New Hampshire Bird Records

SPRING 2024 Vol. 43, No. 1

Spring Migration Spotlight: Warblers

The arrival of warblers is a highlight of spring for any birder—whether you're tallying species, seeking a rare sighting, or celebrating an early arrival. This issue's article, "BirdCast—A Birder's Spring Migration Sidekick" by Emma Stogsdill, will help you predict when to expect large movements of birds and make the most of this exciting season.

Cape May Warbler by Len Medlock, 5-11-2024, Exeter, NH.

Black-and-white Warbler by Debra Powers, 5-10-2024, Bellamy River WMA, Dover, NH.

Magnolia Warbler by Debra Powers, 5-10-2024, Bellamy River WMA, Dover, NH.

Yellow Warbler by Benjamin Griffith, 5-9-2024, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.

Blue-winged Warbler by Debra Powers, 5-9-2024, Belamy River WMA, Dover, NH.

Prairie Warbler by Debra Powers, 5-25-2024, Durham, NH.

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IN MEMORY OF
JoAnn O'Shaughnessy

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* is sponsored by friends and family of JoAnn O'Shaughnessy. She is remembered as an avid birder with a great sense of humor. She is missed by many. Photo of JoAnn competing with the "Saw What Owls?" during the Superbowl of Birding, by Len Medlock.

In This Issue

Cover Photo: The spring of 2024 was exceptional for Hooded Warbler sightings in New Hampshire. This striking male was photographed by Eric Masterson, 4-27-2024, on Star Island. Discover how Hooded Warbler populations are changing in the U.S. in Eric's "Season Summary."

From the Editor

SPRING 2024

Spring! The Perfect Time for New Beginnings

Spring in New England can feel like an oxymoron—with summer-like weather arriving just after the snow melts. Still, there's much to enjoy this season, and if you take a closer look, you might be surprised by what you find.

It's the perfect time of year to notice the firsts—your first Baltimore Oriole, your first American Woodcock "peent." As Eric Masterson shares in his season summary, the arrival dates of some species are now being obscured by overwintering birds. In a changing climate, tracking when birds migrate and arrive has never been more important. All of the bird sightings in *New Hampshire Bird Records* come from eBird, and I encourage you to report your first-of-season sightings (and all your birds!) to this valuable platform.

Spring is also an ideal time to brush up on your warbler songs before the flurry of migration begins—when the forest comes alive with birdsong in every direction. Pam Geiger offers a timely reminder of this in her article "A Spring Learning to Bird." Meanwhile, Ashton Almeida highlights a new birding hotspot—who knows, maybe it will host another Lawrence's Warbler this spring!

For the listers among us, Pam Hunt shares a fun piece on taxonomic updates, and Holly Bauer's yard list is sure to inspire—it ranks among the top 30 in the entire United States. If you're curious about keeping up with the latest bird sightings, don't miss James Smith's article on where to get the most up-to-date information.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of JoAnn O'Shaughnessy, an avid birder who found joy and wonder in birds, even from her own home. Among her impressive sightings was a Magnificent Frigatebird that flew right past her window in 2021. Thank you to all who have donated in her memory.

Finally, I'm thrilled to welcome some new folks to our editorial team: James Freitas and Emma Stogsdill, both accomplished writers. James will be editing the "Where to Bird" and "Field Trip Report" features, while Emma is uncovering new resources and information for birders. I'm also excited to have Pam Geiger and Lindsay Herlihy onboard to help tackle the endless (but essential) task of eBird review.

May your spring be filled with memorable birding adventures—and maybe even another Loggerhead Shrike!

Grace McCulloch, *Editor*

A special thank you to those who donated in memory of JoAnn O'Shaughnessy:

Richard Aaronian
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Straat Tenney
Levi and Gertrude Theriault
Kevin Toscano
Susan and Stephen VanDerBeken
Louise A. Wilson
Drummond Woodsum

Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Photo 1.

Photographed in February in Rockingham County, this fairly large bird is typically found in southern New Hampshire, primarily near the coast (though it occasionally ventures as far north as the Lakes Region).

Photo 2.

Photographed in April in Rockingham County, this bird appears to be swimming away, offering little for identification—and its grayed-out reflection provides no clues!

See the answer on page 37.

March 1 through May 31, 2024

by Eric Masterson

Editor's note: Eric mentions BirdCast in his article. This is a wonderful tool for understanding migration patterns and getting forecasts. To learn more about this resource read the article, "BirdCast—A Birder's Spring Migration Sidekick" on page 13 by Emma Stogsdill.

In keeping with the unusually mild winter, temperatures in southern NH rose toward the end of February into the high 40s and low 50s during the daytime. This pattern continued into early March with the addition of some precipitation. The warming climate is having a notable effect on bird movements, with detection of first migrants increasingly obscured by the presence of overwintering individuals. This is especially true of short distance migrants like Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, and Hermit Thrush, which appear to be extending their winter range northward. While a few record-early arrivals were observed later in the season, many species arrived on schedule or even slightly later.

Precipitation fell across the state on March 22 as snow, sleet, or freezing rain depending on whether you were north or south of a freeze line that ran through southern New Hampshire. Parts of the North Country experienced several feet of snow, while six inches fell in Hancock, followed by freezing rain which caused widespread power outages. The impenetrable coating of ice proved hard for foraging birds, bringing huge flocks of Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches to feeders. Another smaller precipitation event fell overnight on April 3 and continued into April 4, bringing approximately six inches of snow and sleet across southern New Hampshire. I drove the length of the state on April 7 and 8 to witness the total solar eclipse and saw a Connecticut River Valley completely free of snow right up to the highlands bordering Canada, where I finally found some snow—more than two feet along Scotts Bog Road in Pittsburg. All the Connecticut Lakes remained ice bound.

While there are a few Hermit Thrush that brave the winter, most begin to return to New Hampshire mid-April. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 4-23-2024, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

Migration Musings

Conditions cleared toward the end of April, facilitating the arrival of hummingbirds and some early warblers. Broken weather returned in early May; however, migration prevailed during the breaks. For example, BirdCast forecast 4.7 million birds moving north overnight on May 1. I recorded 463 individual birds over my yard the same night, primarily sparrows but also the first warbler wave of the spring. It was my biggest night of the season thus far.

This offers an opportunity to do some crude calculations to compare my actual observations with BirdCast's computations. My equipment (a Sennheiser microphone attached to a Nagra recorder, set in a parabolic dish) records calls to a distance of about 1,000 feet, less for species that call in the higher frequency range. For argument's sake, let's assume all bird vocalizations are recorded within a 1000 ft x 1000 ft circle around and above a point in my yard—a generous supposition on technical grounds alone. This would need to be replicated 475 times in a straight line across New Hampshire's widest point to capture all migrants passing over the state during a single night. Multiplying 463 X 475 = 219,925 birds, which is approximately 5% of BirdCast's figure.

However, a) not all migrants will vocalize at the precise time they fly within range of my recording apparatus, and there are several migrant species that are not known to vocalize at all during nocturnal migration—for example, vireos and some of the flycatchers, b) I miss all birds flying at an altitude of 1,000 feet or greater, and c) migration is not spread equally across the landscape. If all the vireos and flycatchers, as well as some of the thrushes, sparrows, and warblers that don't call while flying through my study plot represent 50% of the total, then we can multiply 463 × 2 = 926. Furthermore, according to BirdCast, the ceiling for migration during the night of May 1 was close to 2,000 feet, so we again correct by a factor of 2 = 1,852. Finally, migration in New Hampshire is often more heavily weighted

towards the coast, for which we once again correct by a factor of 2 = 3,704. Multiplying 3,704 X 475 gives us a figure of 1.76 million, which is much closer to eBird's figure of 4.7 million. This tells me two things: a) BirdCast's projections may be pretty reliable and b) logical fallacies are a fun way to get closer to the answer you want.

Warbling Vireo by Debra Powers, 5-24-2024, Nottingham, NH.

Slow Overall Migration

The large-scale movement of May 1 was backed up by numerous eBird reports from across southern New Hampshire on May 2. However, overall migration in May was slow, especially at the coast. May 10-19 was the poorest week for migration on Star Island since I started leading trips more than a decade ago. On nearby Appledore Island, Becky Suomala reported that they captured *one* bird in the mist nets at the banding station there on May 18. It was their slowest day on record.

Steve Mirick, an astute observer of coastal migration, shared the following:

> *Weather didn't cooperate for coastal birders this spring as easterly winds and poor coastal migration weather prevailed for April and especially May. I generally get out to enjoy the morning migration of hawks, swallows, and goldfinches, but completely missed out on any coastal flights this spring. Also, while there were one or two nice warbler days at Odiorne Point State Park, the warblers didn't seem to stick around as they cleared out quickly the next day. 6:00 am wind data from the coast at the Pease Tradeport confirmed the weather pattern. For the first 20 days of May, only five mornings had a 6:00 am wind which had a westerly wind direction component and only three mornings had a favorable WSW direction. Perhaps not too surprisingly, the wind shifted to the SSW on May 21 and I had my best morning of the spring at Odiorne Point State Park. The belief is that the bulk of migrating land birds made their way north by an inland route and bypassed the immediate coastline or perhaps they just didn't run into a weather system that made them stop so they overshot the coast completely.*

Highlights

Notwithstanding the aforementioned observations, it was a great spring for two southern warbler species, **Prothonotary Warbler** and **Hooded Warbler**. We also ended the season with a decent total of 289 species recorded in the state. There were, however, relatively few rarities, especially in the normally productive coastal region. This allowed the unfancied interior counties to take top honors this spring with the first **Loggerhead Shrike** in four years in Laconia, the second Loggerhead Shrike in four years in Dummer, and a third-state record **Chestnut-collared Longspur** in Keene.

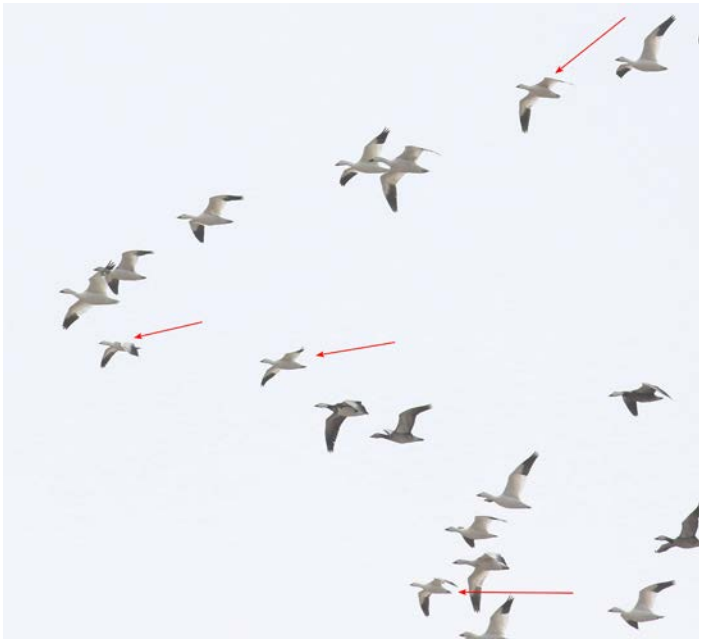
Normally seen in prairies to our west, Donna Keller found this Chestnut-collared Longspur on 5-19-2024 at Otter Brook Lake in Keene, NH.

Rockingham County finally delivered in May, with a third state record of **Black-necked Stilt** in Rye. Though rare sightings in New Hampshire were somewhat limited, it was a good spring for rare sounds, highlighted by singing **White-eyed Vireo**, **Yellow-breasted Chat**, several **Hooded Warblers**, and most especially, **Lark Sparrow**—a truly rare sound in New England.

Waterfowl

Steve and Jane Mirick spotted a flock of **Snow Geese** flying over Hampton on March 24. Noticing a smaller goose amongst the gaggle, Steve took several photos and later determined that the flock comprised 37 Snow Geese and four **Ross's Geese**, the latter a first Rockingham County record.

Two **Greater White-fronted Geese** this spring included



Arrows point to the four Ross's Geese among the Snow Goose flock. Note the size difference and other features that distinguish the two species. Photo by Steve Mirick, 3-24-2024, Hampton, NH.

Greater White-fronted Goose by Iain MacLeod, 3-17-2024, Moulton Farm, Meredith, NH.

single individuals in Charlestown on March 9 (Eric Masterson et al.) and Meredith Town docks on March 16 (Iain MacLeod et al.), with the Charlestown bird being seen in Claremont a week later.

A flock of eight **Northern Shovelers** reported by Wayne Scott et al. at Chaffee Wildlife Sanctuary in Lyme on March 31 was a seasonal high count. Samuel Guiles found two **Redhead** amongst a group of scaup at Jackson's Landing in Durham on March 25. For the second year in a row, Elm Brook Park in Hopkinton hosted a large concentration of **Ring-necked Ducks**, with 390 birds reported on March 29 by Daniel Calder, beating his count of 320 birds reported a year earlier.

A pair of **Harlequin Duck** continued in Hampton Harbor and were last seen on March 10 by Dave Kellam. Two drakes were photographed by Leo McKillop flying north past Ragged Neck in Rye on March 23, and I photographed a flock of five from Star Island on April 26. Katrina Fenton witnessed an extraordinary fallout of 451 **White-winged Scoter** on Lake Umbagog on May 15 with many remaining through May 16. They must have been quite a sight! Apart from a 2004 record of 500 birds in Sandwich, this represents the largest flock of the species ever recorded in the interior of the state. Three **Black Scoter** put down on Lake Wantastiquet in Hinsdale on April 24 (Wendy Ward).

Waterfowl migration along the immediate coastline was subdued, but farther offshore at the Isles of Shoals, birds were moving in number. Black Scoters rafted up off the east side of Star Island in mid-May, peaking at approximately 1,000 birds on May 19. **Long-tailed Duck** numbers around the island gradually dropped from 50 birds to a lone individual over the same week. It was an excellent spring for **Ruddy Duck**, with birds reported from early March through April from Conway, Manchester, Rockingham, and the Great Bay region, with late singles on Nutts Pond in Manchester on May 25 (Kristos Said Kendall) and Exeter WTP on May 26 (Corina Giron and Michael McCloy).

Gallinule, Coot, and Crane

Nocturnal audio recording is well suited to monitoring secretive marsh species—at the time of writing I have yet to see a **Virginia Rail** in 2024 even though I recorded 13 individuals over my Hancock yard this spring alone. Even better, I recorded a yard first **Common Gallinule** overhead at 2:43 am on May 4. Danielle Durocher found another Common Gallinule at Mitchell Pond in Windham on April 19, with another sighting of the bird on April 23. **Sandhill Cranes** continue to be too numerous to list all sightings, but Hillary Siener's sighting of a migrant over her Jaffrey yard on March 8 was record early (not counting the individual that overwintered in Rollinsford a few years back).

Shorebirds

Brett Hillman found a **Black-necked Stilt** in the salt marsh opposite Odiorne Point State Park on May 4—New Hampshire's third-ever record of the species. It was the first one to be found on public land, allowing approximately 40 birders the opportunity to connect with the species in New Hampshire.

American Oystercatcher returned to the Isles of Shoals as per usual, with a high count of five birds on Star Island on April 27 (Eric Masterson). Away from the islands the species

On the Atlantic Coast Black-necked Stilts typically breed south of Delaware Bay. Photo by Nora Hanke, 4-24-2024, Rye, NH.

remains rare. One was present at Seal Rocks in Rye on May 15 (Charlie Nims and Sheila McCarthy), and again on May 29 (Robyn Prieto).

