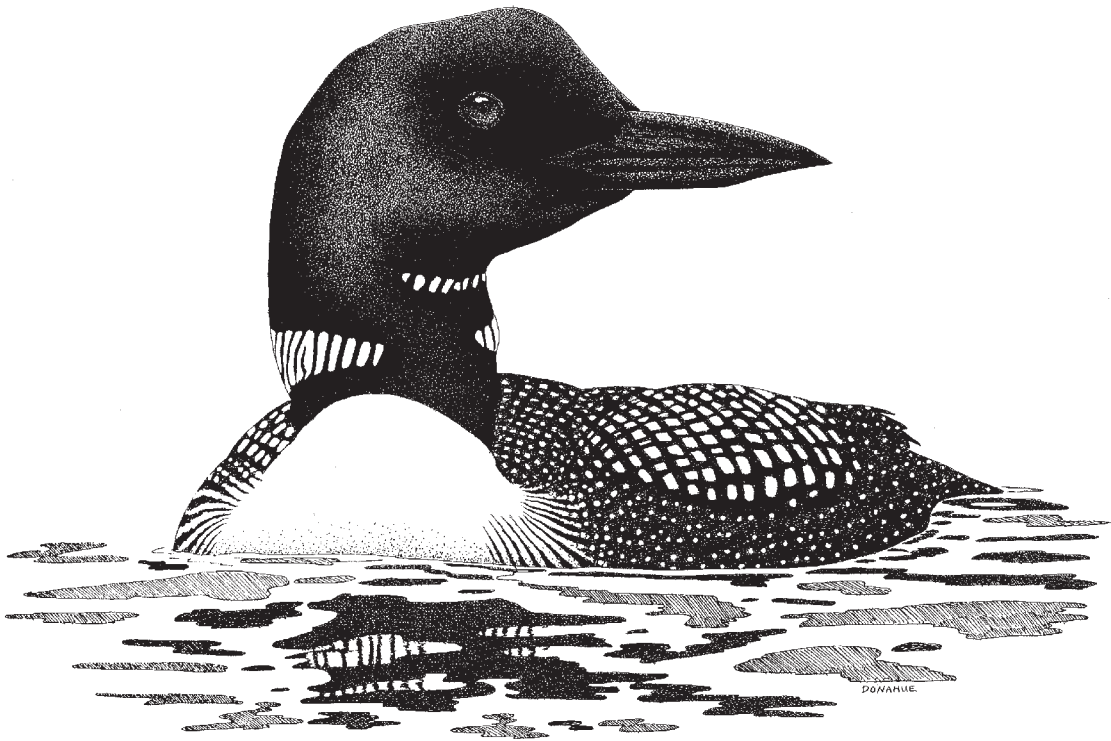


Bird Observer

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 3

JUNE 2004



HOT BIRDS



A **Pacific Loon** (one of at least two seen from late February to early April) with two Common Loons was photographed by Blair Nikula in Provincetown on April 4, 2004. The Pacific Loon is developing some alternate plumage. Pacific Loons are being reported more commonly, but this may be the first Massachusetts photographic record.

Trumpeter Swan was the verdict on the identity of this juvenile bird (right) seen and photographed by scores of people in the East Meadows in Northampton, MA. Do you agree? This photograph was taken by Phil Brown on March 21, 2004.



Yet another **Barnacle Goose** (left) showed up in Essex County (West Newbury) this spring, found by Tom Wetmore. Will this one turn out to be acceptable to the Mass Avian Records Committee? Stay tuned. Digiscoped photograph by David Larson taken on April 14, 2004.

This female **Ruff** (Reeve) delighted many birders as it commuted between the wet meadows on Scotland Rd., Newbury, and the Joppa Flats in Newburyport. This photograph (right) was taken by Phil Brown on April 25, 2004.



This **Bar-tailed Godwit** (left) was found and photographed by Blair Nikula on North Monomoy Island in Chatham on May 12, 2004.

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HOODED MERGANSER BY GEORGE C. WEST



Bird Observer

A bimonthly journal — to enhance understanding, observation, and enjoyment of birds
VOL. 32, NO. 3 JUNE 2004

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$21 for 6 issues, \$40 for two years for U.S. addresses. Inquire about foreign subscriptions. Single copies \$4.00, see <<http://massbird.org/birdobserver/subform.htm>>.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS and subscription inquiries should be sent to: Bird Observer Subscriptions, P.O. Box 236, Arlington, MA 02476-0003, or e-mail to John Marsh at <anmarsh@jocama.com>.

ADVERTISING: full page, \$100; half page, \$55; quarter page, \$35. Send camera-ready copy to Bird Observer Advertising, P.O. Box 236, Arlington, MA 02476-0003.

MATERIAL FOR PUBLICATION: BIRD OBSERVER welcomes submissions of original articles, photographs, art work, field notes, and field studies. Please send submissions to the Managing Editor: Carolyn Marsh, 16 Denton Rd., Wellesley, MA, 02482-6405; E-mail: <anmarsh@jocama.com>. If possible, please include a computer disk (Microsoft Word, txt, or rtf formats), or e-mail to the Editor as an attached file. Please do not embed graphics in word processing documents. Include author's or artist's name, address, and telephone number and information from which a brief biography can be prepared.

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Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area, Hanson/Halifax

Kathleen S. Anderson and Wayne R. Petersen

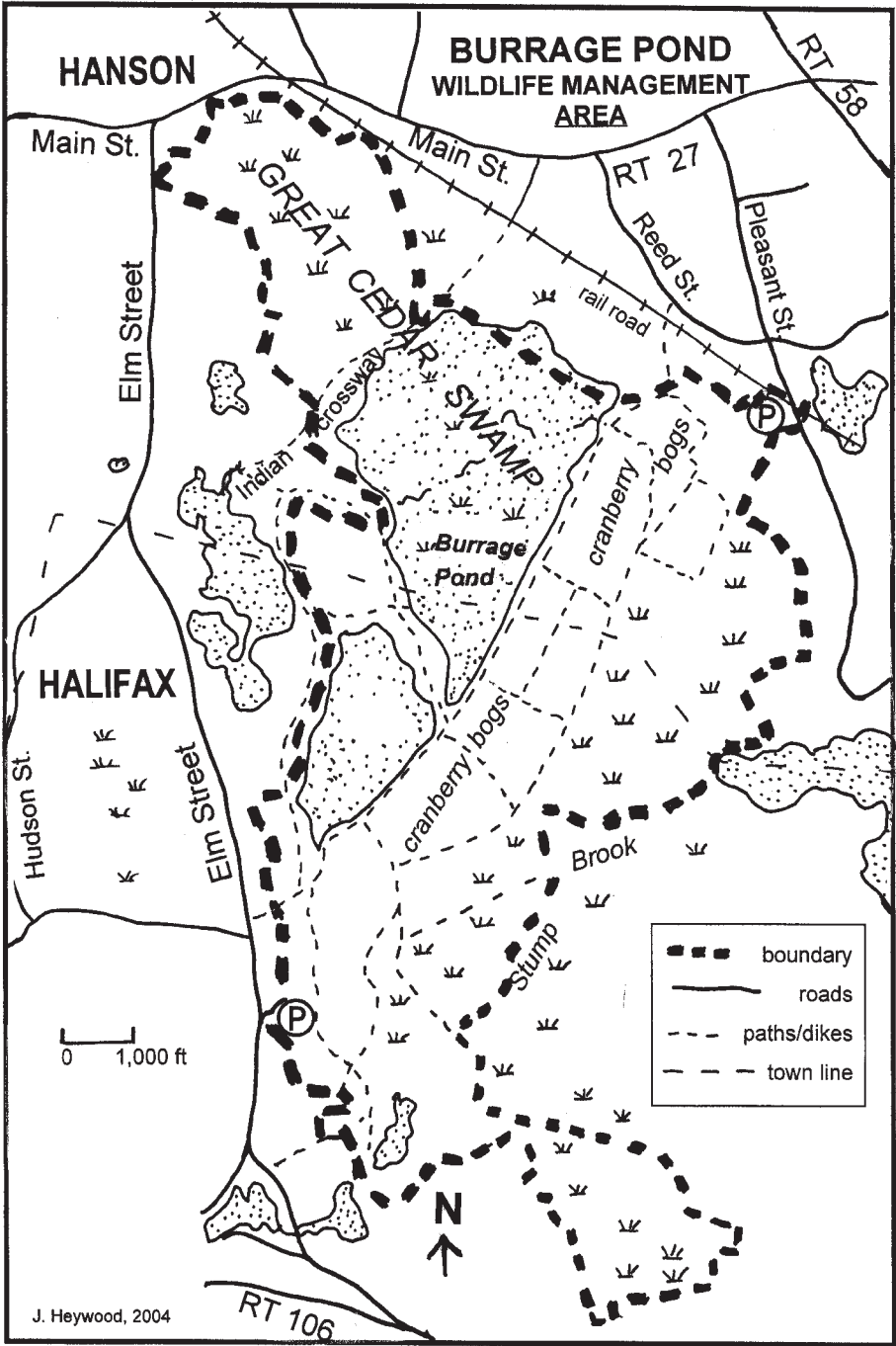


Background and History:

South Hanson Swamp. The name probably means little to most Massachusetts birders in these early years of the twenty-first century, but, for a fortunate few, it brings back vivid memories of thirty or forty years ago when birders eagerly headed for the mix of bog reservoirs, wet woodlands, cattail marshes, and cranberry bogs that at the time was locally called the South Hanson Swamp. Waterfowl in early spring and again in fall, an active night-heron colony and breeding rails in summer, land birds of great variety from spring through fall, and raptors any time. South Hanson Swamp was one of the best inland birding spots on the South Shore. Although birders shared the area with fishermen, hunters, and occasional walkers, there always seemed to be room for all.

Increasingly gated and off-limits to trespassers beginning about 1990, the area was all but forgotten by most birders except an intrepid few who surreptitiously walked in at times when cranberry-growing activities were unlikely. Fortunately, in 2002 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the enthusiastic support of local conservationists and sportsmen, purchased approximately 1700 acres of the swamp from the Northland Cranberry Company and renamed it the Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Today, birders once again have access to this splendid area, and the time has come to put it back on the list of worthy birding destinations for a new generation of birders.

To set the scene, a bit of history is in order. There seems to be no description of what the first Europeans found in the region; however, remaining woodland remnants suggest that for eons it was probably an Atlantic white cedar swamp, intermixed with red maple in some areas, with pines and oaks on the uplands. In other words, it most likely resembled other similar habitats elsewhere in southeastern Massachusetts, such as the Hockomock Swamp in Raynham and West Bridgewater, the Acushnet Cedar Swamp in New Bedford, and the Little Cedar Swamp in Middleborough. It was simply another of many such wooded swamps scattered across the flat and soggy terrain which comprised southeastern Massachusetts 12,000 years ago in the aftermath of the last Pleistocene glacial period. Stump Brook, the only natural outlet of nearby Monponsett Pond, flows southwest through the southern portion of the South Hanson Swamp to Robbins Pond in Halifax, which is the source of the Satucket River — a significant headwater tributary of the Taunton River. A well-traveled Indian crossway, still visible and locally called “The Tunk” (Tunk being the Wampanoag word for crossway or crossing), traversed the northern part of the swamp, connecting the villages of Mattakesett (around the ponds in adjacent Pembroke) with the Titicut region of Bridgewater. The Stump Brook and Snake River floodplain was also part of



J. Heywood, 2004

the important Wampanoag canoe passage leading from Massachusetts Bay to Narragansett Bay.

Historically known as the Great Cedar Swamp (sharing that name with many similar swamps in southeastern Massachusetts), the region was logged for its valuable cedars in the 1700s and 1800s, then apparently ignored until industrialist Albert C. Burrage chose South Hanson as a site for several small industries. In fact, in 1905 Burrage was known to have dug out peat from Stump Pond to generate steam power for his enterprises. In 1931 the United Cape Cod Cranberry Company bought land from the Hanson Cedar Company (presumably the South Hanson Swamp) and began creating cranberry bogs in the area. These bogs were eventually sold to Cumberland Farms, which owned them from 1977 to 1990. Under Cumberland Farms ownership, more swampland was cleared for the creation of additional cranberry bogs, thus destroying much of the fine cattail marsh that some of us fondly recall. Ultimately the draining and clearing activities of portions of the South Hanson Swamp resulted in an enforcement action by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that culminated in Cumberland Farms “gifting” 250 acres of high-quality wetland to the Massachusetts Audubon Society in 1996, a parcel now called Stump Brook Wildlife Sanctuary. While birders never felt totally welcome under Cumberland Farms’ ownership, once Northland Cranberry Company bought the bogs in the early 1990s, the entrance roads were totally gated, and there was no longer any legitimate access.

According to longtime birder Joseph F. Kenneally Jr., the birding history of the South Hanson Swamp began in the 1940s when Raymond J. Seamans, a local naturalist, woodsman, and most excellent birder from nearby Halifax, began exploring the swamp and finding interesting birds. In the December 1942 issue of the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Audubon Society*, Seamans wrote an article called “Birds of Late Summer,” which soon led to exploratory visits by South Shore birders Adrian Whiting, John Foster, and others. (Editor’s note: The article is reprinted in toto at the end of this piece.)

In 1948 a teenaged Joe Kenneally, a young man with a rapidly growing interest in birds, learned from a school chum named Elton Seamans that his uncle knew of a place with lots of birds. Soon the boys were accompanying Raymond Seamans on field trips into the swamp. Joe vividly recalls seeing small flocks of Little Blue Herons and thirty or more Great Egrets on some of those early visits in the late 1940s and recollects hearing the continual calling of Pied-billed Grebes and Soras. For a boy who thought these wonderful birds could only be found in the Deep South, these memories remain fresh. Joe also remembers that it was Ray Seamans who first notified Ruth Emery (Massachusetts Audubon’s seminal Voice of Audubon) of a local place with many birds and great birding. Eventually, his accounts and those of other South Shore birders led to visits by the late Ludlow Griscom, Ruth Emery, Arthur and Margaret Argue, and other similarly distinguished field ornithologists of the day.

The South Shore Bird Club, established in 1946 by Don West and a coterie of area young people (many of them veterans recently returned from World War II), learned of the swamp and began making occasional field trips to the area.

Specifically, it was the report of 380 roosting Wood Ducks on September 24, 1950, by South Shore Bird Club recorder, Sibley Higginbotham, which first brought Ludlow Griscom to South Hanson Swamp. On June 30 the following year, Ruth Emery, Griscom, and others found a Glossy Ibis in the swamp, which at that time was a great rarity in Massachusetts. The discovery of nesting Great Egrets in the Black-crowned Night-Heron colony at South Hanson Swamp in 1954 established the first breeding record of this species for the state. This event put the South Hanson Swamp squarely on the map for a growing number of birders, and the rest was history...until, that is, the gates were locked in the 1990s.

The most recent chapter in the South Hanson Swamp's history opened in 2002, when the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife purchased 1738 acres from the Northland Cranberry Company and officially named it the Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area. Henceforth this important new property will be managed exclusively for fisheries and wildlife habitat. A management plan to protect, enhance, and restore the varied natural habitats is currently in the development phase. A major focus of the management plan will be to ensure the safety of the 64 flumes (i.e., manmade water-control structures used for raising, lowering, and diverting water) associated with the existing 272 acres of cranberry bogs and dikes that comprise a portion of the area. Current access to this marvelous expanse of bogs, ponds, marshes, red maple and white cedar swamps, and mixed upland pine-oak forest is limited to foot traffic. Including Massachusetts Audubon's 250-acre Stump Brook Wildlife Sanctuary, the area now comprises a total of nearly 2000 acres of protected open space. An added bonus of this open space acquisition is that it provides a link previously lacking in the Bay Circuit Alliance's greenbelt of open space stretching from Kingston to the North Shore.



Commissioner David Peters and EOEA Secretary Bob Durand at the dedication of the Burrage Pond WMA on August 24, 2002. Photograph by Kathleen S. Anderson.

In somewhat of a celebratory effort, on June 15, 2003, the South Shore Bird Club returned to this historic favorite field-trip destination for the first time in many years in order to conduct a breeding-bird census of the area. This effort resulted in a tally of 81 species, 17 of which were confirmed as breeding (including a pair of Ospreys and a pair of American Kestrels), along with cumulative totals of 28 Eastern Kingbirds, 24 Warbling Vireos, 63 Gray Catbirds, 40 Yellow Warblers, 34 Baltimore Orioles, and 8 Orchard Orioles. The authors' records, along with those of Robert P. Fox, Joseph F. Kenneally Jr., and others, total 206 species actually observed on the property since regular visits to the area began in the mid-1940s, a figure representing a major percentage of inland species known to regularly occur in Massachusetts.

A Selected and Annotated List of Birds of the Burrage Pond WMA:

Needless to say, the status of certain species has changed through the years, both as a function of changing habitat conditions and as a result of changes in overall regional avian abundance. In an effort to offer readers a sense of the current and historical diversity of bird life at Burrage Pond WMA, an abbreviated description follows for some of the more notable bird species or groups that regularly utilize the area.

Waterfowl – Both historically and currently, migrant waterfowl represent one of the foremost features of the wetland portions of Burrage Pond WMA. An extensive area of dead, but standing, Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*) and dense islands of water willow (*Decodon verticillatus*) in Burrage Pond provide shelter for modest numbers of Wood Ducks, American Black Ducks, Mallards, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintails, Green-winged Teal, Hooded Mergansers, and Common Mergansers in spring. Immediately following ice-out, the area is one of the best localities in southeastern Massachusetts to observe Ring-necked Ducks, sometimes in the hundreds, offering ample opportunity to observe courtship activity. Lesser numbers of Buffleheads and Common Goldeneyes typically join these diving ducks. In late summer and early fall Burrage Pond is a notable roosting area for Wood Ducks that come into the swamp from far and wide, with evening counts occasionally reaching the low hundreds. Burrage Pond also hosts a robust breeding population of Wood Ducks, in addition to a few secretive pairs of Hooded Mergansers.

Pied-billed Grebe – A regular spring migrant, formerly more common and possibly nesting; habitat change, largely as a result of wetland succession and conversion of some of the wetlands to cranberry bogs, is at least among the causes for recent scarcity.

Long-legged Waders – Herons, egrets, and ibises have long enjoyed an interesting history at this locality. As previously noted, the first breeding Great Egrets in Massachusetts occurred at Burrage Pond in 1954 and 1955. In addition, counts of 68 Great Egrets tallied at Burrage Pond during the great southern heron flight of 1948 (Cottrell 1949), and 72 in 1950 (Bailey 1955), were quite remarkable for that period. Similarly, as early as 1949 Glossy Ibises began to appear at Burrage Pond (Bailey 1955), a trend that continues to this day when water levels are appropriate, and a Tricolored Heron was recorded here in 1954 (Bailey 1955). Particularly noteworthy today is the fact that in the 1950s, Black-crowned Night-Herons were nesting inland at Burrage Pond, a situation currently unknown for this now declining and exclusively coastal nester. Finally, both bitterns have a history of regular occurrence in the cattail areas of the region. Members of the South Shore Bird Club historically recorded “pumping” American Bitterns in the swamp in May, but today this species has all but disappeared, although Least Bitterns were recorded in May several times in the 1990s.

Raptors – Despite the lack of any significant elevation, the openness of much of the Burrage Pond WMA can sometimes make hawk-watching productive, especially in spring. At this season small numbers of Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned Hawks, American Kestrels, and Merlins regularly pass northeastward toward the coast, while

a pair or two of Red-shouldered Hawks continue to maintain a long and virtually unbroken tradition of nesting in the area. Recently, Ospreys have nested, a reflection of this species' gradual expansion in Massachusetts into inland nesting situations. Owls in the area, while never obvious, regularly include Great Horned Owls, and Northern Saw-whet Owls are almost certainly annual visitors, if not nesters.

Rails – Although portions of former cattail areas have ecologically changed or been converted to cranberry growing, Virginia Rails continue to maintain a robust population, as evidenced by a tally of eleven birds recorded on a breeding-bird survey in 2003. While King Rails and Soras are no longer regularly found these days, both species have been well documented in the past. Most notably absent today is the Common Moorhen, a species regularly reported at Burrage Pond at least into the early 1960s.

Passerines – A great many passerine species either breed or occur as migrants in the Burrage Pond area. Although the list is long, only a few deserve specific mention. Foremost of this group are the swallows, since all of the swallow species nesting in Massachusetts occur practically annually, and the otherwise uncommon Purple Martin is regular, due to several nearby breeding colonies. Burrage Pond is possibly one of the best locations in Massachusetts to find early migrant Tree Swallows, and there is a healthy population of breeding birds in the many dead trees and snags surrounding Burrage Pond. Besides the plethora of nesting Yellow Warblers, Ovenbirds, and Common Yellowthroats, the more extensive areas of Atlantic white cedar (particularly the Stump Brook section) routinely support a few pairs of Northern Waterthrushes, along with an occasional pair of Canada Warblers. During spring and fall migration the area's wet, swampy woods host small numbers of Rusty Blackbirds, and an unexpected surprise during a 2003 breeding-bird survey was the discovery of eight Orchard Orioles.

