

New Hampshire

BIRD RECORDS



FALL 2023

Vol. 42, No. 3

Late Migrants



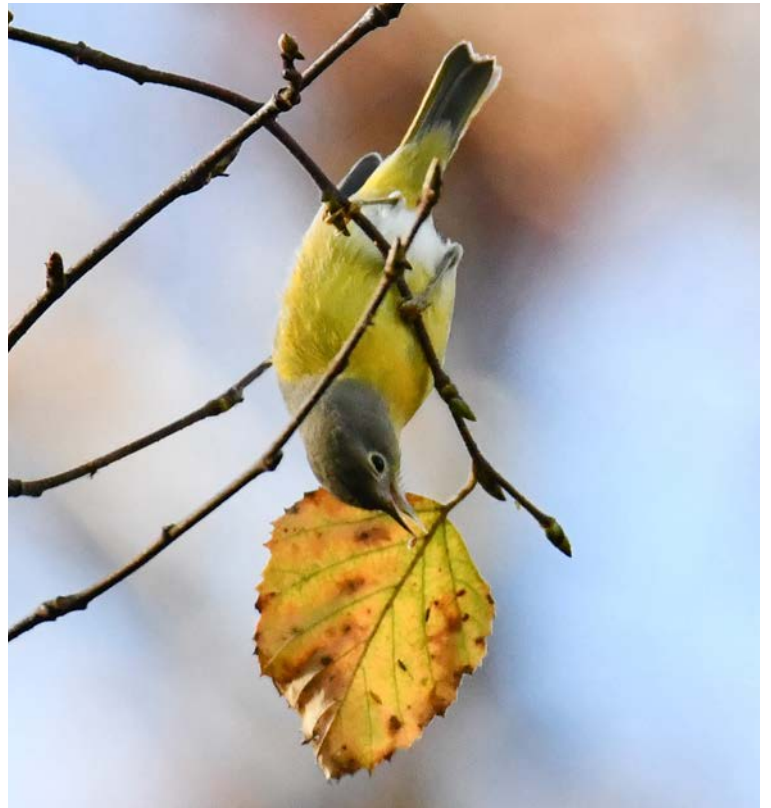
Black-throated Green Warbler by Jim Sparrell, 11-5-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.



Wilson's Warbler by Steve Mirick, 11-25-2023, Hampton WTP, NH.



Blue-headed Vireo by Deb Wiseman, 11-30-2023, Bedford Heritage Trail, Bedford, NH.



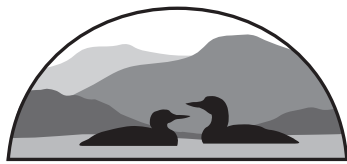
Nashville Warbler by Donna Ellis, 11-2-2023, Tanglewood Dr., Henniker, NH.



Philadelphia Vireo by Debra Powers, 10-4-2023, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.



Tennessee Warbler by Steve Mirick, 11-30-2023, Hampton WTP, NH.



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IN HONOR OF

Kathie Palfy

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* is dedicated in honor of Kathie Palfy's 80th birthday by her four children, seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Kathie has been an avid birdwatcher all her life and has spent many rewarding years both working and volunteering with NH Audubon. Happy Birthday Kathie!

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From the Editor

FALL 2023

by Rebecca Suomala

Thank you Emmily

When Emmily Bottari started volunteering with eBird review in December of 2022, New Hampshire had more than 11,000 sightings in the review queue. As of April 2024, we are below 5,000 and Emmily has a lot to do with that. While she is not the only reviewer, she has worked diligently to catch up on older reports that have been sitting waiting for someone to look at them. She has also been very helpful with the Backyard Winter Bird Survey. I am sorry to say that she is moving out of state and we will greatly miss her (although I'm hoping maybe she will do a little review remotely). A big thank you to Emmily for all her hard work on eBird review.

New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund Annual Request

The Fund provides annual support to *New Hampshire Bird Records* and builds a long-term base of support for providing information about birds and birding in New Hampshire. We make only one annual request for contributions in the Fall issue. Please see this year's announcement (enclosed) or donate online at nhaudubon.org under "Other Ways to Give" – Support Research. This fund was established in 2012 and thanks to Kathie Palfy, we have just broken the \$60,000 mark. Please help us continue to grow this fund. Thank you for your support.

Thank you Kathie Palfy, Family, and Friends

Some of you may remember Kathie Palfy who is a former *New Hampshire Bird Records* volunteer and NH Audubon staff member. When she turned 80, she asked that donations be made to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund. What a wonderful way to celebrate a special birthday! I was especially touched and we are all grateful for Kathie's support and to those who donated in her honor. This issue is sponsored in her honor in appreciation of Kathie and recognition of the gifts to the Endowment from her family and friends.

Donors in honor of Kathie Palfy's 80th birthday

All funds go to build the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund.

Kathie's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren:

Christopher and Robin Ridge
Jeffrey and Jacqueline Smith
Matthew Palfy, Nathan, Landon, and Angela; and
Michelle Sharik
Sarah Graham and Grady
Robert Smith
James and Morgan Simon, Kampbell and Palmer
Aaron and Molly Wright, Wrigley and Wrenley
Bailey Ridge and Michael Miller

Kathie's Friends:

Mary Daly
Maureen Fiedler
Patricia Lynch
Barbara Shea
Rebecca Suomala
Kristine and Margaret Thonnings

Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Two birds flying! These might be a bit tough. Size is difficult to determine against a cloudless sky, but in the spirit of transparency, the two birds in these photos are actually different sizes. Photo 2 is the smaller of the two birds. Photo 1 was taken in Concord, NH in mid-September. Photo 2 was taken in Canterbury, NH in June.

See the answer on page 35.



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

August 1 through November 30, 2023

by Ben Griffith



The fall season started mild, with a wet August and warm and wet September. After hurricane season ended, the fall continued to be mild for the remainder of the season, with relatively few storms, and even less cool weather. The mild weather resulted in perhaps fewer “big” migration days or fallouts than most fall seasons, but

that was made up for by a more protracted migration, with many birds lingering late into the fall.

A strong cone crop resulted in widespread movements of many finches, while others stayed to the north. Most notable was the continued **Red Crossbill** irruption going on for nearly two straight years with the species being widespread and abundant in the state, and **Pine Siskins** making a large-scale movement into the state late in the fall. There was some movement of **White-winged Crossbills** as well.



Red Crossbills by Steve Mirick, 9-3-2023, Freedom Town Forest, NH.

Top Rarities

Perhaps the “find” of the season was New Hampshire’s second documented **MacGillivray’s Warbler** in Charlestown on November 25 by Dylan Jackson. This extremely late date (for a warbler) is typical for this species, which has been documented several times well into December and January in New England. Extra attention should be paid to any Mourning-like warbler found in late fall as it could well be the next MacGillivray’s Warbler in the state.

An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** found on November 19 by Alan Murray in Dover was only the sixth record for the state, although it was the third record since 2018. Remarkably, five days later, another Ash-throated Flycatcher was reported by Ethan Ring in Greenland!

A **Franklin’s Gull** was photographed by Andrea and



Ash-throated Flycatcher by Ethan Ring, 11-24-2023, Greenland, NH.

George Robbins on September 4 in Freedom and is only the eighth record for the state. Franklin’s Gulls often have occurred following hurricanes that cross the Gulf of Mexico, and this bird’s occurrence came shortly after the precipitation from Hurricane Idalia arrived in the northeast.

A **Townsend’s Solitaire** identified by Phil Brown on Pack Monadnock in Peterborough on November 6 was only the fourteenth for the state. Interestingly, this montane-breeding western species has a penchant for occurring on mountains in New Hampshire. Of those fourteen sightings, this is the second record for Pack Monadnock with other records from Mount Cardigan and Mount Garfield (along with a record from the relatively high-elevation Pawtuckaway State Park in Nottingham).

Pacific Loons are less than annual in the state, and their rarity is confounded by the difficulty of identifying distant loons in nonbreeding plumage. Fortunately, one on Star Island this fall was an adult in breeding plumage, making the identification straightforward. Eric Masterson was excited to find this bird – a new species for the island!

A **Leach’s Storm-Petrel** photographed in Orford on September 19 by Cathy Eastburn was another hurricane-driven bird, this one following Hurricane Lee as it approached New England. Remarkably, there were virtually no other storm-driven species associated with this storm, which passed directly over southeastern New England, and this was one of the few Leach’s Storm-Petrels noted throughout New England during this storm.

A **Wilson’s Phalarope** in Rye on August 18 was a less-than-annual occurrence, although they have occurred in six of the last ten fall seasons. This was a “lifer” for Stuart Varney, who found the bird,

Three **Long-billed Dowitchers** were reported during the fall: one on October 7 (Susan Wrisley, Leo McKillop), and



*Long-billed Dowitcher
by Steve Mirick, 11-6-
2023, Meadow Pond,
Hampton, NH.*

two more on November 1 (Steve Mirick), all from Hampton. This species isn't reported every year, but silent birds can be extremely challenging to identify, and it is likely that it is overlooked. Long-billed Dowitcher is a later migrant than Short-billed. Special attention should be paid to adult dowitchers in September and all dowitchers in October and later, as these are more likely to be Long-billed. Photos in flight as well as sound recordings are especially helpful for documenting late dowitchers.

The relatively mild fall was good for vagrant southern warblers. The rarest of these was a **Worm-eating Warbler** in Rye on October 7 (Jane Mirick). Although this species breeds as far north as central Massachusetts, there are only three other documented records of this southeastern species in the past ten years. Hooded Warblers and Yellow-throated Warblers are both somewhat more expected, each occurring nearly annually in the state. This fall there were two of each: **Yellow-throated Warblers** on August 31 in Manchester (Jimmy Smith) and October 20 in Keene (Pamela Hunt); and **Hooded Warblers** on August 19 in Sandwich (Ken Klapper) and September 11 in Keene (Eileen Synnott). The Hooded Warbler in Sandwich was particularly far north for a species more expected to occur in the southeastern part of the state and coastally. **White-eyed Vireo** also had a good fall with at least seven reported during the season.

Unusual Species

The long-staying female **King Eider** at Odiorne Point State Park that has been present since May 2022 was observed intermittently throughout the fall.

Two **Common Gallinules** were reported this fall. The one photographed by Kyle Wilmarth on World's End Pond in Salem on August 16 was the earliest fall record for the state while the timing of the one on Eel Pond in Rye on October 28



Common Gallinule by Kyle Wilmarth, 8-16-2023, Salem, NH.

(Steve Mirick) was more in line with previous fall records.

Parasitic Jaegers have been very scarce in recent years, but one was documented on the September 5 pelagic boat trip by the Seacoast Chapter of NH Audubon (see the article in this issue) and two on the September 11 Nuttall Ornithological Club pelagic trip. **Pomarine Jaegers** have been more regular in recent years and this fall there were a total of six reported.

Three **Red Phalaropes** were reported during the season, one on Star Island on October 14 (Eric Masterson) that was in line with the species' typical pelagic habits. Two different Red Phalaropes were photographed inland on September 9 in the Connecticut River Valley, one each in Surry (Wendy Ward) and Chesterfield (Carol Corliss). Although primarily pelagic (and occasionally abundant), there are nearly as many records from inland locations where the species can be studied at length and is more easily distinguished from the similar fall plumage of the more common Red-necked Phalarope. There was also an inland record of **Red-necked Phalarope** from the Colebrook WTP on September 12 (Aubrie Giroux), which is similarly scarce inland, but is readily observed during much of the early fall offshore.

A **Redhead** reported by Leo McKillop on November 11 from Lake Massabesic in Auburn was unusual not only for its rarity in the state, but also because the majority of records of this species come from Great Bay.



Redhead by Dan Prima, 11-14-2023, Lake Massabesic, Auburn, NH.

Gray-cheeked Thrushes have become more regularly documented in fall as the quality of readily available cameras increases. This year three were documented from southeastern New Hampshire, one in Strafford on October 5 (Scott Young) and two at Odiorne Point State Park, one each on October 2 (Ashton Almeida) and October 9 (Stuart Varney).

Little Blue Herons are typically scarce along the New Hampshire coast, and several were present during the season (their movements along the coast make tracking individual birds challenging). Most remarkable was a count of six documented by Stuart Varney at the Rye Recreation Area on August 26, the highest count of the species since 1989! Two inland records were also notable, as most records are coastal: one in Charlestown on August 27 (Jen & Brendan Armstrong) and one on the Squamscott River in Stratham/Newfields August 13-26 (Steve Mirick).

The only **Sandhill Cranes** during the season were seen at locations where they over-summered: Nottingham, Haverhill/Woodsville, and Monroe. Of these, young were only documented at the Nottingham location. Gary Bashline photographed two adults and two young at Dead Pond in Pawtuckaway State Park on August 6.



Sandhill Cranes by Dan Prima, 10-24-2023, Ledge Farm Rd., Nottingham, NH.

After a fall season with no **Baird's Sandpipers** in 2022, a total of seven were documented during the 2023 fall season. This midwestern sandpiper is uncommon anywhere in the state, and a higher proportion of records come from inland locations than many other shorebird species. This year two of the six reports came from relatively inland locations: one in Surry on September 10 (Philip Kirkhart) and two in Rochester on September 12 (Alan Murray, Dan Hubbard).

Western Sandpipers were present in modest numbers during fall 2023, with a total of 10 reported throughout the season, all from coastal locations. Notably, there were

no **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** reported from any locations during 2023. This species occurs most years and this was the first year in which none were present since 2019.

Stilt Sandpipers were present in small numbers along the coast, with a high count of six observed in Meadow Pond in Hampton (Steve Mirick, Holly Bauer). One in Rochester on September 11 (Alan Murray) was more notable as it was inland, although the species occurs with some regularity at this location.

While not a rare species, an apparently leucistic **Semipalmated Sandpiper** spent much of the fall at Rye Harbor State Park and was a truly striking sight with its almost completely white appearance.

A **Common Murre** found by Steve Mirick on 10-11-2023 is only the fourth October record in eBird and ties the earliest date in October (previous October sightings: 10-31-2009 at Rye Harbor, 10-25-2014 at Hampton Beach SP, 10-11-2011 offshore waters on a NH Audubon pelagic). The 2023 individual was first seen at the Hampton inlet and then in the cove at the N. Hampton/Rye town line.



Common Murre by Steve Mirick, 10-11-2023, cove at Rye/N. Hampton town line.

There were only two **Yellow-breasted Chats** during the fall season, one on Star Island (September 22, Anna Kovaliv) and one in Seabrook (September 27, Ashton Almeida). This is the fewest reported since 2018.