It was a fairly lackluster spring for inland shorebirds with a few exceptions. Dan Hubbard had a **Black-bellied Plover** flying over Rochester WTP on May 16 and Rob Woodward found a stunning individual in breeding plumage at Bartlett Beach in Laconia three days later. Dawn Wright O'Malley went one better and found two **American Golden Plover** in breeding plumage at the remarkable setting of a Salem mall parking lot on May 16, quite the contrast to their final high arctic destination. A regular annual fall migrant, the species has recently become a more frequent spring visitor, with documented records from 1955, 1980, 1988, 1991, 2011, 2017, 2018, 2022, and two records in the spring of 2024—Stuart Varney's sharp eyes spotted another individual in the more likely location of Jenness Beach in Rye on May 6.

Kyle Jones found four **Semipalmated Plover** at Tullando Farm in Orford on May 22 and eleven during a draw-down at Goose Pond in Canaan on May 23. Most Semipalmated Plover reports were at the coast but there were some inland sightings with multiple birds. Dan Hubbard reported 15 Semipalmated Plovers at Rochester WTP on May 23. Ken Klapper reported an extremely early **American Woodcock** from his Sandwich yard on March 6. Nate Marchessault counted 32 **Solitary Sandpipers** at Mud Pond in Dublin on May 10, an exceptionally high count for this species. Kyle Jones reported 16 **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Goose Pond in Canaan on May 6, also a high count for an inland site. Steve Mirick and Stuart Varney both reported early **Greater Yellowlegs** on March 20 with single birds at Sagamore Creek Headlands in Portsmouth and Hampton Salt Marsh Conservation Area.

Nate Marchessault recorded the distinctive call of a **Dunlin** as it flew over Hinsdale Bluffs on April 24 and Andrea and George Robbins found another at Copps Pond WMA in Tuftonboro on May 28. Steve Mirick found an extremely early **Least Sandpiper** in the Hampton Salt Marsh Conservation Area on April 13, the earliest record for the state excepting a bird seen on April 9, 1979 (Keith and Fox 2013). If my Hancock yard is any gauge, there was a decent shorebird flight over New Hampshire during the nights of May 20 and 21, during which I recorded Semipalmated Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpiper, and many Least Sandpipers flying north over my wooded patch of the state (all of these recordings are available on eBird). A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was found on April 10 at the Runnymede Farm in North Hampton (Rich Aaronian), one of only five spring sightings this year.

Gulls, Terns, and Alcids

Overnight rain on April 9 caused a minor fallout of **Bonaparte's Gulls**, with nine birds seen by Hector Galbraith at Hinsdale Setbacks and another bird seen by Daniel Calder at Elm Brook Park in Hopkinton. On April 18, during another rain event, Ducky Darrick saw a "*large flock of whitish birds in the distance...very active and right over the water, reminiscent of swallows but larger…three dozen or more*" on Lake Nubanusit in Hancock. Ducky inquired the NH Birds Google Group whether they could have been terns, but even the earliest Common Terns are not expected until the end of April, and Ducky's birds were almost certainly

Can you spot the Little Gull among this flock of Bonaparte's? Photo by Catherine Holland, 4-20-2024, Goose Pond, Canaan, NH.

Bonaparte's Gulls. Where there are Bonaparte's Gulls, it is always worth checking for Little Gull. On April 20, after another overnight rainstorm, more than 100 Bonaparte's Gulls were recorded from about 15 inland sites around northern New England. However, Wayne Scott found the only **Little Gull**, an adult summer bird with a small flock of Bonaparte's Gulls on Goose Pond in Canaan, the fourth inland record for New Hampshire after Laconia in September 1969, Enfield in April 1997, and Sunapee in April 2018. It is always worth checking ponds during April and May after overnight rainstorms, especially ones that coincide with predicted migration, though it's still a bit of a lottery.

Caspian Tern by Cameron Johnson, 5-1-2024, Horseshoe Pond, Concord, NH.

Dennis Tsorbias photographed a first of the year **Black-headed Gull** offshore of Odiorne Point SP on March 12, with Patience Chamberlin and Jameson French perhaps seeing the same bird on March 16 in Rye Harbor. The unsettled weather in early April brought migrant **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** in from the Gulf of Maine, with six seen in Hampton Beach State Park on April 12 (Leo McKillop and Susan Wrisley). There was only one inland **Common Tern** recorded in the spring of 2024, a single bird found by Hector Galbraith on Lake Wantastiquet in Hinsdale on May 30.

Jacob Rhodes found a **Caspian Tern** at Horseshoe Pond on May 1. Hector Galbraith found the first of several on Lake Wantastiquet on May 7, with another on May 11 (Hector Galbraith), and yet another on May 13 (Robyn Prieto). Ken Klapper continued to build on his incredible yard list when he spotted two distant Caspian Terns heading ENE over Sandwich on May 14. In the competitive world of yard listing, Ken is fast becoming a legend.

The Shoals Marine Lab tern restoration biologists found a breeding plumaged **Black Tern** on Seavey Island and three **Atlantic Puffins** just offshore on May 16. **Common Murre**, though true to the name on Jeffreys Ledge during the winter months, is always the uncommon murre from shore at any time of year. Robyn Prieto saw two flying north offshore from Rye Harbor State Park on March 2.

Loons and Shearwaters

Steve and Jane Mirick found a **Pacific Loon** off Pulpit Rocks in Rye on May 25, continuing their great record of finding late spring/early summer records of this species along New Hampshire's coast. Inclement weather grounded a remarkable 56 **Common Loons** on Lake Wantastiquet on the Connecticut River on May 8 (Donna Keller).

Like other migrants, the various species of shearwater that visit New Hampshire in summer do so on differing schedules. **Manx Shearwater** is the first to arrive back, and Becky Suomala saw one while en route to Appledore Island on May 17. **Sooty Shearwater**, the next most likely species in late spring, was recorded by several observers in May, with a high count of three birds over Jeffreys Ledge on May 31 (Steve Mirick). Both Great and Cory's Shearwater are the last to arrive, usually not reaching the Gulf of Maine until late June or even July in the case of Cory's Shearwater. Leo McKillop and Susan Wrisley photographed an early **Great Shearwater** over Jeffreys Ledge on May 29, with Cory's Shearwater yet to be recorded in New Hampshire during the spring season.

Herons

Least Bitterns returned to their traditional locations, including Cranberry Pond wetlands in West Lebanon, with an individual heard calling there on May 4 (John Peckham), and Piscassic River WMA on May 15 (Roger Stephenson and Jameson French). There were, however, no spring sightings of Least Bittern on World End Pond in Salem this year.

Steve Mirick found an adult **Little Blue Heron** in Rye on April 28, and Stuart Varney found an immature in the marshes adjacent to Odiorne Point State Park on May 2, the latter continuing in the area until at least May 7. Ed Norton found a rarer **Tricolored Heron** at Locke Road in Rye on May 11, with the bird remaining in the area for a week. Elliott Hale posted a video of a white egret flying over Messer Pond in New London on March 24. It was most likely a **Great Egret** given the location and date, though the video was inconclusive to species.

As controversy boils around the renaming of some of North America's eponymously named birds, we can take satisfaction in the few species that have the perfect moniker. Melissa Moore snapped a bucolic photograph of a **Western Cattle Egret** perched on a fencepost next to grazing cattle in Loudon on May 29. Two **White-faced Ibis** were seen at various locations in North Hampton and Rye on May 5 and

Little Blue Heron by Jim Sparrell, 4-28-2024, Rye Recreation Area, NH.

White-faced Ibis by Stuart Varney, 5-5-2024, Parson's Creek Salt Marsh, Rye, NH.

6 (Stuart Varney, Steve Mirick and Robyn Prieto). Though annual in Massachusetts and Maine, this was only their third spring occurrence in New Hampshire within the last ten years.

Raptors

Pam Hunt set a new high count for **Black Vulture** on March 8 when she reported nine birds at a Penacook vulture roost. The record was less than a month old when Joseph Ransdell-Green had Pam hold his beer while he counted ten flying over Hanover on April 1. I might cry "April fools" with any other species, but ten seems par for the course in the evolving story of Black Vulture in New Hampshire.

A **Swallow-tailed Kite** was reported flying north over Newbury sometime during the morning of April 10 following a night of heavy songbird migration. The word circulated on the NH Birds Google Group for birders to be on the lookout, and later the same day James Coombs was driving on the Portsmouth traffic circle when he saw presumably the same bird heading toward Great Bay.

Pam Hunt found a first year **Golden Eagle** in Charlestown on March 10 and Phil Brown spotted another individual while he was boiling sap in his Hancock yard on March 16. Scott Surner photographed a subadult Golden Eagle over Hall Stream Road in Pittsburg on March 1, and little more than a week later David Mozzoni photographed a first year bird in the exact same location. Paul and Lori Charron photographed a clearly different first year bird above Errol on March 25. Cameras helped to prove the presence of at least three individuals in Coos County in March, the first time Golden Eagle has been reported there in that month.

Mississippi Kites returned to Durham on May 15, with two birds reported by James Bradshaw. **Rough-legged Hawks** were reported from Hampton Beach State Park on March 3 (Matt Tarr), Hemenway Road in Tamworth on April 17 (Susan Lee), and Belknap on April 21 (Janice Landry). Len Medlock reported an exceptionally late Rough-legged Hawk from Lancaster on May 26.

The **Northern Hawk Owl** on Hall Stream Road in Pittsburg continued into spring and was last seen on March 26 (Ron Schlegel). Ethan Ring found a **Long-eared Owl** roosting along the Peanut Trail in Newton on April 7. Ethan got the word out to birders and then remained on site for the day to prevent disturbance to the owl. Kudos to Ethan on a spectacular find and for demonstrating exemplary birding ethics to the birding community. You can read more about his find in Ethan's article on page 14.

Woodpeckers, Flycatchers, and Vireos

Robyn Prieto had the debatable fortune to record one of only two **Red-headed Woodpeckers** of the season on May

The other Red-headed Woodpecker of the season, photographed by Ken Faucher on 3-12-2024 in Somersworth, NH. Though often confused with Pileated Woodpeckers and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Red-headed Woodpeckers are quite rare in NH.

11 when Robyn saw an adult male fly across the Everett Turnpike in Merrimack before getting hit by a truck—the woodpecker that is. In better news, Robyn also found an **Acadian Flycatcher** on May 29 in Pawtuckaway State Park, a known location for the species going back to the early 1990s. Robyn also described hearing the song of an **Alder Flycatcher** at Durham Reservoir on May 9, which would be a record early date for this traditionally late arrival. Catherine Holland got a recording of the Alder Flycatcher she found in Lyme on May 11.

Cameron Johnson found a **White-eyed Vireo** singing on the Dover Community Trail on May 22 and a **Yellow-throated Vireo** was well described by Robyn Prieto in Deerfield on April 29. In reviewing the latter record, I noticed that the eBird filters were erroneously set to April 24, despite there being only one April record in eBird with photo or audio documentation (a bird photographed this year by Kevin Murphy at Nutts Pond in Manchester). I don't doubt that some of the early eBird records are genuine, in particular a well described bird seen by Paul Miliotis in Pawtuckaway on April 25, 2012, but I encourage documentation of any future April records. I reset the filter to May 1.

A **Blue-headed Vireo** on April 8 at the UNH main campus in Durham was an early first-of-year record (Patrick Marr). **Red-eyed Vireos** also arrived early, with May 2 records from Hinsdale (Robyn Prieto), Peterborough (Matt Tarr et al.), and Seabrook (Ashton Almeida).

Shrikes and Crows

Iain MacLeod found a **Loggerhead Shrike** in Laconia on April 15, one of the standout birds of the season. Fortunately, the Laconia bird remained long enough to be seen by many of the state's birders. I say the Laconia bird because a little more than a month later, Lori Charron found the Dummer bird, a second Loggerhead Shrike at Magill Bay in Dummer on May 27. This bird also remaining long enough to be twitched. With only two other sightings (according to eBird data) within the last 30 years, two in the same season might seem odd, but there has been a pronounced and recent increase in New England records. Of the 17 birds to occur in New England in the last 20 years, 15 have been seen since 2019.

I reached out to Jacques Bouvier and Jane Spero for answers. Jacques is a regional coordinator for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Ontario hosts the closest breeding population of Loggerhead Shrikes, mostly located in the Carden Plain in Central Ontario and Napanee Limestone Plain in southeastern Ontario. Jacques shared that the small population has been increasing in the last ten years, with 14 breeding pairs in the province in 2014, 18 pairs in 2016, and 24 pairs in 2021. Jane Spero, the lead biologist with Wildlife

The second Loggerhead Shrike to be seen in the Spring of 2024. Photo by Lori Charron, 5-28-2024, Magill Bay, Androscoggin River, Dummer.

Preservation Canada's (WPC) Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program, shared that WPC has a conservation breeding and release program for the species at the two aforementioned sites. The released birds are color-banded (New Hampshire's two birds were not). WPC has also seen an increase in sightings in Eastern Canada, from Quebec to Halifax, and Jane wondered whether some of these birds were establishing new wintering grounds in the Maritimes, a suggestion that should prompt us to check our winter shrikes more carefully in future. You can read more about this species in this issue's special feature on page 15.

Iain MacLeod and Rob Woodward reported plenty of **Fish Crows** from the Lakes Region, where the species is now well established, and reports from elsewhere offer further evidence of this species' expansion in New Hampshire. Steve Mirick reported a flock of 15 flying north over Odiorne Point State Park on April 19, adding that "Fish Crows are exploding!" and my neighbor Phil Brown scored Fish Crow as a new bird for his Hancock yard on April 28. You can read more about how to tell Fish Crows apart from American Crows in this issue's special feature on page 24.

Swallows, Wrens, and Thrushes

Winters have not warmed yet to a degree sufficient to accommodate a regular population of overwintering **Tree Swallows**, so detecting first migrants is still straightforward for this species. A single bird was noted on March 12 at Horsehill Nature Preserve in Merrimack by Robin Feustel, with a more widespread arrival over March 13 and 14 when southern New Hampshire was bathed in sunshine and temperatures reached 60 degrees. An early **Barn Swallow** was photographed by Alan Murray in Durham on April 2. This was less surprising than the **Cliff Swallow** reported by Sam Jaffe at Airport Marsh in Swanzey the following day just

Varied Thrush by Catherine Holland, 4-12-2024, Hanover, NH.

prior to a snowstorm—a reminder that early migrants chart a potentially hazardous path.

Scott Young photographed a **House Wren** in Strafford on April 15, a record early bird by one day, with another reported the next day from Durham by Robyn Prieto. Early March reports of **Marsh Wren** from Hinsdale (Wendy Ward, March 2) and Durham Town Landing (Tom Cooney, March 5) suggest that the species successfully overwintered again in a few southerly locations. Joseph Ransdell-Green found a **Varied Thrush** in Dartmouth College Park on April 11, the second since January, with both birds being found in natural forest environments rather than as feeder birds, as is usually the case with this species.

Waxwings and Crossbills

Bohemian Waxwings moved south of the Lakes Region in March, perhaps because their food supply to the north was nearing exhaustion. Kim Hayes photographed a flock of 15 in Rindge on March 1, one of the most southerly records in the eastern United States at the time. For a species that literally eats its way south in winter, it would be interesting to know more about food choice as the season progresses. Contemporaneous observations from western Massachusetts noted birds feeding on juniper and oriental bittersweet berries. As spring progressed, more Bohemians were reported from southeastern New Hampshire, especially in early April when there was a sizeable movement into the coastal plain, particularly in the Dover and Durham regions. Scott Young recorded a high count of 200 birds in Northwood on April 7 and Hannah Wait reported a tardy individual from Conway on May 3.

Red Crossbills continued in good numbers around the state through mid-April, but their numbers tapered toward the end of the season, perhaps signaling that the end of their generational invasion was nearing. The species is widely suspected of breeding across the state after the big

Bohemian Waxwings are frugivores that migrate south when fruit supplies in the north run low. Photo by Cameron Johnson, 4-5-2024, Dover, NH.

