New Hampshire Bird Records

FALL 2024 Vol. 43, No. 3

A Fall of Shorebirds

Baird's Sandpiper by Benjamin Griffith, 8-17-2024, Hampton, NH.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper by James Bradshaw, 9-12-2024, Rochester, NH.

Pectoral Sandpipers by Kyle Wilmarth, 10-5-2024, Salem, NH.

Semipalmated Sandpiper by Kyle Wilmarth, 9-14-2024, Salem, NH.

Western Willet by Benjamin Griffith, 8-17-2024, Hampton, NH.

White-rumped Sandpiper (left) and Semipalmated Sandpiper (right) by Steve Mirick, 10-17-2024, Hampton, NH.

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Davis Finch by Steve Mirick.

IN MEMORY OF
Davis Finch

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* is sponsored in memory of Davis Finch—a remarkable man with a gift for gently sharing his passion for birds and birding. Enjoy the treasure trove of memories shared by his friends in this issue.

In This Issue

Cover Photo: A rare Bullock's Oriole, discovered by Cindy Pfaff at her feeder in Hooksett, NH, remained through the fall and into the winter. Photo by Harris Stein, 11-17-2024.

From the Editor

FALL 2024

Transitioning Online: Embracing New Opportunities

Since its founding in 1982, *New Hampshire Bird Records* has been a cornerstone of the state's birding community—documenting rare sightings, sharing expert knowledge, and connecting people through a shared love of birds.

When the publication began, there was no widely available internet—and certainly no eBird. Observations were handwritten on paper slips and mailed to NH Audubon, where a dedicated team of volunteers compiled them with care and precision. Over time, the publication evolved: articles became a beloved feature, eBird revolutionized how we report sightings, and digital issues became freely available to NH Audubon members.

The impact *New Hampshire Bird Records* has had over the decades is immeasurable. Yet as times change, so must we. Today, fewer than 70 people pay for the print edition.

To remain sustainable, we will be transitioning to a new format. Print issues will continue through the end of this calendar year, with our final issue (Winter 2024–25) scheduled for release in November 2025. By the time that issue is in your hands, the new *New Hampshire Bird Records* website will be live as part of the NH Audubon site—a place for articles on all things birds and birding in New Hampshire.

This next chapter brings exciting opportunities:

- **Timely content** – Articles can be published as soon as they're ready, allowing us to share stories and sightings closer to when they happen.
- **Greater accessibility** – The new online platform will be open to all visitors, reaching a broader audience beyond NH Audubon membership.
- **Enhanced searchability** – Whether you're looking for birding hotspots, species-specific reports, or seasonal trends, articles will be easier to find and revisit.

We know this transition may bring mixed emotions—especially for those who love the feel of a printed issue arriving in the mail. As someone who values that experience, I understand. But I'm also excited by the potential to reach more readers, highlight emerging conservation issues more quickly, and deliver the same thoughtful, local birding content to a wider community.

A heartfelt thank you to those who have contributed to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund. Your generosity ensures the continuation of this publication in whatever form it takes and also supports eBird review efforts in New Hampshire—both of which are vital to bird conservation and birding in our state.

Thank you for being part of the *New Hampshire Bird Records* family. Your support has shaped what this publication has become, and we look forward to continuing this journey with you—just in a new and more dynamic format. More information on these changes will be included in the next issue. In the meantime, if you'd like to get in touch, feel free to email me at gmcculloch@nhaudubon.org.

Grace McCulloch, *Editor, New Hampshire Bird Records*

Note: If you've paid in advance for next year's print issues, I will be in touch. You are also always welcome to reach out to me with any questions.

Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Can you identify this bird?

Our photo was taken in May. This summer resident begins migrating south in late August and September.

See the answer on page 39.

In Memory of Davis W. Finch

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* is sponsored in memory of Davis Finch, a remarkable man whose passion and dedication left a lasting impact on birding in New Hampshire. We are grateful to all who contributed to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund and NH Audubon in his memory. We hope you enjoy this collection of reflections celebrating the life and legacy of someone who helped shape the birding community we know today.

In 2016, NH Audubon honored Davis Finch with the Goodhue-Elkins Award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the study of birds in New Hampshire. Photo by Terri Donsker.

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Tribute to Davis W. Finch

March 12, 1938 - October 18, 2024

by David Donsker

Editor's Note: The following tribute was originally written for the Nuttall Ornithological Club. It is reprinted here with permission.

Davis was one of the giants of birding in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st centuries. He spent a lifetime observing, recording, and generously sharing his knowledge of the birds of his home state of New Hampshire and beyond its borders with both professional ornithologists and birdwatchers. As a child, Davis began birdwatching as an extension of his interest in the natural world while he explored the forest and fields around his family property in East Kingston, NH. Davis's father bought this property when Davis was merely a year old, and Davis resided in his family home until his death, carefully observing its flora, fauna, and ecological succession over the ensuing years. He was familiar with every nook, corner, boulder, and tree of this beloved property. Davis's precocious and growing interest in birds was encouraged by his parents and was nurtured by several of their colleagues at Philips Exeter Academy who took him under their wings and involved Davis in their birding excursions. Then at Yale University, Davis was further influenced by the great professor of ornithology, S. Dillon Ripley, as well as by his friendship with the late Noble Proctor, who himself became a greatly respected naturalist, and was a protégé of Roger Tory Peterson.

Even as a teenager, Davis began to submit bird records to NH Audubon. His observation of a Blue-winged Warbler in Wilton in 1955 was only the second record of that species in New Hampshire (the first record was recorded twenty years earlier) and was a harbinger of this species' expansion into the southern part of our state. Into the early 1970s, while in his twenties and early thirties, Davis continued to regularly submit records. These notably included the third state record for House Finch in, of all places, Errol in 1967, and the first state record for Fish Crow in Kingston in 1971. In more recent years his observations included a vagrant Ash-throated Flycatcher at his home, and the first and only state record of Eurasian Collared Dove on a neighboring property. Davis further contributed to the knowledge and distribution of New Hampshire and New England birds when he agreed, at the urging of the renowned New Hampshire birder Bob Smart and others, to serve as the regional editor for the Northeastern Maritime region for *Audubon Field Notes* (now *North American Birds*) which he did in the decade from 1967 to 1977.

Using his acquired knowledge of New England avifauna and succumbing to his passion for birds, Davis changed career

paths in 1973, forgoing his profession as an instructor of French at Yale and Vassar, to join Will Russell to form one of the pioneer bird tour companies, Northeast Birding, which specialized in trips to New England and adjacent Canada. Subsequently, with the addition of Rich Stallcup, this evolved into Wings, which grew to became one of the three major American bird tour companies. Wings gradually expanded its coverage to include tours to Alaska, Mexico, and Central and South America in which Davis took an active and principal role. Eventually he focused his interest on Central and South America, leading more than 90 trips to the New World tropics, concentrating on Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Guyana. As a bird tour leader, Davis inspired and influenced many of his clients through his remarkable field and leadership skills. He was a careful organizer whose incomparable field notes were so precise that he (in the pre-GPS era) could locate with pinpoint accuracy the most obscure territory of species that he had previously scouted, even in the infinite sameness of the Patagonian steppes. He was a thoughtful, courteous, wryly humorous, enthusiastic, and skillful leader with a profound command of bird identification and vocalizations and an uncanny ability to attract even the shiest of birds with his virtuoso command of recorded tapes. As an expert in Neotropical bird song, he unselfishly deposited many of his sound recordings at Cornell University's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds, including 1,175 from Guyana, which he obtained from his 20 expeditions to that South American country. Davis further applied his knowledge of ornithology and bird distribution by serving on the Rare Bird Committees of Trinidad and Tobago, Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire.

Even though his responsibilities with Wings often took him far away from his home, Davis managed to regularly and actively participate in many years of Christmas Bird Counts as a compiler and participant in Maine and New Hampshire starting in 1951. Perhaps most notably for many birders, for twenty years until just a few years ago, Davis maintained a "bird feeder of epic proportions" on his property in East Kingston in the form of a meat pile composed of scraps and bones obtained primarily from local butchers and augmented by an occasional deer carcass. This was no small amount of carrion. Davis had calculated that over the course of those twenty years, he added 128,000 pounds to the meat pile—just over three tons per year! This mound of bones and scraps attracted a good variety of birds such as crows, ravens, hawks, Bald Eagles and hundreds of gulls including Thayer's Gull. Alas, and to his deep regret, he never was able to lure a Golden Eagle…despite his high hopes.

Perhaps most remarkable of all was Davis's generosity. His kind heart and charity extended to anyone who visited his home. He had even ensured that his beloved property and lifetime home, the place that nurtured his own profound interest in nature, would remain protected for conservation in perpetuity under the auspices of the Southeast Land Trust. We will all deeply miss and long remember Davis's personal elegance, enthusiasm, knowledge, and generosity.

Memories of Davis Finch

by Marc Bouchard

In the Beginning

To fully appreciate Davis Finch's impact on New Hampshire field ornithology, we have to go back to the 1960s. Our state was very much a quiet backwater in the American birding world. Sightings were meager compared to what our neighbors in Massachusetts were reporting, where the legend of the late Ludlow Griscom's era cast a long shadow.

But changes were afoot in the sixties that would level the playing field. Interstate highways encouraged long-distance travel, superior optics were available, the first SLR cameras appeared, cassette tape recorders gave us portable audio, and the appearance in 1966 of the "Robbins" field guide gave us our first fully illustrated reference work. That decade also saw the emergence of the American Birding Association (ABA), the first national group devoted solely to field birding—not research, not conservation, just birding.

Technological improvements, however, can only do so much. What New Hampshire really needed were people who would act as leaders, setting an example for others. Many deserve credit, but to me four people stood out: Bob Smart, Betty Phinney, Denny Abbott and, of course, Davis Finch. All of them were exciting field men/women, peerless people and, dare I say it, good friends. They provided more than just their skills. They led the way with their energy and inspiration.

Davis was clearly the "Where's Waldo" of this quartet: forever in motion, never tethered to one spot, always ready to travel to see a bird anywhere at a moment's notice. It became a running joke. I'd see him week after week, and then suddenly…poof! He'd be gone. "Where's Davis?" I asked. In Maine, said someone. Or maybe New York, said another. Next weekend it was Connecticut, and then on to Canada. That was Davis.

If he seemed private, his reticence to discuss his motivation was an honest New England trait. I always felt that his actions, more than his words, spoke loudly about his philosophy of birding. It revolved around one word: experience. But as befits a complex man, it had more than one meaning.

Originally "experience" referred to the actual adventure of being out in the field, reveling in the moment. But, as someone like Davis who took the task seriously, "experience" also meant putting in the years of field work necessary to master the craft. In all the times that I went out with him I

never remember him talking about lists. It was just about the birds.

I should add that by the early 1970s you could clearly see a difference in New Hampshire's standing in the birding world. Bob was an officer of the ABA, Davis was an editor for American Birds, and NH Audubon's field trips drew increasing out-of-state interest, particularly for our offshore excursions, which were maybe the best on the East Coast.

In the Field with Davis: July 1971

I have memories of many field trips with Davis, but two weekends in July 1971 stand above all others, both in quality. They are also the perfect example of how Davis would go the extra mile, literally, to see a good bird.

The shorebirding at Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge (now Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge) in southern New Jersey that summer was off the charts. Davis had already been down but was aching to return. He, Denny Abbott, and I coordinated a plan. We'd leave late Friday after work, drive all night, and be at the refuge at dawn.

'Twas not to be. Just hours before we were scheduled to leave, Davis received another call about another bird. Change of plans! We left as originally planned, but when the sun rose, we weren't in New Jersey. We were in New Brunswick!

Saturday, July 10, 1971, found us in Fredericton, where we met up with a provincial wildlife specialist, and by midday we were paddling canoes on an obscure pond to the edge of a distant marsh. There, circling over the grasses, was a restless flock of about 60 nesting Black Terns. In the middle of the flock was one, just one, adult White-winged Black Tern (today officially known as the White-winged Tern), the first confirmed sighting for the country of Canada—not a bad find!

We celebrated with two more days of birding along the Brunswick coast, ending at Campobello Island. We crawled home exhausted, Denny and I went back to our jobs, and I figured that any future field trips would be local.

Ha! A couple of weeks later I got the call from Davis: "You still up for Brigantine?" Hell yes! Once again, we repeated our Friday night trek, but this time southward, stopping only to pick up Bob Smart in New York.

Dawn of July 30 found us cruising the dikes of Brigantine, and the earlier reports from Davis were confirmed: it looked like every sandpiper on the East Coast had stopped by for lunch!

However, I don't think any of us were prepared for what we saw next. Scanning the mud flats, Davis and Bob identified a Black-tailed Godwit, only the second US record! (The bird had first been discovered earlier in the spring but decided to drop by for a return engagement.)

Little did we know that the fun was just starting. We scoped the rest of the flats, and our jaws dropped. Next to the Black-tailed stood a Bar-tailed Godwit. Immediately to his right was a Hudsonian Godwit and just two feet away was a feeding Marbled Godwit. All four of the world's Godwits side-by-side. It was a living field guide!

Davis, however, felt frustrated, because the views weren't optimal. We had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity; there must be some way to get closer to the birds!

There was, but it involved swimming a deep tidal creek, hiking half a mile through razor-sharp marsh grass, and probably breaking several regulations. I've always maintained that New Hampshire birders are the hardest working field men/women I've ever met. They are also a little crazy. I'd like to think that we upheld our state's reputation that day.

Within minutes, Davis and I had stripped down and were swimming the creek, using a spare tire as a raft for our optics. We withstood both an unexpected monsoon and an attack by the meanest Greenhead Horseflies on the East Coast, but we never stopped.

That's what hitting the road with Davis was like: grab your gear, hold on tight, and drive like hell. Was it worth it? Totally!

Reflections and Remembrances from Friends and Fellow Birders

Editor's Note: Steve Mirick posted the news of Davis Finch's death to the NH Birds email list on October 19 with his own tribute to this wonderful man. His post inspired many others to share memories and praise for Davis, some of which are excerpted here.

Steve Mirick

It is with great sadness that I share with you the passing of Davis Finch who died last night at the age of 87. While new birders may not know of him, Davis was a legend to me in my early days of birding in the 1980s and 1990s. I only came to know him personally in the 1990s and was proud and fortunate to be able to travel with Davis to Guyana in 1997 toward the end of his tour leading career. His skills as a birder and the breadth of his knowledge were incredible and respected by all. While Davis spent a good part of his adult life traveling around the world, his home was always in East Kingston, and his contributions to New Hampshire's bird records spanned seven decades with personal records dating back to at least 1953. Many will recall Davis warmly welcoming birders into his yard to see many rare and not so rare birds over the last 20 years. His contributions to New Hampshire's bird records and his educational and conservation activities in the state culminated in NH Audubon awarding him the prestigious Goodhue-Elkins Award in 2016. His warm smile and polite and soft demeanor will be missed.

Paul Dionne

I was honored to get to know Davis while on the board of the Rockingham Land Trust/SELT. He always went out of his way to welcome me, was a true gentleman, and one heck of a birder. He touched many lives for the better.

Scott Heron

Davis was always such a kind, humble, and welcoming spirit to New Hampshire birders. His legendary "meat pile" was one of my early exposures to birding. Imagine driving down your average New England country road, looking up and seeing a cloud of gulls overhead. Add Bald Eagles in double-digits, as well as the occasional rarity, and that was Davis's yard. I snapped this shot back in 2015 and I was honored that NH Audubon chose it as part of Davis's 2016 Goodhue-Elkins Award. It perfectly captured his patience and undying fascination with the natural world.

Davis Finch's "bird feeder of epic proportions." Photo by Scott Heron, 4-11-2015, East Kingston, NH.

