

BIRD SIGHTINGS

May–June 2017

Neil Hayward and Robert H. Stymeist

The month of May started as very cold, with a high temperature on May 1 in Boston of just 48 degrees; the average temperature for May Day is 61. The month averaged 56 degrees, two degrees below normal. The first 15 days saw temperatures below normal with some rain on nine of those days, including a thunderstorm on May 2. The second half of the month was warmer thanks to a heat wave when the mercury hit 90 degrees or better for three consecutive days. Rainfall for the month totaled 3.45 inches, normal for May. The highest rainfall amount on any one day was 0.95 inches on May 14.

June was slightly warmer than normal, with an average temperature of 69 degrees in Boston, one degree above normal. There were four days with temperatures recorded in the 90s, and the high for the month was 95 degrees on June 12 and 13. The low temperature of 47 degrees on June 6 was recorded during five straight days of rain. Flash floods were noted in western Massachusetts on June 19–20 with as much as two inches of rain per hour in some communities. Total rain in Boston for the month of June was 4.85 inches, 1.17 inches above normal.

R. Stymeist

WATERFOWL THROUGH TERNS

The exodus of Brant—both winter visitors and migrants—is usually complete by Memorial Day, although a few straggled into June. There were four birds in Orleans on June 2, and seven at Plum Island on June 5. Other late-departing waterfowl included a male Harlequin Duck at Martha’s Vineyard until May 30, a Ring-necked Duck in Andover on June 7, and a male **King Eider** in Gloucester until June 28. A pair of American Wigeon was in suitable breeding habitat at Plum Island at the start of June. The baldpate, as American Widgeons used to be known, is a rare state breeder, with only three confirmed breeding records, the most recent of which was at Monomoy in 1983. Green-winged Teals are uncommon breeders in the state. This year, pairs were present in June at Bolton Flats, Plum Island, and Monomoy.

Pacific Loon—a rarity for us, but probably the most abundant loon in the rest of the continent—has become almost annual in May. This year, a basic-plumaged bird was spied from the tower at Stage Island Pool at Plum Island on May 23. Another bird, seen at Race Point on May 21, had already molted into attractive alternate plumage, and the same, or a different bird, was reported there on June 7. The latter sighting marks the first June record for the species since 2011.

Horned Grebes usually linger into early May before hot-winging it to their breeding grounds in mid-Canada west to central Alaska. This year’s dawdlers, many in colorful, golden-horned alternate plumage, were all in western Massachusetts, including seven birds at Pittsfield on May 1. Pied-billed Grebes also had another good year in 2017, with breeding confirmed at Fairhaven and Monomoy NWR. Pied-billed Grebe is a state-listed species (endangered), and 2017 is only the fifth year this century that breeding has been confirmed. Such scarcity wasn’t always the case. In the 1890s, local ornithologist William Brewster commented on the species’ abundance at Great Meadows. More recently, Plum Island was the go-to place for this secretive summer breeder, with multiple families raised in the 1970s. (The most recent breeding record from Plum Island

dates from 2005.) This year's success, following confirmed breeding last year in Royalston, gives some hope for this diminutive species.

On June 10, a lucky observer on a Hyannis Whale Watch Cruise photographed an immature **Magnificent Frigatebird** just west of Stellwagen Bank. Two days later, an immature bird was seen at Scarborough, Maine, and on the following day, presumably the same bird was back in Massachusetts harassing gulls and terns off Salisbury Beach. The first record of Magnificent Frigatebird for the state occurred in 1893, when a bird was collected from New Bedford after a southerly gale. However, most records since have been of wanderers, not storm-assisted birds. This year's sighting is the eighth report since 2000.

New Hampshire scored a state first with a **Brown Booby** in Rockingham County, only four miles north of the Massachusetts border. The bird appeared on June 10 and stayed until June 20, providing many local birders with exceptionally close views. Intriguingly, a photo of undoubtedly the same bird was taken in Ludlow, Massachusetts, the previous week.

Northern Gannets made the news in May, with multiple birds brought into rehabilitation facilities at Eastham and Barnstable. The prognosis for these birds has not been good: three quarters of the birds at Wild Care, in Eastham, have died. Stephanie Ellis, the executive director of Wild Care, reported that the birds "were unable to hold their head up, they had tremors and were unable to control their body movements." The recovered gannets aren't physically injured, nor are they emaciated. Zachary Mertz, executive director of The Cape Wildlife Center in Barnstable, believes the gannets may be suffering from "a virus passed bird to bird or by ticks or fleas (at nesting sites)." Mertz is waiting on results from necropsies and notes that "the staff vet and myself have been in the field for many years. This is the first time we have seen gannets affected by this." The total number of birds involved may be upwards of 100.

