding Osprey in Essex County as well as developing education programs and conducting research to further Osprey conservation. Prior to the 1980s and going as far back as the 1850s, there are no records of Ospreys nesting in Essex County, Massachusetts (Rimmer and Berry 2011). However, since the early 1980s when the first nesting pair was observed, the population of breeding Ospreys in this area has been steadily increasing (Rimmer 2014).

Table 1 shows data collected in 2013 by Greenbelt with the assistance of many volunteer nest monitors. The total of 26 breeding pairs is the highest on record for Essex County compared to 18 pairs in 2012, 14 pairs in 2011, and 11 pairs in 2010 (Rimmer 2014). The increase in breeding pairs is likely linked to above average annual productivity over the past 10–20 years, as Ospreys are known to return to natal sites to breed as adults (Poole 1989).

Overall productivity was low in 2013 when expressed as total fledglings per breeding pair (0.88). In reality, 10 pairs produced all the fledglings and those pairs had a high fledgling per pair rate (2.1). A long-term average of 0.8-1.2 fledglings per pair is believed to be sufficient to maintain a stable population (Poole 1989). A higher productivity rate would likely result in an expanding population, similar to what has been observed in Essex County. Nest failure was observed at 16 nests. Great Horned Owl predation was suspected in most cases and six nests had an unknown outcome. Some pairs were observed making multiple nests, explaining the higher nest than pair total in Table 1.

Town/City	Nests Observed	Active Pairs (est.)	Successful Nests	Unsuccessful or No Egg Nests	Nests with Unknown Fate	Fledglings Observed
Marblehead	2	2	2	0	0	2
Salem	1	1	0	1	0	0
Danvers	1	1	1	0	0	1
Gloucester	1	1	1	0	0	2
Essex	4	4	2	2	0	6
Ipswich	9	6	0	6	3	0
Rowley	6	4	0	4	2	0
Newbury	2	2	1	1	0	3
Newburyport	1	1	1	0	0	3
Salisbury	5	4	2	2	1	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>

Table 1. Distribution and status of Osprey nests and breeding pairs in Essex County by town in 2013.

The 32 active Osprey nests observed in 2013 were all located near saltwater and were all found on man-made structures including hunting blinds (5), hunting camps (2), navigation day markers (3), electrical transmission tower (1), and man-made nest platforms (21). Not a single nest was observed in a tree or other natural site.

Greenbelt installed a live-streaming webcam on an Osprey nest in Essex in 2013 and had an amazing public response to the daily drama that the pair, Allyn and Ethel, provided from their nest. In addition, Greenbelt collaborated with Dr. Richard Bierregaard from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte on his long-term study of Osprey migratory behavior. Small solar-powered satellite transmitters were placed on two fledgling Osprey captured on their nests in August 2013 by luring the birds back to the nest with a fresh dead fish under a wire mesh screen covered in small monofilament loops that tangle the birds toes, allowing someone to capture the bird easily and safely by hand. The transmitter tracks the birds daily during their lifetimes. One of these transmitters stopped emitting a signal in Pennsylvania in October and it is suspected the bird perished. The other bird traveled south from Gloucester, Massachusetts, in September and arrived in Venezuela in December, travelling via Cape Cod, Rhode Island, North Carolina, Florida, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately this Osprey was a casualty of a collision with a vehicle in late January 2014. The bird and transmitter were recovered.

First year Ospreys have a high (50-60%) mortality rate. They spend their first full year on the wintering grounds and do not return to begin their breeding cycle until nearly two years after hatching (Poole, Bierregaard, and Martell 2002). So neither of these tagged fledglings would have returned north to breed until 2015. You can



Greenbelt Osprey webcam

follow the Greenbelt webcam, which is active April–October, and the satellite tracking research at <[http://www.ecga.org/what we do/osprey program](http://www.ecga.org/what_we_do/osprey_program)>.

Ospreys appear to be thriving as a breeding bird in Essex County, and Greenbelt will continue to coordinate oversight of Osprey nesting activity in this part of Massachusetts. Carrying capacity for Ospreys is unknown for this area and may be limited by suitable and available nesting structures. To learn more about Essex County Greenbelt’s Osprey Program, visit <<http://www.ecga.org>>. 🦅

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**Dave Rimmer** is currently the director of land stewardship for the Essex County Greenbelt Association, a non-profit land trust based in Essex, Massachusetts. Since 2001, Dave has been responsible for the management and monitoring of over 10,000 acres of protected land for Greenbelt in Essex County. Dave also directs Greenbelt’s Osprey Program. Dave resides with his family in Newbury, Massachusetts. He can be contacted at <[dwr@ecga.org](mailto:dwr@ecga.org)>.

# A Friendship that Began with a Bird-a-thon

*David Allen and Elissa Landre*

*David:* I don't remember my earliest encounters with Elissa Landre, director of Mass Audubon's Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary. I don't remember what I thought of her, or what the eight-year-old me said to her. But I definitely remember the day she opened up birding to me. Until that day, I had been interested in birds—I had looked at field guides and read books and magazines. But that day, I stepped out of my mom's car into a May morning at Marblehead Neck Sanctuary, and it was different; I was part of the Bird-a-thon team. For the rest of the day, my mom intermittently drove and napped in the car while I tagged along for Bird-a-thon, bouncing along the trails, excited to be with real birders.

*Elissa:* David and his mother, Shirley Hui, came to Broadmoor's Mother's Day Birds and Breakfast in 1998 when David was eight. After looking at the adult Mass Audubon birding trips, Shirley contacted me to ask if there were children's trips. Bird-a-thon was scheduled for the following weekend, so I invited them to participate in Friday night Bird-a-thon at the sanctuary. He was hooked—and invited himself to join us the next day at 4:00 a.m. for my team's Saturday segment of Bird-a-thon on the North Shore. This was the start.

*David:* Birding shaped much of my childhood and adolescence. Elissa was essential in linking me into the birding world in a way I might never have managed on my own. More significantly, however, Elissa and her husband Bill Giezentanner became important influences in my life independent of birding. I suppose due to our age difference, the mentor-mentee label comes to mind. Elissa certainly mentored me and is invested in my development and success. She trusted me, for example, to run my own sector for the Millis Christmas Bird Count (CBC) when I was 14. We collaborated on a couple of blocks for the Breeding Bird Atlas. She also hired me to help with odd jobs and to lead canoe trips at Broadmoor on various occasions.

*Elissa:* I invited David to become a sector leader for the 2003 Millis CBC. By then he had done at least four, maybe five Bird-a-thons. He knew his birds and had the energy and enthusiasm to bird a sector on his own. It was also clear that he could be trusted to accurately observe, count, and report all the birds in his sector—a trait not always seen in birders who only like to chase rarities. I also wanted to encourage him to meet other birders and explore different places. Several adult birders wanted to help with the count, and I knew that David was familiar with the sector area, having lived in Natick all his life and having birded the sector with Ed Morrier, the previous sector leader. Ed was seriously ill and was pleased that David could take over the lead on his sector. David often returned for the CBC wrap-ups with a real prize, like Wilson's Snipe or Red-headed Woodpecker.

When David was young, mentoring played a larger role in our relationship; as he grew older and became a more skilled and independent birder, our relationship shifted

to friendship. In turn, as a teenager, David became a mentor to Paul Dougherty, one of the summer campers at Broadmoor who was interested in birds.

*David:* Additionally, Elissa helped nurture opportunities for me beyond Bird-a-thon and Broadmoor such as participating in the American Birding Association's Young Birder of the Year Contest and attending Camp Chiricahua with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. Most of all, thanks to Elissa, I was graced with many amazing mentors and connections in the birding community.



Northern Hawk Owl. Photograph © Henry D. Mauer.

I remember standing in the parking lot at Salisbury State Park, where Simon Perkins told me, “Never let school get in the way of birding.” I remember Kathleen Anderson tirelessly chauffeuring and feeding a band of enthusiastic adolescent boys up and down the South Shore. Wayne Petersen, too, shared generously of his time, experience, and legal driving age.

I remember most fondly two people who have passed away. I especially cherish my memories of Betty Petersen's kindness and enthusiasm. And I especially feel grateful for meeting Ed Morrier through Elissa. Ed adopted me as a partner for the Sudbury and Millis CBCs. He taught me immensely about appreciating one's local environment and resisting the need always to run toward the hot spots.

Over the years, I have lost contact with many of these people. In reflection, I wish that I had been more appreciative of their time and effort and that I had soaked up even more from their wealth of knowledge and experience.

But even as my involvement in the birding community waxed and waned, Elissa and Bill remained constants in my life. Mentorship was never the most important part of our relationship; Elissa and Bill are really part of what ties me to home. I think we actually became much closer when I was away at college. Over those years, our relationship became cyclical—I would come home from college in time for Bird-a-thon. This would kick off a summer of catching up and planning an August trip to South Beach, which would inevitably never happen. I would go back to school and then return for winter break in time for the CBC. We'd arrange to do Bird-a-thon planning via conference call and then repeat the process throughout my college years.

*Elissa:* David showed his competitive side when he looked at totals of other Mass Audubon Bird-a-thon teams and felt that Broadmoor could do better. He and Mark Kasprzyk became co-strategists. Their detailed color-coded spreadsheets and conference calls began early in the year and resulted in extensive analysis and targets for each of Broadmoor's Bird-a-thon teams.

More than the strategizing and spreadsheets, Bill and I looked forward to David's return home for Bird-a-thon. On one Bird-a-thon, our team included Chandler Fulton, a biology professor when I was an undergraduate at Brandeis, who is now a good friend. I remember a mid-Saturday afternoon break in a fast-food restaurant where the whole team—including Chan Fulton and David, Bill and me, and at least three or four other people—had an intense discussion about life and choices that seemed very important at the time. It was satisfying to have multiple generations of people talking and birding together.

David: Broadmoor has still never broken 200 species as a sanctuary for Bird-a-thon—my quest for the past couple of years—but that's okay. The time Elissa and Bill have spent talking to me about relationships and career choices is as valuable as the time we've spent in the field together. As I struggled with my decision to stay in Philadelphia after completing my undergraduate degree, Elissa and Bill were valuable sounding boards. They offered advice and opportunity for reflection. I sought and valued their insights on balancing the need for work experience and the desire to explore.