Aveen Burney

It's an honor to have been part of the last Philips Exeter Academy ornithology class to bird with Mr. Finch. We had the privilege of meeting him during a memorable field trip to his home with Mr. Matlack and Mr. Aaronian. I've shared the news with our ornithology class group chat, and the condolences and messages are pouring in, all reflecting on his legendary status. We had so much fun and learned a great deal from him. His prowess was unmatched, and I'll never forget him mimicking a crow's call with his voice. It was beyond impressive. After the field trip, a few of us stayed behind to chat with him about his life, and I'm so glad we did. We even joked about how he was a level above Mr. Matlack and Mr. Aaronian. We all, of course, loved that his name was fittingly Mr. Finch. His passion was truly inspiring, both for our class and for me personally. He showed us that birding and love for the world around us isn't just a hobby, but a lifelong endeavor.

Chris Martin

In addition to his familiarity with the Neotropics, Davis Finch was a mainstay on the Errol-Umbagog Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for many years, starting with his first year participating in 1965. Davis served as the Errol Count compiler from 1968 through 1982 (except for 1979) and he continued to take part in the count through 2007. One of my fondest early memories of Davis in the 1990s (back when I was a greenhorn newbie to this North Country CBC) was marveling at him and his long-time birding buddy Denny Abbott, who together had the gumption to take a then-already-vintage Volvo coupe on untracked roads through the woods between Errol Hill and Umbagog Lake in late December. Back then, there was no National Wildlife Refuge and no cell phone tower system in place to facilitate communications. It was something that I was unwilling to attempt even in my new high-clearance SUV. Finding and counting those good birds for the CBC was the only priority!

Ken Kauffman (via Facebook)

During the early 1980s I had the honor of co-leading Wings tours with Davis to places as diverse as eastern Quebec, southern Arizona, the edge of Hudson Bay at Churchill, and our Grand Alaska tour, sweeping from Glacier Bay to Barrow. His skill at finding and identifying birds was remarkable. I'll never forget one morning in New Brunswick when we had a group out looking at Savannah Sparrows in a marshy coastal area. Rain was approaching and people were nervously watching the sky, but Davis had wandered away quietly to the side, and after several minutes he electrified us with a loud whisper: "I think I have a Little Stint!" He did—a first for the province, and one of the few North American records of this sandpiper at that time. We watched it for an hour, and no one minded the rain.

August 1 through November 30, 2024

by Benjamin Griffith

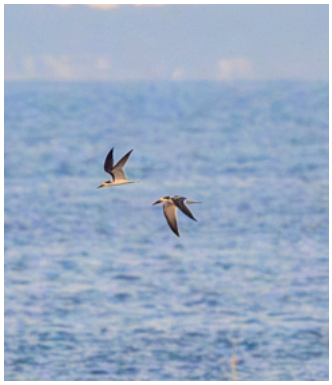
The fall season was marked by an overall lack of rainfall. At the start of August, unusually dry conditions affected the southern part of the state, with a moderate drought in the coastal plain. By the end of the season, the entire state was experiencing some level of dryness, with the most severe conditions in the southeast. One side effect of this mild weather was a lack of a strong frontal system, resulting in a rather lackluster passerine migration. Coastal shorebird migration began with good numbers, but quickly dropped off, with lower than typical numbers in September and October. Inland shorebirds benefited from widespread habitat availability as lower water levels exposed mudflats and shorelines for foraging, but the absence of significant weather events limited the number of inland waterbirds.

Top Rarities

The rarest bird of the season was undoubtedly the long-staying **Bridled Tern** (New Hampshire's first state record) that lingered at the tern colony on White Island into early August. You can read more about this exciting record in the Summer 2024 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*.

The NH Audubon Fall Pelagic trip (September 3) also turned up some rare seabirds, with the state's second record of **South Polar Skua** and two **Long-tailed Jaegers**, the first since 2013. Read about this incredible field trip in the feature article on page 27.

As is typical, trips to Star Island yielded some of the top rarities. Cole Parks found two **Black Skimmers** there (September 28)—a rare species more expected on the mainland—marking the first record for the Isles of Shoals. A **Pacific Loon** discovered by Eric Masterson (October 21) was well-documented and marked the second record in as many years for the location. A shearwater photographed on October 25 was suspected to be a **Scopoli's Shearwater**, but the images lacked definitive field marks to confirm the identification.



The first record of Black Skimmer on the Isles of Shoals, NH. Photo by Cole Parks, 9-28-2024.

A **Purple Gallinule** photographed in a yard in Franklin on November 4 by Elaine Gauthier was the third state record since 2000 and only the second live sighting in that time. Given its inland location, the bird was likely in poor health and was not seen again.

A **White-winged Dove** that appeared at Ken Lindberg and Jude Schultz's feeders in Gilford on August 17 was only the sixth state record. Unlike many rarities that occur in expected seasons, White-winged Doves show little pattern; New Hampshire's six records span all four seasons, five different months, and four different counties.

The sixth state record of a White-winged Dove. Photo by Ken Lindberg, 8-17-2024, Gilford, NH.

There were two documented reports of **American White Pelican**, both from Hampton, but separated by over a month. One photographed by Cameron Johnson flying over Plaice Cove in Rye on August 29 was not relocated. Another found by Tony Vazzano in Hampton Harbor on October 4 lingered into early October and was seen by many. Both birds were molting and may represent the same individual that went undetected in the interim or they could just as easily have been two different birds.

An **American Three-toed Woodpecker** was reported from a high-elevation site in the White Mountains on August 24, however, the description did not rule out a female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The resemblance between these two species is often underemphasized in field guides, and several previously photographed reports have recently been re-identified as sapsuckers.

An American White Pelican forages among Double-crested Cormorants. Photo by Leo McKillop, 10-4-2024, Hampton Harbor, NH.

This fall featured two rare southern warbler reports. A

Kentucky Warbler that I found on September 7 at Odiorne Point State Park was the rarer of the two, but unfortunately it was not photographed, and other observers were unable to find it. In contrast, a **Yellow-throated Warbler** found by James Smith at the same site on October 14 remained through October 25 and was seen by hundreds.

Yellow-throated Warbler by Jim Sparrell, 10-21-2024, Odiorne Point State Park, Rye, NH.

A **Bullock's Oriole** that arrived at Cindy Pfaff's feeders in Hooksett (November 4) and stayed until Christmas Eve was the seventh eBird record since the species was re-split from Baltimore Oriole in 1995. Interestingly, all but two of those records have occurred in the past decade. Thank you to Cindy for sharing this incredible find with the birding community!

Seven **Cave Swallows** in Hampton on November 9 followed the typical pattern for the species, occurring on northwest winds following a November warm front. While this species has only occurred 12 times in the state, all sightings have occurred under these conditions since 2003, and all but one have been coastal.

Unusual Species

Although numbers were generally down, less-common shorebirds had a good year. Most notable were adult individuals of four species: a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** in Hopkinton (Donna Ellis, August 6), a **Western Sandpiper** at Plaice Cove, Hampton (Steve & Jane Mirick, August 16), a **Baird's Sandpiper** also at Plaice Cove (Cameron Johnson, August 16), and a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at the Hampton Salt Marsh Conservation Area (Ben Griffith, August 30). Although these four species occur most years, nearly all records are juveniles. As expected, there were additional records of a juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper and Long-billed Dowitcher, and two juvenile Western Sandpipers. You can read about how to tell the difference between adult and juvenile Western and Baird's Sandpipers in Steve Mirick's article on page 26.

An adult Buff-breasted Sandpiper found and photographed by Donna Ellis, 8-6-2024, Elm Brook Recreation Area, Hopkinton, NH.

It was a below average fall for rare geese, the most notable being a **Cackling Goose** reported from Concord on October 31 and subsequently photographed.

Up to four reports of the western subspecies of **Willet** were received during the season. One long-staying and well-photographed juvenile was in Hampton (Cameron Johnson, August 16), followed by three in North Hampton (Steve Mirick, August 18). There are about a dozen records of this western form in the state, but it may be underreported since it is not recognized as a distinct species. Similarly, a **White-crowned Sparrow** photographed in Hampton (Ben Griffith, November 2) was of the western Gambel's subspecies—one of the few records for New Hampshire. The scarcity of records may reflect a general lack of attention to subspecies rather than actual rarity.

The western Gambel's subspecies of the White-crowned Sparrow by Benjamin Griffith, 11-2-2024, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH. Note the pale lores and small yellowish bill of the Gambel's subspecies.

As has been typical in recent years, **Parasitic Jaeger** went unreported. Historically the most expected jaeger species, Parasitic has become increasingly scarce. In contrast,

the season's four reports of **Pomarine Jaeger** were about average for recent years. Several unidentified jaegers were also reported, which is typical given the challenges of jaeger identification.

Black Terns are most regularly found offshore, though they can also appear along the coast and at inland lakes during storms. This year's sightings—one at White and Seavey Islands (seen by many) and another at Surry Mountain Lake (Phillip Kirkhart), both on August 4—fit that pattern well.

Rarer sparrows were generally scarce, although a total of 19 Vesper Sparrow reports was higher than in most recent years. Two **Lark Sparrows** were photographed: one on Star Island (Eric Masterson, et al.) on August 30, and one in Rye (Ethan Ring, et al.) on October 5, slightly below the recent average of three per fall. Six **Clay-colored Sparrows** was strikingly lower than the minimum of ten reported each of the previous three years. Although not a sparrow, **Dickcissels** are often found in similar habitats, and approximately 16 individuals were reported statewide this fall.

Dickcissel by Benjamin Griffith, 11-2-2024, Goss Farm, Rye, NH.

A single **Hudsonian Godwit** was found on August 29 in Hampton Harbor by James Nealon—an average showing for this species, which was formerly more common. Most state records are from Hampton Harbor, but dates vary widely from July through October.

Little Gulls haven't been reported annually over the past decade, so a juvenile that lingered for a few days near Odiorne Point in Rye (Steve & Jane Mirick, September 18) was a welcome surprise. A previous flyby report at Seal Rocks, Rye by Stuart Varney on September 2 may have involved the same individual.

White-eyed Vireos typically occur in small numbers in fall, and this year the only reports were from Odiorne Point State Park in Rye. They were observed at two different locations within the park and may represent either one or two individuals. **Yellow-breasted Chats** were reported from Odiorne (Ethan Ring, October 5) and Star Island (Steve Mirick, September 9 and Eric Masterson et al., September 28). The Star Island sightings were nearly a month apart and likely involved different birds.

White-eyed Vireo by Jim Sparrell, 10-10-2024, Odiorne Point State Park, Rye, NH.

Connecticut Warblers are regular fall migrants, but their secretive behavior makes them difficult to detect. Three were reported this fall: one at Spinney Lane in Durham (Robyn Prieto, September 19), another at the same location (Kurk Dorsey, September 29), and one that struck a window in Nashua on October 5. Fortunately, Tom and Carrie Young observed it recovering and eventually flying off.

Red and **Red-necked Phalaropes** are primarily pelagic, so records onshore of either species are notable. Generally Red-necked Phalarope is more likely early in the fall and **Red Phalarope** later. This year's four reports follow this pattern, with **Red-necked Phalaropes** on August 29 in Hampton (Jean Mullen) and Moultonborough (Win Shafer), and **Red Phalaropes** in Stewartstown in September (Aubrie Giroux, September 12) and Rochester in November (Dan Hubbard November 22). The latter date is late enough that nearly any phalarope should be expected to be Red.

Red Phalarope by Steve Mirick, 11-22-2024, Rochester, NH.

Western Cattle Egrets (recently split from the Asian form) occasionally irrupt into the northeast during late fall. One found by Richard Bickford on October 29 in Rochester and two the following day in Concord found by Jacob Rhodes were part of a small cluster of sightings including others in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia. Another found in Hampton on November 14 (Stuart Varney) was part of a broader movement involving birds in Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Massachusetts.

Western Cattle Egret by Cameron Johnson, 11-17-2024, Hurd Farm, Hampton, NH.

Snowy Owls had a moderate fall, a stark contrast from last fall's near-absence. Most notable were three sightings from high elevations: Pack Monadnock (Glen Chretien, November 2), Mount Washington (Ryan Knapp, November 14), and Mount Guyot (Dave Geiger, Tom Ickes, and J. Pelletier, November 20). These alpine locations resemble the species' breeding habitat.

Short-eared Owls also had a modest showing during the fall with only two individuals documented. Steve and Jane Mirick and Holly Bauer saw one migrating south from Bicentennial Park in Hampton on October 13. Then, on November 3, the group at the Pack Monadnock Hawkwatch were treated to great views of a Short-eared Owl circling above them for several minutes before heading south. This species is never common in the state, but most years at least a handful are observed in fall. **Long-eared Owls** are also reported most years but remain notoriously difficult to find in New Hampshire. Ethan Ring observed his second of the year on November 11 in Newington.

There were only four discrete observations of migrant **Sandhill Cranes** this fall, slightly fewer than in recent years. Two of these involved groups of eight: one flying over Pack Monadnock (November 3) and the other along the shore of Lake Massabesic (Jesse Roussell, November 4). Given that these locations are at roughly equal latitudes, it seems likely that these are separate records.

Other Noteworthy Records

Perhaps the other most interesting records this season were two clusters of inland waterbirds, both including some very rare species. The first was at the Moore Reservoir in Littleton; a rare inland **Laughing Gull** (second county record) on August 6 was joined by a **Forster's Tern** (first county record and one of the only inland records for the state!). On August 18, they were joined by two **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (third county record). A **Sanderling** also joined the mix that day—only the seventh or so record for the county. (See the Field Notes section for more on these observations.) While these birds occurred on a large reservoir on the Connecticut River, the other group of sightings took place on a small, montane lake.

Forster's tern and Herring Gull by Jim Sparrell, 8-17-2024, Moore Reservoir, Littleton, NH.

The second cluster occurred at Lake Gloriette in Dixville Notch on November 25, where Lori and Paul Charron documented a surprising assortment of coastal species: a **Common Eider** (very rare inland), two **Red-throated Loons** (also rare inland), and six **Long-tailed Ducks**. This remarkable collection of ocean-going birds made for a memorable day of birding.

Dunlins are rare in New Hampshire before mid-September, so one found in Hampton on August 16 (Steve Mirick) was especially noteworthy. Similarly, a **Wilson's Snipe** photographed on August 14 on Jeffrey's Ledge (Steve Mirick) was unusually early and clearly a migrant, as this species breeds only in the far north.

A relatively mild fall may have allowed some birds to migrate uninterrupted, contributing to a lack of notably late records. One exception was a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** found at Meadow Pond in Hampton on November 25 (Holly Bauer), a date when a White-rumped Sandpiper would have been more expected. Other late migrants included a **Magnolia Warbler** in Lebanon (Annelise Hansen, November 3), a **Black-and-white Warbler** in Durham (Alan Murray, November 29), a **Canada Warbler** in Brentwood (Steve Mirick, September 25), and a **Black-billed Cuckoo** lingering at Odiorne Point State Park until October 12.

Fall 2024 New Hampshire Raptor Migration Report

by Iain MacLeod

Every fall, thousands of migrating raptors pass through New Hampshire on southbound journeys to their winter territories—some traveling as far as Central and South America. Dedicated hawkwatchers scour the skies and enter daily observations into the Hawk Migration Association (HMA) HawkCount database, which allows for real-time analysis of trends. In 2024, counts were conducted at four New Hampshire sites, logging 749.42 hours of observations and tallying 7,500 migrant raptors (See Table 1, page 14). All data provided in this article are from HawkCount.org, the online raptor migration database of the Hawk Migration Association.

Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory

Fall 2024 marked the 20th consecutive fall season of daily coordinated counts conducted at the Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory at Miller State Park in Peterborough, NH. 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 was Caroline Fegley. Julie Brown, Phil Brown, Levi Burford, Katrina Fenton, Tom Delaney, Glen Chretien, Mark Timmerman, and I served as official counters on days when Caroline wasn'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.

Short-eared Owl by Cameron Johnson, 11-3-2024, Pack Monadnock, NH.

Daily coverage officially began on September 1, though counts were conducted on five days in August (23, 24 25, 30, and 31) and continued through November 20. In that time, 608.92 observation hours were logged (27.5 hours in August, 217.92 in September, 235.08 in October, and 128.42 in November). The total observation hours were well above the previous 10-year average and marked the second-highest total ever. A total of 5,770 individual migratory raptors were recorded, which equals 9.48 raptors per hour. The prior 10-year average is 12,510 raptors; the 10-year average for raptors per hour is 23.2. Ten-year averages in this report refer to data from the prior 10 years, 2014-2023.