White Pine cone crop in the fall of 2023. Nate Marchessault photographed a family group in his yard in Swanzey on April 12, with parents feeding two juvenile birds. **White-winged Crossbills** were restricted to higher peaks in the Monadnock region and the White Mountains north.

Longspurs, Sparrows, Chats, and Orioles

Donna Keller found a stunning male **Chestnut-collared Longspur** in breeding plumage at Otter Brook Lake in Keene on May 19. This is the third state record of this western vagrant. Donna's sighting was the only spring record in eBird for all of New England. Like most western strays, vagrant Chestnut-collared Longspurs show a significant coastal bias in the eastern US; they tend to keep flying until they hit the coast, yet curiously all three of New Hampshire's records (Deering 1992, Hollis 2020, and Keene 2024) hail from the state's interior. The bird lingered long enough to be twitched by those willing and able to drop everything. It was last seen early on the morning of May 20. Congratulations to Donna on a terrific find!

Pam Hunt reported 22 **Grasshopper Sparrows** at Concord Airport, including 20 singing males on May 29, a record high count for spring. While leading a birding group, Matt Tarr found two singing birds at Notch View Farm Trails in Chatham less than five miles from Coos County. Range expansion is often a characteristic of an increasing population, and in New Hampshire Grasshopper Sparrow has not been recorded this far north during the breeding season since the 1960s. Grasshopper Sparrow's good fortune stands in contrast to **Vesper Sparrow's** continued decline. The species may now have the dubious distinction of being New Hampshire's rarest regularly breeding sparrow. The seven Vesper Sparrows counted by Patty Christinat at Rivervail Bison Farm in Coos County on April 21 are

The overwintering Clay-colored Sparrow, photographed by Joy Wilby, 4-7-2024, Goffstown, NH.

certainly noteworthy.

The overwintering **Clay-colored Sparrow** first seen in Goffstown on January 18 continued into spring and was last reported on April 25. Catherine Holland likely recorded a migrant when she heard the distinctive buzzy song of a Clay-colored Sparrow in Orford on May 10, though without a visual, it is impossible to rule out the possibility of a hybrid Clay-colored Sparrow X Chipping Sparrow.

Cynthia Barrett reported a **Lark Sparrow** from her Milford yard on multiple dates in February, but the bird was not seen again until the storm event of March 22 which pushed birds to feeders, including Cynthia's Lark Sparrow. This time, however, it brought a friend! Observers documented the duo until they disappeared for the second time on March 25. Several birders reported hearing one of the birds singing, which must be a first for New Hampshire! Odd birds are often described as rare sightings, but this was a case of an even rarer "sounding."

The male Lark Sparrow's song is melodious, described as a jumble of clear notes, accompanied by harsh buzzes. Photo by Susan Wrisley, 3-25-2024, North River Rd., Milford, NH.

Multiple birders noted high numbers of **Fox Sparrows** this spring. Pam Hunt tallied 13 on April 7 while conducting her Penacook survey, and the snowstorm of March 22 brought five Fox Sparrows into my Hancock yard. **American Tree Sparrows** generally leave the state by the end of April and are uncommon in May. Aubrey Giroux watched one linger in her Colebrook yard until May 4 and Natalie Thompson reported one from the Seacoast Science Center in Rye on May 9. I recorded several suspected migrants over my house in early May, but I entered them as sparrow sp. in eBird given the inherent difficulty of identifying many nocturnal migrants to species.

Slightly less unusual than a singing Lark Sparrow, but still a rare sound in New Hampshire is a singing **Yellow-breasted Chat**. Steve Mirick found one in song at Odiorne Point State Park on May 7. Jacquie McGillicuddy scored an excellent first record for Coos County when she photographed a first year male **Orchard Oriole** coming to her Gorham birdfeeder on May 6. The species has a more southerly distribution in the northeastern United States than Baltimore Oriole, and in New Hampshire it is rare north of the Lakes Region. Coos County offers little suitable habitat for a species that prefers deciduous riparian corridors, orchards, parkland, and suburban shade trees but it is the kind of habitat found in the Androscoggin River Valley where Jacquie's birdfeeder is located.

Warblers and Tanagers

One of the many fascinating aspects of bird migration is how species usually arrive in a synchronous movement, not as individuals but as part of a broad single species migration front. The first **Louisiana Waterthrush** of the year was reported by John DeBaun in Atkinson on April 9, and within the next two days, reports were coming in from multiple locations across Rockingham County and northwest as far as Concord.

Ovenbirds were recorded singing at Beaver Brook in Hollis (Chris McPherson) and Spinney Lane in Durham (Robyn Prieto) on the relatively early date of April 24. Ben Griffith found a **Brewster's Warbler** on May 3 in Rochester. Brewster's Warbler is one of the hybrid forms of Golden-winged Warbler X Blue-winged Warbler. George Raspa found a **Lawrence's Warbler** at Beech Hill Forest in Strafford on May 11, Lawrence's being the other form of this hybrid pairing. Steve Mirick found a second Lawrence's Warbler at Seabrook Town Forest on May 15.

Kirk Elwell heard and saw a **Black-and-White Warbler**

Brewster's Warbler by Benjamin Griffith, 5-3-2024, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.

at Brookside Wildlife Sanctuary in South Hampton on April 11, a new record-early date by two days.

Mike Drelick posted a picture of a mystery bird that he saw in Greenland on May 1 to the Birdwatchers of NH Facebook group, and the community of online birding sleuths quickly solved the puzzle. The bird was the first of two stunning adult male **Prothonotary Warblers** to be seen this spring. Paul Lacourse found a second bird at the McDonnell Conservation Area in Exeter on May 9. Word quickly got out and this one remained all day, to the delight of multiple observers. Prothonotary Warbler is a classic spring overshoot in northern New England. Of the twelve New Hampshire records of this southern warbler in the last 50 years, all but one have occurred in spring. This was the second year in a row that New Hampshire has hosted multiple birds.

By contrast, **Orange-crowned Warbler** is usually a scarce fall migrant. Dan Hubbard found one in his Rochester yard on May 4. George and Andrea Robbins found another in their Pittsfield yard on May 10.

Scott Heron recorded a terrific flight of 146 **Common Yellowthroat** at Odiorne Point State Park on May 14, a new high count in eBird.

Sahil Asnaani photographed a male **Hooded Warbler** in Newfields on April 17. Kristen Simard found another on Star Island on April 24. Remarkably the bird stayed for five days, a rarity itself on an island that traditionally holds rare migrants for only a day (e.g., Cassin's Sparrow, September 2019) or sometimes only a few minutes (e.g., Lazuli Bunting, September 2021). Scott Young photographed a third (also a male) in his Strafford yard on May 14. Scott is one of the few people in New Hampshire who can challenge Ken Klapper for the title of Granite State Champion Yard Lister. Steve Mirick

Prothonotary Warbler by Leo McKillop, 5-24-2024, McDonnell Conservation Area, Exeter, NH.

found a fourth, a male in Seabrook Town Forest on May 22. Last but certainly not least, Billy Weber recorded an individual in song at Pawtuckaway State Park in Nottingham on May 26.

There have been 40 records of Hooded Warbler in New Hampshire in the last 30 years, but most of these have occurred since 2017. Indeed, last year there were six records, and at the time of writing, there have already been five in New Hampshire since spring 2024. This all fits with the following excerpt taken from *Birds of the World* (Mumme et al. 2023):

> *Unlike many migratory songbirds that breed in North America, breeding populations of Hooded Warbler have increased dramatically since the 1970s. Indeed, the overall population in the United States and Canada increased by an estimated 103% from 1970–2014.*

Also of note, 75% of the Hooded Warbler recorded since 1994 were male. Perhaps this is partly because males are much more distinctive than females, which can be more easily misidentified as Wilson's Warbler amongst others. Also, female Hooded Warblers rarely sing, and for a species that

Hooded Warbler by Scott Young, 5-14-2024, Lake Shore Drive, Strafford, NH.

has a habit for being furtive and primarily occurs as a spring overshoot (almost 60% of New Hampshire's birds occur in spring), song is an important factor leading to the discovery of individuals.

Robyn Prieto found a male **Cerulean Warbler** in song at Wantastiquet Mountain Natural Area in Hinsdale on May 13. Nora Hanke reported both a male and a female on May 17 and Ben Griffith had two males counter-singing on May 25. The species continues to hang on in the state by the slimmest of threads.

Black-throated Blue Warblers in New England sing a song variation that is identical to the Cerulean Warbler (pictured here). A visual confirmation is critical for any Cerulean Warbler report. Identification by sound alone is not reliable, even by Merlin. Photo by Donna Keller 5-13-2024, Wantastiquet Mt. Natural Area, Chesterfield/Hinsdale, NH.

Richard and Janice Strong photographed a male **Blackpoll Warbler** at Pickering Ponds in Rochester on the early date of May 3 while looking for the Brewster's Warbler found earlier the same day. Larry Morin, Catherine Holland, and Kyle Jones saw a "western" **Palm Warbler**, the duller form more common in the fall, at Bedell Bridge State Park in Haverhill on May 3. Ethan Ring reported another from Pickering Ponds in Rochester on May 2.

A male **Summer Tanager** visited the Bedford suet feeder of Teresa Dainesi on April 23. Also coming to a suet feeder, a male **Scarlet Tanager** was photographed by Holly Ehrbar in Pittsfield on April 13, beating the old record early arrival date by almost a week.

Painted Bunting

An overwintering **Painted Bunting** in Manchester continued into the spring, being last seen on April 9 by Elise Perry. It probably left with the seven million birds that BirdCast projected overflew the state later that night. Another Painted Bunting was photographed coming to a Portsmouth bird feeder in late April.

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BirdCast—A Birder's Spring Migration Sidekick

by Emma Stogsdill

Spring birding in New England boasts the return of many of our beloved birds. Though birding is a daytime affair for many, the true magic of spring migration happens at night. In early spring, BirdCast shows nighttime migration in a way binoculars can't.

BirdCast provides real-time, machine-learning based predictions of bird migrations. These predictions are rooted in the study of flight calls, radar data, satellite imagery, weather, and human population data.

For backyard and seasoned birders alike, a tool of this caliber may sound unapproachable, but BirdCast can be a great resource for any birder. The website boasts four primary tools: Bird Migration Forecast Maps, Live Bird Migration Maps, Local Migration Alerts, and a Migration Dashboard.

Chestnut-sided Warbler by Len Medlock, 5-26-2024, Lancaster, NH.

Bird Migration Forecast Maps

Available starting in March, these maps model nocturnal migration based on the last 23 years of bird movements. The maps use these data combined with weather and precipitation forecasts, to predict suitable conditions for migration and suitable conditions for spotting birds.

Live Bird Migration Maps

BirdCast's live maps depict the intensity of nocturnal bird migration as detected by radar between local sunset and sunrise, allowing you to look at the current night's migration in real time. The data in this tool span back to 2018, making for a simple determination of the intensity of birds in our local area on a given date in the past too.

Local Migration Alerts

This may be the best feature for busy birders. With a quick search of any US zip code, BirdCast provides "tonight's migration forecast" and a "3-night migration forecast." There is a "Subscribe to Alerts" feature that will let you know when birds are migrating through your area. This feature is fun for birders but can also serve as a reminder to turn off non-essential outdoor lighting during migration. Bright lights at night can disorient birds. Disorientation potentially causes birds to fly into glass windows or other hazards.

Migration Dashboard

The newest tool in the BirdCast toolbelt allows users to type any state into the search bar and find estimates of the total number of birds migrating through, their directions, speeds, and altitudes. This is available from March 1 to June 15 for spring migration, and August 1 to November 15 for fall. This tool can show migration patterns in real time or provide a summary of any whole night since 2013.

To check BirdCast out for yourself, visit https://birdcast.info/.

Tufted Titmice Reveal an Exciting Owl

Story and photo by Ethan Ring.

Editor's Note: On Sunday, April 8, 2024, Ethan Ring found a Long-eared Owl on the Peanut Trail in Newton, NH. Below is his story of the find. Ethan exhibited excellent birding ethics, carefully ensuring the bird was not disturbed, while allowing others to view it at a safe distance. Long-eared Owl is a sensitive species and their records are hidden in eBird.

Long-eared Owls are notoriously elusive and difficult to find, preferring dense conifers for roosting.

About an hour and twenty minutes into my search for Rusty Blackbirds (with no luck), I was ready to call it a day on the Peanut Trail. I was making my way back to the parking lot from the half-mile sign near the end of the cedar swamp when I noticed two Tufted Titmice alarming in the pines. Initially, I started looking for what had upset the titmice, not thinking much of it. That's when I noticed two ear tufts sticking up from behind the pine needles.

My first thought was that it might be a Great Horned Owl, but I quickly realized the silhouette was way too small. As I watched, the owl lifted its head. It was a small size, had a slimmer body, and a striped belly. The buffy face was obvious—this was a Long-eared Owl.

I had to step back as I realized I was way too close when I first found it. Remember, I was not expecting an owl! I walked back to a safe distance to observe the owl. I called fellow birder Steve Mirick and we agreed to let people know about the presence of the Long-eared Owl.

I stayed there for four hours after discovering the owl, having it in view the entire time and happily showing people this incredible bird. I also kept people at a safe distance so the owl would not be flushed. The onlookers were very respectful, observing the owl from a partially obscured view through the pines. The owl only appeared to be threatened once as a barking dog got near. It was never alert due to photographers/people, as they remained at a distance. I left with the last people at 4:30 pm, after seeing a pretty good but not excessive showing for this owl. This is almost certainly a migration stop as Long-eared Owls make their journey back north, rather than a permanent roost.

It was a great day marked by the discovery of an incredible bird!

Loggerhead Shrike in New Hampshire

by Iain MacLeod

Many of us know the charismatic Northern Shrike, a regular winter visitor to the Granite State. Its slightly smaller southern cousin, the Loggerhead Shrike, is a rare vagrant here. On April 15, 2024, I was lucky to find one in Laconia. Its time in the region allowed many birders to add it to their state lists.

The Loggerhead Shrike has a fascinating history in New Hampshire. An "open-country" specialist, the bird perches on low shrubs to hunt for insects, small mammals, and small birds. As forests were cleared following European settlement, Loggerheads expanded eastward and occupied New England by the late 1800s. The first New Hampshire breeding record of this species was in 1884. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in New Hampshire*, by Foss et al., states: "The population in New Hampshire may have peaked between 1885 and 1910, when nesting occurred in Charlestown, Hanover, Tilton, Jefferson, Lancaster, and in the Durham area (Dearborn 1898, Allen 1903, Dearborn 1903, and Wright 1911)."

As fields were abandoned and forests returned, the Loggerhead retreated. There have been no breeding records in the Granite State since 1910. Loggerheads are widespread in the open, thicket-laced habitats of southern and western states. They're year-round residents in Florida, Texas, and New Mexico—where I've seen them.

Since 1960, there have been less than a dozen records of Loggerheads in New Hampshire. The *Atlas* lists records for Lancaster in 1963, Shelbourne in 1971, Canterbury in 1974, and Hebron in 1980. During the *Atlas* fieldwork years, there were three spring reports: 1982, 1983, and 1986. In the *Monadnock Sightings: Birds of Dublin, New Hampshire 1909-1979*, by Elliott and Kathleen Allison, it states of the Loggerhead, "We have but two Dublin records: September 2, 1957; March 29, 1970."

Known as "butcher birds," Loggerhead Shrikes and their relatives the Northern Shrikes are notorious for impaling their prey on thorns and barbed wire. Their hooked beak is a powerful tool, allowing them to target their prey's nape and paralyze it. This Loggerhead Shrike was spotted by Iain MacLeod on 4-15-2024, in Laconia, NH.