This February, while I was up in Waterbury, Vermont, a woman drove past the line of scopes peering at the Northern Hawk Owl with her son in the back seat. A few minutes later, I saw her standing with him some distance up the road looking up at the owl. I had my girlfriend go get them while I lowered the scope. I watched as this little mop of blonde hair looked through my scope: "Brown back with white spots, white on front with brown lines...and yellow eyes!" he observed. I remember hoping that he would find someone to humor him when he wants to tag along for Bird-a-thon. 🐦

*David Allen graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a Bachelors of Science in Nursing. He currently works in the Heart and Vascular Surgical Intensive Care Unit at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. David resolves to visit Cape May this spring for the first time in 12 years despite living an hour away for the past five years.*

*Elissa Landre serves as director at Mass Audubon's Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary, where she operates a small bird-banding station and leads Fair Weather Birding walks year-round. Farther afield she guides natural history tours to destinations including Central and South America, Europe, and Asia. On tours, she takes special delight in seeing Neotropical migrants that nest at Broadmoor in their winter habitats. Elissa currently chairs the Pamela and Alexander F. Skutch Award Committee of the Association of Field Ornithologists, which awards funds for life-history studies of little-known birds of the Neotropics. Please go to <<http://www.afonet.org/grants/index.html>> for details.*

# FIELD NOTES

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## Aggression in Wintering Least Sandpipers at Bahia Honda State Park, Florida Keys

*William E. Davis Jr.*

On February 28, 2013, at Bahia Honda State Park on Bahia Honda Key, Florida, at about 3:30 p.m., I encountered a flock of a hundred or so Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*). In a dozen winters of observation it was the largest flock I had seen in the Florida Keys. Mixed in with the flock were a Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), a Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*), a half-dozen Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), about 20 Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*), and two Semipalmated Sandpipers (*Calidris pusilla*).

I watched the flock foraging and noticed frequent intraspecific aggressive moves by the Least Sandpipers. I selected a group of 34 Least Sandpipers along a 40-foot side of a spit that extended about six feet into the shallow water, where the birds were pecking and probing the calcareous mud. I counted 100 aggressive maneuvers in five minutes and forty seconds. Most aggressive maneuvers involved either chases of up to 12 feet where the aggressor attacked from a distance of up to nine feet, or short distance attacks that usually resulted in the attacked bird hopping and fluttering out of the line of attack (Figure 1). I saw no instance where the two birds grappled or made other contact. On a few occasions, the attacked bird turned and faced the attacker and hop-fluttered towards it, whereupon the attack ceased. The attacks typically were preceded by the attacker leaning forward, raising its tail (Figure 2) and then hop-fluttering toward the attacked bird (Figure 3 and 4), although in many chases there was no hop-fluttering behavior. Occasionally the attacked bird would fly to another part of the flock before continuing to forage (Figure 5). It did not appear that only a few birds were highly aggressive; rather any of the birds might initiate the aggression. There was no obvious pattern to the aggression—it occurred in areas where the density of the birds was low as well as in the areas where birds were closely congregated. Despite the close presence of other species, particularly Sanderlings, I witnessed no interspecific aggression. Intermittent observation ended about 4:30 pm as the flock began to thin.

The level of aggression among the Least Sandpipers surprised me because I had not seen any aggressive interactions among them on dozens of occasions while watching them forage in the beach wrack. I had seen intraspecific aggression among Sanderlings and Ruddy Turnstones (Davis 2008) but neither intra- nor interspecific aggression by Least Sandpipers. Because late February is early for Least Sandpipers to migrate, I doubt that the aggression resulted from hormonal changes associated with the breeding cycle. Least Sandpipers tend to migrate north in spring relatively late; the peak migration across the United States does not occur until early to mid-May (Cooper 1994).

So why were the Least Sandpipers so aggressive on this occasion and unaggressive in other situations when I have observed them during winter? The probable answer comes from the early, extensive studies of Harry and Judy Recher (1969), who concluded that aggression is essentially a response dictated by prevailing environmental conditions. Aggressive behavior is influenced by either sparseness of prey or patchy distribution of prey, with the density of shorebirds a contributing factor. Birds that defend feeding territories also express aggressive behavior. It did not appear that any of the Least Sandpipers were defending territory—they moved freely along the beach. The aggression was no more pronounced in tight groups of Least Sandpipers than in more scattered arrangements, although the large number of sandpipers may have created a sparseness of prey through depletion. On the previous occasions when I have seen Least Sandpipers foraging on beach wrack without aggressive behavior, there was always a superabundance of prey—clouds of amphipods were made available primarily by the tossing of wrack by Ruddy Turnstones with whom the Least Sandpipers associated. It appears that the dominant factor in the aggression pattern was most likely the sparseness or the patchiness of prey. 🐦

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*Ted Davis would like to thank John Kricher for helpful comments on the manuscript.*



Figure 1. The bird on the upper right has hop-fluttered away from the bird to the left, which had just attacked it. All photographs by the author.



Figure 2. The upper bird is about to attack the lower bird. Note the raised tail and crouch of the attacking bird.



Figure 3. The lower bird to the right is hop-fluttering as it attacks the bird to the left.



Figure 4. The bird at the left is hop-fluttering as it chases the bird to the right.



Figure 5. The flying bird has just been attacked.

# Mourning Doves Nest on Man-made Structure

*William E. Davis Jr.*

At the end of February, 2013, I noticed a nest perched on a steel I-beam under the house we were renting on Big Pine Key, Florida. It was toward one end of one of the I-beams that supported the house, and was nestled behind two water pipes (figure 1). On March 1, I noticed that a Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) was sitting on the nest. The following day I photographed the bird on the nest (figure 2).

Mourning Doves typically build flimsy nests, often so skimpy that you can see the eggs in the nest from below. Mourning Doves typically nest in woodland edges, in orchards, or in either coniferous or deciduous trees or shrubs, but they will also nest on the ground. They have been recorded nesting on man-made structures, including such improbable locations as a traffic signal light, a side-view mirror, a mangled bumper of an immobile car, eave troughs, light poles, and electric signs (Sayer and Silva 1993). They have been recorded as nesting in old nests of other Mourning Doves and may build over old nests of other species (Mirarchi and Baskett 1994). This nest, therefore, may not originally have been a Mourning Dove nest. Mourning Doves also reuse nests of their own. When reusing their own nest or that of another species, they typically add new material.

The nest I noticed was thick and bulky—atypical of a Mourning Dove nest (Figures 1 and 2). Of birds with nests of this appropriate size, only the Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) is mentioned in *Birds of North America* accounts as sometimes nesting on man-made structures such as eaves and rafters (Derrickson and Breitwisch 1992). That there was a territorial mockingbird pair in our yard suggests the possibility that this Mourning Dove nest was constructed atop an old mockingbird nest. Another possibility is that the dove pair has used the same nest for several years and added new material at each nesting.

The Mourning Dove is among the top ten most abundant bird species in North America, despite losing an estimated 70 million individuals to hunting each year out of a population of nearly half a billion (Mirarchi and Baskett 1994). One reason for their abundance is that they produce multiple broods, particularly in the more tropical areas, where they breed nearly year-round. Their production of small nests and reuse of old nests are listed among the suite of adaptations that conserve time and energy in reproduction and facilitate the production of multiple broods (Mirarchi and Baskett 1994). 🐦

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*Ted Davis would like to thank John Kricher for helpful comments on the manuscript.*



Figure 1. Mourning Dove nest on man-made structure. Photographs by the author.



Figure 2. Closer view of Mourning Dove nest.

# GLEANINGS

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## Hot Times in the Salt Marsh

*David Larson*

Birds don't sweat. That's a good thing, because sweating into the downy feathers next to their skin would be nasty and useless, like humans sweating inside heavy winter clothes. Sweat needs to evaporate for evaporative cooling to work. So how do birds get rid of excess heat? Much of the cardiac output of birds is directed to the legs, and that is because cooling by conductive and convective radiation through the bare skin of the tarsus and toes is a major mechanism for thermoregulation in these species.



Saltmarsh Sparrow. Photograph by Phil Brown.

Birds can also lose heat by evaporative cooling through the mouth, by panting, or the enhanced cooling facilitated by gular fluttering. However, for birds living in habitats with little availability of fresh water, these methods involve expensive water loss. In the paper highlighted in this issue, Greenberg et al. (2012) help us to understand thermal regulation in sparrows in salt marsh habitat by examining the other bare skin radiator, the bill. The tested hypothesis was that birds nesting in hotter, drier habitats would have larger bills, allowing for more radiative cooling.

During the summer, North American salt marshes are hot, windy environments, low on freshwater supplies. Sparrows breeding in salt marshes along the eastern coasts

of North America from Nova Scotia to the Gulf of Mexico, for example, are adapted to deal with mean high temperatures ranging from 21° to over 35°C (70° to over 95°F).

Saltmarsh-breeding sparrows studied in this report included four subspecies of Song Sparrows, two subspecies of Savannah Sparrows, two subspecies of Seaside Sparrows, Acadian Nelson's Sparrow, and Saltmarsh Sparrow. Using museum specimens, the authors measured bills (length, depth, and width), calculated bill surface area, and related bill size to latitude, temperature gradients, and bird weight.

Analysis of the bill sizes showed that the higher the mean maximum summer temperature, the larger the bill surface area. In fact, the summer temperature metric explained 75% of the range of bill size in breeding males and 67% in females. The effects of bird genus, mass, latitude, or wintering temperatures were all considerably less important to bill size. Therefore, mean maximum summer temperature was the most important correlate with bill size for both genders. Of course, there are several other selective pressures that influence bill morphology in birds, including diet and foraging techniques.