So, what happened to all the raptors? One species, the Broad-winged Hawk, usually makes up around 75% of the total hawks counted at Pack. This year's Broad-winged count was the lowest in the history of the site, but most other species had normal or above average counts. See details below and also in the additional Broad-winged spotlight article (page 15).

After three consecutive years of sightings (of just one to three individuals), no **Black Vultures** were counted this year. However, it's clear from other year-round sightings throughout the state that this "southern" vulture has become established in the state. We can expect to record small numbers in the future.

Our first migrating **Turkey Vultures** were noted on September 18 (although local, non-migrating birds are seen daily throughout August and September). The count of 158 was well below the prior 10-year average of 284. The biggest single day count was 29 on October 20. Despite this year's low count, the trend for the 20 years of counting is very solidly up and the 10-year trend shows a more rapid increase.

Osprey had a nice bounce back year. In previous reports, I have speculated on the impact of Bald Eagles on Ospreys to our north. This year's count of 195 was a 60% jump over last year's record low and is the highest annual count since 2017 (the 10-year average is 184). The 20-year trend is still solidly down, but it's encouraging to see the downward trend line pop upwards this year. The peak flight day was an impressive 52 seen on September 15.

The **Bald Eagle** total (173) dropped slightly from last year but matched the 10-year average. Twelve were counted in August, 87 in September with 44 in October, and 30 in November. The peak one-day count was 10 on September 22—the exact same date and peak count as last year!

The count of **Northern Harriers** (124) was just one shy of the record set back in 2015. This year's tally was well above the 10-year average (87, see Figure 1). A staggering 82 were counted in September, 34 in October, and eight in November. The peak flight day was September 15 when 13 were counted.

The **Sharp-shinned Hawk** count (1,058) was down about 11% compared to last year. The 10-year average is 1,124. The bulk were counted in September (699), with the peak date on

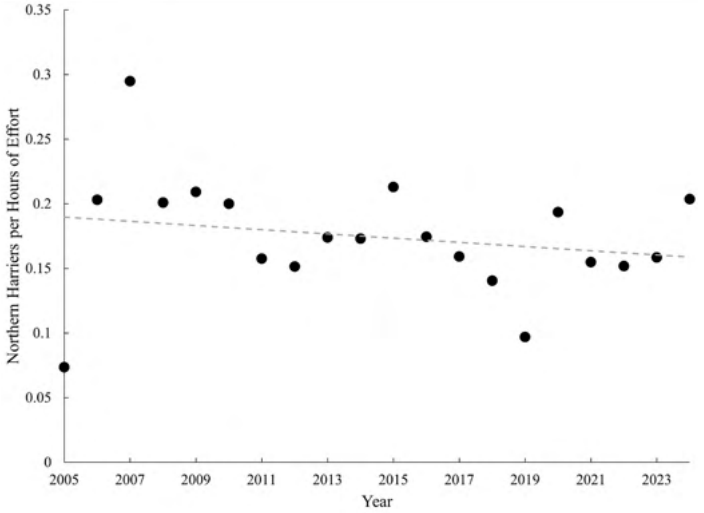


Figure 1. Northern Harrier counts per hours of effort from 2005-2024 at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH. Source: HMA's HawkCount.org Database.

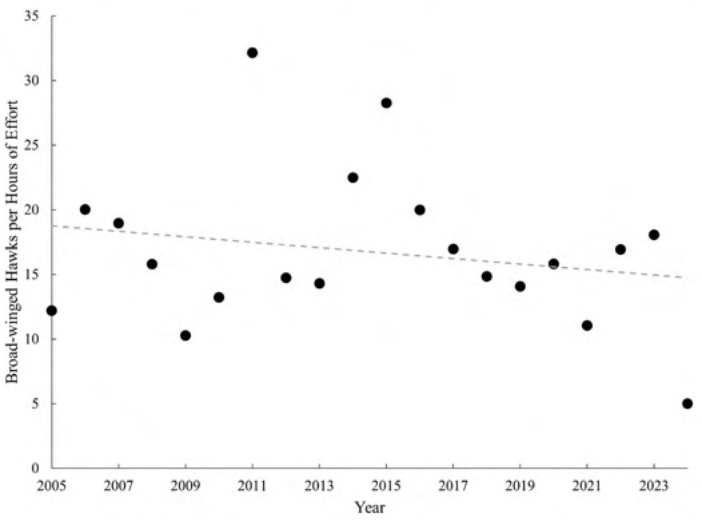


Figure 2. Broad-winged Hawk counts per hour of effort from 2005-2024 at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH. Source: HMA's HawkCount.org Database.

September 15 when 88 were counted.

The count of 162 **Cooper's Hawks** was ahead of the 10-year average (143). Overall, the trend is consistent for the last 10 years with a slight increase.

Twenty-two **Northern Goshawks** were counted this year, a nice bounce back from the record low (6) last year. The 10-year average is 21, though this is well below the numbers we used to count (Figure 2, Table 2). There was a high count of 68 back in 2006.

The **Broad-winged Hawk** count of 3,042 is the lowest ever recorded in the 20 years of the Pack count. The ten-year average is 9,600. Broad-winged Hawks always show a peak flight period on a few days in mid-September. Typically, 70-80% of the entire tally is seen within that short window. The weather at Pack during the mid-September peak flight period was hot and hazy with an offshore weather system that kept winds generally from the east. Our conclusion is that the Broad-winged missed us and moved farther west. Backing up that theory is the record count at Putney Mountain in Vermont, 38 miles west of Pack. They counted 16,206 Broad-winged Hawks which is a site record. Their peak count day was September 15 when they counted 5,229. That same day at Pack, only 77 Broad-winged Hawks were counted! For more analysis of the 2024 Broad-winged Hawk migration see page 15.

The **Red-shouldered** Hawk count dipped a little again this year to 177 (but that is just a little below the 10-year average of 181). The peak count day was October 28 when 56 were tallied.

The **Red-tailed Hawk** tally (209) was our second lowest ever and well below the 10-year average of 313. Red-tailed Hawks are late season migrants. As I noted in last year's summary, the count is going steadily down and that decline

Table 2. Broad-winged Hawk fall migration totals and peak counts at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH. Source: HMA'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
2024	3,042	516	11-Sep

has become steeper in the last ten years. All other evidence suggests that Red-tailed Hawk populations are not actually declining; rather, more northern breeders are wintering further north and fewer are migrating further south through New Hampshire.

Two **Rough-legged Hawks** were seen this season (our average is one). The tally of 15 **Golden Eagles** was our second highest tally ever. The 10-year average is 10. One was counted in September, five in October and nine in November. There were three days in November when two of these beauties were seen.

The **American Kestrel** count of 180 was nearly twice last year's count. The 10-year average is 161. After lamenting the record low count in last year's report, it's great to see the kestrel bounce back so well. What will next year bring?

The **Merlin** count of 138 was well above the 10-year average (101). Six were counted in August, 64 in September, 63 in October, and five in November.

The **Peregrine Falcon** count dropped a little this year. Thirty-nine were counted (the ten-year average is 49).

Alton Bay Hawk Watch

2024 was the fifth year Rob Woodward conducted a count on Pine Mountain in the Morse Preserve in Alton. He counted for 114 hours this year and tallied a total of 1,296 migrating raptors between September 9 and October 24. In 2023, he tallied 1,356 raptors in 91.5 hours; 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.

Only 11 migrating **Turkey Vultures** were counted which is well below the prior four-year average of 44.

Twelve **Ospreys** were tallied in 2024 (prior four-year average is seven). Thirty-three **Bald Eagles** is the highest season count at this site. The four-year average is 15.

Nine **Northern Harriers** was the highest count at this site (average is three).

There were 127 **Sharp-shinned Hawks** seen in 2024 (average is 75) as well as ten **Cooper's Hawks** (which matches the 2020 high). No **Northern Goshawks** have been tallied at this count yet.

One **Red-shouldered Hawk** was tallied in 2024 (the high is three). There were 1,024 **Broad-winged Hawks** counted this year (the average is 1,545). September 13 was the peak day with 424 seen. Thirty **Red-tailed Hawks** were counted (the average is 17).

Eighteen **American Kestrels** were tallied this year—a nice bounce back after last year's low of just three (average is 11). The count of eight **Merlins** is close to the average. No **Peregrine Falcons** were seen.

Interlakes Elementary School

2024 marked the 44th 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 17 and 18. A total of 392 raptors were counted over the two days: 19 **Turkey Vultures**, one **Osprey**, six **Bald Eagles**, one **Northern Harrier**, 11 **Sharp-shinned hawks**, three **Cooper's Hawks**, 349 **Broad-winged Hawks**, one **Peregrine** and one unidentified accipiter.

Concord School District

2024 marked the 14th year of data in HawkCount from this site. This year, they counted on five days in September (16, 17, 20, 23, and 27). There were 42 migrating raptors tallied over the five days (well below last year): 12 **Turkey Vultures**, five **Bald Eagles**, one S**harp-shinned Hawk**, nine **Broad-winged Hawk**s, four **Red-tailed Hawks**, one **American Kestrel**, and 10 unidentified hawks.

Carter Hill Raptor Migration Observatory

No data were entered in HawkCount in 2024.

Little Round Top

No data were entered in HawkCount in 2024.

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 (HMA). 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.*

Peregrine Falcon by Kyle Wilmarth, 10-20-2024, Salem, NH.

Table 1. Total raptors counted in 2024 at all New Hampshire hawkwatch sites. Source: HMA's HawkCount.org Database.

	Obs. Hrs.	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	UR	SE	SO	Total
Pack Monadnock	609	-	158	195	173	124	1058	162	22	177	3042	209	2	15	180	138	39	74	1	1	**5770**
Alton Bay	114	-	11	12	33	9	127	10	-	1	1024	30	-	-	18	8	-	13	-	-	**1296**
Concord School	18	-	12	-	5	-	1	-	-	-	9	4	-	-	1	-	-	10	-	-	**42**
Interlakes School	9	-	19	1	6	1	11	3	-	-	349	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	**392**
Total	**749**	**-**	**200**	**208**	**217**	**134**	**1197**	**175**	**22**	**178**	**4424**	**243**	**2**	**15**	**199**	**146**	**40**	**98**	**1**	**1**	**7500**

*Table 3. Total raptors counted for all years (2005-2024) at Pack Monadnock Raptor Migration Observatory, Peterborough, NH. Source: HMA's HawkCount.org Database. * The average is for the previous ten years (2014-2023).*

Year	Obs. Hrs.	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	SW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	UR	SE	SO	TOTAL
2005	330.25	-	29	219	52	24	520	47	11	23	3,978	-	122	-	5	78	40	11	62	-	-	**5,221**
2006	408.25	-	99	257	55	77	1,253	213	68	46	7,595	-	407	-	11	201	48	29	76	-	-	**10,435**
2007	430	-	121	291	53	121	1,288	186	49	112	7,776	-	263	-	5	143	90	44	82	-	-	**10,624**
2008	435.75	-	47	256	50	87	1,189	162	28	67	6,835	-	254	-	3	183	59	17	37	-	-	**9,274**
2009	420.75	-	80	182	51	88	1,196	133	25	129	4,322	-	421	-	6	135	56	30	109	-	-	**6,963**
2010	627.75	-	145	298	85	115	1,248	168	66	109	7,606	-	410	-	10	221	147	53	105	-	-	**10,786**
2011	368	-	127	271	54	58	1,124	145	21	43	11,831	-	202	-	9	170	68	40	93	-	-	**14,256**
2012	600.75	-	164	314	105	91	1,388	181	63	209	8,848	1	522	1	7	194	108	54	74	-	-	**12,324**
2013	575	-	142	193	101	100	1,254	146	25	118	8,221	-	378	1	11	166	89	48	36	1	-	**11,030**
2014	497	-	99	213	120	85	1,094	126	22	123	11,043	-	348	1	7	112	80	39	53	-	-	**13,565**
2015	586.92	-	137	201	132	125	1,443	115	48	141	16,593	1	546	1	13	118	120	54	57	-	-	**19,845**
2016	527	-	322	242	136	92	1,126	163	48	117	10,530	-	294	1	5	167	96	49	78	-	-	**13,466**
2017	515.25	-	324	219	163	82	1,179	142	16	181	8,744	-	341	2	7	166	106	64	68	-	-	**11,804**
2018	463.25	-	98	189	176	64	668	124	11	126	6,756	-	246	2	22	172	58	31	108	-	-	**8,851**
2019	557.17	-	268	171	180	54	1,027	105	9	181	7,840	-	223	-	4	185	64	64	128	-	-	**10,503**
2020	557.67	-	172	162	185	108	1,325	180	12	223	8,815	-	293	-	5	257	143	30	122	-	-	**12,032**
2021	548.42	2	641	182	227	85	1,291	157	13	223	6,055	-	329	1	11	165	100	57	66	-	-	**9,605**
2022	553.42	1	493	137	210	84	886	149	22	301	9,369	-	300	-	11	175	130	44	58	-	-	**12,370**
2023	567.75	3	286	122	196	90	1,198	167	6	188	10,256	-	212	1	10	92	108	61	62	-	-	**13,058**
2024	**608.92**	**-**	**158**	**195**	**173**	**124**	**1,058**	**162**	**22**	**177**	**3,042**	**-**	**209**	**2**	**15**	**180**	**138**	**39**	**74**	**1**	**1**	**5,770**
Average*	537.39	0.6	284	183.8	172.5	86.9	1,123.7	142.8	20.7	180.5	9,600	-	313.2	0.9	9.5	160.9	100.5	49.3	80	-	-	**12,307.1**

Key to Tables 1 and 3.

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

Spotlight: Broad-winged Hawk Migration 2024

by Iain MacLeod

Broad-winged Hawk by Steve Mirick.

The Broad-winged Hawk migration count at Pack Monadnock in the fall of 2024 was the lowest recorded in the 20 years of monitoring efforts at that site. Although counters were there every day during the peak migration days in mid-September, the birds never came. Meanwhile, just 38 miles away in Putney, Vermont, they had their highest ever count of Broad-winged Hawks—16,206 individuals.

Broad-winged Hawks have a compact fall migration push through New England: 90% of the entire count will be over a few days in mid-September. Conditions at Pack Monadnock during that period were consistently hot and hazy, with cloudless skies. Observers, however, noted cumulus clouds to the west, toward and beyond the Connecticut River Valley. Cumulus clouds are an indication of rising air and good thermals—the type of conditions Broad-winged Hawks seek during migration.

Figure 1 tells an interesting story and may reveal an emerging trend rather than a one-year anomaly. The graph shows the raw counts of Broad-winged Hawks during the fall migration season at Pack Monadnock and Putney Mountain between 2005 and 2024. It is clear that when Putney Mountain counts a lot of hawks, Pack doesn't—and vice-versa. There also appears to be a recent shift toward a more inland migration route for Broad-winged Hawks.

Pack wasn't the only eastern site bypassed by Broad-winged Hawks in 2024. Clarry Hill on the coast of Maine also had their lowest ever count, with only 867 birds—down from over 17,000 in 2023 and well below their yearly average of over 10,000. At Wachusett Mountain in Massachusetts, the count dropped to 1,498, compared to over 15,000 in 2023. Mount Watatic in Massachusetts also recorded a record low of 903, down from more than 12,000 the previous year. Interestingly, the Detroit River Hawkwatch in Michigan also saw a record low of 6,785 Broad-wings, compared to over 112,000 in 2023.

Further south, Broad-winged Hawks from across the eastern United States funnel along the west side of the Gulf of Mexico and down through the isthmus of Central America. At Corpus Christi in Texas, they counted 659,000 Broad-winged Hawks compared to their average of 529,000. At Veracruz, Mexico, they counted over 1.18 million—their highest count since 2013.

So, although many sites in eastern New England "missed" their expected Broad-winged Hawk numbers, the overall population appears to be just fine. In 2024, local weather conditions at many eastern sites simply sent the birds elsewhere.