A young George Robbins found one in September 1974 near Durham Reservoir in Strafford County. His wife, Andrea, shared details:

> *He was a college student at the University of New Hampshire when he found it. He was all excited to see a shrike in NH, since he was hoping it was a Northern Shrike, which would have been a life bird for him. He was actually a bit disappointed to discover that, instead, it was just a Loggerhead, since he had seen plenty of them while growing up in Maryland. George had no clue how rare a Loggerhead Shrike was in NH until he got back to Ornithology class and his professor, Art Borror, told him how amazing the record was.*

Steve Mirick saw one in Newington on July 18, 1997. After that, there were no records until 2020 when Robin Feustel took a lovely photo of one on a wire near her house in Hillsborough. At the time she was unaware what a rarity she found.

All of these recent sightings were not only "one-day wonders," but "one-person wonders." These birds vanished as quickly as they were found. When I found a Loggerhead in April 2024, I spread the word. My goal was for more eyes to see it than just mine. Matt Tarr was the first to join me, then Sue Francesco. Familiar faces kept coming. The bird cooperated and hung around into the next day, allowing many birders to see and photograph it.

On May 27, just over a month later, another Loggerhead was found at Magill Bay on Pontook Reservoir in Dummer, NH. Lori Charron photographed it, as did several others. It stayed for two days. Spring of 2024 was a veritable shrike bonanza!

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Who's Shearwater?! A Quick Summary of Recent Changes in Bird Taxonomy

as They Apply to New Hampshire

by Pamela Hunt

Birders using eBird may have noticed some changes in the fall of 2024, depending on where they focus their birding. These were just the tip of a major taxonomic iceberg that had been building up for several years, and interested parties are encouraged to read the various updates posted on eBird (https://ebird.org/news) or the website of the American Ornithological Society's North American Checklist committee (https://americanornithology.org/publications/north-and-middle-american-checklist/).

The Big Three for 2024

The changes affecting most people involved "splits" of three *very* widespread species: House Wren, Northern Goshawk (this one happened in 2023), and Herring Gull. The good news here is that these splits aren't actually going to affect your birding because only one of the "new" species in each group is known to occur in New Hampshire. That said, it's still fun to look into them in more detail for what they reveal about avian diversity and evolution.

The Many Faces of the House Wren

We'll start with the wren, for no better reason than it's by far the most widespread species and potentially found anywhere in the state. House wrens of various sorts are found throughout most of the western hemisphere, nesting from southern Canada all the way to Tierra del Fuego, as well on several islands in the Caribbean. Ornithologists have long recognized extensive plumage and vocal variation in this group, but until recently there was limited genetic data to evaluate how significant these differences were. These data became available, and seven species are now recognized in this complex. The one we have in New England has become the Northern House Wren and can be found all the way south to southern Mexico. It's replaced in the Yucatan by the Southern House Wren, which continues through all of Central and South America. Some birders are likely familiar with the "brown-throated" wren, the dominant form in most of Mexico and sometimes proposed as a separate species in the past. It turns out there's a lot of genetic mixing near the border, so "Brown-throated House Wren" is unlikely to appear on anyone's Arizona list any time soon. The remaining five new species are island endemics found on Cozumel, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Grenada, with most named accordingly. The exception is the Kalinago Wren of Dominica, whose name honors the native Kalingo people of the Lesser Antilles. This attractive rufous-colored wren also used to occur on nearby Guadeloupe and Martinique but has been extinct on those islands since 1973 and 1886, respectively.

Northern House Wrens are a common backyard bird. You are more likely to hear them than see them. Listen for their loud song of a series of harsh rattles. Photo by Len Medlock.

Northern Goshawk: A Simple Split, but a Code Challenge

On to the goshawk! This is a simple split into a North American and Eurasian species, and ours is named American Goshawk accordingly. Although there's a record of Eurasian Goshawk from Bermuda, it's not likely something we'll need to worry about in New Hampshire. The trickiest thing to get used to will be the four-letter code (if you even use these!), which is AGOS to prevent confusion with American Goldfinch (formerly AMGO but now AGOL).

The Herring Gull Situation

The situation with herring gull is similar, but a little more complex; instead of two species there are now four. Once again there is only one across most of North America, now appropriately called the American Herring Gull. The European Herring Gull is a rare vagrant on this side of the Atlantic from Maryland to Newfoundland (where it occurs annually) but should be identified with caution. The herring gull group is incredibly complex (three other Eurasian species were split off several years ago), and two more recent splits occur in eastern Asia. The Mongolian Gull is mostly found in its namesake country while the Vega Gull breeds in northeast Russia; both winter in Japan and eastern China. Vega is the

An American Herring Gull carries a large clam. These gulls drop clams onto hard surfaces to crack them open and access the meat inside. Photo by Kyle Wilmarth.

only one of the two that occurs in North America, where it is regular in far western Alaska and accidental everywhere else. There are even a couple of records for New England, so hard-core gull enthusiasts can now try to find two additional species in the Northeast.

Cattle Egrets Split

Two more splits are of species less frequently seen in most of New Hampshire. The first of these involves cattle egret, now divided into the Eastern Cattle-Egret of Southern Asia and Australia, and the Western Cattle-Egret from Africa, southern Europe, and the Americas. Both species are famous for rapid range expansions, with the western species crossing the Atlantic to colonize South America in the late 1800s.

A Western Cattle-Egret lives up to its name, seen here alongside its bovine companions. When Len Medlock captured this photo in 2017 in Greenland, NH, the species was simply known as a Cattle Egret. Regardless of the name, these birds are often found near grazing animals, taking advantage of the insects stirred up by their movements.

From there it spread north and south and reached the United States in 1941. Populations in eastern North America peaked in the 1990s, and after a decline the species seems to have stabilized at lower numbers. Western Cattle-Egret occurs in New Hampshire only as a vagrant, mostly in the late fall. On a side note, both cattle egrets are now reclassified in the same genus as Great Blue Heron. In non-breeding plumage they are miniature versions of the related Great Egret: a white heron with yellow bill and dark legs.

Cory's vs. Scopoli's Shearwater

The differences between Cory's Shearwater (top) and Scopoli's Shearwater (bottom) are subtle. Note the more extensive white on the underwing of the Scopoli's Shearwater. If you plan to report a Scopoli's Shearwater to eBird in New Hampshire, please include a photo for documentation. Top photo by Pam Hunt. Bottom photo by Leo McKillop.

The final split that affects us is that of Cory's Shearwater, a common visitor to our offshore waters in summer and fall. Research is showing that many seabirds are, like gulls, composed of multiple species nesting on different island groups and sometimes even at different times of year. Such was the case for a shearwater that breeds on islands in the Mediterranean and northeast Atlantic, and has now been split into two species. Of these, the one nesting on the Azores and Canary Islands, retains the name Cory's Shearwater, while the species breeding in the Mediterranean has become Scopoli's Shearwater. The Cory's is the expected species off New England, but Scopoli's does occur with some regularity. The best way to tell the two apart is by the extent of white on the underside of the wing. Birders are already paying extra attention to shearwaters as a result of this split. Expect a flurry of interest in finding more Scolopi's Shearwaters in the Gulf of Maine once the summer of 2025 arrives.

Redpolls: When Three Species Become One

Previously known as the "Common Redpoll" (top), this type is distinguished from the "Hoary Redpoll" (bottom, bird on the right) by its larger bill and more prominent streaking. Top photo by Kyle Wilmarth. Bottom photo by Len Medlock.

Avian taxonomy is most definitely in a splitting phase as we learn more and more about things like genetics and vocal differences, but the former sometimes results in lumps as well. Such was the case with the species now known simply as Redpoll, but formerly the separate Common, Hoary, and Lesser Redpolls (the latter restricted to Europe). Here in North America, distinguishing "Hoary" Redpolls from their far more common cousins has always been a challenge, and there have been proposals to lump the two types going back decades. But it wasn't until recently that researchers finally figured out what was causing the differences, and it turns out to be deceptively simple. Our two types of Redpolls are genetically different, otherwise they'd not show consistent differences in plumage and structure, but the only thing separating them is a single "super gene." This is a chunk of chromosome that is inherited as a unit rather than mixing and matching like most genes do during sexual reproduction. Conveniently, it includes genes for both beak size and plumage color, but otherwise the rest of the genes between the two forms are identical and they thus don't qualify as separate species. While birders will lament the loss of an "extra" redpoll from their life lists, they can gain consolation from the fact that—if they're diligent—there are extra gulls and shearwaters out there to fill the void!

How These Changes Impact eBird Users

If you use eBird, most of the changes discussed in this article will have happened automatically behind the scenes, but such is not the case for Cory's and Scopoli's Shearwaters. The shearwater split is more difficult to "resolve" in eBird because most observations—at least in our area— have not usually been assigned to subspecies. We just assumed "Cory's was Cory's" and didn't look at all birds carefully enough to make sure none were Scopoli's. As a result, eBird has no way of knowing which version you saw and thus can't assign such records to one of the two new species. All records of "Cory's Shearwater" entered prior to the split have instead been changed to "Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater," and since the latter is not a species, this will result in the loss of a species from your eBird life and state lists. Most such birds in New Hampshire waters are going to be Cory's, so there will be little harm in going into those checklists and changing the "Cory's/Scopoli's" entries to "Cory's." That said, if you have photos, please take a look and compare them to existing identification resources.

Field Notes Spring 2024

Kathryn Frieden, Editor

A Turkey Vulture Nest Adventure

by Greg Tillman

My wife Siobhan and I were walking in one of the conservation areas in southern New Hampshire on a beautiful day in the middle of May. I had my binoculars, of course. We ran across an old sugar shack in our path. It had been abandoned for decades but was still largely intact. Just before we reached the shack, a large and unexpected bird flew out of the doorway, startling us both! Not a Turkey, but a Turkey Vulture, landed on a nearby branch.

I didn't smell anything, but morbid curiosity made me poke my head inside the shack. I'm very glad I did. In the corner of the shack was a shallow circle of dirt, about a foot across and half an inch high. Right in the center of the circle was one large, spotted egg. I have seen many Turkey Vultures but had never before seen a Turkey Vulture nest!

Keeping a very wary eye on the presumably-mother vulture, and not wanting any part of vomiting or any sort of ejecta it might use in defense, Siobhan and I withdrew expeditiously. Turkey Vultures often nest on inaccessible ledges or even in caves. Sometimes they nest in protected thickets. Southeastern New Hampshire, Pawtuckaway State Park for example, contains some likely cliff nesting sites. I guess an empty sugar shack is a little bit cave-like?

Sadly, this nest was apparently not as hidden nor inaccessible as more typical locations are. I checked back just once, nearly a month later, hoping for a glimpse of a beautifully ugly vulture fledgling, but found only a few long black feathers left behind. Perhaps next year a more experienced bird will select a traditional, hidden, and hopefully more successful nest location. Nonetheless, I am still grateful to have encountered such an unlikely sight.

Not a Rare Bird in Sight

by Kathryn Frieden

If one remembers the Trumpeter Swan who lived at the Abe Emerson Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary in Candia for seven months back in 2019, it is not hard to understand why one might throw a quick glance toward the marsh when driving west on Route 101. That is just what my husband Roger did in mid-March on his way to an early morning appointment in Manchester. His (hands-free) call to me was excited. He had just caught a glimpse of a long white neck, darkish head, and slender bill at the edge of the marsh. Could it have been an unusual or even rare grebe of some sort?

That's why on a cold, windy, coming-in-like-a-lion kind of March day, I found myself at Abe Emerson Marsh with our scope, ready to meet Roger on his return from Manchester and ready to search for that possibly rare bird. We found a pair of Buffleheads. Male Red-winged Blackbirds were everywhere. Several Mallards flew over. A Winter Wren tinkled and trilled its lengthy song. Our first-of-year Eastern Phoebe wagged its tail from a branch just a few feet in front of me. A Canada Goose slid from between the reeds suspiciously close to the location in question. Could that have been our rare bird?

My hands were frozen, my feet were cold, and I had checked nothing off my to-do list, but that was all right. I had spent the morning on a wild grebe chase—searching, and finding—not a rare bird, but a reminder of the gifts of birding. The satisfaction of time spent outdoors. The knowing what is singing, flying, or skulking. The enjoyment of quiet moments. The hope of a big discovery, but the pleasure of small ones. The welcome reminder that while they may be common, the commoners are never commonplace.

One of These *Eggs* Is Not Like the Others

Photo by Eric Masterson

Eric Masterson was leading a birding trip to Star Island on May 18 when the group stumbled across a Common Eider nest near the Summer House. Common Eiders are often found nesting in scrub habitat adjacent to shoreline. Upon closer inspection, the group was surprised to find a golf ball nestled amongst the eider eggs.

Bald Eagles' Nest Survives the Snow

Photos by Elaine Faletra

This pair of Bald Eagles was photographed on February 18, 2024, at the Warren Fish Hatchery. Elaine first saw the eagles here on January 2. She observed them on the nest multiple times over the next several months.

After a big snowstorm the nest was covered with snow; this is how it looked on March 24. It wasn't clear at this point whether the nest would survive.

The eagles remained on the nest and weathered a second heavy snowfall on April 4. Elaine confirmed their success with this photo of two chicks and an adult on April 24. According to the calculations of Chris Martin (Senior Biologist at NH Audubon) they probably hatched around April 14.

Who Wins? Eagle vs. Merganser

by Jane Rice

I was eating lunch at the town dock in Center Harbor on Tuesday, March 12. Lake Winnipesaukee was already open water as far as the eye could see. I looked up from my sandwich just in time to see an adult Bald Eagle attempting to capture a male Common Merganser. It was quite windy, and the eagle was able to hover into the wind while remaining over the spot where the merganser dove. The merganser popped up a couple of times, instantly diving again before the eagle could pounce.

When the merganser finally surfaced, it took flight instantly for a rapid and successful getaway. I originally thought there were only a couple mergansers in the bay, but when the eagle came over quite a few leaped into the air and quickly left the area. The eagle flew away as if muttering to itself, "Curses, foiled again!"

The Chat-a Poem

by Diana Stephens

I decided to go see if I could spot the Yellow-breasted Chat;

Drove an hour, left the car and walked a bit to find where it was at.

Arrived at the swamp, my boots were soaked and muddy;

Figured I may at least see something ruddy.

I'm looking and listening but all I hear from the pond is a "glub, glub, glub" and a bark.

Something submerged, leaving circles and bubbles—

Could it be a muskrat, a peeper or lark?

I searched and searched for the Chat but the only thing I saw was a cat!

A Woodcock Family in South Hampton

by Danielle Stone

As an avid bird lover, I feel very fortunate to live where I do. Each night, I hear owls as I fall asleep. During the day I get to watch the Wood Ducks, occasionally an Osprey or even a Bald Eagle. Driving home in mid-May of 2024, I spotted something quite unusual on Route 150 in Kensington. Right at the end of my driveway was a mother American Woodcock and her chick. The speed limit here is 50 mph, so I began to flash my lights at oncoming traffic and put my hazards on for those behind me. I got out to help the little family.

At this point, mom flew off and her baby was squatting in the road, looking like nothing more than a little brown pom-pom. This little baby was not going to get any help from its mom, so I stepped in to reunite the family. This chick was possibly only a day old; woodcocks typically leave the nest within 24 hours. It was sad there was only one chick; the typical clutch size is four. I did spy another adult that had not crossed the road yet. What a great experience to be able to see such a unique bird right at the end of my driveway!

