

New Hampshire

BIRD RECORDS



What's Inside



Why does this Northern Gannet have two different eye colors? Read about it on page 32. Story and photo by Iain MacLeod.



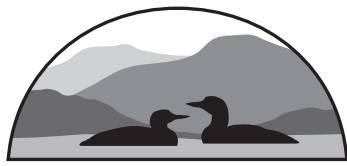
This Orchard Oriole nest was found in the same tree with a Baltimore Oriole nest on the Pickering Ponds Nest Walk in Rochester, NH. See other nests from the walk and learn how the female Orchard Oriole builds her nest inside. Photo by Holly Bauer, 6-3-2023.



An interesting decoration for a porch light! This adult Eastern Screech-Owl raised a family in Concord, NH. Read the story of the trials and tribulations of owl chicks in a suburban neighborhood. Story and photo by Rebecca Suomala.



Find out how the endangered Piping Plovers and Least Terns did on Hampton Beach in the Summer Season report. Piping Plover with four chicks underneath by Debra Powers, 6-9-2023.



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**IN MEMORY OF
Bob Crowley**

The Summer 2023 issue is sponsored in memory of Bob Crowley by his many birding friends, remembering his good humor, his passion for birding, and his friendly smile. He will be greatly missed. Photo courtesy of Tony Vazzano.

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From the Editor

SUMMER 2023

by Rebecca Suomala

Thank you Hank Chary

A special thank you to Hank Chary who served on the *New Hampshire Bird Records* Editorial Team for many years. See his article on birding in Londonderry in the Spring 1998

issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* in the online archives. We appreciate Hank's long-time support.

Volunteers Needed

We are looking for volunteer coordinators for two popular features: Field Notes Coordinator and Where to Bird Coordinator. The primary responsibilities involve identifying content, contacting authors, and editing article drafts. If you are interested, contact me for more information: rsuomala@nhaudubon.org.

Remembering Bob Crowley

by Joe Scott



Bob Crowley (right) with Joe Scott on the New Hampshire coast in 2014. Photo by Charlie Nims.

Bob Crowley was a great friend and fellow birder who had a passion and personality that drew so many people to him. Perhaps the first person to be drawn into his passion for birding was his daughter Debbie who from age six had regular birding adventures in Hampton, Plaice Cove, and Plum Island. "We were definitely obsessed. On Sunday mornings, we would get up super early so we could go to mass at Merrimack College, the only church that had a 5:00 am mass!" Debbie was then given the serious responsibility of recording their sightings on the Life List.

Later, Bob moved to the Mount Washington Valley where he set out to find what birds were out there in Carroll County, Coos County and across the Maine border in Oxford County. He went to the known hot spots and searched new places to winkle out where to find Sandhill Cranes, Northern Hawk Owl, Buff-breasted Sandpipers and Rusty Blackbirds.

He loved to discover new places to bird and he soon uncovered the riches of places like Sherman Farm and Fryeburg Harbor. When new birders like me arrived, he always maintained that there were undiscovered birding spots that only needed more birders to locate and add to our knowledge of the whole Valley. How true that was.



Bob Crowley in his younger years. Photo courtesy of Debbie Crowley.

He loved to travel for birding, whether chasing a Ross's Gull up in Quebec or embarking on trips in his RoadTrek with his wife Sue and their border terriers to every state from Louisiana to Alaska. That camper delivered over 200,000 miles of birding adventures, and they saw many National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges on their way.

In the past few years, Bob turned more to bird photography, a new way to indulge his life's passion. He brought to photography the same desire to learn and enjoy the birds around him in new ways.

All of us who knew Bob will miss his personality, his stories and his banter. Birding is fun, and birding with Bob was even more fun.

A special thank you to those who sponsored this issue in memory of Bob Crowley.

Richard S. Aaronian
Holly Bauer
William Broussard
Dana and Bob Fox
Kathryn Frieden
David Govatski
Jeanne-Marie Maher
Stephen Mirick

Jean Mullen
Charlie Nims
Joe Scott
Richard Steber
Samuel Stoddard
Rebecca Suomala
Tony Vazzano

Birds of Hinsdale Setbacks and Bluffs – Addendum

In 2016, the *Birds of Hinsdale Setbacks and Bluffs* was released as a pdf that any interested birder could obtain from author Dr. Hector Galbraith or on the web at <https://hinsdalebirds.wordpress.com/>. Since then, there has been a great increase in birding activity in the area, resulting in many new species being added to the site list, including such rarities as Sage Thrasher, Nelson's Sparrow, Cattle Egret, and others. The site list has grown to about 260 species. In response to this, an addendum to the original report has been written and released as a pdf, including many fine photographs by skilled New Hampshire birders/photographers. If you would like a (free) copy of the addendum (or the original report), contact Hector Galbraith at hg21@comcast.net.

Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Many beginning birders, understandably, focus on color as they try to learn to identify birds in the field. Experts, however, regularly use a variety of additional clues, and sometimes seem to identify birds without even seeing key field marks, leaving beginners astounded, flummoxed, and maybe a little dejected. The experts, perhaps unconsciously, are using their long experience with behavior, habitat, niche, and especially size and shape, to rapidly narrow down unknown birds to a handful of likely candidates.

Field marks are not always colorful. A surprising number of New Hampshire birds could theoretically be identified



Sage Thrasher by Susan Wrisley, 12-21-2021, Hinsdale, NH.

all the way to species by shape alone. (That is not the best birding practice, of course! Birders should be thorough.) Even if it is not conclusive, shape is often a key field mark that beginners overlook, and habitat and behavior provide helpful indicators that should not be ignored.

This photo quiz uses silhouettes to emphasize the importance of using clues other than color to help with identification. Silhouettes in a photo don't really replicate field conditions, but they can be a useful tool—and we hope they provide a fun quiz as well!

Can you Identify This Bird?

This photo looks as if it might be from one of the coastal marshes. It was taken in June in Rockingham County.

See the Answer on page 39.



2023 Goodhue-Elkins Award

Presented by Mike Bartlett at the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, September 16, 2023.

The Goodhue-Elkins Award is given annually by New Hampshire Audubon to honor an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the study of New Hampshire birds. The award is named for Charles Goodhue, one of the state's first great birders, and Kimball Elkins, who remains the model for critical observation and insightful record-keeping.



George Gavutis, Jr. recipient of NH Audubon's 2023 Goodhue-Elkins Award. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.

I am truly honored to present this year's award to my long-time colleague and friend George W. Gavutis Jr. Many of us agree that George's contributions to the New Hampshire Breeding Bird Atlas alone qualify him for this award. He was a regional coordinator for over six years, field volunteer, author of eleven accounts and co-author of one more. George still does a Breeding Bird Survey route every year, which involves starting at 4:34 in the morning! For decades, he has also faithfully sent in his bird sightings to *New Hampshire Bird Records*. It's obvious to everyone who knows George that he loves being out in the field, finding birds and, perhaps more importantly, recording and sharing the data he collects.

George is the quintessential conservationist, actively working to promote habitat management for birds and other wildlife in the Kensington area, beginning with his own land in 1973. Over the last fifty years, George has installed and monitored several hundred songbird nesting boxes, several dozen Wood Duck boxes, and at least a dozen Barred Owl, American Kestrel and Eastern Screech-Owl boxes—boxes that have produced thousands of ducklings and tens of thousands of songbirds.

In his spare time, George completed a list of bird species for the Natural Inventory section of the Kensington Town

Master Plan and then went on to create lists of mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and fish. He also wrote a four-page overview for the inventory section.

One of the Goodhue-Elkins award criteria speaks to the degree to which the nominee shares his knowledge—and here is where George also shines. In the early 1990s, George started writing a column called Walk on the Wildlife Side for a community newsletter. Lynn Monroe, editor of the monthly newsletter, had this to say regarding George's contribution:

George delivered the most wonderful stories and observations, and his column quickly became the first thing folks looked for when they received their newsletter. We learned how he got up early to count owls for the Christmas Bird Count each year and when we published the count, we learned that bluebirds stick around all winter and that logging of mature forests actually enhances bird populations. Over the years, he's kept our town informed about what to watch for as the seasons change, and the annual migration brings new feathered friends to our feeders. He's cautioned us when to clean out those feeders and what to stock them with—and what to do with those irritating sparrows. He warned us when bobcats and bears were sighted in town and helped us choose the fish that could survive in our ponds.

George is still writing his column, and many say that it is the way they have come to know the woods and streams and wild things that live in our community.

There is no question that our town is a far better place because of our resident naturalist, George Gavutis.

I would only add that, thanks to George Gavutis, our state is a far better place to live as well.

NH Audubon is honored to present the 2023 Goodhue-Elkins Award to George for his decades of service to the birds and birding community of New Hampshire.



George Gavutis (right) receiving the 2023 Goodhue-Elkins Award from Mike Bartlett. Photo by Dyanna Smith.

June 1, 2023 through July 31, 2023

by Jason K. Pietrzak



During the summer season, June and July of 2023, birders reported **249 species** of birds in New Hampshire in eBird. This was one species ahead of 2022 for the summer period, and not too far behind the summer of 2021, when 253 species were reported. Overall, the summer of 2023 could be characterized as a quiet summer for rare birds

in the state. A small number of late and early migrants and a handful of rare birds were seen by one or very few birders, including a state first record, but otherwise the season was fairly uneventful.

Weather during the summer of 2023 marked a significant change from the previous few summers. Leading up to summer, the year had been much warmer than average, primarily driven by abnormally high nighttime temperatures (a phenomenon related to higher humidity and cloud cover), with slightly above average precipitation. June brought above average precipitation across the state, and set a new June snowfall record on Mount Washington with over eight inches of snow! Several days in June featured notably poor air quality across the state due to massive wildfires in Canada, causing birders to wonder how boreal breeding birds might be affected.



Nesting Piping Plovers were helped by the rainy weather this summer that reduced beach traffic. Piping Plover chick by Jim Sparrell, 6-19-2023, Hampton Beach SP.

Higher temperatures arrived in July, with record-high nighttime temps contributing to the second warmest July on record. Precipitation was also notably high, making this New Hampshire's fourth wettest July. Notable rain events on July 9 and 15 caused serious flooding, particularly in the Connecticut River Valley.

The season summary is split into two sections. The first highlights the rarest and most notable state-wide bird reports of the season, listed chronologically. The second section follows a more traditional, taxonomic ordering, and presents species highlights, breeding reports, and other notable information. Flipping between bird resources has become frustrating with the frequent taxonomic changes over the last 20 years. For now, I've left the taxonomic order as I received it from the last editor. An opportunity to update the order may come with the great renaming of eponymous names planned in the next few years.

In writing this section, I primarily relied on eBird for contemporary reports of birds. I also heavily referenced *The Birds of New Hampshire* by Keith and Fox (2014) for bird records prior to 2010. For species accounts, I used Cornell's *Birds of the World* website and throughout the season David Sibley's app, *Sibley Birds V2*, was always at hand.

Note: In the following summaries we do not always include the town for Odiorne Point State Park. It is in Rye, NH.

Rare and Notable Vagrants, Chronological Order

A singing male **Hooded Warbler** was reported on June 16 in Hancock by Phil Brown. Small numbers of this species are reported annually from across the state during migration, but this may be only the sixth summer record. Migratory overshoot is the most likely explanation for this bird, but this formerly southern species now breeds across southern New England. Northern populations of this species prefer mature upland hardwood habitat, so birders in this habitat should give extra scrutiny to vocal warblers.

Although **Royal Tern** reports experienced a slight uptick just over a decade ago, there hadn't been any reports



Royal Tern by Cameron Johnson, 7-23-2023, Hampton, NH.

SUMMER SEASON

in the state in nearly five years until Cameron Johnson photographed one on July 1 from Odiorne Point State Park in Rye. Remarkably, Cameron reported another one about three weeks later on July 23 at Hampton Harbor at the opposite end of our coast. Read more about his discoveries in the Field Notes.

In a stunning first state record, a **Vermilion Flycatcher** was reported and photographed at Pickering Ponds in Rochester on July 13 by James Gosling and Alan Murray, reporting separately. An emblematic bird of the desert Southwest, a handful of Vermilion Flycatchers have wandered into the Northeast over the last few years with records in Massachusetts, Maine and up in Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Highlights by Family

generally in taxonomic order

Waterfowl and Loons

A late-spring migrating **Blue-winged Teal** was reported from the Rochester Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) on June 7 by Brabble and Mark Hoffman. Others reported this bird in the area through June 12.

Probably one of the best documented individual birds in New Hampshire history, the female **King Eider** near Odiorne Point, originally found on May 22, 2022 by Brett Hillman, has persisted ever since in the same general area where it was discovered. Still a rare species in New Hampshire, this individual is a great example of an outlier skewing the statistics!

There are only a handful of summer records of **Common Eiders** away from the ocean. On June 29, Sam and Damaris Stoddard photographed one from the Scammell Bridge in Dover for a first summer record in Strafford County.

Summer **Buffleheads** are merely occasional in the state, and typically stalled spring migrants, but this summer there appeared to be two persistent birds. One bird at Odiorne Point State Park was a spring holdover that was reported as late as June 11. The other was an adult male reported at the Gray Rocks Conservation Area on northern Newfound Lake on June 6 by Tom McShane and continuing through June 26, when it probably flew the short distance over Interstate 93 onto Lake Waukegan in Meredith where it was reported by Roger Simmons.

A **Ruddy Duck** was reported from the Rochester WTP on July 17 by Alan Murray and Sam and Damaris Stoddard, and seen by many through the end of the summer. There are only a handful of previous July records of this species in the state this century. The last was reported by Stephen Mirick on July 17, 2016, at the Exeter WTP.

Occurring occasionally in the summer months, a **Red-**

throated Loon was reported on July 4 by Rebecca Suomala off North Hampton State Beach. According to the Loon Preservation Committee, it was a poor year for nesting **Common Loons**. The heavy rains caused nests to be flooded. Executive Director Harry Vogle wrote:

New Hampshire experienced its third worst year ever, behind only 2008 and the disastrous summer of 1998, for loon breeding success. This despite convincingly smashing our previous record, set just last year, for the number of loon nesting rafts floated on our lakes and our other ramped-up management and education to support our loons this summer. (Loon Preservation Committee Newsletter Fall 2023)

Nests in marshes or on rafts were more successful than nests on island or mainland shores and success (or lack thereof) was influenced by the timing of nesting and the amount of rain in the local area.



Common Loon and chick by Debra Powers, 7-24-2023, East Inlet, Pittsburg, NH.

Lastly for waterbirds is a near-miss. **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were not reported from New Hampshire this summer, but a pair were reported in southern Maine from July 7-10, and on July 11, a pair was reported in western Massachusetts. This is certainly a good species to look out for next summer!