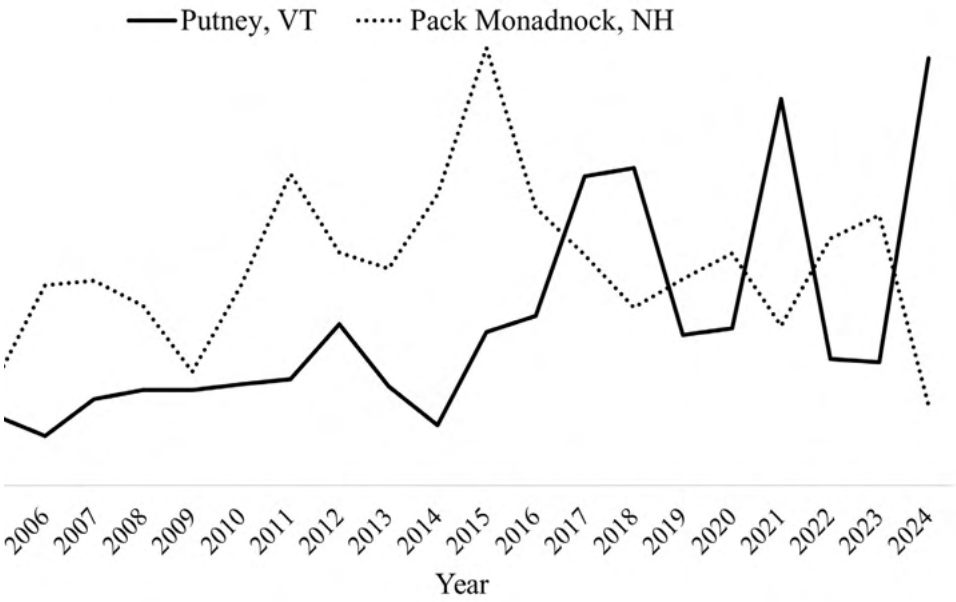


Figure 1. Broad-winged Hawk fall migration counts at Pack Monadnock, NH, and Putney Mountain, VT, from 2005-2024.

Field Notes Fall 2024

Kathryn Frieden, Editor

Great Egret Eating a Vole

Photo by Iain MacLeod.

Iain MacLeod first saw this Great Egret at Moulton Farm in Meredith on August 4. It stayed there for fifteen days. On August 10, he watched as it stalked and then ate a vole very close to the road. The Great Egret's diet consists largely of fish and some invertebrates. Less than five percent of the diet is small mammals, as noted in Birds of the World.

Reference

McCrimmon Jr., D., J. Ogden, G. Bancroft, A. Martínez-Vilalta, A. Motis, G. Kirwan, and P. Boesman. 2020. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), version 1.0. *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.greegr.01

Gulls and Terns of Moore Reservoir

by Kathryn Frieden

The Moore Reservoir is an impoundment about 3,000 acres in size on the Connecticut River just northwest of the town of Littleton, NH. It was formed when the Moore Dam was built in 1956.

Moore Reservoir became the "talk of the town" when Bob Quinn posted to the NH Birds email list that he had a "four-gull-day" there on August 14. These included Laughing, Bonaparte's, Herring, and Ring-billed Gull. That number doesn't even include the rare inland Forster's Tern that drew Bob to the reservoir that day.

View of the Moore Reservior. Photo by Catherine Holland, 9-4-2024.

The earliest gull reports in the eBird hot spot for Moore Reservoir are a Ring-billed Gull and a Great Black-backed Gull by Ruby Emery in 1961. By 1963, Ruby had also found a Herring Gull. It wasn't until 1990 that a fourth gull was added to the list—a Bonaparte's Gull by Sandy and Mark Turner. Then, 34 years later, August 2024 happened. Kyle Jones reported an immature Laughing Gull on August 6. When Jeff MacQueen took his son Brady to see the Laughing Gull on August 11, they discovered an immature Forster's Tern! This was not only the first record at the Moore Reservoir, but it was also the first record for all of Grafton County. More birders kept "flocking" to the reservoir and on August 16, Catherine Holland, Kyle Jones, and Wayne Scott found two Lesser Black-backed Gulls, the third new gull or tern species to be added in August 2024 to the reservoir's bird list.

The average number of checklists at the reservoir for August in recent years was four. In August 2024, there were 72 checklists submitted! Perhaps this will be a trend for, as Bob Quinn put it, "this under-birded inland site."

Bonaparte's Gull photographed at Moore Reservoir by Catherine Holland on 9-4-2024.

The famous Forster's Tern soaring over Moore Reservoir. Photo by Jim Sparrell on 8-16-2024.

Loon Rescue on Pawtuckaway Lake

by Angela Potavin

One of the things I love most about Pawtuckaway Lake is how people on the lake pull together to help one another. On August 22, a family was camping at the state park when they noticed a distressed juvenile loon entangled in fishing line and beached on the small island in Tuckaway Cove. They immediately sought help from neighbors Gary Potavin and daughter Sonoma, who were able to bring out scissors and a box to help capture the loon and remove the line that was tangled around its head and neck. A bystander called the Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) and Caroline Hughes from the LPC stayed on the line to instruct Gary on placing the loon in a box with towels and ice. The box was closed and put in a cool, quiet room while local loon biologist Jayden Mowry dropped everything to drive to the lake and examine the loon. Jayden then took it to a rehabilitator where x-rays revealed an embedded fishhook in the loon's tongue. After it was successfully removed, the young loon was brought back to Pawtuckaway Lake the same day, where it was happily greeted by its parents.

Editor's Note: Here is the phone number for the Loon Preservation Community distress line: (603) 476-5666. Fisherpersons—please don't leave fishing lines, hooks, or lead tackle in our lakes where loons can be harmed by them!

Angela Potavin took this photo of a young loon being helped by Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) biologist Jayden Mowry after it had been rescued from Pawtuckaway Lake in Nottingham.

The Last Louisiana Waterthrush Song

by Greg Tillman

Warblers arrive every spring in a glory of color and song. The Louisiana Waterthrush is among the earliest to arrive, and I begin listening for their slurred whistling song in early April. The Louisiana Waterthrush is also among the earliest warblers to leave New Hampshire, beginning its southern migration in early August. It leaves with less fanfare than when it arrives, slipping out overnight largely unnoticed.

I am lucky enough to live among several waterthrush territories, and when I realized how early waterthrushes migrate, I began listening for their songs in August as well as in April. August evenings were a good time to hear them, occasionally singing a few phrases just before dusk. In 2024, I have eBird entries for the evening of August 4 and again on August 6. I made one last eBird entry on August 14, at about 7:45 pm. I spent a few minutes in the yard and heard one Eastern Wood-Pewee, one insistent Northern Cardinal, and one Louisiana Waterthrush, which as usual sang two or three times, and then went silent. That's the last New Hampshire eBird record of a Louisiana Waterthrush for 2024. Sometime during that night or one of the next few, it slipped out, quietly, unnoticed.

Louisiana Waterthrush by Steve Mirick.

Whimbrel Eating Nightshade Berries

Photos by Greg Tillman on Star Island, 9-25-2024.

According to Birds of the World*, when a Whimbrel is eating berries it "jerks its head back, opens bill to catch the berry in its throat, and swallows it." Here is a Whimbrel in the middle of that process with a nightshade berry. Shiloh Schulte, the late shorebird conservation biologist at the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Manomet, MA, noted that other birds eat nightshade berries, so those berries are not toxic for them; however, to his knowledge nobody has previously documented whimbrel eating nightshade berries.*

Here is the Whimbrel showing its full crop, at least partly from the berries.

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Skeel, M. and E. Mallory. 2020. Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), version 1.0. *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.whimbr.01

Snowy Owl atop Mt. Washington

Photo by Ryan Knapp.

On the morning of November 4, 2024, Ryan Knapp, a meteorologist at the Mount Washington Observatory, took this photo of a Snowy Owl, perched on the Auto Road Stage Office. Shortly after Ryan took the photo, the owl soared off to lower elevations. This is only the third record of a Snowy Owl on Mt. Washington, and neither of the two previous sightings were at the summit, so we can safely say this was the highest Snowy Owl ever in New Hampshire.

Historical Field Note: A Coos County First

by Jason Lambert

Have you ever submitted a bird report to eBird intending to upload photos or audio later, but forgotten to do it? Well, it's never too late to go back and add your media or comments to improve an old record. One birder recently did just that and uploaded the oldest video evidence of a rare bird in NH eBird history (so far).

On September 21, 1995, Erik Nielsen, Seth Sweet, and Svend Erik Lauritzen were birding at the Second Connecticut Lake in Pittsburg, NH, when they found a Sanderling. This was before eBird, which debuted in 2002. The birders must have been knowledgeable enough about Sanderling status and distribution to realize this was an unusual find, since there wasn't an eBird list to alert them with a flag. To document the sighting, Nielsen used an 8mm camera with his Kowa scope. The list was entered into eBird over 15 years later, in 2011, and the video was added to the list nearly as many years after that in 2024. That clip is now the oldest video documentation of any bird in New Hampshire on eBird by nearly three years.

Today, as in 1995, Sanderlings are only occasionally found inland, and this record remains the only eBird record for Coos County. Interestingly, Keith and Fox (2013) list several historic records from the 1800s at Lake Umbagog which was prior to the intense period of the market hunting of shorebirds.

You can check out the 1995 checklist here: https://ebird.org/checklist/S7617992.

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Leucistic Semi-palmated Plover

Photo by Susan Wrisley.

This leucistic Semipalmated Plover was picked out of a large crowd of shorebirds and photographed by Susan Wrisley on September 4 at Plaice Cove in Hampton. Leucism is a condition caused by the lack of melanin pigment and can be partial or complete. It is unusual in shorebirds. (See the Summer 2024 issue of New Hampshire Bird Records *for further information about leucism.)*

The Incident of the Cooper's Hawk in a Dog Kennel

by George Gavutis, Jr.

We have a cement-floored, chain-link-fenced, 12′ x 12′ x 6′ high dog kennel that is attached to the back of our house. Since it was no longer being used for dogs, and after we had finally been "blessed" with our first visit from a marauding black bear, we decided to convert the kennel into a "fortress." This would be a good place to store our heavy steel barrels of bird seed. We covered the kennel with a steel-fence roof of pipes and 2″x 4″ mesh and added a padlock to the latch mechanism. Now our vulnerable bird feeders would be safe inside the fortress—problem solved.

The small songbirds have no trouble navigating their way through the fencing to glean any spilled seed. They sometimes even use the kennel as an emergency escape site when marauding hawks attack them at the nearby feeders. Once in a while, an even larger bird like a Mourning Dove would manage to find its way inside.

One day this fall, I was startled to see a large, beautiful, adult female Cooper's Hawk glaring at me and flying wildly inside the kennel. I had no idea how it was able to gain entrance. Concerned that it would injure itself, I quickly opened the gate and entered, thinking I would need to chase it around a bit to help it find the exit. However, it found the opening in an instant and quickly sped away, dodging around the tree trunks in the adjacent woods. I then did a very close inspection of the kennel and found a small gap that was three inches wide, while all of the rest of the openings were a maximum of two inches. Three inches still seemed awfully small for a hawk that large, but I made a quick repair. It should now be completely "Cooper's Hawk-proof." I'm not so sure about smaller hawks like a Sharp-shinned or a kestrel or even a shrike but time will tell.

Editor's Note: New Hampshire Fish and Game recommends winter-only bird feeding (December–April 1) to help prevent bear conflicts.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Fall Migration in Southwestern NH

by Hillary Siener

For its third consecutive season, the Harris Center for Conservation Education (harriscenter.org) captured and banded Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*)

A Northern Saw-whet Owl banded on Harris Center lands in 2024. Photo by Brett Amy Thelen.

to monitor their population and migration through the Monadnock Region of southwestern New Hampshire. This project is part of a network called Project Owlnet that investigates the movements of saw-whet owls and other owl species throughout North America. The Harris Center also offers educational opportunities related to this project, reaching about 100 people in 2024.

Flight feathers are examined to determine age. The owl in this photograph is a second-year bird (hatched in 2023). Photo by Lindsay Herlihy.

Capture and banding protocols involve using an array of four 12-m long mist nets and broadcasting the male saw-whet owl territorial call on a continuous loop to lure owls towards the nets. Our team opens nets at one of two sites each night, turns on the lure for four hours (weather permitting), and checks the nets for owls every 15-30 minutes. Captured owls are removed from the nets by trained individuals; the birds are measured, sexed, examined to determine age, outfitted with a federal band on their leg, and released back into the wild. At the end of each night, the nets are closed and lure is switched off.

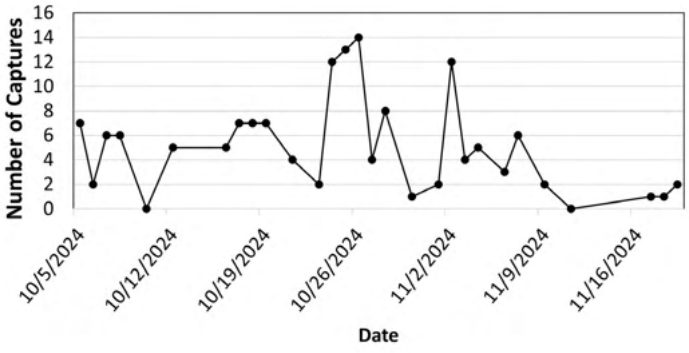

Figure 1. Number of Northern Saw-whet Owls captured per night at the Harris Center for Conservation Education's banding sites in the fall of 2024.

Over the course of 29 nights between October 5 and November 19, we captured 148 individual saw-whet owls. On average, 5.1 owls were captured per night. October 26 had the highest number of captures with 14 owls, but 13 owls on October 25 and 12 owls on both October 24 and November 2 were also significant (Figure 1). Migration timing peaked in mid-late October (October 20 – 26). This is about one week earlier than peak migration in 2023, and about the same as peak migration in 2022.

Of the 148 captures, there were 110 females, six males, and 32 were unable to be sexed. The higher proportion of females is typical at saw-whet owl banding stations. Though playing the male advertising call may attract more females (despite not being breeding season) or deter males, there is growing evidence to suggest that the species has a sex-differentiated migration with males not migrating or not migrating as far as females.

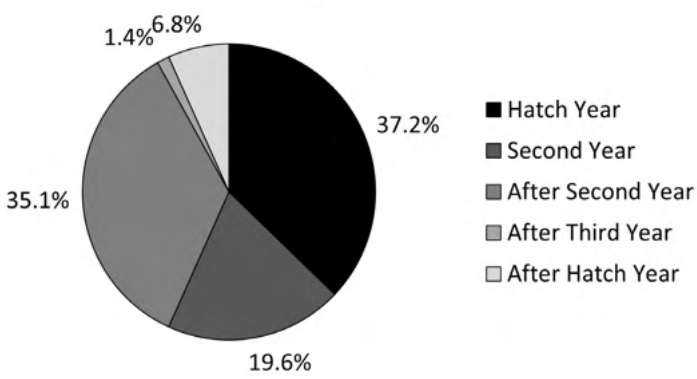

Figure 2. Age breakdown of Northern Saw-whet Owls captured in the fall of 2024 in New Hampshire's Monadnock Region by the Harris Center for Conservation Education. Age categories are as follows: Hatch Year (HY) refers to owls born in the same calendar year as capture; Second Year (SY) owls hatched the previous year and are in their second calendar year; After Second Year (ASY) are in at least their third calendar year; After Third Year (ATY) are in at least their fourth calendar year; and After Hatch Year (AHY) includes all owls older than hatch year.

Of the owls captured, 37.2% were aged as hatch years (hatched in 2024; Figure 2). The majority of owls were at least in the second year of life (hatched in 2023 or before), including two owls that were able to be aged as at least four years old (after third year).

This season, we captured four owls that were already banded. One banded in Milford, Ontario was captured 17 nights later at our Hancock, NH site, traveling a straight-line distance of an average of 14.8 miles per night, presumably taking an easterly migration route before reaching our site. Two owls were banded in previous falls at Sainte-Anne-De-Bellevue, Quebec and Peterborough, Ontario. One owl banded in Bergton, Virginia in 2022, was also caught in Southbury, Connecticut in 2023 before being captured at our Hancock, New Hampshire site in 2024.