Unusual Species – Besides the birds already described, the authors would be remiss not to mention at least a few of the more unusual birds that have been recorded one or more times at the Burrage Pond WMA through the years. The list includes Great Cormorant, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal, Bald Eagle, Caspian Tern, Black Tern, Long-eared Owl, Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Sedge Wren, Dickcissel, White-winged Crossbill, and, on March 26, 2004, two Sandhill Cranes flying over the swamp.

Flora and other Fauna:

In addition to the rich diversity of bird species, another 30 species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals, along with a plethora of invertebrates, have been recorded in the area. Always popular fishing spots, Upper and Lower Burrage Ponds offer excellent warm-water shoreline fishing along the main dike. Fish populations that were found in the ponds during a 2003 sample included golden shiner, brown bullhead, chain pickerel, white perch, pumpkinseed, bluegill, largemouth bass, black crappie, and yellow perch. Although the ponds are very fertile, shallow (average depth three to four feet), weedy, and difficult for human fishing, they are perfect for herons and egrets. Among the more noteworthy butterflies that have been documented on the



South Hanson Swamp Bog Reservoir. Photograph by Kathleen S. Anderson.

property are Hessel's hairstreak (*Callophrys hesseli*) and variegated fritillary (*Euptoieta claudia*).

A proper and thorough botanical survey of the property has never been completed; however, Raymond Seamans and the authors have personally recorded such locally unusual plant species as large whorled pogonia (*Isotria verticillata*), calapogon (*Calapogon tuberosus*), painted trillium (*Trillium undulatum*), white-fringed orchis (*Platanthera blephariglottis*), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*), and pink azalea (*Rhododendron nudiflorum*), among a diversity of other lovely species, during their visits through the years. Files at Massachusetts Audubon include a long list of interesting plants from Stump Brook Wildlife Sanctuary, many of which are almost certainly also found at adjoining Burrage Pond.

Burrage Pond WMA is accessible via Hawks Avenue in Hanson or from Elm Street in Halifax. To reach the Hanson entrance, proceed north (although it appears to be west) on Route 27, 0.3 mile from the intersection of Route 58 in Hanson, to Pleasant Street on the left. Take Pleasant Street for 0.7 mile to a railroad crossing. Immediately after crossing the railroad tracks turn right onto Hawks Avenue (sign on phone pole), and travel several hundred feet to a chain link fence on the left. A left turn here onto a dirt road leads to the WMA parking area. To access the Elm Street entrance in Halifax, continue north on Route 27 1.8 miles from the Route 58 intersection, to Elm Street on the left. Turn left on Elm Street, and proceed 2.4 miles to a dirt road on the left that leads to the WMA parking area. The regional headquarters for the Massachusetts Environmental Police is also located on the Burrage Pond WMA property.

Exploration of the Burrage Pond WMA is most easily undertaken on foot, particularly since the area is generally off limits to vehicular traffic. The easiest access to the area is via the main dikes leading from both the Elm Street and Hawks Avenue entrances. From these main dikes there is a network of connecting cross dikes that makes it possible for birders to gain access to practically all portions of the property. Although some of the smaller cross dikes are somewhat overgrown, the intrepid birder can nonetheless readily traverse them. For viewing waterfowl in Burrage Pond, the Hanson entrance often affords the best observation. Two cautionary notes for visitors are not to walk on the cranberry bog areas and to be watchful for poison sumac (*Rhus vernix*) along some of the more overgrown cross dikes. 🐦

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Kathleen (Betty) S. Anderson's interest in birds and conservation has led to a life-long active involvement in these areas. Her many achievements include her fifteen years as the Founding Director of the Manomet Bird Observatory and her current service as the chair of the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee. **Wayne R. Petersen** is a Community Leader for the Swarovski Birding Community in North America, prior to which he served as Field Ornithologist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society for fifteen years. He is past Vice President of the American Birding Association, and he has made numerous contributions to birding literature as both author and editor.

Betty and Wayne each live within ten miles of the Burrage Pond WMA, and they have birded there together for over thirty years. They are grateful to the many people who contributed information for this article, but would particularly like to thank Philip Clemons (local history), Robert P. Fox (South Shore Bird Club records), and Joseph F. Kenneally, Jr. (early birding history), whose collective knowledge and memories added greatly to their own impressions and records.

Birds of Late Summer

Raymond J. Seamans

Do you know that super-birding-spot of southeastern Massachusetts, the Great Cedar Swamp? Roughly two square miles in extent, it was, prior to the recent development of several large cranberry bogs, very wild and inaccessible country. A network of good sandy roads has now been built up, and from one or another of these the eye may explore almost any part of the area. Besides the reclaimed land, there are a fine hemlock grove, a few knolls covered with pine and beech, a field of two or three acres, a number of small stumpy ponds, considerable meadow region, sand banks galore, and acre upon acre of the swamp proper—a hideous morass of unknown depths presided over by the spectral remains of drowned cedars. This is the place

where feral Nature makes its last impressive stand in the region. What a site for a bird sanctuary! It first endeared itself to me as the breeding locale of many pairs of Water-Thrushes and Brown Creepers, but I have since come to esteem it for many other reasons—for its great Night Heron rookery, its Bank Swallow colony, its breeding Canada Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos and Rough-winged Swallows, its hordes of Black Ducks and Wood Ducks, its visitant Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Little Blues, its Painted Trillium, Calopogon and Mountain Laurel, and its Deer, Raccoon and Otter. There is powerful appeal in the mysteries of its past. But, most of all, I love it for the secrets yet to be revealed to me within its borders.

Of the many entrances to this natural paradise, I chose, this September morning, the road which leads behind the big cranberry cannery. It passes the stumpy cove that the southward-bound Teal call their own. The first Blue-wings, I wagered, should be there today. A multitude of waterfowl took vocally to wing at my approach—Wood-ducks, Blacks, Green and Black-crowned Night Herons. There were dozens of each species, although their ranks are thinning daily now. With difficulty I picked out in the maze of wings the characteristic blue forearms of three Teal. Sometimes, when my presence brings fear to a peaceful group of birds, I heartily wish they might be able to discriminate between their friends and their enemies. Yet I know few more thrilling sights in Nature than that of Black Ducks bolting away in alarm at express-train speed.

All the roadsides were white with Hawkweed gone to seed, and Pokebushes bowed low with their late-summer burdens. I walked the gauntlet of “a clamorous clan in cobalt clad” and thought that feathered vocabulary reached its peak in the Jay. Their autumn fluency, like that of the politicians, is unexcelled. Blessings on the Cooper’s Hawk that yelled suddenly near by and throttled their din for a time. Curious Towhees in patchwork plumage, no two alike, peered at me from all sides. I have often marveled at the way parent Terns, for instance, distinguish their own young from the throng of offspring milling on the spit. But it must be an easy matter for Mother Towhee to call all the neighboring juveniles of her species by name, so great is the diversity of their markings. With surprising difficulty I coaxed a House Wren from his pile of brush. When he finally did emerge, it was to threaten me in no uncertain terms, suggesting very saucily and at great length that I go hiss else-where. The tirade attracted his big relative, Thrasher, to the scene, and that worthy contributed his opinion of the case with a peculiar, choking wheeze. I moved along.

The proprietors of “Water-Thrush Lane” have been gone six weeks. Four short months ago the concert was just beginning. They were back when expected, after a nine months’ absence, to make the floating island sacred. From half a dozen throats the paragon of warbler songs rang through the recesses of the swamp. Now the long wait is on again. Faith in the coming of another May is at low ebb in September, but the bird-seeker need never despair. Each season boasts its quota of interesting birds. If the Water-Thrush goes, the Kinglet, the White-throat, the Siskin will soon be cheerfully present. Click! Did somebody cock a pistol? I glanced up to find myself surrounded by a formidable posse. He who startled me called “pee-a-wee” and sallied forth again, the audible snap of his bill signaling the demise of another public enemy. Cousin Pewee sat on a cedar stump relishing a large dragonfly. Above the

range of this huntsman, a few belated Barn Swallows took prey. Landing light as a feather at the foot of a towering tree, Brown Creeper commenced his hitching, barber-pole ascent. Red-capped Downy, too, was content to play the luck of the bole so long as a prying Prairie Warbler kept his distance. Swamp Sparrows picked at the mud. It was “bad medicine” for the insects in this particular nook. As I turned from the slaughter, I beheld a Woodchuck heading directly for me, full speed ahead. Closer and closer he plunged, until I braced for the assault. Not five feet away, he veered from the path and dived into a hole in the bank. Poor creature, he had believed his retreat cut off. How frightened he must have been! I recall drying my forehead.

The hemlocks were almost deserted today. A furtive Vireo and a fly-catching young Redstart were the only bird inhabitants in evidence. I passed through and walked out on the dike, where a series of queer sights was in store. At once I descried the familiar paradox of a pure white Little Blue Heron stalking about the shallows with nicely measured tread. A berry-eating quintet of tardy Kingbirds was mildly surprising, but I rubbed my eyes at a Downy Woodpecker who gathered sustenance from a mullein stalk. Then—shades of Anhingas and Sandhill Cranes!—a great Blue Heron flew several rods with neck outstretched. The suspicion that I had discovered a rugged individualist was confirmed when Herodias came to rest on a distant stump and spread his wings, Cormorant-fashion, to the breeze. I watched him hold that uncanny pose for several minutes. Then, glancing idly at a flock of Crows overhead, I spotted something that nearly broke my taut credulity, for one of their member displayed great white bars across each wing, the area proportionately large as on a Spotted Sandpiper. I followed him out of sight, then looked weakly about me lest I miss any Wild Turkeys or Flamingoes. But the freak show was over.

I trailed a fresh Deer track until it left the path to skirt the swamp. Here was the grove beloved to a certain few as the home of the variegated-leaved Pipsissewa. Midget forms flitted high in the pines, and I caught a few snatches of song. The author proved to be a bright Blackpoll, his music as radically changed as his plumage. The sandy four-corners where the Rattlesnake Plaintain blossomed was possessed today by the White-topped Aster, Fleabane, and Gall-of-the-Earth. This crossroads is a favorite gathering-place of the birds. A good-sized family of Bob-whites whirred away as I arrived. Everywhere Morning Doves were dusting. A great Hairy Woodpecker bellowed “All aboard” and bounded off with that mail-must-go-through gait. A mixed company of Chipping Sparrows and Pine Warblers were feeding in a small area of tall grass. I found they were robbing the extensive traps of a gigantic Golden Garden Spider. This handsome arachnid, fully an inch in diameter, hung motionless while his larder was being riddled but made an agile getaway when touched with a blade of grass.

A flock of fifty-two Cedar-birds flew up from their pokeberry dinner and clustered in a sapling. Nearly all were striped young-of-the-year. “It is almost fall when we get on the wing,” they seemed to admonish. “You had better order that ton of coal.” Then I made out two White-throats in the swarm of wayside sparrows, and that, for me, spelled the end of summer. 🐦

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The “Duck” Stamp: A Birder’s Imperative?

Paul J. Baicich



This year’s Federal Duck Stamp pictures this pair of flying Redheads, painted by wildlife artist Scot Storm from Sartell, Minnesota. The 2004–2005 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, informally known as “The Duck Stamp,” goes on sale on July 1.

This year’s “Duck Stamp” will soon be offered at post offices, national wildlife refuges, some national retail chain stores, and various sporting-goods stores nationwide.

The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, which is the stamp’s official name, has been a grand success story in its 70-year history. Started in the mid-1930s to address a major crisis in bird conservation and wetland habitat loss, the stamp has been used as a highly effective funding mechanism for our refuge system, having accrued over \$670 million and having been used to secure more than five million acres of valuable wetland habitat for the system. About \$25 million a year is currently collected through yearly stamp sales.

Proceeds from the \$15 stamp go into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, used to purchase wetlands for the National Wildlife Refuge System. (Indeed, 98 percent of the revenue from the stamp goes through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase these refuge wetlands.) In addition to waterfowl hunters required to have a stamp, there are stamp collectors, wildlife-art enthusiasts, wildlife conservationists, and birders who also buy Duck Stamps to add to their collections, to enjoy as a miniature work of art, or simply as a way to support bird conservation and the refuge system. The stamps can also be used to gain admission to any National Wildlife Refuge in the country which charges an entry fee.

The Duck Stamp program has now reached a milestone, since every regularly occurring North American waterfowl has appeared in the series— some of them multiple times (e.g., Canada Goose, Mallard, Northern Pintail, and Canvasback). This occasion presents concerned birders with an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the USFWS and the “waterfowl community” about ways in which the stamp might be improved and expanded beyond the vital, but limited, purpose of refuge wetland habitat acquisition. Fortunately, the involved parties have already begun this effort.

Among the changes that birders hope to see incorporated into the program are: 1) inclusion of more species; 2) inclusion of more types of habitat; and 3) the support of a broader constituency.

1) When we consider benefiting more species, we recall that the stamp was created by bird conservation visionaries in 1934 when our waterfowl species were in deep crisis. The stamp and the refuge system succeeded splendidly in helping to save waterfowl. Now other bird species are in similar trouble (just see, for example, the Partners In Flight WatchList). These other species in need could be highlighted, and their conservation and management problems could be addressed through stamp sales.

2) When we consider more habitat, we can appreciate that the stamp has been a mainstay of refuge wetland habitat acquisition. Still, other, “drier,” habitat, from grasslands to deserts, could benefit from stamp-funding sources.

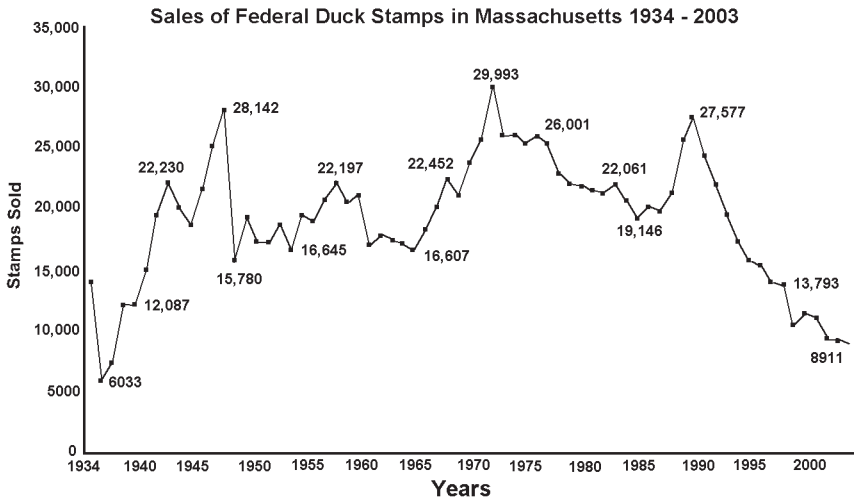
3) When we consider a broader constituency, we are focusing on our community of birders, as well as those immediately beyond our ranks. Indeed, when the stamp’s original name (Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp) was augmented to include the word “conservation” in 1977, it was thought that the change would bring a new cadre of conservationists into the fold of stamp supporters. Unfortunately, beyond changing the name, little was done to adjust or modernize the stamp.

There are other bird-conservation causes on the continental level that could benefit from a stamp funding-mechanism. Some of these could easily include the development of the existing bird plans (e.g., Partners in Flight, the Waterbird Plan, the U.S. Shorebird Plan), a supplement to the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund designed to benefit neotropical science and education, the promotion of International Migratory Bird Day, the addition of funding to NAWCA (North American Wetlands Conservation Act), and other causes.

Finally, implied in a retooled stamp is also a willingness to modify the artwork on the current stamp and to give the stamp greater value. Modifying the artwork might mean deliberate cycling of the art through the featuring of other family groups beyond waterfowl (e.g., shorebirds, passerines, raptors, upland gamebirds, waterbirds) or including other bird species on the stamp alongside the waterfowl. Giving the stamp added value also might mean using it as an expanded entrance pass or a de facto “discount card,” something good for waterfowl hunters and nonhunters alike.

All the while, we must make sure that the legacy and grand achievements of the current stamp are appreciated and maintained. Concerned birders should aim to build on the stamp’s successes, strengthening the foundations, not scrapping the past. This

is one of the reasons why an expanded stamp, and not a new, alternative, stamp, has been proposed. (Such an expanded or revised approach would have to be based on a “wetlands first” prioritization; then it could take up more causes for all birds with any extra funds raised.)



Credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. See <<http://duckstamps.fws.gov>>.

Over the decades, 1.32 million of the stamps have been purchased in Massachusetts. The funds have been used to support wetland habitat acquisition all over the country, but also including specific acquisitions at Great Meadows, Monomoy, and Parker River NWRs. (Other regional NWRs that have been the beneficiary of stamp proceeds have been Stewart B. McKinney in Connecticut, Missisquoi in Vermont, Lake Umbagog in New Hampshire, and Moosehorn in Maine.) The accompanying chart shows the trend in sales (with every other year labeled) in Massachusetts. We can recognize real peaks (e.g., late 1940s, early 1970s, and late 1980s) and intervening valleys. Recently, statewide sales have been less than a third of what they were in peak years. Indeed, we are currently witnessing slipping sales, both locally and nationally. (On a national level, the last year that over two million stamps were sold was back in 1980.) Clearly, the stamp program needs to be reinvigorated, and birder-conservationists need to participate in a more vociferous and creative fashion.

In the meantime, during the first week of July, you have the opportunity to support wetland habitat acquisition in the refuge system by buying and using a new stamp. The refuge system, the birds, and, yes, even you would greatly benefit. 🦋

Paul J. Baicich, coauthor (along with Colin Harrison) of Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds, worked for the American Birding Association for over a decade in multiple capacities and is now one of the two Community Leaders for the Swarovski Birding Community in North America.

Good News for Massachusetts Birds: Introducing Massachusetts eBird

www.massaudubon.org/ebird

Christopher Leahy, Taber Allison, and Simon Perkins

Listing with a Purpose. Birders typically have the most detailed and accurate information about the birdlife of their favorite birding spots, and many of us keep extensive lists and notes documenting our observations. Yet these valuable records have usually been lost to scientists and conservationists either because they were not recorded according to a prescribed (often cumbersome) census methodology or because there was no convenient way to bring such records together in a single database. Now, thanks to the development of a powerful new Web-based data-gathering tool developed by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and adapted for use in the Commonwealth by Massachusetts Audubon Society, you can make important contributions to our knowledge of the state's avifauna, help protect those natural areas in your community that are most important for bird conservation — and have instant access and analysis capability not only for your own records but to those of other eBirders recording observations from the same localities.

What is eBird? eBird is an easy-to-use, interactive computerized database, which in its basic form lets you keep track of the birds you see anywhere, anytime. You can retrieve information on your bird observations — from your backyard, your neighborhood, your favorite bird-watching locations — any time you want. And you can also access the entire database to find out what other eBirders are reporting from across Massachusetts. The computerized format allows you to view your records cumulatively and to perform simple analyses revealing trends in factors such as arrival and departure dates and breeding distribution. Perhaps the most exciting thing about eBird is that your records, combined with those of other observers, become a powerful tool for bird conservation by supplying scientifically useful data on species distribution and movement patterns in Massachusetts and across the continent.

Why should I eBird? It's fun! If you've never kept systematic birding records before, this is a painless way to experience a whole new level of satisfaction from your birding adventures. It's a great way to save and recall exciting days in the field, and as your records accumulate you can begin to track trends relating to the birds in your life. How do the bird populations at my feeder vary from month to month and year to year? When do the Baltimore Orioles return to nest in my yard each May? Which week do I have the best chance of seeing a Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Plum Island? What's the total number of species that I have seen (or anyone has seen) at my favorite birding hot spot? You can discover the answers using eBird. If you are already a veteran list keeper, eBird makes it easy to record, access, and manipulate your records.

You can make a valuable contribution to science. A recent scientific paper published in the United Kingdom documents alarming population declines in many species over recent decades. The data for this authoritative study came from hundreds of volunteers, “citizen scientists” who contributed their records to a centralized database like eBird. The system allows scientists to uncover patterns in bird movements and ranges across Massachusetts and beyond, including migratory pathways, wintering and breeding ranges, arrival and departure dates, range expansions and contractions, and a host of other important environmental relationships.

It’s an important tool for bird conservation throughout the state, the region, and in your own community. Mass Audubon’s eBird system includes special files for tracking the status of birdlife on the seventy-nine Important Bird Areas in Massachusetts recently identified by the state’s birding community. Another set of files encourages the recording of observations from our 30,000 acres of wildlife sanctuaries. You can also help identify and document the most important bird habitats in your town using eBird—a potentially invaluable tool for community planners trying to establish which open spaces should have priority for protection.

In the near future, we will also be adding specialized eBird functions that will allow you to participate in more complex censuses of selected “birds-to-watch” — species that are not yet endangered but seem to be declining. Are Whip-poor-wills and Eastern Meadowlarks getting rarer in Massachusetts? How rapidly? Where are they surviving best? Can eBird serve as an early warning system for common species, e.g., the decline of Skylarks and other widespread farmland birds in the United Kingdom? The answers to such questions will allow us to devise management strategies for many species before they reach the brink of extinction.

