

New Hampshire

BIRD RECORDS



WINTER 2023-24

Vol. 42, No. 4

Lingering Migrants



Wilson's Warbler by Steve Mirick, 1-6-2024, Hampton WTP, NH.



Orange-crowned Warbler by Steve Mirick, 12-5-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH. See more on New Hampshire's own Patagonia Picnic Table Effect at Bicentennial Park on page 35.



A record-late Blackpoll Warbler by Steve Mirick, 12-10-2023, Rye, NH.



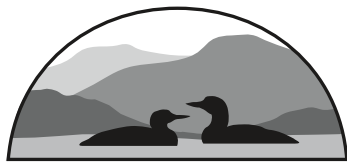
Lincoln's Sparrow by Benjamin Griffith, 12-17-2023, Lee-Durham Christmas Bird Count (CBC), NH.



American Redstart by Steve Mirick, 12-9-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.



Baltimore Oriole by Amy Gauthier, 12-3-2023, Durham, NH.



NH AUDUBON

Protecting our environment since 1914

NEW HAMPSHIRE BIRD RECORDS

VOLUME 42 NUMBER 4
WINTER 2023-24

www.nhbirdrecords.org

EDITORS

Rebecca Suomala and
Grace McCulloch
603-224-9909 X339
gmcculloch@nhaudubon.org

TEXT EDITOR

Dan Hubbard

SEASON EDITORS

Eric Masterson, Spring
Jason Pietrzak, Summer
Ben Griffith, Fall
Jim Sparrell/Katherine Towler, Winter

LAYOUT

Dyanna Smith

PUBLICATION ASSISTANT

Kathryn Frieden

ASSISTANTS

Susan Burkhardt,
Susan MacLeod, Marie Nickerson

FIELD NOTES

Kathryn Frieden

PHOTO EDITOR

Wendy Chatel

WEB MASTER

Kathy Barnes

EDITORIAL TEAM

Phil Brown, Wendy Chatel, James Freitas,
Ben Griffith, Dan Hubbard, Pam Hunt,
Iain MacLeod, Eric Masterson,
Grace McCulloch, Robert A. Quinn,
Rebecca Suomala, Greg Tillman,
Jon Woolf, Susan Wrisley

EBIRD VOLUNTEERS

Zeke Cornell, Kathryn Frieden,
Hector Galbraith, Pam Geiger, Nora Hanke,
Pam Hunt, Dylan Jackson, Kyle Wilmarth,
Season Editors



IN HONOR OF

The Twitchers out of the Rye

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* is sponsored by Catherine Eames in support of the Twitchers out of the Rye, the New Hampshire team that competes in the Superbowl of Birding and raises money for *New Hampshire Bird Records*. Learn more about this fun competition on page 33.

The "Twitcher Feeding Table" at Bicentennial Park provided by Catherine Eames (left) with hot soup, hot drinks, corn bread, and homemade cookies, plus a puffin!

In This Issue

A Changing of the Editors.....	2
Retirement <i>by Rebecca Suomala</i>	2
A Tough Act to Follow <i>by Grace McCulloch</i>	3
Thirty-five Years of Changes to <i>New Hampshire Bird Records</i> <i>by Rebecca Suomala</i>	3
Photo Quiz <i>by Greg Tillman</i>	4
Thank You to Donors.....	5
Winter Season: December 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024 <i>by Katherine Towler and Jim Sparrell</i>	6
Regional Report—Coos County <i>by Robert A. Quinn</i>	14
Birds of 2023 and Bird of the Year Awards <i>by Stephen R. Mirick</i>	16
Species Spotlight: Ash-throated Flycatcher <i>by Stephen R. Mirick</i>	18
Field Notes Winter 2023-24, <i>Kathryn Frieden, Editor</i>	20
An eBird First at Eel Pond <i>by Roger Stephenson</i>	20
Dovekie Rescue	20
The Many Colors of an American Goldfinch <i>by Anita Fernandez</i>	21
Bohemian Waxwings at Wildcat Mountain <i>by Levi Burford</i>	21
Pine Siskin Extravaganza <i>by Jason Pietrzak</i>	22
Pine Seed Feast <i>by Iain MacLeod</i>	22
Waterfowl all Winter at Horseshoe Pond in Concord, NH <i>by Pam Hunt</i>	23
Sandhill Crane Flock <i>by Chase Cote</i>	23
A Winter Night's Visitor <i>by Greg Tillman</i>	24
Tracking down a Varied Thrush <i>by Tom Momeyer</i>	24
Construction Work on the Hampton Jetty	24
Backyard Birder: Pine Warbler Bonanza <i>by Steve Lauermann</i>	25
Red Crossbills: Risk-takers Along the Road <i>by Melissa Moore</i>	26
Field Trip Reports.....	27
A January Field Trip to the NH Coast <i>by Rich Aaronian</i>	27
The Seacoast Chapter's Finch Count in Coos County <i>by Lori Charron</i>	27
New Year's Big Day <i>by Ethan Ring</i>	28
2025 Introduction to Bird Identification, Ecology, and Habitats Course <i>by Matt Tarr</i>	29
Northern Hawk Owl in Pittsburg.....	30
A Rare Winter Visitor <i>by Rebecca Suomala and Grace McCulloch</i>	30
The Northern Hawk Owl Provides an Unexpected Gift <i>by Grace McCulloch</i>	30
Uncovering a Forgotten Record: The Northern Hawk Owl of 1982 <i>by Kathryn Frieden</i>	31
Photo Gallery	32
Superbowl of Birding XXI—The Twitchers are out of the Rye Again! <i>by Kathryn Frieden</i>	33
New Hampshire's Own Patagonia Picnic Table Effect <i>by Melissa Moore</i>	35
Birding Wetherby Road in Charlestown <i>by Dylan Jackson</i>	37
Winter Bird Surveys: Count your Birds this Winter! <i>by Melissa Moore</i>	38
The Next Ten... Second Update <i>by Iain MacLeod</i>	39
Christmas Bird Count Photo Gallery	40
What to Watch for in Winter	41
Answer to the Photo Quiz <i>by Greg Tillman</i>	43

A Changing of the Editors

WINTER 2023-24

Retirement

by Rebecca Suomala

After 36 years of working for NH Audubon, I am retiring at the end of 2024! For most of my career, I have been working on *New Hampshire Bird Records*, starting as Managing Editor in Spring 1989 when Diane De Luca was the General Editor. Beginning with the Summer 1991 issue, I took on the full Managing and General Editor tasks which I've continued to this day.

There have been huge changes during my years with the publication. I tried to describe them briefly, but as I looked at past issues, I realized there were even more changes than I remembered. You can read about some of them in my article on page 3.

I am grateful to all of the many wonderful volunteers who have helped make *New Hampshire Bird Records* such a fantastic publication. There are volunteers doing office tasks, volunteers who enter data, volunteer Season Editors, mailing volunteers, eBird reviewers, volunteer writers, assistants, webmasters, proofreaders, etc. It takes a huge team to not only put each issue together but to make sure we have accurate data for the publication and, most importantly, for



Becky Suomala, trying to climb a tree to confirm a calling Least Bittern in Newfields, NH, 6-19-2023 by Steve Mirick.

bird conservation. I am honored to have worked with so many terrific people.

Please join me in welcoming Grace McCulloch to the *New Hampshire Bird Records* Editor position. Grace brings many skills and abilities to the position, a familiarity with technology, and a very friendly personality. I have enjoyed working with her as she takes on the position and I think you will all like the fresh energy she brings.

Thank you to all who have supported *New Hampshire Bird Records* and me over the years, whether as a volunteer, a subscriber, a bird reporter, or a fellow birder. I look forward to being out birding and continuing to contribute to this terrific publication.

Your Retiring Editor,
Becky

Note: No gifts please, but I would be truly honored by any donations to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund at NH Audubon.

Donations may be made:

- By check made out to NH Audubon with NHBR Endowment Fund in the memo line and mailed to NH Audubon.
- On the NH Audubon website under Support Our Research: <https://www.nh Audubon.org/donate/other-ways-to-give/support-research/> (QR code below). Select the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment to contribute to this fund.



For more information, contact Hope Jordan,
hjordan@nh Audubon.org.

A Tough Act to Follow

by Grace McCulloch

Filling Becky's shoes will be no small feat. Nonetheless, I am thrilled to write to you as the new editor of *New Hampshire Bird Records*. Like you, I love the diversity of experiences, tales, and birds highlighted in this publication. Everyone has their own story of how they got into birding. My passion started with a photography obsession. It was deepened while traipsing through forests at the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Brunswick, Vermont, and Bartlett Experimental Forest in New Hampshire, surveying birds for a functional diversity study.

I put my love for birds to good use while studying at the University of New Hampshire. Through my graduate research partnering with Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, I had the privilege of working with the vulnerable Saltmarsh Sparrow, a species threatened with extinction in the coming years due to accelerated sea-level rise. I zig-zagged across salt marshes searching for nests,



Grace in her natural habitat, banding Saltmarsh Sparrows as part of her graduate research at the University of New Hampshire. Photo by Kara Cole.

banding chicks, and consulting on restoration projects. I look forward to sharing more of my work with you as time goes on, including (but not limited to) stories of being waist deep in mud while trying to catch and band this sneaky species. The plight of the Saltmarsh Sparrow is a good reminder of the importance of paying close attention to our local birds, telling their stories, and taking part in conservation action wherever possible.

Editing this publication is an honor I deeply respect. Becky's impact on our community is immense, and while I may never fill her shoes, I embrace the opportunity to learn from all of you—our readers, writers, and fellow editors. Together, we will continue to highlight thrilling discoveries, humorous anecdotes, and above all, a shared love for the natural world and our responsibility to conserve it here in New Hampshire.

Thank you for trusting me with this.

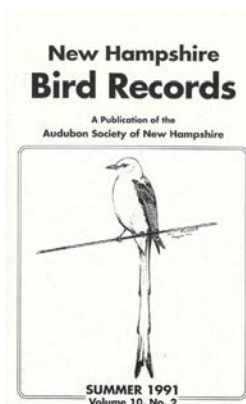
Your New Editor,

Grace

Thirty-five Years of Changes to New Hampshire Bird Records

by Rebecca Suomala

Since the Summer 1991 issue, I have been the General Editor of *New Hampshire Bird Records*. There have been huge changes during that time and I was reminded of them as I looked back at the early issues. There was no eBird when I started. If you wanted to know what birds had been seen, *New Hampshire Bird Records* was the only place to find out. We published each season's summary along with **all the bird reports** that were sent in to NH Audubon (on 3"x5" slips) after entering them in a DOS-based database (computers did not have a mouse in those days).



Becky Suomala became the sole Editor for *New Hampshire Bird Records* with the Summer 1991 issue (Vol. 10, No. 2) after having shared the responsibilities with Technical Editor, Diane De Luca. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher drawing by Iain MacLeod.

We printed out the issue and glued on bird cut-outs where we wanted graphics. There were no photos in the publication and no articles. The interior pages were color coded by season: green for spring, blue for summer, orange for fall, and white for winter. Drawings by Iain MacLeod and others graced our covers. The first photo cover was Spring 1997 of a Peregrine Falcon taken on the 18th floor of the City Hall Plaza in Manchester before they started nesting in the city. The first color cover appeared, thanks to sponsorships, in Spring 2005. We were able to add more color photos thanks to continuing sponsorships.

Articles began to appear regularly with the Winter 1995-96 issue. They were popular and have increased over the years. As birding grew, the number of reports mushroomed and we couldn't publish them all. When we switched to eBird in September of 2009, the number of spring reports jumped from 4,760 to over 43,000 in Spring 2010, and eventually to over 200,000! It was time to change the format again and convert the list of sightings to the narrative that you see today (which is the same format used for the season summaries when *New Hampshire Bird Records* first became an independent publication in Spring 1982). With the advent of digital photography, the number of excellent photos skyrocketed making for some wonderful images in each issue. We're grateful to all the photographers who share their pictures.