Additionally, eight owls that were banded by us from 2022 to 2024 were captured at other stations in 2024, including three same-season banding encounters. These

three owls banded at our station in 2024 were recaptured in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Over the course of the project, we have had 17 interstation encounters of saw-whet owls (Figure 3). All recaptures help to paint a picture of where these owls move from one year to the next, their rate of travel, important migration routes, their longevity, overwintering areas, 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 2025. Special thanks to the Harris Center's 50th Anniversary Fund, Project Owlnet, and New Hampshire Fish and Game. This project was also made possible by 23 Harris Center staff and volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours to the project while donning headlamps and braving chilly fall evenings in the woods. The Aurora Borealis was also a treat for volunteers on a couple of occasions this fall.

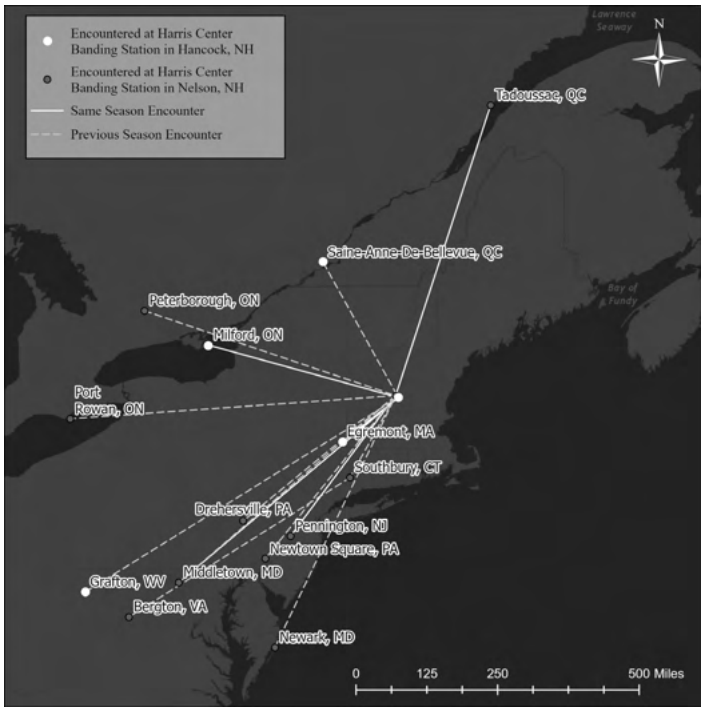

Figure 3. Map showing locations where Northern Saw-whet Owls banded on Harris Center for Conservation Education lands have subsequently been encountered, and where previously banded owls encountered at Harris Center sites were originally banded. Solid lines indicate same-season encounters, and dashed lines indicate owls that were banded in a previous season before they were re-encountered. Data shown here represents encounters from 2022-2024. Map created by Mike Valentino. Updates by Nate Marchessault.

Birding in Pawtuckaway State Park

by Mark Suomala

Pawtuckaway Lake by Karen Rydeen.

Pawtuckaway State Park is located in Deerfield and Nottingham. It is 5,500 acres in size and contains a variety of landscapes centered around the Pawtuckaway Mountains and Pawtuckaway Lake.

The park has recorded several bird species normally found farther south in New England, including Cerulean Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Acadian Flycatcher. These occur in the park irregularly and mainly in association with the Dry Appalachian Oak Forests, primarily restricted to the park's south-facing slopes. Red and White Oak as well as Shagbark Hickory dominate the tree canopy on these slopes.

The park's most productive birding areas are accessible by gravel roads and hiking trails. The last three weeks in May are a particularly good time to visit. Tower Road and Round Pond Road are usually gated until Memorial Day, consequently there are no motorized vehicles on the roads. This is also a peak time for returning avian migrants. Some breed in the area, others just stop over as they travel farther north.

The Reservation Road, Tower Road, and Round Pond Road Loop

To get to the west entrance, travel on Route 107 to Reservation Road and drive east. There is a small brown sign indicating the way to the Fire Tower. In 1.1 miles, there is a power line crossing. This is not the park but is a good place to pull over, as long as the "No Trespassing" signs are heeded. Early successional trees and shrubs under the wires are maintained by regular cutting. From the roadside, a number of species can be encountered; Prairie Warbler, Chestnut-

sided Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, and Indigo Bunting nest here. Most of these species can also be found in the park.

In 0.1 miles, bear right to continue on Reservation Road, which is dirt. After about 0.25 miles, you will enter the park, and in another short distance there is a sign for North Mountain trail, formerly the designated parking lot. To get to the current parking area, continue 0.3 miles until a large, signed parking area on the left. Park here to hike the North Mountain Trail (since you already passed it, you will have to walk back on the road to the trailhead). Yellow-bellied Sapsucker have nested in this area; they can be heard "tapping" Morse code-like on trees.

After another 0.5 miles, Reservation Road crosses a wetland. This wetland can attract a variety of species. Look for Wood Duck, Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, and Baltimore Oriole. In a short distance, Round Pond Road branches off to the left; it is usually gated until the end of May. Continue straight on Reservation Road for a short distance until you see a pull-out on the right. Four or five cars can fit. There is a small stand of pole-sized trees here that can attract Yellow-billed Cuckoo when there are webworms or hairy caterpillars present. Black-throated Green Warbler is also sometimes found on the other side of the road. Park here to continue on foot.

Black-throated Green Warbler in Pawtuckaway State Park by Roger Frieden.

Just a little farther on Reservation Road brings you to a left turn onto Tower Road. After about 0.3 miles, Tower Road travels along the edge of an extensive wetland. This habitat can yield many species. Potential species include Hooded Merganser, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Least Flycatcher, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Purple Finch, and Swamp Sparrow. In May, migrants can include Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Parula, and Palm Warbler. Evening Grosbeak was formerly regular but is now rare.

Traveling another 0.4 miles will bring you to the Middle Mountain trailhead, and then to the Tower trailhead. A small stream-crossing here often hosts Louisiana Waterthrush, and this area was where Cerulean Warblers nested for several years. Great Crested Flycatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak can all be found here. If needed, there is a pit-toilet here.

Scarlet Tanager by Benjamin Griffith, 5-12-2024, Pawtuckaway State Park, Nottingham, NH.

The Middle Mountain Trail is roughly one mile and ends at a rocky outcrop with a view. Early spring arrivals found in this area include Pine Warbler, with its variable trilling song. White Pine are found throughout the park, but most Red Pine has been removed due to an infestation of Red Pine Scale. Louisiana Waterthrush can be heard singing and seen foraging along streams. Blue-headed Vireo usually arrive in April. Listen for Yellow-throated Vireo here. Their song is similar to Blue-headed Vireo but listen for a phrase that sounds like "three-eight" or "ee-yay." Also listen for Blue-gray Gnatcatcher's song, with its whispery high thin notes. Dark-eyed Junco nest at the top of Middle Mountain. A section of the trail is steep and rocky, but the open woodland allows for good views of the birds.

A half-mile hike on the Tower Trail brings you to the peak of South Mountain (908 ft.) and the fire tower. This can be a good place to look for migrating raptors in September and October. A short distance on Tower Road past the tower trailhead, there is a large parking area on the left next to the small Mountain Pond. Continuing on the road you will see a small clearing on the right, which is gradually filling in with trees. Least Flycatcher nests in this area. Aspen stands attract resident Ruffed Grouse, which can be heard "drumming" with their wings on downed logs. Just beyond the clearing, a swamp is on the right and Tower Road can be rough on the way to the intersection with Round Pond Road. The steep

slope on your left has hosted Worm-eating and Kentucky Warblers, but that was at least 25 years ago!

Turn right onto Round Pond Road. It is roughly a mile on the rough road to Round Pond. It leads past some Eastern Hemlock trees with nesting Blackburnian Warbler. Acadian Flycatcher has occurred at the Boulder Field trailhead on the left and a Black-backed Woodpecker was photographed here once–very rare! Winter Wren and Louisiana Waterthrush can sometimes be found along the streams and in the ravines past the Boulder Field trailhead. You will eventually see a swamp on the left that attracts Hooded Merganser, Wood Duck, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Tree Swallows. In a short distance, you will reach Round Pond on the right. In the Round Pond area, some possible birds are Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Turkey Vulture. The road does not end at Round Pond but is usually underwater for a short distance before it continues to Route 156. Plan on turning around and backtracking.

Head back on Round Pond Road. A short distance past the intersection with Tower Road you will see a marsh on the left. There is a right turn leading into a parking lot. Park here to explore the marsh. This is a good place to look for Great Blue Heron, Eastern Kingbird, Veery, Yellow Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, and Gray Catbird. Mid-March through early April is a good time to look and listen for early-returning Red-shouldered Hawks soaring and vocalizing over the wetland areas. Resident Barred Owls can be heard hooting in the same habitat.

Continuing on Round Pond Road, there are numerous recent clearings and some wetlands. Broad-winged Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Canada Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Virginia Rail are all possible on the way back to Reservation Road.

Geology

The Pawtuckaway Mountains in New Hampshire are a small, rocky, circular range. They form the outline of an ancient volcanic ring dike, dating from 110-130 million years ago, the Cretaceous Period. The inner ring is about one mile in diameter, the outer is nearly two. There is a geologically unusual field where large boulders known as glacial erratics were deposited when glacial ice melted near the end of the Ice Age. This is known as Boulder Field and is frequented by those seeking to climb them.

History

One source claims the name "Pawtuckaway" came from the Algonquian language, meaning "the Place of the Big Buck". Another source notes that Native Americans called the area of Pawtuckaway "Land of Sticks and Stones," since the lake area was not suitable for agriculture.

Restrooms

There is a pit toilet at the Tower Trail, but this should only be used in an emergency. The main park entrance and Fundy Road boat launch both have toilets.

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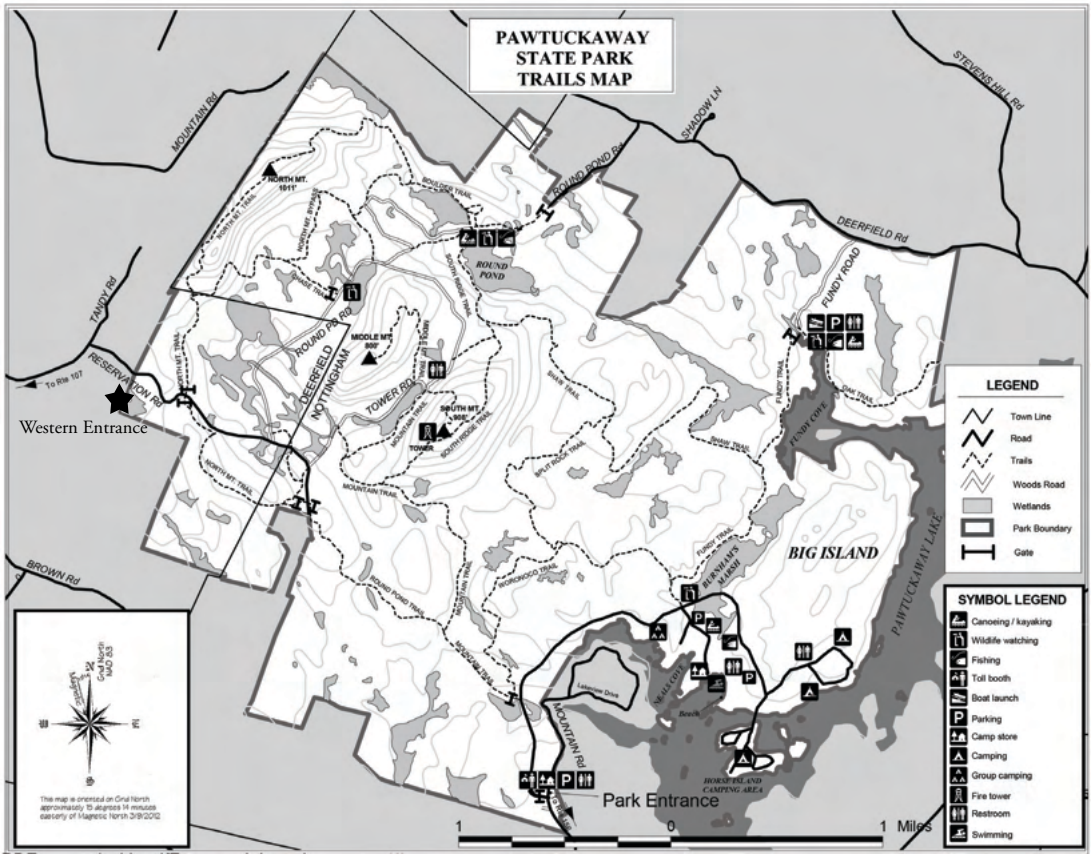

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A Day in the Life: Studying the Black-throated Blue Warbler

by Ellen Estabrook, photos courtesy of Bridget Tweedie

Male Black-throated Blue Warbler carrying a nanotag that transmits a unique radio signal for individual movement detection. All birds were handled with proper permits and training for research purposes.

Who: Scott Sillett, PhD, Research Wildlife Biologist, and Bridget Tweedie, PhD Student, Cornell University
What: Black-throated Blue Warbler Behavior Dynamics in a Shifting Climate
Where: Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest, North Woodstock, NH
When: 1969-Present
Why: Long-term research is essential for understanding behavioral and population trends that can help predict how Black-throated Blue Warblers may respond to future environmental change.

The Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest boasts more than 70 years of ecological research and spans 8,300 acres within New Hampshire's White Mountain National Forest. Its Ecosystem Study is one of the most comprehensive in the world. Since 1969, forest bird populations have been continuously monitored here to better understand the behaviors and life cycles of neotropical migrants—birds that breed in northern forests and overwinter in the tropics. One of the study's focal species is the Black-throated Blue Warbler.

According to NH Audubon's *State of the Birds*, the Black-throated Blue Warbler is "one of the most-studied migrants in North America." Several factors make it ideal for research: stable populations in New England, accessible nests located in knee-high shrubs, and relative ease of capture and banding via mist-netting.

Dr. Scott Sillett, who has studied the species for over 30 years, focuses on demographic research related to breeding and migration. His collaborative research with Richard Holmes (Dartmouth College), Nicholas Rodenhouse (Wellesley College), Allan Strong (University of Vermont), Michael Webster (Cornell Lab of Ornithology), and others explores how weather, habitat structure, and other ecological variables influence forest bird behavior and demographics—particularly regarding breeding success and survival.

"Such information is key to assessing the potential local effects of climate change on migratory bird populations and, ultimately, to predicting how these populations and the biological communities of which they are a part will respond to future environmental change," Scott explains.

The team tracks long-term trends in arrival and departure times, nesting behavior, molting, and site fidelity to determine whether and how climate change affects breeding strategies. These studies aim to detect possible "trade-offs," such as the energy costs associated with a longer growing season.

An essential component of this work is monitoring the bird's full annual cycle—not just the breeding season. This includes research in Caribbean overwintering grounds and tracking migration using lightweight transmitters and mark-recapture methods.

One recent study by Scott's team investigated how non-breeding season conditions impact spring migration and breeding outcomes. Their 2024 publication found that reduced precipitation and lower environmental productivity during the non-breeding period strongly affected spring migration survival (Cooper et al. 2024). This suggests that climate-driven conditions during one part of the year can "carry over" to influence survival and reproductive success later on.

To provide a glimpse of what fieldwork looks like during the breeding season, Bridget Tweedie, a lead researcher and PhD student on Scott's team, outlines a typical day at Hubbard Brook.

A Day in the Field

5:30 am - The team of technicians, undergraduate students, and researchers carpool to the field site while

planning the day ahead. Early mornings are the best time to observe warbler activity.

5:45 am - Upon arrival, the team splits up with GPS units and maps to survey their assigned areas. Researchers observe color-banded Black-throated Blue Warblers and track male sightings to map territories. Technicians focus on banding, measuring, and sampling birds.