The scarcer species of sparrow were all well-represented in the state and followed the typical trends of abundance for recent years. **Clay-colored Sparrows** were the most frequently reported with ten found primarily in coastal areas. The next most common were **Vesper Sparrows** with six reports, relatively evenly scattered throughout the state. Finally, **Lark Sparrows** had the fewest reports, with only three. As with Clay-colored Sparrows, Lark Sparrows tend to be more coastal: one was reported on Star Island on September 11 by Holly Bauer and Jean Mullen, and one was found at Goss Farm in Rye on September 14 by Stuart Varney. The third was inland, located in Surry on August 20 by Wendy Ward and Donna Keller. While not a sparrow, **Dickcissels** are often found with

FALL SEASON



Lark Sparrow by Donna Keller, 8-20-2023, Surry Mountain Lake, Surry, NH.

sparrows, and they were moderately reported this season with 15 throughout the state.

Six **Connecticut Warblers** were reported during the fall season, and this was about average for recent years, while the species was reported less frequently in previous decades. Historical banding data suggests that the species has always occurred in small numbers in fall, and the increase is likely a result of a combination of more observer effort, as well as birders becoming better at detecting the species by voice.

Inland Rarities

Perhaps the most interesting inland sighting of the fall was a **Black-legged Kittiwake** on August 10 by Tom Momeyer at Powder Mill Pond (Hancock/Bennington). This is not only a rare bird at any time of year inland, but also a rarity so early in the fall. One has to wonder if it's the same bird that over-summered on Pleasant Lake in New London, but an early record offshore on the same date suggests that it may have been an independent sighting.



Black-legged Kittiwake by Tom Momeyer, 8-20-2023, Powder Mill Pond, NH.

Sightings of single **Red-throated Loons** on October 30 in Spofford (Eric Masterson) and November 7 in Meredith (Iain MacLeod) were scarce inland records, although perhaps the average for inland reports in the state.

While **Sanderlings** are one of the most common coastal shorebirds, one in Orford on September 12 (Catherine Holland, Wayne Scott) was notable as the species is quite scarce inland, occurring less than annually.

Brant are relatively uncommon on the ground inland so one photographed by Lisa Lukawicz walking around at Mountain Lakes in Haverhill was notable. She found it on November 10 and it stayed until November 14. November is the most likely month to see inland southbound Brant and observations of migrating flocks at Pack Monadnock are becoming increasingly regular.



Brant by Larry Morin, 11-14-2023, Mountain Lakes, Haverhill, NH.

Late Migrants

Overall, the mild fall season was conducive to birds lingering late into the fall. Most notable was a **Whimbrel** in Rye that was seen until November 5, over two weeks later than the previous late date of October 24.



Whimbrel by Jim Sparrell, 11-5-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

Warblers in general seemed very late. Some of the earlier-migrating warblers lingered into October, while quite a few other warbler species stayed on into November. These lingering birds include:

- A **Black-and-white Warbler** in New Castle on November 1 (Steve Mirick).
- A **Nashville Warbler** on November 4 in Concord (Mark Suomala).
- Numerous **Black-throated Green Warblers** early in November with the latest on November 5 in Rye (Brett Hillman), Newfields (Sahil Asnaani), and Hampton (Steve & Jane Mirick, et al.).
- A **Wilson's Warbler** in Concord on November 20 (Mark Suomala) and two that lingered until the end of the season in Hampton.
- A **Black-throated Blue Warbler** in Hooksett on November 20 (Rebecca Suomala).
- A **Prairie Warbler** in Hopkinton on November 29 (Donna Ellis).
- A **Tennessee Warbler** at the Hampton WTP on November 30 (Steve Mirick).
- An **American Redstart** that lingered through the fall season in Rye.
- Several **Palm and Pine Warblers** lingering through the end of the season in the southeast quadrant of the state.
- A **Mourning Warbler** on October 24 on Star Island (Eric Masterson).
- A **Blackburnian Warbler** in Sandwich on October 14 (Ken Klapper) and others in Rye on October 9 (Pam Hunt) and Brentwood on October 8 (Ben Griffith).
- A **Northern Waterthrush** on October 13 in Dover (Cameron Johnson).

Orange-crowned Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow-rumped Warbler regularly linger into November, and were reported in small numbers as expected.

As with warblers, **Blue-headed Vireos** lingered through the fall season, with birds reported in the final three days

of the season in Bedford (November 30, Deb Wiseman), Durham (November 29, James Bradshaw) and Newington (November 28, Stuart Varney). A **Red-eyed Vireo** in Holderness on November 16 (Iain MacLeod) followed a similar trend of lingering far past its normal late date.

Silent *Empidonax* flycatchers are extremely tricky to identify, so understanding just how late fall migrants can be a challenge. This year there were late reports of **Alder Flycatcher** on September 15 in Wolfeboro (Brant Julius) and **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** on Star Island on September 28 (Eric Masterson, et al.).

High Counts

In addition to the Little Blue Herons mentioned above, there were a few other notable high counts from the season.

- Although they're well known for their migration through river corridors, a staggering **8,603 Common Nighthawks** on one night in Franklin (August 28) triples the previous high count for the state! See Rob Woodward's write-up in this issue of this amazing night.
- A report of 300 **Great Egrets** at a roost in Hampton was carefully counted by Olivier Barden and Linda Perez. This was likely a modern-day high count for the state, although there are a few other counts in the mid-2000s.
- An incredible 43 **Cape May Warblers** and 25 **Tennessee Warblers** were reported by Andrea and George Robbins in Freedom Town Forest on August 28. This location has become the premier place to look for these two species in fall.
- The count of 265 **Wood Ducks** in Colebrook by Jeanne-Marie Maher was the highest on record for Coos County, and one of the highest counts for the state of a species that often form large flocks in early fall.
- Over a four-hour period, Ken Klapper counted 974 **Blue Jays** flying southwest on September 26 in Sandwich. This was a nice observation of migration in a species that is often not thought of as migrating.



Northern Waterthrush by Cameron Johnson, 10-13-2023, Dover Community Trail, Dover, NH.



Tennessee Warbler by Steve Mirick, 8-19-2023, Freedom Town Forest, NH.

Field Notes Fall 2023

Anita Fernandez and Kathryn Frieden, Editors

"Woody" May Hold a Record at the Not-So-Wooden Bridge

by Melissa Moore



"Woody," the Lesser Black-backed Gull by Cameron Johnson, 10-29-2023, at the "wooden bridge," Rye, NH.

On September 23, Dave Tucker observed an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull at the "Wooden Bridge" over Rt. 1A in Rye, NH. In a post to the NHBirds email list (9-24-2023), Steve Mirick recalled that this gull, nicknamed "Woody," has a long history of appearing in this vicinity. He reached out to the birding community through the NHBirds email to pinpoint a date for the first occurrence of this bird's sighting.

Within days, Bob Crowley of Chatham responded with a specific date and location. Bob wrote, "It was on my birthday, Nov. 21, 1998." (NHBirds post 9-24-2023). While on a field trip with the Brookline Bird Club to the New Hampshire coast, Bob and the group saw a strange gull at Odiorne Point State Park. It was a winter adult, with all the field marks of a Lesser Black-backed Gull, except that its bill was two-thirds black at the base and yellow at the third near the tip. Its legs were a dull yellow. Steve sent Bob into the Seacoast Science Center to retrieve P.J. Grant's book on gulls, which described on page 104 this combination exactly. The bird was a fourth winter bird that had not quite developed full adult coloring on the legs and bill.

From these observations, research, and memories, it seems that beloved "Woody" has foraged and thrived on the New Hampshire seacoast for 25 years. Most bird identification sites list 14 years as the typical lifespan for Lesser Black-backed Gulls, but additional notes add that some live twice this long. "Woody" may be a record holder for longevity here in North America. According to *All About Birds* online, "In Europe, the oldest known Lesser Black-backed Gull was 26 years old."

History of the "Wooden Bridge"

Story and photo by Kathryn Frieden



View of the no-longer-wooden bridge looking south on Rt. 1A, Rye. Photo taken 10-14-2023.

The Hotspot in eBird named "Rt. 1A Wooden Bridge, Rye" is a popular birding area. It is located three quarters of a mile north of the entrance to Odiorne Point State Park on Route 1A in Rye and is next to the Odiorne Point State Park boat launch. The Hotspot has had 186 species observed, including nine new species added in 2023. After Paul Kursewicz reported to the NHBirds email list that he had seen a Short-billed Dowitcher there on August 26, 2023, he was asked, "Where is the wooden bridge?" This was a good question because there is not actually a wooden bridge there anymore. The only part of the current bridge that is wooden is the pedestrian walkway along the edges.

It is believed that the first bridge here was built in the late 1600s as part of a dam and mill project. The wooden bridge, named the Seavey Creek Bridge, was built in 1943. Due to its style of engineering, it was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; however, by 2008, it needed to be replaced for safety reasons. Because it was an historic bridge, by federal law, it had to be offered to the public before demolition. It was put up for auction in July 2008 "as is" and there was actually one bid made! The rebuilding of the bridge (necessitating detours on Route 1A for nearly seven months!) began November 2008 and was completed July 2009. Perhaps it's time to change the name of the Hotspot to Seavey Creek Bridge?

Turkey Vulture Birthday Cake

by Paul Kursewicz



Too bad it wasn't Paul Kursewicz's birthday on 10-25-2023 when he took this photo of Turkey Vultures impersonating candles on the Epping, NH water tower, giving the impression of a birthday cake.

We used to see Turkey Vultures roosting in a large dead tree on Main Street in Epping. The most I had ever seen there were seven. Several years ago, they abandoned that tree. I eventually relocated them roosting on the nearby water tower. Over the years, their numbers increased and in November of 2022 we counted 17. This year, we counted 40 on October 25! As my wife reminded me, our 40-count only included the ones that we could see. We are both confident that there were more vultures roosting in the trees close to the water tank and we eventually hope to break 40!

Historic Field Note: The Bass and the Virginia Rail

by Melissa Moore

Large-mouth bass are predatory fish known to eat a wide range of species. Size is often the only food restriction they observe. To a large-mouth bass, "if it fits, it's dinner!" Snakes, lizards, crayfish, sunfish, even an occasional duckling or other waterfowl species are all considered suitable food choices. Dr. Art Borror recalled a historic note of interest. An acquaintance of his landed a large-mouth bass from a Durham pond. As the fisherman worked with his catch, he

discovered a baby Virginia Rail in its stomach. Virginia Rail chicks are small and downy feathered. They stay close to their female parent for at least seven days. Mature Virginia Rails eat by probing for food in shallow water. Normal behavior for large-mouth bass is to move to shallow water at the end of the day to search out food. Their paths intersected and on this day in history, the baby Virginia Rail was clearly in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Songbirds Enjoying an Unexpected Menu

by Melissa Moore

While birding on Star Island, Eric Masterson observed four bird species feasting on bittersweet nightshade: Red-eyed Vireo, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Swamp Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow, an unexpected feeding behavior when matched with what we know about this shrubby, invasive, perennial plant. All parts of bittersweet nightshade or *Solanum dulcamara* are poisonous to people. The common names signal danger and steer clear. Climbing nightshade, poison berry, trailing nightshade, and poison flower are all common names for this vine. Birds, however, find the red berries hanging in clusters a delectable treat. Bittersweet nightshade will often display both flowers and berries concurrently. The star shaped flowers have vivid purple petals that appear to curve backward with bright yellow stamens surrounding a solitary pistil. As long as the flowers are pollinated, berries will develop and ripen. The berries are approximately ¼ inch in size and first appear green and oval. The berries ripen to a bright shiny red color with a fleshy interior. Birds eagerly consume the berries and serve as one of the main avenues for seed dispersal through their droppings. Bittersweet nightshade is a non-native plant to New England but is now widespread due to bird dispersal and its habit of spreading through a system of rhizomes.



Eric Masterson photographed this immature Red-eyed Vireo (note the brown eye of immatures) perched next to a cluster of bittersweet nightshade berries. He later observed this bird and three other species eating the berries.

Don't be Fooled by Plastic Swans

Story and photo by Iain MacLeod



This Mute Swan is staying just a little bit too still to be real. Photo taken in Center Harbor Bay, December 2023.

Mute Swan is a species I need for my Belknap County life list, so when a record is submitted to eBird, it pops up in my “needs alert” and I immediately investigate. Over the last few years, there has been a flurry of “sightings” in the Lakes Region . . . but I suspect the vast majority (probably all) are plastic! These very realistic plastic swans are sold as a deterrent to Canada Geese and other waterfowl. Over the last few years, I have seen more and more of them appear around beaches and docks (both private and public). Real Mute Swans are aggressive around their nest and apparently geese will keep away from what they perceive to be a territorial pair . . . at least for a while. Like most such deterrents, the geese eventually determine that the plastic “swans” are not actually a threat.

In the last couple of years, there have been reports of Mute Swans in Center Harbor, Meredith, Laconia and Alton . . . all of which have (or had) one or a pair of plastic swans deployed on goose patrol. I assume they are tethered somehow to keep them in place. The reports are understandable. If viewed from a distance, the illusion can be convincing, but take a few extra minutes to double check any inland swans. You might just notice that they don't up-end to feed . . . or flap their wings . . . or move from one location . . . or move away from people swimming nearby. They just bob in the very same spot. Now, if you see swans flying in the Lakes Region, that's worth reporting. I'm pretty sure no one has developed an anti-goose swan drone...yet.

Scaup Setting Records in the Lake Umbagog Region

Story and photo by Robert A. Quinn

I have been compiling bird records from the Errol/Lake Umbagog area for many years, including some from William Brewster, the great 19th century ornithologist who wrote a 600-page book on the birds of Umbagog.

On November 9 and 10, 2023, I counted at least 90 scaup species in the region, mostly on Lake Umbagog. My field notes from this day tell the tale:

Seven positively identified Lesser Scaup (with 22 Greater Scaup) at close range from the boat ramp in Cambridge at the south end of Lake Umbagog on 11-9-23. A total of 65-70 (!) scaup for the morning with all but five at this location. Later that same day, I saw a flock of 21 scaup at Pontook Reservoir in Dummer with at least five Greater Scaup and 10 Lesser Scaup. Not bad for a morning in November.



Greater and Lesser Scaup found together at Lake Umbagog, 11-10-2023.

This total of about 90 is an unprecedented number of scaup (for the region). To put it in perspective, William Brewster, over a period of almost 40 years, wrote about his experiences with scaup:

Greater Scaup – Transient visitor in autumn, appearing regularly and not uncommonly usually during the month of October.

He recorded this species “...almost every autumn...” with several flocks of eight-ten individuals and a high tally of 30 on October 12, 1885. Brewster, however, only saw one Lesser Scaup – a single bird on October 30, 1884.