Long-time subscribers will remember that timeliness was a challenge from before I started. There were even six

seasons that had never been published (Spring 1986 through Summer 1987). It seemed we were always running late and I was continually saying “We’re catching up” in my From the Editor piece. Finally, we settled on the goal of getting the publication out before that season started again the following year. It wasn’t until the Spring 2021 issue, after yet more delays from COVID, that we met that goal and have maintained that schedule since—yay! Bob Quinn wrote up the missing seasons after volunteers entered the data, and we published them in 2006, maintaining NH Audubon’s unbroken record of publishing New Hampshire’s bird sightings since 1921.

When I started with *New Hampshire Bird Records*, it was a free member benefit and funding was not always available to print the issue. I was surprised to rediscover that my parents, Nan and Ted Waldron, sponsored at least four issues so we could get them printed. We changed to a subscription publication (Spring 1992), but funding remained a challenge, prompting the establishment of the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund to provide long-term support for “bird sighting data collection, organization, utilization and publication, and the preservation of New Hampshire bird information,” while also allowing flexibility for the changing format of these efforts. It’s so exciting to see the publication once again going out to all the members and in a full-color digital version.

It has been wonderful to see the growth of the birding community in New Hampshire. There are so many more birders finding more birds and sharing them with each other. I have had a unique opportunity to share my passion for birds as I worked with *New Hampshire Bird Records* and the special community of New Hampshire birders. I look forward to seeing what exciting changes the future will bring.



Left: The first issue with a photo on the cover, Spring 1997 (Vol. 16, No. 1). The photo was by Anne St. Cyr in August 1997 from her office window. According to NH Audubon’s Chris Martin, it was an unbanded male with some juvenal plumage. Right: The first color cover, Spring 2005 (Vol. 24, No. 1). This Red-necked Phalarope was part of a phalarope fallout during a May nor’easter. Garth McElroy photographed it on May 25, 2005 in a puddle at the Rye Harbor State Park parking lot.

Photo Quiz

Can You Identify These Winter Birds?

by Greg Tillman

Photo 1 comes from Roger Frieden taken in January in Nottingham, NH. The bird perches nicely for us, waiting to be identified.

The bird in Photo 2 is somewhat uncommon during New Hampshire winters. The family might be easy, but can you identify the bird to species? (We’ve blacked out a bit of the branch in this photo, because feet are difficult to black out individually!). Jim Sparrell took this photo in February in Portsmouth, NH.



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

See the answer on page 43.

Payment for Printed Copies Due

If you wish to receive a **print copy** of *New Hampshire Bird Records* it’s time to send in your payment for the coming year. The publication will continue to be available **to members** for free in the digital format. Printed copies are available to members for an annual fee that helps cover the cost of printing and mailing. See page 44 for details.

Thank You to Donors

We are very grateful to everyone who has donated to *New Hampshire Bird Records*, sponsored an issue, or supported the “Twitchers out of the Rye” in the Superbowl of Birding. Your generosity allows us to continue bringing you this publication and maintaining quality records in eBird. We are especially grateful to those who have contributed to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund. Together we are building a secure foundation for the long-term collection, organization, publication, and preservation of New Hampshire bird sighting information. Many of the donations below were made in honor of Rebecca Suomala, retiring editor of *New Hampshire Bird Records*—a beautiful tribute to her lasting legacy.

The following list acknowledges donations from August 1, 2023 to September 14, 2024. Sponsors of specific issues were recognized in the corresponding issue. If we inadvertently omitted or misspelled your name, please let us know. We apologize for any errors.

Donors to *New Hampshire Bird Records*

Anonymous	Allan Keith
Damian Canuto	Charlie Nims
Carol Carlson	Dr. Robert I. Rotberg
Elaine Faletta	Dave Tucker
Tom and Carol Gumbart	Christine Wilson
Gail Henry	



Peregrine Falcon by Kyle Wilmarth.

Superbowl of Birding Supporters

Anonymous – 1	Wendy Chatel	Jeanette Hood	Nanci Mitchell	Jane Robbins
Karen Acerno	Zeke Cornell	David Howe	Jane Mirick	Mary Stewart
Peg Ackerson	Kurk Dorsey	Dan Hubbard	Marie Nickerson	Mark Suomala
Nancy and Blake Allison	Catherine Eames	Kyle Jones	Kathie Palfy	Pat and Gail Thomas
Elizabeth Arms	David Forsyth	Carolyn Kennedy	Stephanie Parkinson	Mark Vernon
Kathy Barnes	Roger Frieden	and Judy Keller	Emily Preston	Allie Vyne
Holly Bauer	Sheila Graydon	Catherine Kilday	George and Andrea Robbins	Lesley Waldron
Steve Bennett	David Harris	Susan Lee		Peter Wrisley
Patience Chamberlin	Dana and Scott Hochgraf	Gray Medynski		Phyllis Yaffie

Donors to the *New Hampshire Bird Records* Endowment Fund

H. Cook Anderson	Dan and Pam Hubbard	Heather Miller	John and Gail Sampieri	Dawn and Arthur Stavros
Elizabeth W. Arms	Allan R. Keith	Anne Morris	Nicholas A. Skinner	Ned Therrien
Leslie and Jim Casey	Rebecca and Joseph Lessard	Thomas and Susan O'Connor	Kimberly Snyder	Leslie Waldron
Sheila Guinther		Mark Peters		Robert P. Woodward
Gail M. Henry				

Donors to the *New Hampshire Bird Records* Endowment Fund in Honor of Rebecca Suomala

Elizabeth Arms	Julie Ellis	Patricia Kellogg	Lucy Murayda	Ruth Smith and Beth McGuinn
Michael Bartlett	Laurel Horne	Jane Kolias	Paul Nickerson	Debbie Stanley
Sylvia Bates	David Howe	Constance Lentz	Kathleen Palfy	Mark and Sandy Turner
Kathleen M. Brockett	Dan and Pam Hubbard	Deborah Lievens	Stephanie and Bill Parkinson	Margaret Watkins
Phillip Brown	Joanne and Kevin Jones	Nanci Mitchell	Shirley Small	Lynn Zeltman
Wendy Chatel		Justin Muccio		
Barbara DelloRusso				

WINTER SEASON

December 1, 2023 through February 28, 2024

by Katherine Towler and Jim Sparrell



Katie and Jim in full birding mode on a trip to California. Photo by Bruce Aird.

Following consecutive months of record warmth in 2023, December was the second warmest on record in Concord, more than six degrees above the historical average. It was also the fifth wettest, although precipitation often came in the form of rain. Across the state, the winter season of 2023-24

was marked by warmer than average temperatures, a lack of snow cover for periods even in the north, major rain events, and open water on rivers and inland bodies of water.

Winter is the fastest warming season in New England. This season's weather reflects the reality of shifting weather patterns intensified by climate change and the effects of an El Niño system. The first major storm on December 18 hit with rain and high winds, causing power outages and flooding, especially in the North Country. The first statewide snowstorm did not arrive until January 6. This was followed by another major rain and wind event on January 10 that caused flooding on the Seacoast and the closure of Rt. 1A in multiple spots, some for several weeks.

One of the most notable trends in bird sightings was the prevalence of half-hardy species. **Winter Wrens** were common. Other half-hardy species widely reported included



Eastern Towhee by Jim Sparrell, 1-21-2024, Osprey Cove Trail, Greenland, NH.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, Eastern Towhee, Gray Catbird, Fox Sparrow, and Chipping Sparrow. A number of Baltimore Orioles were also seen coming to feeders in various locations.

Open water throughout the season, even in the North Country, allowed waterfowl to remain inland. Ice in was not declared on Lake Winnepesaukee until February 9, unusually late. The **Long-tailed** and **Ring-necked Ducks** seen on Lake Winnisquam were the first February records for these species in Belknap County.

Winter finches, with the exception of **Pine Siskins** and **Red Crossbills**, were scarce. An abundant White Pine cone crop was available for these species and others to feed on. Observers noted fewer birds at backyard feeders, especially in December. This was due presumably to warmer temperatures and food sources available in wooded areas (see the article in the Fall 2023 issue, "A Fall of Plenty Led to Fewer Birds at Feeders" by Grace McCulloch).



Yellow-throated Warbler by Len Medlock, 1-20-2024, Exeter, NH.

Red-winged Blackbirds were present throughout the winter in many locations, with large flocks reported each month. **Pine Warbler** reports totaled roughly a hundred individuals in various locations, an exponential increase over previous winters and one of the most notable showings among any bird species this season. Once again, warblers were a significant story of the season. The total of 13 warbler species seen sets a new winter record.

This season's rarities and exciting finds included **Ash-throated Flycatcher, Painted Bunting, McGillivray's Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Spotted Towhee, Varied Thrush, Northern Hawk Owl**, and the second state record of **Virginia's Warbler**.

Editor's Note: The term "half-hardy" refers to species that may be present during mild winters, but cannot handle the cold, snow, and harsh conditions associated with a "typical" New Hampshire

winter. As you will read in this summary, winter conditions are changing, meaning more half-hardies are continuing throughout the winter. These birds tend to be short-distance migrants, spending the winter in the southeastern United States. Some are facultative migrants, meaning they only migrate as far south as needed, moving farther south only when conditions worsen.

Waterfowl and Loons

In contrast to the previous winter (2022-23) when New Hampshire was treated to a nice selection of interesting geese, most of the excitement this winter was about the wide-ranging ducks, mergansers, and loons on the open water around the state.

Single **Snow Geese** were reported from several locations, but never more than one. One **Cackling Goose** was photographed on December 9 by Wendy Ward at Spofford Lake in Cheshire County. No other unusual geese were documented during the winter season.

Barrow's Goldeneye is frequently seen in Manchester, as it was again this winter, but Iain MacLeod also found three drakes on Opechee Bay in Laconia on December 22 along with three **Lesser Scaup**. By early January, the waterfowl flocks that Iain reported in the Lakes Region had swelled to include the continuing drake Barrow's, a drake **American Wigeon**, 120 **Common Merganser**, 80 **Common Goldeneye**, and 11 **Ring-necked Duck**. Even at the end of January, Iain commented, "Most of the lower section of Meredith Bay is ice-free and almost all of Lake Winnisquam. I've never seen so much open water in the Lakes Region in late January." Catherine Holland and Wayne Scott found a Barrow's Goldeneye in Lebanon on December 19 at the Wilder Dam Reservoir that continued until almost the end of February.

Coos County had a first winter record of **Lesser Scaup** observed on the Christmas Bird Count on December 21 by Katrina Fenton and Levi Burford. It was seen again on January 2 by Lori Charron. Only two **Redheads** were reported during the season, one found by Nora Hanke on Spofford Lake on December 6 that continued for a couple of weeks and a single sighting of one on Great Bay by Robyn Prieto on January 11. Spofford Lake hosted a diverse range of waterfowl this winter including **Hooded**, **Red-breasted**, and **Common Mergansers**, **White-winged Scoter**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Bufflehead**, **Greater and Lesser Scaup**, **Common Loon**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **American Black Duck**, and **Mallard**.

Other inland sightings of note included **Red-breasted Merganser** at Newfound Lake (December 8, Kyle Jones) and Lake Kanasatka (December 30, Ken Klapper), a **Long-tailed Duck** at Lake Winnisquam (February 12, Iain MacLeod), **Northern Pintail** from New London, Laconia, Freedom, and

Concord, and **Gadwall** scattered around Tilton, Ashland, Concord, and Merrimack.

A **Canvasback** was photographed on Great Bay by Leo McKillop and Susan Wrisley on February 25. The next day, Pam Geiger found one on Horseshoe Pond in Concord which represents one of only a handful of winter records for Merrimack County.



Canvasback by Leo McKillop, 2-25-2024, Osprey Cove, Greenland, NH.



Harlequin Duck by Cameron Johnson, 1-2-2024, Hampton River Marina mudflats, Hampton, NH.

Common Loons were able to persist well into the winter all around the state, with the northern-most birds found in late December on Lake Francis (December 20, Phil Brown and Jack Swatt) and the First Connecticut Lake (December 20, Phil Brown, Don Gardoqui, and Glen Chretien), representing first winter records of this species in Coos County. A **Pacific Loon** was found offshore in early February by scoping from Odiorne Point State Park in Rye (February 8, Martha Adams, Don Clark, and Ken Cox).