Other researchers have demonstrated that the bill can be important in thermoregulation. Similar correlations have been noted between environmental factors and bill morphology by Symonds and Tattersall (2010) for a variety of bird taxa and by James (1991) for Red-winged Blackbirds. Indeed, the relatively smaller bill size of the Hoary Redpoll in comparison to the Common Redpoll may reflect the more northerly distribution of the Hoary. Under the thin, hard surface layer of the bill is highly vascularized tissue. Tattersall et al (2009) demonstrated that Toco Toucans (*Ramphastos toco*) vasodilate this tissue during heat stress and vasoconstrict during cold stress, controlling the amount of blood flow to this tissue and consequent radiative heat loss, further demonstrating the importance of the bill in temperature control. 🦜

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

# ABOUT BOOKS

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## Through Thick and Thin

Mark Lynch

*The Birds of New Hampshire*. Allan R. Keith and Robert P. Fox. 2013.  
*Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club* no. 19.

*Final Flight: 10 Northeastern Birding Spots at Risk from Climate Change*.  
Trevor Lloyd-Evans and David McGlinchey. 2013. Manomet, MA:  
Manomet Center Press.

These two books could not be more different, yet they are closely related. One is a thick tome, a veritable doorstopper. The other is a mere wisp of a book, almost a pamphlet, but it is about a big topic. *The Birds of New Hampshire* traces changes in the state's bird populations since records were first kept until recently. *Final Flight* is a look into the likely future. Both books meet a need in today's world, and both are important in their own way.

Books like this help to establish a baseline for future reference. And those baselines are changing, at a pace that we with our human life spans often have a hard time appreciating. (Robert S. Ridgely in his forward to *The Birds of New Hampshire* p. 9 )

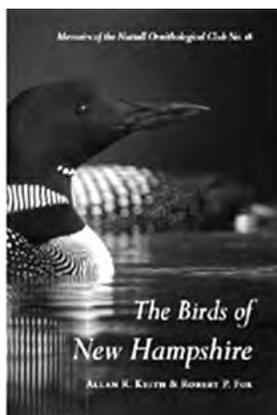
Serious New England birders will devour *The Birds of New Hampshire*. It is a thorough annotated listing of the changes in status and distribution of all species found in the state until relatively recently. The book is a dream project many decades in the planning. Authors Keith and Fox began compiling records of birds in the state in the 1960s and 1970s with the hope of eventually writing this book.

The cutoff date for most of the records is the end of 2009, but the authors admit they could not resist including a number of records of rarities found in New Hampshire into 2011. The criteria for inclusion in *The Birds of New Hampshire* is slightly different from that of records accepted by the New Hampshire Rare Bird Committee (NHRBC). *The Birds of New Hampshire* addresses all published records of birds in the state, and this includes some not accepted by the NHRBC. Data for the species summaries was taken from a number of sources including a variety of state bird-sighting publications, different organized bird counts, hawkwatching data, banding records, breeding bird surveys, and collected specimens.

Each species account features a summary of its current status, a discussion of that species' occurrence before 1950, a separate section on its status after 1950, details of seasonal distribution, and notes on the migration of that species in the state. There is even a listing of inland records for species that are typically coastal or marine. There are no individual range maps for every species. I imagine that would have expanded this books already large size into the definitely unwieldy category and also upped the cost considerably. The book is fully indexed. This may seem like a minor point, but

indices can be helpful because taxonomy changes seem to be occurring on almost a yearly basis, and there is no telling where loons will be listed next. There are a number of black and white illustrations throughout the book.

The introductory sections of this book are really worth reading. Normally one would be excused for skipping a section devoted to the political boundaries of a state. But in the case of a state with a small coastline like that of New Hampshire, trying to establish marine limits for records is a task that would take a Solomon to solve. Problem areas include Jeffrey's Ledge and Cashes Ledge. Are they in or out? I had to smile while reading the authors' writings about these issues because I was a founding member of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee (MARC), and drawing that marine limits map was just one of many points of contention that veered at times into insanity. These things may seem like minor quibbles, but they do matter, especially to state listers. But the fact is that there is not one right way to draw the New Hampshire marine boundary map.

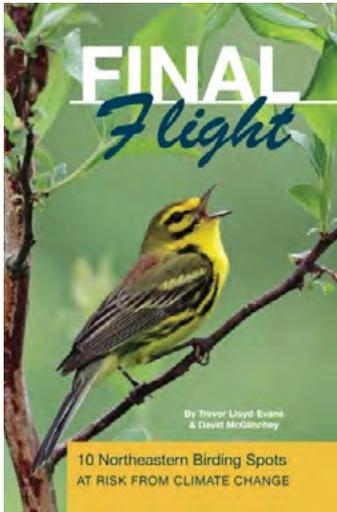


The section titled “Discussion of Habitat Changes and Related Changes in Bird Status and Distribution Over Time” (pp. 21–27) is a nice overview of major changes in species populations since the last breeding bird atlas was completed in 1986. As is typical, there are species that are declining, while others are increasing. Some species like Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and Ospreys are recovering slowly from low numbers. Some species are expanding their breeding ranges or frequency of occurrence. These include Turkey Vultures, Fish Crows, titmice, and cardinals. Northern Mockingbird and House Finch numbers peaked in 1990 and are now declining. Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers have invaded portions of the state south of the White Mountains just as they have in Massachusetts.

Declining species include many aerial insectivores like nightjars, Chimney Swifts, Purple Martins, and most swallows. Certain flycatchers like Olive-sided and Least flycatchers are also declining. In almost every case, similar changes have been noted for those species in Massachusetts to remind the reader that we are looking at large regional changes in the populations of these birds.

There are other sections: the introduction, the appendix on the history of New Hampshire ornithological literature, an overview of the state's Christmas Bird Counts, a summary of hawkwatching, a list of museum specimens collected in New Hampshire, and summaries of breeding bird surveys and banding recoveries. The authors made sure that most topics were addressed. There is also a nice listing of reports of exotics and hybrids. This includes such interesting oddities as a record of a rare Spruce Grouse X Ruffed Grouse cross. The bulk of the book, pages 49 to 400, comprises the actual species accounts.

If you are a New Hampshire birder or even someone who birds only occasionally in that state, *The Birds of New Hampshire* is obviously a must-have book. Should



Massachusetts birders who rarely visit the state own this book? I would answer in the affirmative if you care about the status and distribution of birds in our area. As mentioned before, species decline and increase regionally, and it is important to look at various pieces of that puzzle other than just the small piece that is your home turf. Whenever you bird in Massachusetts near the border of New Hampshire, it would be interesting to look up the status of the species you find. Decades ago I found nesting Acadian Flycatchers less than a half a mile from the New Hampshire border in Royalston, and that was one of the first species I looked up in *The Birds of New Hampshire*. New Hampshire also has a number of wanted lifers for many birders like Spruce Grouse and Black-backed Woodpecker. And why not bird New Hampshire? Many Massachusetts birders have been

taking summer bird vacations for years to the Connecticut Lakes area around Pittsburg to enjoy northern breeding species like Mourning Warblers and Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided flycatchers. This book will give the current status of the species you would see there.

*The Birds of New Hampshire* is a scholarly, enjoyable, and ultimately useful publication of interest to all serious birders of New England. It is nothing short of a landmark publication about the ornithology of our region. Though the book is available from a variety of sources, the authors would appreciate your purchasing it from Audubon Society of New Hampshire because the Society would benefit from the sales of a book about their state.

“The climate is changing.” (p. 3 of *Final Flight*)

*Final Flight* is subtitled *10 Northeastern Birding Spots At Risk From Climate Change*. It is essentially a “where to go” birding guide with a twist. All the birding destinations described will be directly affected in the upcoming decades of global climate change. *Final Flight* is just the start of what will become an unavoidable topic of discussion in birding circles in the years and decades to come.

This publication is also a small celebration of the scientific work of the Manomet Bird Observatory, which in 1969 set up 50 mist nets to band and track birds.

Through it all the 50 mist nests remained in the same location spring and fall, to minimize capture bias. The standardized data were recorded on worksheets, then punch cards, then computers, and now we backup data on the cloud (*per ardua ad astra*)! (p. 2)

What the researchers at Manomet are finding is that bird populations and movements are changing. Southern species have moved north and some species are returning earlier in the spring and lingering later in the fall. The introductory essay is

titled “Climate Basics” (p. 3), and it explains the reality we all now live with. “There really is change,” Lloyd-Evans said of climate impact on birds, during a 2012 interview with National Public Radio. “There is a noticeable, measurable change.” (p. 5)

What follows is a beautifully done guide to ten key birding locations in northeastern North America that will be affected by climate change. These locations range as far north and east as Witless Bay, Newfoundland, and as far south and west as the Housatonic River in Kent, Connecticut. Favored Massachusetts birding locations include the South Beach to Monomoy area and Plum Island. Myles Standish State Forest in Plymouth and Wareham is listed because of the rapid spread of destructive insects and tree diseases that will likely occur with a warming climate. Each account is two pages long and includes a long paragraph on how the location will be specifically affected by climate change. In addition, there is an essay by Trevor Lloyd-Evans on the importance of that location to birds. There is a physical description of the spot, the birds that can be seen there, directions, and notes on the best time to visit. Every two-page spread features several fine color photographs by Ian Davies. This is a well-designed and informative booklet.

*Final Flight* is a unique combination of celebration and dire warning. The tone of the book is never hysterical, but simply educational. *Final Flight's* authoritative and matter-of-fact discussion of global climate change reminds the reader that climate change should not be a political issue. It is simply an observation of what is happening and the inevitable consequences of those changes. *Final Flight* is basic enough that nonbirders interested in the environment will find it informative and useful. It's the kind of book you may want to send to friends. My granddaughters are studying climate change in school, and this will be a good book for them to read. For birders *Final Flight* is a call to action.

“There is still time to act, but not as much as before, and there will be less next year.” (p. 2) 🐦



BELL'S SPARROW BY NEIL HAYWARD

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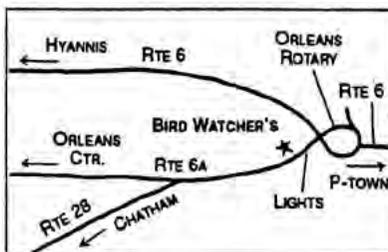
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# BIRD SIGHTINGS

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## November/December 2013

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

November and December were cold, especially compared to the last several years of mild weather during this period. Boston recorded its first frost on November 4. Thanksgiving Day was cold with a high of only 39° in Boston, a big departure from a high of 62 ° the day before. Several small ponds froze by the last week of November. Rainfall totaled only 2.72 inches in Boston, 1.27 less than average. December was bitterly cold just before the start of the Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). A low of just 9° on December 17 was accompanied by upwards of eight inches of snow, and most freshwater ponds froze. On the first weekend of the CBC a winter storm watch was in effect, and several counts scheduled for Sunday were cancelled. In December, Boston recorded 4.62 inches of rain, about an inch more than normal, and snowfall in Boston totaled 11.7 inches with much more in the central and western parts of the state.