A team of banding technicians moving to the next banding location. Banders carry all their banding gear with them throughout the day. They target and capture individuals to give them unique color-band combos.

To study movement ecology, the team uses nanotags attached via leg-loop harnesses. These tiny devices communicate with Motus towers, part of a global wildlife tracking network. While Scott's focus is on long-distance movements and examining migration departure dates, Bridget tracks shorter-distance movements (typically within 300 meters) on the Black-throated Blue breeding grounds using the same technology.

"One of the major goals is identifying where their nests are," Bridget explains. As shrub nesting warblers, Black-throated Blue nests are quite easy to find. "Because of this we can answer a lot of specific questions related to their breeding biology."

A majority of the day is spent nest searching, collecting data, and moving between sites. Additional environmental data collection includes insect surveys (e.g., flipping leaves to count insects for food availability) and biweekly auditory and visual predator surveys (e.g., detecting chipmunks, hawks, or owls within a 50-meter radius) to identify habitat quality "hot spots."

12:00 pm - Fieldwork ends and the team returns to enter data, which can take 20 minutes to an hour. Data is entered on a centralized database containing both current and historical records. "This might include information on new nests we've found, new individuals that have been banded, or making changes to more accurately represent what we know about a male's territory," Bridget explains. Long-term data enables researchers to analyze large-scale trends in nesting success, fledging rates, and population size.

Bridget lives and works in New Hampshire from May through August doing fieldwork. She and her crew stay at the Likens Conservation Campus at Mirror Lake, enjoying the surrounding views and ample outdoor activities.

"I love having a job where I can spend every day in the forest being able to observe birds," she shares.

Members of the 2024 Blue Crew on the Likens Campus at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest. Crew members include undergraduate students part of the Cornell Field Ornithology Program, a Cornell graduate student, and two banding technicians. From left to right: Brian Hofstetter, Lorena Patricio Silva, Emily Andersen, Abigail Archey, Jack Clauss, Bridget Tweedie, Mars Walters, and Cat Urbano.

In her second year of Black-throated Blue Warbler research, Bridget is excited for more seasons integrating her background in neurobiology and behavior with her interest in avian bioacoustics in Hubbard Brook's Field Ornithology Program. "Half of my research is focused on bioacoustics of Black-throated Blues. I became interested in it thinking about how birds monitor their own social environments, how they interact with their neighbors, and how they tell each other apart." She explores these interactions in the soundscape.

Understanding the timing and trade-offs faced by species like the Black-throated Blue Warbler is key to grasping broader patterns in songbird ecology. Since Black-throated

Autonomous recording unit (ARU) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, passively recording acoustic data.

Graduate student Bridget Tweedie gathering focal acoustic data using a parabolic microphone.

Blue Warblers are abundant and accessible, they offer valuable insight that might be harder to obtain from rarer or more sensitive species.

Editor's Note: To learn more about research happening at Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest visit www.birds.cornell.edu/hubbardbrook/bird_research/.

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Western and Baird's Sandpipers in Adult Plumage in Hampton

by Stephen R. Mirick

One lesson I try to instill in birders is the difference between adult and juvenile plumages in fall. This also includes understanding the changes in feather wear and replacement as they transition into winter plumage. This is especially true for the five small confusing sandpipers in the genus Calidris (collectively known as "Peeps") that occur in New Hampshire. These include Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, and Baird's Sandpiper.

In mid-August 2024, a large collection of shorebirds were briefly seen along the New Hampshire coast in Hampton at Plaice Cove. These included at least 11 species of shorebirds, and all five species of "peeps" in a wide assortment of plumages. Two of the most notable sightings were adult Baird's Sandpiper and adult Western Sandpiper—both rare in New Hampshire, and exceptionally unusual to see together. This may be the first time these two species have been documented together in adult plumage in the state. Below are some tips for distinguishing between juveniles and adults of each species.

Baird's Sandpiper

Baird's Sandpiper is the largest and rarest of the five "peeps" in New Hampshire. It's usually found every year, but generally only one or two are found each fall, and none were found in New Hampshire in 2022. They are most often seen between mid-August to mid-September and most sightings are from the coast. Only occasionally are they found inland. Almost all of the sightings in New Hampshire over the years are of juvenile birds as adult birds follow a different migration route south through the central United States. Adults are rare and the Plaice Cove bird is only the third that I have ever encountered in the state. It is the top bird in the next photograph, and the bottom is a typical juvenile.

Notice the differences between the adult and the juvenile. Almost all of the differences are related to the back and

Adult (top) versus juvenile (bottom) Baird's Sandpipers. Photos by Steve Mirick.

shoulder feathers. The adult on top is heavily worn as shown by the tattered look to the fringes of the feathers and uneven coloration and pattern caused by feather wear. The black patches on the back are typical for Baird's Sandpiper in breeding plumage, but the feather wear makes them look like splotches. The fresh juvenile shown below is the typical looking juvenile and is the plumage we regularly encounter. The back and shoulder feathers are all brown and fringed neatly with broad pale buffy white edges of even distribution and coloration causing a distinct golden-buff scaled appearance unique among the "Peeps." During the brief window in which we see them in New Hampshire, this is typical and does not vary as the molt of juveniles is completed on the wintering grounds in South America. The shape is consistent between the two ages, and both have long wings extending beyond the tip of the tail. The adult's wing tips on top, however, are slightly shorter due to feather wear.

Western Sandpiper

Western Sandpipers are similar to the Semipalmated Sandpiper so the identification can be very difficult for some individuals. They're rare, but regular along the coast in the fall with most sightings between mid-August and late September peaking in late August and early September. But again, like the Baird's Sandpiper, almost all sightings are juveniles in New Hampshire as most adults' migration patterns are further to our south and west. Adults are extremely rare, and the Plaice Cove bird is only the second adult that I have ever encountered in the state. It is the top bird in the next photograph and the bottom is a juvenile.

Notice the differences between the adult and the juvenile. Similar to the Baird's Sandpiper, the juvenile Western Sandpiper appears much neater and more scaly-patterned than the adult. The Western Sandpiper adult on top is replacing breeding plumage feathers. It shows some residual black flecking on the lower breast and flanks. It is also in the process of replacing some of its back feathers with new winter plumage feathers, which appear as pale gray-centered feathers on the back with thin white fringes.

Both adult and juvenile Western Sandpipers can vary much more than Baird's Sandpiper as they molt their feathers during migration in August and September. One significant characteristic, however, is that the contrasting rufous scapular feathers on the shoulder of both the juvenile and adult Western Sandpiper don't molt until late in the fall so this field mark is essentially always present in all plumages of birds we see in New Hampshire. Also note that the bill length of the adult on top appears rather short. Bill length varies greatly between males and females

Adult (top) versus juvenile (bottom) Western Sandpiper. Photos by Steve Mirick.

in most shorebirds and short-billed Western Sandpipers can appear very similar to Semipalmated Sandpipers.

Two Skua! 2024 Fall Pelagic Birding Trip

by Jon Woolf

It's been far too long since I've had a chance to write one of these reports, because it's been far too long since one of these pelagic trips was able to run. Weather has kept us in port too many times.

For once, the weather spirits smiled on us (thanks, guys and gals!). September 3, 2024, was bright and clear with good sunlight and mild seas. We had a full group. Everyone was on time, so the Granite State boat pulled away from the dock at 8:00 am sharp. Off we went in search of birds wherever they might be.

As usual, our first stop was the Isles of Shoals. We checked out the coasts of Seavey, Star, and Lunging Islands before

heading out into open water. As usual, the Isles produced a number of good sightings. This time, the stars were a handful of American Oystercatchers. One was on Seavey Island and the rest were on Lunging Island. Oystercatchers are known to nest on Lunging Island and probably on Appledore, but they seem to be spreading south through the Isles. We also found a juvenile Red Knot, plus Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, and a couple of unidentified shorebirds. Peregrine Falcons aren't unusual on the Isles, but none was seen this time. Instead, we got one of its cousins, a Merlin, on Seavey Island.

From the Isles, we headed southeast. For a while, there were no birds. As I usually do, I began to wonder if we were going to find anything at all. I needn't have worried. Around 11:00 am we began to find pelagics, a mix of Great and Cory's Shearwaters. About half an hour later, we found the

Cory's Shearwater by Leo McKillop, 9-3-2024, NH waters between Isles of Shoals and Jeffreys Ledge.

first star of the day, a beautiful dark-morph Pomarine Jaeger, sporting the long "spoon" tail feathers that distinguish this species. We chased it with the boat at full speed, but it wasn't interested in us and eventually left us behind.

Fortunately, around the same time this first jaeger showed us its tail feathers, a second showed up. It was a very fresh, clean juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger. With no other birds around to steal from, this jaeger was feeding on its own, dipping down to the water's surface over and over to pick up bits of food. Within minutes, it was joined by another jaeger, identified as a Parasitic Jaeger, giving us a jaeger sweep for the day! Alas, photos eventually proved this third jaeger was another Pomarine, not a Parasitic, so no jaeger sweep after all. Still, three jaegers of two species in less than an hour is a good day by anybody's standards!

Pomarine Jaeger by Jim Sparrell, 9-3-2024, NH waters between Isles of Shoals and Jeffreys Ledge.

But more, and better, was to come.

Before long, we were visited by a third Pomarine Jaeger, this one a light-morph bird that also had an intact tail including spoons. Then we caught sight of a brown bird floating not far ahead of us, along with a Great Black-backed Gull. At first, Steve Mirick identified it as another jaeger. But

Long-tailed Jaeger by Leo McKillop, 9-3-2024, NH waters between Isles of Shoals and Jeffreys Ledge.

something wasn't right, this bird was plain brown all over, too plain for any jaeger. A Sooty Shearwater? No, it wasn't dark enough for that, and besides, Sootys are more springtime birds. What was this thing?

Even Steve Mirick, calling birds over the boat's speakers, was puzzled. None of the expected birds fit. It must've been something unexpected—there aren't many birds like that—except one. "It's a SKUA!" he shouted. So it was, a South Polar Skua, one of the rarest of Gulf of Maine pelagics, and only the second one ever seen in New Hampshire waters. The first was seen on the Fall 2018 NH Audubon Pelagic Birding Trip, six years ago almost to the day, as described in the Fall 2018 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*. The skua took flight as *Granite State* approached, flying a few hundred yards before landing again. We followed it, of course, and it repeated its performance several times, giving everyone aboard a good look at its brown body and white-flashed wings. The bird was in heavy molt, so the white was scattered all over its wings instead of collected into the distinctive white wrist patches of a fully dressed South Polar Skua.

After several long looks and photo-ops from the skua, we reluctantly decided to keep looking and headed further east and slightly south, dipping into Massachusetts waters. A few minutes later another curiously brown bird appeared ahead of us, and for a minute we wondered if the skua was

South Polar Skua by Leo McKillop, 9-3-2024, NH waters between Isles of Shoals and Jeffreys Ledge.

following us. But no! When this bird took off it had clean white wing patches, proving it was a second South Polar Skua! While it isn't as rare in Massachusetts waters as in New Hampshire waters, the South Polar Skua is still a rarity even for Massachusetts and here we had two in one day—in one hour! How do you top that?

As it turned out, this day we couldn't. We headed north along Jeffreys Ledge and found some more of the birds we'd expected: Wilson's Storm-Petrels, more Great and Cory's Shearwaters, and a couple of the hard-to-get Manx Shearwater. We were also able to spend time with several whales, including a unique Fin Whale which showed its flukes when diving. Normally Fin Whales don't fluke—being negatively buoyant whales, they don't need to; however, this Fin Whale had a traumatic injury. At some point in its life, it lost its left tail fluke. In effect, it only had half a tail, and needed to fluke when it dove in order to compensate for that. Nothing to top two skuas, though. Not that I'm complaining, mind you—two South Polar Skuas in one trip is more than enough for anyone!

Manx Shearwater by Jim Sparrell, 9-3-2024, Jeffreys Ledge, NH.

Nighthawk Migration at Franklin Falls

by Rob Woodward

The big question that needed to be answered this year was: How much of an aberration was last year's count of over 12,000? The 2024 season went very well so I think we have the answer. Nighthawks were first reported from various locations around the state on August 15. I was not able to start counting until August 17, but it was a good count of 75. The next day's count dropped to zero in bad weather but a very good count of 344 was made on the following day.

Common Nighthawk by Len Medlock.

After a few more low counts things changed on August 23. For the next five nights, over 1,000 birds were counted each night, 83% of the season's total. The peak day was August 27 with 3,203 nighthawks passing, marking the third highest count in state history. After that, there was a good count of 643 on August 28 but nothing too unusual for the rest of the season. Ideally, the count on the last day is zero indicating that the migration season has ended but on September 7 we counted 153, an unexpectedly high number. A forecast of strong northwest winds for the following two days meant the season was over. Two nights had a count of zero and on three days no count was held due to unfavorable strong northwest winds.

In all, 9,760 Common Nighthawks were counted. One more flock of 250 would have put the count over 10,000, putting it on a par with last year's count. This year, I logged 53.75 hours over 19 days compared to 33.75 hours over 13 days last year. Even after just two seasons, I think we have to conclude that Franklin Falls is a reliable location for counting large numbers of nighthawks, both on a daily and seasonal basis.

The Wood Thrush Tracking Project. Part 2: Fall

by Pam Hunt

Editor's note: If you haven't read Part 1 of the Wood Thrush Tracking Project, check it out in the Summer 2024 issue of New Hampshire Bird Records.

Readers of the previous issue may recall my summary of New Hampshire's portion of the new range-wide Wood Thrush project using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. Partners in 25 states and one province attached Motus transmitters (nanotags) to over 550 Wood Thrushes during the breeding season. Twenty-seven of those were in New Hampshire, and now it's time to catch up on where they all went!

Wood Thrush by Steve Mirick.

First, the (potential) bad news. Four birds were never detected away from their capture sites in New Hampshire: one each at Tin Mountain Conservation Center (Albany), Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Newington), Stoddard, and Westmoreland. This suggests they may have died before migration, so teams went out to search for the tags using a hand-held radio receiver. Only the team at Tin Mountain detected the tag, although they couldn't find it under the snow. We presume that this individual died on-site. We failed to find active signals at the other three sites, raising the possibility that the birds managed to depart largely undetected. The absence of subsequent detections farther south, however, means the birds probably died soon after. Migration is the most dangerous time of year for birds, so if we only lost four Wood Thrushes off the bat we're doing pretty well.

This means that 23 birds definitively left New Hampshire, and you can see all their paths south in Figure 1. These are coded based on three general routes: Appalachians, intermediate, and coastal. Over half of the birds took a more western and inland route that follows the Appalachian Mountains through central Pennsylvania down to Georgia. The remainder are split between two less well-defined routes that either follow the coast or take an intermediate path slightly to the west. Note that birds from all three groups start shifting around as you get farther south, with the intermediate group in particular converging with the Appalachian group in the Carolinas. Interestingly, birds from more southern or eastern parts of New Hampshire appear more likely to take the coastal route, a pattern that also shows up in data from Massachusetts.

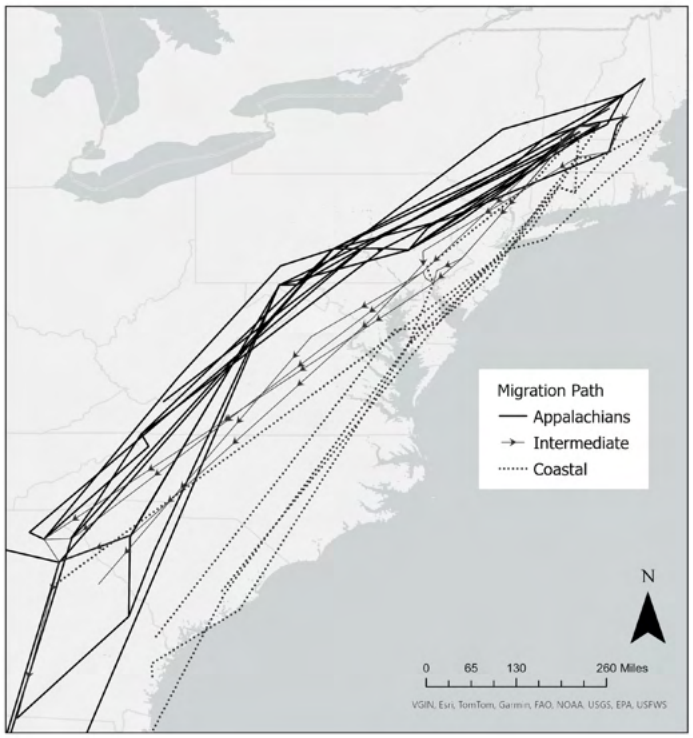

Figure 1. Southbound fall migration routes of Wood Thrushes tagged in New Hampshire in 2024. Routes are coded based on geography: Appalachians (solid line), coastal (dotted line), and intermediate (line with arrows). Note that lines show connections between towers where a given individual was detected, not the actual paths taken.