Goatsuckers, Coots, and Cranes

Common Nighthawks, and their watchers, were affected by the rainy summer. While the number of active sites remained steady, confirming actual nesting was a challenge. See the nesting summary in this issue for the details.

The **American Coot** has been an occasional summer species in recent years, and one was reported on July 28 by Holly Bauer and Stephen Mirick at Meadow Pond in Hampton and was seen again on July 31. This species has an

interesting history in our state; summer records are unknown prior to June 11, 2007, when Richard Aaronian reported one in Exeter. This year's bird was the state's sixth summer record.

Sandhill Cranes illustrate perfectly how well birds can manage to migrate, breed, and go about their lives relatively undetected despite being large and loud. A notable flyover by three birds was reported on June 7 by Jenna and Jed Rosen in Manchester. A pair was reported on June 28-29 by Ronald Champaign in Canterbury. In Monroe, a pair was reported at the former nesting site on July 9 and 11 (Wayne Scott), and another (or the same pair) was reported farther south in the Connecticut River Valley in Haverhill from July 19 (Wayne Scott) through the end of the month. The only report of breeding came when a pair with young were photographed on July 1 by Gary Bashline in the Howard Swain Forest, between Nottingham and Deerfield.

Shorebirds

Reports of nesting **American Oystercatchers** continued from the Isles of Shoals with nests found by the Shoals Marine Laboratory on Appledore and Lunging Islands in Maine.

Biologists from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department reported more great news for the species they monitor at Hampton and Seabrook beaches. There were 16 breeding pairs of **Piping Plovers**, fledging a total of 38 chicks. That's a big jump over the 28 chicks fledged last year at the same location. Only six **Upland Sandpiper** chicks fledged at Pease airfield, their only known nesting site in the state. This is a lower number than in recent years.

A late migrating **Dunlin** was reported at Hampton Beach on June 7 by Juli Tyson, and continued through June 20. The latest spring Dunlin are typically reported during the first week of June. This bird is the second-latest persisting Dunlin behind one reported by Stephen Mirick on June 25, 1998!



Dunlin by Jim Sparrell, 6-7-2023, Hampton Beach SP, NH.

Unusually early fall migrant reports began with a **Pectoral Sandpiper** in Hampton on July 21 by Dan Prima. Pectorals normally begin moving south into the state a week later, in the last few days of July.

Following a record high summer for the species last year (nine!), one **Stilt Sandpiper** was reported on July 29 from the Hampton Salt Marsh Conservation Area in Hampton by Stephen Mirick. Later birders reported two individuals, and these persisted through the end of the summer season.

Inland summer records of **Red-necked Phalarope** are vanishingly rare. One reported on July 26 by Jim Sparrell at the Rochester WTP, perhaps an extremely early migrant, is only the second summer record according to eBird data. The previous record was in Exeter on June 6, 1992.

Terns, Gulls, Alcids, Shearwaters and Gannets



Roseate Tern by Jim Sparrell, 6-6-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

This summer's reporting from the Shoals Marine Laboratory's (SML) seasonal field technicians at the tern colony on the Isles of Shoals indicated more challenging conditions than usual. Estimates for nesting terns on White and Seavey Islands, part of the New Hampshire Isles of Shoals, included 3,165 **Common Tern** nests, similar to last year, but with low productivity due to inconsistent food availability and frequent rain during the chick rearing period. **Roseate Terns** had 151 nests, a new high nest count for that species, and with average productivity. **Arctic Tern** numbers have generally been low for years, but in 2023 there were zero nests, a disappointing first in the history of the SML.

Although the Shoals Marine Lab reported no nesting Arctic Terns on White and Seavey Island this year, a SML field technician did report a group of 14 Arctic Terns on June 4. Records of this species rarely exceed a handful, and the last time double-digits were reported was way back on July 26, 2007, also from the Isles of Shoals.



Least Tern by Jim Sparrell, 6-7-2023, Hampton Beach SP, NH.

Least Terns had a highly productive summer on Hampton Beach with a record 31 nesting pairs. That far surpasses last year's record of 20 pairs.

Aside from terns, SML reported breeding **Black Guillemot** (41 nests) at the Isles of Shoals overall (including Maine islands), as well as the following nesting wading birds: Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Glossy Ibis and Black-crowned Night-Heron (primarily on Appledore Island).

Among New Hampshire's gulls and terns, the **Caspian Tern** is unique in that most summer reports come from inland locations. So it was with one reported on June 4 from Lincoln Park in Gilford on Lake Winnepesaukee by Iain MacLeod. This species is irregular in summer, with reports in six of the last ten years.

While looking for the Pleasant Lake Black-legged Kittiwake, Clay Bliznick and Christy Soldo reported two



Black-legged Kittiwake by Jennifer Esten, 6-11-2023, Pleasant Lake, New London, NH.

Black Terns on June 17. One or two Black Terns are reported in about half the summers over the last decade, and they are found as frequently inland as on the coast.

Nearly twenty years since the last summer record, a **Black-legged Kittiwake** was found on June 11 by Jennifer Esten at Pleasant Lake in New London. The bird remained through July 13, allowing many to view this highly unusual phenomenon. Black-legged Kittiwakes are typically found off coastal waters in fall and winter, but the nearest breeding populations of this bird occur to our north in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. A major oceanic storm is believed to have blown this bird in. See the article by Steve Mirick in this issue.

Typically reported from the coast, a summer inland **Bonaparte's Gull** is more notable, occurring every other year over the last decade. Dotty Doherty reported two "Bonies" from Grafton Pond up in Grafton on July 28.

The narrow boundaries of New Hampshire's pelagic waters make it so that minor and localized conditions, weather, and prey movements can easily make or break the summer pelagic season for New Hampshire birders. Summer 2023 was a more muted season both in terms of number of reports and the number of individual birds reported. Standout dates include July 18, when Noah Gibb reported 66 **Great Shearwaters** and 17 **Cory's Shearwaters** from a Granite State whalewatch out of Rye, NH. These were some of the higher numbers reported for either species in several years.

In consideration of avian influenza impacts on the health of breeding in the region, the highest reported count of **Northern Gannets** this summer being three birds is sadly notable.

Hérons

Least Bitterns continue to be seen at a handful of sites where they've become reliable over the last decade. Now the game is to find them at random reedy wetlands in the inland seacoast region. On July 28, for example, Kirk Elwell added a wetland in East Kingston to the list of sites to check next year.

An intriguing mostly white egret was photographed on June 18 by Holly Bauer in Hampton. The written description and distant photos presented characteristics of both Little and Snowy Egret so it was thought to be a probable hybrid.

Snowy Egrets are easy enough to find on the seacoast in summer, and one or two turn up slightly inland around Great Bay, but only occasionally do they cross the invisible county line from Rockingham to Strafford County that runs down the middle of the Piscataqua River. Sam and Damaris Stoddard reported one on June 29 from the Scammell Bridge (Route 4) just over that county line into Dover.

At least one adult **Little Blue Heron** was seen on the seacoast this summer, beginning with a report on June 3 by Stephen Mirick in the Parson's Creek saltmarsh. It was also



Snowy Egret by Jim Sparrell, 6-15-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

seen by an observer on Maine's Appledore Island at the Isles of Shoals on June 6, but then there were no sightings for over a month. The next sighting was a single report by Ken Rosenberg on July 12, and then several reports from July 25 to the end of the summer season. As many as five Little Blues, including two immatures, were reported on Appledore in early September so it's possible a pair nested in the colony of wading birds that was first reestablished on the island in 2020 and has been growing.

Black-crowned Night-Herons are hard to find reliably inland, but this summer produced a smattering of reports. A June 1 bird was found by Phil Brown in Hancock, and Rick Page photographed a bird in Nashua on July 1. Then Kerry Hurd photographed two juveniles in Milford on July 2. They were old enough to fly well so we're not sure where they came from, but birders should keep their eyes out for a nest. This species has never been confirmed nesting in the state. Reports from Matt Bourgault on Lake Winnepesaukee on July 18 and



Glossy Ibis by Debra Powers, 6-9-2023, Rye, NH.

Sarah Bean near Plymouth on July 28 are the northern-most records in the last couple of summers.

The lone **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** this year was found on June 19 by Cheryl and David Zook at North Mill Pond in Portsmouth. The bird persisted through June 22.

Last summer's **Glossy Ibis** numbers were frequently above average, and set a new all-time high. Reports of this species were steady this summer, although at lower numbers.

Lastly, a follow-up to the American White Pelican reported late in the summer of 2022. No pelicans were reported in New Hampshire in the summer of 2023, but a one-day wonder was photographed on June 30 on a tiny pond outside of Montpelier, Vermont, proving once again that even an enormous black-and-white bird can somehow get around undetected.

Raptors, Flycatchers, and Jays

Black Vulture numbers remained low this summer, but reports were more broadly distributed, including into the Merrimack Valley where Pamela Hunt photographed three birds on July 20.

It was a difficult summer for nesting **Mississippi Kites**, likely due to the cool, wet weather in June. There were four pairs found but only one nest that fledged a single chick. See Steve Mirick's nesting summary in this issue.

On June 10, Kurk Dorsey and James Bradshaw reported an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Oyster River Forest in Durham. The last spring migrating individuals typically trickle through southern areas of the state in the first few days of June.

This was a strong year for **Acadian Flycatchers** in the state. Although this species breeds only as far north as Massachusetts, the range has shifted northward and the species has been reported somewhere in the state during most recent years (with the exception of summer 2022, which had no reports). This summer there were birds in multiple locations across the state including reports on June 14 from Pamela Hunt in Contoocook, June 15 from Jeannette Price and Ellen Taus at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, June 21 from Nora Hanke in Greenville, and June 24 from Jack Hutchinson and Hannah Pryor at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest near Woodstock. There is still no confirmation of successful nesting in this state, although breeding in nearby states occurs in large tracts of hemlock-hardwood riparian areas.

Summer **Canada Jays** can be found with some reliability by birders exploring higher elevations, although they aren't quite annual in summer in Carroll County. A flock of eight reported by Brian Hofstetter on Mt. Jackson on July 23 was particularly notable due to the presence of a color-banded adult bird originally captured in the same area in May 2022.

SUMMER SEASON

Researchers are currently studying the effects of human feeding on this species in the White Mountains and nearby areas of Maine. Read more about this interesting study in the article in this issue.

Crossbills, Sparrows, and Warblers



Red Crossbill by Chris Gagnon, 7-31-2023, Hooksett, NH.

This was a terrific summer for **Red Crossbills**, with small numbers of birds reported from all over the state and bigger groups reported everywhere except the seacoast. A flock of 49 birds reported on June 18 by Anne Winters and me from Winslow State Park on the north slope of Mount Kearsarge was notably large. Far more common were hundreds of reports of single birds and small groups.

Experienced birders might enjoy identifying birds to subspecies, but Red Crossbills are divided into “types” that are most distinguishable in the field by their subtly unique call notes (see previous articles in *New Hampshire Bird Records* on this subject in the Winter 2009-10 issue, vol. 28#4, and Winter 2017, Vol 36#4). In North America, eleven types of Red Crossbills had been identified until fairly recently, but a growing number of birders uploading sound recordings combined with advancements in AI and machine learning allowed researchers to recently identify a twelfth type, Old Northeastern. Birds that are now being identified as type 12 were previously lumped in with type 10, Sitka Spruce, a type that is typically found in the Pacific Northwest. You can read more about this story at the Finch Research Network: <https://finchnetwork.org/>.

You too can learn more about identifying your own Red Crossbills to type. The simple way to start is by recording any crossbills you hear using software like *Merlin*. You can then compare your recording by sound and spectrogram with resources online and then upload your recording to eBird so we can all benefit from your findings.

In the summer of 2023, 50 eBird reports identified their Red Crossbills to type. Of those 50, 44 (88%) were identified as Type 12, Old Northeastern. The rest were identified as:



Grasshopper Sparrow by Steve Mirick, 7-22-2023, Newington, NH.

Type 1, Appalachian; Type 2, Ponderosa Pine; and Type 4, Douglas-fir; with each of those comprising 4% of reports.

On June 18, Chris Borg reported a singing **Clay-colored Sparrow** in a field north of Pittsburg. This is the farthest north the species has been reported in New Hampshire, but it is found farther north in Canada. The last time the species was reported in the summer months was 2015 in Errol, NH (Paul Charron).

Grasshopper Sparrows persist in a limited and shrinking number of locations where grassland habitat is maintained. On July 22, one was reported by Dan Hubbard singing at a new location, “Moore Fields” on Rt. 155A in Durham. That bird was reported through the end of the summer season.

A report of six **Louisiana Waterthrush** by James Cornelius on June 4 was a notable high count for this species during the summer season. Higher counts tend to occur during the spring, when this earlier-than-average warbler is most actively singing.

Bonus Photo



Virginia Rail by Jim Sparrell, 6-11-2023, Portsmouth City Park, NH.

Coos County Regional Report, Summer 2023

by Robert A. Quinn

The summer of 2023 followed the spring weather theme by being cold and wet. Some birders commented on the lack of young ducks and young turkeys, but that did not seem to be borne out in Coos County. As a reminder, the “Summer” season for birds is a short one. Spring migration ebbs into early June, especially this year because of the cold and rain, and by July, fall wanderers are about. So let’s join the flow!

Possible late spring migrants

- June 1 had a few migrants, such as a Common Nighthawk in Milan (Paul & Lori Charron), a high count of seven Least Flycatchers in Lancaster (Ann Griffin), and a Tennessee Warbler in Pittsburg that was not seen on later visits (Jim Lafley, Patti Steinman).
- Some of the 12 Yellow-bellied Flycatchers seen at East Inlet, Pittsburg by Chris Borg on June 3 could easily have been migrants since later in June tallies there were much lower.
- A flock of 33 Chimney Swifts in Berlin on June 5 indicated they were not breeding yet (Robert Quinn).
- Mourning Warblers and late flycatchers (e.g. Alder, Olive-sided) seemed to be steadily reported through June, yet probably included some late spring migrants.

Breeders of note

- Ring-necked Ducks at Lake Umbagog did well with most of the families noted in August, which is the expected timing. Numerous Hooded Merganser families were there as well.
- There was a concentration of five Eastern Whip-poor-wills in Milan (Paul & Lori Charron, June 1) while others were sprinkled throughout the county.
- Northern Saw-whet Owls were noted from Pondicherry, Milan, Errol (several), and a few other sites and Black-billed Cuckoos were similar. Both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos seem to be encroaching on the North Country.
- Cliff Swallows in Pittsburg were well reported with the Tabor Road colony having at least 40 active nests counted by David & Frances Clapp on June 13. A few others were scattered around the county, mainly small numbers in Errol.
- Four territorial Pied-billed Grebes observed by Chris Borg on East Inlet Pond in Pittsburg on June 3 were a hopeful sign for this uncommon breeder. I encourage



Cliff Swallow nests in artificial nest structures in Pittsburg, NH. Photo by Steve Mirick, 7-1-2023.

birders to paddle this lovely and birdy pond every summer; I promise you will not be disappointed!