It’s a great way to get kids interested in science and nature. Are you a teacher in search of a project that will show students how science works while actually contributing useful data to a national database and getting kids out into the field? Are you a parent looking for a fun and meaningful project to share with your family? eBird’s the answer: It’s fun. It uses computers (so your kids can teach you!). It’s of genuine value to society. It’s cool!

How do I eBird? It’s easy. Simply keep track of your bird sightings wherever and whenever you can, then log on to the Mass Audubon eBird site, <<http://www.massaudubon.org/ebird>>. You’ll find detailed instructions and helpful tutorials on the site, but here are the basic steps:

1. From the “Submit Your Observations” tab, we’ll ask you to tell us where you went birding by choosing a location. If you were at a publicly accessible location, you may be able to find your location in our Sanctuary or Important Bird Area list. Otherwise, you can enter the latitude and longitude directly, find the location on the eBird interactive map, or simply enter your observations at the county or city level. You can store the location you select in your “My Locations” list for easy access during future submissions.
2. Next, we’ll ask you how and when you were birding. You’ll be able to select an


“Observation Type” such as casual observation, stationary count, etc. that most closely matches the type of birding you did. Then fill in the time, distance, or area fields when prompted. We’d also like to know the number of other observers in your party, and if weather affected your ability to record birds.

3. Finally, tell us the species you saw and heard. To report a species, simply enter the number of individuals of each species that you observed. Once you submit your checklist, it will be available for immediate retrieval.

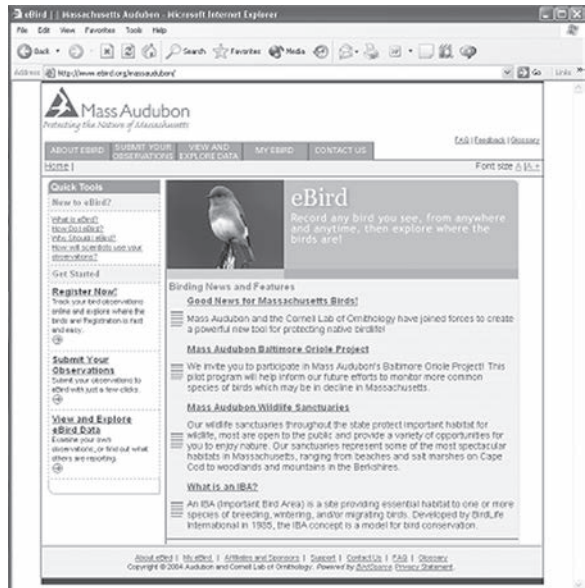
That’s all it takes to eBird! Of course, you’ll find many different ways to view and analyze your data and compare it with other birders’ observations. There is a wealth of fascinating questions to explore!

We Need Your Help! The value of this kind of data increases with the number of records we can accumulate. The more data you can send us from as many localities as possible, the more we will get to know about Massachusetts birds and their conservation status. One way of stating our goal is that we’d like to have “citizen birders” sending us their lists from every city and town in Massachusetts as often as possible — thus securing the Commonwealth’s reputation as The Birders State.

What about Quality Control? The eBird system has a built-in filter that flags unusual records, based on ornithological norms for Massachusetts. If you report seventeen Ivory Gulls from your feeder (or even one), the record is not automatically rejected but is highlighted and reviewed by the Massachusetts eBird editor, Simon Perkins.

You probably have other questions... For the answers please contact the authors at Mass Audubon. The program is up and running now; we hope you’ll be participating soon! 

All three authors can be reached at the Mass Audubon offices in Lincoln, MA. **Taber Allison** is Vice President, Conservation Science; **Christopher Leahy** holds the Gerard Bertrand Chair of Field Ornithology; **Simon Perkins** is a Field Ornithologist. They eagerly await your input to Massachusetts eBird.



Nesting Wilson's Storm-Petrels in Antarctica

Brooke Stevens

Just before leaving on a three-week trip to the Falklands, South Georgia, and the Antarctic Peninsula last fall, I was asked by Carolyn Marsh to think about writing a post-trip account for *Bird Observer*. There were other local birders along — Wayne and Betty Petersen, Ted Davis, Warren Harrington, and Molly Cornell. Although we had great fun together, the New England presence hardly qualified as a topic of regional interest, and besides, I had already used that as an excuse to write about the adventures of the Murrelets on Attu (*Bird Observer*, June 2001). Then I thought, what about doing a piece on “our” birds that are really “their” birds, *really* theirs. In other words, birds that are plentiful and seen regularly on New England summer pelagic birding trips out of Cape Cod or Newburyport, but that disappear in fall and winter — not after nesting and reproducing in North America, but rather to nest and reproduce in the Southern Hemisphere.

I had camped along an Alaskan braided river in the Brooks Range last June, and was serenaded by graceful, close-flying Arctic Terns that were nesting in the gravelly bed below my tent. I was thrilled to see them again in the icy bays of the Antarctic Peninsula just six months later, and marveled at their journey. But perhaps the biggest surprise came on November 26 while we were enjoying (wallowing in!) the animal life at Hannah Point, our last stop before crossing the Drake Passage to Cape Horn. The weather was fair and it offered us a mellow opportunity to wander, sit, listen to, and generally enjoy Gentoo, Chinstrap, and Macaroni penguins; Antarctic (Southern) Giant Petrels, Kelp Gulls, and Antarctic Shags; and courting Snowy Sheathbills scooping out debris from a hollow ledge. It was a somewhat confined area compared with some places we had landed, filled with snow, ice, rock, lichens (and tiny invertebrates), but teeming with life! At one point, as Ted Davis turned and walked away from me, past a tall, jagged rock protrusion, laced with crevices, ledges, and cracks, a Wilson's Storm-Petrel shot past his head and headed to sea. The day before, while cruising around the Melchior Islands in zodiacs, Wayne reported with great excitement that he had seen a Wilson's Storm-Petrel *enter* a nest crevice on one of the rocky cliffs, where Kelp Gulls were also nesting among limpet shells that they had regurgitated. It was the first time that he had ever seen this species actually enter a possible nesting site.

Robert Cushman Murphy's classic study, *Oceanic Birds of South America*, and Ralph Palmer's *Handbook of North American Birds* have subsequently become primary references in my investigation of life history events associated with this regular visitor to New England waters. Wilson's Storm-Petrels breed on South Georgia, the South Orkneys, South Shetlands, islands of the Antarctic Archipelago, and on other islands in the circumpolar Antarctic ring (Murphy p. 750). Our trip from the second week in November to the first of December coincided with the spring arrival of the storm-petrels on their austral breeding grounds in west Antarctica. Although we may see hundreds of “Mother Carey's Chickens” dancing and pattering

over North Atlantic waters during local offshore pelagic trips, there are historical accounts of vast concentrations near Antarctica's Deception Island, and "acres and acres, so close they were almost touching" at South Georgia (Palmer p. 250). Throughout much of the species' range while in the middle latitudes, moderate numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels scatter over huge areas of the Atlantic Ocean, with "tens or scores of birds remaining visible as one travels great distances along tropical coasts and in the vicinity of tropical convergences" (Palmer, p. 250). Throughout the 4000 nautical miles we traveled on our cruise, we saw Wilson's Storm-petrels almost daily.


The storm-petrels that Wayne and I observed on land were flying into and away from rocky cliffs. The actual nest of the Wilson's Storm-Petrel is a burrow, usually in a cavity under rocks, either naturally occurring or, where there is soil, dug out by the petrels. The nest chamber can be unlined or fitted out with bits of vegetation, "a comfortable collection of penguin feathers," or simply accumulated debris, including carcasses of dead young (Murphy pp. 752-3). The nests that Murphy described on South Georgia were located in rocky scree or else on cliff faces. They were generally inaccessible, and the apparently ventriloquial, low whistling cry of the adult birds made them difficult to locate. Murphy himself, after a lengthy and patient search, was unable to discover a nest, although he reports that many of the birds he shot were "undoubtedly incubating." He quotes another account in which an observer sees the birds fluttering around the headlands and tussock flats along the Bay of Isles, South Georgia, "flying back and forth like martins, but I never spied one in the act of alighting at its nesting site" (p. 753). Now I can better appreciate Wayne's excitement at seeing one enter a nesting crevice!

There are purported to be millions of prions (one of several small southern ocean petrel species) nesting in some of the places we visited, yet we saw not a single one coming or going to a nest site. This was no doubt because skuas were everywhere, doing what they do best, stealing eggs and eating any adults that they could capture. There were carcasses of prions strewn all about the rocky slopes of several nesting islands. Are the storm-petrels we saw in broad daylight immune to the attacks of these predators? An account quoted in Murphy notes that "possibly its body affords too small a morsel to warrant any effort on the skua's part" (p. 755). Our sightings were not far from Petermann Island where in January 1909 members of a French expedition discovered twenty nests under large stones, or in deep crevices among the rocks. "The last birds of the species were observed about this locality on April 20, and the first arrival of the next autumn returned on November 23" (Murphy p. 752). Chicks are born in early to mid-February and fledge after fifty days or longer. It is the beginning of the austral winter then, and a daunting prospect, even for a krill-fed fledgling, to escape if the burrow should become snowed in. Although an adult storm-petrel can't reach its chick through hard-packed snow, it can apparently burrow through up to twenty centimeters (about eight inches) of soft snow (Palmer p. 250).

By April, Wilson's Storm-Petrels are migrating north, rapidly crossing warm equatorial waters. However, there is little evidence that first-year birds undertake such long migrations; "specimens determinable as in juvenal plumage are rare in

collections of North Atlantic birds, although very common in those from the tropics” (Murphy p. 750). The fledglings possibly follow a coastal route on their northward journey, while the adults undertake a more intrepid pelagic voyage that intercepts the Gulf Stream and reaches the latitude of Cape Hatteras about the third week in April. This is precisely the time when the vanguard of the population generally reaches the Atlantic Coast of the United States (Palmer p. 248). Gradually at least a portion of the population moves somewhat inshore during May and June. Murphy notes that “the whereabouts of the first-year birds during the northern winter, or breeding season, is a matter of considerable uncertainty.” He concludes that as the young do not molt until after they have left the North Atlantic, and probably not until their second summer; they do not breed until their second year, spending their entire first year at sea.

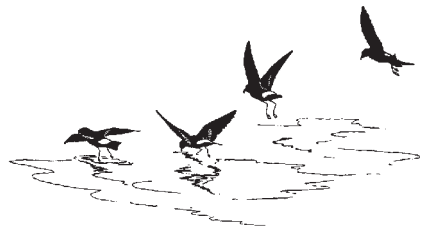
I particularly enjoyed Murphy’s description of this tiny, intrepid seafaring bird, made during a round trip voyage between New York and South Georgia in 1912-1913, when he saw Wilson’s Storm-Petrels as frequently as we did on our journey:

Like all small dark petrels, this species is difficult to see against water ruffled by the wind, and only rarely does it rise above the horizon of a person standing on the deck of a ship. The birds therefore often rush into the field of vision and appear at close range after the observer has been vainly scanning the water in the distance. During calms, when the ocean is silvery, they are silhouetted against it and are visible from afar. When following a vessel, they skip along the surface as they approach, giving a vigorous kick on the lee side with both feet whenever they touch the water. When they ‘stand’ to feed, the wings are held rigidly and they face the wind; the momentum necessary to keep them from being blown away is furnished by the webs, the legs sinking to the heel as they work backward in unison. Why their almost weightless bodies are not whisked off to leeward like fluffs of down is a good deal of a mystery. Regardless of the strength of the gale, however, they contrive to move forward in the apparently effortless, dreamlike manner that seems to defy both wind and gravitation (p.752). 

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Brooke Stevens, a former editor of Bird Observer and current member of the Board of Directors, lives in Cambridge, MA.



WILSON'S STORM-PETREL BY WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR.

Coyotes and the Food Chain

Christopher Neill

If you drive the roads of Falmouth at dawn or dusk you likely have caught a glimpse of our local “top dog,” the eastern coyote.

Or maybe you’ve had dealings with a coyote in another way — when your cat fails to return, or your dog gives chase and comes back worse for wear, or less fortunately, does not come back at all.

Despite the downside to pet owners, I welcome these wild canids to our woods, which have gone far too long with a vacancy at the top spot in the food chain. In reality, we all probably don’t have a choice. Once established, coyotes are remarkably resourceful and notoriously difficult to eradicate.

When a coyote makes off with a cat or shakes a small dog to death, it is doing what it was born to do – killing other midsized predators. Now some new evidence is emerging that suggests that by doing what coyotes do, preying on other “mesopredators,” they improve the chances that a number of sensitive bird species will successfully reproduce.

This occurs through a series of interactions among species in the food chain, or in ecological parlance, “trophic cascades.” They work as follows. Coyotes are at the top of the food chain, or at the highest “trophic” level. Coyotes prey on mesopredators, like raccoons, opossums, striped skunks, and red foxes, which occupy the next lowest trophic level. Because these common mammals are much more efficient predators on bird nests than coyotes, birds, at a still lower trophic level, increase.

The high densities of mammalian predators, like raccoons, near urban areas and in woodlands that have been bisected or fragmented by human activities, especially residential development, are another piece of this picture. All of these mesopredators adapt very well to the edges around human settlements.

The thinking is that in the absence of top carnivores, the release of mesopredators in fragmented habitats reduces the population and diversity of small mammals, birds, and lizards that make up the bulk of mesopredator diets.

Raccoons and other mammalian predators can reach phenomenal densities in suburban areas. Seth Riley and colleagues from the National Park Service found 320 raccoons per square mile in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. These exceed typical populations in rural areas by tenfold or more. This density of raccoons and other predators puts intense pressure on birds.

Biologist Michael Soulé has been the most vocal proponent of the “mesopredator release” hypothesis. He has used this to argue that reintroduction of large carnivores should be part of large-scale restoration of ecosystems where they were formerly eliminated by human persecution.

Soulé and colleague Kevin Crooks of the University of California at Santa Cruz published a recent study that supports their ideas. They examined the numbers of coyotes, other mammalian predators, and birds in remaining patches, or fragments, of California chaparral on the urban fringe of San Diego. They found that a higher number of coyotes was associated with a lower number of foxes and opossums. The simple presence of coyotes in a chaparral fragment had a negative effect on opossums, raccoons, domestic cats, and the total number of mesopredators.


At the same time, the diversity of shrub birds, many of them species whose overall populations are declining from habitat loss, was higher in fragments with larger numbers of coyotes.

In another study from southern Michigan in 1999, C. M. Rogers and M. J. Caro found that the breeding success of song sparrows increased after coyotes invaded woodlots that were surrounded by cultivated fields. Song sparrows are susceptible to nest predation because they nest on or near the ground. The number of nests that produced at least one young went from less than ten percent without coyotes to thirty percent when coyotes were present. Rogers and Caro also showed that the density of raccoons was inversely correlated with song sparrow reproduction.

Interestingly, Crooks and Soulé's study of suburban San Diego found that cats were by far the most abundant predator in their chaparral fragments. By surveying surrounding residents, they estimated that a modest-sized fragment of fifty acres was visited by approximately thirty-five hunting cats from surrounding houses. That compared with only one to two pairs of native predators, such as gray foxes or coyotes. They concluded it was the coyote-cat interactions that had the greatest effect on birds.

Free ranging cats are notorious predators of wild birds. A study of cat predation in an English village in 1987, which is fast becoming a classic, found that a population of 70 domestic cats captured more than 1000 birds and small mammals in one year, including 22 species of birds.

Birds that nest in fragmented woodlands, especially in suburban areas, face a number of hardships, such as changes to forests and high densities of other predators such as jays and crows that are not likely to be influenced by coyotes.

But one effect of our newest top carnivore is that many cat owners have learned their cats are safer indoors. This, in the end, may be the largest — though indirect — effect of coyotes that ultimately cascades down to benefit birds. 

Christopher Neill is an ecologist at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole. This article originally appeared in the Falmouth Enterprise.

FIELD NOTES

Sharp-tailed Sparrow Challenges

Mystery Bird at Great Meadows

Simon Perkins and David A. Sibley

Note: On December 8, 2003, Simon Perkins, David Sibley, Steve Mirick, Wayne Petersen, and I drove to First Encounter Beach in Eastham in the aftermath of a storm and were treated to a wonderful show of seabirds. Eventually we headed off for lunch at a tavern in Orleans, and Simon pulled out his laptop computer to show us images of a curious-looking sharp-tailed sparrow. A most interesting conversation ensued about the identity of that bird. In this article, Simon and David take another shot at this perplexing sparrow.

David Larson

* * * * *

Simon Perkins: I was birding at Great Meadows NWR, Concord Unit, on October 24, 2003, when a mouse-like bird caught my eye within the weedy margin of the dike. I quickly determined that the rodent was a sharp-tailed sparrow. But, to my surprise, this particular bird lacked the bright orangey plumage of the form most frequently found at inland sites: the nominate race of the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni nelsoni*). I spent the better part of an hour studying it and attempting in vain to secure some "digiscoped" images. Luckily, David Hake, a visiting birder/photographer from Tennessee, also arrived on the scene, and was successful in capturing a few images with a more conventional SLR telephoto system (Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Sharp-tailed sparrow at Great Meadows NWR. Photograph by David Hake.

All three forms of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) have been reported from inland sites in Massachusetts (Veit and Petersen, 1993), and though the precise status of each of these within interior portions of the state is obscure due to identification issues, it appears that *A.n. nelsoni* is most frequently reported, perhaps because of *nelsoni*'s distinctive plumage. To my knowledge, Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*A. caudacutus*) has never been found away from the coast in Massachusetts.

The underparts of the Great Meadows bird were virtually colorless, lacking the bright buffy-ochraceous tones across the breast and along the flanks that are typical of *A.n. nelsoni*. In this respect the bird was most similar to the dullest form of Nelson's, *A.n. subvirgatus*, except for the fact that the streaks in these areas were relatively bold, a trait that all but ruled out all three forms of Nelson's. But, while the breast and flank streaks were bold like those of a Saltmarsh, they were, at the same time, somewhat blurry, unlike the rather crisp streaks of a typical Saltmarsh. The bill shape appeared to be intermediate between *nelsoni* and Saltmarsh, being neither as short as *nelsoni* nor as heavy as Saltmarsh. The color in the base of the mandible appeared yellowish, a feature consistent with Saltmarsh. The upperparts were a flat gray, and the whitish back streaks typical of this group were rather weak.



Figure 2. Sharp-tailed sparrow at Great Meadows NWR. Photograph by David Hake.

The overall impressions of this bird were that of *A.n. subvirgatus* with atypically heavy (yet blurry) streaks across the breast and along the flanks. Given the fact that the bird appeared to possess plumage and structural characteristics that were somewhat intermediate between Nelson's and Saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows, the possibility that it was a hybrid remains a viable, though probably unprovable, possibility.

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* * * * *

David Sibley: When Simon Perkins showed me these photographs, I agreed that it seemed wrong for any of the typical subspecies of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (the expected species inland), but at the same time was not quite right for a Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow (which would be very rare inland). Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed should be more crisply marked, with stronger and more distinct streaks below. In this case we felt fairly confident that we could rule out a typical Saltmarsh — the streaks on the underparts were simply too blurry. Our initial reaction was that this bird was a good candidate for a Saltmarsh x Nelson's hybrid, but at the time that was nothing more than a hunch, and I wasn't very confident. So I took the photos to the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology and compared them with a few hundred specimens.

The Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow includes three subspecies: one that is brighter, more distinctly streaked, and smaller-billed than the mystery bird (subspecies *nelsoni*, nesting on the northern prairies, apparently a rare migrant in Massachusetts); one that is drabber, grayer, and less streaked than the mystery bird (subspecies *subvirgatus*, nesting in coastal marshes from the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to southern Maine — where it hybridizes with Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow — and a common migrant in coastal Massachusetts); and one that is intermediate between those two (subspecies *alterus*, nesting in the James Bay lowlands and apparently a regular migrant in Massachusetts in small numbers).

As it turns out, *subvirgatus*, the most frequent migrant through Massachusetts, can actually be quite similar to the mystery bird. The drab back pattern with no black or white markings, and the hint of yellow on the lores are both characteristic of *subvirgatus*. We may have been a little too quick to dismiss it, but ultimately it seems we were correct. The mystery bird seems a little too orange on the face, with the orange eyebrow behind the eye too clean and too prominent, and showing some fine dark streaks. Most importantly, the breast and flanks are not orange enough, being distinctly paler than the face, and the streaks on the underparts are too dark and distinct.

So it's too drab for *nelsoni* and too bright for *subvirgatus*, which should make it just about right for *alterus*.

The subspecies *alterus* is poorly known. It was recognized and described in 1938, and there are very few breeding season specimens in U.S. museums. Birds have been identified as this subspecies in various places along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts as well as inland, but it seems that few of these have been cross-checked with specimens from the breeding grounds. In the collection at Harvard, as in other museums I have visited, I found a confusing array of specimens from different parts of the migration

and wintering range, with apparent *alterus* misidentified as *nelsoni*, *subvirgatus* misidentified as *alterus*, and other problems.