Editor's Note: Young woodcock instinctively freeze when frightened. This behavior, combined with excellent camouflage, helps them survive the vulnerable chick stage. Adult females also have a strategy to distract potential chick predators, by feigning a broken wing, much like a Killdeer, to lure them away from their young. While these adaptations can be effective against predators, they offer little protection from cars. Fortunately for this woodcock, Danielle arrived just in time.

Sophia Wong captured this beautiful moment in the spring of 2022. Be on the lookout for young woodcock in roadways this spring and give them plenty of time to cross safely!

Here is an example of the excellent camouflage of American Woodcock. Look closely and you can just make out the chicks. Photo by Sophia Wong.

Birding by the Northern Lights

by Jason Pietrzak

2024 was nicknamed the "Year of the Aurora," with sightings far beyond the usual Alaska, Canada, and Iceland. On the night of May 10, 2024, much of New Hampshire was treated to a rare view of this phenomenon. Photo taken by Jason Pietrzak that night in Rochester, NH.

The aurora borealis isn't normally associated with birding, but here's a reminder to always be birding. On May 10, 2024, the strongest geomagnetic storm in over 20 years gave North Americans views of the aurora as far south as Mexico! We were visiting in-laws on the seacoast when we got a text alert and rushed outside. We could just barely detect muted pinks and greens through the open patches in the White Pine canopy. Were there any big sky views within a reasonable drive?

Thankfully, Skyhaven Airport in Rochester was just down the road, and how glad we were to have made the trip. Standing in the bed of our truck beside the runway fence, we could see what at first looked almost like the glow of city lights against the clouds, but those weren't clouds. A hint of a gradient from green to blue, then stripes of nearly white, magenta, and violet could be seen. The colors became quite vivid as our eyes adjusted over the course of half an hour. What our eyes could see in the moment was greatly enhanced by the 3-second exposure of our iPhone cameras.

Then the night got even better: Peent! Peent! Peent! American Woodcocks were calling from across the runway. Again: always be birding.

Tracking (& Tracking Down) Goshawk Breeding Territories

by Chris Liazos and Phil Brown

Editor's Note: This article was originally posted on 7-10-2024 on the Harris Center e-news. We are excited to bring it to you here and encourage you to post any American Goshawk recordings or sightings to eBird at www.ebird.org.

For the last two years, Harris Center staff and interns have been collecting data on local goshawk breeding territories in order to: (1) better understand existing habitat use and the timing of breeding milestones in the Monadnock Region, and (2) inform future research collaborations with conservation biologists throughout the Northeast and mid-Atlantic states.

The American Goshawk—a large, migratory raptor known for its feisty disposition—is a member of the Accipiter family, which specializes in hunting other birds. (The name "goshawk" translates to "hawk that eats goose.") As apex predators, goshawks balance forest food webs by preying upon a wide variety of birds, as well as small to medium-sized mammals. Although they breed throughout northern New England, including here in the Monadnock Region, their presence can be difficult to detect. They are most noticeable during an initial vocal period in the early spring, and again in June and July as they defend nests with young.

American Goshawks have experienced a precipitous decline in the eastern United States in the past 50 years, perhaps as a result of forest fragmentation, diminishing prey availability, disease, and/or climate change. In New Hampshire, they are now considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

American Goshawk by Katrina Fenton.

Initially, Harris Center bird conservation interns Mike Valentino and Chris Liazos utilized a traditional broadcasting (playback) technique to search for nesting goshawks. This method involves using a speaker to broadcast sound recordings of goshawk vocalizations in suitable habitat, and then waiting for a response from a nearby goshawk. Surveys took place from February through April, beginning an hour before sunrise. Each visit required 12 broadcasts along a two-mile route over the course of several hours; however, as the team discovered, these surveys were time-intensive and difficult due to challenging late-winter conditions. They also detected very few goshawks.

A New Approach

Starting in the late winter of 2024, Liazos experimented with a more sophisticated, modern research method, acoustic monitoring with autonomous recording units (ARUs). These devices can be programmed to record audio at certain times and under specific conditions. (Think trail cam, with a microphone instead of a camera.) In late March, our team placed Audiomoth ARUs in four known goshawk breeding territories, eventually capturing 447 hours of audio.

Liazos then used BirdNet Analyzer—a free, machine-learning software created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that can identify more than 6,000 bird species by spectrogram—to comb through that audio in search of goshawks and other bird species. The recordings documented a total of 45 bird species, including 2.5 hours of calls by five individual American Goshawks across three of the territories.

Got Goshawks?

Our new library of local goshawk audio recordings provides critical baseline information, but there is still much more to learn. If you know of a territorial goshawk in the Monadnock Region, we want to hear from you! For more information or to report a local goshawk territory, please contact Bird Conservation Director Phil Brown (brown@harriscenter.org).

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

Chris Liazos is a Bird Conservation Intern and Erik Buxton Land Intern at the Harris Center. He is currently pursuing an MS in Conservation Biology at Antioch University New England.

A New Way to Catch a Rare Bird

by James Smith

Editor's Note: For many years, Steve Mirick maintained a text message list to instantly notify the birding community of rarities. This service was greatly appreciated and helped many birders get to see a rarity before it was gone. As his list grew larger, it became unwieldy and had to be discontinued. It was replaced by a new technology, as described below. Thanks to James Smith and Cameron Johnson for managing this group, and to Steve Mirick for all his past efforts to get the word out about rare birds in New Hampshire.

Of all the luck I've had birding, none was better than bumping into Steve Mirick at a rare bird sighting early in my time as a birder. Thanks to this fortuitous meeting, I've seen probably 50 rare birds in New Hampshire that I might not have otherwise seen. The thrill of seeing a text from Steve and wondering where the next rare bird would take me are some of my favorite moments. The Miricks have, in the short time I've known them, always been incredibly helpful in getting as many people on a bird as possible, including the bird that ended up being the impetus to this group's creation.

When the Virginia's Warbler was found by Steve Mirick in December 2023, it was big news. Big enough that it was being talked about in other states' GroupMe Rare Bird Alerts groups. People were coming from all over New England to see this bird, but to those outside of NH, there was no way to accurately get real-time updates on the bird. Folks were asking if NH had a GroupMe where they could share data on the bird. It seemed that there was a need for such a page and that it could be a good complement to the existing notification systems. So, I created one and quickly brought on my friend and fellow birder Cameron Johnson as an admin to catch stuff immediately if it needed to be addressed. This was especially helpful as I have a habit of wandering into the mountains for days on end.

The NH Rare Bird Alert GroupMe is meant to complement, not replace, the existing notifications and ID groups in the state. Its strength lies in its immediacy, convenience, and ability to have real-time conversations, especially when sightings are time sensitive. It fosters a close-knit group where everyone can stay informed and act quickly—whether that's heading out to catch a glimpse of a rare bird or sharing updates on sightings in the area. By conversing directly with folks "on the ground," it becomes much easier to locate a rare bird. It also makes fanning out in an area to relocate a bird simpler, as one message in the group can quickly bring searchers back together. It's also great for logistics, like figuring out where to park to view a rare bird without upsetting the neighbors. However, it's not the best place for discussing IDs and migration patterns, or sharing checklists—all of which are better suited for forums, listservs, Facebook groups, and the like.

Every birder knows the disappointment of learning about a sighting hours too late or seeing a post buried in a forum long after the bird has moved on. We hope that the NH Rare Bird Alert (NH RBA) GroupMe helps eliminate that disappointment by making information accessible instantly, ensuring no one misses out on the excitement.

Recently, Steve Mirick retired his text blast list and told folks to join the GroupMe for NH rare bird alerts. That's a big responsibility to handle, but I think the RBA GroupMe is up for it. The NH birding community is a great place filled with helpful folks who want everyone possible to see a rare bird, and we hope that this GroupMe will continue and expand that tradition in the NH birding community.

Unfortunately, to cut down on spam, we had to "hide" the group from public outputs, so you need someone to share the link with you to join. The link for the NH RBA GroupMe is https://groupme.com/join_group/98092884/POyDQeE1. Please feel free to share it with any birder you would like; the more the merrier. Please read our rules, which can be found at the top of the NH RBA page, and also here at https://sites.google.com/view/nhbirdalertsgroupme/home. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to either Cameron Johnson or me in the GroupMe app. As admins we will always be on the top of the member list.

Happy birding, and we hope to see you at the next rarity!

The Virginia's Warbler that sparked the start of the NH Rare Bird Alert GroupMe. Photo by Steve Mirick, 12-07-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH.

Telling Fish Crows from American Crows

by Dana Fox

Telling an American from a Fish Crow can be tricky. Many field guides suggest the only reliable way to tell one from the other is by their calls. After years of careful observation, my husband Bob and I have developed methods of visually distinguishing these two species. We developed these methods from observing winter roost gatherings of crows in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Kevin McGowan, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's crow expert, agrees that with enough experience it is possible to visually distinguish these two crows. McGowan estimates he can identify a Fish Crow by sight about 80% of the time.

Our History Visiting the Lawrence Crow Roost

Bob and I have been visiting the Lawrence crow roost since the early 2000s. The behavior of these remarkable birds has captivated us. We first learned of the Lawrence crow roost from expert Lawrence birder, Joe Hogan. As reported in Bird Observer, the Lawrence Crow Roost was discovered in 1989 by Eliot Taylor. The first Fish Crow was reported by Chip Charrette in 1994.

Between 2013 and 2018, Bob and I invited Massachusetts birder extraordinaire Wayne Petersen to see the roost a few times. Wayne came to watch the crows stage and visit the roost, then came back for dinner and stayed overnight with us. His passion for crows started when he had one for a pet as a young man.

I vividly remember one night when we were searching for the staging crows among the old textile buildings in Lawrence and suddenly found that the Fish Crows were staging in different parking lots from the American Crows. Their raucous, gregarious behavior was fascinating.

Over the years, Bob and I have shared the experience of the Lawrence crow roost with thousands of birders, including groups like New Hampshire Audubon's Seacoast Chapter and the Brookline Bird Club. I am always thrilled to see the wonder this spectacle inspires in fellow bird lovers. What many see as ordinary or unremarkable birds are wellsprings of fascination.

Observing Crow Behavior in Staging Areas

One of the best times to view the crows is during their staging period. The crows arrive in a different place each night an hour before sunset. These places are near where they will roost that night. During this time, the behavior and species of the crows is easy to observe. As I like to say: "It's like 'Where's Waldo' tonight." The crows begin to enter the roost under the protection of darkness, a behavior we suspect is to conceal their location. As night falls, it becomes impossible to visually tell the two species apart. The hoarse calls of the Fish Crows and at least three different calls of the American Crow can still be heard after they enter the roost. While their roosting location may remain constant for a few weeks, suddenly it may change.

Crows flock to their winter roost in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Photo by Craig Gibson who runs a blog about the roost, www.wintercrowroost.com.

Key Visual Differences Between American and Fish Crows

While challenging to discern at first, subtle differences between the species become apparent with practice, especially when the birds are together:

Size

American Crows are generally larger than Fish Crows. This difference can be subtle, and requires both species to be visible for comparison. Fish Crows

have slightly shorter wings and faster wingbeats than American Crows, as well as shorter legs.

Leg Feathers (Pantaloons)

American Crows have noticeable "pantaloons," meaning the feathers along their legs (tibiotarsus). Fish Crows lack this feathering, giving their legs a sleeker appearance.

Posture and Movement

Fish Crows stand more parallel to the ground and take smaller steps. American Crows have an upright posture and take longer strides when walking.

These subtle differences, combined with their call distinctions, have helped us separate these two fascinating species during our observations. We hope sharing our insights encourages others to enjoy and study crows. For those new to these birds, witnessing the spectacle of a crow roost is worth the time. It offers a glimpse into the rich social lives of one of nature's most intelligent and mysterious bird families.

Posture can be a helpful clue when distinguishing between the two species. Fish Crows (top) often stand more parallel to the ground, while American Crows (bottom) tend to stand more upright. Photos by Len Medlock.

A Spring Learning to Bird

Story and photos by Pam Geiger.

A group of 15 adult learners gathered around the back of our leader's pickup truck to identify as many birds as possible within a two- to three-hour field trip. A well-prepared bunch, we were ready for whatever we might encounter.

We each had binoculars at the ready and wore bug spray. Additionally, we had our pants tucked into our socks or wore tall rubber boots—a precaution against ticks. I also brought my camera with a telephoto lens to photograph our finds.

Our teacher and leader was Matt Tarr, an Extension Professor and State Wildlife Habitat Specialist with the University of New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension. He kindly scheduled the trips to accommodate the early birds (6:00 or 6:30 am start) and the not-so-early risers (8:30 to 10:30 am start). The field trips took place around the state; the later times helped those who had to travel greater distances to participate.

In the spring of 2024, I took Matt's Introduction to Bird Identification, Ecology, and Habitats course. The course runs from March to June. On field trips, we learned about the preferred habitats of bird species, about invasive plants, and bird behavior. Habitat and wildlife go hand in hand. Learning what birds can be expected where was an important part of the experience. We watched weekly YouTube videos, each covering two to five bird species, with the goal of learning 50 common species. That spring, I had the pleasure of attending nine field trips from April through June as part of the birding course. There were also a couple of pre-course pop-up trips. Here are some highlights from my favorite field trips and some lessons learned along the way.

On the trip to Mast Yard in Hopkinton in mid-May, notable bird species were Prairie and Chestnut-sided Warblers as well as Field Sparrow. They favor a similar dry, bushy habitat. We saw all three protecting their territories under the power lines. The Chestnut-sided Warbler may be one of my favorite warblers, not just for the male's dashing colors but also for his easily identifiable song. It has the mnemonic, "pleased, pleased, pleased to meetcha!" On a later trip, we learned that the song with the mnemonic is the accented song. Nothing is easy; the unaccented song must be learned too! On these trips we also learned about ethical birding. The birds have a short breeding season. Our activity should not unduly stress them.

Matt shared many amusing metaphors about bird habitat and behavior. "How would you feel if a stranger barged into your living room and made themselves at home? Well, this might be what the bird experiences when he has a territory staked out and another bird wants to wedge their way in!"

The beautiful Prairie Warbler. Listen for the species' spaceship whirl ("zee-zee-zee-zee-zee-zeeeee") this spring. Photo taken 5-25-2024 from Mast Yard, Hopkinton, NH.

When describing birdsong, the Prairie Warbler's was likened to the sound of George Jetson coming home from work. Once you hear this comparison, it is hard not to associate the Prairie Warbler's song with the whir of a tiny spaceship.

We spent roughly 15 minutes under the power lines with these birds, then walked on the trail into the wooded area and over a small bridge. There, we encountered an Alder Flycatcher. Further down, we came to an opening surrounded by deciduous trees with a tall canopy. A Scarlet Tanager and a Nashville Warbler were spotted. When we returned to the power lines, the same three species we saw earlier were still there—Chestnut-sided and Prairie Warblers and Field Sparrow. With the temperature warming, we also saw a soaring Broad-winged Hawk.

A field trip to Broadview Farm Conservation Area in Derry highlighted a completely different habitat—an open field with knee-high grass bordered by trees and a wetland area on one side. This land was once an active dairy farm. It was fortunately put into conservation rather than developed. We walked a trail along the field edge and soon were rewarded with somewhat of a rarity—a Blue-winged Warbler! A Rose-breasted Grosbeak was also in clear view and then a Red-bellied Woodpecker was spotted in the large tree in the middle of the field. Nest boxes housed Tree Swallows and the field's edges gave us a good look at (and listen to) a Common Yellowthroat. A Pine Warbler was heard in the woods and a Black-and-white Warbler also made an appearance.