- Finches were low in number yet decent in species diversity. Red Crossbills and Purple Finches were strewn across the county, but American Goldfinch were seemingly scarce, as were the White-winged Crossbills.

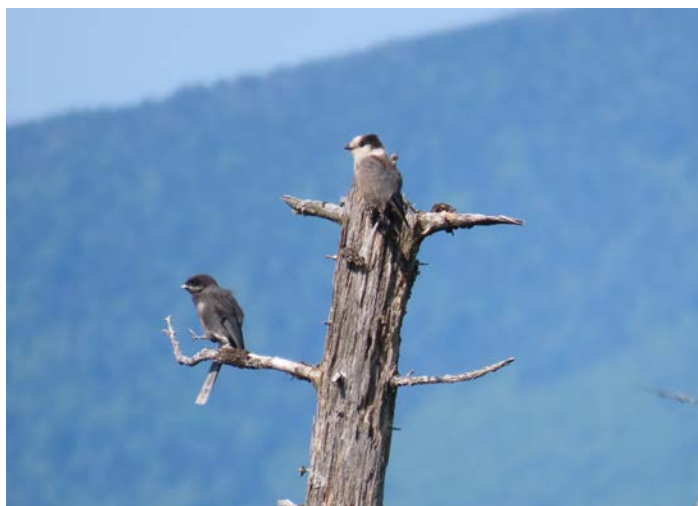
True rarities/vagrants

As with fall migrants (below), it was a modest list this summer.

- A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was seen well and heard singing in Pittsburg on June 18 (Chris Borg). Noteworthy was the fact that this sighting near Back Lake Road was well away from the heavily birded East Inlet Road area.
- **Willow Flycatcher** is still rare north of the White Mountains, except at Airport Marsh/Mount Washington Regional Airport in Whitefield. Therefore, one heard and seen well in Pittsburg on June 16 was significant (a good description by an observer familiar with the species, Matthew Bell of the Connecticut Audubon Society). Perhaps they are marching north.

Families and wanderers

- The baby patrol seemed to start with a family of Canada Jays along the Turbine Road in Dixville on June 11 (Rebecca Suomala, Zeke Cornell), followed by a Spruce Grouse hen with three chicks near Mount Pierce in the White Mountains on July 4 (Devin Silversmith).
- There was a typical influx of Double-crested Cormorants starting around July 4 with at least 15 noted between Berlin and Errol on July 11, including one “surfing down the flooded Androscoggin River on a submerged tree.” (See the Field Notes for details.)
- By July 11, many of the swallows had left their



Canada Jay adult (right) and young (left) by Rebecca Suomala, 6-11-2023, Dixville, NH.

breeding sites in Errol. While this is normal, it might have been hastened by the cold and wet weather. A mixed swarm of about 100 swallows was noted at Airport Marsh on July 21, again, right “on time” (West Chester Bird Club).

Fall migrants

There were fewer shorebirds inland (sandpipers and plovers) than in a typical July due to high water. One migrant Solitary Sandpiper was seen near Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge on July 6 (James Duffy, Nancy Mitiguy). Only a few Tennessee Warblers were noted. This lack of *bona fide* migrants could result from the challenge of data-mining eBird!

Special notes/trends:

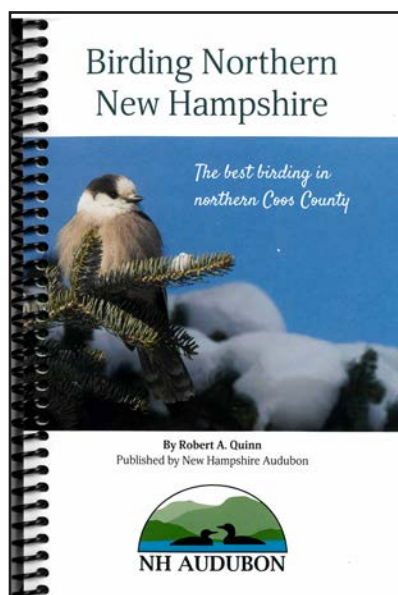
- Large tallies at **Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge** by two different parties on July 1 (Valerie Burdette, Bette Robo) and July 2 (Eric Pilotte) were impressive and were due to starting at 5:00 am and walking 5-7 miles. Sample data: three Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, 11 Blue-headed Vireos, 11 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 11 Red-breasted Nuthatch, six Brown Creepers, 14 Veeries, 15 Hermit Thrushes, 45 White-throated Sparrows, four Wood Thrushes, 14 Ovenbirds, 15 Nashville Warblers, 11 Black-throated Blue Warblers, 20 Magnolia Warblers, and nine Canada Warblers. The two parties of intrepid hikers/birders recorded a combined total of 19 species of warblers!
- There were several noteworthy **alpine birding** reports from high elevation birder/hikers (all-day trips included one of 20 miles by a teen birder/hiker!). Selective records include: the aforementioned family of Spruce Grouse; eight Yellow-bellied Flycatchers (Bette Robo, Valerie Burdette, July 1); all five of the “brown”

thrushes on one hike (Jake McCumber, July 12); one American Pipit on Mt. Madison, and an American Robin singing at the elevation of 5,001 feet on the summit of Mount Franklin (both by Devin Silversmith, July 4); nine Brown Creepers representing several families (Jake McCumber, July 12); several small flocks of White-winged Crossbills; and 40 Blackpoll Warblers on one hike (Mark Adam, June 16).

- There were few reports from the **Mount Washington Auto Road**, but a group from Colorado on June 29 showed that even late in June the road can yield good results including ten Bicknell’s Thrush with several seen well, plus a Fox Sparrow and eight Blackpoll Warblers.
- At **Beaver Brook Falls** north of Colebrook an amazing list was compiled at this mostly scenic site over a two-hour period in the early evening of June 26. The tally included a Black-backed Woodpecker, two Olive-sided Flycatchers, five Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, four Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and ten species of warblers (Charles Stebbins). Good to know there is more here than the waterfall.

Photos are great and ever increasing, while audio recordings are even better. Keep it up!

“Everyone” seems to be birding the same places: Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge; Pittsburg (especially East Inlet); Caps Ridge Trail, and other alpine hikes; and the Turbine Road in Dixville. It was nice to have records from Lancaster, and especially from Stratford away from Route 3. Therefore, I offer a challenge. Find a new place to bird in 2024 in this wonderful county. Here are a few ideas: the Colebrook area, more in Stratford, Nash Stream Forest, and paddling trips especially at Lake Umbagog and East Inlet. Hope to see you in the field!



For your guide to birding in Coos County, see Bob Quinn's book, Birding Northern New Hampshire. It is available for sale in NH Audubon's Nature Stores in Concord and Auburn and online on the New Hampshire Bird Records website (nhbirdrecords.org, Resources). All proceeds benefit NH Audubon.

One Good Royal Tern Deserves Another

Story and photos by Cameron Johnson



This Royal Tern was seen at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye, NH on the first day of July, 2023.

July 1, 2023

The first Royal Tern was just pure luck. I had slept through my alarm and had a later start to the day than I had hoped, but decided to check the seacoast for shorebirds despite the gloomy weather. When I got to Odiorne Point State Park, there were some storm-petrels visible from shore, so I walked out onto the rocks to get a closer look. Just as I was about to turn back, the Royal Tern flew directly over my head, heading north and leaving me stunned.

July 23, 2023

The second Royal Tern was almost more shocking than the first. My local birding group was doing a monthly challenge of “birds seen by boat” and I was looking for common shorebirds and gulls to pad my list. After over three hours of kayaking in Hampton Harbor, a large tern again flew directly over my head, being chased by Common and Roseate Terns. I was sure this was a Caspian, there was no way I would find another Royal Tern, but on reviewing the photos, Caspian was ruled out. Truly a wild month of being at the right place at the right time!



This second Royal Tern was seen in Hampton, NH three weeks later (7-23-2023).

A Lost Bird on Pleasant Lake

by Stephen R. Mirick



Black-legged Kittiwake by Eric Conte, 6-18-2023, Pleasant Lake, New London NH.

Many experienced birders have learned to use the term “gulls” instead of the colloquial term “seagulls” to refer to members of the *laridae* family. After all, gulls are found throughout the United States and some species are far more likely to be seen inland away from the sea. But the Black-legged Kittiwake is one species of gull found in New Hampshire that is definitely a bird of the ocean and very rarely seen inland. Thus, when a Black-legged Kittiwake showed up on Pleasant Lake in New London in June, far from salt water, it created quite a lot of excitement!

This adult bird in breeding plumage was first discovered on Pleasant Lake by Jen Esten and her husband Jonathan Waage on June 11, 2023 and was seen almost daily through the rest of the month of June. There were no reports in early July, but it was then seen one last time on July 13. Most of the sightings were from the vicinity of Elkin’s Beach where it was often seen sitting on a large rock which forever may be called “Kittiwake Rock” by the birders of New Hampshire! During its stay, it’s hard to say what it might have been feeding on in this foreign environment; however, Dylan Jackson noted that it was seen possibly skimming insects off the water on one occasion.

While there are a handful of previous inland reports from New Hampshire, these were from a “more expected” (still quite rare) time of year, typically stopping for one day during migration. This record represents only the second summer season (June/July) record of a Black-legged Kittiwake inland anywhere in New England according to eBird data. Curiously, the first inland summer season record was of an adult kittiwake seen one day earlier on June 10, 2023 from Lake Arrowhead which is an inland community in York County, Maine. Another inland sighting this year in New

Hampshire came from Elaine Faletta, who photographed an adult Black-legged Kittiwake on Lake Tarleton in Piermont on May 5, 2023. These three reports, plus up to seven Black-legged Kittiwakes in the Lake Champlain area of New York and Vermont in early May, suggest a spring migration displacement of birds which may have been a factor in the occurrence of the “Lost Bird on Pleasant Lake.”

Data Sources and References

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Is that the Kittiwake?

by Jon Woolf

As we get better at birding, there comes a time for many of us when we start to think we're better than we are, and we can reliably identify birds at a glance. Then, we get smacked with one or two pretty major mistakes, and learn better. Like the day I was on the New Hampshire coast and saw a largish bird flying overhead with its wings in a broad M shape. Herring Gulls fly that way, so I dismissed it as another Herring Gull and went back to scanning for shorebirds. Then, my subconscious connected the silhouette I'd actually seen with a fact I'd read in a birding book somewhere, and I realized that it wasn't a gull at all. Gulls fly with their primary flight feathers closed, but this bird had its primaries spread. Flies like a gull but with the primaries spread – that's an Osprey! (OK, so it's not that rare but it's still a nicer sighting than a dime-a-dozen gull!)

In mid-June 2023, several people reported an incredible

thing, a Black-legged Kittiwake inland on Pleasant Lake in New London, NH. I don't often go chasing rarities, but Pleasant Lake isn't that far away, so I thought I'd give it a try. I found the location without too much trouble, had a look through binoculars, and sure enough, there was a large rock out there, a couple of hundred yards from shore, with a gull standing on it.

But was it the kittiwake? It looked so *ordinary*, a medium-sized gull with white head, gray mantle, and black wingtips, not very different (through 8x binoculars) from the Ring-billed Gulls that are ubiquitous on New Hampshire lakes and ponds just about year-round. If I had been scanning on my own, without knowing there was a kittiwake around, I would have almost certainly dismissed it as a Ring-billed and moved on.

I wanted to be sure, so I got out my scope and looked at the bird at 20x magnification. It still looked not-unlike a Ring-billed. So, I looked at what the Sibley e-guide shows for a kittiwake, then zoomed in to 60x and took a long, close look at the gull out there on the rock.

Hmmm... The bill was yellow all right, but no black ring visible ... for that matter, the bill itself was thin and straight, not heavy like a Ring-billed's. So, it's not a Ring-billed. No red spot visible either, so it couldn't be a Herring Gull. The legs ... not yellow like a Ring-billed, no, they did look dark. I ran down the list, one feature after the other, and finally concluded that nothing else fit. Yes, that very plain, ordinary looking bird out there was indeed the Black-legged Kittiwake.

Moral of the story? Honestly, I'm not sure there is one. Just ... don't be too sure you know what you're seeing. Take a second look. We all carry bird guides with us; we should use them, instead of being sure from the start that we already know what we're looking at.

The bird in the photo is indeed the Black-legged Kittiwake.



Photo by Rebecca Suomala, 6-17-2023, Pleasant Lake, New London, NH.

Mississippi Kite 2023 Nesting Summary

by Stephen R. Mirick



The only known Mississippi Kite chick in New Hampshire in 2023. The photo was taken by Steve Mirick on 9-1-2023, a day after leaving its nest in Stratham, NH.

Once again, Mississippi Kites seem to have had a difficult year nesting in New Hampshire in 2023. I'm guessing the weather in June may have been a big factor. Like the past two years, only a single nest was found and only a single chick was confirmed to fledge. This despite the fact that at least four pairs of kites were confirmed on territory. The kites were first made famous by nesting in 2008 and this is (at least) the 16th consecutive year that kites (between one and four pairs) have nested in New Hampshire in this isolated, rare, nesting colony. A summary of the four kite territories is as follows.

Durham

Kites in Durham had been somewhat regular in recent years, but they haven't produced any young in the last 3 years. This year, a pair was observed on May 23 and they were seen carrying sticks into a potential nest site! Another visit on May 28 found the pair copulating and bringing in more nesting material, but sadly, they appear to have abandoned at some point after this. I don't know of any sightings after July 2.

Newmarket

The kites of Newmarket continue to be a big mystery. Who knows what's going on? Two birds showed up at a traditional location on May 16. Then again, two birds were seen on May 27 flying above this same location. Then, a single bird was at the same spot on July 28. Another bird was

reported from a different historic location in Newmarket on June 19. I spent a lot of time searching, but came up empty. An intriguing report of a possible juvenile (or first summer?) bird was reported on August 27. Bottom line, no firm territory was found, but there appears to still be some activity in the town. It's possible they nested in town somewhere, but that's hard to say.