A wild pelican chase ensued along the North Shore after an adult **Brown Pelican** was first observed at Crane Beach on May 6. It was seen later that afternoon at Annisquam, then at Point of Pines on May 8 and Winthrop Beach on May 11. Presumably the same bird reappeared on June 20 at Plum Island. Interestingly, Plum Island had only recently hosted a first summer bird on June 17. That bird was probably on its way north, since a similarly-aged Brown Pelican was found at Scarborough, Maine, three days later. Brown Pelican is an uncommon, less-than-annual vagrant to Massachusetts, typically appearing in late summer through winter. This year's May sightings are the first state records for that month, and the earliest for the year (except for a New Year's Day record in Nantucket in 2015).

Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were reported from the North Shore and Cape Cod, typical for this time of year. The presence of adults during summer, including a pair in Ipswich during June, is suggestive of breeding, although unlike the colonial Black-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow-crowneds are solitary nesters, making breeding harder to detect. At least two of the previously reported four **White-faced Ibis** continued into May in the Ipswich area.

And, after an absence of two years, the Essex Road fields in Ipswich once again hosted a Cattle Egret; a single bird was present throughout May and into June.

Mississippi Kites have been enjoying a population boom and range expansion over the last century. The species was first reported in Massachusetts in 1962, and has since become a regular spring migrant on the Cape typically reported five out of every six years (see figure 1). This year's numbers were about average: two birds seen on May 19, and three on June 4, all in Provincetown. Mississippi Kite remains a possible future breeder for the state, after the first nesting record in New Hampshire in 2008. **Swallow-tailed Kite** is less common in Massachusetts, reported on average in two out of every three years. A report from Falmouth on

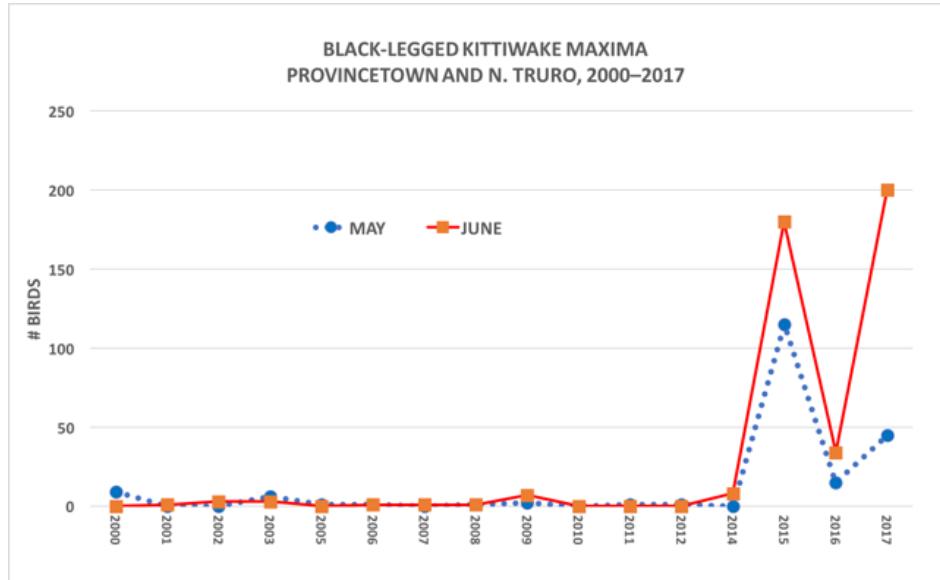


Figure 2. Summering Black-legged Kittiwakes in Provincetown and North Truro, 2000–2017. Almost all counts refer to first-summer (i.e. second calendar year) birds.

A South Polar Skua was spotted on May 24 by a NOAA vessel 86 miles southeast off the coast of Nantucket. South Polar Skua is the expected “summer skua” for our region, replaced by Great Skua in the fall and winter. The nor’easter on June 6 produced a late Common Murre and very late Atlantic Puffin at Andrews Point, Rockport. Another Puffin was seen the next day energetically puffing east past Race Point.

Franklin’s Gull was the larid highlight of the period, with upwards of four birds in June, all hosted by the rare gull-magnet that is Race Point. Black-legged Kittiwakes typically leave our pelagic waters by mid-April, heading north to breeding colonies as close as the Canadian maritime provinces. But that’s not always true. In June of 2015, first-summer birds started appearing in large numbers (up to 180), on the beaches around Provincetown and North Truro. This year, two years later, they’re back: on June 2, there were at least 200 first-summer Black-legged Kittiwakes at Race Point (see figure 2). This unusual pattern is not unprecedented; in June of 1978, 1980, and 1982 there were maxima of 400, 630, and 200 respectively. It’s not known why these young birds are hanging out here (Provincetown Film Festival?), but it’s intriguing to see the same two-year periodicity again.