The problem with *alterus* is that it is intermediate between the gray Eastern subspecies *subvirgatus* and the bright prairie subspecies *nelsoni*, and may overlap both in appearance. I agree with both Todd's original description in 1938, which says it is similar to *nelsoni*, and Peters' 1942 study in which he called it exceedingly close to *subvirgatus*.

At this time I would say that the Great Meadows bird is not *alterus* because of the blurry dark streaks on the breast and flanks, with the ground color of the breast and flanks being paler than the face, and the finely streaked eyebrow.

So we're left with the initial guess of a hybrid between Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed and the drab *subvirgatus* subspecies of Nelson's. These hybrids are intermediate between the parents, so we can think of them as drab like *subvirgatus*, with the more contrastingly marked and brighter orange face of Saltmarsh, the paler breast and flanks with more distinct streaks of Saltmarsh. So the diagnosis is that this is most likely a hybrid, as we initially suspected, but somehow I don't feel a lot more confident than I did at the beginning.

The conclusion of all of this is that there is still a lot to learn about sharp-tailed sparrows. The subspecies *alterus* is poorly understood and probably accounts for many or even most of the reports of *nelsoni* in the Northeast. Hybridization between Nelson's and Saltmarsh is occurring in coastal salt marshes in New England, and these birds should be expected to turn up in Massachusetts on migration (but perhaps not often inland). Most sharp-tailed sparrows can be identified fairly easily, but some individuals will be difficult or even impossible to identify in the field and will continue to challenge our knowledge and skills. 🐦

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Editor's Note: For additional images and information on sharp-tailed sparrows, see Rising, J.D. 1996. A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of the Sparrows of the United States and Canada. *San Diego, CA: Academic Press*; Beadle, D. and Rising, J.D. 2002. Sparrows of the United States and Canada: The Photographic Guide. *San Diego, CA: Academic Press*; and Sibley, D. A. 1996. *Field Identification of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow Complex*, *Birding* 28 (3): 196-208.

Identifying Juvenile Sharp-tailed Sparrows

Richard S. Heil

Editor's Note: In early August 2003, a birder observed two juvenile sharp-tailed sparrows which apparently showed certain characteristics of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. This prompted a query to other birders on the Massbird email list as to whether there was any evidence of them nesting in Massachusetts. A discussion ensued, including the analysis that follows from Rick Heil. The photos are courtesy of <<http://www.virtualbirder.com>> © Don Crockett 2004.

Observers should be very cautious in identifying juvenile Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows in Massachusetts in late summer. The excellent images posted by Don Crockett (see <http://www.virtualbirder.com/vbirder/rba/sts_c/index.html>) show well all the features of juvenile Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows. This plumage, and the equivalent plumage of Nelson's, are short-lived and are unlikely to be observed far from where the birds were fledged. I would be surprised to see birds in this plumage during migration. In general, juvenile Saltmarsh sparrows are not as bright, or as extensively buffy orange as are juvenile Nelson's. I think part of the current confusion is that the Sibley guide possibly depicts juvenile Saltmarsh sparrows as too heavily streaked on the breast and flanks, at least in my New England experience with these plumages.

Characters of juvenile Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow versus juvenile Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow:

- + Crown DARK in Saltmarsh, lacking the well-defined buffy median crown stripe of juvenile Nelson's;
- + Supercilium less clear, more suffused with streaks in Saltmarsh; cleaner, brighter in Nelson's;
- + Throat contrastingly paler than submoustachial or supercilium in Saltmarsh; throat more nearly equivalent in color to these areas in Nelson's;
- + Nape dull, strongly suffused with grayish brown in Saltmarsh; brighter, clearer buffy orange nape in Nelson's;
- + Breast and flanks streaked on sides in Saltmarsh (though extent and darkness probably variable); underparts much less marked in Nelson's, with perhaps just a few streaks (often just spots) on the sides of the breast; otherwise, virtually unmarked buffy orange underparts;
- + Ear coverts more solidly grayish in Saltmarsh; less uniform and more internally buffy in Nelson's;
- + Generally darker dorsum in Saltmarsh, with strong blackish lines; brighter appearance in Nelson's.

(See Sibley, D.A. 1996. Field Identification of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow Complex. *Birding* 28:(3) 196-208. This is an excellent article on the identification of these sparrows, from which much of the above was gleaned.)



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Images of juvenile Saltmarsh (left) and Nelson's (right) Sharp-tailed Sparrows by Don Crockett from http://www.virtualbirder.com/vbirder/rba/sts_c/index.html © 2004.

During the past breeding season I looked at, or listened to, more than 400 different Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows at various locations while trotting around in the marshes of Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, and Rowley, and found six nests. I did not find any Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow nests.

Regarding the recent paper in *The Wilson Bulletin* (Hodgman, T.P., W.G. Shriver, and P.D. Vickery. 2002. Redefining Range Overlap between the Sharp-tailed Sparrows of Coastal New England. *Wilson Bulletin* 114: 38-43), without conclusive evidence of actual nesting I remain skeptical of the authors' assertion of a breeding range extension into Massachusetts. The Massachusetts breeding season observations (audios?) were not made by the authors, but rather by a graduate student under the supervision of the principal investigators. Furthermore, none of the investigators have been forthcoming with the precise details of the breeding evidence obtained for Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows in these marshes, despite the fact that such absolute confirmation would constitute a first Massachusetts breeding record. It seems, therefore, possible that their conclusion of a major range extension into Massachusetts is based solely on observations by an intern of unknown experience. I contacted all three authors and received much-appreciated responses from Peter Vickery and Tom Hodgman; however, they were unable to provide details about the Massachusetts Nelson's observation, since apparently it was Greg Shriver who was responsible for the southern New England portion of the survey.

In June 2003 I visited five of the sites where the researchers cited above claimed the presence of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows, but failed to find any. However, I would reiterate what Jim Berry has already pointed out, that it's a large marsh, and there certainly could be a few pairs of Nelson's out there. Also, the observations and conclusions of the Shriver study may indeed be correct. I simply have been unable so far to find any of these sparrows, despite considerable effort. I would welcome evidence of breeding-season Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in Massachusetts, but to date I remain unconvinced that such nesting has occurred. 

Greater Yellowlegs Feeding Behavior

Mark Daley


Over the past Columbus Day weekend my family and I visited my in-laws at their home on Cape Cod. With three young children, finding time to fit in some serious birding can be hard to do. An opportunity presented itself when I took my (then eight-month-old) son for a drive where he could enjoy his nap, and I could bird Cape Cod Bay from the car at several of the north-facing beaches. My plan was to hit Chapin, Corporation, and Cold Storage beaches in Dennis to watch the seabird migration. If time (read: my son's nap) permitted, I would also check for shorebirds at Gray's Beach in Yarmouthport.

The Dennis beaches were everything I had hoped for as I watched large numbers of scoters (all three species), Common Eiders, and Double-crested Cormorants moving back and forth across the bay. They were joined by lesser numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers, a few Common and Red-throated loons, and a small flock of plunge-diving gannets. After a couple of hours of watching, my son was still asleep, so I headed over to Gray's Beach.

There the flats were exposed and occupied by over 100 Black-bellied Plovers. Additionally, there were several Red Knots, Dunlins, Sanderlings, and Ruddy Turnstones along with a fair number of Greater Yellowlegs. After a short time a lone yellowlegs flew from the flats toward the shoreline, which was quite close to my car, and began to feed. Anyone familiar with either of the yellowlegs species knows that they are very active feeders, moving quickly, jabbing rapidly, and often chasing their prey. However, I had a front row seat to watch this bird feed like no other yellowlegs that I had ever seen before.

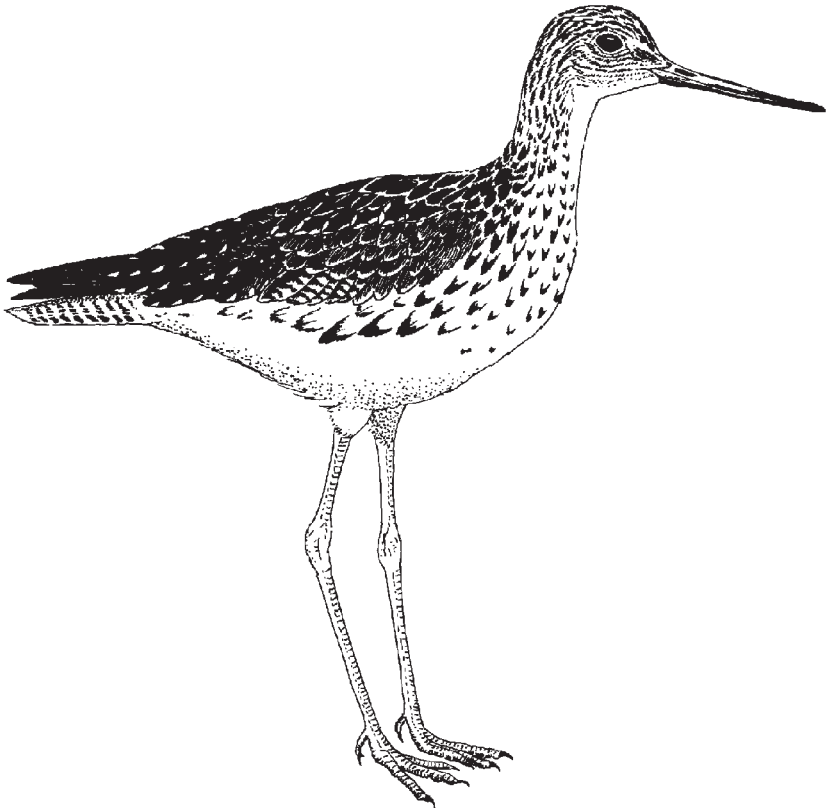
As I watched this bird, it leaned its head down and opened its bill until the lower mandible was in the water. It then ran rapidly along the shore searching for prey. Elphick and Tibbitts (1998) state, "They will also capture small fish by running toward surface ripples with its bill open and lower jaw submerged, plowing the water." While feeding in this manner, the bird very much resembled a Black Skimmer, albeit without the flight. In fact, when the yellowlegs felt a prey item its head even "jerked back" in a similar fashion to that of a skimmer. At times the bird ran fast enough that a wake

curled up and over its head (Zusi 1968). I observed this bird successfully find prey at least four times in the short time I watched him feeding in this manner. The bird caught three small minnows and what appeared to be a grass shrimp. I enjoyed watching for about ten minutes until the bird “skimmed” around a corner of the marsh grass and out of sight.

I watched thousands of birds in those few hours, but this lone yellowlegs was the highlight of my day. The experience reminded me that even those birds that you see on a regular basis exhibit fascinating behavior worthy of your study, a lesson I can pass on to my sleeping son another day. 

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GREATER YELLOWLEGS BY GEORGE C. WEST

ABOUT BOOKS

That was Then. This is Now.

Mark Lynch

Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas. Wayne R. Petersen and W. Roger Merservey, editors. 2003. Massachusetts Audubon Society. Distributed by University of Massachusetts Press. Amherst.



1979 seems like such a very long time ago. In that year, disco reigned supreme, and the Village People's *Y.M.C.A.* was a number one hit. Folks stood in line to see movies like *Alien*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Meatballs*. No one had even heard of the term "director's cut." On television, hit shows included *Charley's Angels*, *Laverne and Shirley*, and *Taxi*. Cellular phones had just been invented, but of course no one had one of these gadgets yet and would not for years. Joop Sinjou and Toshi Tada Doi invented the CD in 1979, but it would take fifteen more years for it to finally replace the record album. *Windows*, DVDs, and PDAs were only gleams in the imaginative brains of engineering geeks. 1979 was also the last year of collecting data for the *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas*.

U.S. Geological Survey topological maps of the state divide Massachusetts into uniform quadrangles. Each of these 189 "quads" (about sixty square miles in area), was then further split by Massachusetts Audubon and Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife into six equal "blocks." Therefore, for this breeding atlas, Massachusetts was divided into 989 blocks of ten square miles each. After a pilot year to iron out the kinks, from 1974 to 1979 over 600 volunteers, sometimes in teams, were sent out to these blocks during the breeding season. They then filled in data cards on what species of birds they found. Just reading the lengthy list of volunteers for this project is an exercise in Massachusetts birding nostalgia, and long-time state birders will recognize many names of friends no longer with us. Even with this huge effort, the coverage was not always equal from quad to quad:

Although not every block and quad in Massachusetts received equal coverage over the 1974 to 1979 period, at least some coverage was obtained in every block except for several on the borders of the state where the quad maps include only negligible Massachusetts territory [p.19].

Breeding confirmation data were coordinated and updated by Richard A. Forster, and the data finally computerized for the maps by David Stemple.

The finished book is a sumptuous volume, wonderfully designed and brilliantly augmented with color illustrations by John Sill and Barry W. Van Dusen. After introductory chapters on methodology and the ecoregions of the state, each species is

given a two-page spread with an illustration and a large map. Species accounts are written by a gaggle of participants. (I confess I had forgotten that I had written the account of the Saw-whet Owl; it was so long ago.) Different dots on the maps indicate whether a species breeding status was “confirmed,” “probable,” or “possible.”

An important appendix of “Additional Breeding Bird Atlas Species Accounts” (pp. 422-9) lists all the species that have been discovered breeding in the state since 1979 with a short account of their breeding history and status. This section includes such now-familiar breeding species as Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Common Raven, and Cerulean Warbler. A thick packet of transparent overlay maps is included at the back of the book. These include maps of the major drainages of the state, the county lines, elevations, and forest types. I found these very useful and handy in getting the most from the maps with each species account.

If the reader is very familiar with contemporary breeding bird surveys and breeding records from journals like *Bird Observer*, or regularly birds the central and western sections of the state, then it will be startling to see how the extent of the breeding range for many species has changed noticeably in the past twenty-five years. The number of species whose breeding ranges have dramatically shrunk since 1979 is unsurprisingly large. It is sobering and depressing to see how many fewer breeding locations we now have for such species as American Kestrel, Northern Bobwhite, Common Moorhen, Barn Owl, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Cliff Swallow, Golden-winged Warbler, and Vesper Sparrow. And those are only a very few of the most obvious examples. Most species show a less dramatic, more spotty and local decrease in their breeding status. In other words, it amounts to one dot less here, a new blank block there. All together these changes demonstrate the effects of the serious and dramatic loss of habitat that has occurred across the state since the last year of the atlas project.

It is therefore surprising also to learn that the breeding ranges of certain other species have rapidly increased in the last twenty-five years. Take a moment and glance at the *Breeding Bird Atlas* maps for species like Mute Swan, Wild Turkey, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Carolina Wren. In the *Atlas*, the breeding ranges of these species are represented by a mere scattering of just a few dots. One of the oddest species in this category is Evening Grosbeak, represented in the *Atlas* with only one dot, but now known to breed in select locations in northern Worcester County, the Berkshires, and other areas. Unfortunately, this list of species on the upswing is small.

Undoubtedly, some species were easier to count than others. Nocturnal species in particular are notoriously difficult to discover on Breeding Bird Surveys. Just based on my own local observations, I have found that the *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas* shows far too few, if any, indications of breeding for Barred, Screech, and Saw-whet owls in southern Worcester County particularly in the French, Quinnebaug, Quabog, and Blackstone drainages. These are not new species for those areas, but are local and nocturnal and therefore much easier to miss when doing surveys like this. Likewise, very thinly distributed diurnal species like Orchard Oriole and Worm-eating Warbler have long been known to breed in the Blackstone Valley in areas of

Northbridge and Uxbridge, among other places, but this fact is also not represented on the *Atlas* maps. Both of these examples show how easy it is for certain species to fall through the cracks of a survey with such a wide scope.

The one serious drawback to this otherwise wonderful achievement is the considerable span of time that elapsed from the end of the surveys to the actual publishing of the data. Twenty-five years is far too long a time to have waited for this book. By way of comparison, the New Hampshire breeding bird survey was conducted between 1981 and 1986 with 390 observers logging in excess of 9,750 hours of field time. The *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New Hampshire* was published in 1994. Similarly, *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Vermont*, covering survey years from 1976 to 1981, was published in 1985. And in Vermont the surveying for an updated edition is already in its second year. Certainly, an atlas of this nature is a “snapshot” of what bird populations were like in the mid-1970s, but the value of that snapshot diminishes as more time passes unless there is another more current picture with which to compare it. Massachusetts is being so rapidly developed that changes in distribution of species, especially in the interior of the state, need to be reevaluated every few years. Are there plans to conduct another complete breeding bird survey of the state any time soon?

Of course, for those of us who are “record mavens,” in other words the kind of person who eagerly pores over the records in every issue of *Bird Observer*, this atlas is a treasure trove of data. We “data junkies” have a sense of what the current status is of many of these species and can mentally draw numerous conclusions from the wealth of material in this book. However, I am concerned that any new birder to this state will pick up this atlas and come away with a very skewed and outdated idea of where birds are breeding. I wish a paragraph or two addressing some of the specific changes in distribution of species since the surveys were completed was included in the individual species accounts. Perhaps in the future, an ongoing breeding bird atlas can be kept as an online database, constantly updated and corrected.

It needs to be mentioned that much of the data in the *Atlas* has already been published in the 1993 book *Birds of Massachusetts* by Veit and Petersen. When that book was published, many people thought this is what the data from the years of the breeding surveys ended up becoming. But *Birds of Massachusetts* was not the intended *Atlas*. A comparison of the maps between the two books shows them to be essentially the same. *Birds of Massachusetts* did not publish the maps of species with very sparse breeding records, like Sedge Wren and Evening Grosbeak, but does mention the few breeding records in the text. Otherwise, the other species maps use the same data. Granted, the maps in the *Atlas* are larger, use different symbols, and have the set of matching overlays. The main difference between the two books is in the content of the text. In the *Atlas*, there are general species accounts, whereas in *Birds of Massachusetts* the text is concerned with details of occurrence and records of that species in the state. The *Atlas* is certainly a more attractive book with the color illustrations and a spacious layout. But if you like your data straight up with no frills, then much of it can be found in the previously published Veit and Petersen.

The *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas* is an important addition to our understanding of birds in the state and should be on the shelf of anyone with even a mild interest in the changing status of our avian breeders. I was getting concerned that I would die before I finally saw the publishing of this long-overdue book, and I'm glad I made it. Let's hope I'm still around for the also long-overdue butterfly atlas.



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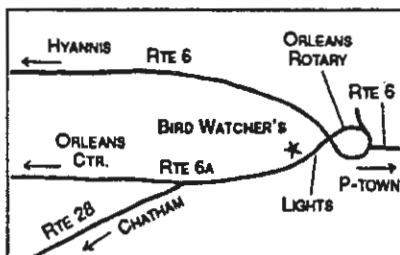
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BIRD SIGHTINGS

January/February 2004

Seth Kellogg, Marjorie Rines, Robert H. Stymeist, and Jeremiah Trimble

New Year's Day 2004 was a wonderful day, sunny with temperatures averaging about 10° above normal, a perfect day to begin a new year of birding. Alas, the warmth did not last long. On January 6 a cold siege began bringing record-low daily highs of just 9° on the 9th and 14° on the 10th. The month averaged 20.7° in Boston, 8.6° below normal and the coldest January since 1893! The coldest day in Boston was minus 7° on January 16, toppling the previous record of minus 5° from 1920. Many communities experienced double-digit, sub-zero readings, and the AAA auto club responded to over 1000 calls per hour for assistance with dead batteries! The severe cold inhibited snow, and total snowfall in Boston was only 4.9 inches, 7.6 inches below average. Snow actually fell on 16 days during the month, but most was very light. Rainfall was 1.01 inches, 2.91 inches below normal, making this January the seventh driest in 134 years.

February was much better, a dry and sunny month with above-normal temperatures. In Boston the average was 32.8°, 1.3° above normal and 5.6° warmer than last February. The temperature reached a balmy 55° on the last two days of the month, 9° above normal. Precipitation was below average for both rain and snow. Only 1.45 inches of rain fell in Boston, nearly two inches under the average, and snowfall totaled just 2.4 inches, 8.8 inches under normal and a far cry from the record-breaking 41.6 inches last February. *R. Stymeist*

WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

A report of a **Greater White-fronted Goose** came in from Rochester, where it was also seen in early November but has gone undetected since that time. Snow Geese lingered into January at several coastal locations, while a record of a single bird inland at Southwick on January 21 was more noteworthy. One Snow Goose was also reported in mid-February from Medford. **Tundra Swans** formerly wintered in coastal Massachusetts, especially on Cape Cod and the Islands, with regularity. Recently, however, the vast majority of sightings have been of migrating birds, in both spring and fall, which have not lingered for more than a few days. A bird observed in early January on Nantucket feigned interest in wintering but then disappeared after only a few days.