Stratham #1

This was a new territory last year and the site where the only chick from 2022 fledged. At least one bird was reported back in the area on May 11 and two birds were first reported on May 26. Birds were observed carrying sticks and working on a nest on May 30 and then, over two weeks later on June 16, they were observed carrying sticks again! Then on June 25, the pair was seen *copulating*?!! I can only guess that they failed at their first attempt and the copulation was just a veiled attempt to re-nest which apparently never happened.

Stratham #2

Thanks to a tip, I was able to track down a new nest site with a chick in the nest on August 24! What a relief! I had thought the season was over and we weren't going to have any baby kites! It's easiest to find these nests when the adults are bringing in food and this is how I found this nest. The nest was high up in a maple tree crotch in the front yard of a single-family home in an established residential neighborhood. I never got a chance to talk to the homeowners.

The baby fledged on August 30 or September 1 and was still seen in the area flying and being fed by the female on September 7. This was my last sighting, but a neighbor claims that they were there on September 10. This is pushing the envelope as to the late fledge date. Hopefully, the chick had learned to feed on its own and, hopefully, it successfully passed through the southeastern US on its way to Paraguay!

A summary of confirmed fledged kites (and pairs of kites present) from recent years in New Hampshire:

2017 - 0 (3 pairs)
2018 - 3 (3 pairs)
2019 - 2 (3 pairs)
2020 - 3 (3 pairs)
2021 - 1 (4 pairs)
2022 - 1 (4 or 5 pairs)
2023 - 1 (4 pairs)

Thanks to all who helped out this year and contributed to this information.

Note: I will continue to keep the locations of most or all of these nests quiet unless the circumstances permit. The popularity of these birds for photographers (and birders with cameras) is a messy situation with homeowners and neighbors. The kites don't seem to care much, but the people do.

Common Nighthawk 2023 Nesting Season

Story and photos by Rebecca Suomala

It was a rainy summer in 2023 and rain is a significant impediment to nighthawk watching if you're trying to locate nesting birds. Nesting nighthawks don't exhibit their typical behavior in the rain so Project Nighthawk protocol calls for watches in good weather only. That made it a struggle this summer to fit in nighthawk watches during June and July. Thanks to volunteer help, we were able to at least locate active territories even if we couldn't do full watches to determine nesting status.

The nighthawks held their own with 15 known nesting territories in New Hampshire in 2023, similar to the last two years. Most of the territories were in either Concord or the Ossipee Pine Barrens area (Ossipee, Freedom, Madison, Tamworth). There were five confirmed nests statewide and ten other sites where we suspected nesting but couldn't confirm. Four of the confirmed nests were in Concord and three of them failed due to either heavy rain or extreme heat. The fourth was suspected to be successful. That nest was on the roof of the Steeplegate Mall where there were two nesting pairs last year. There are plans to renovate the mall that may unfortunately result in the loss of the flat, gravel roof the nighthawks use for nesting. There were also two other sites with suspected nesting in Concord.

The other confirmed nest was at Black Cap Mountain in Conway. Charlie Nims monitors this site and he had an amazing night of watching on June 21, which he reported in a post to NHBirds on 6-22-2023:

A (birding) Solstice Night Cap on top of Black Cap

Sheila's 16-year-old grandson, Thomas, and I had a bonanza with Common Nighthawks (CONI) on top of Black Cap Mtn. (Conway, NH). It started with

a good omen; as soon as we got out of my vehicle, I heard Red Crossbills calling and Thomas quickly got us on four of them. Shortly after, we started on the 1.1 mile hike to the top; we had—among a few other species—a Barred Owl calling.

This evening hike up to the peak was part of NH Audubon's Common Nighthawk monitoring which I now have been doing for 5-6 years. When we got to the top, all was quiet for over 30 minutes, discouraging compared to prior years. But, right around 8:30 pm, the "floodgates" opened. We ended up having continuous CONIs, at least three and probably four, with at least two peenting and booming for a full hour. When we started down in the dark a bit after 9:30 pm, the birds were still calling.

What a great Summer Solstice treat for Thomas (a relatively new young birder) and me but, more importantly, great to see the success this declining species is having here in the Mt. Washington Valley. As an aside, I was with a nature group led by Joe Scott a couple days ago at the Eastern Slopes Airport in Fryeburg, ME (only about four air miles from Black Cap) where we had about ten CONIs. So, regardless of state borders, we have a nice cluster of nesting CONIs in this area.

Finally, we "capped" off our hike back down with probably the same Barred Owl calling. The pleasures of birding!!

There were seven nighthawk territories in the Ossipee pine barrens. Some of these territories have more than one male displaying but it takes a lot of careful, close watching to spot females in this habitat and determine whether there's more than one nest. The pine barrens is one of the strongholds



for the species in New Hampshire, but we weren't able to do enough watches to confirm nesting. It is interesting to note that the remaining nesting territories in Concord are all in or near the remnants of the Concord Pine Barrens. Also, the site that Charlie mentions at the Eastern Slopes Airport in Fryeburg is also in an area of pine barrens.

The Tin Mountain Conservation Center had two male nighthawks calling at one of their study sites in Conway. There was a nest here in 2016, but there's been only occasional activity at the site since then.

We are sad to report that, for the second year in a row, there were no nighthawks in Keene, NH. Thanks to Brett Thelen of the Harris Center and her crew of volunteers for all their watching.

A thank you to Project Nighthawk donors who fund the Common Nighthawk monitoring.

A Nighthawk Nest in Concord

This female nighthawk laid two eggs on the roof at Havenwood Heritage Heights in Concord, NH (you can see the eggs next to the middle section of the small iron bar). It had been many years since there was nighthawk activity at Havenwood, but back in 2008, Project Nighthawk put an experimental gravel nest patch on top of their four-story building. When Mark Jenks, Director of Maintenance then and now, found the nest with two eggs this summer on their lower peastone roof, he contacted me right away. With support from Mark and Mike Palmieri, we monitored the nest, hoping for hatch. By the time I took the photo on July 27, it was very late for hatch and we were getting worried. Nighthawks migrate at the end of August and there wasn't much time for a chick to develop into a well-flying adult. Unfortunately, the female abandoned a couple of days later. An examination of the unhatched eggs showed signs of very early development and, it's likely, they were made inviable by extreme heat or a cold, flooding rain.



Purple Martins in 2023 – a New Colony

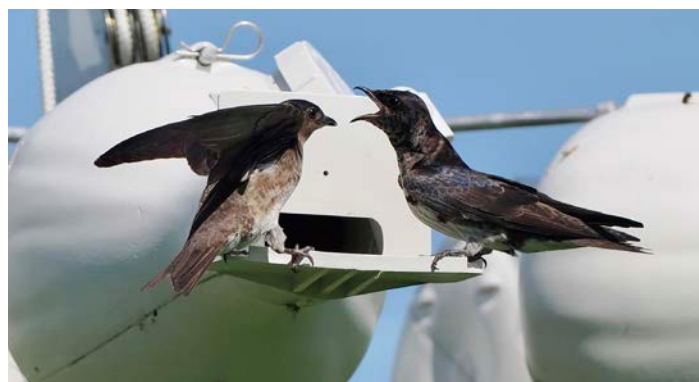
by Pamela Hunt

There was generally good news for Purple Martin colonies on New Hampshire's seacoast in 2023. One highlight was a new colony at Goss Farm in Rye, where the conservation commission erected a set of gourds in the spring of 2022. After some exploratory visits that same summer, martins settled down to nest in 2023, and five pairs produced 21 fledglings. Looking ahead, it's clear we'll need to expand the number of gourds here (currently six) and hope for continued growth.

Elsewhere on the New Hampshire coast the nesting season was somewhat mixed. Weather extremes including hot temperatures and heavy rain can take a toll on nestling martins, and we saw our share of abandoned eggs and dead nestlings. Success appears to have been proportionately higher at the colony on Island Path in Hampton, perhaps because its timing was a little later than the others. Like Goss Farm, this colony is now also at capacity, so we're contemplating adding another six gourds here as well.

A surprise came in late August, when I learned that martins had reappeared at the Portsmouth Country Club in Greenland after being absent in 2022. Not only did they return, but there were three pairs instead of the usual one. Technical issues prevented nest checks after late June, but an increase in birds in late August suggested at least some of the nests had been successful.

This means there were five successful colonies in New Hampshire for the first time since 2004, back when they were all in the Lakes Region! When the numbers are all combined it was a typical year, with 57 pairs (a new high, but not by much) fledging at least 150 young. Granted, these numbers reflect five colonies rather than the usual three (Cross Beach in Seabrook, Island Path in Hampton, and Awcomin Marsh in Rye), but with Goss Farm and Greenland in play there is plenty of room for growth.



Purple Martins at the new Goss Farm colony in Rye, NH. Photos by Jim Sparrell, 8-2-2023.

Volunteers and Research

Canada Jay Study

Story and photos by Jennifer Long



*A Canada Jay enjoying the view on Mt. Tom, in the WMNF, 3-18-2022.
Photo by Jennifer Long.*

A number of birders reported color-banded Canada Jays in eBird in the summer of 2023, so we set out to find out why. Here's what's happening. Your reports are needed.

The incredibly cute and inquisitive Canada Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) is well known to anyone hiking the alpine summits of the White Mountains. Canada Jays (also known as Gray Jays, Whiskey Jacks, Gorbies, or Camp Robbers) often have close interactions with people and are frequently photographed landing on a person's hand to take food, perching on someone's head, or photobombing a perfectly staged summit shot.

Canada Jays have a very good reason to take the calculated risk of approaching a person for food, because they must store a great deal of food to survive the harsh northern winters. Canada Jays live year-round in boreal forest regions across Canada and in the northeast United States. The southern part of their range just touches parts of northern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the Adirondacks of New York. To prepare for the coming winter, Canada Jays use specialized salivary glands to store hundreds of food morsels under tree bark dispersed all throughout their territory. It is thought that the Canada Jay's sticky saliva and their preference to cache in evergreen trees, such as spruce, aids in preserving the caches through the winter.

Nesting in these jays occurs extremely early, under the cold, snowy conditions of early March, so they must also rely



*Jennifer Long
enjoying her work
with Canada Jays,
5-16-2023.*



Canada Jay diving for some food in the hand on Mt. Field in the WMNF, 12-1-2023.



Game camera at a study nest catches a Canada Jay stealing a fake egg, 5-20-2023.

on their cached food to feed their nestlings. Luckily, Canada Jays are not picky eaters and will eat just about anything, including insects, berries, fungi, carrion, and human food, as well as the eggs and nestlings of other birds. Therefore, these birds are more than happy to pose for a photo in exchange for a tasty treat of any kind. This feeding of jays, however, has sparked much debate in the outdoor community when it comes to Leave-No-Trace principles. Should we really be feeding these birds or not?

Some research suggests that supplemental feeding by outdoor recreationists may in fact help the jays. Previous studies at Algonquin Park in Ontario, Canada, have found that food supplementation allows jays to begin breeding earlier and lay more eggs. Food supplementation also allows the nestlings to leave the nest sooner, which gives the fledglings a leg-up in finding a territory of their own. On the other hand, concern has been expressed that Canada Jays attracted to wilderness recreationists might increase local predation pressure on nesting songbirds.

To try to address this concern, Dr. Marielle Postava-Davignon from Virginia Wesleyan University and I are performing field experiments looking at the effect of human feeding on Canada Jay behavior, local density, and nest predation. The hypothesis of the study is that jays regularly fed by recreationists may become attracted to human activity, increase in density around popular recreation areas, and increase predation pressure on nesting songbirds. To test this hypothesis, we are comparing jay behavior and levels of nest predation between control sites, where no human feeding has been observed, and experimental study sites located at popular lunch spots for hikers, where feeding has been well-documented.

Our current research takes place during May and June, the peak nesting season for most forest songbirds, and includes study plots in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and in several areas in western and northern Maine. We capture and color-band Canada Jays on the study plots to track individuals, use artificial nests with game cameras to study nest predation, and use acoustic recorders to document songbird activity in the area. We rely heavily on citizen scientist observations on eBird, iNaturalist, and through our google survey to find our study sites.

When you see Canada Jays out on the trails or in other parts of New Hampshire or Maine, please visit our website (<https://sites.google.com/vwu.edu/northeastcanadajaysurvey>) and fill out our survey. It helps us to gather information on where the jays are seen, how often, at what times of year, and what types of interactions they are having with humans. You can also find more information on our study and see updates as our research progresses.

Dr. Jennifer Long is an Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of Maine at Augusta.

Field Notes Summer 2023

Anita Fernandez, Editor

Merlins Making Noise at Deer Mountain Campground

by Kathryn Frieden



Female Merlin calling loudly (top), and a nearby male Merlin (bottom), Pittsburg, NH, 6-12-2023. Photos by Roger Frieden.

It was mid-afternoon on June 12 (2023) when Roger and I pulled into the Deer Mountain State Park campground in Pittsburg, NH to do some birding. When we got out of the car, we immediately heard a loud, continuous “kee kee kee” call coming from somewhere high up and fairly close by. It went on non-stop for over 20 minutes, and my first thought was that I wouldn’t want to camp there if this happened frequently.

We were soon able to locate the bird perched motionless (other than her vocal exertions) at the top of a pine tree—a female Merlin! Then Roger spotted another Merlin in a nearby tree, also motionless and seemingly unconcerned by the racket. This was a male, with a gray back compared to the

browner back of the female. Chris Martin, NH Audubon's raptor expert, confirmed that these were both adults, not juveniles begging for food, which was one of our initial thoughts. It was too early in the season for young Merlins to be that big. Chris explained that this was most likely a mating call from the female of a new pair, so it was taking a little more work to form the pair bond, and yes, Merlins can be very noisy birds!

Whip-poor-will Whips Up a Courtship Dance

by Anita Fernandez

Just before 9:00 pm on Monday June 19, 2023, Tim Krafton was out for an evening walk, flashlight in hand, when he saw reflecting eyes in the distance. As he got closer, he saw two birds on the ground. One was acting very peculiarly, dancing around the other, tucking and bouncing. Tim was able to watch these birds for a full five minutes, and he remembers feeling like he was living in a live episode of PBS's National Geographic. They then flew off and Tim continued on his way. The next day, Tim did some research and discovered they were Eastern Whip-poor-wills. This brought back memories of childhood summers in which he would hear the call of the elusive whip-poor-will, but he had not yet been able to lay eyes on them until this June evening.