R. Stymeist

### WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

A **Ross's Goose**, discovered in Ipswich on Christmas Day, remained through the month to be enjoyed by many. This species was reported for the first time in the state in 1997, and with the exception of a minor "invasion" in March 2009, remains extremely rare. **Cackling Geese** were reported from four eastern Massachusetts locations; although this species appears to be regular in the Connecticut River Valley, it remains uncommon in the east.

Inland reports of many sea ducks are routine in the fall, but neither eider species seems to move inland in migration, so a female **King Eider** discovered at Quabbin Reservoir on November 11 was an exciting find. The observer got the word out quickly, and many other county listers enjoyed the bird. Two reports of inland **Barrow's Goldeneye** were also noteworthy.

A Little Blue Heron in Gloucester on November 3 was unusually late, but a Cattle Egret seen on December 3 in Westport was exceptionally late.

Rough-legged Hawks were reported in modest numbers, heralding a good winter for them.

**Golden Eagles** were reported from two western Massachusetts locations.

The **American Avocet** that was originally discovered on Plum Island on October 29 lingered through the middle of November.

A **Mew Gull** was discovered on Nantucket on December 30, and a number of people there for the Christmas Bird Count were able to see and photograph it. Nantucket is the best place in the state to see Lesser Black-backed Gull, and over one hundred were tallied there on December 7.

M. Rines

Greater White-fronted Goose				11/8	P.I.	250	T. Wetmore
11/25	Saugus	1	S. Corona#	11/17	Wayland	30	B. Black
12/3-7	Dorchester	1	T. Factor#	Canvasback			
Snow Goose				11/1-12/17	Cambr. (F.P.)	14 max	v.o.
11/27	W. Bridgewater	2	S. Meuse	12/14	Shrewsbury	1	E. Eaton
12/7	Clinton	3	D. Grant	12/16	Worcester	1	J. Johnson
12/9	Norwood	25	M. Iliff	12/19	Newbypt H.	1	D. Larson
12/19	Newbypt H.	2	P. + F. Vale	<b>Redhead</b>			
<b>Ross's Goose</b>				11/9	Lincoln	1	J. Forbes
12/25-31	Ipswich	1	v.o.	11/29	Acoaxet	1	B. Cassie
<b>Brant</b>				12/7	Gardner	3	T. Pirro
11/3	Wachusett Res.	1	A. Marble	12/17	Falmouth	2	M. Schanbacher
11/17	Dennis	85	P. Flood	Ring-necked Duck			
12/4	Winthrop B.	85	P. Peterson	11/1	Lincoln	350	M. Rines
12/12	Nahant	280	L. Pivacek	11/3	Southboro	125	N. Paulson#
<b>Cackling Goose</b>				11/3	Groveland	575	T. Walker
11/1-6	Lincoln	1	v.o.	11/4	W. Newbury	560	D. Chickering#
11/4	Concord	1	S. Perkins	11/14	Cambr. (F.P.)	85	R. Stymeist
11/29	Newbypt H.	1	S. Grinley	11/29	Brewster	95	D. Clapp
12/26-31	Ipswich	1	G. Gove	Greater Scaup			
<b>Mute Swan</b>				11/11	Ipswich	12	J. Berry
11/18	Turners Falls	53	B. Zajda	11/15	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	12	P. Champlin
11/30	Acoaxet	130	E. Nielsen#	12/1	S. Boston	120	BBC (R. Stymeist)
<b>Wood Duck</b>				12/8	Falmouth	1183	D. Berard
11/1	Washington	18	E. Neumuth	12/26	P.I.	20	T. Wetmore
11/11	GMNWR	17	A. Bragg#	Lesser Scaup			
11/26	Brookline	49	B. Mayer	11/10	Lincoln	5	S. Perkins#
<b>Gadwall</b>				11/26	Braintree	10	J. Sweeney
11/4	Ipswich	100	J. Berry	11/29	Falmouth	28	D. Berard
11/11	Seekonk	20	A. Morgan	11/30	Acoaxet	25	S. Perkins#
11/15, 12/10	P.I.	80, 35	T. Wetmore	12/1	Groveland	41	D. Chickering#
11/16	DWWS	115	G. d'Entremont#	<b>King Eider</b>			
11/20	Gloucester (E.P.)	40	MAS (D. Larson)	11/11	Quabbin Pk.	1 f	L. Therrien#
11/30	Acoaxet	49	S. Perkins#	11/23	Gloucester (B.R.)	1 m ad	S. Mirick
<b>Eurasian Wigeon</b>				12/thr	P'town	1	v.o.
11/thr	Acoaxet	2-3	v.o.	Common Eider			
11/thr	P.I.	1-2	v.o.	11/2	Bourne	525	BBC (R. Stymeist)
11/15	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1 m	P. Champlin	11/10	Salisbury	220	J. Berry#
11/16	Harwich	1	D. Clapp	11/16	Rockport	650	S. Perkins#
12/12	Salisbury	1 m	C. Sheridan	Harlequin Duck			
12/21	Falmouth	1	B. Lagasse	11/3	Westport	2	P. Champlin#
<b>American Wigeon</b>				11/16	Rockport	169	S. Perkins#
11/3	Arlington Res.	47	M. Rines	11/16	Chilmark	8	P. Gilmore
11/6	P.I.	60	R. Merrill	11/23	Acoaxet	11	E. Nielsen
11/30	W. Barnstable	72	P. Trimble	12/2	Plymouth	3	M. Faherty
11/30	Acoaxet	49	E. Nielsen#	Surf Scoter			
12/8	Waltham	26	C. Cook	11/3	Rockport (A.P.)	40	S. Perkins#
<b>Eurasian Wigeon X American Wigeon</b>				11/17	Essex	55	M. Brengle#
12/thr	Newton	1	v.o.	11/21	P.I.	38	R. Schain
<b>American Black Duck</b>				11/23	Quabbin (G35)	3	B. Zajda
11/5	P.I.	950	J. Berry#	White-winged Scoter			
11/26	Ipswich	220	R. Heil	11/3	Groveland	8	T. Walker
11/30	Acoaxet	250	S. Perkins#	11/12	P.I.	850	T. Wetmore
<b>Blue-winged Teal</b>				11/13	Wachusett Res.	4	P. Morlock
11/16	Duxbury	4	R. Bowes	11/17	Rockport	86	J. Berry#
11/18	GMNWR	1	L. Hale	12/3	Cambr. (F.P.)	2	v.o.
11/21	Marstons Mills	1	P. Crosson	<b>Black Scoter</b>			
<b>Northern Shoveler</b>				11/3	Wakefield	28	BBC (D. Williams)
thr	Marstons Mills	2-8	v.o.	11/3	Waltham	18	J. Forbes
11/9	Arlington Res.	5	L. Ireland	11/3	Jamaica Plain	15	R. Schain
11/10	P.I.	17	P. Peterson	11/3	Westport	400	P. Champlin#
11/17	GMNWR	9	S. Perkins#	11/3	Rockport (A.P.)	900	S. Perkins#
12/15	Jamaica Plain	2	v.o.	11/3	Stoneham	28	D. + I. Jewell
12/28	Cambr. (Alewife)	2	C. Devanthery	11/12	P.I.	350	T. Wetmore
<b>Northern Pintail</b>				Long-tailed Duck			
11/4, 12/21	Ipswich	55, 1	J. Berry	11/3	Manomet	450	G. d'Entremont#
11/17	GMNWR	6	S. Perkins#	11/13	Wachusett Res.	18	P. Morlock
11/21	W. Barnstable	8	P. Crosson	11/16	W. Gloucester	70	S. Perkins#
11/19	P.I.	170	R. Heil	11/17	Nant. Sound	400	O. Burton
11/23	Acoaxet	71	E. Nielsen	11/23	Quabbin (G35)	4	B. Zajda
<b>Green-winged Teal</b>				Bufflehead			
11/1	Washington	25	E. Neumuth	11/2	Bourne	145	BBC (R. Stymeist)
11/4	Ipswich	203	J. Berry	11/13	Duxbury B.	250	R. Bowes