Another interesting coastal find was a **Harlequin Duck** that Cameron Johnson reported in Hampton Harbor on January 2, which eventually became two Harlequin Ducks continuing for almost two months in the same general area. This joins a few scattered reports of Harlequin Ducks from

WINTER SEASON

various spots along the coast. The female **King Eider** that was first reported in the spring of 2022 in the vicinity of Odiorne Point SP continued throughout the winter with the added brief excitement of at least one immature male King Eider reported along the coast (December 13, Jonathan Layman). On December 25, Steve Mirick reported that the immature male was only about 100 yards away from the female before he ghosted us and was not seen again.

Shorebirds

Overall numbers of shorebirds were lower than expected. **Dunlin** thinned out in January and were not seen after January 23. **Sanderling** and **Purple Sandpiper** were present on the Seacoast throughout the winter, but in relatively small groups. Ken Klapper spotted an unusual inland Purple Sandpiper on Leavitt Beach in Meredith on December 6. It is only the fourth eBird report outside Rockingham County.

There were a few lingering **Black-bellied Plover** in early December, but no reports for the rest of the season. Stuart Varney once again hosted an overwintering **Wilson's Snipe**, and he was able to see the bird from his yard in each month of the winter season. He has had Wilson's Snipe there in winter for about three years. February 8 brought an early returning **American Woodcock** to Woodridge Park in Durham, observed by Kurk Dorsey. **Killdeer** cleared out of the state by the end of December, but on February 13, Todd Peterson heard an early one returning at the Rochester Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP).

Gulls, Seabirds, and Alcids



Black-headed Gull by Cameron Johnson, 12-24-2023, Little Harbor, NH.

On December 24, Cameron Johnson found an early Christmas present—a state-lifer **Black-headed Gull** in Little Harbor in New Castle, where it continued through mid-January, affiliating with a group of Bonaparte's Gulls. Black-headed Gulls are relatively common in Europe, Iceland, and Greenland. They are omnivorous feeders. The New Hampshire bird was observed probing along the

mudflats looking for food. Dennis Tsorbias photographed an intriguing **Common/Short-billed Gull** (January 14) in a large mixed gull flock at Bicentennial Park in Hampton. The bird was small, similar in size to nearby Ring-billed Gulls, with an all-yellow bill. Common and Short-billed Gulls were once considered the same species, Mew Gull. They are very similar and difficult to distinguish without multiple perspectives to clarify details of wingtip and tail patterns and body coloration. A few **Glaucous**, **Lesser Black-backed**, and **Iceland Gulls** were seen along the Seacoast or at Pickering Ponds/Rochester WTP, which hosts large flocks of gulls who visit the nearby landfill looking for food.



Iceland Gull by Kyle Wilmarth, 2-5-2024, Salem, NH.

There were a number of pelagic birding trips this winter season, including the Isles of Shoals Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on January 1 and multiple trips by birders on Eastman's fishing boats. **Atlantic Puffins** were regularly observed, with a high count of 16 on the CBC trip, although most of these birds were in Maine waters. Leo McKillop and Susan Wrisley had a high count of seven in New Hampshire waters on an Eastman's trip on January 3. **Common Murre** and **Razorbill** were seen in good numbers (high counts in the 50s) on fishing trips in January and early February. **Thick-billed Murre** reports were scant, with single birds reported along the Seacoast on four occasions and generally not seen on the pelagic trips. Northern Fulmar were only seen on two of the fishing trips, but **Black-legged Kittiwake** were consistently seen in good numbers.

The drama of the winter season was the fate of the **Dovekies**. There were two storms that involved high winds, heavy rains, and extensive coastal flooding, one on December 18 and 19 and another on January 13 and 14. These small birds can be blown inland during such events, and a large number of them were found inland in New Castle, Portsmouth, and Rye. Once on the ground they become stranded and can't return to the ocean. One was found as far

inland as Lake Willoughby, Vermont, about 150 miles from the Maine coast. The birds that were found stranded were transported to the Center for Wildlife in York, ME, and later released if they were in good health. (See “Dovekie Rescue” in the Field Notes for this issue.) Roger Stephenson also had a brief and dramatic encounter with a Dovekie on Eel Pond in Rye (see his report in “An eBird First at Eel Pond” on page 20).

Herons, Eagles, and Hawks to Owls

Great Blue Herons were seen in many locations across southern portions of the state in all three months of the season. Although this species has been found with increasing frequency in recent winters, these birds will move south if temperatures drop for extended periods. This year the warmer temperatures allowed many to remain throughout the winter. They are often seen in the marshes along the Seacoast, but were also reported from the Hinsdale Setbacks, Hopkinton, Nashua, Manchester, Newport, Hudson, Barnstead, and Charlestown, among other locations. Six found on December 12 in Madbury (James Cornelius) and another six on January 12 in Hampton Harbor (Nora Hanke) are notable high counts.

A very unexpected sighting of a **Snowy Egret** in Rye flying north on December 25 (Steve Mirick) is a record late date for New Hampshire. A **Great Egret** found on December 1 in Hampton (Holly Bauer) was seen through December 6.

Black Vultures continue to expand their range northward and to be seen in the winter months. This year reports came in widely from southern counties. A group of four was seen in various locations around Exeter from mid-December through February in roosting spots with up to 60 Turkey Vultures. On February 19, six were observed in flight over Londonderry (Jenna and Jed Rosen).

Rough-legged Hawk sightings were scattered and



Black Vultures by Len Medlock, 1-14-2024, Exeter, NH.

sporadic, with no reliable spots for this species this year. The **Northern Hawk Owl** first reported in Pittsburg on February 12 (Aubrie Giroux) was a rare and exciting winter visitor. The last time one was seen in the state by many observers was 2009 when one spent most of January and February in Center Harbor (see the article, “A Rare Winter Visitor,” in this issue). This season’s owl remained along a dirt road, hunting in farm fields, into the spring. The hawk owl was a life bird for many who traveled from around New England to add this magnificent bird to their lists.

There were no confirmed sightings of **Snowy Owl** in New Hampshire this year. Movement of this species from the Arctic in the winter season is thought to be influenced by the success of the breeding season and availability of food sources. In years when food sources are abundant, leading to successful breeding, a higher population will result in some individuals moving south to increase their chances of feeding successfully through the winter. Birders missed seeing this charismatic bird on the coast and at inland locations where they have been found in recent years.

Short-eared Owls were found in only two locations, marking a shift for this species as well. In recent winters, they have been observed in groups on the Seacoast and a few inland spots. A single individual was first reported on January 1 (Michelle Saunders) and seen sporadically by birders over a couple of weeks at Portsmouth International Airport at Pease in Newington. Another was found at the end of the month in the Hampton-Seabrook Marsh (January 28, Magill Weber).



Long-eared Owl by Catherine Holland, 2-25-2024, Grafton County, NH.

A rare and exciting sighting of three **Long-eared Owls** came from Grafton County on February 25 by Kyle Jones, Wayne Scott, and Catherine Holland. One of Catherine’s photos from this encounter is featured on the back cover of this issue.

Woodpeckers to Waxwings

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were reported from all ten counties this winter, with 250 reports in eBird, a remarkable number for this half-hardy species that has historically

WINTER SEASON

migrated south. Like other half-hardies, the sapsuckers benefited from the warm temperatures and overall availability of food. Reports were primarily of single individuals, but a few counts of two came in, including two on December 9 in Greenland (Sheila Graydon and Alice Passer) and two on January 20 in Hudson (Danielle Durocher). The northernmost counties of Carroll, Belknap, Grafton, and Coos all had sightings. In Coos, one was observed coming to a feeder in Gorham on February 6 (Lori Charron et al.). This bird was reported continuing at the same feeder throughout the month with the last report on February 24 (Will O'Brien).

American Kestrels were reported from a few locations this winter, with multiple sightings from the Strafford County Farm Complex in Dover and Dillant-Hopkins Airport in Swanzey. Farther north, Anne Duncan Cooley found this species in Piermont on December 30 and again on February 10.



Ash-throated Flycatcher by Benjamin Griffith, 12-5-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH.

The **Ash-throated Flycatcher** seen at Bicentennial Park in Hampton on December 5 (Steve Mirick) is the second winter record for this species. This western vagrant has been observed in New Hampshire with greater frequency in recent fall seasons. The individual found December 5 remained at Bicentennial Park with the **Virginia's Warbler** and kinglets through December 13, delighting the many birders who came to enjoy unique winter sightings of a wonderful collection of birds. After a twelve-day absence, the Ash-throated Flycatcher was reported again from this location on December 25 and 26 (Steve Mirick et al.). An Ash-throated Flycatcher was subsequently reported from the Hampton WTP on January 6 (D. Sacks), a late record and the first for January. It appears that all these sightings were of the same individual, though this cannot be determined with certainty. For more on Ash-throated Flycatchers in New Hampshire, see the Species Spotlight by Steve Mirick on page 16.

Eastern Phoebes were seen in seven of New Hampshire's ten counties in all three months of this winter, a notable

showing for a species that has remained unreported in some recent winters or reported only in December as a lingering migrant. There was just one report for the season in the winter of 2022-23. Sightings on consecutive days were made in East Kingston on January 3 and 4 (Dennis Skillman). Other reports were of single individuals on single days, including a rare sighting in the North Country made on February 12 in Gorham (Will O'Brien and Benjamin Gagnon).



Northern Shrike by Jim Sparrell, 1-28-2024, Great Bay NWR, Newington, NH.

Northern Shrike sightings were numerous this winter, with reports from Coos, Grafton, Carroll, Strafford, and Rockingham counties. One was reported during the CBC from Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington on December 16 (Kyle Wilmarth), a common winter location for this species. A shrike continued to be found at this location and nearby at Short Street at the Portsmouth International Airport at Pease throughout January and February. Multiple reports also came from various locations in Pittsburg throughout the season. There was one report from the Strafford Country Farm Complex, another spot where this species has historically been found, on December 31 (Dan Hubbard).

Winter Wrens were widespread this winter, one of the more dominant species and notable trends of the season, with more than 500 reports in eBird. Observations were concentrated in southern and central regions, although reports also came in from Grafton, Carroll, and Belknap counties to the north as welcome additions to winter lists. Reports of two or more individuals came in from multiple locations. A high count of five individuals was recorded in Keene on December 11 (Nate Marchessault).

Hermit Thrush is another half-hardy with a remarkable number of reports in all ten counties this year. Three were reported from Seabrook on December 8 (Ashton Almeida). The same observer subsequently reported two individuals at the same location on December 15 and February 10. Counts



Winter Wren by Cameron Johnson, 2-4-2024, Dover Community Trail, NH.

of two came in from several locations in all three months. Warmer weather presumably allowed these birds to remain rather than migrate south as they normally do.

One **Varied Thrush** was found during the winter in the state in Peterborough on January 19 by Rich Frechette. The bird was seen and photographed by many birders through January 22.

Gray Catbird sightings were numerous, in keeping with the trend of high numbers of half-hardy species. They were observed in southern counties primarily, though one report came from Gorham in Coos County by Eric Conte on February 27.

Bohemian Waxwing sightings were confined mostly to the north, with no widespread movement of this species south. They were observed in small numbers in Grafton and Coos Counties in December and early January. By mid-January, flocks of up to 60 were being seen in Gorham, a historic winter location for this species. High counts of 500 were recorded on January 23 (Lori Charron) and February 13 (Will O'Brien), both in Gorham. Reports came in from a number of other locations, including a couple in southern counties, but this species was found most consistently in Gorham. See the Field Note "Bohemian Waxwings at Wildcat Mountain" for an even higher count of 1,000 observed by Katrina Fenton and Levi Burford.

Pipits, Finches, Sparrows, Buntings, and Blackbirds

American Pipit sightings were scattered, with reports primarily at the end of December from the Seacoast. Most were of single birds, with the highest count of three seen at Bicentennial Park in Hampton on December 13 (Paul Lagasi et al.) and four on February 27 at Hampton Beach State Park (Kirk Elwell).

Pine Grosbeaks were present in small numbers and only at a few locations. The high count was a group of four in Coos County on December 16 (Christine Howe, Craig Repasz). This species was reported in groups of up to 50 in the North Country in the winter of 2022-23, so numbers were down substantially as birds remained farther north with the good Mountain Ash berry crop.