Ed. Note

What Tim observed in mid-June is a whip-poor-will courtship display. Thanks to NH Audubon Naturalist Stephanie Parkinson for the following information:

The courtship of an Eastern Whip-poor-will is not an everyday sight, and most information about their displays is from anecdotal accounts. The accounts suggest that the female may



Tim Krafton spotted his first whip-poor-will courtship dance in progress, bringing back memories of childhood summers spent listening to the chanting of these male birds. Photo by Tim, 6-19-2023 in East Wakefield.

solicit the attention of the male by strutting on the ground with wings and tail outspread and head lowered; she may rock side-to-side as she walks, circling first in one direction and then the other, producing a guttural chuckle as she moves. The male may respond by approaching the female, raising and lowering his body in a "sort of undulating" manner. He may circle the female and she in turn moves her body up and down or quivers her wings. He may then sidle up to her and touch her bill with his.

Seven Little Nuthatches Lined Up in a Row



Elaine Faletra looked out her window to what she describes as full "feed me" mode in her yard during this year's nesting season, including these seven White-breasted Nuthatches. As you can see, the one on the far right just cannot behave, and opts instead for the traditional nuthatch "pose." Photo taken by Elaine Faletra on July 5, 2023 in Warren, NH.

Migrating Virginia Rail

by Rebecca Suomala

On July 14, 2023, I was outside in my yard at 10:30 pm picking Asiatic beetles off my plants after a nighthawk watch. Suddenly, I heard a sound in the distance, overhead to the north. I thought it sounded like "kidick-kidick," the call of the Virginia Rail. I live in urban Concord, NH and I couldn't imagine a Virginia Rail would be anywhere near my house. It also seemed too early for migration, but then I heard the call again, much closer and clearer. Then again, the "kidick-kidick" was right over my head. I heard it one more time to the south of me. A Virginia Rail had flown over my house migrating south! Wow!

Even after hearing it clearly, I'm not sure I would have believed it if it hadn't been for Eric Masterson. He led a trip to Star Island that I was on, and he gave a presentation to the group about the bird calls he had recorded going over his house at night. One of his recordings was a Virginia Rail calling "kidick-kidick!" Although it's early for migration, I can't think of any other reason a rail would be flying south over my house, so I'm speculating that it was a bird that failed in its breeding attempt, perhaps due to all the rain this summer. It's certainly a yard bird I never expected.

Kingbird Attack!

by Anita Fernandez

The following information comes from Sandy Turner's post to the NHBirds email list on 7-9-2023. All photos taken by Sandy Turner on 7-9-2023 at Dodge Pond in Lyman, NH.

Sandy received a call from one of her neighbors across Dodge Pond, asking about a pair of nesting birds in their yard. One of the birds had attempted to attack the neighbor, and another had attacked a paddle boarder. Sandy had an idea what could be happening and went over to the property to take a look. There she found the reason for the aggressive bird behavior; a pair of Eastern Kingbirds had a nest with three nestlings built on a water-bicycle moored at shore – in the cup holder! This behavior reminded Sandy of watching kingbirds pecking the head of a Bald Eagle she was monitoring at Lake Umbagog. Luckily the young would fledge soon, and the neighbors' grandchildren could resume their summer swims.



A female Eastern Kingbird built her nest in the cup holder of a water-bicycle.



The pair of Eastern Kingbirds raised a brood of three chicks in a water-bicycle.

Tagged Lesser Black-backed Gull

by Anita Fernandez



Leo McKillop captured a photo of this banded and satellite-tagged Lesser Black-Backed Gull on 7-10-2023 at Hampton Beach State Park.

On July 10, 2023, Leo McKillop found a satellite-tagged Lesser Black-backed Gull at Hampton Beach State Park. This bird was part of a research project conceived by Richard Veit, a Professor of Biology at the College of Staten Island. He tagged it on Nantucket Island on February 8, 2023, and since then, it has made its way north to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and then returned to Nantucket. This traveling supports Richard's work showing the bird's "exploratory behavior" or "prospecting." The other birds also banded during the same time on Nantucket traveled to Greenland to nest.

Richard's work aims to determine the true nature of "vagrancy." This term has been used to describe bird appearances which seem to be the result of something going "wrong," such as a weather disaster or a bird's inferior capability to navigate properly. Richard's team has studied the Lesser Black-backed Gull because of its large population increase and range expansion. They looked at dispersal habits of the gulls and hypothesized that this "vagrancy" is actually taking place by more fit members of the population, who have the physical stamina and resource capabilities to explore new frontiers. These birds are seeking new suitable habitats for breeding sites because the current "market" is saturated, and climate change may be opening new areas for them. The research team thinks that the gulls' source population is from Greenland, which is why the majority of birds are returning to this area. However, the bird spotted by Leo at Hampton Beach State Park supports the idea that at least some members will begin exploring new territory in the hopes of finding suitable breeding areas.

A special thank you to Richard Veit for the information he provided.

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Barn Swallow Feeding on the Wall



In early June 2023, we had a long stretch of cold, wet weather. These conditions make it hard for aerial insectivores like swallows to find food. On June 3, it was 51 degrees F and many Barn Swallows were flying along the wall at North Beach in Hampton, picking insects off the concrete.

Yellow-throated Vireo Feeding a Cowbird



Brown-headed Cowbirds lay their eggs in other birds' nests. Here an adult Yellow-throated Vireo is feeding a fledged Brown-headed Cowbird that it undoubtedly raised after the female cowbird laid her egg in the vireo nest. Photo by Debra Powers, 7-30-2023, Gile Rd., Nottingham, NH.

A New Take on Cliff Swallow Nest Shape

by Pam Hunt

In July 2023, NH Audubon volunteers Sue Francesco and Kathy Wheeler found a highly unusual Cliff Swallow nest at the Burleigh Farm in Holderness, NH. While Cliff Swallows normally build their mud nests on vertical surfaces with the opening facing down and out, this bird built one on top of an old robin nest with the entrance facing up. Unfortunately, this nest was unsuccessful, and I am unaware of any previous cases like this for the species.



A single occupied Cliff Swallow nest displaying the traditional downward facing openings. Photo by Pam Hunt, 7-9-2022, Tamworth, NH.



This Cliff Swallow in Holderness constructed its nest differently from the typical shape. Photo by Sue Francesco and Kathy Wheeler in July 2023.



All six Barn Swallow chicks are visible in this Concord, NH nest, some looking less satisfied than others. Photo taken on 7-1-2023 by Robert A. Quinn.

The Barn Swallow Six

by Robert A. Quinn

According to the *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New Hampshire* most pairs of Barn Swallows lay four or five eggs. On July 1, 2023, I found a nest in a colony in Concord, NH, which held six hungry young. This colony is significant because of its size and location within a mile of the Statehouse in Concord (as the swallow flies!). On July 8, 2023, I counted 27 nests which equals 54 adults, and at an

average of four fledglings per nest a total of 162 individuals (189 if each nest averaged five young)! A quick search indicates that this tally is the highest in Merrimack County since the inception of eBird and going into the back issues of *New Hampshire Bird Records* the next highest is 100+ from Canterbury in the 1990s.

Double-crested Cormorant “Hangs Ten”

by Robert A Quinn

On July 11, 2023, I ventured north to Errol, NH with Tom McShane and Trudy Mott-Smith. The Androscoggin River was extremely high and mud-brown due to the rainy summer. Ragged pieces of flotsam and jetsam were floating down the rushing river, including entire trees.

One particular tree caught our eyes because it had a passenger, a Double-crested Cormorant. The sub-adult cormorant was blithely riding down the river on a tree, and since cormorants are “totipalmate” (all four toes are webbed, unlike waterfowl and gulls where only three toes are webbed), it was “hanging ten” in surfing lingo (or should we say “hanging eight”?). It cruised out of sight, but certainly not out of mind!



This photo is from a video of the “surfing” Double-crested Cormorant taken by Tom McShane in Errol, NH on 7-11-2023. The stills show a great view of its totipalmate feet.

A Northern Mockingbird Defends in Center Harbor

Posted to the NHBirds email list by Jane Rice on July 31, 2023.

When I parked at my local grocery store E.M. Heath in Center Harbor this afternoon, I noted a Northern Mockingbird in a small conifer which is part of the ornamental planting around the adjacent restaurant, Osteria Poggio. Next to the restaurant is a new post and beam outdoor dining area, open on the gable ends and protected from the local House Sparrows by a plastic owl on one of the beams. That poor mockingbird was physically attacking the plastic owl, but despite taking a serious beating from the mockingbird, the owl stood its ground, or beam, while the poor mockingbird must have been hurting, especially if this had been an ongoing confrontation. There was no reaction from other birds while I was there, but this observation answers a question that I have often wondered about, which is whether birds would recognize a plastic owl, or if it was just another useless piece of plastic that didn't work as advertised. I'm rooting for the mockingbird, especially since we don't often see them locally, but the owl appears to have the upper hand.

Field Trip Reports

Birds and Butterflies of Pondicherry

by Stephen R. Mirick

Taken from a post to the NHBirds email list 7-10-2023.

Jane and I led a "Birds and Butterflies" field trip for the Seacoast Chapter of NH Audubon to the Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge in Whitefield/Jefferson north of the White Mountains on Saturday, July 8, 2023. About 24 people joined us and we had a very long enjoyable hike down the Pondicherry Trail to Big Cherry Pond and then through the spruce forest to the Little Cherry Pond bog. We searched for all the birds and bugs we could find! A special thank you to Dave Govatski, "Mr. Pondicherry," for meeting us at the Tudor Richards platform and giving us an excellent history of the refuge.

Bird Highlights

We had a nice assortment of birds, but as is typical at this time of year, they were mostly heard rather than actually seen. We dipped on the recent Black-backed Woodpecker family that's been seen out toward Little Cherry Pond. Thanks to Holly Bauer for "keeping score" and to all the participants with better ears than I that were able to pick out some of these birds!

Wood Duck – 2

Black-billed Cuckoo – 1 calling along the trail.

Common Loon – 3, two adults and a chick on Big Cherry Pond.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – 4, beautiful views along Little Cherry Pond trail.

Least Flycatcher – 2

Great Crested Flycatcher – 1

Winter Wren – 4

Swainson's Thrush – 1

Purple Finch – 1

Nashville Warbler – 2

Mourning Warbler – 1, nice singing male not far from parking area in clearcut to the left. It was singing his heart out and some of us got some glimpses of it.

Northern Parula – 5

Magnolia Warbler – 2

Blackburnian Warbler – 1

Chestnut-sided Warbler – 5

Black-throated Blue Warbler – 3

Canada Warbler – 2, nice views of agitated female along trail.

Butterfly Highlights

The day started in fog, so we got a slow start on butterflies. Walking back on the Pondicherry Trail, the sun came out and we had a nice variety, but not large numbers of butterflies. The highlight in terms of rarities was by far the Ocola Skipper. Some photos from the day (including some from the Karner Blue Easement in Concord, NH on the way home) are here:

https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?d1=2023-07-08&d2=2023-07-08&place_id=any&user_id=stevemirick&verifiable=any

Ocola Skipper – Extraordinary find along road at Airport Marsh in Whitefield. This is a southern butterfly that strays north into the northeastern United States in the fall (September-October). There

Ocola Skipper by Steve Mirick, 7-8-2024, Pondicherry NWR.



are roughly three previous records for the state of New Hampshire, all from New Castle and Rye along the Seacoast and all from September. Unfortunately, this was seen after most trip participants had left, and it was a bit frustrating since I wasn't positive when I saw it, and then it disappeared and we couldn't relocate it. I didn't realize the identification with certainty until I got home and looked at my photos. Interestingly, there was another (rare July) report of an Ocola Skipper in Newburyport, MA the same day!

Monarch – One out at Little Cherry Pond and one at Localizer Road. My (overdue?) first definite report for the year. We had a couple more on Sunday.

Pickering Ponds Nest Walk

by Holly Bauer

All photos by Holly Bauer, 6-3-2023.



A cheerful group on the Pickering Ponds Nest Walk.

Dan Hubbard leads many field trips for NH Audubon's Seacoast Chapter but my favorite is the one he co-leads with Alan Murray in June, focusing on nests at Pickering Ponds in Rochester, NH. Both Dan and Alan keep a sharp eye on the birds at Pickering Ponds, and Alan in particular is known for discovering the nests there. With a temperature of 51 degrees, 10 mph winds from the northeast, and an occasional light mist, it didn't feel much like June, but 21 people set out to see how many nests we could see on June 3, 2023.

Two birds tied for top honors in the nest count category; we saw four nests each for American Robin and Eastern Kingbird. The kingbird nest locations varied in height, with some towards the tops of maples and one at the level of the embankment in a small shrub.

Both Orchard Oriole and Baltimore Oriole had two nests each. One tree held nests of both species, with an Orchard Oriole nest swaying in the wind at the very top of the tree and a Baltimore Oriole nest in the same tree but much lower, hanging from the outer branches.



Eastern Kingbird on a nest.



Baltimore Oriole nest.

Eastern Phoebe appeared to have three territories at the ponds. We didn't see any nests because they locate their nests inside the concrete structures designed to control water levels. Alan Murray investigated earlier and discovered the phoebes use a ledge on the inside of the structures to hold their nests.

I sometimes think that Pickering Ponds is the Warbling Vireo capital of the world; maybe they just appear to be everywhere because they are so vociferous. We saw two Warbling Vireo cup-shaped nests, suspended from forked horizontal branches. One nest was woven liberally with white feathers; the second nest was composed of a fluffy material that looked like cattail, and from that nest, the incubating vireo kept warbling non-stop.

Similar to Warbling Vireos, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers take advantage of forked branches but they use a vertical fork, building their nests in the crook of a horizontal branch with an angled branch providing some shelter overhead. The tiny



Warbling Vireo nest with white feathers woven in.



American Redstart nest.



Note the lichen in this Blue-gray Gnatcatcher nest.



Gray Catbird on a nest.

gnatcatcher nests are constructed from lichen and spider webs, similar to a hummingbird's.

We also saw a small (2-3") Least Flycatcher nest wedged between White Pine branches and a Yellow Warbler nest in the fork of a small shrub.

Those who braved the cold and the threat of rain until the end of the field trip were treated to the sight of a Hairy Woodpecker nestling being fed by both of its parents.

Our last nest of the day was found by Melissa Fleming. She spotted a small round American Redstart nest, lined with pine needles, in a low shrub.

In addition to our nest tally, we saw evidence of breeding by a female Hooded Merganser with three young and a female Wood Duck with eight ducklings trailing behind her.

Our big miss of the day was due to heavy rains earlier in May. Alan had watched Belted Kingfishers excavating a burrow on the banks of the Cocheco River. Kingfishers excavate an upward sloping tunnel in a soft bank that can

extend from three to six feet into the bank (according to All About Birds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology). That would have been a wonderful sight to see, but unfortunately, a flood washed out the burrow and the kingfishers moved on.

Although we focused on nests, Zeke Cornell kept our eBird list for us and we tallied a very respectable total of 57 species for the day (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S140392805>).