Leucistic Semipalmated Sandpiper



Cameron Johnson took this photo of an unusual leucistic Semipalmated Sandpiper at Rye Harbor State Park on 10-14-2023.

Belted Kingfishers Going Back to Their Roots, for over 20 Years!

Story and photo by Robert A. Quinn



Sean McCabe at the towering root-ball along the Magalloway River in August 2023.

Between 1999 and 2021, I conducted bird surveys for the New Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge (renamed Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge). During that time, a windstorm blew down a large White Pine tree along the Magalloway River, leaving its enormous, vertical “root-ball” as a 15-foot-tall wall of roots and soil. Surprisingly, (and entertainingly), a pair of Eastern Phoebes and a pair of Belted Kingfishers successfully nested in this large natural structure during those years. From my edited field notes: “A pair (of kingfishers) nested in a giant root wad along the Magalloway River in 2000. Both adults (were) seen bringing food to the hole June 25, 2000.”

Much to my surprise, in 2023, I found a used Kingfisher nest hole in the same intact root structure! The hole showed the “two-track” lines from the feet of the birds indicating use of the site this year, 23 years later. There were several other holes that indicated that kingfishers likely had been nesting in this structure all those years.

Curious Snow Bunting

Story and photos by Rebecca Suomala

Zeke Cornell and I started the morning of November 5, 2023 at Turtle Pond for the second day of the Concord November Challenge (a group event coordinated by Pam Hunt where we try to find as many species as we can in Concord, NH). As we stood on the platform, we heard an

unfamiliar call note. I thought it might be a Snow Bunting so Zeke pulled out his phone to play a recording of their call for comparison. When the call started playing on the phone we were surprised to see the bird spiral overhead and then come down and land near us on the platform railing right next to us. It was a Snow Bunting! Snow Buntings are usually found in groups and it was clearly looking for other members of a flock. It made me realize how important sound must be in helping these flocking birds find each other. They are also usually in open field habitat (not wooden platforms or wetland habitat). We did not continue to play the recording for fear of disturbing it further and eventually it flew off.



A Snow Bunting landed on the small viewing platform at Turtle Pond in Concord, 11-5-2023.

Black-legged Kittiwake in Hancock, NH

Story and photo by Tom Momeyer



Black-legged Kittiwake, 8-10-2023, Powder Mill Pond, Hancock/Bennington, NH.

I put my kayak in the water at a cove on Powder Mill Pond in southwest New Hampshire on August 10, 2023, at 7:00 am. The early bird gets the worm, or bird, as the case may be! The small boat put-in location is at Elmwood Junction in Hancock, NH, and is very small and down a bank into the water. It usually takes me quite a while to get through the backwater and cove areas, because it's sometimes very birdy and hey, why rush the experience.

I started an eBird list and stopped occasionally to look and listen, and sip from a thermos of hot coffee. As I left the cove areas and got out on the main body of the pond paddling north, I could see a distant gull just south of the abandoned rail trestle bridge and floating towards me. I was kayaking with a Sony a1 camera with a 200-600 zoom lens and attached 1.4 teleconverter that enables more distant photos. I immediately took a few photos of the gull. As I got closer, I stayed to one side of the pond; however, it narrows where the water flows under the bridge. The gull floated slowly towards and past me and I took more close up photos.

I didn't know the gull species but I knew it wasn't any of the handful of gulls that I recognized, so I took a quick photo with my phone of the back of the camera's screen and texted the photo to Phil Brown at the Harris Center. Phil identified it as a Black-legged Kittiwake and seemed pretty excited, so I put the word out to a couple of other local birders, posted to eBird, and followed up with updates to Phil after I saw it fly south and land in a different location.

For anyone interested, the GPS location of my kayak for this photograph is 42°58'45.132" N 71°55'54.774" W. Photo details: 840 mm focal length, 1/2000 to 1/3200 second, f9.0, and ISO 100 to 800. Happy birding!

The 2023 Nighthawk Migration



Migrating Common Nighthawk by Debra Powers, 8-20-2023, Rollinsford, NH.

Record Nighthawk Count at Franklin Falls

Story and photo by Rob Woodward

In this space last year, I wrote about the importance of a river valley to count large numbers of nighthawks. During the 2021 and 2022 nighthawk migration seasons, I paid my dues by watching from the parking garage in downtown Laconia with poor results. I knew I needed a new location in a river valley. I studied the maps and decided the best place with a river would be the Franklin Falls Recreation Area on the Pemigewasset River in Franklin. My only concern was that I ran a scouting visit on August 21, 2022 with a count of zero nighthawks, but still I felt it was worth trying, at least for one season.

The first two counts of 2023 on August 20 and 21 totaled a modest 100+ birds. The next two counts on August 23 and 24 were much better, with totals of 915 and 829 respectively. These numbers alone satisfied me that this site was a worthwhile location for counting nighthawks. Then the next two counts of August 26 and 27 with only 98 birds made me wonder, but I had to keep trying.

The weather on August 28 was ideal for nighthawk migration. In fact, two days earlier, I predicted a "big flight" for this date. A moderate south wind blew with temperatures in the 70s (F). Most importantly, I was joined by two others who were there to help with the count, Miriam Simmons of Northfield and Shipp Webb of Franklin. Both had stopped by at least briefly earlier in the week. No one was asked to come, they appeared of their own volition (and intuition?). As far as I knew, they had little or no experience counting nighthawks.

The count began at 4:00 pm with little to show until



The Franklin Falls dam nighthawk watch site.

about 5:00 pm. Without warning, a flood of nighthawks inundated the surrounding area, first coming directly overhead. Pretty soon, Miriam discovered a “river” of birds streaming northeast well to our south. She set up her chair and focused exclusively on those birds. I was working on the birds streaming overhead until I discovered a second “river” of birds to the west flying north. I asked Shipp to take over the count overhead. We counted birds continuously, with maybe two very brief breaks, until 6:40 pm.

I checked with Miriam at least three different times to confirm that her birds were moving northeast out of the area and were unrelated to the birds coming up the river straight at us overhead. I glanced over a few times to see the river for myself. Those birds were streaming right to left toward the woods and beyond our count area. The group to the west that I counted was very clearly separate from the other two groups, over and west of the river. Miriam and I tried to count by fives but there were so many to count we could not keep up. Miriam even mentioned that for every five she counted, probably seven passed. I know my count was similarly low, in part because they were at different distances and different heights. All birds flew in a northerly direction, there were none coming back downstream confusing the count. At least twice, I called out to “reset” the count to make it easier to keep track. Two of Miriam’s counts hit 1,232 and 1,411. I was counting by fives until I hit 100, wrote that down, and started over. Those 100s total 2,600 nighthawks.

The night’s total was a staggering 8,603 Common Nighthawks, a number that boggles the mind. By way of comparison, in the 16 years of counting nighthawks systematically in Concord, the highest daily count is 2,811 from August 14, 2014. The highest ever recorded state-wide was 4,000 in Plymouth on August 27, 1976. It is hard to find a state high-count on eBird in any other state higher than this. The highest eBird count is 200,000 from Charleston, West Virginia in 1947. The Franklin Falls count can only be described as an anomaly, but anomalies do occur

in nature. We are rarely present to witness one.

I have at least two reasons why I have confidence in the validity of this count. For starters, I have two witnesses. In fact, they are more than witnesses, they were active participants in the count, not passive observers. Each of us counted a separate sector that involved separate birds. The birds were easy enough to see – Miriam counted with binoculars not a scope and Shipp and I counted ours with the naked eye. Binoculars would have created too small a field of view. The flood of birds was so large and lasted so long, I am confident the only inaccuracy to the count is that it is too low. If the actual number of birds present was 4,000 not 8,000, that would mean all three of us counted two birds for every one present, which is utterly impossible. Interesting to note is that none of us saw all 8,000 birds. We each counted a separate group and only collectively saw that many.

Another important factor is that nighthawk counts become difficult and messy when birds fly north, then turn around and come back. Are these the same ones already counted? They get in the way of the northbound birds and confuse the count. On this evening, all birds were generally northbound, there was no southbound “leakage” back into the northbound flight. Swirling feeding flocks also make counts difficult. None of the birds were feeding and swirling, all were flying directly. The only difficulty of the count was keeping up with the sustained volume over a 90 minute period.

How could there be such a high count? The weather and date are contributing factors, as late August is the peak of migration and winds were southerly with temperatures in the 70s (F). Miriam later sent me a screen shot of the radar image of New England at the time of the count, showing rain to the northwest and southeast, possibly creating a funnel effect. The site is favorably situated in a river valley. The topography creates something of a “box canyon” crowding the birds into a smaller space than the broad river valley of Concord. Is there in fact something intangibly special about this site? That question will be answered in the coming years when it either proves itself to be a particularly bountiful location or it reverts to the mean.

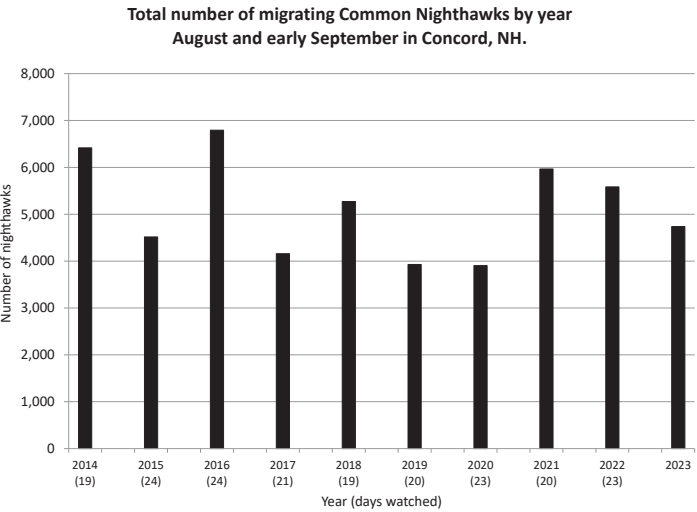
There was one more large count the following day totaling 1,196 birds on a moderate south wind, which my eBird report describes as “probably an undercount since it was a solo effort,” followed by an unusually high September count of 601 on September 3, with four other observers. The season ended on September 6 with a remarkable total of 12,626 nighthawks. Now that the need for a river valley in nighthawk counting is settled, I look forward to counting at Franklin Falls in the coming years to see if anything close to this year’s count is possible.

The nighthawk season runs from the last two weeks in August through the first week of September. If you would

like to help count or simply observe, this site can be found by going north on Route 127 (W. Bow Street) off Central Street in Franklin for two miles. You will see signage and a parking lot on the left. Walk down the paved road to the dam.

Concord Nighthawk Migration Watch

Zeke Cornell again led the fall nighthawk watch in Concord, NH at the usual site on the roof of the Capitol Commons Garage on Storrs St. The fall 2023 watch began on August 17, but the first nighthawks weren’t detected until the next day. Zeke’s tally on August 28 (Rob Woodward’s big night in Franklin) was 1,602 which would normally be considered a good flight. The figure below shows the total nighthawks tallied during fall migration at the site in the last ten years (2014-2023). The data for 2023 is from August 17 through September 5, 2023 totaling 4,738 nighthawks. Data collected by Zeke Cornell and Rob Woodward.



Brett Amy Thelen and Russ Cobb enjoy a nighthawk watch, 8-27-2023.

Powder Mill Pond Nighthawk Migration, 2023

Story and photos by Phil Brown

For a second year running, the Harris Center for Conservation Education monitored migrating Common Nighthawks along the shoreline of Powder Mill Pond in Hancock, NH. Former Hancock residents, Don and Lillian Stokes, first put this site on the map as a nighthawk migration hotspot of the Contoocook River Valley. Their annual backyard watches on late August evenings starting around 2005 built momentum and drew a crowd of friends at a “nighthawk party” which they hosted each year around the peak of migration. Counts of over a thousand birds in an evening weren’t uncommon during their monitoring of this spectacle for over a decade.



Nighthawks streaming by the Concord Migration Watch on 8-20-23, by Rebecca Suomala.



The moon over North Pack Monadnock during a nighthawk watch on Powdermill Pond.

Last fall's pilot season at the edge of their former property was an attempt to further document this local migration phenomenon and better quantify it over an unbroken period of time, as close to the entirety of the nighthawk migration window as possible. This would allow for comparisons to other nighthawk watches in the state and the region.

Each evening for three weeks between August 20 and September 8 (a day shorter than our first season on either end), one or more experienced Harris Center staff and volunteers observed and tallied migration from privately-owned land from 5:30 - 7:30 pm (or so). This year's tally of 5,123 migrating nighthawks was on par with last year's count, which was just over 300 more individuals. At least one individual bird was observed and deemed to be migrating on each of the nineteen evenings.

Like last year, our team rotated evenings as best as schedules would permit, mainly ensuring that at least two counters were present at any one time. Nighthawks sometimes travel in broad fronts that are difficult to count, or they can be tiny, distant specks, so multiple observers are crucial on those nights especially. We set up lawn chairs in a field with the river and adjacent ridgelines in view, observing mainly with binoculars, but at times, with scopes too. We aimed for consistency night-to-night and adhered closely to similar start and end times, but rainy weather would sometimes cut our watch short.

The peak of this year's migration seemed to align with reports coming in from other regional watch locations. During a particular six-day stretch between August 23-28, observers tallied 3,443 individual nighthawks (67% of season total). This, too, was similar to last year in which a seven-day stretch of August 22-28 produced a remarkably similar 3,426 nighthawks, or 62% of that season's tally. These similar counts during a similar stretch of time recall the hard-wired

migration of another long-distance migrant, the Broad-winged Hawk, whose peak migration at Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory can often be narrowed down to a period of a few days in mid-September. This will be an interesting marker to watch as our dataset grows.

As with any watch, there were slow times and thrilling ones. Some evenings were fast-paced and full of nighthawks in the sky for nearly the entirety of the count period. Two particular evenings had a single bird each. That's part of the thrill and the mystery, but what drives some observers is the chance to catch the peak of migration. It can be difficult to pin this down to a single night, and despite our best predictions, we can't always know when the big one will come. A few of us who were fortunate enough to be on hand the evening of August 23 were treated with a most thrilling evening of nighthawk migration in which 2,039 migrants were tallied – a new record high count for this location!

Once again, our team of Harris Center staff and volunteers noted numerous qualitative observations and kept complete eBird species lists. Our count was 86 overall bird species from this one location and included such diverse gems as Purple Martin, American Bittern, Cape May Warbler, and Great Horned Owl. The large flocks of other insectivores were also enjoyable to watch, and it was interesting to compare the timing of swallows and swifts, as well as the many Cedar Waxwings hawking insects over the field, to nights with big nighthawk flights.