In the winter of 2022-23 New Hampshire birders enjoyed a major irruption of **Evening Grosbeaks** in some areas. The winter of 2023-24 was not a repeat, though this species was reported in all three months, mostly from Coos and Grafton counties with a few sightings in central and southern parts of the state. The high counts came from Joanne Dionne in Millsfield, who reported the birds coming to her feeders throughout the season and noted 13 on February 25, and Alan and Glen Chretien, who observed 28 in Pittsburg on December 20.

Redpoll sightings were sporadic as well and also in small numbers. Reports came primarily from northern counties. Ethan Ring observed 10 in Center Barnstead on December 5 and Nora Hanke counted 13 in Greenfield on January 23. Other reports were in single numbers or under five.

Continuing an irruption that has been ongoing for two years, **Red Crossbill** sightings were wide-spread across the state with over 1,700 reports posted to eBird, making this a very big winter season for this species. High counts were a group of 32 on Pitcher Mountain in Stoddard on December 1 (Warren Cairo, Claudia Burns) and 34 at Bear Brook State Park in Allentown on January 6 (Alison Rhodes). A number of other reports of larger flocks under 30 came in, but most were of single birds or pairs, or groups of under ten. The Red Crossbills were feeding on the bumper crop of White Pine seeds, along with many other bird species. See Iain MacLeod's Field Note on page 22.

In contrast, **White-winged Crossbill** sightings were sparse with just 125 reports entered in eBird. Large groups were reported from the North Country, including 58 observed



White-winged Crossbill by Leo McKillop, 2-16-2024, Pittsburg, NH.



Lapland Longspur by Susan Wrisley, 2-27-2024, Woodmont Orchard, Hollis, NH.

on the CBC in Pittsburg on December 20 (Phil Brown et al.), 35 observed separately as part of the count on the same day (Levi Burford and Katrina Fenton), and 40 observed on Pitcher Mountain in Stoddard on January 21 (Nate Marchessault). The majority of other reports were single birds or groups under ten.

Lapland Longspurs were found in several locations this year, mixed in with flocks of **Horned Lark**. In addition to Hampton Beach State Park and Walpole, where they have typically been seen, this species was reported from Charlestown, Penacook, Rye, and two locations in Concord, the fields behind the post office on Loudon Rd. and Horseshoe Pond. Two individuals were consistently seen at Hampton Beach SP, although not until January 20. The first reports from Walpole came in at the same time and up to ten were seen there on January 20 (Coleen Lawlor).

Sightings of **Dark-eyed Junco** and **White-throated Sparrow** in high numbers were reported throughout southern and central counties. Other sparrow species typically seen sporadically or not at all in winter were also present in high numbers.

Chipping Sparrows, usually a rarity for the winter season, were seen at locations across southern portions of the state at backyard feeders and in parks and cemeteries. A group of three was found on January 27 at High Street Cemetery in Hampton by the Twitchers during the Superbowl of Birding (see the article in this issue) and four were reported from this spot on February 20 (Steve Mirick). Groups of four were also seen in Danbury on January 18 (Kate Shaw) and in Newmarket on January 20 (Steve Mirick). These are unprecedented numbers for winter. Only single individuals of this species have been reported in recent years in the winter with often one or two sightings for the entire state.

Fox Sparrow reports were even more numerous than those



Fox Sparrow by Christopher MacPherson, 1-20-2024, Brookline, NH.

for Chipping Sparrow and include a rare northern report from Coos County on December 5 in Colebrook (Aubrie Giroux). Other sightings were widespread in southern and central counties. Among these were multiple sightings of two individuals, as well as groups of five seen in Milford on January 19 (Gail and Gerry Coffey) and in Brookline also on January 19 (Christopher McPherson). Like the reports for Chipping Sparrow, these sightings of groups of Fox Sparrow are unusual.

Lincoln's Sparrow was found in two locations this year in December. Reports came from Penacook on December 17 (Pam Hunt, Cory Levine) and Madbury on December 20 (James Cornelius). A **Lark Sparrow** observed coming to a backyard feeder in Milford on January 17 and 19 (Cynthia Barrett) is another rare winter find, and the first winter record of this species away from the Seacoast.

The combination of warm temperatures and available food sources kept large flocks of **Red-winged Blackbirds** present in all three months of the winter season in southern counties. Though this species does not migrate long distances, in years with colder weather and fewer food sources, they will move south and only be observed sporadically in small numbers as the weather fluctuates. This year a flock of 500 was seen in Durham on December 1 (Kurk Dorsey). Other high counts early in the season include 650 reported from Rye on December 16 (Pamela Hunt, Unity Dienes), 120 from Windham on December 21 (Kyle Wilmarth), and 350 from Hollis on December 27 (Gail Coffey). Large flocks continued in Hollis in January, although in reduced numbers, possibly due to a period of colder temperatures in the middle of the month. By early February, a flock of up to 400 was reported from East Kingston, suggesting the return of birds that moved south in the cold spell (February 5, Kirk Elwell). A few observers reported seeing Red-winged Blackbirds feeding

on the abundant available White Pine cones, an unusual phenomenon.

Common Grackles were likewise present in all three months in southern New Hampshire, sometimes mixed with the flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds. High counts include 2,500 on December 6 in Strafford (Scott Young), 1,000 at Burley Farms in Epping on December 21 (Mary Tyler et al.), and 1,000 on December 29 in Hollis (Cameron Johnson). Numbers were down in January and early February, although this species continued to be widely reported. Larger flocks were again reported in late February with 500 seen in Stratham on February 23 (Roger Stephenson).



Painted Bunting by Elise Perry, 1-28-2024, Manchester, NH.

A **Painted Bunting**, first observed by a homeowner in Manchester coming to her feeder on December 22, is the third winter record for this species. Although the homeowner was delighted to share this rare sighting, the position of the backyard feeders meant that the bird was most easily viewed with the aid of a scope from across Crystal Lake. A number of birders were able to use this method to view this exciting find. The last sighting reported to eBird was on January 28, but the bird continued to be present through February and into the spring season.

A **Spotted Towhee** was reported by a homeowner coming to a back yard feeder in Franconia on January 10 (Ginny Jeffries). This western species has been recorded infrequently in New Hampshire and this was only the fifth record for the state. A number of birders from Vermont and New Hampshire were able to see this individual before it was last reported on January 20.

Warblers

In the winter of 2021-22, a record number of 11 species of warblers were seen in New Hampshire. That number was surpassed in the winter of 2023-24 with 13 species recorded,

including a few rarities that would be notable for the state if found during any season. Warblers were reported all three months of the winter as well, making this a truly memorable winter for these “jewels” of North American birds.



Virginia's Warbler by Jim Sparrell, 12-10-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH.

A **Virginia's Warbler** found by Steve Mirick at Bicentennial Park in Hampton on December 5 is a second state record and the first to be widely seen. Birders came from across New England and even farther afield to view this beautiful bright bird. Present through December 27 and associating with two to three **Orange-crowned Warblers** and **Ruby-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, the Virginia's Warbler provided great photo opportunities as it fed in the rocks and juniper trees and created New Hampshire's own Patagonia Picnic Table Effect (see the article on page 35).

Nashville Warbler, Palm Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler were reported from the Hampton WTP in the first week of December, all continuing birds from the fall season. On December 9, Steve Mirick found a **Yellow Warbler** at this location as well. Orange-crowned, Wilson's, and Palm Warbler were still present here at the end of December, and Palm and Yellow-rumped Warbler continued into early February. The Wilson's Warbler was last reported on January 6, establishing a record late date for this species.

Sightings of **American Redstart** at Odiorne on December 9 and **Blackpoll Warbler** in Rye on December 10 (both by Steve Mirick) added to the warbler species total. Both species are seldom seen in the winter season. On December 26, Chris McPherson confirmed the identification of a **McGillivray's Warbler** he had first seen on December 23 in Hollis. This is the third state record for this Western vagrant that winters in Central America and breeds in west



Can you spot the MacGillivray's Warbler? Photo taken by Christopher MacPherson, 12-26-2023, Hollis, NH.

coast states and up into British Colombia. Although elusive, remaining hidden in brush, the McGillivray's was seen by a few lucky birders and heard vocalizing. Chris McPherson also observed a **Common Yellowthroat** at the same location on December 26.

The dramatic numbers of **Pine Warblers** reported across the state was another significant development. While this is a species commonly seen in winter, sightings of single birds from a few locations have been the norm in the past. This year up to 100 individuals were reported from southern and central spots, with birds seen in 42 locations between the first of January and mid-February. For comparison, over the last five years roughly 25 individuals have been recorded in total. Equally unusual, multiple reports came in of groups of up to seven Pine Warblers, a phenomenon not seen in historical



Black-and-white Warbler by Cameron Johnson, 12-26-2023, Dover Community Trail, NH.

records for winter. Along with the number and variety of half-hardy species in other bird families, the remarkable showing of Pine Warblers appears to be a result of warming weather, the lack of snow and ice, and availability of food sources.

A **Black-and-white Warbler** found by Cameron Johnson on December 26 in Dover brought the number of warbler species seen in December to 12. Another rarity was added to the season total on January 15 when Lois Semrau in Exeter reported a **Yellow-throated Warbler** coming to her feeder. This obliging bird was present through mid-February. A big thank you to Lois who reported the bird and welcomed birders to enjoy this species that is only occasionally seen in the state.

Regional Report, Winter 2023-24

Regional reports are dependent on the availability of authors and the occurrence of notable sightings. If you are interested in writing a regional summary, please contact the Editor.

Coos County

by Robert A. Quinn

The big event and rarest bird of the winter season in Coos County was the occurrence of a **Northern Hawk Owl** along Hall's Stream Road in Pittsburg, one of the lesser known and more remote parts of the northernmost area of New Hampshire. (*See the article on this sighting on page 30 for more details and photos*). Luckily, this sporadic visitor from the north found the neighborhood to its liking and stayed for weeks. The rest of the winter was quieter for unusual birds but always fascinating!

Fall 2023 Lingerers

In contrast to mid-winter, December in Coos County frequently has some mild days and, seemingly, fewer big snowstorms, but even with typically benign conditions in 2023 there were very few land birds that lingered. Waterbirds of note into December (and in some cases January) included a **Red-breasted Merganser** in Pittsburg (Glen & Alan Chretien on December 17), and a **Lesser Scaup** and a **Ring-necked Duck** on the Androscoggin River on January 2 in Errol (Lori Charron).

Christmas Bird Counts

The relatively mild weather meant good conditions for the

two northern Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). The Pittsburg counters on December 20, 2023, found three **Common Loons** and two **Common Goldeneyes** on the open waters of Lake Francis and First Connecticut Lake. Snow depths were modest, being between zero-to-eight inches. An excellent wild food crop resulted in a good diversity of northern finches and winter irruptives with large numbers of **Pine Siskin** being most noticeable (1,449, third highest total ever), followed by Purple Finch (249), Red-breasted Nuthatch (203), White-winged Crossbill (134), Golden-crowned Kinglet (63), Boreal Chickadee (41), Evening Grosbeak (41), and Canada Jay (25). No brand-new species were found on this count that is still going strong after more than 70 years, but unusual species or tallies included Red-breasted Merganser, 11 Bald Eagles, four Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Winter Wren, Belted Kingfisher, and Sharp-shinned Hawk. Special thanks go to Lori and Paul Charron, Phil Brown (compiler), and Glen, Lori-Ann, and Alan Chretien for their extra efforts before and after the day of the count.



Evening Grosbeak by Benjamin Griffith, 12-20-2023, Pittsburg CBC, NH.

The Errol counters on December 21, 2023, found similarly good though colder conditions with little snow on the ground. Even though there was less open water than in Pittsburg there was enough for a new count record: Lesser Scaup. The wild food crop seemed similar to that in Pittsburg but it must have been reduced because many of the finches (including Pine Siskin) were recorded in lower numbers (325 vs. 1,449) followed by White-winged Crossbill (27 vs. 134), Purple Finch (28 vs. 249), and Boreal Chickadee (only 3 vs. 41!), while other species “held their own” such as Red-breasted Nuthatch (138), Golden-crowned Kinglet (75), and Canada Jay (10). It is fascinating to see these differences between Pittsburg and Errol on consecutive days.