As we walked through the field, Matt would say the mnemonic for each bird's song, pausing after each to let us hear the actual bird singing. His explanation of "teacher, teacher, TEACHER" for Ovenbird, or "witchity, witchity,

Nesting Tree Swallows. Photo taken 5-23-2024 from Broadview Farm, Derry, NH.

witchity" for the Common Yellowthroat followed by the bird singing, enhanced the learning experience. When this is repeated over several trips for various birds, you start to identify birds by ear on your own. This was my biggest leap in learning; I did not expect it to be so helpful. Once the trees leaf out, birding by ear allows birding to be enjoyable instead of frustrating! Matt advised us that early spring is the time to hone your listening skills because as more migrants arrive there will be many more songs, making it harder to parse them out. That certainly proved to be true. I have noticed that my ear knows a good handful of species, so when I detect a new song mixed in with familiar ones I pay extra attention to find that bird and see who it is.

For the Alton field trip, we met in the morning at 8:30 to walk up Pine Mountain at the Morse Preserve. This is a beautiful, easy hike to a summit with views of the Belknap Range and Lake Winnipesaukee. On our hike up, we came to an opening and field. Matt let us know an Indigo Bunting was singing. Sure enough, the bird was at the top of the tallest tree, singing "fire, fire, where, where, here, here!"

When we got to the summit, it was an open area with lots of blueberry bushes. The vegetation was mainly low or chest height, a shrubby habitat maintained every few years to keep the vegetation from getting too high. Here we met the trio of species that were in the brushy habitat at Mast Yard: Prairie Warbler, Chesnut-sided Warbler, and Field Sparrow. An Eastern Towhee flitted about in the bushes. I was reminded it is not random where birds occur. The course showed me firsthand where to look for which species. It also taught me

to revisit locations and expect the same birds in subsequent years. Pine Mountain is a fall hawk migration viewing spot. I will be returning for this spectacle too.

Bringing a camera helps me identify birds after the fact, if I am unable to do so in the field. Some photos are strictly for documentation to help me remember what I saw where. Others are taken as portraits, catching birds in a beautiful light or "pose." I don't take Song Sparrows and Black-capped Chickadees for granted. They are sometimes the only willing or easily captured photo subjects.

It was a great spring spent learning 50 birds by sight and

Abundant and often photogenic, Song Sparrows are perfect practice subjects for bird photographers. Photo taken 5-23-2024 from Broadview Farm, Derry, NH.

sound. Spending time with like-minded nature lovers and seeing beautiful conservation areas and birds is a great way to explore New Hampshire. Happy Birding.

Editor's Note: The course Pam took is UNH Cooperative Extension's Introduction to Bird Identification, Ecology, and Habitats course. This course is taught by Matt Tarr (UNHCE) with help from Phil Brown (Harris Center for Conservation Education) and is co-sponsored by NH Audubon, NH Fish & Game Department, NH Division of Forests & Lands, Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire, and New Hampshire Timberland Owner's Association. Email Matt Tarr (matt.tarr@unh.edu) if you would like to receive important updates about this course. We included an announcement about the course in last season's issue as registration opens in early February and fills up quickly.

Interview with a Birder: Holly Bauer

by Kathyrn Frieden

Holly Bauer is well known in the New Hampshire birding community. She is currently the Field Trip Coordinator for the Seacoast Chapter of NH Audubon and can often be seen birding along the coast. Her home on Meadow Pond in Hampton, NH, allows her the opportunity for an extensive yard list, and in April 2021 she found a Virginia's Warbler in her yard—the first state record! She is even in the eBird Top 30 for the number of species on a yard list in the United States.

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

My first birding memory is my grandfather teaching me how to identify an American Tree Sparrow by the dark spot on its breast. I was probably eight or nine at the time. He was a farmer and I still have his field guide with his lists of the birds he saw at his bird feeders. I really became a birder when I graduated from college and moved to Boston. My first roommate was a birder who taught me the concept of going places to see birds. We spent a lot of time birding on weekends and went to Plum Island frequently.

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

If I had to pick one, it would be the Roseate Spoonbill in Gorham in 2021. I drove up late the day it was reported and couldn't find it. Other people were also looking. I considered buying a toothbrush and staying overnight but decided to go back home instead, somewhat resigned to missing it. But then the next morning I thought, "Well, I'm just going to try again," so I drove back up north. Sure enough, there was the three-foot-tall pink bird! One of the reasons it is my favorite is that it is always fun to see an amazing bird with a group of people that are just as excited to see it as you are. It brings out such a nice camaraderie. The weirdest thing is that the spoonbill was in the same location where the Neotropic Cormorant had been found in 2018.

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

I am somewhere in the 360s. I should spend more time on pelagic outings, because my target bird is a Sooty Shearwater.

Do you have or have had a New Hampshire nemesis bird?

There are certainly a lot of birds I've missed, but nothing that I think qualifies as a true "nemesis." Connecticut Warbler took me the longest, but they're hard to find

Holly Bauer enjoying the birds.

anyway. I finally saw one that Robyn Prieto found just last fall in Durham at the Spinney Lane and Reservoir Hotspot. There was one a few years ago at Odiorne State Park in Rye, NH, that stayed around for several days, and I could hear something scratching around, but I never saw it. I'd still like to get a much better look at one, so I'm not going to give up trying to find more.

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

I have to say Meadow Pond in Hampton. I am lucky enough to live with it in my backyard and there are a lot of great birds there. Anything that has shorebirds is going to be a favorite place. I think it's the association with water, whether the ocean or a brook, that appeals to me. I grew up going to Hampton in the summer, so I was on the ocean a lot. One of my earliest memories is playing Pooh Sticks in a stream near our backyard.

Do you have a favorite shorebird?

It's hard to pick a favorite, but I guess I'd have to say Sanderlings because they are just so cute and they keep you company in the winter.

What changes have you seen in birding over the years?

The popularity has increased dramatically, and I don't think it is just "COVID birding;" it was even before that. Birding isn't a weird "niche" thing anymore. Loss of habitat and loss of birds are also big changes. I can see a difference in the numbers of warblers, for example, during a migration wave. In the past the trees would be just dripping birds. One of the positives is eBird, which helps you find birds rather than just stumbling across them. Before eBird and listserves, we used to use the Voice of Audubon. Each state would have a number that you could call to get current sightings – and "current" was a relative term. It usually meant only once a week although during migration you could hope for more frequent updates. There were also phone trees, but I was never really part of one.

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

I don't have a United States target bird. I used to travel for work, and I would always try to reserve a weekend before or after for birding. I still have plenty to see in the United States but as far as travel for birding, I would like to go to Panama or maybe Costa Rica.

Do you have any advice for young or new birders?

Go on field trips! You will have a lot of fun and you will learn a lot, but also go out birding on your own. Sometimes when you are with a group, you may only catch a glimpse of a bird and wouldn't have been able to identify it yourself. If you bird on your own, you can spend more time with a single bird to really get to know it. Finally, listen for the chickadees. They are great communicators, and they can bring a lot of interesting friends along with them to the party.

Holly Bauer took this beautiful photo of the Gorham, NH, Roseate Spoonbill (8-1-2021).

UNH Birders' First Field Trip

by Samantha Tanksley

Who are the UNH Birders?

The University of New Hampshire (UNH) Birders is a new student organization, introduced to UNH in Spring 2024. The group's common interest in birds brings its members together and fosters a community of like-minded people.

Our members range from beginners to "seasoned bird nerds," all are passionate about avian wildlife. Though our club is new, members are already making a difference. During the 2024 spring semester, some of our members participated in a window collision study on campus, collecting data on window strikes. Others built birdhouses, which were installed around campus. Our club aims to protect birds and their habitats through conservation initiatives. Through monthly bird walks, guest speakers, and hands-on events, we strive to deepen our understanding of local and migratory bird species and actively advocate for avian conservation.

Our First Field Trip!

The UNH Birders were able to attend our first off-campus field trip during 2024's spring semester. Three executive board members, seven members, and our lovely club advisor, Dr. Janet Anderson, were led on an excursion by the Education Coordinator of NH Audubon's Massabesic Center, Slater Roosa. This field trip, lasting nearly three hours and just short of four miles, took place at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, New Hampshire. Great Bay serves as a sanctuary for migratory birds. It spans over one thousand acres consisting of shoreline, mudflats, marshes, swamps, ponds, woodlands, and meadows. The diversity in habitat allows for great diversity in bird species.

Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Great Bay might not look like much from your car but once you step outside it instantly comes to life. The parking lot is encircled by towering trees. Right away, a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers could be heard livelily communicating from the treetops. Across the street from the parking lot, power lines overlook a vast field. The field is protected by a tall fence, lined with barbed wire. Perched atop the wire, was an Eastern Bluebird.

As we set out along the path, a field to our left and a forest to our right, a Killdeer's call could be heard. The call came from the field on the opposite side of the fence, but the bird couldn't be seen. It was hidden deep in the brush. "Killdeer can be found in many different habitats. They often nest on the ground in fields close to a water source," Slater explained.

The path veered around a corner, the surrounding habitat transformed from field and forest to swamp. Though the swamp was enticing, our eyes were immediately drawn to the sky, filled with a plethora of silhouettes. An Osprey, a species known to nest here, soared toward the coast with a fish in its grasp. A pair of American Crows mobbed a Red-tailed Hawk to drive it away.

Slater, in response to a member's question, offered valuable insights on identifying large birds in flight. He explained that while color can be helpful, it is not always reliable. Often, you may need to pay closer attention to the shape and length of the wings and the tail for accurate identification. Directing our eyes back toward the swamp around us, we saw and heard Song Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, House Wrens, and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

A bridge in the swamp led to an expansive field, changing the habitat around us once more. In the distance, two female Wild Turkeys scratched and looked below their feet in search of their next meal. Around us, Gray Catbirds mewed, warblers hopped from branch to branch, and American Goldfinches weaved through the trees.

We approached a manmade platform overlooking the shore. On the platform, Slater shared the difference between birding on the shore and birding in the forest: "Birds in forests are harder to spot due to coverage, so you have to focus on movement before taking a closer look with binoculars.

Photo by Samantha Tanksley.

Birds on the shore, however, are easier to spot as they have less coverage, and more wide-open space." He suggested when birding on the shore, to begin by scanning the horizon using your binoculars, rather than looking for movement first. As our Birders stood on the platform, they put their new binocular skills to the test. Results were instantaneous! The Birders standing on the platform overlooking the coast observed a pair of Double-crested Cormorants in the water, as well as a few American Herring Gulls flying above.

Moving on from the platform, we headed back to the parking lot and made our way through the rest of the trail. We observed a curious female Eastern Bluebird resting on a branch overlooking the path, heard the Killdeer's calls yet again, and tuned in to the chatter of the Red-bellied Woodpeckers. During our time at Great Bay, our members, with help from Slater, were able to identify 27 species of bird total, and saw 46 individual birds, making for a successful first field trip for the UNH Birders.

To hear more about our adventures and to see some of our member's amazing photos, follow along on our Instagram, @unh.birders. If you have any questions or want to get in contact, reach out! Our email is unh.birders@gmail.com.

Birding Seabrook Town Forest and Wellfield

by Ashton Almeida

The Seabrook Town Forest and Wellfield (as the hotspot is called in eBird) is a great secret birding spot. As of June 12, 2024, a total of 142 species have been seen there. Aside from birds, there is plenty of other wildlife. Visitors have had sightings of Eastern Coyotes, White-tailed Deer, Long-tailed Weasel, and more. All year long, the Town Forest can provide 25+ species of birds. Warblers sing in the dense forest during summer and large flocks of waterfowl congregate in the pond during winter. When it comes to fall and spring migration, this is not a place you want to miss out on.

A well-kept secret, the Seabrook Town Forest offers exciting finds in every season. Ashton Almeida photographed this stunning Palm Warbler there on 5-2-2024.

Growing up in Seabrook, I would fish in Tri-Town Pond, alongside the trail in the Town Forest. In 2022, I decided I'd trade bluegill for bluebirds and take my talents to the sky. The Town Forest was one of the first places I thought about birding, but I didn't have enough knowledge of the wildlife it brought. In 2023, after about a year of teaching myself about birds, I decided to take on the challenge of birding at the Town Forest every day in May for spring migration.

By May's end, I'd seen 101 species. Thirty of them I'd never seen before and were added to my life list. Birding all May in the Town Forest brought 20 warbler species, such as Cape May, Bay-breasted, and Canada Warbler. I also observed several nesting species, including Wood Thrush, Northern House Wren, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. You can hear all these nesting birds singing when you visit Seabrook Town Forest during the spring and summer months.

On April 8, 2024, I decided to watch the solar eclipse at the Town Forest and observe how the birds would react. It was an interesting and memorable experience. I started my day there around 6:30 am for my usual walkthrough. Black-capped Chickadees and American Goldfinches sang when I arrived. As I continued on the trail, I stopped to look at the pond. There were Ring-necked Ducks, Canada Geese, a pair of Mallards, and Wood Ducks. Near the Town Forest's firing range I heard a call I wasn't as familiar with at this location. Four Red Crossbill swooped down onto the tops of some pine trees. After my exciting encounter with the Red Crossbill, I left to go about my day, then returned to Town Forest around 2:00 pm, greeted by the sound of spring peepers. A fluttering Mourning Cloak landed on me as I sat and waited for the eclipse.

The eclipse started peaking at around 3:30 pm and brought unusual events. Two Black-capped Chickadees chased each other while synchronously calling. I have no explanation for this behavior and wonder if it was eclipse-related. A group of 12 vultures soared above me—one was a Black Vulture! Three Mallards swooped to the pond and circled it for about three minutes. While watching the Mallards, a Barred Owl called. Not too uncommon to hear in the Town Forest, it was still cool in the middle of the day. To end the eclipse, a Common Raven hovered over the pond, calling—a species uncommonly seen at the Town Forest. Seabrook Town Forest is full of surprises and can bring a new experience every time you go! I highly encourage you to check it out at least once, especially during migration.

Best Places to Bird

Tri-Town Pond

Located along the first half of the trail, Tri-Town Pond can provide a number of species from Ring-necked Ducks to Double-crested Cormorants. Due to rising water levels in the pond, there is only one access area with decent visibility. This

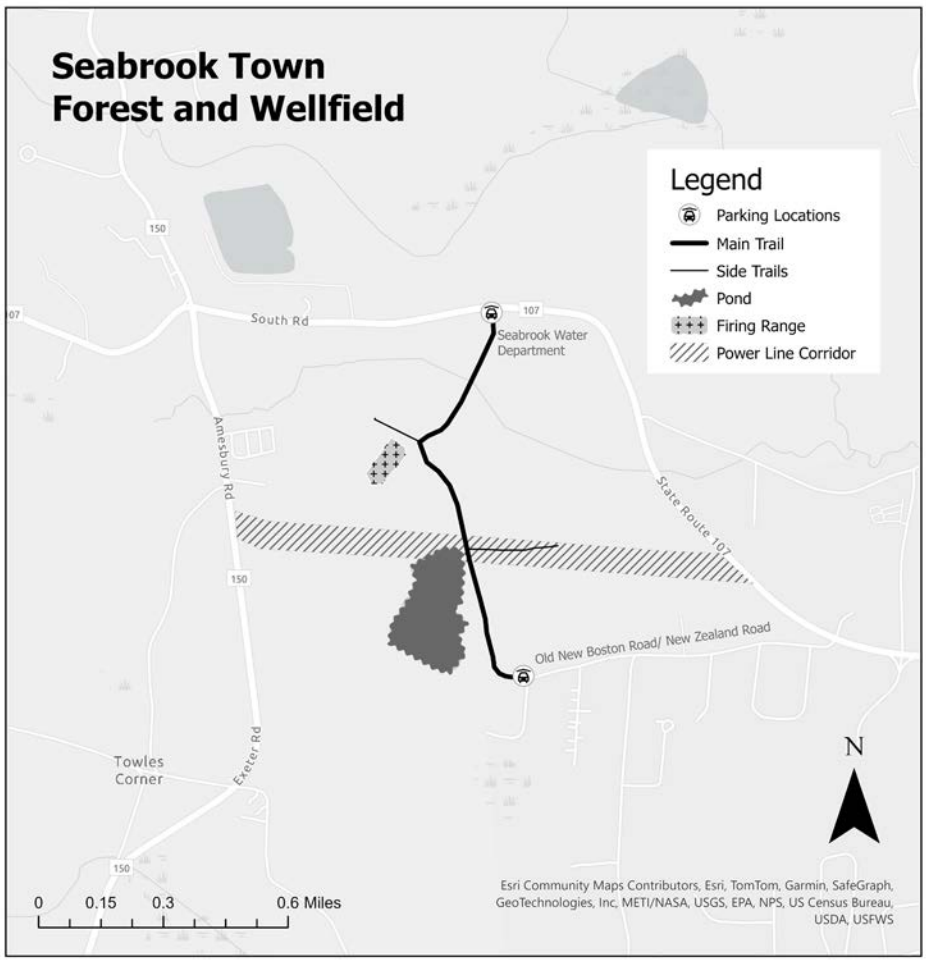
A Philadelphia Vireo photographed migrating through the area, 9-15-2023. Photo by Ashton Almeida.