The impressive concentration of Motus towers in the Mid-Atlantic region makes it hard for birds from New England to pass over that area undetected. Such was the case for our Granite State cohort, which started showing up in Pennsylvania and neighboring states beginning on September 14. If you plot their arrival times on a graph, you see two distinct peaks about ten days apart (Figure 2). In many species, adults leave before yearlings, but the five young birds tagged in 2024 are spread across this graph. The same applies to birds from northern vs. southern New Hampshire. It may be that birds whose nesting attempts were unsuccessful departed earlier, but without data on breeding success, it's impossible to test this hypothesis.

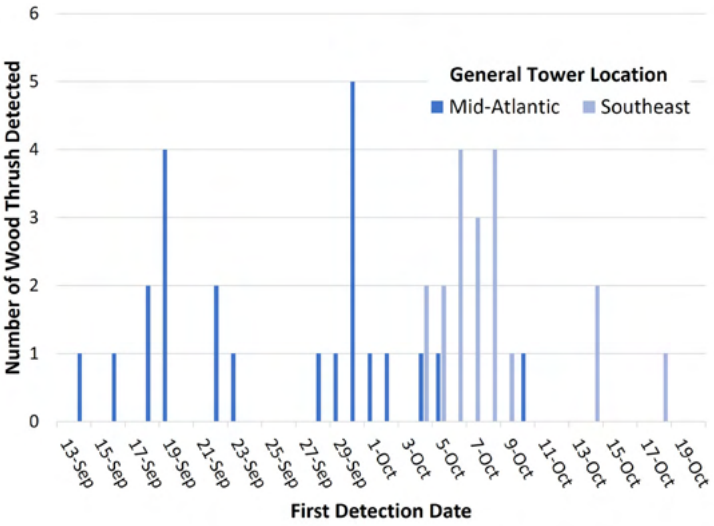

Figure 2. First detection dates for southbound New Hampshire Wood Thrushes in two regions during the 2024 fall migration. "Mid-Atlantic" includes Motus towers in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware, while "Southeast" includes towers in Georgia, South Carolina, and western North Carolina.

Of the 23 birds that made it to the mid-Atlantic states, all but three eventually continued south, and were detected by another collection of towers in South Carolina and Georgia. Most thrushes passed through this region in a very tight window from October 4-9, as shown (Figure 2). The three "late" birds at the right-hand tail of the graph were also relatively late in passing over Pennsylvania. The fact that birds which were so varied in their mid-Atlantic arrival dates clustered so tightly in the Southeast indicates that some migrated more slowly than others. The fastest was a bird from Tin Mountain that went from western Maryland to northern Georgia in two days, while at the other extreme two birds from the Monadnock region took 20 days to cover roughly the same distance.

Since Motus towers only detect birds as they're passing over, we usually don't know where an individual ends up at the end of the night, so in most cases estimates of travel time are very approximate. This is not the case when a thrush passes sequentially over multiple nearby towers on the same evening. A great example of this is a bird tagged at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, NH. It departed Great Bay around dusk on September 22 and over the next six hours passed over towers in eastern Massachusetts, Connecticut, Long Island, NY, and northern New Jersey (Figure 3), covering roughly 250 miles at 40 mph. This speed seems typical of Wood Thrushes moving south from New Hampshire that fall. The bird in question probably continued south that same evening, since the New Jersey detection was only around midnight. Where it landed on September 23 is a mystery, however, since it was not picked up again until October 4 in Georgia. Somehow it eluded a concentration of towers in Delaware and Maryland

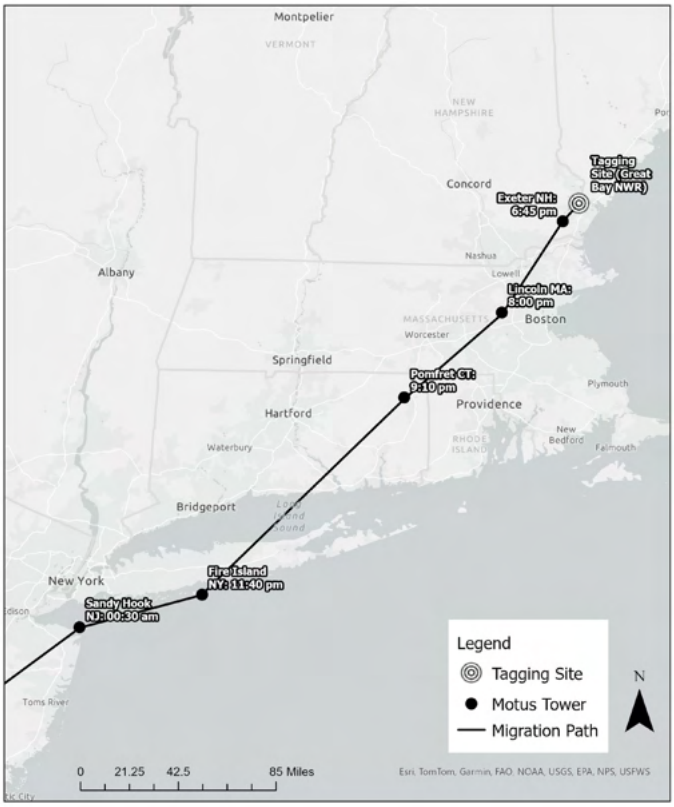

Figure 3. Southbound path taken by Wood Thrush #601 upon departing the Great Bay, NH, area on September 22, 2024.

before (probably) resting for a few days in Virginia or North Carolina, where there are very few towers.

Wood Thrushes that make it to Georgia have traveled roughly a thousand miles, yet they are barely halfway to where they'll spend the winter, forests from southern Mexico to Costa Rica. Although some individuals move west along the Gulf of Mexico and avoid an overwater crossing, we know that many migratory birds make a non-stop flight across the Gulf after building up fat reserves. This is where tracking them gets particularly tricky, since there are relatively few towers along the north shore of the Gulf of Mexico and even fewer on the far side where the birds are headed. The exciting news here is that of the 20 New Hampshire Wood Thrushes that made it to the Southeast, four were detected by a tower in southern Belize! The timing of their movements is much more varied, and given the paucity of towers we don't really know when they crossed (the Belize tower is 350 miles from the northern tip of the Yucatan Peninsula). The lengths of time between their last US detection and the one in Belize range from 6-44 days, leaving a lot of wiggle room for them to rest at either side of the crossing. The Belize detections were all between October 12 and November 19, suggesting that this leg of migration is wrapping up in the second half of October. At the same time, there are a few birds still moving in the US, including one from Tin Mountain that was detected in South Carolina on October 18, and again in Georgia on November 11. The two

towers are only 100 miles apart, so we can only assume this bird spent over three weeks somewhere between them.

Last but not least, a bird tagged near Mt. Wantastiquet in Hinsdale, NH gets the record for the longest migration—potentially of any bird in the entire project. It presumably left southwestern New Hampshire on September 29, since that evening it passed over a tower in northwestern Connecticut. Twenty-four hours later it was over Delaware and appears to have settled down along the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay on the morning of October 1. Two weeks later it was detected in South Carolina, and a week later, on October 20, it showed up in Belize. It wasn't quite done, however, and next appeared in Costa Rica on November 2. This is near the southernmost edge of the species' winter range (a few make it to Panama). The straight-line distance connecting all these detections is over 2600 miles (Figure 4), so it's likely this bird flew close to 3,000 miles. Only one other Wood Thrush tagged in 2024, from Connecticut, has gone as far as Costa Rica, so these two New Englanders may not be that far apart!

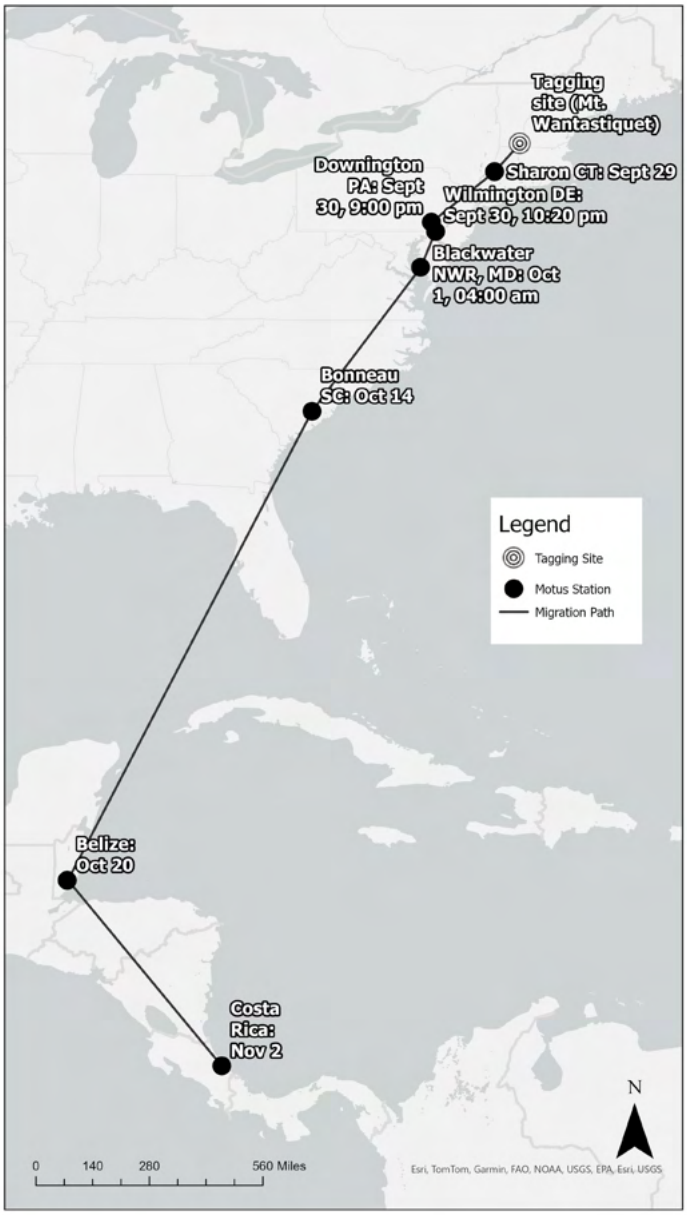

Figure 4. Southbound path taken by Wood Thrush #592 from New Hampshire to Costa Rica during the 2024 fall migration.

Given the scarcity of towers in Central America, we'll likely not be hearing from any more New Hampshire thrushes until they start heading north in April. Meanwhile, tagging has begun in parts of Central America, so if we're lucky some of these birds will also work their way north to New England next spring.

Records Through the Years

by Wes Moore

Editor's Note: Elizabeth Arms, known to many at NH Audubon as "Widge," passed away on June 1, 2025. She will be greatly missed.

I was five years old when I entered the birding world. The enthusiasm of other birders was infectious. Years later, one birder still stands out, Elizabeth Arms, our neighbor at Crystal Lake in Gilmanton Iron Works. My family knows Elizabeth as Betty. A lifelong birder, when Betty learned of my interest she gave me copies of articles from publications like *New Hampshire Bird Records*. Betty's 100th birthday was in November 2024, and I visited a few days before to hear about her life as a birder.

From Lynn, Massachusetts, Betty spent her summers in Gilmanton Iron Works and attended Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Her formative years were spent in Cincinnati. She also spent time in Florida before moving to Gilmanton Iron Works in 1990. Her parents were avid birders. Betty's father recorded daily species observations, and

Wesley Moore and Elizabeth Arms, two generations of avid birders.

her interest in birds was sparked by her parents' backyard bird feeders. She has maintained a love of birds throughout her entire life. In the 1960s, Betty started keeping her own daily records of species observations.

Hearing Betty's story, I noticed similarities between the way her interest in birds developed and the way mine did. Growing up, Betty observed there were different birds depending on where she was in the country—Cincinnati, New Hampshire, Florida. Similarly, when I was younger, I was fascinated that I could find a Roseate Spoonbill in Florida but would never see one with the Common Loons in New Hampshire. The possibility of seeing a new species always makes me want to explore more areas.

Betty and I both enjoy keeping records of our bird observations. Betty keeps hers in notebooks and on graph paper. In the margins, she records where the bird was spotted and what else was going on that day. Her notes show the correlation between environmental conditions and bird abundance. One day, she recorded birds were "scarce due to rainy conditions." Her notes can also be unrelated to birds, like "first snowmobiles were out on the lake today."

Using paper lists allows Betty to record whatever she wants, a freedom online databases like eBird don't provide. Betty does occasionally use eBird for extraordinary sightings, but overall she thinks technology creates challenges and can be limiting. Because we've entered the age of eBird, Betty generously shared her records of unique sightings with *New Hampshire Bird Records*. They updated eBird accordingly. Betty also trusted me with sixty years of paper records to enter into eBird.

When I began birding in the early 2010s, I kept my life list in an Audubon Journal. It had a place to take notes, and checkboxes to keep track of the birds I'd seen. Every time I saw a new species I would add a checkmark. After I got a smartphone, I started using eBird. The app lets me track sightings and submit observations for every birding excursion. It automatically keeps my life list organized by time and region. Keeping lists electronically allows me to participate in citizen science efforts. It also introduced me to a world of other birders keeping track of their experiences. Digital reporting helps me find new species, like a Hooded Warbler a few years ago. It also advances our understanding of bird behavior and the impact of environmental changes.

The ways birders keep records change—first graph paper, now eBird. Consistency creates a timeline of bird habits, trends, and behavior. In her years of record-keeping, Betty noticed she sees fewer birds today than she used to. "I used to get ten species at my feeder before breakfast, now it's a struggle to even get ten species in a day." Overall, birds seem less abundant than they were 40 years ago. There is an urgent need to take action for the benefit of birds as they disappear from the skies. Hearing observations of decreasing bird numbers from Betty, who has paid attention for so long, really hit home.

I hope Betty's records and the continued record-keeping of birders can support discoveries to help reverse declining bird numbers. The dedication of Betty and others has the potential to influence conservation far beyond our region and I know it's had an impact on me.

New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee Report

Spring 2023 through Winter 2023-2024 Seasons

by Kurk Dorsey, Chair, Kurk.Dorsey@unh.edu and Christopher McPherson, Secretary, cmcpherson687@gmail.com

The New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee (NHRBC) would like to thank Mike Resch for his tenure as Chair and Secretary of the NHRBC. Mike was instrumental in revitalizing the NHRBC nearly a decade ago and finalizing the committee website in an effort to better organize NHRBC records and communicate the accomplishments of the NHRBC. Mike will surely be missed! As Mike departs Kurk Dorsey steps in as Chair and Chris McPherson as Secretary. In addition, the committee offers heartfelt thanks to the following former New Hampshire Rare Bird Committee members for their efforts:

- David Donsker
- Jeanne-Marie Maher
- Lori Charron

This report from the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee (NHRBC) contains the decisions for records voted on by the Committee for four seasons: Spring 2023, Summer 2023, Fall 2023, and Winter 2023-2024. The four seasons produced one first New Hampshire state record accepted by the committee:

- **Vermilion Flycatcher**—Located by Alan Murray on July 13, 2023, at Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH. This record stands alone as the only New Hampshire record of Vermillion Flycatcher to date!