In addition to the new bird (Lesser Scaup), unusual species or higher than normal tallies included Ruffed Grouse (19), Spruce Grouse (second count record and found in the exact same spot as last year!), American Goshawk (2), Rough-legged Hawk (fourth record), Belted Kingfisher, Brown

Creepers (a record high 17), and Northern Cardinal (now regular). Special thanks go to Lori and Paul Charron, Katrina Fenton (compiler), Levi Burford, and Glen, Lori-Ann, and Alan Chretien for their extra efforts before and after this count as well.

Other Highlights

Very few other finches were reported in the county after the CBCs, or for that matter, other noteworthy sightings in January and most of February. Therefore, I will focus on the two epicenters of this season’s birding in Coos County, Gorham and Hall’s Stream Road (Pittsburg).

The feeders along Mechanic Street in Gorham, combined with the nearby Androscoggin River and local fruit trees, attracted many interesting species (and birders). A sample of these included: American Robin, several Bald Eagles, six Eastern Bluebirds, Merlin, both Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, three Pine Grosbeaks, Song Sparrow, Carolina Wren, and Gray Catbird.

The same goes for the Hall’s Stream area in Pittsburg, with the following being just some of the ancillary species seen near the Northern Hawk Owl: Belted Kingfisher, 50 American Crows (a large number for winter), Bohemian Waxwing, Ruffed Grouse, up to 18 Wild Turkeys, and Golden Eagle.



Ruffed Grouse by Leo McKillop, 2-16-2024, Pittsburg, NH.

There were a few other miscellaneous but noteworthy sightings. A Barred Owl along the Great Gulf Trail in the White Mountains on December 1 was noteworthy for being at high elevation (Benjamin Gagnon). A Northern Saw-whet Owl was seen and heard at a remote cabin in Errol on December 2 (Ashton Almeida). A Fox Sparrow was noted in Colebrook on December 7 (Aubrie Giroux). A Peregrine Falcon found in Stark at a known nest site on February 9 could easily have been an early returning “spring” migrant (Stuart Varney). A Black-backed Woodpecker on the summit of Wildcat “C” on February 12 demonstrates they can be found at elevation in mid-winter (Janice Landry). A flock of waxwings estimated at 1,000 birds, mostly Bohemian

Waxwings, were found feeding at the Wildcat Ski Area in Pinkham Notch on February 26 (Katrina Fenton, Levi Burford, see the Field Notes in this issue).

Early Spring Migrants

Does one Red-winged Blackbird in Millsfield on February 27 represent migration (Joanne Dionne)? I will let you be the judge of that.

Final Thoughts

In thinking about Coos birding as I head to roost, I continue to find that huge areas of the county receive little attention from birders, especially during the winter. Let's all go to a couple of new places next winter. I am thinking about a late season migration watch at the head of Crawford Notch and something along the lower reaches of the Connecticut River. Care to join me?

Birds of 2023 and Bird of the Year Awards

by Stephen R. Mirick

Taken from his post to the NHBirds email list, 1-5-2024.

In 2023, approximately 321 bird species were reported in New Hampshire, according to eBird (if you exclude about seven species of exotics). This is down roughly four species from last year and closer to the state average of about 310 to 330 species a year since 2010. I had the highest personal number of species in New Hampshire in eBird at 287. This total was way down from my big year in 2022 with 308 species but much closer to my average. I began the year with 399 species on my personal state list. Somewhere along the way, I "lost" a species from this list. I am not sure how or which one! But I added one new species to my overall list when I discovered the Virginia's Warbler in Hampton, New Hampshire. Therefore, my overall personal New Hampshire list is *still* at 399!

County Totals and Top County Birders in 2023

Rockingham: 302 species (Steve Mirick with 271 species)
Strafford: 233 species (Alan Murray with 196 species)
Grafton: 223 species (Wayne Scott with 201 species)
Hillsborough: 222 species (Nora Hanke with 187 species)
Cheshire: 218 species (Wendy Ward with 196 species)
Merrimack: 215 species (Pam Hunt with 197 species)
Carroll: 213 species (Ken Klapper with 189 species)
Coos: 202 species (Lori Charron with 173 species)
Sullivan: 198 species (Jen Armstrong with 175 species)
Belknap: 194 species (Rob Woodward with 164 species)

Bird of the Year Awards *(my humble opinions!)*

Bird of the Year: Overall

Vermilion Flycatcher—also one of the most infamous birds of the year! This has to get the award since it was the first state record. The Vermilion Flycatcher showed up in Rochester on the odd date of July 13 and was photographed by Alan Murray and James Gosling. Correct ID, however, wasn't uncovered until later that day when photos were examined. It was also seen by James and Katherine Smith, but sadly, it was a "One-day Wonder", disappearing the next day. This was a new species for the state and there are only about five other records for this southwestern flycatcher in New England, according to eBird.

Bird of the Year: First Runner-up

Virginia's Warbler. Found by Steve Mirick on 12-5-2023 in Hampton. It was seen daily and stayed for more than three weeks. This is only the second documented record for the state, but it's the first one seen by *many* birders. There are only about five other records in New England.



Virginia's Warbler by Jim Sparrell, 12-9-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH.

Bird of the Year: Second Runner-up

MacGillivray's Warblers—two of them! I give equal weight to both records which constitute the third and fourth records for New Hampshire. Since most records come from the coast, they are even more rare considering how far inland they were. The first was discovered by Dylan Jackson in Charlestown on 11-25-2023. It was elusive and hard to see but was recorded by several birders. The second bird was discovered by Chris McPherson on 12-23-2023 in Hollis and was seen (but mostly heard) through at least 12-30-2023.

Bird of the Year: Third Runner-up

Say's Phoebe. Found by Ruth Smith on 5-15-2023. She got the word out quickly and lots of birders got to enjoy it



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

for one day. It was gone the next. This is only the second state record.

Rarest Birds Continuing from 2022

Mountain Bluebird in Newington, Western Tanager in Greenland, and Pink-footed Goose in Durham!

Rarest Ocean Bird Found Inland

This one has to go to the famous adult Black-legged Kittiwake(s). Although there may have been more than one bird and part of a larger incursion of Black-legged Kittiwakes, it's interesting to ponder whether all three sightings represent the same bird. First, an adult bird was photographed by Elaine Faletta in Piermont on 5-5-2023. Then there was the famous bird found by Jen Esten on Pleasant Lake in New London on 6-11-2023 which stayed around and was seen by *many* birders up until at least 7-13-2023! Finally, a bird was found in Hancock on 8-10-2023 by Tom Momeyer. Kittiwakes are exceptionally rare away from the immediate shoreline. Honorable mention goes to a Leach's Storm-Petrel photographed by Cathy Eastburn in Orford on 9-16-2023.



Cape May Warbler by Pam Weeks, 1-13-2023, Auburn, NH.

Rarest Summer Bird in the Winter

A Cape May Warbler hung on into January of 2023 in Auburn at a feeder.

Most Long-staying Rarity of the Year

King Eider. The female King Eider which was first found at Odiorne Point SP on 5-22-2022 by Brett Hillman stayed all summer during 2022 and then through *all* of 2023!

Most Numerous Rarity of the Year

Ash-throated Flycatcher. Part of a regional influx of this western species, New Hampshire hosted three separate individuals this year! The first was found by Alan Murray in Dover. Next, 16-year-old Ethan Ring found one in Greenland and finally, I found one while trying to get a positive ID on the Virginia's Warbler the first day it appeared in Hampton.

Most Numerous Rare Bird of the Year Runner-up

Mountain Bluebird. *Two* individuals were seen in New Hampshire in 2023. One was the continuing bird from Newington, which was found in December 2022 and stayed into March 2023! A second Mountain Bluebird was discovered in Peterborough in February 2023 and was seen by many. These constitute the third and fourth state records for this species.



Mountain Bluebird by Susan Wisley, 3-8-2023, Great Bay NWR, NH.

Biggest Rare Bird Misidentifications of the Year

These happen to all of us. I got the award last year! I'll keep the names off, but the following rarities were initially identified as something much more common: Vermilion Flycatcher identified as Scarlet Tanager, Franklin's Gull identified as Laughing Gull, and a MacGillivray's Warbler identified as Mourning Warbler. Fortunately, photographs can make a big difference!

Biggest Rare Bird Non-identification of the Year

Golden-crowned Sparrow! A sparrow was photographed on 11-13-2023 in Hopkinton at the Elm Brook Recreation Area and was left unidentified in eBird. Cameron Johnson

somehow came across this report, saw the photo, and realized the true identification. This is only the third report of Golden-crowned Sparrow in New Hampshire. The second one was found in Derry in October of 2010. According to the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee the first ever record of a Golden-crowned Sparrow in New Hampshire was in April 1985 in Tamworth.

Best Coastal Birding Hotspot of the Year

Bicentennial Park. Visited by dozens of birders, this amazing patch of trees hosted the Virginia's Warbler, three Orange-crowned Warblers, and an Ash-throated Flycatcher! Read about this park in this issue's article "New Hampshire's Own Patagonia Picnic Table Effect" on page 35.

Most Frustrating Rare Bird of the Year

A Chuck-will's Widow flew over Star Island but could not be relocated. Runner-up is the Worm-eating Warbler seen at Odiorne Point SP by Jane Mirick (and Becky Suomala and Ethan Ring), but not by me! I searched for hours but could not relocate it. Who knows where it went?

Rarest Birds for Which an Award Category Could Not Be Found

Varied Thrush in Bath, Yellow-throated Warbler in Keene, Summer Tanager in Rye, Prothonotary Warbler in Rye, Golden-winged Warbler in Rye, Bullock's Oriole in Newington, Black-necked Stilt in Hampton, Townsend's Solitaire in Peterborough, Franklin's Gull in Ossipee, and two Red-eyed Vireos found in November less than a week apart in the Lakes Region. My apologies for any birds I didn't include.

Thanks to everyone for their help, cooperation and sharing. You made 2023 another wonderful year!!!!



Summer Tanager by Jim Sparrell, 4-19-2023, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

Species Spotlight: Ash-throated Flycatcher

by Stephen R. Mirick



Ash-throated Flycatcher by Jason Lambert, 11-4-2018, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

Background and Breeding

The Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) is a medium-sized flycatcher with a widespread breeding range. The core of the breeding range is from the southwestern United States through central Mexico, but some birds nest as far north as Idaho and Washington. It is a medium distance migrant that winters from southern Arizona (where it occurs year-round) south through coastal regions of Mexico and along the Pacific coastline to Honduras and Nicaragua. During fall migration, they can occasionally be seen along the east coast of the United States.

The Ash-throated Flycatcher is a member of the *Myiarchus* genus of flycatchers. Species within this genus can be very similar in appearance and many are best identified by voice. Only six species of *Myiarchus* have been recorded in the United States and the only regularly occurring member of the genus in the eastern United States is the Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) which is an uncommon, but widespread nesting species in summer months throughout New Hampshire. The Ash-throated Flycatcher looks similar to the Great Crested Flycatcher; however, it is slightly smaller and paler with a different call note and tends to forage closer to the ground and in more open areas.

Occurrence in New Hampshire

Ash-throated Flycatchers are a rare fall migrant in New England, found more commonly closer to the coast; however,

they appear to be increasing in occurrence as there are no historic records for the region prior to the 1970s. The first state record for Maine came in 1971 and in Massachusetts the first record followed in 1972. The first New Hampshire record came in 1998. As of April 1, 2024, there are ten records in New Hampshire (Table 1).

Another unidentified *Myiarchus* flycatcher seen in Rochester on November 13, 2008, was also likely an Ash-throated Flycatcher given the late date; however, it's possible it could have been a very late Great Crested Flycatcher, which are even more unusual past early October.

The three or four fall/winter 2023-2024 sightings in New Hampshire were part of a larger scale incursion of this species into the eastern United States that season. Approximately 13 individuals were reported throughout New England including Vermont's first state record.