Bufflehead (continued)				11/23	Quabbin (G35)	10	B. Zajda
11/17	Dorchester	120	P. Peterson	12/1	P.I.	23	M. Brengle
11/30	Acoaxet	210	S. Perkins#		Red-necked Grebe		
12/13	Newbypt	260	R. Heil	11/16	Rockport	11	S. Perkins#
Common Goldeneye				12/4	Duxbury B.	3	R. Bowes
11/10	Lincoln	22	S. Perkins#	12/8	Quincy	3	L. Tyralla#
11/17	Dorchester	12	P. Peterson	12/12	P.I.	14	T. Wetmore
12/13	Newbypt	45	R. Heil		Manx Shearwater		
12/26	Westport	43	D. Jones	11/16	Chatham	3	R. Schain
12/28	P.I.	35	T. Wetmore		Northern Gannet		
<b>Barrow's Goldeneye</b>				11/3	Rockport (A.P.)	60	S. Perkins#
11/3-11	Southboro	1	N. Paulson#	11/6	P.I.	15	R. Merrill
11/4	Cambr. (F.P.)	1 m	J. Trimble	11/17	Essex	17	M. Brengle#
12/8	Harwich	1	T. Green		Double-crested Cormorant		
12/11	Boston (Deer I.)	1	S. Corona	11/3	Wakefield	75	BBC (D. Williams)
12/23	Orleans	1	B. Lagasse	11/10	Salisbury	21	J. Berry#
Hooded Merganser				11/16	Cambr. (Alewife)	6	R. Stymeist
11/4	Ipswich	108	J. Berry	12/1	Boston H.	3	BBC (R. Stymeist)
11/30	Acoaxet	61	S. Perkins#		Great Cormorant		
12/1	W. Newbury	81	D. Chickering#	11/5	P.I.	2	T. Wetmore
12/8	Waltham	229	C. Cook	11/16	Rockport	130	S. Perkins#
12/12	Brewster	46	P. Trull	12/17	Medford	2	M. Rines
Common Merganser					American Bittern		
11/8	Ware	200	B. Zajda	11/3	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1	P. Champlin
11/16	N. Quabbin	65	BBC (J. Center)	11/5	Concord	1	S. Perkins#
11/30	Lynnfield	329	D. Williams	11/18	Mashpee	1	M. Keleher
12/2	Stoneham	84	D. + I. Jewell	12/1	P.I.	2	K. Elwell#
12/17	Medford	145	M. Rines	12/2	Duxbury B.	1	R. Bowes
Red-breasted Merganser					Great Egret		
11/29	Dorchester	110	P. Peterson	11/2, 23	P.I.	6, 1	Vale, Berry
11/30	Acoaxet	76	S. Perkins#	11/3	W. Gloucester	2	S. Perkins#
12/7	P.I.	302	T. Wetmore	11/3	Fairhaven	1	BBC (R. Stymeist)
12/13	Newbypt	310	R. Heil	11/8	Duxbury	1	R. Bowes
12/17	Cambr. (F.P.)	5	B. Miller	11/24	Falmouth	1	D. Remsen
Ruddy Duck					Little Blue Heron		
11/2	Attleboro	160	J. Sweeney	11/3	W. Gloucester	1	S. Perkins#
11/3	Southboro	80	N. Paulson#		Cattle Egret		
11/7	Chestnut Hill	172	P. Peterson	12/3	Westport	1	A. Morgan
11/11	Lincoln	107	M. Rines		Black-crowned Night-Heron		
11/28	W. Newbury	250	P. + F. Vale	11/3	Squantum	4	L. Waters#
12/8	Waltham	259	C. Cook	11/29	Gloucester (E.P.)	5	C. Haines
Ring-necked Pheasant				12/27	Barnstable	1	R. Schain
11/2	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1 m	MAS (Wheelock)		Black Vulture		
11/8	Cumb. Farms	1	J. Sweeney	11/23	Acoaxet	2	E. Nielsen
11/17	Saugus	1	S. Zende#	11/26	Blackstone	8	P. Peterson#
Wild Turkey				12/20	Westport	10	P. Champlin
11/3	Plymouth	51	G. d'Entremont#		Turkey Vulture		
11/8	Ware	30	B. Zajda	11/2	Winchester	4	J. Thomas
11/11	Mattapan (BNC)	15	P. Peterson	11/12	P.I.	4	T. Bradford
11/16	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	57	A. Morgan	11/17	Essex	5	J. Berry#
Red-throated Loon				11/26	Blackstone	12	P. Peterson#
11/3	Quabbin Pk.	1	L. Therrien	12/21	Westport	23	P. Champlin
11/10	Salisbury	48	J. Berry#		Osprey		
11/16	Rockport	45	S. Perkins#	11/2	Melrose	1	D. + I. Jewell
11/17	P.I.	95	T. Wetmore	11/3	Wakefield	1	BBC (D. Williams)
11/30	Acoaxet	31	S. Perkins#	11/17	Wayland	1	B. Black
Common Loon				11/21	Woburn (HP)	1	L. Thompson
thr	P.I.	50 max	v.o.		Bald Eagle		
11/3	Westport	80	P. Champlin#	11/7	Lawrence	5	C. Gibson
11/3	Manomet	47	G. d'Entremont#	11/23	Quabbin (G35)	4	B. Zajda
11/16	Rockport	60	S. Perkins#	11/26	Ipswich (C.B.)	4	R. Heil
11/23	Quabbin (G35)	6	B. Zajda	11/30	Holland	4 ad	B. Zajda
12/29	Ipswich (C.B.)	23	J. Berry#	12/3	P.I.	4	T. Wetmore
Pied-billed Grebe					Northern Harrier		
11/3	Lincoln	3	M. Rines	thr	P.I.	10 max	v.o.
11/3	Groveland	4	T. Walker	11/17	Duxbury B.	2	R. Bowes
11/15	Winchester	4	R. LaFontaine	11/19	Westport	7	P. Champlin
11/30	Acoaxet	3	S. Perkins#	12/7	Ipswich	6	B. Cassie
12/12	Jamaica Plain	4	P. Peterson	12/17	Cumb. Farms	3	J. Sweeney
Horned Grebe					Sharp-shinned Hawk		
11/16	W. Gloucester	42	S. Perkins#	11/11, 23	Malden (PR)	3, 6	Hawkcount (CJ)
11/17	Dorchester	22	P. Peterson				

Cooper's Hawk				Semipalmated Sandpiper		
11/2 P.I.	2		P. + F. Vale	11/2 Wellfleet	1	B. Harris#
Northern Goshawk				11/3 Westport	2	P. Champlin#
11/3 Barre Falls	1		J. Hoye#	11/7 P.I.	1	S. Sullivan
11/7 Jamaica Plain	1		A. Joslin	White-rumped Sandpiper		
11/14 P.I.	1 imm		D. Chickering	11/2 P.I.	10	P. + F. Vale
Red-shouldered Hawk				11/13 Harwich	4	E. Hoopes
11/9 Rehoboth	2		K. Bartels	Pectoral Sandpiper		
Rough-legged Hawk				11/2 P.I.	7	P. + F. Vale
thr P.I.	3 max		v.o.	11/3 Nantucket	6	K. Blackshaw#
12/19 GMNWR	1		A. Bragg#	11/5 Lynn	2	R. Heil
12/25 Saugus	1		S. Zende#	11/11 Chatham	1	J. Trimble
12/27 Rowley	2		C. Johnson	Purple Sandpiper		
12/31 W. Bridgewater	1		J. Sweeney	11/15 Salisbury	15	R. Stymeist
<b>Golden Eagle</b>				12/8 Falmouth	21	D. Berard
11/3 Barre Falls	1		J. Hoye#	12/26 Westport	50	D. Jones
11/7 Quabbin Pk.	1		L. Therrien	12/29 Rockport (A.P.)	114	R. Heil
Virginia Rail				Dunlin		
11/9 S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1		E. Nielsen	thr P.I.	400 max	v.o.
11/11 GMNWR	1		A. Bragg#	11/15 Quabbin (G43)	2	B. Kamp
12/27 Barnstable	14		R. Schain	11/16 W. Gloucester	490	S. Perkins#
<b>Common Gallinule</b>				11/17 Duxbury B.	2442	R. Bowes
11/4-23 GMNWR	1 imm		S. Zende#	11/19 Newbypt H.	1900	R. Heil
American Coot				11/30 Acoaxet	275	S. Perkins#
11/3 Groveland	153		T. Walker	Long-billed Dowitcher		
11/16 Woburn (HP)	45		M. Rines#	11/6 P.I.	5	P. Peterson
11/16 Mashpee	260		M. Keleher	12/30 Nantucket	2	P. Trimble
11/20 GMNWR	61		A. Bragg#	Wilson's Snipe		
12/13 Jamaica Plain	50		M. Barber	11/2 P.I.	2	T. Wetmore
12/14 Sandwich	535		J. Trimble	11/5 Lynn	3	R. Heil
<b>Sandhill Crane</b>				American Woodcock		
12/30 Plymouth	2		S. McGrath	11/18 Franklin	2	E. LoPresti
Black-bellied Plover				12/8 Raynham	3	E. Kneipfer
11/2 Duxbury B.	32		R. Bowes	12/29 Nantucket	3	P. Trimble
11/2 P.I.	98		T. Wetmore	Black-legged Kittiwake		
11/16 W. Gloucester	18		S. Perkins#	12/11 Westport	2	M. Iliif
12/26 Westport	1		D. Jones	12/29 P.I.	3	T. Wetmore
Semipalmated Plover				12/29 Rockport (A.P.)	18	R. Heil
11/2 Duxbury B.	9		R. Bowes	Bonaparte's Gull		
11/6 P.I.	6		R. Merrill	11/4 Ipswich	71	J. Berry
Killdeer				11/9 Duxbury B.	36	R. Bowes
11/3 Arlington Res.	19		M. Rines	11/19 P.I.	150	R. Heil
11/3 Newbury	24		N. Landry	12/30 Nantucket	5000	V. Laux
<b>American Avocet</b>				Black-headed Gull		
11/1-13 P.I.	1		v.o.	11/29 Gloucester (E.P.)	1	C. Haines
Spotted Sandpiper				12/13 Newbypt H.	1	R. Heil
11/1-19 Chestnut Hill	1		v.o.	12/30 Nantucket	5	V. Laux
11/3 Dorchester	1		L. Waters#	Little Gull		
Greater Yellowlegs				11/4 P'town (R.P.)	4	J. Trimble
11/2 Cohasset	16		S. Maguire	12/30 Nantucket	3	V. Laux
11/4 Ipswich	57		J. Berry	Laughing Gull		
11/5 Lynn	37		R. Heil	11/16 Eastham (F.H.)	8	P. Trimble
12/1 P.I.	15		M. Brengle	11/24 Salisbury	1	S. Grinley#
Lesser Yellowlegs				11/30 Acoaxet	1	S. Perkins#
11/5 Lynn	1 imm		R. Heil	<b>Mew Gull</b>		
Hudsonian Godwit				12/30 Nantucket	1	Dugan, Gallo
11/17 P.I.	1		T. Wetmore	Iceland Gull		
Ruddy Turnstone				11/18 Turners Falls	2	B. Zajda
11/29 Dorchester	4		P. Peterson	12/6 Cambr. (F.P.)	2	J. Trimble
12/21 Revere	6		CBC (J. Keeley)	12/10 Millbury	3	J. Lawson#
American Oystercatcher				12/20 E. Gloucester	10	R. Heil
11/16 Chatham	1		R. Schain	12/24 Revere B.	14	P. Peterson
Red Knot				12/31 Nantucket	110	V. Laux
11/17 Dennis	1		P. Flood	Lesser Black-backed Gull		
12/22 Westport	1		P. Champlin	thr Reports of indiv. from 10 locations		
Sanderling				12/7 Nantucket	112	E. Ray#
11/4 P.I.	60		T. Wetmore	12/26 Westport	2	D. Jones
11/9 Westport	240		E. Nielsen	Glaucous Gull		
11/17 Duxbury B.	401		R. Bowes	12/7 P.I.	1	T. Wetmore
12/24 Revere B.	90		P. Peterson	12/13 Gloucester	2	P. Peterson
12/29 Ipswich (C.B.)	50		J. Berry#	12/14 Wilmington	1	S. Sullivan