The Lawrence's Warbler is a striking hybrid of two species, the Golden-winged Warbler and the Blue-winged Warbler. Hybrids appear in two forms: the less common Lawrence's and the more frequent Brewster's. Despite their visual differences, research by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology reveals the two parent species differ genetically by just 0.03%. Photo by Steve Mirick taken at the Forest on 5-15-2024.

access area is located about halfway along the trail on the west side. Kayaking is a great way to explore the pond; you can venture toward the pond's back left to see Green Herons that have nested there for the last two years.

Power line Cut-through

Located about halfway through the trail, the power line cut-through is where you will find most of the warbler, sparrow, and tyrant flycatcher species. At the beginning of May, you will hear warblers from Chestnut-sided to Yellow singing away. In winter the White-throated Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows take over. On the right side of the power line cut-through, a trail branches off toward Route 107. I haven't ventured on it many times due to ticks, but if you are willing to take the risk, I know it will be worth it.



Firing Range

Toward the end of the trail there is a firing range that is used for events like hunter trainings. The area surrounding the firing range has brought a number of uncommon species to the Town Forest. On September 15, 2023, a migrating Philadelphia Vireo was seen just outside the firing range. Two weeks later, a Yellow-breasted Chat was seen with three Gray Catbirds in the back end of the firing range.

On May 15, 2024, a Lawrence's Warbler (a Blue-winged/Golden-winged hybrid) was found by Steve Mirick. He informed me there was a Lawrence's Warbler also found at the Town Forest 21 years ago! A week later, a Hooded Warbler was spotted around the firing range's outskirts. If the firing range is not occupied during the months of migration, I highly suggest looking out for anything. (*Note: the status of the firing range may change as community members seek to reopen it. Be sure to check any notices prior to birding in this area. As with any birding outing use common sense*).

Travel Notes

- **Bug Spray Recommended:** Mosquito and tick repellent is highly recommended as insects get really bad in the warmer months.
- **Beware of Ticks!** Always do a tick check after walking the trail, especially if you branch off to the trails with high grass.
- **Active Hunting Area:** Please be cautious of hunters during hunting season, particularly pheasant and deer. Wear orange during these periods.
- People walk their dogs on the trail at all times of day. Dogs are not required to be leashed, but I have never seen an unleashed dog at the Town Forest.
- **Check the Weather:** If it rained any day prior to your visit, I recommend boots. The trail tends to stay muddy.

How to Get There

Via either I-95 North or South, continue until you reach Seabrook/Kingston Exit 1. Take the exit. If you are coming north, you will reach a set of lights where you will go left. If you are coming south, you will reach a set of lights where you will turn right. This will take you onto Route 107. You will hit another set of lights where you continue straight for about a mile. Shortly after passing The Brook Casino, you will turn left onto New Zealand Road. Continue straight until you reach a gate with a small brick building to the right. Here, you can park around the loop by the building, just do not block the gate. Alternatively, there is also parking off Route 107 by the Seabrook Water Department, though it is a longer walk to the key birding places.

Trail Directions

To start from the end of New Zealand/Old New Boston Road, walk past the gate and continue onto the paved path. The trail isn't paved the whole way. Continue straight when it becomes dirt. While walking the main trail, you'll see branched off trails that are available to be explored but are not maintained. Continuing straight, you will reach a point where the trail branches off in many directions. Once you get to this point, you can either go left to the firing range or right to the water department. When branching off to explore, walk back the same way you came from.

The Future

As of spring 2024, efforts are underway to reactivate the firing range. While progress appears to be moving smoothly, the project has unfortunately caused some habitat destruction. Despite this, the Seabrook Town Forest remains a wonderful destination, with plenty of land to explore. Use common sense when exploring the area and stay up to date on any safety notices posted.

Birding in the Shadow of the Eclipse

On April 8, 2024, northern New Hampshire experienced a total solar eclipse, leaving many in awe. Eclipses have long captivated both imaginations and scientific curiosity, especially among ornithologists wondering how wildlife reacts to sudden darkness. One of the earliest efforts to document these effects occurred around the August 1932 eclipse in New England. Observers reported Barred Owls and whip-poor-wills calling during totality and bees returning to their hives as the sky darkened (Wheeler et al. 1935). Historical accounts even mention "birds falling to the ground" during a 1560 eclipse, though such reports (naturally) remain unverified. Modern studies echo this intrigue; in 2018, researchers found bird activity sharply declined before and during totality, with birds retreating to the ground or their perches (Nilsson et al. 2018). The next total solar eclipse in New Hampshire won't happen until 2079. In the meantime, enjoy these two accounts below.

References:

Nilsson, C., K. G. Horton, A. M. Doker, B. M. Van Dorne, and A. Farnsworth. 2018. "Aeroecology of a solar eclipse." *Biology Letters* 14:201804852.

Wheeler, W. M., C. V. MacCoy, L. Griscom, G. M. Allen, and H. J. Coolidge. 1935. "Observations on the Behavior of Animals during the Total Solar Eclipse of August 31, 1932." *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 70, no. 2: 33-70.

Birding Lake Umbagog During a Total Solar Eclipse

Story and photos by Robert A. Quinn.

From April 7-10, 2024, I ventured north to the Errol/Lake Umbagog region to combine paddling for waterbirds with watching the total solar eclipse. What a mind-blowing experience it was to be on an open island at Lake Umbagog that provided great views of the umbra (the actual shadow of the moon turning the western sky indigo just before totality) plus the "360-degree sunrise" glowing around the entire horizon during the several minutes of totality.

Three categories of birds stood out: inland waterbirds, early (for northern Coos County) spring landbirds, and a few eclipse birds.

There were good numbers of waterfowl with a fair amount of open water when I arrived on April 7. The open water increased dramatically over the next several days as temperatures rose into the 60s and more ice melted. These warm winds also brought in some early landbird migrants on April 9 and 10. The following records are from Route 16

The total solar eclipse seen from Lake Umbagog.

between Berlin and Errol. Most of the waterbirds were in the Androscoggin River from Errol up to the edge of Lake Umbagog. The larger wetlands that edge the river, Harper's Meadow and Sweat Meadows, were still inaccessible (frozen).

The only obvious species heard during totality were two Common Loons and one Barred Owl, which had been silent until it became totally dark at the peak of the eclipse. Other species such as robins and geese continued to be talkative.

Waterbirds & Gulls

- Canada Goose: ~200
- Wood Duck: ~50 in marshes, beaver ponds, and backwaters
- Mallard: 100+
- American Black Duck: 160+
- Northern Pintail: one pair
- Green-winged Teal: 30+
- Ring-necked Duck: 150+ (though this may be an underestimate)
- Greater Scaup: one female at close range on Mile Long Pond (Errol)

One of the eclipse loons, obviously not photographed during totality! Photo taken 4-28-2024.

- Scaup species: one pair at Leonard Pond, too distant to ID
- Bufflehead: 18
- Common Goldeneye: 50, mostly below the Errol Dam
- Hooded Merganser: 50+
- Common Merganser: 32
- Common Loon: four at Lake Umbagog and one at Pontook Reservoir (Dummer)
- Ring-billed Gull: 12 at the edge of Lake Umbagog

Landbirds

- Killdeer: four
- Wilson's Snipe: two, including one near Lake Umbagog
- Great Blue Heron: zero
- Northern Harrier: one male
- Bald Eagle: at least seven, mostly between Errol and Lake Umbagog
- Barred Owl: one calling during the eclipse
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: at least four, with the first on April 9 (early dates for the location)
- Belted Kingfisher: two
- Northern Flicker: one
- Merlin: one in Wentworth's Location and one in Dummer
- Eastern Phoebe: at least three (brought in by April 9 warm winds)
- Tree Swallow: one at Umbagog on April 9 and several more on April 10—all early dates for the location and obviously came in on the warm winds
- Golden-crowned Kinglet: a flock of eight with one Black-capped Chickadee on April 10 at Pontook Reservior—likely northbound migrants
- European Starling: one seemed out of place at the edge of Lake Umbagog (seen with grackles and redwings)
- American Robin: seen in Errol in modest numbers but there was a clear influx of 100+ birds that had reached as far north as Milan the day I drove south (April 10)
- American Pipit: two along the edge of the Androscoggin River at Mile Long Pond on April 9—probably the earliest local record ever
- Pine Siskin: a handful—the large flocks were probably still in central and southern NH
- Tree Sparrow: one
- Dark-eyed Junco: a handful—in stark contrast to the hordes I left in southern NH
- Song Sparrow: they were "everywhere" on the morning of the April 10 with a total of at least 50

Bob Quinn lives in southern NH but birds the Umbagog region as often as possible.

Birds of the Eclipse

by Rebecca Suomala

At 5:00 am on April 8, 2024, Zeke Cornell, Pam Hunt, and I met at the Park & Ride in Concord and drove to Moose Bog in Vermont for the great eclipse. The idea was to get far enough north to see totality before the crowds clogged the roads, then do a little birding in the morning before finding a place to watch the eclipse. Why Vermont? We hoped to avoid the bottleneck along Route 3 and Franconia Notch heading back south after the eclipse.

We had no traffic going north and arrived at Moose Bog to find a group of college students already staked out on the bog platform waiting for the eclipse. We had some good birding with a Black-backed Woodpecker as a highlight. For the eclipse, we moved a little farther east on Rt. 105 to the beginning of Notch Pond Road (about six miles west of the Connecticut River and the New Hampshire border).

Totality was an absolutely amazing experience, made even more so by a few birds that started calling. The woodcock peenting across the road was the least expected, but we also had a Brown Creeper start singing, and a Barred Owl hooting. To be fair, we had gotten the Barred Owl riled up a little earlier with some hooting, but other people also reported Barred Owls during the eclipse including Eric Masterson at Scott Bog Road in Pittsburg and Bob Quinn in Errol. The calling did not last long and as the sun returned they went silent.

The plan to avoid traffic bottlenecks was something of a failure, but we eventually made it home over the back roads between Rt. 91 and Rt. 93.

The solid black back of a Black-backed Woodpecker provides effective camouflage against the charred trunks of burned conifer trees. These specialist birds prefer beetles found on dead and dying trees, thriving in post-fire habitats. Photo by Pam Hunt.

Birding Laconia: 55 Years Later

by Rob Woodward

Recently, Becky Suomala (former editor of this publication) shared an article with me from the Winter 1969 issue of *New Hampshire Audubon Quarterly*, the predecessor to *New Hampshire Bird Records*. The article was "Bird-Finding in Laconia, New Hampshire," by H. Cook Anderson. A long-time birder of the area, Cook is known to the NH Birds Google Group as the Cranky Yankee. The article lists his top nine places for birding within Laconia's city limits, with the exception of the airport and the "dump," just over the town line in Gilford. Reading the article was like opening a time capsule! It allowed me to peek into the past and revealed changes to the birding sites and bird life of Laconia.

Bartlett Beach in winter, or as H. Cook Anderson puts it, "when it gets too cold for pleasure boating to the start of salmon fishing season." Photo by Rebecca Suomala.

1. Winnisquam Avenue-Bartlett Beach-Water Street

The Cranky Yankee's article started with Winnisquam Avenue-Bartlett Beach-Water Street. The best time, Cook's article advises, is from "when it gets too cold for pleasure boating to the beginning of salmon fishing season," i.e., winter. At that time, this was a good area for waterfowl. "Coots may be seen here...", the article says. An American Coot was seen in this spot as recently as January 2023.

"White winged" gulls, that is Iceland or Glaucous Gulls, were regular here and in nearby areas. Today, there are no "white winged" gulls in this area or anywhere else in Laconia. The last record of Iceland Gull in Laconia was January 19, 2015; a Glaucous Gull has not been seen since March 13, 2004. This is likely due to the fact we no longer have open

landfills. Cook's article doesn't mention shorebirds, but Bartlett Beach is always worth checking. So far, I have seen six species at Bartlett Beach, including a Black-bellied Plover on May 19, 2024. The sandbars at the end of Water Street can hold surprises too, like September 5, 2022's White-rumped Sandpiper.

Black-bellied Plover by George McCluskey, 5-19-2024, Bartlett Beach, Laconia, NH

2. Lakeport

Next on the list is Lakeport. Water passing over the dam from Paugus Bay to Opechee Lake keeps some open water, drawing winter waterfowl now and then. The Purple Martin colony on nearby North Street is long gone. Cook suggests Northern Rough-winged Swallows could nest in the stone dam and raceway. I have never seen them there, but they successfully nested in the stone wall along the Winnipesaukee River at Rotary Park in 2023.

3. Church Street Bridge

Third, Cook lists Church Street Bridge. The article states it is a good winter stop for waterfowl. Still today, this is usually my first stop when searching for waterfowl in the area. "As many as 280 ducks can be seen..." Cook said, but such a number is not a sight replicated today.

4. Pleasant Street Woods

Fourth: Pleasant Street Woods. This was a tract of woods of about 40 acres behind the Pleasant Street Elementary School. It was reliable for observing spring and fall migration. Carolina Wren and Tufted Titmouse are mentioned as notable sightings.

Fifty-five years ago, spotting a Carolina Wren in New Hampshire was a rare treat! Today, these southern newcomers have established themselves and are now commonly seen south of the White Mountains. Photo by Debra Powers.

"As many as 9 species of sparrow can be seen here… in October…" This implies there was open space here back then. Today it is very different. The development of Havenwood Drive off Pleasant Street has shrunk the acreage. The rest is deep woods, not suitable for sparrows. May 26, 2024, I tried to explore this site, but my visit was cut short by an encounter with an unfriendly sow Black Bear with her two cubs!

5. O'Shea Industrial Park

Fifth we have O'Shea Industrial Park. Cook's article said this spot "has not yet been developed into factory sites." It has since been so developed! Major manufacturers like NH Ball Bearing and Viant have set up shop here. The Belknap County complex has also expanded into what were once open fields. A major apartment development on Blueberry Lane has also diminished open space. In 1969 you could've found Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Field Sparrows. Fall shorebird migration was excellent too. Some species included Solitary Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Wilson's Snipe, even American Golden-Plover. Rarities recorded here include Western Kingbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Dickcissel. Today, no place in Laconia can match this.

As fields have been developed or reverted to forests, Eastern Meadowlarks—a grassland-dependent species—have experienced dramatic declines and are now found in only a few areas of New Hampshire. Photo by Len Medlock.