So many questions remain about this enigmatic species, and more research and observations are needed to understand better and, ultimately, conserve the state-endangered Common Nighthawk. Their migration over our region is just a small, but still important, part of their story. The Harris Center also connected several dozen more people directly to nighthawk migration at public events in Peterborough and Keene in late August, raising awareness and appreciation for this remarkable species. We look forward to connecting more people to this awe-inspiring late summer spectacle again in 2024.

Below are a few notes from the season, excerpted from my posts to the NHBirds email list.

8-20-2023 – 81 Common Nighthawks (CONI)

Only 81 for the night in Hancock to kick off the second season of our count, but thrilled to find a Purple Martin mixed in with many dozens of swallows including cliff and bank, and lots of Chimney Swifts. The martin, a male, appears to be the second site record in eBird and only Monadnock Region fall record in the past 10 years.

Eastern Kingbirds were also staging tonight with 19 counted in view at once, many foraging and sparring for space with abundant Cedar Waxwings. An aerial insectivore bonanza tonight! Maybe Concord's nighthawks will work their way down in our direction tomorrow.

8-21-2023 – 318 CONI

Count of 318 tonight along the shore of Powder Mill Pond, about 250 coming in two large groups five minutes apart. Lots of distant foraging and a definite southbound direction tonight.

8-22-2023 – 67 CONI

I tallied 67 nighthawks between 5:37 and 7:37 pm tonight, not too surprising a tally for a cooler evening with a north wind (though great for raptors, these are generally not the best conditions for a big flight). Most were moving across the pond east to west, and very little foraging was observed. New species from the migration watch for the season included several raptors. The Merlin wrapped things up as it harassed the local Barn Swallows and waxwings, nearly catching one of the latter for a final meal of the day.

8-23-2023 – 2,039 CONI

I had help for the first time this season and thank goodness! The biggest all-time count recorded on Powder Mill Pond (according to eBird and *The Birds of New Hampshire*) by several hundred birds. Four times have 1,000 birds been recorded here in the past, the previous highest count of 1,399 birds I tallied with Don and Lillian Stokes from their former home on the pond on 8-30-2017.

Tonight Henry Walters, Brett Amy Thelen, and I divided the sky and bore witness to a steady stream of northbound nighthawks. Rather than passing in groups, they streamed across the sky for long periods and in broad fronts with up to three distinct 'lines' at a time. Sometimes, several hundred passed before we got a momentary break. As the evening wore on, many dozens foraged low over the field where we stood and put on an incredible show in the orange glow of fading daylight. Twice we heard vocalizations (two different calls), which is one time more than I heard last fall.

There were a few other neat birds around too. A flyby Bald Eagle hunting the pond at sunset followed by a calling Great Horned Owl were two that were hard to miss.

Glad to hear that several others had some fantastic counts tonight, too.

8-27-2023 – 116 CONI

Really challenging to get an accurate count tonight as birds moved in both directions and a couple of dozen birds were "sloshing" around the close fields and adjacent pond, but clearly not a huge migration night here. Steven Lamonde and Henry Walters covered the last two nights, respectively, with totals in the 150-300 range each night. Hoping for a bigger movement tomorrow.

8-31-2023 – 344 CONI

A high southbound flight that was hard to witness in yesterday evening's blue sky made for an interesting evening.

Birds seemed to be on a mission, and the flight may have started earlier in the day.

Lots of migration in the air following the passage of storms associated with the cold front. Our first migrating harrier of the season.

9-4-2023 – 145 CONI

All moving east to west or southwest. A low flock of 20+ foraged in the field around me for half an hour before moving on. Other highlights included an American Bittern that flew in and posed for us in a nearby wetland, two Solitary Sandpipers, a Northern Harrier, and a Merlin.

Phil Brown is Bird Conservation Director/Land Specialist at the Harris Center for Conservation Education in Hancock, NH. Through his role, he coordinates the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory in Peterborough, as well as other avian research projects and community programs across the Monadnock Region. He lives in Hancock, NH, with his family.

Fall 2023 New Hampshire Raptor Migration Report

by Iain MacLeod



The Broad-winged Hawk is the most numerous hawk during fall migration in New Hampshire. Photo by Tom Momeyer, 9-14-2023, Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory.

Every fall, thousands of migrating raptors pass through New Hampshire on southbound journeys to their winter territories. Many dedicated hawkwatchers scour the skies and enter daily observations into the Hawk Migration Association of North America's HawkCount database, allowing real-time analysis of trends. In 2023, counts were conducted at four sites in New Hampshire logging 689.75 hours of observations and tallying 14,963 migrant raptors equating to 21.69 raptors/hour of effort (see Table 1 at end of article).

Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory

Fall 2023 marked the 19th consecutive fall season of daily coordinated counts conducted at the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory at Miller State Park in Peterborough, NH (Table 3). The count was conducted this year under the leadership of the Harris Center for Conservation Education in a formal agreement with the NH Division of Natural and Cultural Resources. The Seasonal Counter/Raptor Biologist duties for 2023 were split between Levi Burford and Katrina Fenton. Julie Brown, Phil Brown, Tom Delaney, Glen Chretien, Mark Timmerman, and I served as official counters on days when Levi or Katrina weren't there. Phil Brown served as the Raptor Observatory Coordinator and a wonderful group of dedicated volunteers rounded out the coverage and helped scan the skies.

Daily coverage officially started on September 1 but counts were conducted on four days in August (20, 27, 28 and 31) and ran to November 20. In that time, 567.75 observation hours were logged (17.75 hours in August, 216.75 in September, 213 in October, and 120.25 in November). The total observation hours were a little above the previous 10-year average.

A total of 13,058 individual migratory raptors were recorded. That equals 22.99 raptors per hour. The prior 10-year average is 12,307 raptors (10-year averages in this report refer to data from just the prior 10 years, 2013-2022). The 10-year average for raptors per hour is 22.87.

A record-high three **Black Vulture** were counted. These "southern" vultures are continuing to spread north into New Hampshire and are likely already breeding here. This is the third consecutive year we have counted them at Pack.

Our first migrating **Turkey Vultures** were noted on September 4 (which is very early). The count of 286 didn't come close to the record counts of the past two years. The prior 10-year average is 270. The biggest single day count was 54 on October 14. The trend for the 19 years of counting is very solidly up and the 10-year trend shows a more rapid increase.

The **Osprey** count at Pack hit another all-time low (122). The 19-year trend is solidly down. To put that in perspective, during the first 10 years of counting here (2005-2014) we had a yearly average of 249 Ospreys. This trend is seen consistently at hawkwatch sites throughout the Northeast, and to me is evidence of a downturn in the Osprey population in interior Maine and the Canadian Maritime provinces where Bald Eagles are expanding at a rapid rate.

The **Bald Eagle** total (196) dropped slightly from the 200+ mark of the past two years but was still well above the 10-year average of 163. Three were counted in August, 97 in September, with 54 in October, and 42 in November. The peak one-day count was 10 on September 22.



Osprey by Tom Momeyer, 9-14-2023, Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory.

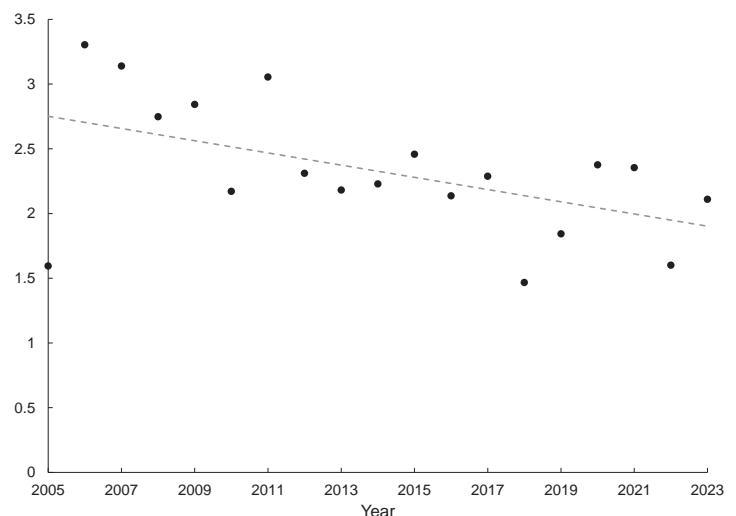
Our count of 90 **Northern Harriers** was slightly higher than the 10-year average of 88. Thirty-six were counted in September, 34 in October and 20 in November. The peak flight day was September 21 when seven were counted.

The **Sharp-shinned Hawk** count (1,198) was a nice rebound after last-year's low count (Figure 1). The 10-year average is 1,129. The bulk were seen in September (639) and the peak day was September 21 when 100 were counted, but, mid-October saw a really solid push with three 80+ days in a row (October 13, 14, 15).

The count of 167 **Cooper's Hawks** was well ahead of the 10-year average (141). Overall, their 18-year trend line is down, but looking at only the last 10 years of Cooper's/hour it shows a slight positive trend.

Only six **Northern Goshawks** were counted this year, which is our lowest tally ever. The 10-year average is 23 and some years we have counted more than 60, although in

Figure 1. Sharp-shinned Hawk counts per hours of effort from 2005-2023 at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH.



the last ten we barely hit the twenty mark. This spectacular boreal forest raptor is clearly in steep decline.

The **Broad-winged Hawk** count of 10,256 was well ahead of the 10-year average (9,397). The highest daily tally was September 15 (2,841, Table 2). September 21 added another 2,543 to the tally. The bulk of Broad-winged migration is concentrated in a few days in mid-September. Only seven were seen in October with a late straggler on October 15.

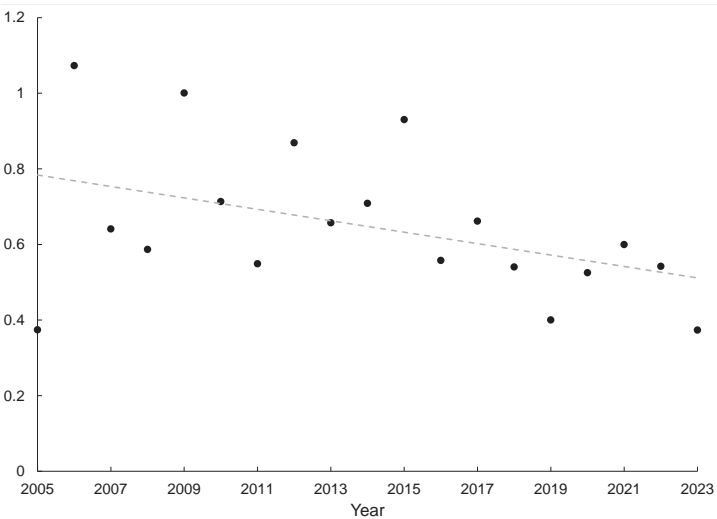
Table 2. Broad-winged Hawk fall migration totals and peak counts at Pack Monadnock, NH, 2005-2023. Source: HMANA's HawkCount.org Database.

Year	Total	Highest one-day count	Date
2005	3,978	1,687	18-Sep
2006	7,595	3,044	11-Sep
2007	7,776	2,676	16-Sep
2008	6,835	2,424	18-Sep
2009	4,322	2,042	16-Sep
2010	7,557	3,328	18-Sep
2011	11,831	5,208	18-Sep
2012	8,848	2,556	17-Sep
2013	8,221	2,759	17-Sep
2014	11,043	4,101	15-Sep
2015	16,693	3,959	17-Sep
2016	10,530	3,245	15-Sep
2017	8,744	1,836	21-Sep
2018	6,756	2,239	24-Sep
2019	7,840	2,436	18-Sep
2020	8,815	2,886	18-Sep
2021	6,055	1,636	14-Sep
2022	9,369	4,987	17-Sep
2023	10,256	2,841	15-Sep

After a record-setting count last year (302), the **Red-shouldered Hawk** count this year was just 188 (but still above the 10-year average of 174). The peak count day was October 1 when 41 were tallied. The 18-year trend is strongly positive indicating that this lovely hawk is doing very well right now.

The **Red-tailed Hawk** tally of 212 was the lowest count since 2011, the third lowest ever, and well below the 10-year average of 330 (Figure 2). Red-taileds are late season migrants. We only tallied three in September, 36 in October and 173 in November (with a peak flight of 38 on November 1). The 19-year trend is steadily down and that decline has become steeper in the last ten years. All other evidence suggests that Red-tailed populations are *not* actually

Figure 2. Red-tailed Hawk counts per hours of effort from 2005-2023 at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH.

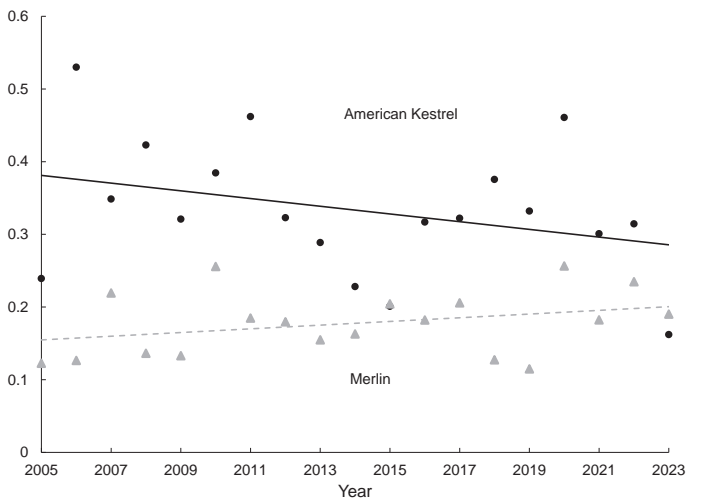


declining, but more northern breeders are wintering farther north and fewer are migrating through New Hampshire.

Only one **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen this season. Ten Golden Eagles were tallied, which is exactly the 10-year average. One was counted in September, four in October, and five in November. Overall, the Golden Eagle trend is slightly up.

The **American Kestrel** count of 92 was startling. It represents the lowest count per hour ever for this site, and way below the 10-year average of 168. Last year, I was rejoicing that the kestrel had turned the corner after bottoming out in 2014, but now we have a new bottom. This is the first year in the history of this site that more Merlins were counted than kestrels (Figure 3). I have no idea what happened to kestrels this year.

Figure 3. American Kestrel and Merlin counts per hours of effort from 2005-2023 at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH.



The **Merlin** count of 108 was a little lower than last year but still above the 10-year average (99). There were 47 counted in September, 60 in October and one in November.

The **Peregrine Falcon** count rebounded over last year with a solid 61 (only the third time it has surpassed 60 here). The 10-year average is 48.