Glaucous Gull (continued)				Thick-billed Murre			
12/21	Revere B.	3	CBC (S. Sullivan#)	12/22	Rockport (A.P.)	3	R. Heil
Forster's Tern				12/29	P.I.	1	J. Kovner#
11/2	Duxbury B.	2	R. Bowes	Razorbill			
11/9	Westport	4	E. Nielsen	12/13	Wellfleet	605	M. Faherty
Parasitic Jaeger				12/22	Rockport (A.P.)	62	R. Heil
11/3	Chatham (S.B.)	3	B. Harris#	12/29	P.I.	100	T. Wetmore
Dovekie				Black Guillemot			
12/1	P.I.	1	J. Sender	11/17	Essex	9	M. Brengle#
12/29	Rockport (A.P.)	3	R. Heil	11/17	Rockport	9	J. Berry#
Common Murre				11/24	Duxbury B.	4	R. Bowes
12/22	Rockport (A.P.)	33	R. Heil				

## DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

The appearance of a Snowy Owl in Holden on November 20 heralded what would become the biggest invasion of Snowys to occur in eastern North America for over 50 years. Within the next few days Snowys were showing up in many places with double digit counts for Plum Island and the Rowley marshes. These Snowy Owls were also appearing much farther south with reports as far away as Florida and even Bermuda, an island 600 miles out at sea. In Newfoundland Bruce MacTavish counted 301 Snowy Owls the weekend of December 7–8, mostly from the Cape Race area. Record numbers were recorded on Massachusetts Christmas Bird Counts. Nantucket logged in 33 (compared to its previous high of four for the Count), and Greater Boston had 28, Newburyport 24, Cape Ann 17, and Cape Cod 13. Even the Central Berkshire CBC had a Snowy Owl. At Logan Airport in Boston Norm Smith banded 56 Snowy Owls in the month of December.

Birds are a hazard at airports, and Boston's Logan Airport has long had the policy of allowing Norm Smith of Mass Audubon to trap Snowy Owls and remove them from the airport. The New York Port Authority's policy of shooting the owls triggered outrage from the public, particularly when media outlets featured Norm's alternative program. Within days, airport officials agreed they would install a catch-and-release program for Snowys similar to that at Logan.

Biologists speculate that most of these birds came from northern Quebec, where lemming populations were exceptional last summer, resulting in unusually high success in raising young. There was a photograph on the Arctic Raptors Facebook page showing a Snowy Owl nest with 70 lemmings and 8 voles at the nest site even before the eggs had hatched!

Unlike the banner year for Snowy Owls, the fall migration of Northern Saw-whet Owls saw one of the lowest capture numbers from banders in the eastern US. At Lookout Rock in Northbridge only 48 birds were banded, the lowest in eleven years of study. There were two reports of Long-eared Owls, two on the Mid Cape CBC and one on Nantucket.

Unlike last year with six reports of **Rufous Hummingbirds**, this year there was only one, which showed up at Sue Finnegan's banding station on Wing Island in Brewster. An unexpected bonus was the discovery of a **Red-headed Woodpecker** in the woods directly opposite the fields on Argilla Road in Ipswich where a Ross and Cackling Goose were being seen.

Late fall is always exciting for finding the unusual; a **Say's Phoebe** was photographed in Fairhaven, and a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** was seen on Nantucket. **Cave Swallows** were scarce compared to the influx last year brought on by the effects of Hurricane Sandy.

Other vagrants included a **Varied Thrush** on Christmas Day in Wellfleet, a **Harris's Sparrow** in Wenham, and a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** in West Bridgewater, one of the most reliable spots for this species in the state. A female **Western Tanager** was seen and enjoyed by many over the two weeks that it spent along Penzance Road in Rockport. At the same time, a male Western Tanager was frequenting a feeder only a mile away in Rockport. Finally a **Bullock's Oriole** turned up at a feeder in Carlisle but later moved to a feeder in Chelmsford, where many birders were able to enjoy it.

December is a busy month for birders many of whom are scouting their areas for the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). A snowstorm on December 14–15 cancelled many of the counts on December 15, and the weather was less than ideal on the following two weekends. As always, something good turns up. A **White-winged Dove** was found on the grounds of the JFK Library in Dorchester, and a **Harris's Sparrow** was well seen on the Northampton CBC; unfortunately neither bird was seen subsequently. A **MacGillivray's Warbler** was found on the Taunton-Middleboro CBC.

The winter finch flight this year was a bust. Unlike last year's historic numbers there were no reports of crossbills, Evening Grosbeaks, and not even a Pine Siskin. Only four individual Red-breasted Nuthatches were noted.

R. Stymeist

<b>White-winged Dove</b>				Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		
12/21	Dorchester	1 ph	CBC (Garvey)	11/2	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	2 MAS (Wheelock)
<b>Barn Owl</b>				11/2	Falmouth	2 BBC (R. Stymeist)
11/10	Edgartown	2 ad, 4 yg	B. Cassie	11/17	Nantucket	2 O. Burton
<b>Eastern Screech-Owl</b>				12/13	Rehoboth	3 K. Bartels
12/14	Randolph	2	G. d'Entremont	12/20	Cambr. (Mt. A.)	3 R. Stymeist
12/22	Essex	2	P. Brown	<b>Pileated Woodpecker</b>		
12/22	Marshfield	2	G. d'Entremont#	12/8	Wayland	4 G. Long
<b>Great Horned Owl</b>				<b>Least Flycatcher</b>		
11/27	Concord	3	CBC (S. Perkins)	11/23-25	Brighton	1 P. Peterson#
12/21	P.I.	2	N. Landry	12/7	Wayland	1 B. Harris#
<b>Snowy Owl</b>				<b>Empidonax species</b>		
11/20	Holden	1	S. Lawson#	12/2	Plymouth	1 M. Faherty
11/21-12/31	Numerous reports		thruout state	<b>Eastern Phoebe</b>		
11/30	Hanscom	3	S. Perkins#	11/3	Westport	2 P. Champlin#
12/thr	Boston (Logan)	56	N. Smith	12/20	Sudbury	1 G. Freedman
12/3	Rowley	13	R. Stymeist	12/31	Plymouth	1 M. Faherty
12/4	Duxbury B.	7	R. Bowes	<b>Say's Phoebe</b>		
12/4	Nantucket	10	E. Ray	12/7	Fairhaven	1 ph C. Longworth#
12/7	P.I.	19	B. Cassie	<b>Western Kingbird</b>		
<b>Barred Owl</b>				11/1-11	Concord	1 v.o.
11/11	Holden	1	S. Olson	11/8-23	Fall River	1 A. Morgan + v.o.
11/30	Washington	1	E. Neumuth	12/12	Marion	1 R. Sawyer
12/6	Lincoln	1	M. Rines	<b>Scissor-tailed Flycatcher</b>		
12/25	Natick	1	G. Dysart	11/2-17	Nantucket	1 fide E. Ray#
<b>Long-eared Owl</b>				<b>Northern Shrike</b>		
12/27	Barnstable	2	R. Schain	11/3	Westboro	1 N. Paulson
12/30	Nantucket	1	D. Bates	11/18	Mashpee	1 M. Keleher
<b>Short-eared Owl</b>				11/29	P.I.	2 S. Riley
11/4	P.I.	1	P. Miliotis	12/7	Winchendon	1 T. Pirro
11/29	Westport	1	B. Cassie	12/22	Marshfield	1 G. d'Entremont#
11/29	Hanscom	1	S. Perkins#	<b>Blue-headed Vireo</b>		
11/30	Orleans	2	B. Lagasse	11/4	P.I.	1 D. Chickering#
12/4	Nantucket	1	E. Ray	12/5	Milton	1 P. Peterson
12/5	Boston (Logan)	1	N. Smith	<b>Red-eyed Vireo</b>		
12/28	Rowley	4	J. Lawson	11/1	Cambr. (Daneyh)	1 P. Wilson
<b>Northern Saw-whet Owl</b>				11/2	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1 MAS (Wheelock)
11/2-8	Northbridge	15 b	fide B. Milke	<b>Fish Crow</b>		
11/17	Harwich	1	P. Kyle	11/1	Hyannis	75 M. Keleher
11/17	Sandwich	1	M. Keleher	12/21	Mattapan	173 CBC (R. Stymeist)
12/27	Marstons Mills	3	R. Schain	12/26	Braintree	1 J. Sweeney
12/27	Barnstable	1	G. d'Entremont	<b>Common Raven</b>		
<b>American Kestrel</b>				11/2	Sudbury	2 A. Scholten
11/3, 12/8	Saugus	2	S. Zende#	11/5	Sandwich	2 P. Trimble
<b>Merlin</b>				12/5	Northboro	3 J. + K. Hogan
12/7	Nantucket	2	E. Ray#	12/12	W. Roxbury (MP)	2 M. Iliff
<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>				12/25	Newton	2 P. Gilmore
11/10	Cambridge	2	P. Roberts	<b>Horned Lark</b>		
11/23	P.I.	2	A. Gurka	11/3	Saugus	65 S. Zende#
11/26	Boston	2	P. Peterson	11/16	Chatham	125 R. Schain
11/29	Haverhill	2	S. + J. Mirick	11/26	Ipswich	70 R. Heil
12/31	Revere B.	2	C. Cook	12/17	Cumb. Farms	100 J. Sweeney
<b>Rufous Hummingbird</b>				12/28	Gloucester	75 P. + F. Vale
11/1-12/19	Brewster	1 b	S. Finnegan	12/29	Ipswich (C.B.)	30 J. MacDougall#
<b>Red-headed Woodpecker</b>				<b>Tree Swallow</b>		
12/28-31	Ipswich	1	J. Lawson#	11/3	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	7 P. Champlin