For unknown reasons, Ash-throated Flycatchers, like some other species of vagrant flycatchers from the south and west, often appear very late in the fall season, when they feed on fruit to survive the cold days and nights. In fact, regionally, they are extremely rare in any month *other than* October through January (Figure 1).

The tolerance of this species to cold weather, however, may be overcome by a winter snowstorm. The Ash-throated Flycatcher on January 6, 2024, at the Hampton Wastewater Treatment Plant was seen foraging around the buildings late in the afternoon just as the snow was starting to fly, but it was not reported again after the snowstorm continued through the night and into the following day leaving behind 15 inches of snow in Hampton!

Data Sources and References

Cardiff, S and D. Dittmann. 2020. Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.astfly.01>

eBird. 2024. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. <http://www.ebird.org>. (accessed: April 2024).

Keith, A. and R. Fox. 2013. *The Birds of New Hampshire*. The Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, MA.

Sibley, D. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Second Edition. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY.

Veit, R. and W. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, MA.

Vickery, P. 2020. *Birds of Maine*. Princeton University Press & The Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, MA.

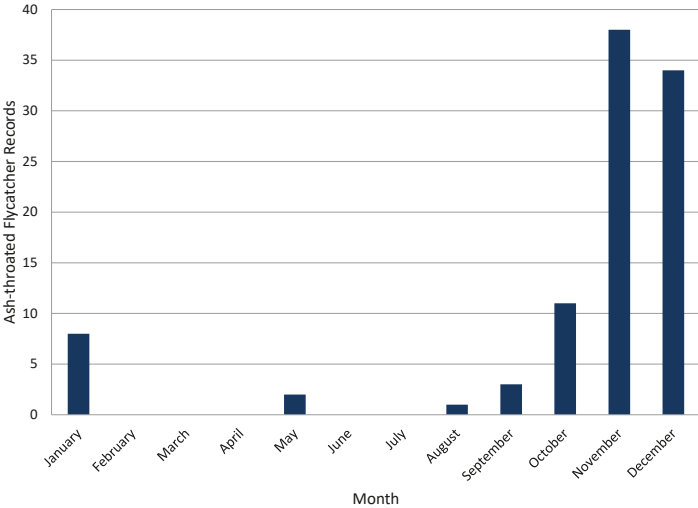
Table 1. Ash-throated Flycatcher records in New Hampshire, as of 4-1-2024. Source: eBird, www.ebird.org.

Year	Period	Town	Observer(s)
1998	Late November through December 6	Lyme	H. Swartz et al.
2001	October 26 – 28	Concord	M. Suomala et al.
2005	November 19 through December 1	East Kingston	D. Finch et al.
2005	November 20	Kensington	D. Finch
2018	November 4 – 5	Rye	M. Watson, S. Wong et al.
2022	December 11 – 14	Durham	K. Dorsey et al.
2023	November 20 – 26	Dover	A. Murray et al.
2023	November 24 – 25	Greenland	E. Ring et al.
2023	December 5 – 26	Hampton	S. Mirick et al.
2024	January 6	Hampton	D. Sacks, S. Mirick



Great Crested Flycatcher by Kyle Wilmarth. Note the similar appearance to the Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Figure 1. Total Ash-throated Flycatcher reports by month in New England. Totals are approximate and some reports appear in multiple months. Data reflects totals as of 4-1-2024. Source: eBird, www.ebird.org.



Field Notes Winter 2023-24

Kathryn Frieden, Editor

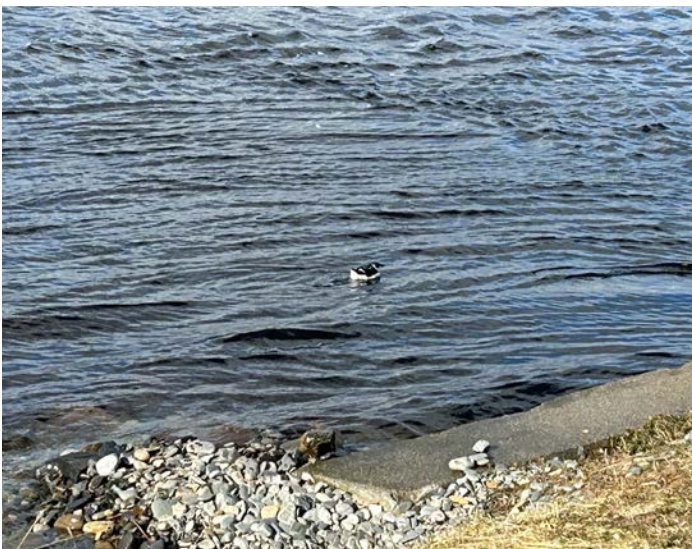
An eBird First at Eel Pond

Story and Photos by Roger Stephenson. Photos taken on 01-14-2024 at Eel Pond in Rye, NH.

Just after lunch on a clear and mild January, I was counting various ducks and gulls from the Rt. 1A shoreline of Eel Pond in Rye, hoping to see a Lesser Black-backed Gull which had been documented the day prior by Leo McKillop. Suddenly, a black and white blur flew across my field of view. I lowered my binoculars, thinking a Bufflehead might have flown in to join his pals; I was stunned to see that a Dovekie had landed mere feet from me, near the small clump of cattails. Having only a smart phone, I remained where I stood and took a few photos, stopping only to realize in horror that the bird was



Dovekie on Eel Pond floating near the cattails.



This photo was taken only moments before the Dovekie disappeared into the culvert that drains the pond to the ocean.

swimming toward the culvert! I watched, paralyzed as the outpouring water, significant due to the recent flooding, forced the bird down into the culvert, under the road and into the stormy Atlantic. The ocean was doing its part, crashing against the rocks and the outflow, no doubt dooming the bird. I could not relocate the bird on the ocean side. It appears from eBird this may be an Eel Pond first for this species, if lasting only a minute.

Dovekie Rescue

Editor's Note: On February 20, 2024 the Seacoastonline digital publication included an article by Susan Pike about "birds that aren't supposed to be here" in the winter. This article contained these remarkable photos of Dovekies at the Center for Wildlife in York, ME. They are included here with permission from the Center for Wildlife.



The Center for Wildlife in York, Maine rescued 64 Dovekies that had been blown inland by winter storms, one from as far away as Vermont! At least 44 recovered fully and were able to be returned to the ocean. Here are a few of them, recuperating in a bathtub. Photo taken 1-30-2024, at the Center for Wildlife.



Here is a close up of one of the Dovekies found in the snow and ice on 1-30-2024.

The Many Colors of an American Goldfinch

by Anita Fernandez



Sabine Duran took this photo of a leucistic American Goldfinch in Stoddard, NH, on 2-3-2024. An abundance of white is visible, with little melanin apparent.



This melanistic American Goldfinch was photographed in Franconstown, NH, by Eric Masterson on 1-29-2024. You can see in drastic contrast to the leucistic bird, the melanistic bird has almost no yellow coming through.

There are several color aberrations that can change the “typical” plumage of a bird. If a bird is suffering from albinism, it lacks all pigment. Not only will the feathers appear white, but the legs, feet, beaks, and any exposed skin will look pink, due to the visible veins. For leucistic birds, a lack of melanin can make parts or all of their plumage lighter. Beaks and skin will still appear normal in these birds. Some birds also suffer from progressive graying; with each molt they grow more and more light feathers due to a lack of melanin.

Then there are the “too much” pigment color-shifts.

Xanthochromism results from the excessive production of the yellow carotenoid pigment. Melanism occurs when too much melanin is produced, making parts of their plumage dark. Many of these color aberrations are caused by either genetic mutations or dietary deficiencies. For example, a bird could appear to exhibit Xanthochromism during one molt, but because of a better diet during the following period, grow in typically colored feathers the next molt. In the case of this melanistic American Goldfinch, you can see in the photo that although a few feathers display a colorful yellow, the majority are almost black or a rusty brown, indicating there may be an over-production in both types of feather melanin: eumelanin (blacks and grays) and phaeomelanin (russet and buff colorations).



This photo, taken by Roger Frieden 2-4-2022 in Nottingham, NH, shows the normal appearance of an American Goldfinch in winter plumage.

Bohemian Waxwings at Wildcat Mountain

Post to the NHBirds email list 2-28-2024 by Levi Burford.

Katrina and I were skiing at Wildcat Mountain in Gorham, NH, on Monday, February 26, 2024. We noted large flocks of Bohemian Waxwings, with some Cedar Waxwing flocks here and there. Also present were American Robins, who all seemed to be feeding on abundant Mountain Ash berries high up on the mountain. I took a video of a swirling flock being split in two by a marauding Sharp-shinned Hawk. Shortly before the sharpie showed up, Katrina counted through one flock by tens, coming up with approximately 700; she thought she probably missed some. I had counted by hundreds and came up with around 1,000!

Check out the video: <https://youtu.be/iqOuAoJO-7I>

Editor's Note: 1,000 is the highest Bohemian Waxwing count in eBird since 2016 when there were 1,200 in Gorham, NH.

Pine Siskin Extravaganza

by Jason Pietrzak

As predicted in the finch forecast, it was a great winter for Pine Siskins, with their distinctive, husky, rising, buzzy calls nearly ubiquitous across the state. On January 13, 2024, a flock of about a hundred siskins descended out of the blue into my Walpole yard and whipped themselves into a frenzy down the driveway. In just a minute or two, they were gone. It turned out to be a harbinger of what I would see a few minutes later at Fall Mountain State Forest in Langdon, NH.

Upon pulling up to park at the trailhead, I detected a major swarming and swirling of birds hidden amongst the hemlocks and hardwoods. I couldn't imagine what might be flocking deeper in the woods but, upon opening my car door, I had my answer immediately with the constant, jumbled calls of a massive siskin flock.

Seeing huge numbers of birds always brings to mind swarms of insects or watching flocks of gulls and shorebirds at the beach. It looked like buckets of siskins were pouring across the forest floor and sweeping and rolling along like a wave coming ashore. Constant small clusters of birds swept up, down, and across from the low branches like the foam blowing across the beach in a storm. The action made it hard to focus on any one bird or spot. I got about 20 siskins in my binoculars wherever I focused. I conservatively estimated the flock at 350, but I was so caught up in the excitement that I couldn't decide whether to count, just enjoy the spectacle, or search desperately for redpolls or other odd finches with the flock (I never noticed any).

I've seen big flocks of different finches before, though never this many siskins. It was raining at the time, with only a light cover of snow on the ground, so the siskins were likely foraging on the forest floor to avoid the weather in the treetops. So, was this behavior actually unusual or does a similar phenomenon occur all across the boreal forest without anybody around to witness it?

Pine Seed Feast

Photo and Story by Iain MacLeod.

The fall of 2023 and winter of 2023-24 will be remembered for one of the biggest bumper crops of pine seeds in decades. We could see it coming the prior summer when the tops of the white pines were laden with growing cones. The birds took advantage of the feast. We all saw and heard groups of Red Crossbills in every corner of the state. These nomadic, conifer specialists "erupt" in direct response to the availability of pine and spruce cones.

But it was not just the typical seed-eating passerines that found the bounty irresistible. I was struck by the many



A Ring-billed Gull with pine seed parts attached to its bill photographed at Opechee Bay in Laconia, NH, on 1-4-2024.

waterbirds that visited the buffet. During the November Challenge (see the Fall 2023 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*) I spent a lot of time at various lakes in Meredith and Center Harbor. On every visit, I noted Mallards and Ring-billed Gulls constantly pecking food items off the water's surface close to the shore (in the shadow of white pines). It only took me a few moments to put two and two together and determine that they must be eating fallen pine seeds—and why not? The seeds were an easy-to-find source of calories!

I began to pay closer attention to the dinner guests. A Bonaparte's Gull that visited Lake Waukegan (Meredith/Center Harbor, NH) in mid-November showed the same surface-gleaning behavior as the Ring-billed Gulls it associated with. Then I noted a whole flock of Common Goldeneye, that had just arrived for the fall, were also engaged in surface-feeding . . . rather than their usual diving habits. They fed just like the nearby Mallards and even squabbled over the tasty floating treats.

In February, two Gadwall were found feeding with Mallards along the Winnepesaukee River in Tilton. All these ducks positioned themselves facing into the strong current pecking items off the surface rather than upending in the shallows as you would expect. I suspect that they too were taking advantage of a quick seed meal floating past them.