Alton Bay Hawkwatch

Fall of 2023 was the fourth year that Rob Woodward has conducted a count on Pine Mountain in the Morse Preserve in Alton. He counted for 91.5 hours this year and tallied a total of 1,356 migrating raptors between September 12 and November 5. In 2022, he counted for 101 hours and tallied 726, in 2021 he counted for 61 hours and tallied 3,410 raptors, and in 2020 he counted for 23.25 hours and tallied 1,472.

Rob counted 73 migrating **Turkey Vultures** which is very close to last year's count. Only one **Osprey** was tallied this year (11 were counted in 2020 and 2021 and four last year). Only nine **Bald Eagles** were counted (25 were counted last year). Five **Northern Harriers** passed the mountain in 2023 (the same number as last year).

A total of 87 **Sharp-shinned Hawks** were seen in 2023 (149 last year) and only one **Cooper's Hawk**. No **Northern Goshawks** have been tallied at this count yet.

Three **Red-shouldered Hawks** were tallied in 2023 (same as last year). The 1,152 **Broad-winged Hawks** this year was a nice jump up from last year. September 15 was the peak day with 1,077 seen. Only eight **Red-tailed Hawks** were counted, likely because Rob's last count day was in the first week of November (and the peak push of this species is later in November).

Only three **American Kestrels** were tallied this year (19 were counted last year). The count of nine **Merlins** was slightly down from last year. One **Peregrine Falcon** was seen.

Interlakes Elementary School

Fall 2023 marked the 43rd year that staff from the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center have conducted a hawkwatching program with all fourth grade students at Interlakes School in Meredith. As part of the class, the students participate in hawkwatches from the grounds of the school. This year, the two count

dates chosen were September 19 and 20. A total of 244 raptors were counted over the two days: 14 Turkey Vultures, 1 Osprey, 10 Bald Eagles, 3 Northern Harrier, 31 Sharp-shinned hawks, 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, 177 Broad-winged Hawks, 2 Red-tailed Hawks, and 4 American Kestrels.

Concord School District

Fall 2023 marked the 13th year of data in HawkCount from this site. This year they counted on five days in September (15, 21, 22, 25 and 26). They tallied 305 migrating raptors over the five days (just shy of the record high set last year): 25 Turkey Vultures, 1 Osprey, 2 Bald Eagles, 4 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 250 Broad-winged Hawks, 4 Red-tailed Hawks, 1 American Kestrel, and 15 unidentified hawks.

Carter Hill Raptor Migration Observatory

No data were entered in HawkCount in 2023.

Little Round Top

No data were entered in HawkCount in 2023.

Data Sources

HawkCount.org. Online raptor migration database of the Hawk Migration Association of North America.

CBC Data are provided by National Audubon Society and through the generous efforts of Bird Studies Canada and countless volunteers across the Western Hemisphere.

Iain MacLeod is Executive Director of the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center in Holderness, NH and is President of the Board of NorthEast Hawk Watch and former board chair of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). Iain founded the Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory in 2004 and has studied raptors (particularly Ospreys) for 40+ years. Iain is a member of the New Hampshire Bird Records Editorial Team and a former member of the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee. In 2019, he was the very proud recipient of NH Audubon's Goodhue-Elkins Award.

Observers at the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory, 9-14-2023, by Tom Momeyer.



Table 1. Total raptors counted in 2023 at all New Hampshire watch sites. Source: HMANA's HawkCount.org database.

	Obs. Hrs.	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	UR	Total
Pack Monadhock	567.75	3	286	122	196	90	1,198	167	6	188	10,256	212	1	10	92	108	61	62	13,058
Alton Bay	91.5	0	73	1	9	5	87	1	0	3	1,152	8	0	0	3	9	1	4	1,356
Concord School	20.5	0	25	1	2	1	4	2	0	0	250	4	0	0	1	0	0	15	305
Interlakes School	10	0	14	1	10	3	31	0	0	2	177	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	244
	689.75	3	398	125	217	99	1,320	170	6	193	11,835	226	1	10	100	117	62	81	14,963

Table 3. Total raptors counted for all years (2005-2023) at Pack Monadhock, NH. * The average is for the previous ten years (2013-2022). Source: HMANA's HawkCount.org Database.

Year	Obs. Hrs.	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	SW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	UR	SE	TOTAL
2005	330.25	0	29	219	52	24	520	47	11	23	3978	0	122	0	5	78	40	11	62	0	5221
2006	408.25	0	99	257	55	77	1253	213	68	46	7595	0	407	0	11	201	48	29	76	0	10435
2007	430	0	121	291	53	121	1288	186	49	112	7776	0	263	0	5	143	90	44	82	0	10624
2008	435.75	0	47	256	50	87	1189	162	28	67	6835	0	254	0	3	183	59	17	37	0	9274
2009	420.75	0	80	182	51	88	1196	133	25	129	4322	0	421	0	6	135	56	30	109	0	6963
2010	627.75	0	145	298	85	115	1248	168	66	109	7606	0	410	0	10	221	147	53	105	0	10786
2011	368	0	127	271	54	58	1124	145	21	43	11831	0	202	0	9	170	68	40	93	0	14256
2012	600.75	0	164	314	105	91	1388	181	63	209	8848	1	522	1	7	194	108	54	74	0	12324
2013	575	0	142	193	101	100	1254	146	25	118	8221	0	378	1	11	166	89	48	36	1	11030
2014	497	0	99	213	120	85	1094	126	22	123	11043	0	348	1	7	112	80	39	53	0	13565
2015	586.92	0	137	201	132	125	1443	115	48	141	16593	1	546	1	13	118	120	54	57	0	19845
2016	527	0	322	242	136	92	1126	163	48	117	10530	0	294	1	5	167	96	49	78	0	13466
2017	515.25	0	324	219	163	82	1179	142	16	181	8744	0	341	2	7	166	106	64	68	0	11804
2018	463.25	0	98	189	176	64	668	124	11	126	6756	0	246	2	22	172	58	31	108	0	8851
2019	557.17	0	268	171	180	54	1027	105	9	181	7840	0	223	0	4	185	64	64	128	0	10503
2020	557.67	0	172	162	185	108	1325	180	12	223	8815	0	293	0	5	257	143	30	122	0	12032
2021	548.42	2	641	182	227	85	1291	157	13	223	6055	0	329	1	11	165	100	57	66	0	9605
2022	553.42	1	493	137	210	84	886	149	22	301	9369	0	300	0	11	175	130	44	58	0	12370
2023	567.75	3	286	122	196	90	1198	167	6	188	10256	0	212	1	10	92	108	61	62	0	13058
Average*	538	0	270	191	163	88	1129	141	23	174	9397	0	330	1	10	168	99	48	77	0	12307

Key to Tables 1 and 3.

TV	Turkey Vulture (<i>Cathartes aura</i>)	RS	Red-shouldered Hawk (<i>Buteo lineatus</i>)	ML	Martin (<i>Falco columbarius</i>)
OS	Osprey (<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>)	BW	Broad-winged Hawk (<i>Buteo platypterus</i>)	PG	Peregrine Falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>)
BE	Bald Eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	SW	Swainson's Hawk (<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>)	UR	Unidentified Raptor
NH	Northern Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>)	RT	Red-tailed Hawk (<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>)	SE	Short-eared Owl (<i>Asio flammeus</i>)
SS	Sharp-shinned Hawk (<i>Accipiter striatus</i>)	RL	Rough-legged Hawk (<i>Buteo lagopus</i>)		
CH	Cooper's Hawk (<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>)	GE	Golden Eagle (<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>)		
NG	Northern Goshawk (<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>)	AK	American Kestrel (<i>Falco sparverius</i>)		

Northern Saw-whet Owl Migration in the Monadnock Region

by Hillary Siener



A Northern Saw-whet Owl banded on Harris Center lands in fall 2023. Photo by Ben Conant ©.

In the fall of 2023, the Harris Center for Conservation Education (<https://harriscenter.org>) held its second season monitoring the Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) population and their migration through the Monadnock Region. This project contributes to the growing knowledge about the movements of this species throughout North America. We follow capture and banding protocols outlined by Project OwlNet, which is a continent-wide network of researchers investigating this secretive owl's migration. The Harris Center also expanded educational opportunities related to the banding project in 2023, reaching about 100 individuals.

Our capture techniques involve using a temporary array of four 12-m long mist nets and broadcasting the male territorial call on a continuous loop to lure owls towards the nets. Always outfitted with headlamps, and sometimes with mittens and toe warmers, our team opens nets and turns on the lure for four to five hours per night (weather-permitting), and checks the nets for owls every 30 minutes. Captured owls



Assistant Annamarie Saenger banding a Northern Saw-whet Owl in fall 2023. Photo by Brett Amy Thelen.

are removed from the nets by trained individuals, and they are measured, sexed, examined to determine age, outfitted with a federal band, and released back into the wild.

Over the course of 22 nights between October 8 and November 14, we captured 100 individual saw-whet owls. On average, five owls were captured per night. Halloween and November 5 were the busiest nights of the season with 15 and 16 owls captured, respectively (Figure 1). Migration timing peaked in early November, which is about one week later than was documented in 2022 at our sites. Project OwlNet stations across the northeast all reported a late migration in 2023.

Of the 100 captures, there were 93 females, one male, and six were unable to be sexed. The higher proportion of females is typical at saw-whet owl banding stations. Although playing the males advertising call may attract more females (despite not being breeding season) or deter males, there is growing evidence to suggest the species has a sex-differentiated migration with males not migrating, or not migrating as far as females.

It did not appear to be a great breeding season for saw-whet owls in the northeast. Only 13% of owls caught were hatch year birds (Figure 2). A poor breeding season could be the result of low cone crops in the northeastern boreal regions in the fall of 2022, which would result in a low small mammal population during the owl breeding season. There is also some question as to how much impact the spring 2023 Canada wildfires had on owl breeding success.

This season we captured four owls that were already wearing bands. One banded in Tadoussac, Quebec was captured 19 nights later at the Harris Center site, traveling a straight-line distance of an estimated 19.7 miles per night. The other three owls were banded in the fall of 2022 in northern West Virginia, southeast Pennsylvania, and coastal Maryland. All recaptures help to paint a picture of where

these owls move from one year to the next, rate of travel, important migration routes, their longevity, and much more.

The Harris Center will continue to monitor the saw-whet owl population, contribute to the continent-wide understanding of their movements, and offer educational programs in 2024. Special thanks to the Harris Center’s 50th Anniversary Fund, Project OwlNet, and NH Fish and Game. This project is also made possible by an excellent group of Harris Center staff and 16 volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours to this night-time project in 2023.

Figure 1. Number of Northern Saw-whet Owls captured per night in fall 2023 in New Hampshire’s Monadnock Region by the Harris Center for Conservation Education.

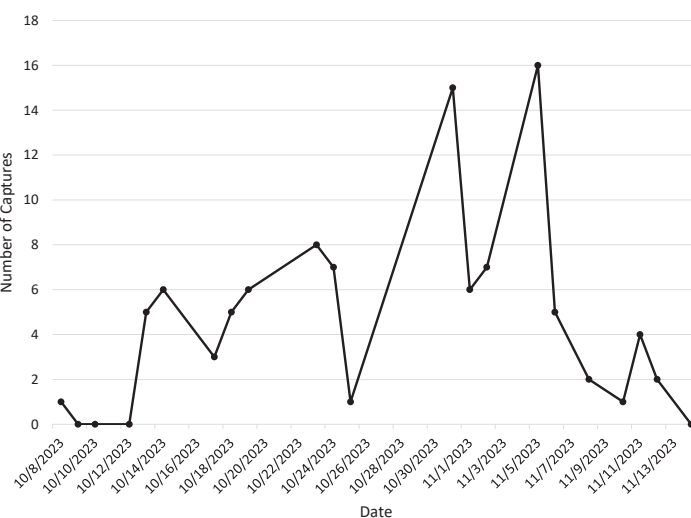
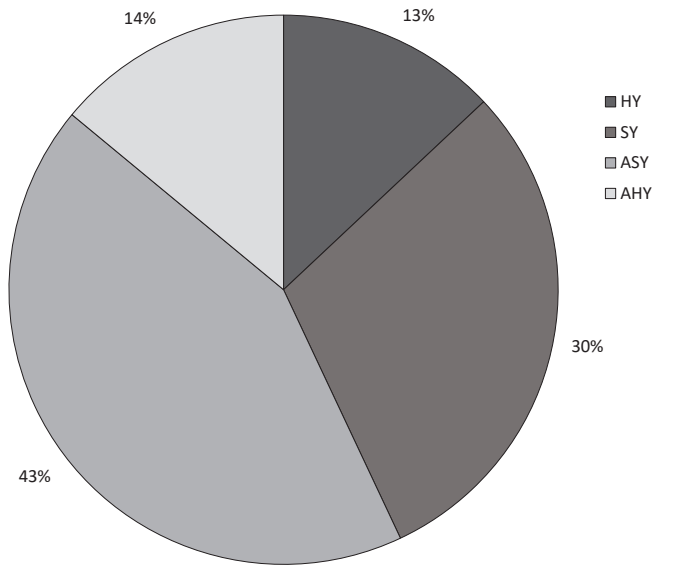


Figure 2. Age breakdown of Northern Saw-whet Owls captured in fall 2023 (HY = hatch year; SY = second year; ASY = after second year; AHY = after hatch year) in New Hampshire’s Monadnock Region by the Harris Center for Conservation Education.



Fall Pelagic Field Trip

by Stephen R. Mirick

Edited from a post by Steve Mirick to the NHBirds email list on 9-6-2023.

On September 5, 2023, the Seacoast Chapter of NH Audubon sponsored an all-day pelagic trip aboard the MV Granite State out of Rye Harbor, NH. We started with a tour of the Isles of Shoals where we were able to locate several Great Cormorants on Square Rock as well as an adult gannet. We were also able to get views of three American Oystercatchers on Lunging Island. This species is now nesting regularly on the islands. Just past the islands there were large numbers of Common Eiders and a couple of flocks of Black Guillemots. After this, we cruised offshore toward “Old Scantum” and “New Scantum” and Jeffreys Ledge working in a counterclockwise loop and working the outer edge of Jeffreys Ledge before heading home.

With the exception of a decent number of Wilson’s Storm-Petrels for the date, pelagic birds were very scarce offshore as has been the norm recently. There was an interesting assortment of passerines offshore, however, considering the weather pattern and unfavorable migration conditions. A Parasitic Jaeger was seen chasing a Baltimore Oriole! Some folks also got photos of an Eastern Red Bat flying over Smuttynose Island (<https://flic.kr/p/2p1n9oo>).