Tree Swallow (continued)			12/27	Lynn	1	R. Heil
11/6	P.I.	1	S. Grinley	American Pipit		
11/17	Nantucket	35	O. Burton	11/2	Carlisle	20 T. + D. Brownrigg
11/19	Westport	1	P. Champlin	11/3	Sharon	60 L. Waters#
Northern Rough-winged Swallow				11/6	Nantucket	58 V. Laux
11/3	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1	P. Champlin	11/6	Acton	46 R. Stymeist
<b>Cave Swallow</b>				11/9	P.I.	10 S. Sullivan
11/3	Falmouth	2 ph	M. Schanbacher	Cedar Waxwing		
11/3	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1	P. Champlin	11/8	Ware	200 B. Zajda
11/19	Westport	1	P. Champlin	11/10	Woburn	55 M. Rines
Red-breasted Nuthatch				12/8	Waltham	35 C. Cook
11/2	Falmouth	1	BBC (R. Stymeist)	12/8	DFWS	40 P. Sowizral
12/5	Milton	2	P. Peterson	12/8	Newton	30 H. Miller
12/29	P.I.	1	N. Landry	Lapland Longspur		
Brown Creeper				thr	P.I.	7 max v.o.
11/11	GMNWR	2	A. Bragg#	11/4	Barre Falls	3 D. Grant
12/2	Boston	4	P. Peterson	11/8	Salisbury	40 M. Resch
12/14	Braintree	3	G. d'Entremont#	11/9, 12/4	Duxbury B.	24, 3 R. Bowes
12/21	Cambr. (Mt.A.)	3	M. Sabourin#	11/16	Chatham	11 R. Schain
Carolina Wren				12/8	Acton	3 C. Winstanley#
11/2	Bourne	19	BBC (R. Stymeist)	Snow Bunting		
11/16	W. Gloucester	4	E. Nielsen#	thr	P.I.	85 max v.o.
11/30	Fairhaven	19	SSBC (GdE)	thr	Ipswich (C.B.)	100 max J. Berry
11/30	Acoaxet	6	E. Nielsen#	11/9	P'town	180 J. Young
12/29	Concord (NAC)	7	M. Rines#	11/10	Salisbury	350 J. Berry#
House Wren				11/17	Concord	220 S. Perkins#
11/8	Cumb. Farms	1	J. Sweeney	12/3	Duxbury B.	123 R. Bowes
11/9	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1	P. Champlin#	Ovenbird		
Winter Wren				11/17	Boston (RKG)	1 R. Stymeist
thr	Reports of indiv. from 16 locations			Northern Waterthrush		
Marsh Wren				11/6	Reading	1 D. Williams
11/21	P.I.	1	T. Wetmore	11/15	Boston	1 P. Peterson
11/30	Acoaxet	2	E. Nielsen#	Orange-crowned Warbler		
12/4	GMNWR	2	A. Bragg#	thr	Reports of indiv. from 11 locations	
12/21	Dorchester	1	R. Schain	Nashville Warbler		
12/27	Barnstable	4	R. Schain	11/3	Falmouth	1 G. Hirth
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher				11/3	Newbury	1 T. Spahr
11/10	Plymouth	1	I. Davies	11/6	Cambr. (Danehy)	1 D. Hefferon
11/11	Fairhaven	1	C. Longworth	11/18	Merrimac	1 B. + B. Buxton
Golden-crowned Kinglet				<b>MacGillivray's Warbler</b>		
11/2	Attleboro	26	J. Sweeney	12/29-31	Lakeville	1 ph M. Faherty
11/5	P.I.	56	P. + F. Vale	Common Yellowthroat		
11/11	Truro	30	J. Young	11/15	Boston	3 P. Peterson
12/1	Sandwich	16	M. Keleher	12/8	Concord	1 C. Johnson
12/19	Newton	7	P. Peterson	Northern Parula		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet				11/9	P.I.	1 T. Wetmore
11/5	P.I.	5	T. Wetmore	Magnolia Warbler		
11/6	Nantucket	4	V. Laux	11/10	Edgartown	1 B. Cassie
11/14	Cambr. (F.Pd)	2	R. Stymeist	Blackpoll Warbler		
11/15	Chatham	3	R. Schain	11/2	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	1 MAS (Wheelock)
11/26	Stoneham	2	D. + I. Jewell	11/5	Lynn	1 R. Heil
Eastern Bluebird				11/16	P.I.	1 J. Keeley#
11/10	Concord	15	S. Perkins#	11/19	Westport	1 D. Hlousek
11/17	DFWS	15	P. Sowizral	Black-throated Blue Warbler		
11/30	Acoaxet	15	S. Perkins#	11/1	Natick	1 B. Harris
12/20	Ipswich	17	J. Berry	Palm Warbler		
Hermit Thrush				11/2	Woburn	5 M. Rines#
11/2, 12/7	Medford	11, 4	M. Rines#	11/3	Westboro	4 N. Paulson
11/3	Westport	13	P. Champlin#	12/1	Sandwich	4 M. Keleher
11/15	Boston	13	P. Peterson	12/18	Brockton	1 K. Ryan
11/16	Woburn (HP)	5	M. Rines#	12/31	Lakeville	1 J. Lawson#
<b>Varied Thrush</b>				Pine Warbler		
12/25	Wellfleet	1 ph	N. Rabke	11/9	Westport	2 P. Champlin#
Gray Catbird				11/24	Chestnut Hill	1 P. Peterson
11/3	Fairhaven	5	BBC (R. Stymeist)	12/23	Concord	1 D. Swain
11/8	Cumb. Farms	4	J. Sweeney	Yellow-rumped Warbler		
11/23	Acoaxet	13	E. Nielsen	11/3	Fairhaven	26 BBC (R. Stymeist)
12/20	E. Gloucester	5	R. Heil	11/16	W. Gloucester	43 S. Perkins#
Brown Thrasher				11/22	Duxbury B.	23 R. Bowes
11/3	Westport	2	P. Champlin#	11/30	Acoaxet	29 E. Nielsen#
11/23	Acoaxet	2	E. Nielsen	12/29	Ipswich (C.B.)	28 J. Berry#
12/3	P.I.	1	R. Stymeist			

<b>Prairie Warbler</b>				<b>Fox Sparrow</b>		
11/10	Arlington Res.	1	L. Ireland#	11/2	Woburn	9 M. Rines#
11/16	Chatham	1	R. Merrill	11/4	Newton	5 M. Kaufman
<b>Black-throated Green Warbler</b>				11/9	Lexington	8 M. Rines#
11/1	Concord	1	M. Goetschkes#	11/12	Concord	5 P. Peterson
11/2	Wellfleet	1	B. Harris#	12/7	Wayland	2 B. Harris
11/2	P.I.	1	M. Watson	<b>Lincoln's Sparrow</b>		
11/11	Boston	1	J. Taylor	11/3	Saugus	1 S. Zende#
11/24	Centerville	1	J. Richards	11/4	P.I.	1 P. Miliotis
<b>Wilson's Warbler</b>				11/8	Cumb. Farms	1 J. Sweeney
11/10	Plymouth	1	I. Davies	12/22	Ipswich	1 J. Style#
<b>Yellow-breasted Chat</b>				12/31	W. Bridgewater	1 J. Sweeney
11/3	Chatham	1	B. Harris#	<b>Swamp Sparrow</b>		
11/18	Rockport	1	R. Stymeist#	11/16	Woburn (HP)	5 M. Rines#
11/23	Acoaxet	2	E. Nielsen	12/1	P.I.	5 T. Wetmore
12/1	Sandwich	1	M. Keleher	12/19	GMNWR	6 A. Bragg#
12/16	P.I.	1	M. Brengle#	12/27	S. Peabody	7 R. Heil
12/27	Barnstable	1	G. d'Entremont#	12/31	W. Bridgewater	6 J. Sweeney
<b>Eastern Towhee</b>				<b>Harris's Sparrow</b>		
11/3	Fairhaven	3	BBC (R. Stymeist)	11/28-12/31	Wenham	1 ph Bill Busby
11/26	Newton	5	R. Merrill	<b>White-crowned Sparrow</b>		
12/26	W. Bridgewater	1 m	D. Cabral	11/4	P.I.	1 T. Wetmore
12/28	Eastham	1	P. Kyle	11/10	Eastham	2 K. Yakola
<b>American Tree Sparrow</b>				11/11	Wrentham	1 E. LoPresti
11/3	Westboro	3	N. Paulson	12/29	Concord	4 S. Perkins
11/4	P.I.	4	T. Wetmore	<b>Western Tanager</b>		
11/21	Concord	35	S. Perkins#	11/16-12/4	Rockport	1 f ph S. Perkins+v.o.
11/22	GMNWR	25	P. Peterson	11/16-12/29	Rockport	1 m ph G. Leavitt
12/31	W. Bridgewater	40	J. Sweeney	<b>Dickcissel</b>		
<b>Chipping Sparrow</b>				11/2	Wellfleet	1 J. Keeley
11/6	Nantucket	8	V. Laux	11/2	Bourne	1 BBC (R. Stymeist)
12/10	Medford	2	M. Rines	11/15	Salisbury	1 f M. Weber
12/23	Eastham	4	J. Hoye#	<b>Red-winged Blackbird</b>		
12/29	Dighton	3	S. Whitebread	11/10	Acton	900 S. Perkins#
<b>Clay-colored Sparrow</b>				11/17	P.I.	110 T. Wetmore
11/1-8	Bourne	1	v.o.	12/17	Cumb. Farms	400 J. Sweeney
11/1	Concord	1	L. Hale	<b>Eastern Meadowlark</b>		
11/18	W. Roxbury (MP)	1	M. Iliff	11/5	Westport	20 J. Hoye#
11/23	Manomet	1	I. Davies	11/8	Eastham (F.H.)	21 P. Kyle
12/4	Lexington	1	R. Stymeist	11/9	S. Dart. (A.Pd)	23 E. Nielsen
12/7-26	Medford	1	R. LaFontaine#	12/8	Saugus	3 S. Zende#
<b>Field Sparrow</b>				12/27	DWWS	3 P. Eagan
11/2	Bourne	3	J. Kricher	12/31	E. Boston (B.I.)	2 C. Cook
11/5	P.I.	3	J. Keeley	<b>Yellow-headed Blackbird</b>		
11/23	Acoaxet	4	E. Nielsen	11/16-21	W. Bridgewater	1-2 R. Finch#
12/13	WBWS	5	M. Faherty	<b>Rusty Blackbird</b>		
12/23	Eastham	5	J. Hoye#	11/3	Westboro	45 N. Paulson
12/27	S. Peabody	2	R. Heil	12/9	Wayland	15 A. McCarthy#
<b>Vesper Sparrow</b>				12/29	Concord (NAC)	9 CBC (S. Perkins)
11/1	Cambr. (Daneyh)	1	P. Wilton#	12/31	Lakeville	10 G. d'Entremont#
11/9	Falmouth	1	J. Hoye#	<b>Brown-headed Cowbird</b>		
11/10	Bourne	1	J. Kricher	11/10	Acton	600 S. Perkins#
12/1	Eastham	3	K. Yakola	<b>Bullock's Oriole</b>		
<b>Lark Sparrow</b>				11/15-12/5	Carlisle	1 imm m ph S.Spang#
12/8-24	Medford	1	R. LaFontaine#	12/15-31	Chelmsford	1 m imm ph v.o.
<b>Savannah Sparrow</b>				<b>Baltimore Oriole</b>		
11/2	P.I.	9	P. Miliotis	11/2	Truro	1 B. Harris#
11/10	Concord	12	S. Perkins#	11/21	Barnstable (S.N.)	1 P. Crosson
11/30	Lexington	3	C. Cook	11/31	Centerville	1 J. Richards
12/31	W. Bridgewater	10	J. Sweeney	12/3	Cambr. (F.P.)	1 M. Goetschkes
<b>Ipswich Sparrow</b>				<b>Purple Finch</b>		
11/8	Salisbury	1	M. Resch	11/5	Concord	1 S. Perkins#
11/22	Duxbury B.	1	R. Bowes	11/9	Lexington	1 R. LaFontaine#
11/22	P.I.	2	T. Wetmore	11/13	Melrose	1 D. + I. Jewell
12/3	E. Boston (B.I.)	1	R. Schain	11/16	P.I.	6 A. + G. Gurka
12/14	Wareham	1	C. Gibson	12/29	Ipswich (C.B.)	1 J. Berry#
12/29	Westport	1	A. Morgan	<b>Common Redpoll</b>		
<b>Nelson's Sparrow</b>				12/29	Concord (NAC)	1 M. Rines#
11/2	Eastham	2	B. Harris#	<b>Pine Siskin</b>		
<b>Saltmarsh Sparrow</b>				11/21	Newburyport	1 S. McGrath
12/3	E. Boston (B.I.)	3	R. Schain			
12/27	Barnstable	2	R. Schain			