Although small numbers of Wood Ducks are reported throughout the winter from favorable localities in Massachusetts, counts are generally in the single digits. This winter Brockton proved to be a favorable spot for Wood Ducks, with counts of seventeen from early January and twenty-four on February 16. These represent some of the highest winter counts for the state. Eurasian Wigeons were reported from three locations during the period, including one from Swansea on February 15th. A Northern Shoveler in February in North Falmouth was somewhat noteworthy for the late date. Westport has typically been the best winter site in Massachusetts for Northern Pintails. This year, 210 were counted there on February 8, representing the second-highest winter count in at least the last ten years. A Green-winged Teal of the Eurasian subspecies (*Anas crecca crecca*) was reported from Falmouth in February. Although not currently recognized as a full species by the American Ornithologists' Union, the

British Ornithologists' Union has considered it separate from our Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) since 2000.

As many as ten Redheads, currently an uncommon winter bird in Massachusetts, were reported from Nantucket in early January. King Eiders were rather well reported this winter. Rockport, as so often is the case, had the lion's share, with as many as six being reported throughout January. The Sandwich end of the Cape Cod Canal was also particularly good for King Eiders. Three females, "Queens," were observed there on January 17.

The Islands south of Cape Cod have long been known to host sizeable groups of wintering Common Eiders. This year we are lucky to have received systematic counts of birds from that region. The most impressive of these counts came from January 22, when 30,000 Common Eiders were counted off Muskeget Island and over 20,000 were counted around South Monomoy. Harlequin Duck numbers reached an all-time high this winter in Massachusetts. As many as 147 were counted at Cape Ann during the period. At least thirty different Barrow's Goldeneyes were recorded in Massachusetts during the period, including ten on the Nantucket CBC. Thirty-one may be a more accurate total given the two male Barrow's x Common Goldeneye hybrids identified by an astute observer in Cape Ann at the end of February.

Two **Pacific Loons** were found and photographed at Race Point in Provincetown in late February. Although this species is reported with increasing regularity in Massachusetts, Pacific Loons have only very rarely been photographed in the state. Another was reported on New Year's Day in Gloucester. Small numbers of Great Blue Herons typically overwinter successfully in southeastern Massachusetts, and this year was no exception. Not willing to risk giving up a prime nesting locality were a pair of Great Blue Herons already staking out theirs on February 29.

Incredibly, there were two independent reports of Osprey from January in western Massachusetts. There is only one previous January record of Osprey and only one from February both from eastern Massachusetts. If you know where to go, Black Vulture is not a difficult bird to see in Massachusetts. Fourteen were reported from "their spot" in Sheffield and a single was reported from "their other" spot in Westport. It was encouraging to receive reports of so many Bald Eagles from their typical hangouts. Newburyport hosted the most (fourteen individuals), though Lakeville (eight individuals) and Quabbin (seven individuals) were not far behind. Some of the ponds in Arlington have also become reliable localities for wintering Bald Eagles (three individuals). Both Red-shouldered and Rough-legged hawks, though denizens of rather different habits, were well reported throughout the period and throughout the state.

The pair of **Sandhill Cranes**, first reported in December, remained in Barnstable throughout January and the beginning of February before becoming restless and wandering around the mid-Cape area for the rest of the reporting period. Both Greater and Lesser yellowlegs lingered into January on Cape Cod. Although Greater Yellowlegs is frequently encountered during the winter in southeastern Massachusetts, Lesser Yellowlegs is extremely rare at this time of year and has only twice overwintered. Even more impressive was the Willet of the western subspecies (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus inornatus*) present on Martha's Vineyard until at least January 19. This represents the first January record for Massachusetts. The latest previous record was from December 31, 1967, on the Nantucket CBC.

As usual, Nantucket hosted the greatest number and diversity of gulls this winter. Another notable gull spot this winter was the Gloucester fish pier, which hosted a maximum of five Glaucous Gulls during January and February. Glaucous Gulls are uncommon in Massachusetts and are generally encountered singly, especially since the commercial fish piers, their favorite

haunts, have become less active. In fact, this record represents the highest single day count in over twenty years.

J. Trimble

Greater White-fronted Goose				1/4	Newbypt	12	P. Brown
1/6	Rochester	1	G. Gove#	1/11	Sandwich	40	T. Prince#
Snow Goose				1/18	Marlboro	2	T. Spahr
1/1-2/21	Chilmark	4-8	A. Keith#	1/18, 2/12	Barnstable	5	Keleher, Prince
1/1	P.I.	9+	R. Heil#	1/27, 2/29	Cambridge	3	M. Rines
1/11	Westport	2	BBC (R. Stymeist)		Eurasian Teal		
1/11	Barnstable	1 blue	D. Furbish#	2/14	Falmouth	1 m	D. Furbish#
1/19	Katama	11	A. Keith#		Canvasback		
1/21	Southwick	1	T. Swochak	1/10	Nantucket	53	MAS (Larson)
2/15	Medford	1	D. Oliver	1/11, 2/28	Westport	64, 68	Stymeist, Lynch
Brant				1/24-31	Falmouth	7	G. Gove#
1/10	Nahant	220	P. + F. Vale#	1/29	Hadley	5	P. Yeskie
1/18	Boston H.	191	TASL (M. Hall)	2/27	Mashpee	23	M. Keleher
1/19	Mashpee	120	G. Gove#	2/29	Lakeville	2	K. Rodman
2/15	Swansea	133	M. Lynch#		Redhead		
2/29	N. Truro	162	D. Manchester#	1/3	Nantucket	10	CBC (J. Trimble)
Mute Swan					Ring-necked Duck		
thr	Turners Falls	6-22	v.o.	1/1	Melrose	5	D. + I. Jewell
1/3	Framingham	18	E. Taylor	1/4	Nantucket	60	G. d'Entremont#
1/4	Nantucket	20	G. d'Entremont#	1/18	Sandwich	6	J. Trimble#
2/1	Westport	125	G. d'Entremont	1/24	Marston Mills	7	P. + F. Vale#
2/15	Swansea	197	M. Lynch#	2/3	Falmouth	14	M. Keleher
Tundra Swan				2/10	Agawam	1	H. Allen
1/1-4	Nantucket	1 ad	fide G. d'E	2/16	Brockton	4	M. Faherty
Wood Duck				2/29	Sheffield	2	M. Lynch#
1/1, 2/16	Brockton	17, 24	M. Faherty		Greater Scaup		
1/10	Nantucket	3	MAS (Larson)	1/1	Nantucket	405	G. d'Entremont#
1/25-2/5	Turners Falls	1-2	v.o.	1/17	P'town	60	SSBC (W. Petersen)
2/2	Plymouth	2	I. Lynch	1/18	Boston H.	943	TASL (M. Hall)
2/7	Medford	2	A. Ankers#	1/30	Swansea	384	R. Farrell
2/20	Southwick	1	S. Kellogg	2/thr	Nahant	115 max	L. Pivacek
Gadwall				2/8	Westport	130	E. Nielsen#
1/1	Ipswich	14	R. Heil#	2/15	Woods Hole	40	CCBC (D. Furbish)
1/2	Nantucket	11	G. d'Entremont#	2/27	Gloucester	70	R. Heil
1/2	P.I.	20+	T. Wetmore		Lesser Scaup		
1/18	Barnstable	20	CCBC (M. Keleher)	1/1	Nantucket	17	G. d'Entremont#
1/24	Dennis	21	B. Nikula	1/1	Lynn	185	R. Heil#
2/8	Plymouth	10	BBC (d'Entremont)	2/8-22	Turners Falls	2	T. Gagnon
2/9	Newbypt	6	S. Grinley#	2/28	Westport	60+	M. Lynch#
2/18	Salisbury	12	MAS (Weaver)	2/thr	Nahant	136 max	L. Pivacek
2/21	Gloucester (E.P.)	8	L. Bowman		King Eider		
Eurasian Wigeon				1/thr	Rockport	6 max	v.o.
1/1-4	P.I.	1 m	v.o.	1/2	Gloucester	1 ad	M. Faherty#
1/18	Barnstable	1	CCBC (M. Keleher)	1/4	Dennis	1 ad	G. Gove#
2/15	Swansea	1 m	M. Lynch#	1/11	Nantucket	1 m imm	MAS (Larson)
American Wigeon				1/11-23	Sandwich	3-4	v.o.
1/1	Barnstable	60	J. Hoye#		Common Eider		
1/1	P.I.	1 m	T. Wetmore	1/1	Nantucket	15000	G. d'Entremont#
1/10	Nantucket	18	MAS (Larson)	1/11, 2/15	Sandwich	3000, 1500	T. Prince#
1/14	Amherst	1	W. Lafley	1/18	Boston H.	5523	TASL (M. Hall)
2/3	Falmouth	9	M. Keleher	1/19	Fairhaven	1100+	J. Sweeney#
2/15	Swansea	142	M. Lynch#	1/21	Nahant	1550	L. Pivacek
American Black Duck				1/22	Muskeget	30,000	S. Perkins#
1/18	Boston H.	700	TASL (M. Hall)	1/22	S. Monomoy	20,000+	S. Perkins#
2/1	Sandwich	370+	D. Manchester#	2/thr	Barnstable H.	10,000	G. Gove#
2/1	Salisbury	750+	M. Lynch#	2/11	Gay Head	15,000	A. Keith
2/16	Westport	1700	E. Nielsen	2/20	Chatham (S.B.)	1500	P. Flood
Northern Shoveler				2/27	Cape Ann	1170	R. Heil
1/1-12	Nantucket	1-2	v.o.		Harlequin Duck		
2/6-7	N. Falmouth	1 m	I. Nisbet	thr	Cape Ann	146 max	v.o.
Northern Pintail				1/10	Nantucket	30	MAS (Larson)
thr	Amherst	1-2	v.o.	1/17	Orleans	4	SSBC (Petersen)
1/1	Westport	76	E. Nielsen	1/17	Sandwich	3	B. Nikula
1/1	Northampton	1	T. Gagnon	1/18	Boston H.	1	TASL (M. Hall)
1/2	P.I.	60+	T. Wetmore	2/1	Westport	10	G. d'Entremont
1/11	W. Tisbury	3	A. Keith	2/8	N. Scituate	12	BBC (d'Entremont)
1/11	Uxbridge	2	M. Lynch#	2/14	P'town H.	1 f	B. Nikula
1/25	Marlborough	4	E. Taylor		Surf Scoter		
2/8	Westport	210	E. Nielsen#	1/1	Nantucket Sound	800	G. d'Entremont#
2/12	Barnstable	3	T. Prince	1/17	Sandwich	1800	B. Nikula
Green-winged Teal				1/18	Manomet	200	A. Brissette#
1/1	Winchester	12	M. Rines	1/18	Boston H.	33	TASL (M. Hall)
1/2	P.I.	4	T. Wetmore	2/3	Westport	123	J. Offermann#

Surf Scoter (continued)				2/24	Lee	20	R. Laubach
2/22	Fairhaven	400	G. d'Entremont	2/28	Groton	23	E. Stromsted
2/27	Cape Ann	115	R. Heil		Red-breasted Merganser		
White-winged Scoter				1/3	Belmont	3	M. Rines
1/18	Boston H.	618	TASL (M. Hall)	1/17	Sandwich	150+	M. Lynch#
1/18	Sandwich	650	A. Brissette#	1/18	Boston H.	368	TASL (M. Hall)
1/18	Manomet	125	A. Brissette#	2/20	Chatham (S.B.)	120	P. Flood
2/22	Fairhaven	225	G. d'Entremont	2/27	Cape Ann	375	R. Heil
2/27	Cape Ann	400	R. Heil	2/28	Westport	120	M. Lynch#
Black Scoter					Ruddy Duck		
1/1	Nantucket Sound	160	G. d'Entremont#	1/1	Westport	3	E. Nielsen
1/17	Sandwich	800	B. Nikula	1/1	Lynn	7	R. Heil#
1/18	Manomet	33	A. Brissette#	1/1-18	Nahant	42 max	L. Pivacek
1/18	Boston H.	7	TASL (M. Hall)	1/2	Newbypt	1 m	J. Berry
2/3	Westport	25	J. Offermann#	1/4	Boston	5	BBC (R. Stymeist)
2/14	Rockport	60+	M. Lynch#		Ruffed Grouse		
2/22	Fairhaven	35	G. d'Entremont	1/10	Royalston	2	M. Lynch#
Long-tailed Duck				1/11	New Braintree	2	C. Buelow
1/3	Nantucket	83304	CBC (E. Ray#)	1/23	Quabbin (G40)	4	C. Buelow
1/17	Barnstable (S.N.)	50+	M. Lynch#	2/22	Hardwick	3	C. Buelow
2/7	Ipswich	25	P. + F. Vale#	2/29	W. Newbury	1	D. Larson
2/15	Woods Hole	180+CCBC	(D. Furbish)	2/29	Manchester	1	S. Hedman
2/28	Newbypt	50+	D. Chickering		Wild Turkey		
Bufflehead				1/3	Amherst	27	H. Allen
1/1	Nantucket	540	G. d'Entremont#	1/4	Gr. Barrington	64	C. Barrett
1/18	Boston H.	1072	TASL (M. Hall)	1/10	Needham	30	J. Samelson
2/1	Newbypt	409	M. Lynch#	1/22	Woburn	16	M. Rines
2/15	Swansea	346	M. Lynch#	2/12	Newton	18	G. Long
2/26	Agawam	4	S. Kellogg	2/14	Orange	30	S. Surner
2/27	Cape Ann	170	R. Heil	2/14	Groveland	14	D. Chickering
2/28	Westport	663	M. Lynch#	2/17	Royalston	25	M. Faherty
Common Goldeneye				2/23	Wrentham	30	D. Furbish
1/1	Nantucket	575	G. d'Entremont#	2/25	Sheffield	200	D. St. James
1/18	Boston H.	689	TASL (M. Hall)	2/28	W. Newbury	20	D. Chickering
1/27	Chicopee	60	H. Allen		Northern Bobwhite		
2/1	Newbypt	335	M. Lynch#	1/20	Cummaquid	11	T. Prince
2/8	S. Dartmouth	140	E. Nielsen#		Red-throated Loon		
2/15	Swansea	414	M. Lynch#	1/1	Nantucket	5	G. d'Entremont#
2/16	Westport	320	E. Nielsen	1/1	Newbypt/Salish	7	BBC (L. delaFlor)
2/22	Turners Falls	18	H. Allen	1/4	Wellfleet	16	P. + F. Vale
2/26	Agawam	25	S. Kellogg	1/17	Sandwich	10	M. Lynch#
2/27	Cape Ann	210	R. Heil	2/29	P'town (R.P.)	42	E. Nielsen
Barrow's Goldeneye					Pacific Loon *		
thr	Falmouth	4 max	G. Gove	1/1	Gloucester	1	T. Martin
thr	Gloucester	1-2	v.o.	2/29	P'town (R.P.)	2 ph	B. Nikula
1/1-7	Harwich	1	E. Banks		Common Loon		
1/1-21	P.I.	1-2	v.o.	1/1	Nantucket Sound	20	G. d'Entremont#
1/3	Nantucket	10	CBC (v.o.)	1/1	Newbypt/Salish	34	BBC (L. delaFlor)
1/11	Cotuit	1 m	T. Prince#	1/4	Wellfleet	15	P. + F. Vale
1/22-2/11	Chilmark	1 f	M. Pelikan#	1/17	Bourne	30	SSBC (W. Petersen)
1/31	Swansea	2	R. Farrell	2/7	Ipswich	24+	P. + F. Vale#
2/16	Ipswich	2	BBC (J. Berry)	2/27	Cape Ann	77	R. Heil
2/25	Merrimack R.	4	MAS (Weaver)	2/28	Westport	18	M. Lynch#
2/28	Fairhaven	1 m	MAS (Larson)		Pied-billed Grebe		
Common x Barrow's Goldeneye				1/2	Nantucket	7	G. d'Entremont#
2/27	Gloucester	2 m ad	R. Heil		Horned Grebe		
Hooded Merganser				1/4	Quabbin (G37)	18	C. Buelow
1/1	Ipswich	15	R. Heil#	1/4	Dennis	16	G. Gove#
1/1	Lynn	15+	R. Heil#	1/17	Barnstable (S.N.)	30+	M. Lynch#
1/2	Brewster	18	D. Silverstein#	1/18	Boston H.	15	TASL (M. Hall)
1/2	Nantucket	34	G. d'Entremont#	1/21	Gloucester (B.R.)	13	F. Vale#
1/4	Ayer	7	J. Duprey#	2/1	Westport	33	G. d'Entremont
1/11	Barnstable	16	D. Furbish#	2/1	P.I.	13	M. Lynch#
1/17	Wareham	25	G. Gove#	2/15	Swansea	36	M. Lynch#
2/10	Agawam	4	H. Allen	2/16	Hull	21	S. Maguire#
2/15	Swansea	62	M. Lynch#	2/27	Cape Ann	92	R. Heil
2/28	Mashpee	18	M. Keleher	2/29	Hadley	1	C. Gentes
2/29	Wakefield	20	D. + I. Jewell		Red-necked Grebe		
Common Merganser				1/1	Newbypt/Salish	16	BBC (L. delaFlor)
1/1	Southwick	76	H. Allen	1/4	Winthrop	24	J. Young
1/1	Stoneham	155	D. + I. Jewell	1/4	Dennis	12	G. Gove#
1/3	Arlington	293	M. Rines	1/18	Boston H.	1	TASL (M. Hall)
1/4	Quabbin (G37)	60	C. Buelow	2/7	P'town	27	B. Nikula
1/9	Lakeville	54	A. Brissette#	2/27	Cape Ann	43	R. Heil
1/11	Barnstable	75	D. Furbish#	2/29	Scituate	22	S. Maguire#
1/18	Turners Falls	20	H. Allen	2/29	P'town (R.P.)	4	E. Nielsen
2/1, 27	Amesbury	30, 25	J. Berry#		Eared Grebe (no details) *		
2/1	Newbypt	43	M. Lynch#	thr	Gloucester	1	v.o.