6. Hilliard Road Marsh

Hilliard Road Marsh was Cook's sixth. He stumbled upon this place by chance. It is a marsh of about three acres off Hilliard Road which runs off North Endicott Street in the Weirs. Cook found American Bittern, Wood Duck, and Virginia Rail here. His directions to find it are precise, down to the number of telephone poles from the recommended parking spot. On May 26, 2024, armed with Cook's precise directions I set out to rediscover this hidden gem. The article describes where to park, and that at the third telephone pole away there's an obscure path leading into the woods. I

parked, counted the poles, which are still there, and found a well-used dirt road instead of an obscure path. The road had a gate across it and multiple "No Trespassing" signs. Very disappointing! The Hilliard Road Marsh will have to remain a hidden, inaccessible gem.

7. Beaver Ponds, Roller Coaster Road

Seventh Cook lists Beaver Ponds, Roller Coaster Road. The article describes two beaver ponds here. The smaller one is not visible from the road, so is probably grown in. There is also a house in that area. Today the larger pond is known as Foote's Pond, an important waterfowl stop in Laconia. Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, and American Coot were expected fall migrants back then, but no longer are. Also, you will no longer see "a large mixed flock of Tree, Bank, Barn, and (especially) Cliff Swallows over the water." Instead, this pond is the county strong-hold for Ring-necked Duck in migration, especially fall. My high count here is 115 on November 5, 2021.

8. Daisy Gardner Road

Daisy Gardner Road was Cook's eighth. He includes this as one of his favorite spring migration sites. When I tried to verify this on May 20, 2024, I had no such luck. This road runs off of Meredith Center Road, then runs along the north end of Lake Winnisquam. Swain State Forest's deep woods hem in both sides of the road. I'm sure I will go back on another fine spring day to double check, but for now it doesn't strike me as a hotspot.

9. Gilford Dump-Laconia Airport

Finally, Gilford Dump-Laconia Airport. Remember when your local dump was the place to go for gulls and Great Horned Owls? Such was the case in Laconia. Cook notes that until recently as many as 500 gulls could be found at this site. This included "white winged" gulls. Now, the dump is known as the Gilford Recycling Center. No gulls, no owls. The airport remains an important location for open country and grassland species. While meadowlarks no longer nest here, this is probably the most reliable place in Belknap County to find one during migration in late April, along with American Kestrel. Snow Buntings and Horned Larks can be found on fall migration. Savannah Sparrows still nest and other sparrows have been seen here, notably a Grasshopper Sparrow on May 27, 2006, and a Clay-colored Sparrow on May 20, 2007.

On the other side of Route 11C from the airport, not mentioned in the article, is Lily Pond. The pond is an important waterfowl observation area during spring and fall migrations. This is the most reliable place to find Pied-billed Grebe in the fall anywhere in Laconia, and probably in the county. I first visited this site April 13, 2002, to see the pair of Redheads that was reported here. I was two days late. To this day I have yet to add Redhead to my state life list.

Not all species in Laconia have declined over the last 55 years. Loons, Ospreys, and Bald Eagles are far more numerous today. There have been plenty of newcomers. Merlins nest here. On three different occasions I've observed a family group, twice at and near Bayside Cemetery, once at Bartlett Beach. Many southern species have expanded their ranges into Laconia since 1969. Red-bellied Woodpecker and Fish Crow, for example. Wild Turkey has been reintroduced, and Sandhill Crane remains a tantalizing possibility.

Before submitting this article for publication, I forwarded a draft to Cook for his comments. He thanked me for writing this and added one more of his favorite places in the area. Before it was developed into the Gilford High School athletic fields, he called it "Sawyer Meadows." On eBird it is known as "Rte 11B fields at Old Lake Shore Road". I like the old name better. It's a better fit. The Sawyer's Dairy Bar, a regional landmark that has been serving homemade ice cream at this location since the 1940s, is adjacent to this site on the corner of Routes 11 and 11B. Cook reminisced about finding a Gyrfalcon here "after 46 years of searching." According to *The Birds of New Hampshire*, the date was March 12-19, 2006. Cook searched these fields with hopes of turning up a Northern Lapwing, ultimately in vain, and he witnessed an "amazing" phalarope fallout where "the fields were dotted with these pelagic species…." This area too has been modified but remains an important birding site in the region.

The Gyrfalcon Cook found in 2006. Photo by Dave Austin, 3-12-2006, Sawyers Meadow, Gilford, NH.

Some places all these years later are still worthwhile, some are lost, and some are out of reach. To this list I would add what I consider the best birding spot in Laconia: the former Laconia State School. (See my article "Birding the former Laconia State School campus" in the Spring 2022 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*.) Back in the day its access may have been restricted, it certainly wouldn't have been the brushy, weedy, overgrown place it is today. The school was front page news recently when a Loggerhead Shrike was seen April 15, 2024 (see the species spotlight on page 15). Big changes are coming to this site as New Hampshire seeks a buyer to redevelop the property for housing, retail, and other commercial uses. As Cook correctly predicted in his article, "Some of the areas described are changing and others will change," but he hoped "there will always be places within the city boundaries suitable for birds and birding." More than five decades later, I can reassure you this is certainly true.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Photo 1

Our silhouette is a long-necked bird that appears to be walking across some ice. Only a handful of birds have long necks. The short but powerful-looking legs immediately rule out herons and cranes. I can't quite tell if the feet are webbed or not. Some sandpipers have somewhat long necks, but nothing like this—and certainly not with legs like that.

We're left with something in the goose or swan family, or perhaps a cormorant. But who are we kidding? This is no cormorant; a long, arched neck like that can only belong to a swan. Another clue (which might or might not be cheating) is the reflection in the ice! (Oops, maybe we should have grayed that out!)

But which swan is it? There is one wild species of swan commonly found in New Hampshire, two others that are rare but possible, and a fourth that is an occasional escapee. All of these adult swans are white, so it's rare that we'd see one in silhouette! Still, focusing on the bill—a key shape-related field mark—we see that our bird has a bump at the base of its bill. That field mark is definitive for the adult of New Hampshire's most common swan.

Conclusion: Mute Swan.

It's worth noting that the arched wings and curved neck, while not definitive, are also highly suggestive of Mute Swan. Both the Tundra Swan and the Trumpeter Swan tend to keep their necks straight and their wings flat, as does the occasional escaped Whooper Swan.

Adult Mute Swans have that black knob at the base of a bright orange bill, but juveniles lack both the orange bill and the knob at the base, so they may need closer examination.

Mute Swan by Greg Tillman, 2-25-2021, Kingston, NH.

Photo 2

We see a bird swimming away from us, or maybe toward us. Swimming is a behavioral clue, though a broad one. Swimming birds include ducks, geese, loons, grebes, gulls, cormorants, and alcids, to name a few. The lily pads in the water suggest that our bird is in a marsh, not the ocean. We should also note that the photograph was taken in April. March and April are migration months for most of our inland waterfowl, so we need to be thorough as we look at possibilities.

As is often the case, bill shape helps narrow down the possibilities. With a head-on view, we don't have much else to go on! We can rule out loons, gulls, and cormorants, none of which have a stubby bill like this. Loons have straight, spear-like bills—nothing like the one we see here. This bird also seems too small to be a cormorant, and even head-on, it isn't shaped like a gull.

It's in a marsh, but unfortunately, the bill doesn't match any marsh ducks or geese. Most marsh ducks have longer bills that appear gracefully concave on the upper mandible (or culmen). The shoveler has a unique bill shape, but its bill would be longer and shouldn't appear pointed. Some geese have almost straight culmens, but none have this stubby, finch-like bill.

Maybe it's one of the so-called "bay or ocean" ducks that ended up in a marsh on migration. (Scoters are sometimes seen at Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge in spring and sea ducks do migrate up the Connecticut Valley.) However,

when we evaluate bill shape and review all the waterfowl, we can rule them all out—this is not a scoter, eider, merganser, or scaup.

Let's go back to our list of swimmers and look at grebes and alcids. Among the grebes, New Hampshire has two common wintering species: the Red-necked Grebe and the Horned Grebe. Both grebes nest in marshes (though not in New Hampshire). However, their straight and narrow bills rule out those two species pretty easily. We also have a nesting grebe in New Hampshire—and it's an early migrant, arriving on our marshes in April.

The Pied-billed Grebe has a distinctly odd bill for a grebe. (It is also the only grebe in its genus.) Pied-billed Grebes are small birds with a thick and stubby bill, and it's a good fit for this silhouette.

But what about the alcids? Maybe this bird is a puffin that got blown off course? The bill shape might resemble a puffin's, but unfortunately for rarity hunters, an adult puffin's bill is significantly larger, and even a young puffin's bill would be longer and heavier.

Conclusion: Our bird clearly has the odd, stubby bill of the marsh-nesting Pied-billed Grebe.

This bird's submarine-like diving behavior is another helpful clue. When seen well, the dark vertical stripe on its stubby bill is diagnostic.

Pied-billed Grebe by Greg Tillman, 4-21-2021, Brentwood, NH.

What to Watch for in Spring

Spring is a time of incredible bird movement, with new arrivals throughout the season. Things can start slowly but be patient. There is always something to see. From waterfowl to warblers, here's what to look for and when:

March

- Waterfowl migration is in full swing. Every week can bring different species. Watch for fallouts on open water in rainy weather, especially on large inland lakes. Flooded corn fields can also be quite good. Major river valleys and the coastal plain are the best areas. In warm springs with little ice or snow, the migration can pass through quite quickly and you can miss it.
- American Woodcocks start displaying as soon as the ground is open (or even before). Look for them at the edge of open fields, especially adjacent to wet meadows or brushy swamps. Killdeer often return around the same time.
- Black-capped Chickadees start to sing in late February or early March. Their "fee-bee" song can be mistaken for Eastern Phoebes which don't return until early to mid-April.
- The Connecticut River in mid-March is the best place to check for rare geese such as Greater White-fronted Goose.
- Red-shouldered Hawks return and can be mistaken for Broad-winged Hawks which don't come back until mid-April.

Red-shouldered Hawk by Steve Mirick.

April

- Winter visitors like American Tree Sparrows and redpolls or siskins leave in April. Chipping Sparrows, the tree sparrow look-alike, arrive around mid-April.
- In early April watch for Hermit Thrush to arrive. Veerys and other thrushes arrive later, usually in May.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglets begin to arrive the second week of April. Their song can be confused with Common Yellowthroat which doesn't arrive until the beginning of May and Carolina Wren.
- Watch for Broad-winged Hawks in the third week of April, especially on a warm, south wind. You can follow their progress north in eBird to know when they are getting close.
- The earliest warblers arrive mid-month: Pine, Palm, and Yellow-rumped, followed quickly by Louisiana Waterthrush. The first warblers of the main May wave often appear at the very end of the month, including Black-and-white, Northern Parula, and Black-throated Green Warblers.
- Inclement weather in late April can bring fallouts of migrating Horned and Red-necked Grebes as well as winter sea ducks such as Red-breasted Mergansers and Long-tailed Ducks. Look for them on large lakes such as Newfound, Spofford, or Lake Winnipesaukee.
- Tree Swallows are the first swallows to return in early April (and often late March), followed by Northern Rough-wingeds. Look for huge flocks over waterbodies if there's a cold spell or rainy weather. The Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers, waste treatment plants, and even local ponds can provide quite a concentration.
- Northern House Wrens begin to trickle in during the last few days of April. Wren chatter before that is likely to be Carolina or Winter Wren.

Northern Parula by Benjamin Griffith.

May

- The main push of warblers happens in May and it can be spectacular. Watch for south winds that can bring in a flood of birds. A few of the northern-most species won't peak until later in the month: Blackpoll, Wilson's, and Tennessee.
- Blue Jays are daytime migrants and in some years large number go south for the winter and begin returning in early May.
- Our eagerly-awaited Ruby-throated Hummingbirds start showing up reliably in the first week of May.
- The colorful Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and Baltimore Orioles arrive around May 5-10 and often come visit feeders when they first arrive, but then disappear as the weather warms.
- Although some shorebirds arrive by late April, their peak migration isn't until mid-May. Numbers in spring generally pale in comparison to fall, but sometimes you get lucky. Most of the action is on the immediate coast, but as with other waterbirds there are sometimes significant inland fallouts associated with rainy weather. Watch for inland Short-billed Dowitchers around May 20.
- Mid-May is the best time to look for terns inland during their migration.
- Of the small *Empidonax* flycatchers, Least are the first to arrive in early May but Alder, Willow and Yellow-bellied won't arrive until mid-to-late May.

A female (left) and male (right) Rose-breasted Grosbeak visiting a feeder. Photo by Len Medlock, 5-9-2024, Exeter, NH.

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Abbreviations Used

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

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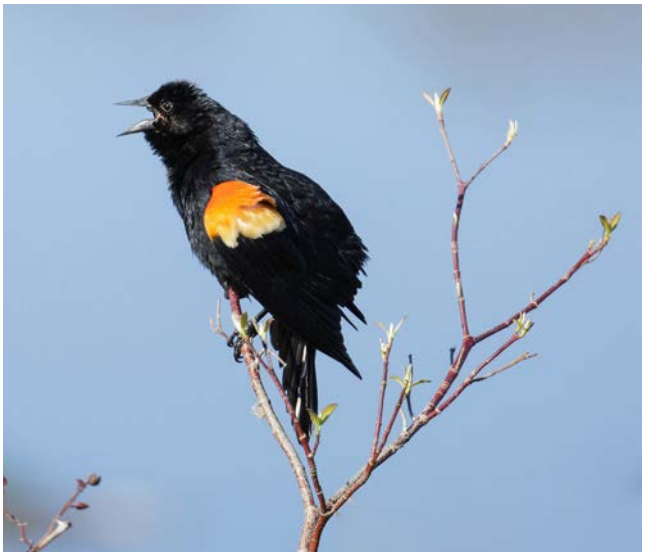
Signs of Spring



One of the first signs of spring, Red-winged Blackbirds typically arrive in early March. Photo by Len Medlock, 5-11-2024, Exeter, NH.

Baltimore Orioles return to New Hampshire by early to mid-May. Place halved oranges outside to welcome these vibrant visitors. Photo by Len Medlock, 5-11-2024, Rye, NH.

Listen for Killdeer calls in March. Once you spot a pair, keep watch—you may see their chicks later in the season. Photo by Donna Keller, 5-19-2024, Otter Brook Lake, Keene, NH.

Barred Owl courtship begins in February, with eggs laid by April. Owlets leave the nest for their first adventures at four to five weeks old but remain flightless until about ten weeks. Photo by Debra Powers, 5-19-2024, Durham, NH.

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers build tiny, cup-shaped nests on horizontal branches, with lichen and spider webs. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 4-23-2024, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.

Alder Flycatchers arrive in mid-May. Look for them in shrubby wetlands. Photo by Benjamin Griffith, 5-22-2024, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.

Spring 2024 Rarities

The third-ever record of a Black-necked Stilt in New Hampshire, spotted at Parson's Creek Salt Marsh near Wallis Sands State Beach, Rye. Photo by Susan Wrisley, 5-4-2024.

Loggerhead Shrike by Susan Wrisley, 4-16-2024, Laconia, NH. This Loggerhead Shrike was one of two spotted in New Hampshire in the spring of 2024—a rare occurrence! Learn why this sighting was so exceptional in the "Season Summary" on page 3 and dive deeper into the species in the feature article on page 15.

A rare sound for New Hampshire—Cynthia Barrett's yard hosted not one, but two Lark Sparrows in March, one of which delighted birders with its song. Photo by Susan Wrisley, 3-25-2024, Milford, NH.

Another third-ever state record for New Hampshire, this time a Chestnut-collared Longspur. Photographed by Donna Keller, 5-19-2024, at Otter Brook Lake, Keene.