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIRD SIGHTINGS

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

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

### HOW TO CONTRIBUTE BIRD SIGHTINGS TO *BIRD OBSERVER*

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

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

# ABOUT THE COVER

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## Prairie Warbler

The flashy yellow and black Prairie Warbler (*Setophaga discolor*), with its distinctive song that resembles an ascending musical scale, is one of New England's most beloved warbler species. Males are bright yellow below with two or more thick, black stripes on their flanks and sides and a short, black band on the neck. The upperparts are yellow gray with rufous streaks on the back and two faint yellow wing-bars. The facial pattern is black and yellow. Females resemble a somewhat muted version of the male but they lack its bold facial pattern. Juveniles are muted versions of the adults with grey heads that are whitish above and below the eye. All have conspicuous white outer tail feathers. Frequent tail pumping is a behavior that Prairie Warblers share with Palm Warblers, a characteristic that can aid in identification. Two subspecies are recognized, *S. d. discolor*, which is migratory, and is found over most of the species' breeding range and *S. d. paludicola*, which is resident in the mangrove swamps of peninsular Florida.

The Prairie Warbler's breeding range extends from the southern portions of northern New England states south to northern Florida, and west and south diagonally from the southern Great Lakes to eastern Texas. *S. d. discolor* is a medium-distance migrant, wintering in peninsular Florida, the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, and sporadically in the West Indies. They also have been recorded occasionally in Bermuda and coastal southern Mexico, Belize, and Honduras. In Massachusetts, Prairie Warblers are considered locally common breeders and common to uncommon migrants. They arrive in Massachusetts in early May and depart over an extended period from late July through October.

The Prairie Warbler is poorly named because its preferred habitat—breeding and wintering—is early successional woodlands, forest and edge, including power lines and abandoned orchards. The species is primarily monogamous, but occasionally a male may have two females nesting in his territory. They may also produce two broods in a season.

Males have two types of song, the most common of which consists of 15-20 evenly spaced *zee* notes that ascend the scale. Given from elevated song perches in their territories, this song serves primarily to attract and communicate with females. The second two-parted song—usually several clear notes followed by raspy notes—is used in a variety of situations including territorial advertisement. Male display flights in territorial encounters and courtship consist of an undulating flight with slow wing beats and the tail depressed and spread. In territorial disputes, males include a 'butterfly flight' with stiff wing beats and a 'moth flight' with shallow wing beats and outstretched wings. Males also use gliding flight during courtship. Chases may end in grappling in the air or on the ground, involving fluttering, kicking, and pecking. During the egg-laying period males may mate-guard the females.

The female usually chooses the nest site and constructs the cup-shaped nest with plant fibers held together with spider web. The nest may include some exotic substances such as a snake skin. The female lines the nest with feathers or fur. Only the female develops a brood patch and only she incubates the clutch of three to five gray to white eggs spotted with shades of brown. The young hatch after 12 days of incubation; they are altricial—helpless, eyes closed, and naked except for a hint of down. Adults may perform wing-quivering distraction displays if the nest is approached. The young are fed mostly caterpillars by both parents for the 9–10 days to fledging; the parents continue to feed the young until they reach independence at age 40–50 days. Interestingly, the adults may split the brood with each parent tending its own portion.

Prairie Warblers are foraging generalists, taking a broad range of insects and spiders. They sometimes also eat fruit. They forage primarily by gleaning, taking arthropod nymphs and adults from leaves, twigs, and bark of branches and trunks, usually in the shrub layer and in small trees. They also hawk flying insects and may hover-glean the undersides of leaves and flowers. Occasionally they will hang upside down while gleaning (hang-gleaning). In winter they may join loose mixed-species foraging flocks.

The breeding range of Prairie Warblers expanded during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as forests were cleared and in some areas, such as New England, as farm land returned to second-growth forest. The fundamental hindrance to successful breeding for Prairie Warblers is that their preferred breeding areas are successional and thus tend not to remain suitable for long. Habitat loss on their wintering grounds is another problem. They are frequently parasitized by cowbirds and may desert parasitized nests. The Prairie Warbler is a species in decline. Breeding Bird Census figures for 1966–1996 indicated decline in eleven regions and gains in only two. The reasons are not entirely clear, although urbanization and reforestation are implicated. Factors like fire suppression, which aids reforestation, may also be important. Nevertheless, the Prairie Warbler has not yet been listed as threatened. We can continue in spring to hear the ascending *zee zee zee* song emanating from woodland edge. 🐦

*William E. Davis Jr.*

## About the Cover Artist: Barry Van Dusen

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

# AT A GLANCE

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February 2014



DAVE LARSON

The season-opener “At a Glance” photograph depicts waterbird species. The mystery bird in the foreground has an obviously sharp, pointed bill and a thin white line on the trailing edge of its secondary wing feathers. There are no other strikingly obvious patterns or markings on the upper wing surface. This combination of features eliminates all waterfowl species other than Surf and Black scoters. However, neither scoter possesses a thin white trailing edge to the hind wing, and both have heavier, more rounded bills. Although the American Coot is uniformly dark gray above and exhibits a white trailing edge to the hind wings, a coot’s bill is much thicker and strikingly white in color; its overall body shape is significantly more robust that of that of the birds in the photograph.

The uniform blackness of the upperparts and the relatively stubby wings of the pictured birds almost give the impression of penguins—a highly unlikely occurrence in Massachusetts waters! Given this superficial resemblance to penguins, a more viable possibility is that the birds are some type of alcid. We can eliminate Atlantic Puffin because puffins have uniformly dark trailing edges to their wings, much deeper and heavier bills, and grayish or whitish faces (depending upon their age or time of year). A Black Guillemot displays conspicuous white oval patches on the top surface of its wings at any time of year, and a Dovekie always appears noticeably smaller with a tiny stubby bill.

The remaining Atlantic alcid species are Razorbill, Common Murre, and Thick-billed Murre. Razorbills are typified by deep, laterally compressed bills—vertically

marked with white depending upon their age—thick necks, and long tails compared to other alcids. In winter plumage, Razorbills also have a white throat and neck and a whitish marking that extends up the hind neck to a point behind the eye. Also, their longish tails (for an alcid species) are often cocked upward when they are floating on the water. By contrast, both murre species have thinner, more pointed bills and thinner necks than Razorbills; their shorter tails are rarely visible when they are swimming.

Considering this information, one of the two murre species is represented in the mystery photograph. Because the alcid with its wings raised reveals distinct streaking on its flanks, it has to be a Common Murre (*Uria aalge*). The presence of this flank streaking eliminates the Thick-billed Murre as well as the Razorbill because both the Thick-billed Murre and the Razorbill have plain white underparts. These Common Murres are in breeding plumage. In winter plumage they would exhibit extensively white faces with a thin dark line running back behind the eye.

Common Murres are relatively rare to quite uncommon inshore visitors to the waters off Cape Ann and outer Cape Cod from late fall to late winter. Largely pelagic for most of the year, Common Murres have markedly increased in Massachusetts waters in recent years. On occasion dozens may be seen passing coastal headlands during northeasterly storms, as well as occasionally during offshore pelagic trips. The author photographed these Common Murres in Resurrection Bay, Alaska, June 2010. 🐦

Wayne Petersen



RED-THROATED LOON BY NEIL HAYWARD

# AT A GLANCE

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WAYNE PETERSEN

Can you identify the bird in this photograph?

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

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