Eared Grebe (no details) * (continued)			1/19	Arlington	2	K. Hartel
1/2	Swansea	1	R. Bowen	2/7	Rowley	2 P. + F. Vale#
Northern Gannet			2/7	Ipswich	2	J. Offermann#
1/1	Nantucket	150	G. d'Entremont#	2/14	Northampton	3 T. Gagnon
1/4	Wellfleet	8	P. + F. Vale	2/28	N. Andover	2 W. Drummond#
1/5	Rockport (A.P.)	15	R. Heil	thr	Reports of indiv. from	38 locations
1/7	Orleans	60+	E. Banks	Northern Goshawk		
2/7, 14	N. Truro	8, 31	B. Nikula	1/1	Gloucester (E.P.)	1 juv B. + S. Ross
2/14	M.V.	6	J. Liller#	1/7	E. Middleboro	1 K. Anderson
2/29	P'town (R.P.)	1	E. Nielsen	1/9	Pepperell	2 E. Stromstead
Great Cormorant			1/19	S. Dartmouth	1	T. Raymond
1/2	Nantucket	23	G. d'Entremont#	2/7	Fairhaven	1 F. Smith
1/7	Woburn	1	M. Rines	2/16	Royalston	2 ad J. Trimble
1/11	Westport	36	BBC (R. Stymeist)	Red-shouldered Hawk		
1/17, 2/29	P'town	22, 25	B. Nikula#	1/3	Concord (NAC)	1 T. Carrolan
1/18	Manomet	47	A. Brissette#	1/4	N. Easton	2 A. Brisette
1/29	Chatham	45	B. Nikula	1/26	W. Newbury	1 ad D. + I. Jewell
2/8	Amesbury	70	D. Furbish#	1/26	Rowley	1 ad D. + I. Jewell
2/26	N. Scituate	27	S. Maguire#	2/16	Acton	1 ad S. Perkins#
2/27	Cape Ann	148	R. Heil	2/16	Royalston	1 ad J. Trimble
Great Blue Heron			2/21	Northampton	1	S. Satin
1/1	Westport	3	E. Nielsen	2/25	Stow	1 ad T. Carrolan
1/2	Nantucket	7	G. d'Entremont#	2/28	Westport	6 M. Lynch#
1/2	Amherst	1	H. Allen	2/28	E. Middleboro	2 K. Anderson
1/11	Sandwich	4	T. Prince#	thr	Reports of indiv. from	7 SE Mass loc.
1/27	Cambridge	3	M. Rines	Red-tailed Hawk		
2/29	Boxboro	pr on nest	S. Hardy	1/4	Boston	8 BBC (R. Stymeist)
Black-crowned Night-Heron			1/11	Westport	9	BBC (R. Stymeist)
1/1	Nantucket	1	G. d'Entremont	2/25	Concord (NAC)	9 T. Carrolan
1/3	W. Bridgewater	1	A. Brisette	2/28	Westport	8 M. Lynch#
2/thr	Falmouth	1-2	G. Gove#	Rough-legged Hawk		
Black Vulture			thr	Cumb. Farms	3 total	v.o.
2/25	Sheffield	14	D. St. James	thr	DWWS	6 max D. Furbish
2/29	Westport	1	J. Young	thr	P.I.	11 max v.o.
Turkey Vulture			thr	Northampton	1	v.o.
1/2	Ipswich	2	J. Berry	thr	Reports of indiv. from	14 locations
1/11	Westport	36	BBC (R. Stymeist)	Golden Eagle		
1/17	Bourne	2	J. Trimble#	1/11, 17	S. Quabbin	1 Peacock, Hoye
2/13	Westfield	13	N. Eaton	1/25, 2/29	W. Quabbin	1 ad M. Lynch#
2/13	Westboro	7	L. Sutton	1/29	Hadley	1 P. Yeskie
2/14	Bourne	4	D. Chickering	2/1	Westport	1 imm G. d'Entremont
2/23	Winchester	3	M. Rines	2/29	Mt.A.	1 C. Cook
2/27	Gloucester	4	R. Heil	American Kestrel		
2/28	Lincoln	10	J. Hoye#	1/4	Winthrop	2 m J. Young
2/29	Sheffield	31	M. Lynch#	thr	Reports of indiv. from	14 locations
Osprey			Merlin			
1/17	Shutesbury	1	J. Jorgenson	thr	Medford	3 max P. Roberts#
1/27	Chicopee	1	D. Bliss	1/1	Salisbury	2 BBC (L. delaFlor)
Bald Eagle			1/4	Nantucket	3	G. d'Entremont#
thr	Lakeville	4 ad, 4 imm total	v.o.	thr	Reports of indiv. from	18 locations
thr	Newbypt	2 ad, 12 imm total	v.o.	Peregrine Falcon		
thr	Quabbin	7 plus	v.o.	1/thr	Lawrence	2 J. Hogan
1/1-2/13, 1/6	Arlington	2 ad, 1 imm	M. Rines	1/1	Springfield	2 T. Gagnon
1/1-2/11	1-2 from Boston, Belmont, Cambridge, Waltham, Newton, Concord, Lynnfield, Wakefield, Stoneham, Melrose, Lynn, and Peabody, which may have been the Arlington birds.			2/thr	Boston (Logan)	2 N. Smith
1/10, 1/18	Berkley	1 ad, 1 imm	fide R. Turner	2/10	Chicopee	2 H. Allen
1/13	Chilmark	2	A. Fischer	2/22	Deerfield	2 S. Emerson
1/18, 19	Lawrence	3 imm, 2 ad	J. Hogan	thr	Reports of indiv. from	19 locations
2/2, 2/14	Scituate	1 imm, 1 ad	S. Maguire	Virginia Rail		
thr	Reports of indiv. from	11 locations		1/3	Nantucket	12 CBC (J. Trimble)
Northern Harrier			Common Moorhen			
thr	P.I.	11 max	v.o.	1/2-4	Nantucket	1 imm G. d'Entremont#
thr	Cumb. Farms	4 max	v.o.	American Coot		
thr	DWWS	6 max	v.o.	1/1	Lynn	2 R. Heil#
1/2	Nantucket	4	G. d'Entremont#	1/1	Brocton	1 M. Faherty
1/17	Eastham (F.E.)	2	S. + C. Thompson	1/1	Nantucket	13 G. d'Entremont#
1/24	Sandwich	2	P. + F. Vale#	1/1	Woburn	2 M. Rines#
1/31, 2/23	Scituate	2, 2	S. Maguire#	1/3	Arlington	2 M. Rines
2/28	Westport	4	M. Lynch#	1/4	Boston	11 BBC (R. Stymeist)
thr	Reports of indiv. from	14 locations		1/18	Plymouth H.	2 A. Brissette#
Sharp-shinned Hawk			Sandhill Crane			
1/1	Westport	2	E. Nielsen	1/1-2/8	Barnstable	2 v.o.
thr	Reports of indiv. from	25 locations		2/14	Yarmouthport	2 E. Banks
Cooper's Hawk			2/20	Yarmouth	2	P. Schwab
1/4	Boston	3	BBC (R. Stymeist)			

Black-bellied Plover				1/19-2/29	Gloucester	6		v.o.
1/17, 2/25	Sandwich	3, 2	Lynch, Prince	1/31	Swansea	2		R. Bowen
2/16	M.V.	1	J. Liller#	2/7, 29	N. Truro	9, 3		B. Nikula
Killdeer				2/14-22	Northampton	6-10		v.o.
1/1	Chilmark	2	A. Keith	2/29	P'town (R.P.)	20		B. Nikula
2/24	Concord	1	S. Mardis	Lesser Black-backed Gull				
Greater Yellowlegs				thr	Boston	1		v.o.
1/9	Falmouth	1	CCBC (G. Hirth)	1/1-2/3	Plymouth	1 ad		v.o.
Lesser Yellowlegs				1/3	Nantucket	31	CBC (P. Trimble)	
1/1	W. Harwich	2 ph	B. Nikula	1/3	Brewster	1		S. Finnegan
"Western" Willet				1/6	Hull	1 1W, 1 2W		C. Dalton
1/1-19	Edgartown	1	A. Keith + v.o	1/16	S. Dartmouth	2		T. Raymond
Ruddy Turnstone				2/1	Swansea	1		R. Bowen
1/11	Nantucket	11	E. Andrews	2/6	Oak Bluffs	2		M. Pelikan
1/17	Sandwich	4	M. Lynch#	2/14-22	Northampton	1-2		v.o.
1/18	Barnstable	7	CCBC (M. Keleher)	2/22	Gloucester	1		S. Moore#
1/19	Gloucester	1	S. Leonard#	Glaucous Gull				
1/19	Fairhaven	4	J. Sweeney#	thr	Gloucester	5 max		v.o.
Sanderling				1/6	Hull	4		C. Dalton
1/1	P.I.	12	BBC (L. delaFlor)	1/18	Nantucket	1		E. Ray
1/1	Truro	200	J. Young	1/20	Plymouth	1 1W		J. Trimble
1/1	Westport	76	E. Nielsen	2/8	Scituate	1 1W		BBC (d'Entremont)
1/18	Barnstable	33	CCBC (M. Keleher)	2/14	Wellfleet	1 ad		B. Nikula
1/18	Boston H.	8	TASL (M. Hall)	2/14-22	Northampton	1-2		T. Gagnon
2/7	Yarmouth	80	G. Gove#	2/27	Newbypt	1 ad		M. Taylor#
2/29	P'town (R.P.)	185	B. Nikula	2/29	Agawam	1		N. Eaton
Purple Sandpiper				Black-legged Kittiwake				
thr	Rockport	66 max	v.o.	1/1	Salisbury	15+		P. + F. Vale#
thr	Gloucester	100 max	v.o.	1/1, 2/7	P'town	40, 45		B. Nikula
thr	Salisbury	36 max	v.o.	1/1, 2/7	Truro	35, 25		B. Nikula
1/1	Nahant	30	R. Heil#	1/3	Nantucket	110		CBC (P. Trimble)
1/18	Boston H.	111	TASL (M. Hall)	1/5	Rockport (A.P.)	340		R. Heil
2/1	Westport	30	G. d'Entremont	2/19	Eastham (F.E.)	120		B. Nikula
2/8	N. Scituate	150	BBC (d'Entremont)	Dovekie				
2/27	Magnolia	30	R. Heil	1/2, 6	Wellfleet	5, 3		Silverstein, Cozza
Dunlin				1/10	P'town	1		C. Nims
1/1	Truro	300	G. Gove#	2/16, 26	Rockport	1		Chickering, Murray
1/17	Eastham (F.H.)	100	SSBC (W. Petersen)	Common Murre				
2/16	Westport	343	E. Nielsen	1/5, 22	Rockport (A.P.)	6, 8		Heil, Berry
2/20	Chatham (S.B.)	65	P. Flood	1/21-2/11	Gay Head	1		A. Keith
2/23	Duxbury	300+	L. Cleveland#	2/14, 29	P'town	1, 6		B. Nikula, Nielsen
Wilson's Snipe				Thick-billed Murre				
1/11	Sandwich	1	T. Prince#	1/6, 2/14	Rockport	2, 1		Nelson, Fox
2/1	Lynnfield	2	D. + I. Jewell	2/8-22	Gloucester	1		v.o.
2/8	Newbypt	1	D. Chickering	2/28	Sciticut	1		MAS (Larson)
2/15	Oak Bluffs	1	P. Uhlerdorf#	2/29	P'town (R.P.)	8		E. Nielsen
American Woodcock				Razorbill				
1/4	Nantucket	1	G. d'Entremont	1/1	Nantucket Sound	25		G. d'Entremont#
1/26	N. Tisbury	1	A. Keith	1/1	Nahant	25		R. Heil#
2/13	W. Springfield	1	J. Gottsche	1/1, 2/14	Truro	35, 60		B. Nikula
2/13	Northampton	1	J. Gottsche	1/2	Salisbury	730		D. + S. Larson
2/28	Falmouth	3	M. Keleher	1/2	P.I.	55+		T. + L. Wetmore
Little Gull				1/5	Rockport (A.P.)	727		R. Heil
1/1	Nantucket	2 ad	G. d'Entremont#	1/7	Harwich	100+		E. Banks
Black-headed Gull				1/17	Eastham	800	SSBC (W. Petersen)	
1/1	Gloucester (E.P.)	1 ad	R. Heil#	2/7, 29	P'town	310, 62		Nikula, Nielsen
1/3	Nantucket	5	CBC (P. Trimble)	2/20	Rockport	40+		M. Harvey#
1/5	Barnstable	1 ad	G. Gove#	Black Guillemot				
1/11-2/14	Milford	1 ad	M. Lynch + v.o.	1/3, 21	Gloucester (B.R.)	19, 18		F. Vale#
1/22	Oak Bluffs	1	V. Laux#	1/13	Gay Head	1		A. Keith
Bonaparte's Gull				1/19	Nahant	2		BBC (D. Wilkinson)
1/1	Nantucket	3500	G. d'Entremont#	2/16	Marshfield	1		G. d'Entremont
1/1	Westport	60	E. Nielsen	2/27	Cape Ann	101		R. Heil
1/5	Rockport (A.P.)	56	R. Heil	2/29	P'town (R.P.)	7		B. Nikula
Iceland Gull				Large alcid species				
thr	Newbypt	7 max	v.o.	1/5	Rockport (A.P.)	110		R. Heil
thr	Sandwich	2-3	v.o.	1/17, 2/1	Truro	2800, 290		B. Nikula#
1/3	Nantucket	83	CBC (P. Trimble)	2/7, 14	P'town	200, 40		B. Nikula
1/6	Hull	7 1W	C. Dalton	2/7, 14	N. Truro	200, 150		B. Nikula
1/17	Bourne	3	J. Trimble#					

OWLS THROUGH FINCHES

A pair of Barn Owls was found feeding young on February 10 in West Tisbury. This was the first sign of this species' road to recovery from the devastating winter of 2002-2003. The combination of severe cold and heavy snow cover that made it difficult to find small rodents decimated the island's population, and between February and March of 2003, twenty-three Barn Owls were found dead on the Vineyard. Barn Owls have a long breeding season, and it is possible for them to raise a second brood, so this early observation of young is hopeful for the restoration of the island's population.

Short-eared Owls performed their crepuscular flights to the delight of many birders during this period, especially on Plum Island where as many as seven were tallied, and from the Salisbury State Reservation where as many as five individuals were noted. This owl is easier to observe hunting than are most owls, and at open locations such as Plum Island and Salisbury, birders can enjoy their moth-like flight or watch as they perch on a nearby sign or post. A Short-eared Owl in Windsor was just the fourth winter record since 1993 in western Massachusetts. It was an off year for Snowy Owls. There were only sporadic reports throughout the period of one or two birds at Plum Island and single birds at Logan Airport in Boston. On February 29 a Snowy Owl was found dead at Logan, apparently caught in the backblast of a jet. It was discovered to have been banded sixteen years before by raptor expert Norm Smith!

A Red-headed Woodpecker in Medfield was the only one reported during the period. At least nine sapsuckers were noted from a widespread area, continuing the trend in recent years of wintering individuals. There were more reports this year of Northern Shrikes than last year and the most in western Massachusetts in three years. The number of American Crows was down considerably on the most recent Christmas Bird Counts, and an observer following an important roost in Brighton tallied only half the number of crows counted in 2003. Interestingly, however, the number of Fish Crows continues to rise. Over 300 individuals were noted in the Brighton/Newton area, compared with about sixty birds in 2003. Common Ravens continue to increase in our area; note the high counts in Templeton, Athol, and Quabbin, and from nontraditional localities such as Boxford. On the subject of common birds in unusual locations, a Tufted Titmouse on Martha's Vineyard is a rare sighting; the first was reported only four years ago. On Nantucket, White-breasted Nuthatches are rare; in fact there are no breeding records from the island.

The lack of snow this winter certainly contributed to above-normal numbers of the semi-hardy lingerers such as Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, and Eastern Towhee, and the number of Carolina Wrens was significantly higher than last winter. Eastern Bluebird and American Robin were also noted in better-than-average numbers during the period.

It was a good season for the rare bird. A very obliging **Varied Thrush** was located near the tower at Quabbin Park on January 30, and it remained there throughout the month of February. Another Varied Thrush visited the feeder of Nantucket birder, Edith Andrews. It must have known it was the only place to find mealworms on the island! A **Summer Tanager** was present at a feeder in Stow until January 26, ironically the day before the bird's host family left on vacation. This is the just the second winter record for Massachusetts, the only other occurrence in November 1964. A **Western Tanager** was present at a feeder in Orleans from January 11 through February 18. This stray tanager, unlike the Summer, is more likely to be found in Massachusetts during the winter. There are under fifteen sight records during the spring and summer months. Finally, to wrap up the colorful rarities this winter, a male **Painted Bunting** visited a number of feeders in a Shrewsbury neighborhood from January 11 through early February.

Some additional unusual winter visitors included a **Bullock's Oriole** in Walpole and a classic "**Oregon**" **Junco** (*Junco hyemalis thurberi*) in Nahant. This bird had a very distinct, sharply demarcated-all-around, convex-bibbed, dark slate gray hood with no loreal contrast, an extensive white belly with pale pinkish orange sides and flanks, and a reddish brown back. The bird was present in the area for about three weeks. A Grasshopper Sparrow, first found on the Greater Boston CBC, was still present in Stoneham throughout January.

Winter finches were much more in evidence this year compared with the same time period last year. Purple Finches continued to be well-noted from a wide area of the state. Red Crossbills were reported from only two locations, and Evening Grosbeaks were restricted to the higher hill towns. The big show was the flight of the redpolls. It was not uncommon to find flocks of over 100 individual birds from many widespread areas. Not surprisingly, several **Hoary Redpolls** were reported. In years when there is a major flight of Common Redpolls, a number of Hoary reports are received, but differentiating between the two species is not easy. Some photographs have been submitted to MARC (although even photographic evidence is not always definitive), as well as some written reports. The reports of these MARC-listed species await final approval of the Committee. Finally, the indications of a major flight of **Bohemian Waxwings** this winter materialized in the closing days of January. Large flocks were noted mostly from northern Worcester County and the Truro area on Cape Cod. R. Stymeist

Barn Owl				2/14-29	Lexington	1	M. Rines
1/20	Chilmark	1	A. Keith	2/18	Ashfield	1	S. Sauter
2/10	W. Tisbury	pr w/ yg	R. Woodruff	2/28	Middleboro	1	A. Bristette
Eastern Screech-Owl				2/28	W. Yarmouth	2	P. Gray
1/1	Belmont	2	R. Stymeist#	Belted Kingfisher			
1/4	Boston	6	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/11	Westport	2	BBC (R. Stymeist)
1/6-28	Melrose	3	D. + I. Jewell	Red-headed Woodpecker			
1/11	Westport	2	BBC (R. Stymeist)	thr	Medfield	1	imm v.o.
Great Horned Owl				Red-bellied Woodpecker			
thr	Mt.A.	2	R. Stymeist#	1/4	Framingham	4	J. Hoye#
1/1	Northboro	2	S. Moore#	1/11	Westport	9	BBC (R. Stymeist)
1/4	Framingham	2	J. Hoye#	2/14	Wayland	4	G. Long
1/25	Shrewsbury	2	J. Berrier	2/29	Sheffield	4	M. Lynch#
1/31	Belmont	2	S. Brown	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker			
Snowy Owl				1/1-17	Mt.A.	2	R. Stymeist#
thr	P.I.	1-2	v.o.	1/1	Truro	1	J. Young
1/11, 2/8	Salisbury	1	Mirick, Trimble	1/4	Nantucket	1	G. d'Entremont
2/2, 22	Boston (Logan)	1, 1	N. Smith	1/4	Boston	1	BBC (R. Stymeist)
Barred Owl				1/10	Newton	1	A. + D. Bandes
thr	Medford	1-2	M. Rines#	1/17	Shutesbury	1	K. Weir
2/16	Hamilton	2	BBC (J. Berry)	1/19	Barnstable	1	f S. Jaffe
2/26	Blandford	2	M. + K. Conway	2/1	Brewster	1	imm M. Maurer
Long-eared Owl				Hairy Woodpecker			
1/1	Boston (Long I.)	1	R. Donovan#	thr	Maynard	4-6	L. Nachtrab
1/9	Nantucket	1	D. Larson	thr	Medford	4-6	M. Rines#
1/27	Newbury	2	J. Berry#	1/9	Harwich	3	E. Banks
2/8-15	Salisbury	1-2	J. Trimble#	1/11	Hardwick	3	C. Buelow
2/13	Marblehead	1	K. Haley	1/11	New Braintree	4	C. Buelow
2/14	P.I.	1	M. Lynch#	1/23	Quabbin (G43)	6	C. Buelow
Short-eared Owl				Northern Flicker			
thr	P.I.	3-7	v.o.	1/1	New Braintree	4	C. Buelow
thr	Salisbury	3-5	v.o.	1/1	Rowley	10	P. + F. Vale
thr	Cumb. Farms	1	v.o.	1/4	Nantucket	7	G. d'Entremont#
1/1	Windsor	1	D. Charbonneau	2/1	Hadley	3	T. Gagnon
1/10	Nantucket	1	MAS (Larson)	2/17	Medford	6	E. McDonald
1/10, 2/27	Boston (Logan)	1, 8	N. Smith	Pileated Woodpecker			
1/12, 2/23	Duxbury	2, 5	N. Smith	1/23	Quabbin (G43)	3	C. Buelow
1/20	W. Dennis	1	E. Banks	2/21	Westford	2	S. Selesky
2/8-12	Katama	1	J. Cressy#	Eastern Phoebe			
2/17	Peabody	1	D. Larson	1/1-14	W. Tisbury	1	S. Hickman
2/20	Chatham (S.B.)	1	P. Flood	1/16	Canton	1	S. Landry
2/29	Westport	1	J. Young	Northern Shrike			
Northern Saw-whet Owl				thr	Hadley	1	C. Gentes
1/1	Hadley	1	A. Magee	thr	P.I.	1	ad v.o.
1/3	Nantucket	15	CBC (J. Trimble)	2/15	Bolton Flats	2	S. Sutton
1/4	Framingham	1	J. Hoye#	thr	Reports of indiv. from	26	locations
1/17	Eastham	1	SSBC (W. Petersen)	American Crow			
2/1	N. Concord	1	dead R. Westerberg#	2/15	Brighton	2700	A. Joslin