A Female Orchard Oriole Starts with a Single Blade of Grass

by Melissa Moore

Alan Murray took these photos at Pickering Ponds in Rochester, NH. They illustrate how an Orchard Oriole builds a nest. Three of the photos show the female building the nest on June 20.

The female Orchard Oriole does most of the nest building. The male may help gather material, but the weaving of the nest is completed by the female. She begins her nest building with a single strand of grass among forked branches away from the main trunk.

The Orchard Oriole's instinct to weave an intricate hanging nest is unique among bird species. After the supporting blades of grass are looped around the branch and secured, she will continue her weaving using in and out movements of her beak to add more long fibers. The nest grows more dense with the addition of more strands of grass. The final nest is likely to measure 4" across and 3" deep. Her nest building activity may span up to six days.

Once the Orchard Oriole female is satisfied with the overall shape of her nest, she gathers plant down. She will add the plant down to the purse-like nest's interior to have a soft place for her eggs. A typical clutch is four to six eggs.

The incubation period for this species is 12-14 days. At hatching, both the female and male launch into action and bring insects to their brood. The nest the female wove weeks ago stood the test of time and supported the weight of this clutch of eggs throughout the incubation period. After an additional 11-14 days pass, the young will try their wings and leave the nest. Some young birds choose to stay in close proximity to one or both parents for a few weeks after fledging.



Here you can see the female weaving the long grass into the nest.



The female bringing in plant down.



The female Orchard Oriole with a long, single strand of grass.



On July 19, 2023, Alan Murray photographed the female feeding at least two nestlings.

Nesting Eastern Screech-Owl in Concord

by Rebecca Suomala

All photos were taken by the author in Concord, NH.



The first time I saw the Eastern Screech-Owl that had been roosting for months in my neighborhood, 3-28-2024.

In New Hampshire, Eastern Screech-Owls are found primarily in the southeastern part of the state. They are uncommon in the western and middle portion of the state, and very rare north of the Lakes Region. There are not many reports for Concord, NH where I live. Although the species was recorded breeding in Concord in 2007 and 2008, there was only one other eBird report until 2022. In March of 2023, I appeared to be the last person in my neighborhood to find out that a screech-owl was roosting not far from my house. Evidently, it had been present since November of 2022 but I never saw it. Amazing!

After finally seeing the owl sitting in its hole on March 28, I tried to check on it most evenings hoping for signs of nesting. It was present regularly until April 10 when it vanished. Alas! The crowds of people who had been coming to see the owl, faded away, to the relief of the neighbors. I couldn't quite give up though, so on April 27, I decided to just sit quietly, partially out of sight, and watch the hole until it got dark. Finally, as it was getting hard to see, an adult screech-owl flew in, landed in a tree near the hole, then flew to the next door neighbor's yard and called softly a few times. A second owl flew towards the first owl and landed out of sight. I didn't see if it came from the hole, but I was hopeful. It wasn't until May 10 that I saw the owl again, this time it was in the hole in the evening. Hmmm, was this just an occasional roost hole? I saw the bird in the hole only a few more times, but then on May 31, I heard a youngster begging from inside the hole. We had nesting!



The first fledged young that I saw, calling constantly to be fed, 6-7-2023.

We (the interested locals and I) eventually confirmed four young. On June 7, at least one owlet had fledged and was calling constantly in a nearby tree while two owlets looked out of the hole. The adult sat on a porch light, then flew to the tree with the fledgling, caught something in the grass, and fed the owlet. A few minutes later, the fledgling fluttered down from the tree and landed in the grass. It clearly couldn't fly well, but I was amazed to see it walk across the driveway and climb up the trunk of a small tree. It has no trouble walking vertically up the tree using its sharp talons.

The next day, June 8, was full of drama. At 8:30 in the morning, my friend Mary tracked me down to tell me that an owlet was in the street. Yikes! By the time I arrived, someone had moved it to the base of a nearby tree. I picked it up and put it on a branch just over my head where I thought it would be safer. When I went by a little later, it had moved out towards the end of the branch. All this time, we were being watched by an adult and another fledged youngster that were sitting together in a tree over the road. A little later in the morning, Mark Suomala was there when a cement truck drove by and brushed the branch with the adult and fledgling. He asked them to take a different route on their way out and they kindly complied. In the evening, I was lucky enough to watch the fourth young fledge at 8:45 pm, gliding across the street to a clumsy landing in a small bush. We were able to locate all four youngsters, mostly by their begging calls from nearby bushes and trees.

On the evening of June 9, I got another call. One of the chicks had fallen out of the tree and wasn't moving. By the time I got there, it had died, apparently of starvation. While we know this happens to young birds, it's not often you actually see it happen. If there's not enough food, the smallest young don't survive, but in this case something else may have



Two chicks on the evening of June 8: the chick that landed in the street and was moved to the base of the tree (above) and a slightly older chick in the tree above (below).



been going on. Mary brought me the wing of a screech-owl she had found the day before on a street near the nest. It was an adult wing, not a youngster as I expected. We had recently been seeing only one adult and it seems likely the other member of the pair died, possibly from a car collision or predation by something such as a cat. This would also explain a youngster dying of starvation. One adult alone might not be able to bring in enough food for all the fledglings.

We were guessing the remaining adult was a female and she successfully raised the remaining three young as best we could tell. We followed them as they very gradually moved away from the nest tree. Melanie, who lived near the nest, was the expert at finding the owls. The young seemed to roost in the same tree and we could usually hear them begging in the evening. At first, they only moved a few houses away. By the end of June, they had moved a couple of blocks from the nest site and it became harder to find them as they traveled more each night. The last time I saw the family was on July 6 when I could confirm at least two



The adult keeping an eye on its fledging chicks. I didn't usually see it fly in and it looked so much like part of the light that I didn't notice it until a mockingbird or robin started making alarm calls.

April 4-9 – female sitting in hole

April 10 – egg laying starts (owl no longer appeared in the hole)

May 11 – estimated hatch

June 5 or 6 – first fledging

Epilogue

At least one screech-owl remained in the neighborhood as of December 2023. When I searched for the owls during the summer, it was the alarm calls of other birds that were most helpful in locating them. In November, when I finally paid attention to the alarm calls of Blue Jays one morning, I discovered a roosting screech-owl. I'm hopeful it stays around. Because the crowds of people made the neighbors uncomfortable, I will not be sharing the exact location.



Despite all the nesting activity in my neighborhood, it wasn't until July 1 when I finally ticked off an Eastern Screech-Owl for my yard. The adult perched on the house across the street at 6:00 pm where I could see it from my side yard. The robin alarm calls were so loud they alerted me despite my ear protectors and the sound of my lawn mower!

Backyard Birder

The Nesting Habits of Wacky Wrens

by George Gavutis, Jr.



Carolina Wren by Debra Powers.

The most common wren species in the Kensington, NH area is the House Wren. A birder friend of mine in central Maine is jealous of how common they are here most years—when he hardly ever finds one there. They are anything but a favorite of mine, though. I find it very frustrating that the males, as soon as they return from the southlands, promptly begin filling all the songbird nest boxes in what they consider to be “their territory” with a maze of twigs and sticks. This is their way of assuring that those boxes will not be used by other species like the bluebirds and swallows. Then, if Johnny Wren is successful in attracting Jenny Wren to nest in one of “his” boxes, the others will likely not get occupied by any other birds. We also find the loud and monotonous song of this species annoying, but I am sure that Jenny would disagree. We sometimes get another species of wren to nest in this area, but only very rarely – the Winter Wren. They are much more common nesters up north. I have only found their nests deep in the Hog Hill Swamp in adjacent East Kingston, where their preferred site is off the ground under the huge root mats of windfallen trees.

Finally, there is now our new species – the Carolina Wren. They prefer not to migrate south for the winter so, if we have a tough winter, many of them do not survive. This wren is a bit larger than the others and has an extensive repertoire of songs and calls, all very loud and commanding. I thought they were cavity-nesters that would likely occupy an old

woodpecker hole or a nest box, but the only two nests I have observed have been in ridiculous places. The first one was pointed out to me by Hans, who lives on Moulton Ridge. It was in a small barn in plain view, just sitting in a plant pot containing some soil that was hanging on a back wall, and if that wasn't a crazy enough place for a nest, this April I kept finding Carolina Wrens in one of our garages whenever I opened the overhead door. I kept wondering how they got in there and why but assumed that because they were a more southern species, they might need a protected place to spend the night in our somewhat colder (sometimes) New England climate. May arrived, however, and I was still finding them in the garage daily. I finally began hearing some faint “cheeping” calls coming from a plastic bag that was hung on a nail on the wall and was stuffed full of grocery-type plastic bags for possible reuse. I just couldn't believe there could ever be a nest in a place like that, but there it had to be. I had just unknowingly stuffed another bag in there a few days earlier, and then later retrieved it, apparently without creating a crisis. I avoided bothering them any further. A bit of nesting material began accumulating in a sagged portion of the outer bag and when I peered in one day, there was a mostly-feathered baby wren scrunched down and looking back at me. A day later, there were three baby wrens visible. They had apparently found the tunnel through the stuffed-in bags that their parents had made to build and then access the nest.

I assumed the nestlings would soon be able to fly out from the bag and through the open garage door. That is what our bluebirds and other species are always able to do when launching from our nest boxes on their maiden voyages, often flying over a hundred feet up into a nearby tree. Not so these wrens. It turns out their wings were not fully developed, and they could barely manage to flutter to the garage floor, similar to what happens when young owls first depart their nest sites long before they can actually fly. So, now there were at least four or five half-grown, urchin “wrenlets” scampering and fluttering all around our garage and being fed there by their parents. When it became obvious that they had no intention of leaving anytime soon, I decided to close the garage door each night. This would at least preclude entry by the predators too large to fit through the tiny opening next to the bottom of the door that the parent-wrens were using. Of course, smaller potential predators like shrews, weasels, and chipmunks would still be able to gain entrance.

To hasten the departure of the still-flightless, would-be fledglings, I began providing the adults with wet mealworms so they wouldn't have to compete with all the other yard birds at the feeders for these delicacies. By early June, the young wrens that had been scurrying and fluttering around on the floor (except for one that had dropped into an empty

coffee can and succumbed) had finally flown from the garage and were being fed by the parents in the nearby shrubbery. I removed what I thought of as a “poor excuse for a nest” from the plastic bags, thinking that would be the end of it, but a few weeks later, I began seeing an adult wren in the garage again! I reached down into the plastic bags and sure enough, there was another nest that already had a couple of cold eggs in it. A few days later, there were at least four warm eggs, indicating that the adult female had already begun to incubate them. Here we go again!!! The eggs hatched, the parents continued to enter with food through the crack under the garage door, the young left the nest still unable to fly, but at least this time they all exited the garage without incident after I raised the door and left it open the following day. I was very glad the parents stopped after two broods, unlike our bluebirds that have been producing three broods for each of the past few years, but at least having enough sense to utilize the outdoor nesting boxes. We are very glad to have our garage back!

The Merlin App: Pitfalls of Summer

by Jason Pietrzak

Bernd Heinrich described the sensation of finding a bird with telemetry equipment for the first time in *Mind of the Raven*, likening it to a superpower. I felt the same thing the first time I found a condor with a telemetry antenna, and I can raise the same feeling when I really think about Cornell’s Merlin app. Merlin uses your phone’s microphone to analyze bird sounds and suggests identification with remarkable accuracy. Keyword “**suggests**.” In capable hands, Merlin is a modern miracle, but beware it can lead you astray! I’ve never been a natural ear-birder. Every year, just before spring, I gather up all my resources and re-train using all the tricks and I still struggle and sometimes forget and embarrass myself. This is where I seek suggestions from Merlin.

Walking through the wood in early spring in New Hampshire can be a little overwhelming on the ears. A dozen or more songs coming from every direction, many high up in the leaves. The ears and mind tire after filtering copious vireos and warblers. Lifting my phone before me, Merlin begins listing birds: Chipping Sparrow, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Pine Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo... I’m connecting the dots between the listed birds and the songs I’m hearing. Sometimes my ears are picking up a Red-eyed Vireo right above me and another one just a little ways farther down the trail and a third one in the other direction, but I’m not sure I actually hear that Philly Vireo, and I certainly don’t see one. I guess it’s best to trust

Merlin and just put it on my list, right? Not.

Here’s where birders must engage their other resources, because Merlin should be just one of your birding tools. How well do you know your vocalizations? Is it the right time of year to find this bird here? Is the habitat right? Should you get a visual confirmation? Based on some preliminary research, it appears that Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos are not distinguishable by vocalization alone in New Hampshire. As Red-eyeds are ubiquitous here, they are by far more likely and NHeBird reviewers won’t typically accept a Philadelphia report without visual confirmation. Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireo songs are similar enough that I’ve literally been looking at a singing Red-eyed and watched Merlin report it as both species simultaneously.



Philadelphia Vireos sound so similar to Red-eyed Vireos that a visual confirmation is needed to confirm the identification. Photo by Zeke Cornell, 6-11-2023, Dixville, NH.

Merlin takes location into consideration when suggesting IDs, so be careful if you’ve recently traveled. I’ve experienced glitches with this feature and Merlin reported a Mountain Elaenia in Concord and a Eurasian Eagle-Owl on the coast. I’ve also had Merlin mistake background sounds like cars or kids as birds. Again, consider Merlin’s suggestions, but use your other tools to confirm (preferably visually) before filling out your eBird list. Here are some Merlin mistakes I picked up during the summer of 2023 that Merlin users should watch out for.

The above discussed **Red-eyed Vireo/Philadelphia Vireo** issue came up for me a few times a month. On a couple of occasions **Blue-headed Vireo** was added to the mix. Range is a good clue in scrutinizing this Merlin ID. Philadelphia Vireos migrate all across the state and nest in the far north, so finding one anywhere is a possibility, but visual confirmation is essential.

I occasionally experienced confusion between **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and **Yellow Warbler**, typically at the start of a Merlin recording, as if the app had to warm up a little

before making the correct ID. Chestnut-sided Warblers have an alternate song that sounds a little like a Yellow Warbler, and Yellow Warblers have an alternate song that sounds a little like a Chestnut-sided. Habitat is a good clue with these species, although there is overlap. Patience in listening to more vocalizations may clear things up.

Confusion between **Cerulean Warbler** and **Black-throated Blue Warbler** vocalizations has been discussed in previous issues of this publication, and I have seen Merlin make this error in southern areas of the state. Cerulean Warblers are rare and any suspected birds need to be visually confirmed.

Orchard Oriole and **Baltimore Oriole** each have an exciting repertoire of whistles and rattles with some overlap. Knowledge of status and distribution is the place to start. Baltimore is widespread whereas Orchard is limited to a handful of reliable spots. When in doubt, get visual confirmation.