What other unexpected species did you see eating pine seeds?

Waterfowl all Winter at Horseshoe Pond in Concord, NH

by Pam Hunt



Canvasback by Pam Geiger, 2-26-2024, Horseshoe Pond, Concord, NH.

As January 2024 continued to cycle between unseasonably warm and frigid cold, local water bodies were equally variable in ice cover. Early in the month, Long Pond remained wide open and there were still almost 100 Ring-necked Ducks and three Greater Scaup there through January 14. It froze up solid shortly thereafter, and the action shifted to Horseshoe Pond. The fun began on January 11, when Becky Suomala and Zeke Cornell found a pair of Northern Pintails and a male Bufflehead. The latter continued to February 3, but the pintails took up residence, and were even joined by a second male at the very end of February. By comparison, there were only two separate winter pintail records for the pond the previous five winters, and none for Bufflehead.

A couple of weeks later, Darryl Parker turned up a female diving duck that, after some discussion, was determined to be a Lesser Scaup, and she remained at the pond until February 11. The other fun find in January was a male Gadwall on January 30-31, but only three people had a chance to see this short-staying bird. Fast forward to February 26, when Pam Geiger located a female Canvasback that was seen by several lucky birders the same day but not relocated subsequently. Late February is the typical start of spring migration for this species, so it was clearly on the move. People looking unsuccessfully for the Canvasback the next day found the first Ring-necked Duck of the season, and it was joined the next day by four more to close out the winter season.

Throughout this period, the more expected species of Canada Goose, Mallard, American Black Duck, and Hooded Merganser were far more reliable – and occurred in significantly higher numbers – than in a typical winter. Numbers increased noticeably in early January, right around the time that other local water bodies like Long Pond froze during the first major cold snap. Horseshoe probably never

froze because of its location in a warmer-than-average urban area, and thus provided a refuge for waterfowl that otherwise would have continued south along the Merrimack River or towards the coast. With winters only likely to get warmer, there's a good chance that this local hot spot will continue to dish up a few surprises in years to come.

Also, if you've been keeping track, the two remaining waterfowl species at Horseshoe this winter were a Common Goldeneye on January 16 and a handful of Common Mergansers. These two species are common on the Merrimack River all winter in Concord and thus not tied to open water in lakes and ponds, but if there is water they will come, and they graced Horseshoe a couple of times to keep things interesting.

Sandhill Crane Flock

by Chase Cote

On December 6, 2023, I was walking to my car in Raymond, NH, and unexpectedly heard the calls of Sandhill Cranes mixed with Canada Geese. I pulled out my phone to scan the sky and with great surprise identified a whole flock of sandhills tailing a flock of Canada Geese!

Here is the link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKigcqRerHI&t=10s>



This is a still image from the video that Chase Cote took in Raymond, NH, on 12-6-2023. It shows part of the remarkable "v" of Sandhill Cranes (24 in total).

A Winter Night's Visitor

by Greg Tillman

Here's something that would not have happened if I'd been watching TV! I was sitting cozy in my chair, reading on a winter's night in February (2024), when an irritating, barely audible, squeaky sort of sound gradually caught my attention. Eventually, I looked up from my book to try to figure out which of our modern household conveniences might need some attention. Not the refrigerator . . . not the furnace. In fact, after walking around, I realized the sound was coming from a direction where I had no appliances at all—it was coming from outside! Excited now, I stepped outside, and more clearly heard the remarkable and totally not irritating tooting of a Northern Saw-whet Owl! Supposedly named after the sound of a saw being sharpened, saw-whet owl is a mouthful of a name. Still, much better than Squeaky Fan-belt Owl!

I've lived here 20 years or so, and Northern Saw-whet Owls are relatively common, but this was the first time I have ever heard one in the yard. No telling how often I might have missed that soft song over the years, though, sitting inside on a winter night with the windows closed, unaware of visitors outside in the cold and dark.

Tracking down a Varied Thrush

Story and photo by Tom Momeyer.

I headed out the morning of January 21, 2024 (nine degrees Fahrenheit!) with toe warmers in my boots and hand warmers in my gloves to find a Pacific Northwest bird that found its way to my hometown of Peterborough, NH. The Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) looks like a cross between an American Robin and a Baltimore Oriole. It's more elusive than a robin, usually feeding on the ground among dense thickets. The small group of birders that I was with included a couple of folks who had traveled all the way from York,



Varied Thrush, 1-21-2024, Peterborough, NH.

Maine, to see the remarkable bird. After an hour or more of searching in the bitter cold, we found it foraging with several juncos on the Common Pathway in Peterborough... success!

Editor's Note: The Common Pathway trail begins at the Noone Falls area in south Peterborough and follows the Contoocook River north for six miles on a combination of old rail beds and sidewalks when in the downtown area. See the Summer 2022 issue for more on birding the Pathway.

Construction Work on the Hampton Jetty



Large flocks of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks were less common at Hampton Beach State Park during the winter of 2023-24. Construction work on the jetty created disturbance and the piles of stone and large equipment reduced the area of grass where these two species like to feed (photos by Rebecca Suomala 1-5-2024). The Snow Buntings, however, sometimes liked to land on the stone when work was stopped (photo by Susan Wrisley during the Superbowl of Birding, 1-27-2024).

Backyard Birder

Pine Warbler Bonanza

Story and photos by Steve Lauermann.



Three of Steve Lauermann's Pine Warblers, all relatively bright birds, 2-16-2024. The first bird to appear at the feeders is on the lower left. Note the growth on his claw.

Editor's Note: The winter of 2023-24 was marked by an unusually high number of Pine Warblers. See this issue's Season Summary for more details. Catching a glimpse of one Pine Warbler in the winter is exciting. Steve saw six in his backyard! All photos were taken by Steve in his backyard in Rochester, NH and showcase some of the different plumages this species can exhibit.

We have a small backyard that has good forage, cover, and protection. It is in a residential neighborhood in Rochester with flower beds, a vegetable garden, ample shrubbery, and mature trees. Our feeding station is well-protected. It consists of large and small platform feeders and three hanging feeders filled with black sunflower seed, mealworms, and a suet block. All-in-all, it is rather well-suited for a diverse local bird population of 15-20 species as well as a good recharge spot for intermittent visitors and migrants. In past years, we have had Pine Warblers fit the latter category, showing up April 16 (to the day) through late May. In October, they stop by again, briefly, on their way south.

To my surprise, on January 4, 2024, a male Pine Warbler appeared early in the morning at my feeder. On January 8, I had two, and then a third on January 15. On January 26, I had four at once at my feeders, but the peak was on February 15 when six appeared at once with siskins, goldfinch, and titmice. They were *very* active! During the winter and into March, they showed up almost every day, usually individually, but sometimes in multiples and once all together.

The Pine Warblers, much like our other feeder birds, showed up during morning twilight. They fed briefly, usually at the suet block or platform feeder, pushing aside the sunflower seed preferring the mealworms hidden below. They did at times resort to sunflower seed in the hanging

feeders or search through discards on the ground. They either consumed their food in place or flew up to a branch high up in one of the maples, usually returning for more.

They returned throughout the day every hour or two, and typically stopping around 2:30 pm. They flew in with the finches, juncos, chickadees, and woodpeckers, feeding in close proximity to them, sometimes across the feeder or on the other side of a suet block. They rarely slowed down. They were always on the move, and appeared anxious, constantly looking about them. Once in a while they challenged others, but only those of like size, choosing to flee from the larger Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, or Northern Cardinal. Like many species, proximity to another of their own kind was usually cause for a confrontation, resulting in much bluster and ending with the exit of one.

The Pine Warblers were active on our feeders daily until early May, when we started hearing them only in the woods. They left the area on May 15. It was a great gift to have them here for the better part of winter.



Two Pine Warblers on suet, one bright and one dull, 2-16-2024.



A very bright yellow male Pine Warbler, a little wet, 1-26-2024.



A very colorless Pine Warbler, likely a young female, 2-11-2024.

Red Crossbills: Risk-takers Along the Road

by Melissa Moore



Red Crossbill by Christopher MacPherson, 1-19-2024, Brookline, NH.



Red Crossbills pick up grit in a Hannaford's parking lot in Northwood, NH. Photo by Scott Young, 2-26-2024.

When I was walking one day this winter with my neighbor and her leashed dog, her canine stopped us and pointed at a dead bird on the side of the road. The dog is a Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, and pointing is what she does best. They continued their walk while I inspected the bird.

I noticed the bird's brick red color and crossed bill. I was curious and wondered why this feathered beauty lay lifeless at the roadside. It seemed like an odd place for it, right on the side of the road. A week later, I found an olive-colored female crossbill in the same state. This double fatality launched me on a path to learn more about crossbills and their behavior. Here is some of what I learned.

In the fall of 2023, New Hampshire experienced a mast

year for White Pine cones. Roadsides were littered with these coniferous delights and the bountiful supply attracted record numbers of Red Crossbills. Seeds from conifer cones are their preferred food source and when Red Crossbills discover a plentiful supply of cones, they move into the area without a care for the season. They follow the conifer cones like a NASCAR fan follows the Cup Series Circuit.

Their odd-shaped bill is specialized for prying open the scales on cones and extracting the seed inside. Red Crossbills require the seeds for sustenance and will even bring the seeds to the nest to feed their young. A conifer cone bonanza spurs the breeding season which can occur at any time during the year.

Once Red Crossbills have moved into an area, it's common to see them on the ground along the roadside. A dietary requirement for this species is to consume grit which they pick up from sifting through roadside sand. This eating habit, while necessary for proper digestion, puts them at risk. The Red Crossbills I found dead on the road were likely hit by a car while they were sifting through sand.

As the season marched towards spring, sightings of Red Crossbills intensified. By this point in the season, I was making many car trips between my maple sugarhouse and home. One morning, as I pulled out of the sugarhouse parking lot and onto the road, I had to jump on my brakes to avoid a quartet of crossbills. They were unaware of how dangerously close they came to death by my vehicle's rotating tires. I stopped, backed up, blew my horn, and watched as they took flight; crisis averted. Two days later, I smiled with glee when I saw a group of three males and one female noisily perching in an old Sugar Maple's treetop.



White-winged Crossbills are also known to pick up grit to aid in their digestion. Photo by Scott Heron 2-27-2016, Pittsburg, NH.

Field Trip Reports

A January Field Trip to the NH Coast

by Rich Aaronian

Editor's Note: Rich Aaronian led a January field trip to the coast for the Seacoast Chapter of NH Audubon and provided these highlights. As an added bonus, he brought the stuffed head of a Red-breasted Merganser from the Phillips-Exeter Academy collection. When the field trip group saw some Red-breasted Mergansers, he pulled the head out of his pocket to show people what they look like up close. Not many trip leaders can do that!

Approximately 15 hearty participants arrived at Hampton Beach State Park in Hampton, NH, at 9:00 am on January 20, 2024. We were greeted by a balmy temperature of 11°F and 10-15 mph WNW winds. By the end of the trip the temperature soared to the mid-teens! Despite the conditions, everyone remained upbeat and excited about finding and identifying our coastal winter birds.



Rich Aaronian gives people a close up look at a Red-breasted Merganser head, 1-20-2024.

In addition to the challenging conditions, our trip was shortened since Rt. 1A was closed north of North Hampton State Beach due to the flooding and erosion from two previous January storms. Erosion was also visible on the beach front at Hampton Beach State Park where the sand dunes were noticeably undercut exposing the roots of beach grass (*Ammophila* sp.) which stabilize the dunes. Despite these

conditions, we forged ahead and birded Hampton Beach State Park, Hampton River Marina, Bicentennial Park, and North Hampton State Beach.

A number of experienced birders with spotting scopes helped others see most of the expected winter waterfowl and other species typical on our coast in winter. For a few, life birds resulted. Some participants left early due to the conditions and those of us who remained all had red faces and watery eyes. Jim Sparrell's camera battery died and needed to be warmed up in his pocket, but not before he took photos of the two Lapland Longspur at Hampton Beach State Park—a highlight of the trip. Other notable species included: both Purple Sandpiper and Sanderling, Snow Bunting, Horned Lark, Northern Harrier, Horned and Red-

necked Grebe, Belted Kingfisher, and the Hampton water tower Peregrine Falcon—a spotting scope sighting from the marina! Unfortunately, the two Harlequin Ducks, which had been present in the marina, did not receive my text that we would be looking for them.