The highlight for most on board was the absolutely spectacular performance of a young calf of the Humpback Whale named Shuffleboard. This baby alternated flipper flapping and breaching over and over. The interns counted 43 breaches from the baby!!!

Thanks to Holly Bauer for organizing this trip through the Seacoast Chapter of NH Audubon and to Captain Pete Reynolds and crew for helping to spot whales and birds!

A trip report with totals and some photos can be seen at: <https://ebird.org/nh/tripreport/155840>



This Humpback Whale calf breached for more than ten minutes during the pelagic birding trip. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 9-5-2023.

Paddling the Androscoggin River from Errol to Lake Umbagog

Story and photo by Robert A. Quinn



Late fall paddling on Lake Umbagog

The bird highlights were modest (see below), but the experience of paddling up the Androscoggin River to Lake Umbagog on November 28, 2023 was exhilarating and sublime!

A white velvet sheet of snow covered our boats and cars as Tom McShane and I rose in the dark. It was 15 degrees (F), calm, and cloudy as we drove the short distance to the Steamer Diamond boat launch just north of Errol, NH. We slid our boats across the snow to the icy edge of the open Androscoggin River. Nothing was stirring as dawn seeped into our day. The river was calm, the crystalline coatings on the pointy trees exquisite.

Everything takes a little more time to prepare for a safe launch at this time of the year, but within a few minutes we were ready. A shelf of about ten feet of ice between the shore and the open water was easily navigated as we slid into the water.

Our first ducks, two dark blobs in the distance, resolved into a male Ring-necked Duck and a male Lesser Scaup. The scaup kindly showed us his shorter wing stripe (eliminating the very similar Greater Scaup). Paddling slowly brought us pleasingly close to these ducks which paid little attention to us. A snow shower urged us to quicken our pace as we paddled by the towering “landmark pine” upstream toward the lake.

Another strong snow squall caused us to pause just before we reached “River Junction,” where the Magalloway River enters the Androscoggin River just after the Androscoggin leaves Lake Umbagog. Back in the boats, we hit open water, with birds! The more easily accessible south end of the lake was frozen and bird free. That is why we had paddled up the Androscoggin in search of open water, but the waterfowl soon disappeared behind the dense veil of an intense snow squall.



Parasitic Jaeger chasing a Baltimore Oriole during the pelagic trip on 9-5-2023. Photos by Samuel Zhang, offshore waters, NH.

We retreated to the shelter of River Junction and waited for the squall to pass. A second try was slightly more successful for seeing the ducks, a flock of scoters, more Ring-neckeds and scaup, and hundreds of birds that were probably Common Mergansers, unidentifiable wraiths in the wind-driven snow. Prudently, we retreated to the shelter of the rivers once again and headed downstream to our cars.

The only bird of note on the return paddle was a Black-backed Woodpecker that flew across the river in front of me. The real show was the skyscape with its ever-changing, multi-colored clouds, highlighted by slim gashes of blue which alternated with pelting squalls from gusts that tested our paddling skills.

A modest list of birds, tallied during a tempestuous experience in the dramatic and wild landscape of early winter on Lake Umbagog was rewarded with a hot drink and camaraderie back in town.

Bird highlights:

- Canada Goose, a wild flock, no “golf-course” geese on this tree-enshrouded and remote lake.
- Green-winged Teal, a late one for up north.
- One Ring-necked Duck with his sidekick, a Lesser Scaup. The scaup repeatedly flew 100 feet and then waited for the Ring-necked to swim to catch up.
- Black Scoters, a dozen dark-winged scoters were almost assuredly this most-likely-in-autumn species.
- Common Merganser, a large patch of roiled up water way out in the lake was probably created by a big flock of these ducks, but they disappeared into the swirling snow. Umbagog has had flocks of 2,000 Common Mergansers in past Novembers.
- Unidentifiable duck species, a flock of 20+ birds were likely Ring-neckeds/scaup.
- Pied-billed Grebe, found by Tom. This bird was farther down the Androscoggin, and is always a treat in November.
- Black-backed Woodpecker, our only boreal species.

A Fall of Plenty Led to Fewer Birds at Feeders

by Grace McCulloch

It is not unusual to find me, completely oblivious to the rest of the world, staring up into a tree. Often my aim is to see *that* bird I just can't quite make out, but in the fall of 2023, I found myself staring at something else. While far less elusive, the phenomenon was no less marvelous.

The number of cones clustered at the top of Eastern White Pine trees that fall was staggering. They were evident



White Pine cones by Rebecca Suomala.

everywhere I looked—along the highway, on the water's edge as I kayaked, and scattered across my neighbor's backyard (much to his frustration!). Like oak species, Eastern White Pine trees go through cycles of bumper crop seed production every few years. Referred to as mast years, these times of copious seed production flood the forest with food, a strategy known as predator swamping. Oaks and birches employ a similar strategy, often with multiple tree species having a “mast year” at the same time. The vast amount of available food means that there will be plenty of seeds left for regeneration, not consumed by the predators.

The “predators” of Eastern White Pine cones are numerous. Black-capped Chickadees feed on the seeds, Red-breasted Nuthatches cache the seeds under loose bark for later, and Red Squirrels dismantle the cones munching on seeds and leaving large piles of discarded remnants. Small mammals, including mice and chipmunks, hurriedly gather the seeds to store for the winter ahead.

Many of you noted the absence of birds at your feeders this fall. This mast crop likely had much to do with it, in addition to a good oak and birch crop in many areas of the state. Birds tend to turn to backyard feeders when the weather gets colder, and food is scarce. Abundant food and a warm fall meant plenty of food was available for your backyard birds, including insects before the frost settled in. While it can be disheartening to not see birds at your feeder, a short walk in the woods made it clear that the birds were still around, busy reaping the benefits of a productive year. The summer of 2023 was also the wettest on record in New Hampshire. June, July, and August had more than 21 inches of rain combined, eight more than average. The extra water made for a great berry crop too!

While the birds may not have been as close as we'd like this fall, our patience was rewarded a few months later. A plethora of Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills arrived to feed

on the Eastern White Pine cones. It was a treat to watch large flocks feed, noisily calling from the towering trees. The 2024 annual Backyard Winter Bird Survey showed that the birds did eventually make it to our feeders, just in time to be counted. The annual Backyard Winter Bird Survey is a great way for us to examine trends in species over time. Please consider reporting your birds next year and visiting <https://nhbirdrecords.org/backyard-winter-bird-survey/> to find more information on how and when to participate.

This fall was a good reminder of the importance of natural food sources. NH Fish and Game recommends only feeding birds between December 1 and April 1. Just as migratory birds are fattening up for their journey southward, black bears are busy putting on fat for their hibernation. An easily accessible feeder is a perfect snack from a bear's standpoint. Please exercise common sense if you do choose to feed birds in the fall. A second story window feeder can be a good compromise—inaccessible to bears, but still providing opportunities to watch your local songbirds. Unfortunately, bears habituated to feeding can become problems that end in euthanasia. This is an ending no one wants and with common sense it is easily avoidable. Reach out to NH Fish and Game for more information on how to keep bears in the wild where they are supposed to be.

As for the abundant pine cones this fall, my neighbor implemented a new strategy for garden cone removal. Using a golf club, he took to putting them into a plastic garbage bin and hauling them off site. While in some cases this may be necessary (and fun if you take my neighbor's approach), I encourage you to put those cones and other scattered seeds to good use. The birds may not have been at feeders last fall, but try leaving the fallen cones and seeds in your yard next time. You may be surprised by the wildlife that partake in the feast!

Interview With a Birder— Pam Hunt

by Kathryn Frieden

Pam Hunt has been a force of nature in the New Hampshire birding scene for many years. She has worked as a Senior Biologist at NH Audubon since 2000, as well as volunteering her time with *New Hampshire Bird Records*, where she served as both the Spring and then the Winter editor for over 20 years. In 2020, she debuted the November County Challenge, which has stirred up quite a bit of excitement in the birding community. Besides birding, she has also been known to participate in Renaissance Fairs in her spare time.

How old were you when you became a "birder" and what got you started?

I was always interested in critters. When I was eleven, an uncle of mine who lived in New Jersey took us on a little field trip to Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge on November 1, 1975. There were thousands of geese and ducks and herons; all these cool big birds that were obvious, and something clicked. There was a science teacher in seventh grade who liked birds (Ecology Club, for example), so he was somewhat of a mentor. It took me a while to get up to speed. I had a bike and would poke around town. I had my favorite spots and went birding all the time. I still have notes from the late seventies from those places. I went to Cornell University because of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, which was really tiny back then. I took an ornithology class, met other birders, joined the local bird club, and got more involved that way.

Did you learn bird song at the beginning or did that come later?

That was probably around the same time. For the three summers I was in college, my summer job was working for the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas, doing what they call blockbusting. It was essentially doing a "big day" of birding five days a week for six to eight weeks, one for each block on the map. I got the job because a friend, a local birder, recommended me when somebody dropped out. They hired me, which was a lucky break. I had a similar opportunity back in high school when, through a connection between my hometown and the woman running the research program, I was able to volunteer at the tern colony on Great Gull Island in Long Island Sound during the summer. I also started the Johnstown, NY Christmas Bird Count during my college years, which is still running over 40 years later!

Do you have a favorite sighting in New Hampshire?

My most recent sighting is my favorite. Right now, it's a Song Sparrow.



*Pam Hunt
feeding two
Canada
Jays at once
by Unity
Dienes,
1-10-2021,
Pittsburg,
NH.*

How many birds are on your state list and what do you hope for next?

There are 372 birds on my list — the most recent one was the Black-necked Stilt that I added in May 2023. I suppose if I had to name a bird I'd like to see, it would be the American Three-toed Woodpecker, which probably doesn't occur here anymore. I saw one years ago in Montana, but the last one confirmed in New Hampshire was in 2000.

What is your favorite place to go birding in New Hampshire?

Trudeau Road in Bethlehem is a favorite. I've been there at all different times of the year and it is always interesting. I've skied there in winter and, even if there aren't a lot of birds, it is quite pretty with snow on the fir trees. Spring is buggy but that's when the birds are singing. Also a favorite is my Penacook Survey route, which is a ten-kilometer walk that I have been doing every week since 2005. I have been doing a weekly walk each place I've lived since coming to New Hampshire in 1989. There are so many changes that take place over the seasons and the years, both in birds and habitat. It will not surprise anyone to know that there have been huge increases in the number of Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, for example. Many vacant lots are built up, and what I called "Sparrow Alley" is now gone.

What other changes have you seen in birding over the years?

One big change is that with modern technology, it is easier to spread the word when there is an unusual sighting, which allows more people to see the bird. Also, we are now entering our field data directly into eBird. And of course, there have been big changes in bird populations over the years, some going down, and some increasing. Sometime in the next century, there will be Carolina Chickadees in New England!

Any ideas for future birding for you? Do you have a United States target bird?

I want to see all the endemics of the West Indies. So far, I have seen all but sixteen of them. Most of those are single island endemics. My favorite of the islands is Dominica. It's not a huge tourist destination, it's mostly forested, and it has the world's largest parrot – the Imperial Parrot. For the United States, there are a few scattered lifers I haven't seen, such as Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, and Colima Warbler. My latest life bird was a Black-capped Vireo that I saw last summer while at a meeting in Oklahoma.

Do you have any advice for young or new birders?

1. Don't rely on the Merlin app!
2. Find someone to show you around.
3. Context is important. You need to think about where and when the bird is expected, not just the field marks.

November County Challenge 2023

The November County Challenge was started by Pam Hunt in 2020 during COVID and she continues to run it every year as more and more people participate in this friendly competition. It is one of the many events Pam is involved with that benefit the entire birding community. See the interview with her in the previous article.

Overall Results

by Pam Hunt

Edited from a post by Pam Hunt to the NHBirds email list, 12-1-2023.

There was almost no doubt for the entirety of November that Belknap was going to take the County Cup in 2023. They started out strong, beat the bushes like no one's business, and kept the pace to the very end, when David Nelson found three Field Sparrows at the Upper Suncook Recreation Area in Barnstead. Kudos to all involved and co-captains Rob (Woodward) and Iain (MacLeod) for their insane commitment to this game. (See Rob Woodward's account of their efforts in his article in this issue and David Nelson's article on birding Upper Suncook Lake.)



Greater Yellowlegs in Belknap County during the November Challenge. Photo by Rob Woodward, 11-20-2023, Upper Suncook Recreation Area, Barnstead, NH.

Also holding strong through most of the month was last year's winner Carroll, but despite their valiant efforts they never caught up with their neighbor to the southwest. Sneaking in for the bronze was Coos with an all-time November high of 94 species. The highest Coos had been over the last three years was sixth, so congrats to Ann (Griffith), Lori (Charron), and the rest of the North Country team.

Next up was a tight little pack consisting of Sullivan,

Grafton, and Strafford (in that order). With the lowest all-time bird total for November, Sullivan still has a clear mathematical advantage, but to regain its place on the podium it probably needs more birders (no one can do it alone, not even Dylan Jackson). Grafton stepped up to the challenge this year in a big way, with recruits brought in from Vermont and Upper Valley birders venturing across the divide to check out locations in the Pemigewasset Valley. Strafford had help from Robyn Prieto for the second half, but it just wasn't enough.

Then there are the rest of us. Rockingham and Hillsborough, after continually sliding in the standings through the month, managed to both bump up a slot to finish at seventh and eighth. Cheshire meanwhile was stuck near the bottom the entire time, which is a little surprising since they came in second in 2020. Merrimack gets the prize for the most dramatic crash and burn, from third place on November 1 to tenth on November 30.

Table 1. Final standings of the November 2023 County Challenge and how they changed over the month. Rankings are based on the percentage of species seen in 2023 of the all-time species total for the county in November (based on eBird data). The numbers in parentheses are the ranks on November 1, 5, 9, 15, 23, and 30.

Belknap: 106 species for 80%	(1	1	1	1	1	1)
Carroll: 107 species for 73%	(4	2	2	2	2	2)
Coos: 94 species for 70%	(6	6	5	3	3	3)
Sullivan: 87 species for 68.5%	(10	7	7	4	4	4)
Grafton: 111 species for 67.3%	(7	10	8	7	6	5)
Strafford: 123 species for 67.2%	(9	8	10	9	5	6)
Rockingham: 168 species for 62.5%	(2	3	4	5	8	7)
Hillsborough: 103 species for 62.0%	(5	5	3	6	7	8)
Cheshire: 99 species for 61%	(8	9	9	10	9	9)
Merrimack: 110 species for 60%	(3	4	6	8	10	10)

November Challenge – Thoughts and Highlights

by Steve Mirick

Edited from a post by Steve Mirick to the NHBirds email list, 12-1-2023.