Lastly, a frequent issue from traveling birders in the summer was confusion between **Swamp Sparrow**, **Chipping Sparrow**, **Dark-eyed Junco**, **Pine Warbler**, and **Worm-eating Warbler**. Again, birders can use their knowledge of range and habitat to judge Merlin's accuracy, then try for a visual confirmation.

These are just the most common errors I encountered. Since Merlin is constantly being updated and (hopefully) improved, some of them may be addressed. The vast majority of the time, Merlin can be relied on to accurately get you in the ballpark, if not on an exact ID, and that alone makes it an incredible tool for most birders. It's vital to remember that Merlin is only one tool in your birding kit and it takes some skill to use it well. I personally use Merlin all the time, juggling my phone, binoculars, and one-year-old. Next time you see somebody meandering through the woods, phone held straight up to the sky, stop and say hello!

Gannet Iris Color impacted by Bird Flu

by Iain MacLeod

Every year, I lead birding trips for Squam Lakes Natural Science Center to my homeland in Scotland. In 2023, I led two excursions to the Orkney and Shetland Islands. One of the highlights of the trip is a boat expedition to the spectacular seabird cliffs on the Isle of Noss. Thousands of Northern Gannets breed there and gather around the boat on the way back to harbor for a fish treat. Getting so close to the gannets was a photographer's dream.

I noticed that several of the gannets had oddly-colored irises. A normal gannet has a light blue iris, but several of the ones I saw had black irises. I soon found out why.

Researchers at the Bass Rock in southern Scotland (home to the largest Northern Gannet colony in the world) noticed this phenomenon last year. The team took blood samples from 18 apparently healthy adult gannets with both normal and black irises which were tested for bird flu antibodies to determine whether the birds had been previously infected. Eight tested positive, of which seven had black irises.

Why gannets that have survived bird flu should have black irises is a mystery and scientists don't yet know if the iris color impacts the vision in that eye.

I discovered first hand that it doesn't always impact both eyes. I took the photo of a gannet that shows only one impacted iris. Someone on the trip christened it the "David Bowie bird."



Northern Gannet with only one eye impacted by avian flu. Photo by Iain MacLeod during his 2023 trip to Scotland. See this photo in color in the print version on the inside front cover.

New Hampshire Lakes Region Osprey Monitoring

by Iain MacLeod

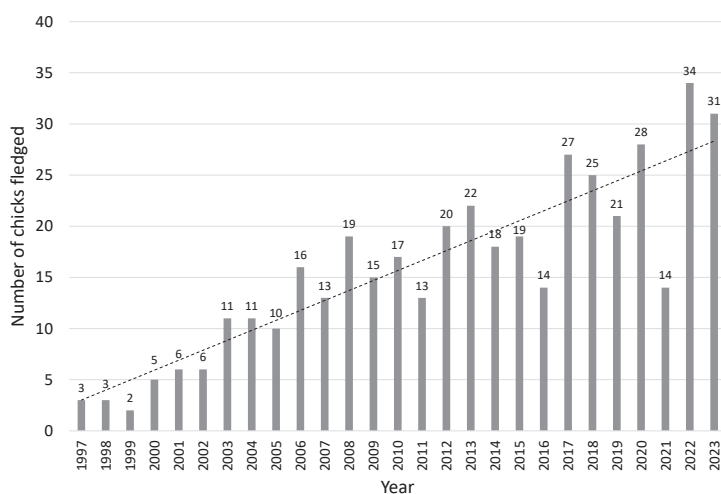
Ospreys are now a widespread nesting bird throughout New Hampshire. There are known nests in every watershed. This is a remarkable turnaround since the post-DDT low point in 1981, when only one successful nest was known in the entire state and all nesting attempts were confined to the watershed of the Androscoggin River near Errol.

In May 1997, a new Osprey nest was discovered near the shore of Lake Winnisquam in the town of Belmont – the first known nesting attempt in the Lakes Region in living memory. For the last 27 years, I have spearheaded an effort to systematically monitor the growing nesting population of Ospreys in the Lakes Region, finding new nests, and keeping track of nesting success and chick production. I have been ably assisted by Hal Bush, Everett McLaughlin, Mike Cosker and Chris Martin.

As the Osprey population has increased throughout New Hampshire, there has been less urgency in monitoring on a state-wide scale. Although NH Audubon's Chris Martin keeps a database on known nest locations, only the Lakes Region study area has been consistently monitored each year for occupancy and production. This acts as a good sample monitoring program. Theoretically, nesting success or failure in this central part of the state provides us with an idea of the overall Osprey picture statewide.

Ospreys build large stick nests and prefer to locate them on the tallest available location in any area. That might be a super-canopy pine within a densely wooded area or a dead snag in a beaver pond, an electric pole in a utility corridor or a cell tower. Ospreys will also readily use

Figure 1. The number of Osprey chicks fledged from the Lakes Region population each year from 1997 to 2023 (total = 423).



Osprey with fish by Debra Powers.

platforms on poles and over the years, I have also coordinated the installation of several of these poles in spots where Ospreys needed a helping hand.

In 1997, two nests were located and a total of three chicks were fledged. In 2023, there were 21 active nests that produced 31 chicks. Since 1997, I have tracked the outcomes of 329 nesting attempts resulting in the total chick production of 423 (Figure 1).

The first cell tower nest was documented in 2008. In 2023, ten nests (48% of active nests) were on cell towers, so this has become a favorite for my study birds and we know this is true for the rest of the state. Take a careful look at any cell tower near water and you might find it is occupied by a pair of Ospreys. These cell tower nests are very successful. They are safe from predators and provide a very solid superstructure on which to place the nests.

One of the most interesting dynamics that is emerging for Ospreys throughout the eastern US is competition from the now-thriving Bald Eagle population. Ospreys and Bald Eagles compete for resources and eagles are inveterate pirates that will happily (and very efficiently) rob an Osprey of its hard-earned fish catch. Eagles will also take over Osprey nests and have now been documented on multiple occasions preying on Osprey chicks. In some parts of coastal Maine, eagles have been described as “harvesting Osprey chicks” from vulnerable nests and Osprey numbers are declining in those areas. Counts of migrating Ospreys at Pack Monadnock (and at almost all inland hawkwatch sites in the north-east) show a dramatic decline in migrating Ospreys (while also documenting a steady rise in Bald Eagles). In 2023, I had the first hard evidence of an eagle preying on an Osprey nest in Tilton. It will be interesting to see if this plays out on a more frequent basis. Figure 1 shows the results of nest monitoring efforts in the Lakes Region from 1997 to 2023.

Birding Prescott Farm, Laconia

by Rob Woodward



Prescott Farm by Rob Woodward.

This is quite a place! Prescott Farm Environmental Education Center is a private non-profit organization that, among many other things, runs educational programs on its 160-acre farm year-round. The property has been in the Prescott family since Colonel Dudley Prescott was awarded 700 acres in 1797 for his service in the Revolutionary War. The property has been more or less kept in the family and today is still in part a private residence. In 1997, a non-profit conservation foundation was set up that established a working relationship with NH Audubon and then became independent in 2009. In 2023, a new building, the Innovation Center, was completed to provide additional indoor classroom space and other uses. Innovation is a good name for this building and could apply to the entire operation. With the addition of new solar panels, the center is now completely fossil fuel-free.

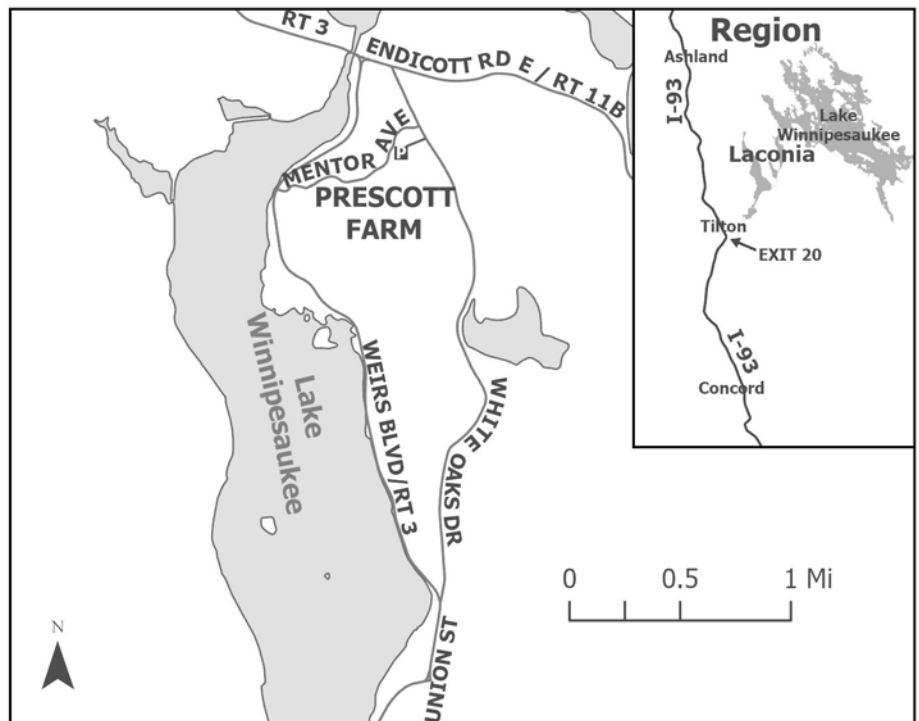
On a warm sunny June day, I visited Prescott Farm to gather some additional information for this article. I was greeted by Phoebe Van Scoy-Giessler, development and communications director, who rolled out the red carpet for me by giving me a private tour, starting with the Pardoe Education Center. There, I got a quick lesson in how their geothermal heating system works. Warm water from deep in the ground is pumped up, heated a little more, and provides enough heat for the building. Classroom and office space is housed here in a building constructed with local materials. I also got to see the new

Innovation Center and we nailed down the location of some special trees on the property.

Three miles of trails wind their way through woods and, across the street, open fields. Some trees are 200 years old. You can identify particularly old trees by how their branches extend outward as they did when these woods were open fields. A classic example is the Wolf Tree, a large white pine at the intersection of the Forest and Orange Trails. A Paper Birch visible from the Sugar Trail is the oldest in Belknap County, and the Black Walnut in the yard adjacent to the farm house may be the oldest of its kind in the state, planted in 1886. Near the walnut tree is Harold's Rock, a large glacial erratic named for a farm hand who preferred to eat his lunch on top of this boulder.

To bird the property, from the upper parking lot, I start down the Blue Trail that hugs the western perimeter of the sanctuary. The deep woods are good for all the woodland songbirds of our region. Walk slowly and carefully. On May 11, 2022, I found and photographed a Brown Creeper bringing food to its nest hidden under loose bark on a pine tree. On the right, you will come to a vernal pool that can attract Louisiana Waterthrush. This trail eventually leads to Alan's Overlook on a high rocky ledge overlooking the pond. This is a good place to stop and add a few marsh birds to your day's list. This trail continues around the marsh and where it meets a small stream. I often hear Winter Wren singing its boisterous song. After you get to the top of the hill, you will reach the intersection with the Scat Ridge Trail on the right. Take this trail for more access to the pond.

I have tried without luck to find Sora and Virginia Rail, but I did see a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk on this trail



Map by Nora E. Hanke.

on August 10, 2020. My three other reports for this raptor at this preserve suggest it may be the most reliable place in the county for this species. Check the tips of the snags for Olive-sided Flycatcher in migration. I found one here quietly perched on June 2, 2022.

Continue on the Pond Loop Trail until you see the Sugar Trail on the right. Follow this trail to see the sugar house up close. This is where the hands-on maple sugaring program is held in season. The trail continues uphill to the edge of the field where you are likely to find Indigo Bunting and Bobolink in season. On July 11, 2018, I counted 12 Bobolinks perched on the fence that crosses the field, indicating successful breeding. As you near the farm buildings, expect to find nesting Eastern Bluebird and House Wren.

The trail continues around the edge of the field and through the gardens that produce the products used in some of their programs. Follow the trail past the solar collectors and back to the parking lot. There are more trails across the street that skirt the perimeter of the field. The potential is there for a good bluebird trail that would likely house Tree Swallows if not bluebirds.

Prescott Farm offers a wide variety of year-round programming for children and adults called Community Connections that run the gamut from day camps and making maple candy for kids to snowshoe yoga and frogging by ear for adults. The on-site maple sugar house provides the materials for some of these programs, including a participatory program to learn maple sugaring in March.

Whether you visit to participate in a program or for an early morning bird walk on your own, you will find your connection to nature among the tall trees, wetlands, and fields at Prescott Farm.

Directions

From Rt. 93 traveling north, take Exit 20 following Rt. 3/Laconia Road to Court Street into downtown Laconia.

From downtown Laconia, travel north on Union Avenue 2.5 miles and turn left on Weirs Boulevard. After half a mile, stay right on White Oaks Road. Prescott Farm is 2 miles up



The sugar house at Prescott Farm by Rob Woodward.

the road at 928 White Oaks Road on the left.

2001: A Big Year Odyssey

by Rob Woodward

While researching some data in my birder's journal, I recently rediscovered that in 2001 I ran a Big Year in New Hampshire. It was long enough ago that it was largely forgotten. My goal was not to break the state record but rather to tally 230 species, since my previous high count was 218. I'm sure if you looked up the dates, you would find that my birding outings were limited primarily to weekends. A review of that year illustrates some changes in the bird life of New Hampshire and in my birding style. Here are the highlights as I recorded them in my birder's journal, without which I would remember almost none of this, illustrating the value of keeping a birder's journal.



The Lark Sparrow was found in December 2000 but lingered into 2001 for Rob's Big Year. Photo by Steve Mirick, 12-27-2000, Durham, NH.

January 1

I burst out of the gate on New Year's Day, recording American Robin before 11:00 am (unusual enough then that I made note of it) and trying for the Lark Sparrow that had been present at Durham Point in Dover since at least December 27, 2000. I had seen it just two days before but not on this day. On January 3, however, I returned again and "got it instantly," my journal says.

I had a court appearance in Whitefield on January 17 so, on my way back to Concord, I stopped at Trudeau Road in Bethlehem and found several White-winged Crossbills. Journal: "Everything was quiet, cold, white, and wintry, really nice. [If I had known winter was so wonderful, I wouldn't have bought a house in Florida!] This could be the only crossbill this year," I predicted. It was!

January 20

On my second trip of the year to the seacoast, I found my first of nine state life birds this year, a Thick-billed Murre "with Steve [Mirick?] and [illegible]" as written in my journal.