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 sightings accepted by the Committee, including the second record of Virginia's Warbler, a Northern Hawk Owl, a Painted Bunting, and multiple records of MacGillivray's Warbler.

The members of the Committee voting on these records were: Phil Brown, Will Broussard, Adam Burnett, David Deifik, Kurk Dorsey (Chair), Jason Lambert, Chris McPherson (Secretary), Robyn Prieto, and Mike Resch.

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 NH. 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, usually via the internet, 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 3 or more observers. If none of these criteria is met, though the record 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.

Spring 2023 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Pacific Loon	3-18-23	Odiorne Point State Park, Rye
Black-necked Stilt	5-18-23	Hampton
Say's Phoebe	5-15-23	Canterbury
Golden-winged Warbler	5-13-23	Hampton
Golden-winged Warbler	5-14-23	Weare
Golden-winged Warbler	5-15-23	Weare
Yellow-throated Warbler	3-15-23	Hampton
Prothonotary Warbler	5-15-23	Star Island
Hooded Warbler	5-13-23	Odiorne Point State Park, Rye
Hooded Warbler	5-18-23	Canterbury
Hooded Warbler	5-20-23	Newmarket
Summer Tanager	4-18-23	Odiorne Point State Park, Rye

Say's Phoebe by Darryl Parker, 5-15-2023, Canterbury Shaker Village, Canterbury, NH.

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Chuck-will's-widow	5-13-23	Star Island
Description and photo were not sufficient to eliminate other members of the Nightjar family like Eastern Whip-poor-will.		
Bicknell's Thrush	5-17-23	Wilton / Mason
Description and photo were not sufficient to eliminate Gray-cheeked Thrush. Bicknell's vs. Gray-cheeked Thrush identification is complicated by an overlap of all visible features including size and color. The presence of an eye ring and contrasting reddish tail are great field marks for Hermit Thrush.		

Summer 2023 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Royal Tern	7-1-23	Odiorne Point State Park, Rye
Royal Tern	7-23-23	Hampton Harbor
White-winged Dove	7-29-23	East Kingston
Vermilion Flycatcher	7-13-23	Rochester
Hooded Warbler	7-16-23	Hancock

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

None

Fall 2023 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Pacific Loon	9-29-23	Star Island
Wilson's Phalarope	8-18-23	Rye
Franklin's Gull	9-4-23	Freedom
Ash-throated Flycatcher	11-19-23	Dover
Ash-throated Flycatcher	11-24-23	Greenland
Townsend's Solitaire	11-6-23	Peterborough
Gray-cheeked Thrush	10-9-23	Rye
Yellow-throated Warbler	8-31-23	Manchester
Yellow-throated Warbler	9-11-23	Keene
Worm-eating Warbler	10-7-23	Rye
MacGillivray's Warbler	11-25-23	Charlestown
Hooded Warbler	8-19-23	Sandwich
Hooded Warbler	9-11-23	Keene
Golden-crowned Sparrow	11-13-23	Hopkinton

Ash-throated Flycatcher by Steve Mirick, 11-24-2023, Greenland, NH.

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Gray-cheeked Thrush	10-2-2023	Rye
Description and photo were not sufficient to eliminate Bicknell's Thrush. Bicknell's vs. Gray-cheeked Thrush identification is complicated by an overlap of all visible features including size and color. This record will be accepted as Gray-cheeked/Bicknell's Thrush.		
Gray-cheeked Thrush	10-5-2023	Strafford
Description and photo were not sufficient to eliminate Bicknell's Thrush. Bicknell's vs. Gray-cheeked Thrush identification is complicated by an overlap of all visible features including size and color. This record will be accepted as Gray-cheeked/Bicknell's Thrush.		

Winter 2023-2024 Records

Records Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Pacific Loon (2)	2-18-24	Rye
Northern Hawk Owl	2-12-24	Pittsburg
Long-eared Owl	2-25-24	Haverhill
Ash-throated Flycatcher	12-5-23	Hampton
Varied Thrush	1-19-24	Peterborough
Virginia's Warbler	12-5-23	Hampton
Yellow-throated Warbler	1-15-24	Exeter
MacGillivray's Warbler	12-23-23	Hollis
Painted Bunting	12-22-23	Manchester
Spotted Towhee	1-10-24	Franconia

Northern Hawk Owl by Leo McKillop, 2-16-2024, Pittsburg, NH.

Records Not Accepted by the Committee

Species	Date	Location/Town
Common Gull	1-14-24	Hampton
This record consisted of a single picture and no description. The picture was taken in high light and lacks a few important details to confirm the record as Common Gull. This record will be accepted as Common/Short-billed Gull.		
Gray-cheeked Thrush	2-11-24	Francestown
Description and photo were not sufficient to eliminate Bicknell's Thrush. Bicknell's vs. Gray-cheeked Thrush identification is complicated by an overlap of all visible features including size and color. This record will be accepted as Gray-cheeked/Bicknell's Thrush.		
Brambling	2-16-24	Littleton
The description and lack of pictures or corroborating sightings did not provide enough support to confirm this record.		
American Three-toed Woodpecker	2-3-24	Gorham
The description and lack of pictures or corroborating sightings (additional observers) did not provide enough support to confirm this record.		

Historical Records

The NHRBC was also asked to review a historical record of red-shafted Northern Flicker. In December 1994, a birder observed four flickers in Bedford, at least one of which she reported to NH Audubon as a red-shafted Northern Flicker. The paper record showed that, by in-house consensus in 1995, NH Audubon accepted that there were two red-shafted Northern Flickers, based on the written description. The record was addressed by the NHRBC in 2018, which accepted one red-shafted Northern Flicker. In 2021, Jeremiah Trimble, reviewing eBird records, noticed that these were the only accepted records of red-shafted Northern Flickers in the eastern United States. He asked the NHRBC to review the record again, which caused the committee to evaluate its rules for reopening records at its 2023 annual meeting. While revising our by-laws to address outside requests to reconsider a record that we had earlier voted on, the committee began researching the status of red-shafted Northern Flickers.

At our meeting in 2024, we came to the conclusion that intergrades between red-shafted and yellow-shafted groups are very common, and that it can be very hard to differentiate between pure red-shafted Northern Flickers and hybrids. The written description from 1994 clearly indicated one bird with elements of red-shafted traits, but it also left open the possibility of a bird with traits of both races. After discussion, the committee voted first to reopen the record, then it voted to change the record from red-shafted Northern Flicker to Northern Flicker.

What to Watch for in Fall

Fall is migration time. Migration starts earlier than one might expect, with many species on the move in August. Enjoy each wave of birds as they pass through and keep an eye out for rarities that may appear. Here are some highlights to watch for each month.

August

- 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 through 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 Wastewater Treatment Plant (open on weekdays only until 2:45 pm), and Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant (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.

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.
- 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 Winnipesaukee.
- 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.

A rare vagrant, this Rufous Hummingbird was found in Newmarket, NH. Photo by Steve Mirick, 11-5-2022.

Interview with a Birder—Rich Aaronian

by Kathryn Frieden

Rich Aaronian (left) after receiving the Goodhue-Elkins Award in 2018 for his outstanding contributions to bird education for young people, accompanied by Steve Mirick (center) and Paul Lacourse (right). Photo by Beth McGuinn.

Rich Aaronian began teaching at Phillips Exeter Academy in 1971, where he dedicated his life to educating young people in the sciences while sharing his love of birds and enthusiasm for the outdoors. In 1975, he introduced an ornithology class which is still being taught to this day. He retired in 2020 (his last semester was remote teaching) after an amazing 49 years. In 2023, Phillips Exeter Academy gave him the Founders' Day Award for his exceptional service. He has been a contributor to *New Hampshire Bird Records* for over 40 years and is a regular participant in the Coastal NH Christmas Bird Count (CBC). In 2018, Rich was one of a trio of recipients of the NH Audubon Goodhue-Elkins Award in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the education of young people about birds. He is active in the Seacoast NH Audubon Chapter and still leads popular field trips for them.

How old were you when you became a "birder" and how did you get started?

I got a relatively late start. During my junior year of college at the University of New Hampshire, where I was a zoology major, I took Ornithology from Art Borror, a professor known for teaching many students who became birders. I enjoyed it but did not do much more with birding at the time. A few years later, while I was working toward my Master's degree, I became a graduate assistant and helped to teach the class. That was what really got me started. Then, I did my first CBC, and I was hooked. Looking back, I wish I had been introduced to birding earlier in my life.

Do you have a favorite sighting in New Hampshire that comes to mind?

I think it was the Northern Lapwing that Steve Mirick found in March 2022, only the second one ever for New Hampshire. I had seen one before in Scotland, but to see it locally was exciting since it brought back memories of the year our family lived in St. Andrew's. I tend to like birds with plumage that has nice clean lines. The American Tree Sparrow and Snow Bunting come to mind. My favorite raptor is the Northern Harrier and the Surf Scoter is always great to see.

The Northern Lapwing is typically found in Europe and Asia. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 3-7-2022, in Greenland, NH.

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

I don't really keep a list. I just enjoy going out and seeing what I can see. I also get a lot of satisfaction from teaching about birds. The more people learn about birds may lead to a greater appreciation of habitat diversity and preservation. As a teacher, it is rewarding to know that many of my students asked for a pair of binoculars as a high school graduation gift after having taken my ornithology class.

Do you have a New Hampshire nemesis bird?

You know what I really want to see in New Hampshire? A bobcat! I have never seen one! I know, I know—it is a mammal, not a bird.

What is your favorite birding area in New Hampshire?

My favorite birding areas in general are coastal habitats. I have a particular fondness for Beckman's Island in Seabrook. This was the area of the Coastal CBC that I first covered with Art Borror back when I was a student. It has quite a reputation for owls, hosting at least three different species. At the back of the island there is a patch of cedar trees that I remember Art called "Monterey East." Quite a few unusual species have shown up at Beckman's, such as the Canada Warbler in December just a few years ago. I have also enjoyed doing a couple of CBCs in Pittsburg. There were not a lot of species, but the ones seen there are quality birds!

What changes have you seen in birding over the years?

I feel that interest in birding has increased considerably. COVID had a lot to do with this since people spent more time outdoors, which has been a change for the better. Unfortunately, a change for the worse has been so much habitat loss. I am appreciative of the work of land conservation organizations in New Hampshire such as SELT (the Southeast Land Trust). I also think the Merlin App has been a positive influence and is easy to use in the field. It does make mistakes but can be surprisingly accurate. Once I was walking by the river in Exeter and it picked up a Spotted Sandpiper. I continued walking and then, there it was—a Spotted Sandpiper! Hopefully, the ability to learn the birds around homes and neighborhoods will lead to a greater interest in avian conservation.

Do you have any advice for young or new birders?

My advice is simple—spend more time outdoors and be aware of your surroundings. Young people have such natural curiosity. They keep wanting to know more. Keep asking questions. Observations followed by questions may lead to discoveries. I used to take classes out to see Davis Finch's "meat pile" in East Kingston. They loved seeing the activity on the meat pile and, of course, Davis would always come out and interact with the kids. He enjoyed them and the feeling was reciprocal. It is great seeing a lot of birders, young and older, starting out now and I hope that interest in birds, and all nature, continues.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

This silhouette looks like a fairly standard passerine, or perching bird—what one of my neighbors calls a "regular bird." Compared to some common "regular birds," it appears a little bigger than a sparrow, and a bit smaller and more slender than a robin.

Let's take a closer look at each part of the bird before we go further. The head is at the top, easily enough, but there's a bit of a mishmash of feathers forming various points at the back end of the bird. If you follow the curve of the left and right shoulders down toward the perch, the primary feathers of both wings come together near it. The other feather tips, extending a bit further down and to the right, are the tail feathers. With that in mind, we can see this bird has quite long, pointed wings that reach nearly to the end of a tail that is also long—and deeply forked. That combination implies agility in flight.

Falcons have long, pointed wings like this, but the lack of a heavy, hooked bill rules them out. Instead, the small bill and the long wings suggest one of our aerial insectivores. A variety of insectivores nest in New Hampshire during the summer months, including flycatchers (like phoebes, kingbirds, and so on), swifts, swallows, and nightjars.

However, none of our flycatchers—not even Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, which is rarely seen in New Hampshire—have wings quite like this. Flycatchers have generally straight, solid bills suitable for grabbing; this bird's bill looks almost delicate.

I will leave ruling out nightjars (Common Nighthawk and Eastern Whip-poor-will) and Chimney Swifts as an exercise for the reader. Hopefully a review of a field guide is enough to pick out significant differences from our quiz bird.

Within the swallow family, however, there's one species well known for its deeply forked tail, long pointed wings, and agile flight.

Conclusion: With that combination of tail and wings, this slender bird can only be a Barn Swallow. They're often identifiable not just by silhouette, but also by their acrobatic flying style. (Flight behavior can be a useful clue in bird ID—though not especially helpful in a photo quiz!)

Barn Swallows are common throughout the summer across North America and Eurasia. Since they depend on flying insects, by late September a Barn Swallow in New Hampshire is an uncommon sight—they've mostly departed for insect-rich regions farther south.

Barn Swallow by Greg Tillman.

New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund

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For more information, contact the Editor or Hope Jordan, Development Director (603) 224-9909 x307; hjordan@nhaudubon.org.

Getting the Shot and the Shot

Cameron Johnson paddles the extra mile to photograph this Common Murre. Photos taken 11-10-2024, Hampton Harbor, NH. Top photograph by Ken Faucher.

Information at www.nhbirdrecords.org

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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 Warblers

Blackpoll Warbler by Kyle Wilmarth, 10-20-2024, Salem, NH.

Black-throated Blue Warbler by Steve Mirick, 11-4-2024, North Hampton, NH.

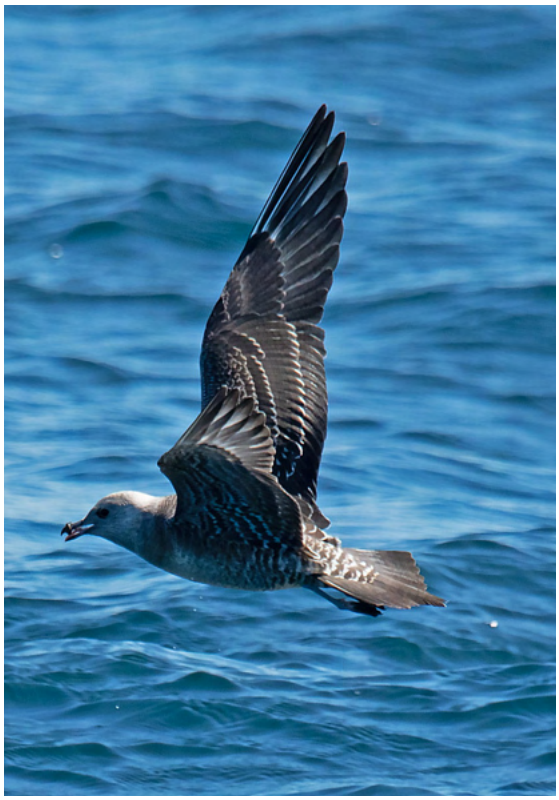
Chestnut-sided Warbler by Steve Mirick, 9-23-2024, Stratham Trails, Stratham, NH.

Magnolia Warbler by Cameron Johnson, 10-10-2024, Dover Community Trail, NH.

Orange-crowned Warbler by Steve Mirick, 10-6-2024, Griffin Rd., Portsmouth, NH.

Yellow-rumped Warbler by Kyle Wilmarth, 10-5-2024, Salem, NH.

Fall 2024 Rarities and Unusual Species



Long-tailed Jaegar by Debra Powers, 9-3-2024, NH waters between Isles of Shoals and Jeffreys Ledge.

New Hampshire's second record of a South Polar Skua. Photo by Leo McKillop, 9-3-2024, NH waters between Isles of Shoals and Jeffreys Ledge. Read more about this exciting finding on page 27.

A juvenile Little Gull by Leo McKillop, 9-20-2024, Odiorne Point State Park, Rye, NH.

Long-billed Dowitcher by Cameron Johnson, 10-14-2024, Hampton Saltmarsh Conservation Area, NH.