American Crow (continued)				1/21	W. Springfield	12	S. Kellogg
2/22	Newton	2000	A. Joslin#	2/14	Quabbin (G40)	5	C. Buelow
Fish Crow				2/15	Scituate	5	S. Maguire#
1/9	Bourne	2	MAS (Larson)	2/29	Sheffield	5	M. Lynch#
1/14	W. Springfield	1	S. Kellogg		Ruby-crowned Kinglet		
1/17	Weymouth	3	D. Furbish	1/1	Athol	1	D. Small
1/26	Seekonk	3	R. Farrell	1/1	Chilmark	1	A. Keith
2/8	Lawrence	4	S. Mirick#	1/1	Westport	3	E. Nielsen
2/11	Boston	2	P. Perry	1/1	Marblehead	1	R. Heil#
2/14-22	Northampton	1-2	v.o.	1/2	Lexington	1	B. Kernan#
2/15	Brighton	300+	A. Joslin	1/2	E. Middleboro	1	K. Anderson
2/22	Newton	300+	A. Joslin#	1/4	Medford	1	M. Rines#
2/29	Great Barrington	1	M. Lynch#	1/4	Boston	1	BBC (R. Stymeist)
Common Raven				1/18	Springfield	1	B. Wright
1/4	Quabbin (G37)	4	C. Buelow	2/2	W. Bridgewater	1	D. Cabral
1/24	Windsor	4	M. Lynch#	2/16	Quincy	1	J. Young
1/25	Boxford	1	T. Martin	2/29	Belmont	1	M. Rines
1/31	Quabbin Pk	14	S. Moore#		Eastern Bluebird		
1/31	New Braintree	2	M. Lynch#	1/1	Gr Barrington	14	R. Laubach
2/7	Templeton	24	T. Pirro	1/4	Wellfleet	23	P. + F. Vale
2/11	Royalston	2	G. Gove#	1/11	Medfield	8	M. Lynch#
2/14	Athol	10	P. + F. Vale#	1/19	Nantucket	9	N. Slavitz
2/22	Leominster	2	K. Anderson#	1/20	Brewster	12	D. Silverstein#
Horned Lark				2/11	Southwick	8	S. Kellogg
1/3	Hadley	200	H. Allen	2/14	M.V.	12	J. Liller#
1/4	Brewster	25	S. Finnegan	2/23	Maynard	8	L. Nachtrab
1/10	Salisbury	25	B. Krisler	2/29	Sheffield	10	M. Lynch#
1/11	Sutton	120+	M. Lynch#		Hermit Thrush		
1/11	Duxbury	16	J. Sweeney	1/1-2/7	Medford	4-5	R. LaFontaine
1/12	Northampton	500	B. Bieda	1/1	Marblehead	4	R. Heil#
1/25	PI.	60	J. Hoye#	1/2	Nantucket	2	G. d'Entremont
1/28	Cumb. Farms	75	A. Brissette#	1/11	Westport	21	BBC (R. Stymeist)
1/31	Hadley	300	S. Kellogg	1/17	Barnstable (S.N.)	4	M. Lynch#
2/5	Essex	40+	J. Nelson#	1/18	Sandwich	6	J. Trimble#
2/22	Gloucester	25	M. Lynch#	2/2	Marblehead	2	K. Haley
2/29	Concord	18	S. Perkins#	2/8	Marshfield	2	BBC (d'Entremont)
Tufted Titmouse				2/22	Hardwick	2	C. Buelow
2/1	N. Tisbury	1	A. Keith#	thr	Reports of indiv. from 29 locations		
Red-breasted Nuthatch					American Robin		
1/1	Boxford	3	T. Martin	1/4	Framingham	180	J. Hoye#
1/4	Milton	9	A. Joslin	1/4	Nantucket	200	G. d'Entremont#
1/11	Wachusett Res.	10	S. Sutton#	1/17	Salisbury	175+	P. + F. Vale
1/11	Barnstable	6	D. Furbish#	1/17	Barnstable (S.N.)	131	M. Lynch#
1/21	W. Springfield	16	S. Kellogg	1/18	Sandwich	400	J. Trimble#
1/23	Quabbin (G43)	16	C. Buelow	1/20	Ipswich	150	J. Berry
2/16	Southwick	16	S. Kellogg	1/22	Orleans	250	G. Gove#
2/18	Royalston	6	M. Faherty	1/31	Hardwick	149	M. Lynch#
2/24	Middleboro	5	A. Brisette	2/14	Shelburne	100	T. Gagnon
2/28	Mashpee	4	M. Keleher	2/20	Southwick	150	S. Kellogg
White-breasted Nuthatch				2/21	Wakefield	150+	P. + F. Vale
1/22	Nantucket	1	E. Ray	2/24	Groton	200	T. Pirro
Brown Creeper				2/25	Lee	100	T. Collins
1/4	Milton	3	A. Joslin	2/29	S. Quabbin	150	R. Laubach
1/10-11	Wachusett Res.	3	S. Sutton#		Varied Thrush		
1/18	Hardwick	4	C. Buelow	1/25-2/29	Quabbin Pk	1 m ad	M. Lynch + v.o.
1/25	Mashpee	2	M. Keleher	1/30-2/19	Nantucket	1 m ad	E. Andrews + v.o.
1/29	Wayland	3	G. Long		Gray Catbird		
2/8	Winchester	3	A. Ankers#	1/1	Marblehead	4	R. Heil#
2/14	Quabbin (G40)	3	C. Buelow	1/4	Nantucket	9	G. d'Entremont#
Carolina Wren				1/11	Sutton	2	M. Lynch#
1/4	Nantucket	11	G. d'Entremont#	1/11	Westport	6	BBC (R. Stymeist)
1/4	Medford	6	M. Rines#	1/16	W. Springfield	1	S. Kellogg
1/4	Boston	6	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/17	Barnstable (S.N.)	3	M. Lynch#
1/11	Westport	31	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/18	Sandwich	2	J. Trimble#
2/14	Northampton	2	T. Gagnon	1/26-2/29	Dartmouth	2	A. Morgan
2/24	Middleboro	4	A. Brisette	2/7	Squantum	3	G. d'Entremont
Winter Wren					Brown Thrasher		
1/1	Marblehead	4	R. Heil#	1/15, 2/18	Cambridge	1	H. Hofheinz
1/4	Medford	2	M. Rines#	1/17	S. Dartmouth	1	T. Raymond
1/18	Sandwich	2	J. Trimble#	2/6	Chilmark	1	T. Baird
Marsh Wren				2/16	Medford	1	M. Rines
1/3	Nantucket	3	G. d'Entremont#	2/thr	Marlboro	1	T. Spahr
2/1	S. Dartmouth	1	G. d'Entremont		American Pipit		
Golden-crowned Kinglet				1/19	Chappaquiddick	1	A. Keith#
1/4	Medford	5	M. Rines#		Bohemian Waxwing		
1/4	Milton	10	A. Joslin	1/24, 29	Gloucester	3, 13	Ferraresso, Vale
1/5	W. Harwich	6	D. Silverstein#	1/25	Truro	62+ ph	B. Nikula
1/10-11	Wachusett Res.	12	S. Sutton#	1/31	Hardwick	41	M. Lynch#

Bohemian Waxwing (continued)			1/11	Westport	8	BBC (R. Stymeist)	
2/thr	Royalston	94 max	v.o.	1/18	Scusset B.	2	K. Anderson#
2/8	Easton	12	N. Bonomo	1/19	Rockport (H.P.)	1	S. Moore#
2/11	New Salem	30	B. Lafley	1/26-2/28	Southwick	1	S. Kellogg
2/12	Turners Falls	40	H. Allen	2/7	Concord	1	M. Small
2/17	Hadley	10	H. McQueen	2/15	Bolton Flats	2	S. Sutton
2/22	HRWMA	80	T. Pirro#	2/29	Sheffield	1	M. Lynch#
2/27	Windsor	50	G. Soucie		Savannah Sparrow		
2/29	N. Truro	48	D. Manchester	1/11	Cumb. Farms	4	J. Sweeney
thr	Reports of indiv. from 15 locations			1/17	WBWS	1	S. Hedman#
Cedar Waxwing				1/17	Bourne	2	SSBC (W. Petersen)
1/4	Nantucket	24	G. d'Entremont#	1/18	P.I.	1	T. Wetmore
1/6	Amherst	300	D. Ziomek	1/23	Nahant	1	J. Nelson#
1/9	Bourne	50	MAS (Larson)	2/15	M.V.	4	J. Liller#
1/10	Hardwick	50	C. Buelow	2/20	Chatham (S.B.)	6	P. Flood
1/22	Easthampton	100	B. Bieda		Ipswich Sparrow		
1/30	Groton	250	T. Pirro	1/21	Eastham (F.E.)	1	M. Tuttle#
2/7	Worcester	250+	M. Lynch#		Grasshopper Sparrow		
2/10	Winchendon	113	R. Stymeist#	1/thr	Stoneham	1	D. + I. Jewell
2/16	Southwick	80	S. Kellogg		Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow		
Black-throated Blue Warbler				2/22	Gloucester	2	M. Lynch#
1/2-11	Belchertown	1 m	M. Beresky		Fox Sparrow		
1/7-14	Chatham	1 m ph	D. Stacey	thr	E. Middleboro	7 max	K. Anderson
Yellow-rumped Warbler				1/1	W. Springfield	1	S. Kellogg
1/1	Marblehead	12	R. Heil#	1/4	Medford	2	M. Rines#
1/4	Wellfleet	54	P. + F. Vale	1/10-27	WBWS	1	v.o.
1/4	Nantucket	30	G. d'Entremont#	1/18	Sandwich	3	J. Trimble#
1/27	Newbury	15-20	J. Berry#	1/28	Boston	1	J. Offermann
2/8	S. Dartmouth	12	E. Nielsen#	2/1	Squantum	1	P. O'Neill
2/14	M.V.	25	J. Liller#	2/8	Natick	1	G. Long
2/17	Falmouth	22	G. Gove#	2/8	Mendon	2	O. Herbert
2/25	Sheffield	4	D. St. James	2/11	Amherst	1	H. McQueen
Pine Warbler				2/22	Newbypt	1	T. + L. Wetmore
1/9	Harwich	1	E. Banks	2/29	S. Dartmouth	3	J. Young
1/11	Barnstable	2	D. Furbish#		Swamp Sparrow		
1/11	Salisbury	1	J. Hully	1/1	Marblehead	2	R. Heil#
Common Yellowthroat				1/2	Nantucket	4	G. d'Entremont#
1/3	Truro	1	J. Young	1/17	WBWS	1	S. Hedman#
Yellow-breasted Chat				1/24	Sandwich	2	P. + F. Vale#
1/1	Chilmark	1	A. Keith	1/30	Plymouth	1	D. Furbish
1/4-7	MNWS	1	K. Haley	2/1	Bolton	1	T. Pirro
1/8	Barnstable	1	E. Banks	2/7	Ipswich (C.B.)	1	P. + F. Vale#
1/9	Harwich	1	B. Nikula	2/29	Watertown	1	C. Cook
Summer Tanager					White-throated Sparrow		
1/1-26	Stow	1 ph	D. Stewart + v.o.	1/4	Boston	96	BBC (R. Stymeist)
Western Tanager *				1/25	Squantum	75	G. d'Entremont
1/11-2/18	Brewster	1 ph	R. Everett + v.o.	2/27	Mt.A.	52	R. Stymeist#
Eastern Towhee				2/28	Westport	66	M. Lynch#
1/4	Medford	1	M. Rines#		White-crowned Sparrow		
1/10	Needham	1 f	J. Samelson	1/1-1/10	Chilmark	1	A. Keith
1/11	Weston	1 m	Sa. Miller#	1/11	Westport	6	BBC (R. Stymeist)
1/11	Westport	7	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/12	Salisbury	1	D. + I. Jewell
1/16	Bourne	2	K. Anderson#	1/25	Amherst	1	S. Surner
1/22	Ipswich (C.B.)	1	J. Nelson#	2/1	Harwich	1	E. Banks
1/25	Marlboro	1 m	C. Nims	2/20	Deerfield	1	R. Packard
American Tree Sparrow					Dark-eyed Junco		
1/1	New Braintree	26	C. Buelow	1/3	Wakefield	60	P. + F. Vale
1/4	Framingham	38	J. Hoye#	1/10	Petersham	66	M. Lynch#
1/4	Boston	86	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/11	Sutton	58	M. Lynch#
1/11	Cumb. Farms	50+	J. Sweeney	1/12	Stoughton	45+	V. Zollo
1/11	P.I.	56	P. + F. Vale	1/31	Hardwick	45	M. Lynch#
1/17	Bourne	40	SSBC (W. Petersen)	2/27	Mt.A.	44	R. Stymeist
1/26	Ipswich	30	J. Berry	2/29	Sheffield	54	M. Lynch#
2/2	Hardwick	26	C. Buelow		"Oregon" Junco		
2/29	Sheffield	31	M. Lynch#	1/20, 2/11	Nahant	1 m	R. Heil, L. Pivacek
Chipping Sparrow					Lapland Longspur		
thr	Williamsburg	1	R. Packard	1/11	P.I.	25	T. Wetmore
thr	Falmouth	14 max	G. Gove#	1/11	Sutton	2	M. Lynch#
1/10	Katama	10	A. Keith	1/12	Hadley	1	H. Allen
1/11	Barnstable	6	D. Furbish#	1/12	Northampton	20+	M. Taylor
1/12	Stoughton	4	V. Zollo	1/13	Newbypt	15	P. McFarland
2/3	Mashpee	1	M. Keleher	1/21	Eastham (F.E.)	3	M. Tuttle#
2/28	Westport	2	M. Lynch#	1/21	Newbury	44	O. Spalding#
Field Sparrow				1/31	Salisbury	9	S. Leonard
thr	Chilmark	2	A. Keith	2/3	Hadley	1	H. Allen
1/thr	Falmouth	4 max	G. Gove#	2/4-22	Northampton	1-3	v.o.
1/1	Salem	3	R. Heil#	2/8	Newbury	35	T. + L. Wetmore
1/3	Truro	12	J. Young	2/12	P.I.	10	D. Larson

Snow Bunting			1/3	Maynard	24	L. Nachtrab
1/1 P.I.	40	BBC (L. delaFlor)	1/24	IRWS	4	S. Sutton#
1/2 P'town	40	J. Young	2/3	DWWS	8	J. Offermann#
1/4 Boston	1	J. Young	2/7	Natick	9	G. Long
1/10 Salisbury	13	B. Krisler	2/22	Fairhaven	5	G. d'Entremont
1/10 Wachusett Res.	4	S. Sutton#	2/23	Medford	6	M. Rines
1/11 Sutton	10	M. Lynch#		Bullock's Oriole *		
1/11 New Braintree	25	C. Buelow	1/1-7	Walpole	1 ph	Walter Barnes
1/11 Chatham	90	J. Kricher		Baltimore Oriole		
1/13 Northampton	100	L. Therrien	1/1-21	Hadley	1	S. Emerson
1/19 Fairhaven	30	T. Raymond	1/3	Salem	1 imm	L. de la Flor#
1/22 Plymouth	300	S. Perkins#	1/3	Brewster	1	S. Finnegan
2/1 Bolton	25	T. Pirro		Purple Finch		
2/1 Longmeadow	6	J. Wojtanowski	thr	Hardwick	4-6	C. Buelow
2/1 Hadley	120	T. Gagnon	1/thr	S. Lancaster	5	S. Sutton#
2/7 Ipswich (C.B.)	20+	P. + F. Vale#	1/4	WMWS	6	J. Dekker
2/10 Templeton	25+	R. Stymeist#	1/5, 2/21	Maynard	2, 14	L. Nachtrab
2/14 Quabbin Pk	3	M. Emmons	1/17	Barnstable (S.N.)	4	M. Lynch#
2/15 Gay Head	4	A. Fischer	1/20	Pepperell	4	E. Stromstead
2/15 Ashfield	20	S. Sauter	1/25	Cummington	15	T. Gagnon
2/22 Baldwinville	27	T. Pirro#	2/2	Rowley	4	P. + F. Vale
2/28 P.I.	20+	D. Chickering	2/6	E. Sandwich	7	D. Manchester
2/29 P'town (R.P.)	3	E. Nielsen	2/14	Wayland	3 f	G. Long
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			2/16	Royalston	4	J. Trimble
thr N. Truro	1 ph	Cathy Skowron	2/16	Ashfield	20	S. Sauter
Painted Bunting *			2/29	Sheffield	3	M. Lynch#
1/11-2/5 Shrewsbury	1 m ph	E. Surette + v.o.		Red Crossbill		
Dickcissel			2/15-18	Royalton	1	J. Doppler
1/1-11 Chilmark	1	A. Fischer#	2/22	E. Quabbin	4	T. Gagnon
Red-winged Blackbird				Common Redpoll		
1/4 Boston	90	BBC (R. Stymeist)	thr	Pepperell	150 max	E. Stromsted
1/6, 2/6 DWWS	100, 160	D. Furbish	1/3, 2/22	Wakefield	20, 29	P. + F. Vale
1/10 Bolton Flats	25+	M. Lynch#	1/4	Nantucket	35	G. d'Entremont#
1/11 Cumb. Farms	100+	J. Sweeney	1/5	Worcester	30+	M. Lynch#
1/19 Arlington	31	K. Hartel	1/6	Hinsdale	57	L. Roberson
1/21 W. Harwich	80+	B. Nikula	1/11	S. Quabbin	100	C. Gentes
1/26 Falmouth	80	G. Gove#	1/11	Williamsburg	175	T. Gagnon
2/9 Salisbury	25	S. Grinley#	1/15	Northboro	50+	J. Hogan
2/11 Sheffield	5	J. Alexander	1/23	Falmouth	17	G. Gove#
2/12 Cummaquid	30+	R. Danca	1/24	Wayland	170	G. Long
2/21 Scituate	50+	S. Maguire	1/28	Ashfield	60	S. Sauter
2/29 Boston	327	A. Joslin	2/7	Granby	120	M. Faherty
Eastern Meadowlark			2/9	W. Newbury	200	S. Grinley#
1/19 E. Boston	3	BBC (D. Wilkinson)	2/9	Ipswich	28	J. + N. Berry
1/21 Cumb. Farms	15-18	W. Petersen#	2/18	Royalton	160	M. Faherty
1/23 DWWS	6	D. Furbish	2/20	Northfield	100	M. Taylor
2/1 P.I.	1	T. Wetmore	2/21	Blandford	100	M. + K. Conway
2/8 S. Dartmouth	1	E. Nielsen#	2/29	Gloucester	26	F. Vale
Rusty Blackbird				Hoary Redpoll (details) *		
1/4, 24 Wayland	11, 1	G. Long	1/5	Worcester	1	M. Lynch#
1/4 Boston	3	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/8	Concord	1	P. Cozza
1/11 Westport	4	BBC (R. Stymeist)	1/24	Brewster	1	J. Offermann#
1/17 Barnstable (S.N.)	1	M. Lynch#	2/29	Brewster	2	D. + F. Clapp
1/18 Westboro	1	S. Sutton		Pine Siskin		
1/31 Stow	30	J. Dekker	1/2, 22	Wayland	20, 11	J. Hoye
2/11 Reading	20	I. Giriunas	1/3	Salisbury	28	S. Walch
2/15 W. Newbury	1 m	P. + F. Vale	1/4	Williamsburg	25	R. Packard
2/22 Baldwinville	2	T. Pirro#	1/13, 2/5	Maynard	12, 7	L. Nachtrab
Common Grackle			1/4	Pepperell	30+	J. Duprey#
1/3 Maynard	2	L. Nachtrab	1/6	Upton	20+	R. Brill
1/12 Framingham	30+	E. Morrier	1/10	Royalston	18	M. Lynch#
1/12 Upton	300+	P. Debruyen	1/10	Northfield	40	M. Taylor
2/1 Rockport	5	J. Paluzzi	1/10	Sunderland	15	H. Allen
2/1 Bolton	75	T. Pirro	1/13	Stow	17	D. Larson
2/3 Chilmark	50	A. Keith	1/27	Southwick	15	S. Kellogg
2/4 Northboro	1	B. Volkle	1/27	Scituate	30	S. Maguire#
2/10 Lenox	1	R. Wheeler	2/12	Lincoln	15	M. Durand
2/22 Medford	94	A. Gurka		Evening Grosbeak		
2/24 Sandwich	100	G. Gove#	thr	Royalston	25 max	v.o.
2/29 Boston	14	A. Joslin	1/11, 2/29	Peru	105, 51	T. Gagnon
Brown-headed Cowbird			1/19	Sheffield	1	S. Purdy
1/2 Falmouth	4	G. Gove#	2/9	Ashfield	11	S. Sauter

Errata

The following reports were erroneously listed as having been sighted in August. The correct dates are as follows:

Cory's Shearwater			
7/16	Great S. Channel	16	B. Pateson#
Greater Shearwater			
7/16	Great S. Channel	4051	B. Pateson#
Sooty Shearwater			
7/16	Cape Ann to Hydrog	770	B. Pateson#
Manx Shearwater			
7/16	Lydonia Canyon	7	B. Pateson#
Wilson's Storm-Petrel			
7/15-16	Cape Ann to Hydrog	9240	B. Pateson#

White-faced Storm-Petrel (no details) *			
7/15	10 m E of Hydrog	1	B. Pateson#
Leach's Storm-Petrel			
7/15-16	Cape Ann to Hydrog	131	B. Pateson#
Red-billed Tropicbird (no details) *			
7/15	Gilbert Canyon	1	B. Pateson#
South Polar Skua (no details) *			
7/15	Lydonia Canyon	1	B. Pateson#
7/16	Great S. Channel	1	B. Pateson#
Parasitic Jaeger			
7/16	Great S. Channel	1	B. Pateson#
Bridled Tern (no details) *			
7/15	10 m E of Hydrog	1	B. Pateson#

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIRD SIGHTINGS

Taxonomic order is based on AOU checklist, Seventh edition, 44th Supplement, as published in *The Auk* 117: 847-858 (2000); 119:897-906 (2002); 120:923-932 (2003).