June is a good month for Royal Terns, and this year didn’t disappoint with a pair at Dennis on June 11, and up to two birds at Provincetown from June 7–29. Also at Race Point, a Sandwich Tern was a one-day wonder on June 28. Caspian Terns were reported from nine locations, including Race Point, where as many as five were present in early June.

N. Hayward

DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

Gypsy moth populations in Massachusetts are often cyclical, and during the summer of 2016 they were particularly destructive to foliage. Egg mass surveys have indicated that the summer of 2017 would also result in significant foliage damage. The one benefit to birders was more cuckoos; both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos were noted in good numbers across the state. Unlike during fall migration, Common Nighthawk movement in spring is generally unnoticed with few reports of large numbers. Thus, a count of 130 from Great Meadows on May 20 was notable. The **Chuck-will's Widow** returned for the fifth year to Elain Avenue in North Falmouth, another was heard in nearby Camp Edwards, and four were noted from Nantucket. Reports of Red-headed Woodpeckers in nine communities from Cape Cod to western Massachusetts were encouraging. The spring hawk migration on Plum Island wound down in mid-May, adding 32 American Kestrels to the 521 tallied in April and 26 Merlin to the 39 recorded in April.

By the first week of May, passerine migration has usually started in earnest. A low pressure system off the Carolina coast at the end of April brought the first wave of migrants, which lingered into the first few days of May. On Plum Island, impressive numbers were tallied on May 2: 19 Blue-headed Vireos, 132 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 28 Black-and-white Warblers, and 80 Yellow-rumped Warblers. In addition, early records of Red-eyed Vireo and a banded Indigo Bunting were notable. Migration stalled during the first 15 days of May with unseasonably cold and wet weather. On May 16, the weather cleared from the northwest and the floodgates opened, pushing migrants eastward and concentrating birds along the coast. Highlights on Plum Island that morning included 29 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, 18 Merlins, and large numbers of Merlin "food": 857 Tree Swallows, 824 Barn Swallows, and 203 Bank Swallows. The next three days saw temperatures in the 90s with warm southwest winds. On May 19, warblers were "dripping off the trees" at Plum Island: 141 American Redstarts, 139 Magnolia Warblers, 91 Common Yellowthroats, 74 Yellow Warblers, and 53 Northern Parulas.

A total of 35 warbler species was reported during May and June. Highlights included three Golden-winged, three Yellow-throated, and six each of Prothonotary, Orange-crowned, Kentucky, and Cerulean. Marblehead Neck Wildlife Sanctuary has always been a favorite hot spot in late May, as foliage is often delayed due to coastal proximity. During May 21–24, birders tallied high counts: 33 American Redstart, 34 Magnolia, 26 Bay-breasted, and 28 Canada Warblers. In addition, an Acadian Flycatcher and a Bicknell's Thrush were sighted during this period.

Winter finches, especially crossbills, are nomadic and can occur at any time of the year. During this period, **Red Crossbills** were found in seven locations from Provincetown to western Massachusetts. Throughout the Northeast, numbers of Red Crossbills were reported singing and apparently pairing up to nest, although the sightings in Massachusetts did not indicate signs of breeding. Stay tuned. Evening Grosbeak pairs were also noted from many communities, with good numbers showing up at bird feeders. The rarities this period included two reports of **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**, with one individual making a brief appearance on Plum Island and a second, more cooperative individual sighted in Sharon. There were seven reports of **Summer Tanager**, three reports of **Painted Bunting** and five reports of **Blue Grosbeak**, including a territorial pair at Crane Wildlife Management Area in Falmouth. The **Harris's Sparrow**, first reported on November 25, 2016, in Dalton, was last seen on May 11.

A breeding survey at Petersham on June 4 hinted at a successful breeding season: 18 Eastern Wood Pewee, 16 Blue-headed Vireo, 156 Red-eyed Vireo, 46 Chestnut-sided Warbler, and 48 Black-throated Green Warbler. And a week later, in Great Barrington, the following were counted: 69 Least Flycatcher, 36 Veery, 5 Louisiana Waterthrush, 45 American Redstart, and 32 Black-throated Blue Warbler.

R. Stymeist

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIRD SIGHTINGS

Taxonomic order is based on AOU checklist, Seventh edition, up to the 56th Supplement, as published in Auk 132 (3): 748-64 (2015) (see <<http://checklist.aou.org/>>).

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

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. Styneist, 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://www.birdobserver.org>Contact-Us/Submit-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 Sean Williams, 18 Parkman Street, Westborough MA 01581, or by email to seanbirder@gmail.com.