Well.....Rockingham County finished in seventh place. Not a very impressive year, but we managed a decent total of 168 species. I thought it was a tough year for us. I certainly put in more effort than any other year, but I thought birds were not plentiful and there weren't a lot of good "nuggets" to help with our overall list. I ended with 133 species which is my fourth highest for November.

A quick random list of some of the highlights across the state (in my opinion...sorry if I missed one or two) include:

- MacGillivray's Warbler found by Dylan Jackson. The

number one bird for the challenge this year.

- Townsend's Solitaire at the hawkwatch at Pack Monadnock.
- *Two* Ash-throated Flycatchers found by Alan Murray and Ethan Ring.
- *Two* Red-eyed Vireos (one in Belknap County and one in Grafton County) both found by Iain MacLeod. The first one tied a record late date for New Hampshire, the second one set a new record!
- A high count of *eight* Blue-headed Vireos across the state.
- A White-eyed Vireo and a Prairie Warbler together in Hopkinton found by Donna Ellis.
- Second latest date for Tennessee Warbler in New Hampshire.
- Second latest date for Indigo Bunting in New Hampshire.
- Record late date for Whimbrel in New Hampshire.
- Second latest date for Bobolink in New Hampshire.
- 14 species of warblers (Ovenbird, Black-and-white, Orange-crowned, Nashville, MacGillivray's, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Palm, Pine, Yellow-rumped, Prairie, Wilson's).
- 116 Black-legged Kittiwakes, 26 Dovekies, and a Pomarine Jaeger during a coastal storm on 11-22-2023.



Bobolink on 11-1-2023, the second latest fall date in New Hampshire. Photo by Steve Mirick, Great Bay WMA, Greenland, NH.

Belknap Wins The 2023 November County Challenge

by Rob Woodward

What a heartbreaking loss! In 2022, Carroll County defeated Belknap by just one bird in a photo finish. The race couldn't have been closer and the sting of defeat couldn't have been sharper. Our impossibly narrow defeat only fueled our determination to win convincingly in 2023.

On October 31, I visited the Upper Suncook Lake Recreation Area in Barnstead to search for a Gadwall that had been reported for a week. I not only relocated the



Merlin at the Center Harbor docks 11-27-2023, one of five sightings in Belknap in November. Photo by Iain MacLeod.

Gadwall for a county life bird, but I also found 2 Dunlin, a very uncommon species for Belknap. I called Iain MacLeod since I knew he would be interested. Later that day, Iain visited and in addition to the Dunlin, he found a Pectoral Sandpiper. We immediately recognized this location as the starting point for the November County Challenge the next day.

The following morning, Iain arrived minutes after I did at the Recreation Area bright and early. We relocated the Dunlin, 3 in fact, and much more. We found the Pectoral Sandpiper and a bonus Semipalmated Sandpiper along with Greater Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, and Killdeer for a 6 shorebird bonanza. Over 30 species were tallied, almost one-third of what we would need to win the race. We felt very good about our chances. From here, we split up, with me going in a woodlands direction and Iain searching for raptors and waterfowl. This is the balanced pattern we would follow for the rest of the month.

By November 2 or 3, early results were released showing Belknap with a big lead that we would refuse to relinquish. We would make sure there would be no close finish this year. The Belknap "team" consisted of Iain MacLeod and me as the primary players supported by a good cast of part-timers who made substantial contributions. Dan Mullarkey found our only Savannah Sparrow and located Bonaparte's Gull on Lake Waukegan. Carol McCluskey pitched in with a clutch Palm Warbler (only the second Belknap November record) and Gray Catbird, which I spent hours over many days looking for unsuccessfully.

Over the course of the month, ever keeping one eye on

our neighbor Carroll County, we continued to add more species, with Iain adding clutch finds like Northern Saw-whet Owl November 6, Red-throated Loon November 7, and an extraordinarily late Red-eyed Vireo on November 13. His raptor vigils at Leavitt Beach, Meredith turned up Golden Eagle on November 2 and American Goshawk on November 13. I found the only White-crowned Sparrow at the airport on November 3 and the only sapsucker at Ellacoya State Park on November 17.

By late in the month, it was clear our lead was insurmountable and the race was all but decided. There would be no dramatic finish this year. I decided to give up on shrike and focus on Barrow's Goldeneye in and around Laconia, but without luck. Our last new bird was a good one, 3 Field Sparrows at the Barnstead Business Park by David Nelson on November 29.

Ultimately, the winner of this event is our knowledge of the status and distribution of the birds of New Hampshire in the month of November. As we turn up new and surprising finds around the state (6 new species were added to the November Belknap list), we are rewriting the book on what birds are found here and in what numbers. Add the head-to-head competition among the counties and you have a fun event we now look forward to each year.

Editor's Note

Rob Woodward did occasionally leave Belknap County in November. This time it was to help with the Concord November Challenge which, like the County Challenge, involves finding as many species as possible but just in Concord, NH and only on the first weekend in November. Pam Hunt coordinates this fun event as well and it's a great way to kick off the County Challenge, but certainly doesn't seem to help Merrimack County. Zeke Cornell and I were out searching for Concord birds on November 4 (2023) when we heard a Gray Catbird, a species I had been specifically listening for. We turned around to find Rob Woodward playing the call and waiting for us to turn around!



Rob Woodward during the Concord November County Challenge, by Rebecca Suomala, 11-14-2023.

Birding Upper Suncook Lake

by David Nelson



Tundra Swans by Jason Lambert, 11-15-2019, Upper Suncook Lake, Barnstead, NH.

Upper Suncook Lake is a 400-acre body of water located near the northwest corner of Barnstead in Belknap County. At the northern end of the lake is the Suncook River, which flows into the lake after passing through a small wetland area. At the southern end is a 1000-foot-long channel that flows under Narrows Road and connects Upper to Lower Suncook Lakes. The water level on both lakes is controlled by a NH Department of Environmental Services dam at the southern end of Lower Suncook Lake and is lowered every fall by two feet in advance of the spring runoff and snowmelt.

The best times to visit the lake are in spring and fall. In spring, the wetlands at the north end draw staging waterfowl and, among the large groups of Canada Geese, American Black Ducks, Mallards, Wood Ducks, and Green-winged Teal grazing around the edges of the marsh, there is the occasional Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Gadwall, or Northern Shoveler. Ring-necked Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and sometimes Lesser Scaup congregate here between late March and April, and Common Mergansers and Common Goldeneyes appear just after ice out.

With lower water levels in the fall, the Upper Suncook wetlands convert to wide mudflats, attracting shorebirds, waterfowl, and open-area species such as American Pipits, Horned Larks, Snow Buntings, and occasionally Northern Shrike. Killdeer can be seen staging over the flats beginning in early October and, depending on the weather, will continue well into November. Greater Yellowlegs and Wilson's Snipe, uncommon throughout the rest of the Lakes Region, are annual on the flats in October, and Pectoral Sandpipers are uncommon visitors. During October and November of 2023, three Dunlin and a Semipalmated Sandpiper, rarities for inland New Hampshire, were spotted on the flats. Among waterfowl, one can expect many of the springtime dabbling duck species mentioned above. American Coot and Pied-billed Grebe are possible, and Blue-winged Teal is occasionally a late-summer to early-fall visitor.

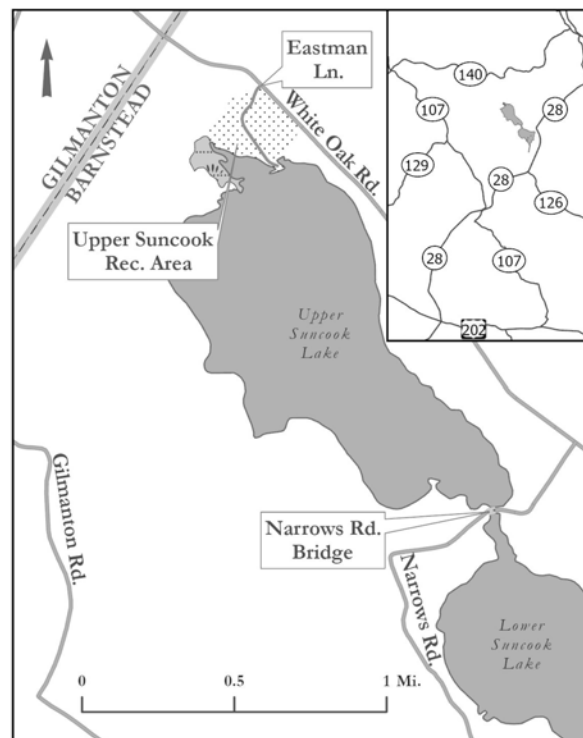
Horned Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Long-tailed Duck, and scoter species are uncommon migrants in the deeper, colder waters of the lake.

A few notably rare waterfowl have been recorded at the north end of the lake during the fall months. Red-throated Loon (November 2016, J. Lambert), Common Gallinule (October 2017, J. Lambert), and a pair of Tundra Swans (November 2019, J. Lambert), all "firsts" for Belknap County, were found here.

During the summer months, the lake is host to breeding Common Loons and Bald Eagles, both long-established in the area. Yellow Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Warbling Vireos, Baltimore Orioles, and Red-winged Blackbirds can be heard singing along the wet edges, while Red-eyed Vireos, Pine Warblers, and Black-throated Green Warblers lead the chorus in the white pine woods along the west and north sides.

The ice-in date is usually around mid- to late-December. The channel at the south end freezes later in winter than the rest of the lake, and even in mid-January one may find Mallards, American Black Ducks, goldeneyes, or a Belted Kingfisher close to the Narrows Road bridge.

The south end is viewable from a pull-off near the Narrows Road bridge. The west shore of the lake abuts a conservation parcel and is open to everyone but trails appear to be limited. The wetlands are viewable from the Upper Suncook Recreation Area, a small resident-only beach at the northeast corner of the lake (accessible via a one-lane dirt road off White Oak Road, near the Barnstead-Gilmanston border). Non-residents wishing to bird from the recreation area should contact the town clerk (603) 269-4071 (x1) or town administrator (x4) with questions about access ahead of their visit.



*Map by
Nora E.
Hanke.*

Backyard Birder

Adventures of Fonzi, the Ring-necked Pheasant

Story and photos by Melissa Moore



Latest update: "Fonzi," the Ring-necked Pheasant is still roaming around the neighborhood as of this issue's printing.

In June 2023, members of the Moore Family at Windswept Maples Farm in Loudon started noticing a male Ring-necked Pheasant strolling through the pastures. He was easy to spot due to his long tail, green head, white collar, and red facial skin. Everyone became fascinated with how often he appeared and we started calling him Fonzi. Fonzi apparently adopted this section of pasture as his home. Jeff and Brad Moore, who are brothers, often traverse this pasture to complete fencing tasks. Fonzi loved to graze under the old apple trees and in and out of the tall grass.

Since these observations started in early summer 2023, we all realized that Fonzi was special and a survivor from the game bird release that took place previously back in October of 2022. He was in good health and would appear when solitary walkers moved through the field. His habit was to follow Jeff or Brad out of the field and sometimes walk the distance from the pasture back to the barn. Later in the summer Jeff noticed that Fonzi was limping. More than likely a predator snagged Fonzi, but the wily game bird showed his will to survive and escaped to live another day.

NH Fish and Game releases Ring-necked Pheasants every October for hunting. The farm-raised game birds are not expected to survive the hunting season and the cold New Hampshire winters. Fonzi must have overwintered in the nearby dense forest habitat where he found food and stayed protected from the wind and cold.

In New Hampshire, the season for pheasant hunting is October 1 to December 31. According to the NH Fish and Game website, in October 2023, NH Fish and Game

released 10,000 adult Ring-necked Pheasants at 63 sites in 43 towns. This is the level that was probably released in October 2022. The game birds are released on three different dates and this activity stops around October 20.

Eventually Fonzi expanded his territory and was last seen in a neighbor's driveway in early September 2023. His appearance stopped traffic that day. According to the most recent figures, there is only one stocking site in the town of Loudon. Fonzi's summer appearances were a full 3.5 miles from the release site. This fact marks Fonzi as both a survivor and competent traveling wayfarer.

Epilogue

As of May 2024 Fonzi was hanging out in backyard bird feeders in my neighborhood. He regularly samples the sunflower seeds, millet, and nyjer seed scattered below these perches. He has no regular schedule and is known to frequent up to four different yards at any time during the day. Fonzi sightings always spark excitement. Neighbor's digital photo libraries are filled with stills and videos of this frequent visitor. One neighbor was lucky enough to find Fonzi under his bird feeder during the 2024 Backyard Winter Bird Survey.



The shadow of Jeff Moore strolling through a farm field while completing an August fencing task appears in this photo. Just before him, is Fonzi, the Ring-necked Pheasant who adopted this section of pasture as his home. Photo taken by Jeff in Loudon, NH in August of 2023.

New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee Report

Spring 2022 through Winter 2022-23 Seasons

by Michael Resch, Chair and Secretary, reschmike1@gmail.com

This report from the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee (NHRBC) contains the decisions for records voted on by the Committee for four seasons – Spring 2022, Summer 2022, Fall 2022, and Winter 2022-23. These seasons included one first New Hampshire state record accepted by the Committee:

- Tropical Kingbird – found by Jane and Steve Mirick on 11-13-2022 in Greenland. The bird was seen and heard giving distinctive calls for two weeks. This sighting replaces “Tropical/Couch’s Kingbird” on the state list based on two previous records of birds seen but not heard. The first was a bird well documented from Claremont on 11-2-2003 by William McCumber and two other observers. The second was seen by Holly Bauer on 6-2-2022 in Rye, ironically just five months before the vocal Greenland bird.

As of February 2023, the official New Hampshire state list is 428 fully substantiated species, with an additional four species on the Hypothetical List.

There were many other exciting 2022 sightings accepted by the Committee, including Pink-footed Goose, Northern Lapwing, Curlew Sandpiper, Slaty-backed Gull, American White Pelican, Little Stint, Swainson’s Hawk, LeConte’s Sparrow, and Mountain Bluebird.

The members of the Committee voting on the 2022 records were: Will Broussard, Adam Burnett, Lori Charron, David Donsker, Kurk Dorsey, Jason Lambert, Chris McPherson, and Mike Resch (Chair and Secretary).

NHRBC Background

The NHRBC reviews rare and unusual bird sightings in New Hampshire in an effort to maintain the accuracy and scientific integrity of rare bird records in the state. It is independent of *New Hampshire Bird Records (NHBR)* and New Hampshire Audubon. Per the NHRBC Bylaws, the purpose of the Committee includes the following:

- To review reports of unusual occurrences of birds within the state of New Hampshire and adjacent ocean waters.
- To accept or reject such reports based upon the adequacy of documentation.
- To establish and maintain an official state list of the birds of New Hampshire.