January 27

Back to the seacoast, where I added Lesser Black-backed Gull in Newmarket and then I joined six other people to wait for dusk to see a Short-eared Owl that had been frequenting the area of Fantini's Restaurant in Seabrook [at the Seabrook Back Dunes, now residences]. Journal: "This is a good bonus bird for my NH Big Year. The goal is 230, plenty." Remember, I only had weekends and I would be out-of-state a lot.

January 28

I led my annual Bald Eagle trip for the Capital Area Chapter of NH Audubon along the Merrimack River from Concord to Manchester. The highlight wasn't the two Peregrine Falcons or the five to six Bald Eagles but the pancake breakfast afterward with the group at Bickford's in Manchester. Those were the good old days!

February 26

After court duty in Laconia, I successfully checked the Winnepesaukee River in Tilton for Barrow's Goldeneye after two prior misses. Journal: "This, along with the Rough-legged Hawk on Saturday [somewhere on the coast] really boosts my NH Big Year. I can't believe spring is near as I still need several more winter species, it's coming too fast." Get used to time flying by on a Big Year.

March was a quiet month for the Big Year, in part due to all the snow, so much that state offices were closed on March 10, a rare event.

April 12

The Northern Shoveler at Horseshoe Pond in Concord was a state life bird.

April 23

It was such a cold and snowy winter, especially in March, that the last patch of snow in my yard didn't melt until today.

May 21

At midnight last night, I finished yet another state Big Day with Iain MacLeod and George Robbins. A Big Day within a Big Year, it doesn't get any bigger than that! I'm sure I added many year birds during that arduous twenty-four hours. My year list stood at an even 200 species, only 30 more to go.

June 3

I joined a NH Audubon field trip at Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge in Whitefield/Jefferson. I'm surprised I didn't turn around before I got there as it rained all the way up. Good thing I didn't. Right there in the railroad tracks was the bird of the year: Northern Wheatear! A totally unexpected surprise. Journal: "We couldn't believe it! ... It left all of us very excited." I also added Olive-sided Flycatcher, American

Bittern, and Mourning Warbler. Journal: "This is the kind of trip that boosts your hopes." The unexpected rarity is crucial in a Big Year to offset the sure thing you are bound to miss.

June 10

Rise and shine at 3:40 am to run my Breeding Bird Survey, then I went "just past the Lee traffic circle" to see a Grasshopper Sparrow. Who knows why I stopped here for this species since I saw three more at Concord Airport two weeks later. To add more sparrows to the list, I continued on to the seacoast for both "Sharp-tailed Sparrows," bringing my year list up to 213. A good total but not without its price. Journal: "I'm starting to get worn out going out every weekend without rest. I haven't changed the oil yet in the car, the house and yard need work, and I don't have a garden." A Big Year requires sacrifice and dedication!

Early on the morning of June 11, I heard a Black-billed Cuckoo out the open window of my bedroom and early the next morning, at the same location, I heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Sometimes in this game you can succeed without trying!

The exact dates are uncertain, but during the third week in June, I camped at the Deer Mountain campground in Pittsburg. I always loved going up there. My first trip was with Bill Goodwill on the Capital Area Chapter's annual Pittsburg Weekend field trip in June of 1994. We camped at Deer Mountain and heard Olive-sided Flycatcher early the first morning in the campground. I didn't get up to look at it since it was so early and I thought I would see one later. It wasn't until June 27, 1997 that I saw my life Olive-sided here at Deer Mountain.

In 2001, I only stayed for two nights while in prior years I would stay for three nights. I added Merlin and Philadelphia Vireo for species number 216 and 217. Surprisingly, it would be another 22 years before I would return to Pittsburg! I missed Gray Jay and had some concerns about reaching my goal. Journal: "It's hard to believe I have six full months to



Sedge Wren by Steve Mirick, 7-29-2001, Durham, NH.

find only 13 species but this will be hard. [It was!] I really need some rarities to ensure 230.”

July 31

After work, I drove over to Durham and found the two Sedge Wrens at Foss Farm. An excellent year bird and a life bird, but I have no memory of seeing these two rare birds whatsoever.

August 4

I hiked the Caps Ridge Trail in the White Mountains to search again for Spruce Grouse and Gray Jay. Sure enough, at Pot Hole Rocks, I found three Gray Jays, one landed only 10 feet away as these tame birds are prone to do. I now had 219 ticks for the Big Year, breaking my previous high of 218.

August 11

This doesn't happen very often! On a whalewatch out of Rye we failed to see any whales, earning me a voucher for a free trip. Wilson's Storm-Petrel was an easy addition to the list but the Great Shearwaters seen were outside New Hampshire waters and therefore out of bounds.

During late August, I put in seven evenings studying Common Nighthawk migration from my backyard, the early beginnings of a major research project.

August 29

Journal: “The last two mornings [before work], I have gone to Horseshoe Pond to search for Buff-breasted Sandpiper.” After work, I also tried the Canterbury Sod Farm and again at Horseshoe without luck. A good try though; we don't try often enough for this rare species.

September 9

Journal: “Did a little hawkwatching at Mt. Kearsarge to practice for this week's workshop.” I don't remember what the workshop was about, but I did not see much in the way of raptors on this or on a few other scouting trips to this site. Mt. Kearsarge would never become a hawkwatching destination.

September 11

Journal: “Today is a dark and horrible day” An important date in American history.

September 15

A Big Year requires persistence. I tried more hawkwatching, this time at Pack Monadnock, long before it became the official hawkwatch site it is today. What luck! A Black Vulture soared down from somewhere up north and then a Golden Eagle, “distant but confirmed by the experts,” one of whom was Iain MacLeod, so I counted it (#224).

September 21

After leading a chapter field trip to Elm Brook Park in Hopkinton, I ran over to the seacoast where I saw a Laughing Gull in Rye Harbor (#225), a good find, but a trip to the Isles of Shoals the next day was a disappointment with no new birds for the year.

October 7

To think I had to go all the way to Elm Brook Park in Hopkinton to find a White-crowned Sparrow (#226). Either the community vegetable gardens off Clinton Street in Concord weren't established yet or Concord birders hadn't explored them, but they are loaded with sparrows in October.

October 14

While driving past the South End Marsh in Concord (it must have been from the highway), I noticed it was “covered” with ducks. I had a closer look and one was an American Coot (#227), a surprise rarity. Journal: “Now I am certain I can get over 230.” I did, and it didn't take long.



*Ash-throated Flycatcher by
Steve Mirick, 10-26-2001,
Concord, NH.*

October 26

Before I left work for the day, I saw the news flash from the NH Birds email list – Ash-throated Flycatcher at Silk Farm Sanctuary in Concord! A huge bonus bird for the list and only the second New Hampshire state record. Journal: “It's not every day I get a life bird on the way home from work.”

November 4

My favorite Capital Area Chapter field trip of the year – our annual seacoast trip led by Bob Quinn and George Robbins, a power duo if ever there was one. There was always something interesting to see every year. Journal: “Things started out slow but we got Snow Bunting (#229) and gannet – #230!” I reached my goal and it was only early November. “I should end up around 235”, I forecasted. Let's see if I was right.

November 10

I am back on the seacoast, this time with the Amoskeag Chapter, probably led by Hank Chary. (Yes, Manchester had an Audubon chapter!) No Lapland Longspur as I had hoped, but instead a Common Redpoll was # 231.

November 17

A Snowy Owl was reported from the area of the intersection of Routes 3 and 302 in Twin Mountain. Despite a search by me and several others it was not relocated, but I did see a Pine Grosbeak (#232), so the long trip was not for nothing. On the way home, I stopped in Plymouth and found more Pine Grosbeaks in the crab apple trees, but no Bohemian Waxwings.

December 1

Another Big Day! This time I teamed up with birding buddy Murray Jukes and his father who was visiting from Manchester, England. Our goal was to break the state December Big Day record of 64. Blimey, we could only find 57 species, but I did get Bohemian Waxwing (# 233) in Plymouth and maybe the most interesting sighting of the year. Journal: "... in Durham we had two singing Carolina Wrens, #234, and a state lifer and long-time state nemesis bird." That's how rare this species used to be in New Hampshire, that I searched and searched and didn't find one until 2001. Now, I could find one, even in Laconia, almost any day of the week.

December 25

Another trip to the seacoast with hopes of finding something new. At Odiorne Point State Park I saw my first and only "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler in New Hampshire. I reached Hampton Beach State Park at sunset. Journal: "As the sun set ... I started to leave, then decided to check the beach for Sanderling and there it was [Snowy Owl – # 235], right in front of me." I returned to the seacoast the following weekend, the last of the year, but added nothing new. Snowy Owl was the last and one of the most rewarding new birds of the year – I found my own rarity.

I was surprised to see how many times I chased rarities out-of-state while running this Big Year. I added Mew Gull, Painted Bunting, Kentucky Warbler and Least Bittern to my life list on separate trips to Massachusetts. I tried without luck for Black-tailed Godwit in Connecticut and saw the Sage Thrasher in Maine. I took a pelagic trip led by Wayne Peterson to Stellwagen Bank with the Brookline Bird Club. Not once but twice, I traveled all the way to Fredericton, New Brunswick to see a Fieldfare. Add in the three-week trip to Peru in July and it was an active birding year!

A Big Year is a big thrill, no matter what the geographic area you cover or what your goal is. The excitement of knowing you could chance upon an unexpected rarity lasts every day of the year. The practical benefit you will achieve from this game is learning status and distribution – you must know what is found when and where. I'm glad I did this when I did. Today, my rarity chasing is primarily limited to life birds, which are far fewer for me than 22 years ago. Now-a-days it's hard to drag me out of Belknap County. I'm afraid I might miss something!

What to Watch for in Summer

Summer in the bird world is only two months long – June and July. It is the breeding season for most birds in New Hampshire, but the tail end of the northward migration is still going on in early June. By the end of July, southbound shorebirds start to appear. This begins the heart of the migration for adult shorebirds; the young will follow later in the fall. Watch for songbirds carrying food to feed their young. Here are some of the birding highlights to watch for.



Roseate Tern by Jim Sparrell, 6-6-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

June

- Common Eider chicks appear in numbers in late May and early June at the coast. There is still no documented breeding on the New Hampshire mainland, only on the Isles of Shoals.
- Common and Roseate Terns nest at the Isles of Shoals and feed on the coast, especially at Hampton Harbor and the Piscataqua River off New Castle.
- American Oystercatchers recently began nesting at the Isles of Shoals and can be seen on Star Island. The best way to look for them is to take a boat tour around the islands and/or land on Star Island. They can also be seen occasionally on the coast, especially in the cove south of Odiorne Point State Park in Rye.
- The first Wilson's Storm-Petrels arrive in northern waters after breeding in the southern hemisphere. Numbers build during the summer and peak in July. They can sometimes be seen from the coast, but are more reliable offshore, such as on a whalewatch.
- Bicknell's Thrush are on their breeding territories in the high elevations of the White Mountains and northern Coos County. They are easier to hear rather than see, especially their "veer" call.
- The boreal bird song chorus is in full voice in early June. Birds can be difficult to see in the dense spruce-fir of northern forests in Coos County, but this is the time to look for them, especially in the early morning during peak singing.



Black-billed Cuckoo by Steve Mirick, 6-10-2023, Concord, NH.

July

- Watch and listen for both Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos wherever there are caterpillar outbreaks, especially the Spongy Moth (formerly called Gypsy Moth). Cuckoos are one of the few species in New Hampshire that eats hairy caterpillars.
- Hummingbird numbers increase at feeders as youngsters fledge and feed on their own.
- Great Shearwaters, and sometimes Manx, Sooty, and Cory's Shearwaters join the Wilson's Storm-Petrels in offshore ocean waters. A whalewatch or fishing boat is the easiest way to see them.
- Tennessee Warblers nest in northern New Hampshire and Canada but sometimes show up well to the south in early July.
- Southbound shorebird migration starts in early July with the first species to arrive being Least Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Lesser Yellowlegs. They are most common on the coast, but Least Sandpipers and Solitary Sandpipers are common inland.
- Watch for an influx of Bonaparte's Gulls at the coast in late July, with adults arriving first. Check coves anywhere along the coast, especially the cove north of the Seacoast Science Center at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye and the Piscataqua River off Fort Constitution in New Castle.
- Early landbird migrants such as Yellow Warblers start appearing in late July. Louisiana Waterthrush are gone by the end of the month.
- The first Great Egrets appear inland in late July. This is post-breeding dispersal and birds can show up anywhere.
- Most swallows finish nesting early and begin to stage in large flocks at ponds and lakes, and along the coast.
- Chimney Swifts start to gather in large flocks, often in cities and towns, roosting in large chimneys.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

We have a summer photo taken in a marsh, and I don't think we need to belabor the obvious; the long legs (hidden by marsh grass), long bill, and overall shape indicate a bird in the heron family but which one?

The neck is curled, which is too bad, that could have been helpful. In the field, comparing the size of this bird to surrounding birds would provide us with clues, but as is often true with photographs, the size is hard to judge here.

Once again, let's look at the bill. It seems to be a typical heron bill, but cast your memory back to other herons (or look at a field guide, or google some heron pictures!). This is a long bill, and I think it's long enough to rule out the night-herons.

It's also a slender bill. Not as slender as a hummingbird bill, of course, but given the size of the bird, that bill is pretty slender. We are not looking at the massive fish-catching spear of a Great Blue Heron or a Great Egret. In fact, I think the shape of that bill is a sufficient field mark all by itself and in the field, I think the size of the bird would be a sufficient secondary field mark to confirm our identification. I wouldn't even need to see the yellow feet, although that would be additional confirmation as well. Conclusion: Snowy Egret.

Next time you're in the marshes, spend some time comparing the Snowy Egret's almost delicate bill to the bills of any nearby Great Egrets or other herons.



Snowy Egret by Greg Tillman.

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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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Summer Babies



Spotted Sandpiper juvenile by Jim Sparrell, 7-12-2023, Rochester WTP, NH.



Ruffed Grouse by Roger Frieden, 6-11-2023, Pittsburg, NH.



Northern Mockingbird and chick by Debra Powers, 6-9-2023, Rye Harbor SP, NH.



Common Eider chick by Len Medlock, 6-4-2023, Rye, NH.



Willet chick (left) and two adults (right) by Jim Sparrell, 6-30-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

Summer 2023 Rarities



Least Bittern by Kyle Wilmarth, 6-26-2023, Salem, NH.



King Eider by Steve Mirick, 6-18-2023, Rye, NH



Red-necked Phalarope by Jim Sparrell, 7-26-2023, Rochester WTP, NH.



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron by David Zook, 6-19-2023, North Mill Pond, Portsmouth, NH.