Locations

ABC	Allen Bird Club
A.P.	Andrews Point, Rockport
A.Pd	Allens Pond, S. Dartmouth
B.	Beach
Barre FD	Barre Falls Dam, Barre, Rutland
B.I.	Belle Isle, E. Boston
B.R.	Bass Rocks, Gloucester
BBC	Brookline Bird Club
BMB	Broad Meadow Brook, Worcester
C.B.	Crane Beach, Ipswich
CGB	Coast Guard Beach, Eastham
C.P.	Crooked Pond, Boxford
Cambr.	Cambridge
CCBC	Cape Cod Bird Club
Cumb. Farms	Cumberland Farms, Middleboro
DFWS	Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary
DWMA	Delaney WMA
DWWS	Stow, Bolton, Harvard Daniel Webster WS
E.P.	Eastern Point, Gloucester
EMHW	Eastern Mass. Hawk Watch
F.E.	First Encounter Beach, Eastham
F.P.	Fresh Pond, Cambridge
F.Pk	Franklin Park, Boston
G40	Gate 40, Quabbin Res.
GMNWR	Great Meadows NWR
H.	Harbor
H.P.	Halibut Point, Rockport
HRWMA	High Ridge WMA, Gardner
I.	Island
IRWS	Ipswich River WS
L.	Ledge
M.V.	Martha's Vineyard
MAS	Mass. Audubon Society
MBWMA	Martin Burns WMA, Newbury
MNWS	Marblehead Neck WS
MSSF	Myles Standish State Forest, Plymouth
Mt.A.	Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambr.
NAC	Nine Acre Corner, Concord
Newbypt	Newburyport

ONWR	Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge
P.I.	Plum Island
Pd	Pond
P'town	Provincetown
Pont.	Pontoosuc Lake, Lanesboro
R.P.	Race Point, Provincetown
Res.	Reservoir
S. Dart.	South Dartmouth
S.B.	South Beach, Chatham
S.N.	Sandy Neck, Barnstable
SRV	Sudbury River Valley
SSBC	South Shore Bird Club
TASL	Take A Second Look
WBWS	Boston Harbor Census
WMWS	Wellfleet Bay WS
Wompatuck SP	Wachusett Meadow WS
	Hingham, Cohasset, Scituate, and Norwell
Worc.	Worcester

Other Abbreviations

ad	adult
alt	alternate
b	banded
br	breeding
dk	dark (morph)
f	female
fl	fledgling
imm	immature
juv	juvenile
lt	light (morph)
m	male
max	maximum
migr	migrating
n	nesting
ph	photographed
pl	plumage
pr	pair
S	summer (1S = 1st summer)
v.o.	various observers
W	winter (2W = second winter)
yg	young
#	additional observers

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE BIRD SIGHTINGS TO BIRD OBSERVER

Sightings for any given month must be reported in writing by the eighth of the following month, and may be submitted by postal mail or e-mail. Send written reports to Bird Sightings, Robert H. Stymeist, 94 Grove Street, Watertown, MA 02172. 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 e-mail submission, visit: <<http://massbird.org/birdobserver/sightings/>>.

Species on the Review List of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee (indicated by an asterisk [*] in the Bird Reports), 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 Marjorie Rines, Massachusetts Audubon Society, South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773, or by e-mail to <marj@mrines.com>.

Bulletin of the Essex County Ornithological Club, 1920

NOTES ON THE IPSWICH SPARROW

(*Passerculus princeps Mayn*)

CHARLES JOHNSON MAYNARD

In response to an invitation of the editors of the Bulletin of the Essex County Ornithological Club to give an account of my experiences with the Ipswich Sparrow, I have written the following notes:

On December 4, 1868, I was walking over the Ipswich sand-dunes in search of birds. At that date this section was even more desolate than it is at the present time for the depressions among the sand-hills, now largely covered with low bushes and other trees, were without vegetation of any kind. I had been looking especially for Lapland Longspurs, but my search was unsuccessful, and as it was getting near sundown I was making my way back to the Woodbury house (which stood near the southwest corner of the sandy area) where I had been staying for a few days. I had come to some low dunes near the Essex River, where beach-grass was growing in abundance, when a sparrow started out of it quite near me. It darted rapidly away, but alighted in the grass a few rods from where I stood. Somewhat surprised to see a sparrow at this late date, so far north and in such a bleak place, I approached the grass patch in which it was hiding. After some trouble I again started it. It rose wildly as before, but this time, being ready, I took a snap shot and secured it.

As soon as I saw that I had a species that was new to me I instantly went in search of more. After a time I succeeded in starting another, but this one rose too far for a successful shot and I did not get it. It continued to fly until I lost sight of it in the distance.

Although I was fairly familiar with our native sparrows at that time, I was, of course, unable to identify my new capture. When I took it to Cambridge and showed it to Mr. J. A. Allen, then in charge of the birds of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and he also failed to place it, I became convinced that I had a new species. By his advice, I forbore to describe it as such, until I had sent it to Prof. S. F. Baird, at Washington. Rather to my disappointment he returned it with a letter saying that he had concluded that it was undoubtedly Baird's Sparrow, (*Emberiza bairdis Audubon.*) The Smithsonian Institute possessed the only specimen of this (then very rare) bird in existence. This was one of the original lot collected by Audubon on the banks of the Yellowstone River, July 26, 1843, and by him given to Prof. Baird.

Although I was at heart scarcely satisfied with this decision, I could do no better than defer to the opinion of so eminent an ornithologist, and so printed an account of its capture, calling it Baird's Sparrow, in the first edition of my *Naturalist's Guide*, published in 1870, p. 113. It is, however, rather significant that I should have given the following opinion as a conclusion to that article. "I think it more probable that the

birds which occur at Ipswich are winter visitors from the north, than that they are stragglers from so great a distance as Nebraska” p. 117.

Although I, and others, searched the Ipswich dunes diligently during the next two years for more examples of this bird, I did not find another until October 14, 1871, when I took one more, and another the next day, October 15. Both of these were females.

These specimens confirmed my belief that I had obtained a new species, and I sent them to Prof. Baird, begging him to compare them with his sparrow. This he did and wrote that he thought I was right in my opinion that the birds were new, but added that he would like to have me come to Washington and make the comparison myself. This I did in returning from a trip to Florida the following spring. As a result I described the species as *Passerculus princeps* in *The American Naturalist* of October 1872, p. 637.

Sometime in 1873 Mr. Harold Herrick sent to me for identification two Ipswich Sparrows, which had been collected on Long Island, New York. Then a few other specimens continued to be taken at Ipswich, but it was not until April 4, 1874, that I saw the bird in full spring dress. Then I shot a fine male which was perched in a tree about a mile from the beach.. This bird is the one figured on plate XXV of the second edition of my *Birds of Eastern North America*, 1896. The type, a male in autumnal plumage, is now in the New England collection of the Boston Society of Natural History.

From 1871 on, the Ipswich Sparrow occurred in ever increasing numbers, reaching its maximum abundance in the eighties. After this it appears to have become less numerous.

My earliest record for the occurrence of the Ipswich Sparrow in fall is October 12, 1912, when I saw two on Plum Island. The latest in spring is May 11, 1918, when I found a male in full spring dress, also on Plum Island. Since all notes of the observations of this species in Ipswich and elsewhere that have been made by myself and members of my classes in Ipswich and elsewhere for the last twelve years, have been published in *Records of Walks and Talks with Nature*, I will not repeat them here. One record, however, which does not appear in that publication, I will give: –On November 19, 1900, I shot a female Ipswich Sparrow that came in from sea in company with a Snow Bunting and alighted on the beach at New River Inlet, North Carolina. This specimen is in the collection of Mr. John E. Thayer. Another rather remarkable observation is, where two were noted on Virginia Beach, Virginia, April 4, 1909, by myself and members of my class.

After a rather careful study of this interesting sparrow for over fifty years, it is quite natural that I should have come to some conclusions regarding it. These conclusions are briefly stated below.

It appears to me that all the known facts regarding the Ipswich Sparrow indicate that it is comparatively a recently evolved species. At a time in the not distant past some hardy Savanna Sparrows found their way to Sable Island, which we now know,

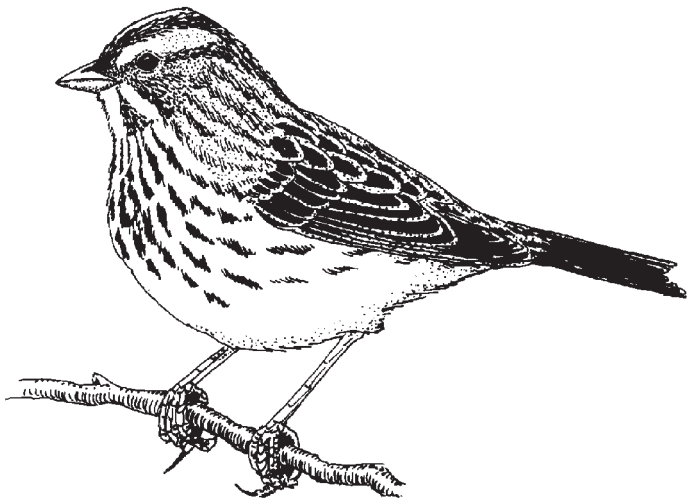
through the efforts of Dr. Jonathan Dwight and others, is in all probability the sole breeding ground of the Ipswich Sparrow. These hardy Savannas, finding a suitable home on this island, not only for summer, but also for winter, remained there. Here on this wind swept tract of sand, the law of the survival of the fittest produced an even stronger, larger race than the hardy individuals from which it originated, and, as we find in many species of birds, became protectively colored.

At first, as above stated, these Sable Island Sparrows, excepting as mere stragglers, never left their island home. But, at length came a time, possibly after a season of unusual productiveness among them, or possibly when the beach grass produced a more meager crop than the normal, that the food supply was not sufficient to adequately meet the wants of all of the Sparrows.

Then the old migrating habit, dormant perhaps, for centuries, but never lost, asserted itself and some of the birds left the island in search of food. How long this migrating habit had been established before I got the type of the Ipswich Sparrow is, of course, difficult to determine, but I believe from a careful study of the progressive appearance of the species along one coast, not long. In short, I feel that those Ipswich Sparrows which I got in 1868 and 1871 were among the earlier immigrants.

In closing I want to suggest that it would be exceedingly interesting and instructive if a good observer could be established on Sable Island to note whether the food supply varied, and if it did, what effect this variation had upon the number of Ipswich Sparrows which remained there over winter. If such variations occurred they could be compared with the fluctuations of the numbers of these Sparrows which came to us in winter and some valuable results obtained.

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SAVANNAH SPARROW BY GEORGE C. WEST

ABOUT THE COVER

Common Loon

The Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) is well known from Native American lore, where it is associated with myth and magic and is often referred to as “the spirit of the northern lakes,” probably because of its nocturnal, haunting yodel and wail. The name “loon” comes from Scandinavian words for “water bird” or “diving bird” and is most appropriate for this denizen of the lakes and coastal waters that, because of its posteriorly positioned legs, has great trouble walking on land. A large loon, in breeding season it can be identified by its black head and bill and the extensive checkering pattern of its back. In winter plumage, identification can be more difficult because the dull gray above with white throat, neck, and breast pattern is shared with the smaller Pacific and Arctic loons. However, its robust bill and partial white collar, together with its larger size, should make identification possible. Like all the loons, the Common Loon flies with its head in line with the lower part of its body, producing a distinctive humpback profile. They fly at about 75 mph and need 90-600 feet of “running room” to take off from the water. The sexes are similar in plumage, but males are larger than females. The Common Loon is monotypic (no subspecies) and forms a superspecies with the Yellow-billed Loon.

Common Loons are Holarctic in distribution, and in North America breed on the lakes of mixed and boreal forests in a broad swath across Canada from Alaska to Newfoundland, and in the United States in New England, the Great Lakes region, and the far northwest. They winter in coastal waters, mostly near shore, along the Pacific Coast from the Aleutian Islands to Central Mexico and in the east from Newfoundland south to Florida, the Gulf Coast, and northern Mexico. They may remain on large inland lakes until the lakes freeze. In Massachusetts the Common Loon is near the southern edge of its range and is considered a rare and local breeder. They found the Quabbin Reservoir during the 1940s while it was still being flooded and have had adults present on the reservoir ever since. About 10 pairs probably breed each year in Massachusetts. They are considered a common coastal migrant, with protracted migration seasons, mid-March to early June in spring, and from late August to December in the fall. Adults leave the breeding grounds before juvenile birds, and older birds are the first to arrive in the spring. There is some evidence that birds that breed in the same area also winter together. Loons can form flocks of hundreds to thousands on staging areas such as the Great Lakes or Chesapeake Bay. In Massachusetts they are uncommon winter residents, mostly along the coast and islands.

Common Loons are monogamous and don't breed until at least four years of age. They nest on the shores and islands of large, clear lakes and in bogs surrounded by forest. They are highly territorial, with territories that averaged 175 acres in one study. Lakes under 200 acres support only a single breeding pair. Unlike most animals, loons frequently fight in territorial disputes. Both males and females attack and often kill intruders by chasing them down, climbing onto their backs and thrusting their bills

into the neck or head of the transgressing bird, or grasping the intruder by the neck and holding its head under water. They also attack from underwater, impaling the intruder with a saber-like bill. In one study over fifty percent of loons autopsied had evidence of old wounds that were probably made by loon bills. They often chase other birds by running across the water with wings spread out. They will attack and kill other waterfowl such as mergansers, and have been recorded attacking beavers, snapping turtles, and otters. Several loons were once reported mobbing a swimming coyote—these are tough birds. Courtship displays are generally simple and include head-turns and splash-dives. They are reported to use a “penguin dance” display, where the bird is vertical with wings held out in a V. High-speed glides with wings held in a V may also be involved in courtship. The yodel, a loud call that can be heard up to ten miles away, is given only by the male and is largely a territorial advertisement. Loons also have a wolf howl-like wail, a tremolo or laughing call that they give in times of distress, a flight call, and a hoot that serves as a contact call.

Common Loons prefer to nest on islands or floating islets in bogs, presumably because these locations are more difficult for mammalian predators to access. Either member of the pair can choose the nest site, and both contribute to building the nest, a platform of submerged vegetation yanked up by the birds. Nests may be reused in subsequent years, and loons will use artificial floating platforms or the tops of logs or muskrat houses upon which to make their vegetation nest. The usual clutch is two olive or brown eggs, splotched with darker shades. The parents share incubation duties during the four weeks until hatching. The chicks are semiprecocial, leaving the nest with their parents within hours of hatching, but are dependent on the parents for food. They climb onto their parents’ backs where they are brooded and ferried around. The chicks are fed mostly crustaceans and fish and can feed themselves by the time they can fly, about eleven weeks after hatching. By mid-October the juveniles are ready for their first migration.

Common Loons eat primarily live fish and crustaceans, although leeches and some vegetation are also taken. They are visual foragers and depend on clear water, usually foraging within fifteen feet of the surface, although they occasionally dive to depths of 200 feet. They often peer under the water from the surface and, upon seeing a fish, give chase, propelling themselves with simultaneous thrusts of their powerful feet. Their dives averaged about forty seconds in one study. A loon catches a fish by grasping it in its bill and shifting it with its mandibles so that it is swallowed head first, usually under water. Loons have tooth-like structures on the roof of their mouths and on their tongues that aid in holding and swallowing prey items, and they have muscular gizzards and gizzard stones that help them grind up bones and scales — they don’t regurgitate pellets as raptors and shrikes do. The sexes have different sized digestive organs and take, on the average, different size prey, suggesting that they partition food resources.

The Common Loon faces a variety of threats from man, and some populations have been extirpated from the southern part of their range. Development of lake shores, recreational boating, and most recently the onslaught of the jet ski, have seriously damaged breeding habitat. They are still hunted in parts of Canada, have

suffered from outbreaks of botulism and aspergillosis, and have been adversely affected by water pollution, particularly by mercury. Acid rain has diminished their food supply, and in winter they are vulnerable to oil spills and storms, especially if they are flightless due to molting. In the New England states their conservation status ranges from Endangered to Species of Special Concern. However, loons have always elicited public concern and have benefited from volunteer protectionists — the “Loon Rangers” — and the American Loon Fund. People tend to like loons and thus try to protect them. Despite the public attention, many basic aspects of Common Loon remain obscure, such as winter ecology or dispersal of young. Conservation efforts, together with vast and remote breeding grounds in much of Canada and elsewhere in the world, make the species’ prospect for survival a bright one. *William E. Davis, Jr.*

About the Cover Artist

Paul Donahue is a bird painter, environmental activist, and tree climber who divides his time between Downeast Maine, New Brunswick, California, and South America. His work has appeared on *Bird Observer* covers many times. He can be reached via email at aracari@ptc-me.net.

News from the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences

Likely Record-Setting Recovery of Shorebird Banded 20 Years Ago. May 20, 2004 - A shorebird that turned up near Jacksonville, Florida, last Friday is creating a buzz in the international ornithological community. The bird, which had been banded 20 years earlier in Lagoa do Peixe in southern Brazil, is very likely the oldest Red Knot on record.

“Absolutely amazing” were the words of Brian Harrington, a senior scientist at Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, who led the research team that first banded the bird in Brazil more than 20 years ago. According to Harrington, Patrick and Doris Leary discovered the banded bird while conducting shorebird surveys from Florida’s Bird Islands to Fort George Inlet. The Learys reported sighting a knot with “a strange gray-colored marker” to Harrington by email, who was able to confirm through photos that this bird was one banded by his team in 1984. At the time of banding the bird was already an adult, so Harrington has been able to conclude that the bird is at least 21 years old.

This bird has “clocked” almost 400,000 migration miles over the course of its lifetime. “It is a champion migrant,” Harrington said, noting that even though this species is known for its remarkable flights, this particular bird has an exceptional story. “By its 13th birthday, this Red Knot, weighing only about 4.5 ounces, had migrated a distance equal to the moon and back.”

The rest of this report is at
<<http://www.manomet.org/naturereport/#floridabird>>.

AT A GLANCE

April 2004



DAVID LARSON

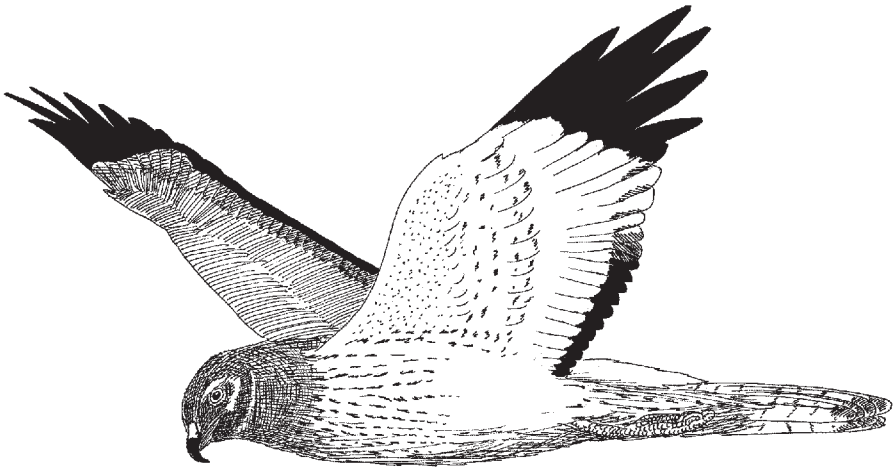
Wow! Here's a tough one! In addition to providing a useful tool for birders attempting to document unusual sightings, digital imagery also offers an improved technology for capturing unusual views of common species. Given the tradition of the *At A Glance* column to feature Massachusetts birds, it stands to reason that this month's mystery image probably represents a reasonably familiar species seen from something other than a familiar perspective.

Based upon the length of the pictured bird's wings, along with the apparent bulk of its body as seen from below, it is safe to assume that it is a fairly large bird, rather than a small passerine of some sort. Closer examination also reveals that the bird appears to be mostly white below, along with having decidedly pointed wings that are white underneath with sharply contrasting black wingtips. Unfortunately, because of the angle of the bird in the picture, it is impossible to see the length of its tail relative to the rest of its body. There is, however, the suggestion that the tail is dark, rather than white. More important is the fact that either the base of the tail, or possibly the bird's rump, is sharply white.

Assuming that our perceptions of color and pattern are correct to this point, then we have to carefully consider what field marks remain that could possibly be helpful. A close look at the long, slender wings suggests that, in addition to having black wingtips, they also appear to have a thin trailing edge along the secondaries (a point visible on the bird's left wing). Also, the wings look as though they may be set at a slight upward angle (i.e., a dihedral) and that they fail to exhibit a noticeable kink, or bow, at the "elbow."

Although it is clear that immature gulls in certain plumages can exhibit a white rump or white base to an otherwise dark tail, it is also clear that gulls ordinarily show an obvious bow or joint in their extended wings. When the combination of white underparts, white rump, pointed wings with black wing tips, dark line along the rear edge of the wing, and uptilted (not bowed) wing posture are taken together, the best choice for the mystery bird is an adult male Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). An immature gull would probably appear more robust than the bird in the photo, and the distinctive, straight-winged aspect of the mystery bird should, almost by itself, indicate that the image is not that of a gull. The only other species displaying an underwing pattern similar to the mystery photo would be a Cory's Shearwater; however, the obvious white rump, the wing posture, and the fact that the bird is not over the ocean should remove that species as a viable candidate.

The Northern Harrier is a scarce and declining coastal breeder in Massachusetts, although it is a fairly common migrant and wintering species, both along the coast and in inland areas where large fields or marshlands still exist. David Larson captured the image of the male harrier in the picture in Newburyport. *Wayne R. Petersen*



NORTHERN HARRIER ADULT MALE BY GEORGE C. WEST

AT A GLANCE



DAVID LARSON

Can you identify this bird?

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



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