- To permanently maintain copies of evaluated records and their associated documentation and all Committee votes, comments, and pertinent outside expert information regarding those records.
- To respond to a request from the observer of the result of the evaluation of his/her records and to educate the birding community of the results of those deliberations.
- To work closely with the editors and staff of *NHBR* toward our common goals.
- To function as an independent technical advisory committee to *NHBR*.

One of the most important functions of the NHRBC is the evaluation of records of rarities found in New Hampshire. The typical process used to evaluate these records is as follows:

- Species to be reviewed are those listed in the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee Review List, which can be found here: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/NHRBC/nh-rare-birds-committee-review-list/>
- Records of these Review List species come to the Committee either from eBird checklists, or information submitted directly to *NHBR* or the NHRBC such as through the use of the New Hampshire Bird Sighting Documentation form, available at: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/documentation-forms-for-rarities/>
- The NHRBC will request additional information on those records where key details are not provided or limited.
- Records are compiled once a year, generally in early Spring, by the Committee Secretary, to include four consecutive seasons – Spring (March-May), Summer (June-July), Fall (August-November), and Winter (December-February).
- The members of the Committee review each of the records and submit their votes to the Secretary, who then compiles all the votes.
- The Committee typically meets once per year usually in summer, often by phone, to discuss any vote that is not unanimous, and finalize the votes for all records.
- The Committee requires a vote with not more than one dissension for acceptance of a record, except for potential first state records which require a unanimous vote. A first state record also requires at least one of the following: photograph, specimen, video recording, audio recording, or separate documentation from three or more observers. If none of these criteria is met, but the identification is still accepted by the Committee, the species is added to the Hypothetical State List.

Note that if the Committee does not accept a record it is not necessarily an indication that the identification was incorrect. More likely, the information received was not

sufficient to allow its acceptance as a state record. In other words, adequate documentation is key to whether a report is accepted. A reminder that the best way to ensure your sighting is accepted by the NHRBC is to prepare and submit adequate documentation of the sighting using the New Hampshire Bird Sighting Documentation form. Even if you have a photo, a supplemental documentation form can be invaluable in gaining acceptance of the record, especially with photos of limited quality. Not to worry, however, if you don't have a photograph it doesn't mean the record can't be accepted by the Committee.

Additional details on the NHRBC can be found on the Committee website: nhbirdrecords.org/NHRBC

Spring 2022 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Western Grebe	5-23-22	Rye
Little x Snowy Egret	4-15-22	Rye
Pink-footed Goose	3-11-22	Walpole
Pink-footed Goose	4-18-22	Errol
Cackling Goose	3-18-22	Charlestown
Cackling Goose	3-19-22	Charlestown
Cackling Goose	4-1-22	Concord
Clapper Rail	5-28-22	Hampton
Northern Lapwing	3-7-22	Greenland
Curlew Sandpiper	5-24-22	Rye Harbor
Slaty-backed Gull	4-8-22	North Hampton
Arctic Tern	5-14-22	Hinsdale
Chuck-will's-widow	5-16-22	Rye
Hooded Warbler	5-20-22	New Hampton
Painted Bunting	5-2-22	Plymouth
Summer Tanager	5-17-22	Rye

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Cackling Goose	3-23-22	Conway
Description and photo were not sufficient to eliminate smaller race of Canada Goose		
Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco	3-1-22	Marlborough
Bird was within expected variability of "Slate-colored" Junco		

Summer 2022 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
American White Pelican	7-31-22	Pittsburg
White-faced Ibis	6-3-22	Hampton
Swallow-tailed Kite	7-30-22	Moultonborough
Little Stint	7-25-22	Hampton
Tropical/Couch's Kingbird	6-2-22	Rye
Golden-winged Warbler	6-2-22	East Kingston

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

None

Fall 2022 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
White Ibis	8-16-22	Hampton Harbor
Ross's Goose	11-30-22	Rochester
Cackling Goose	11-28-22	Conway
Swainson's Hawk	9-21-22	Sandwich
Rufous Hummingbird	11-5-22	Newmarket
Tropical Kingbird	11-13-22	Greenland
Cave Swallow	11-31-22	Hollis
Mountain Bluebird	11-4-22	Sandwich
Townsend's Solitaire	11-2-22	Mount Cardigan
Gray-cheeked Thrush	10-1-22	Rye
Gray-cheeked Thrush	9-20-22	New Castle
Yellow-throated Warbler	8-16-22	Enfield
Kentucky Warbler	9-11-22	Star Island
LeConte's Sparrow	10-31-22	Rye
Seaside Sparrow	8-25-22	Star Island

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Cackling Goose	10-24-22	Hinsdale
Description could not eliminate smaller race of Canada Goose		
Cackling Goose	11-2-22	Portsmouth
Description of birds in flight could not eliminate other smaller waterfowl		
Cackling Goose	11-20-22	Westmoreland
Brief view and description were insufficient to eliminate smaller race of Canada Goose		
Rufous Hummingbird	9-17-22	Newbury
Description was too limited to confirm this rarity.		

Winter 2022-23 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Pink-footed Goose	12-20-22	Durham
Cackling Goose	12-18-22	Durham
Ash-throated Flycatcher	12-11-22	Durham
Mountain Bluebird	12-22-22	Great Bay NWR, Newington
Mountain Bluebird	2-8-23	Peterborough
Varied Thrush	12-18-22	Pittsburg
Varied Thrush	2-17-23	Bath
Varied Thrush	2-19-23	Lancaster
Western Tanager	12-17-22	Greenland

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Common Gull	2-22-23	Rye
Immature Ring-billed Gull could not be eliminated		
Dark-eyed "Slate-colored/Cismontanus" Junco	2-7-23	Walpole
Bird was within expected variability of "Slate-colored" Junco		
Dark-eyed "Cismontanus" Junco	12-16-22	Marlborough
Bird was within expected variability of "Slate-colored" Junco		
Dark-eyed "Cismontanus" Junco	2-7-23	Walpole
Bird was within expected variability of "Slate-colored" Junco		



Curlew Sandpiper by Diana Stephens, 5-24-2022, Rye Harbor, NH.

What to Watch for in Fall

August



Purple Martins still linger at the coast in August feeding the last of their fledged young. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 8-2-2023, Goss Farm, Rye, NH.

- Post breeding dispersal can bring Great Egrets to inland sites anytime during the month.
- Shorebird migration is a highlight in August. Adults come through first – watch for them to be in molt with new feathers mixed in with the older, worn ones. Aging shorebirds helps with identification of species. Some of the first species to come through are Least Sandpipers and both yellowlegs.
- Male hummingbirds depart first, usually in early August; females and young linger into mid-September.
- Louisiana Waterthrush depart early and are gone by mid-August.
- Look for large flocks of Tree Swallows along the coast in Seabrook near Cross Beach Road and the Seabrook Back Dunes. Some roost at Plum Island and stream north in the morning. Tree Swallows are most numerous and Barn Swallows will linger into October, but Bank Swallows are few in number and Northern Rough-wingeds are the first to leave, departing by early August.
- Common Nighthawk migration peaks August 21-September 1. The best places to watch are along major rivers such as the Merrimack and the Connecticut, on warm evenings with a south wind.

September

- The first Blue-winged Teals appear in August but sightings peak in September. Good places to look for them include Horseshoe Pond in Concord, the

Rochester WTP (open on weekdays only until 2:45 pm), and Exeter WTP (do not walk past the gate).

- Juvenile shorebirds begin to arrive. They have fresh feathers and look stunning. The later-migrating species such as American Golden-Plover and Dunlin also begin to arrive.
- September is a great month for warbler migration as the “confusing fall warblers” can move through at any time. Odiorne Point State Park in Rye can be a great place for a fallout in poor weather.
- Broad-winged Hawk migration peaks in mid-September with the potential for days with over 1,000 birds. Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory in Peterborough has a regularly staffed fall hawkwatch, but you can watch from any high spot with a good view to the north.
- In late September, check any hummingbirds very carefully; this is the time when vagrants such as Rufous Hummingbird become more likely than Ruby-throated.



American Golden Plover by Kyle Wilmarth, 10-29-2023, Salem, NH.

October

- Sparrow migration peaks. Good places to check are weedy fields or community gardens such as the Birch Street Community Gardens in Concord.
- Chipping Sparrows depart and American Tree Sparrows arrive from the north, with their rusty cap giving them the nickname of “Winter Chippy.”
- Waterfowl that winters on the ocean begin to arrive. Watch for inland fallouts of grebes, scoters, and other sea ducks anytime there is a rain storm.
- Most thrushes are gone by early October, but a few Hermit Thrush linger into November.



Vesper Sparrow by Steve Mirick, 10-17-2023, Hampton-Seabrook Marsh, NH.

- Large blackbird flocks gather at the end of October and early November sometimes numbering in the thousands. Flocks may be single species or comprised of a mixture of Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Common Grackles, and European Starlings. They are often seen in the evening coming in to roost (Great Bog in Portsmouth has had spectacular concentrations of grackles) or feeding in corn fields.

November

- Golden Eagles are rare in the state, but November is the month when they move through. The Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory is one of the best places to watch for one.
- Common Mergansers and Horned Grebes gather in large numbers on Lake Winnepesaukee.
- An offshore boat trip can bring sightings of Northern Fulmars and alcids such as Razorbills and Common Murres, as they leave their breeding grounds for the open ocean.
- If Cave Swallows are going to be seen in the state, November is the month. Watch for this rarity at the immediate coast.

Answer to the Shorebird Quiz on the inside back cover.

From left to right (and smallest to largest), Semipalmated Sandpiper, Dunlin, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Black-bellied Plover.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Photo 1

The only contextual clue we really have is that our bird is flying, so I guess we can rule out domestic chickens, and maybe farm-raised ostriches!

Looking at the shape of the bird, long narrow wings stand out, and immediately rule out a lot of common passerines. Birds with wings like these that come to mind include gulls and terns, falcons, and aerial insectivores like swallows. We might also want to briefly consider some of our shorebirds, which as long-distance migrants can have surprisingly long wings when they fly overhead.

The wing shape, however, is not quite right for gulls or terns. Also, we're not seeing much of a bill on this bird, which rules out not only gulls and terns, but also rules out all the shorebirds. The heavy bill of a falcon might be hard to see from directly below the bird, but these narrow wings look a little too delicate for a falcon. In addition, none of New Hampshire's falcons show a notched tail like this.

Aerial insectivores all have small bills (and they mostly also have large mouths), as our subject bird seems to have. The long, notched tail in the photo kind of suggests a swallow, but as we review the swallows, the tail still doesn't quite match, and the subject's wings seem too long. Barn Swallows have a more deeply forked tail than the bird in our photo, and the only other swallow with a strongly notched tail is a Bank Swallow, which is a small swallow that definitely doesn't have long, delicate wings like this.

The insectivores we need to look at are the nightjars and comparing the shape of a nightjar to the shape of our bird, we can see we're almost there. The New Hampshire nightjar with the most strongly pointed wings, as seen here, is the



Common Nighthawk.
Common Nighthawks are often seen migrating in New Hampshire in fairly large

Common Nighthawk by Pam Hunt, 9-08-22, Concord, NH.

numbers during September evenings. The white stripes on their wings are diagnostic, and usually easy to see. The tail is often closed rather than flared as it is in this picture. Their flight is decidedly un-falcon-like.

Photo 2

If you've taken part in Common Nighthawk migration watches, this species is the one most likely to be confused with nighthawks. Using the same logic we used for our first photo, we have another long-winged bird with not much of a visible bill, and we again turn to our field guide and start sorting through the aerial insectivores.

Unfortunately, aerial insectivores are not all in one section of our guide, so we have to do some paging around, but as we do that, look at those wings! Proportionately, bird wings don't get much longer and narrower than that, except maybe on an albatross!

No, we didn't sneak an albatross into the quiz! In addition to the long narrow wings, we have quite a short and stubby tail. This shape does not match any of our swallows. Having just looked at nightjars, we can agree it's clearly not a nightjar of any sort.

This is the bird Roger Tory Peterson described as a "cigar with wings," a Chimney Swift.

Chimney Swift is the only species of swift in the eastern United States, and so the bird can easily be identified in New Hampshire by its shape alone (which is fortunate since the bird is a plain ash gray). Its rapid, almost bat-like flight style can also be diagnostic. Anyone who has attended a Manchester (or Boston) night baseball game has probably seen swifts flying around the stadium lights.



Chimney Swift by Pam Hunt, 6-17-22, Canterbury, NH.

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Abbreviations Used

AMC	Appalachian Mountain Club
BBC	Brookline Bird Club
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey
CA	Conservation Area
CC	Country Club
CFT	NH Audubon Chapter Field Trip
FT	Field Trip
IBA	Important Bird Area
L.	Lake
LPC	Loon Preservation Committee
NA	Natural Area
NHA	New Hampshire Audubon
NHBR	New Hampshire Bird Records
NHRBC	NH Rare Birds Committee
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
PO	Post Office
R.	River
Rd.	Road
RO	Raptor Observatory
Rt.	Route
SF	State Forest
SP	State Park
SPNHF	Society for the Protection of NH Forests, Concord
T&M	Thompson & Meserves (Purchase)
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WMNF	White Mountain National Forest
WS	NHA Wildlife Sanctuary
~	approximately
WTP	Wastewater Treatment Plant

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Fall 2023 Shorebird Highlights



Wilson's Phalarope by Cameron Johnson, 8-18-2023, Marsh Road Pond, Rye, NH.



Red-necked Phalarope by Jim Sparrell, 8-2-2023, Rochester WTP, NH.



Red Phalarope by Eric Masterson, 10-14-2023, Star Island, NH.



Baird's Sandpiper by Steve Mirick, 9-15-2023, Rye Harbor SP, NH.



Test Your Shorebird Identification

There are four species of shorebirds in this photo. Can you tell what they are? Photo by Leo McKillop, 10-7-2024, Hampton Harbor, NH.

Answer on page 34.

Fall 2023 Highlights



A rare inland Black-legged Kittiwake by Tom Momeyer, 8-10-2023, Powder Mill Pond, Hancock, NH.



Townsend's Solitaire by Kevin Murphy, 11-6-2023, Pack Monadnock, NH.



White-eyed Vireo by Susan Wisley, 10-8-2023, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.



Connecticut Warbler by David Nelson, 9-27-2023, Barnstead Business Park, NH.



Dickcissel by Jim Sparrell, 10-9-2023, Goss Farm, Rye, NH.



Franklin's Gull by Andrea Robbins, 9-4-2023, Berry Bay, Freedom, NH.