About eight of us ended the trip at North Hampton State Park and looked forward to warming up at home after an invigorating three hours on the New Hampshire seacoast. Many thanks to Holly Bauer for keeping the participant and species list and for her overall help in making this trip a success. I look forward to another trip in the winter of 2025 and hope everyone who attended does as well.



Lapland Longspur by Jim Sparrell, 1-20-2024, Hampton Beach SP, NH.

The Seacoast Chapter's Finch Count in Coos County

by Lori Charron

Posted to the NH Birds email list on February 9, 2024.

On Tuesday, February 6, 2024, eleven birders met at McDonald's parking lot in Gorham, NH, for a great day of birding. With temperatures starting in the morning at 19 °F, we topped off the day with a record high of 38 °F and a bluebird day, not a cloud in the sky! We started the morning in Gorham on Mechanic Street with our first rare bird of the day, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker! Then at our second stop behind the old Burger King, we got our second rare bird for this time of year, a Hermit Thrush. We were off to a great start!

There were a few fly-over Bohemian Waxwings but we wanted to get a good visual, so we spent a little extra time on Industrial Dr. in Berlin. What a show we got! These were life-birds for two of us. There was a good flock of Snow Buntings at the horse farm in Milan. We took a slow ride up to Errol on Rt. 16, but only saw a few birds on the Androscoggin River. After a quick stop at LL Cote, the big local convenience and outlet store in downtown Errol, we were off to Bean Road where my brother Gregg Dionne welcomed us to his yard in hopes of finding a Canada Jay. It was a success and several more birders had a lifer!

We then continued up Rt. 16 a short distance looking for



Canada Jay by Paul Kursewicz, 2-6-2024, Errol, NH.

the male Ring-necked Duck that had been hanging around, success again! We had good views and a couple of Common Goldeneyes as well. We finished the day in my yard where we took a nice walk around the back woods. There were not many birds, but we reached 30 species for the day with our sighting of two Golden-crowned Kinglets. What a great

day for birding! Great birders, lots of laughs, and a few good birds.

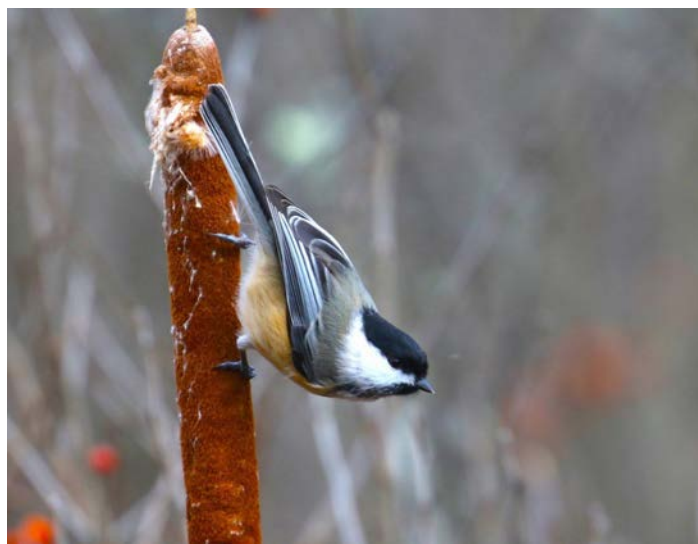
A big thanks to Gregg for letting us come to see the birds in his yard. Also, a big thanks to Dan Hubbard for being the tail runner and keeping the bird lists for us. Most of all, a big thank you to all the birders that came to spend a day birding in Coos County!

Editor's Note: John Keator had a great time photographing his Canada Jay life bird at Gregg Dionne's yard in Errol and was treated to an interesting example of bird behavior in the process. Here is his story:

We were all congregated at the house watching the Canada Jay come to the feeder and grab food multiple times. I was photographing the bird and tracking it with a telephoto lens, so I could see the details. Each time the bird took some food it flew up into an adjacent tree. I watched and noticed that it didn't eat the food but hid each morsel behind a section of bark. After a few repetitions, I saw a Blue Jay fly down and land in the tree around ten feet from the Canada Jay. It seemed very intent on watching the Canada Jay. The next time the Canada Jay left to get additional food, the Blue Jay flew to the exact spot where it had been and grabbed the food that had been 'hidden.' It then immediately flew away and I don't know if the Canada Jay, which soon returned with more food, even saw what had happened.

A New Year's Big Day

by Ethan Ring



Black-capped Chickadee by Ethan Ring, 1-1-2024, Great Bay Rd., Greenland, NH.

January 1, 2024, marked my first official big day on my own. My mom and I had done smaller big days on January 1 for the previous three years, but this year I was going all day from dawn to dusk. January 1 means a lot to me because it was the date my mom and I shared in previous years. It also represents a fresh start to a new year. Plus, seeing Bostic do a big day on January 1 in the movie *The Big Year* (2011) made it seem fun and special.

In the few weeks before January 1, I scouted out my locations. I figured out what was around and what I should be chasing. My route would start early in the morning at the Great Bay Discovery Center in Greenland, NH, and would take me all throughout Greenland to Hampton and up the New Hampshire seacoast ending at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye, NH.

I started very early to try to get a head start on the owls. This is where I struggled the most during my big day, striking out on owls all morning. Mallards calling at 4:50 am were the first birds of my big day and for the year. It was very quiet up until around 6:30 am when I had a calling Winter Wren off Dearborn Road in Greenland. Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, White-throated Sparrow, and Northern Cardinal were added before sunrise by just driving around Greenland with the car window down. I made my way to the McDonald's off Ocean and Greenland Road. Here I picked up grackles, robins, and a single Red-winged Blackbird leaving the roost.

I arrived at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) shortly after sunrise to target the overwintering ducks on Peverly Brook Pond. Three Gadwall and about twenty American Wigeon were still present on the pond.

Two Cedar Waxwings on the Ferry Way Trail were a pleasant surprise. A calling Swamp Sparrow and a Cooper's Hawk chasing the pigeons at Great Bay Farm were key birds for the day, two species I had suspected I might struggle to find. An overwintering Gray Catbird was still present off Great Bay Road in Greenland, continuing from the Christmas Bird Count. Also present was my second Winter Wren of the day.

I made my way to Brackett's Point on Great Bay to find wintering ducks. Off the point were Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, and a lone Hooded Merganser. An overwintering Eastern Towhee was also present along the Brackett's Point trail. One last check of the Bay from the Discovery Center offered three Lesser Scaup and my *third Winter Wren* of the day along the boardwalk.

I then made my way to Seabrook and Hampton. I had a good group of Ring-necked Ducks in the Seabrook Town Forest and a Great Blue Heron along Rt. 1. Two Ruby-crowned Kinglets, two Yellow-rumped Warblers, and the continuing Wilson's Warbler were still present at the Hampton Wastewater Treatment Plant. Hampton Beach SP only offered a single Horned Lark, but more were at Bicentennial Park with three Orange-crowned Warblers and another Ruby-crowned Kinglet. I had a Double-crested Cormorant, Razorbill, and Black Guillemot at Rye Harbor, all good pickups.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet by Ethan Ring, 1-1-2024, Hampton WTP, NH.

I made a stop at Pulpit Rocks in Rye to scan for the female King Eider, which had been seen there. No luck, but I finally got Red-throated Loon for the day, a species I did not expect to struggle with as much as I did. I was starting my walk at Odiorne Point SP (my final stop) at sunset, when I got a text from Holly Bauer to say that she had found the King Eider off Pulpit Rocks. I rushed back down, got my scope out, and got eyes on the eider.

I made my way back to Odiorne as the sun was setting fast, quickly making it over to Little Harbor to look for a Bonaparte's Gull. I spotted a small flock of four gulls on

the buoys. Three were Bonaparte's Gulls and the other was an immature Black-headed Gull that had been in the area throughout the winter. A last-ditch effort at the Rye Recreation Area resulted in a tooting Northern Saw-whet Owl at 5:30 pm, putting an end to an incredible day.

I ended with 79 species on the day and many more memories. Barred Owl was a species I really expected to get in the early morning hours but it never showed; the same was true with Great Horned Owl. The Black-headed Gull, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and the many Winter Wrens would have to go down as my highlights of the day. I had a blast doing this big day and I will 100% continue my tradition of January 1 big days into the future.

Editor's Note: A favorite of many, the movie "The Big Year" (2011) follows three avid birders in their adventures to see as many birds as possible within a calendar year, a challenge that gave the movie its title. Featuring Owen Wilson, Steve Martin, and Jack Black, the star-studded cast introduces audiences to the world of birding through this comedic adaptation of Mark Obmascik's book "The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession" (2004), based on a true story. While offering great comedic value, the film also appeals to birders who might spot small inaccuracies overlooked by Hollywood producers, such as a Pink-footed Goose atop a snowy mountain! Share this movie with your friends and family; it might just help them understand your passion for birding.

2025 Introduction to Bird Identification, Ecology & Habitats Course

UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) opens registration for this exciting course in early February 2025. Designed for anyone looking to improve their bird identification skills and knowledge of bird ecology and habitats, the course includes online lessons and optional field trips. Participants will learn to identify 50 common bird species, predict which species will occur in different habitats, and discover ways to attract and support birds on their property.

This course is taught by Matt Tarr (UNHCE) with help from Phil Brown (Harris Center for Conservation Education) and is further co-sponsored by NH Audubon, NH Fish & Game Department, NH Division of Forests & Lands, Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire, and New Hampshire Timberland Owner's Association. Email Matt Tarr (matt.tarr@unh.edu) if you would like to receive important updates about this course, including the complete course outline as soon as it's available in January 2025.

Northern Hawk Owl in Pittsburg



Photo by Susan Wisley, 2-16-2024.

A Rare Winter Visitor

by Rebecca Suomala and Grace McCulloch

In the winter of 2023-24, birders were delighted by a rare visitor to Pittsburg, NH, a Northern Hawk Owl. This captivating owl, first reported by Aubrie Giroux on February 12, 2024, was a significant sighting. There have only been ten documented sightings in the state since 1965. (See Table 1 on page 31.) The last recorded sighting was in Center Harbor, NH, on December 5, 2008, extending into March 2009.

The appearance of this winter's Northern Hawk Owl sparked a flurry of excitement in the remote reaches of Pittsburg, situated along the Canadian border. Even local border patrol agents joined in, eagerly seeking updates from birders about the owl's whereabouts.

Data Sources

eBird. 2024. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. <http://www.ebird.org>. (accessed: February 2024).

Keith, A. and R. Fox. 2013. *The Birds of New Hampshire*. The Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, MA.

The Northern Hawk Owl Provides an Unexpected Gift

by Grace McCulloch

Nora Hanke went to Pittsburg on February 25 in search of the Northern Hawk Owl. Upon finding it, she watched as the owl descended behind a garage, not reappearing until mid-afternoon. When it did, it promptly regurgitated a pellet which she collected and photographed. Diane Seavey captured a similar moment in a photo on March 28 (shown below). Owls regurgitate the indigestible parts of their prey, including feathers, bones, and teeth in the form of pellets. The pellet Nora shared from her trip likely contained the remnants of whatever the owl caught behind the garage!



Photo by Diane Seavey, 3-28-2024.



Northern Hawk Owl pellet
by Nora Hanke, 2-25-2024.

Uncovering a Forgotten Record: The Northern Hawk Owl of 1982

by Kathryn Frieden

While researching these sightings, I came across an isolated eBird entry for February 1, 1982, by Sarah Hobart. She wrote in the comments that it was a bird that drew many visitors, and yet there was no record of it in the old paper files of *New Hampshire Bird Records* and it was not mentioned in *The Birds of New Hampshire* by Keith and Fox. I emailed Sarah to ask if perhaps she had gotten the date and location wrong in eBird. Within an hour she had replied to my email. She included a photo of the bird that her father had taken and a photo of the article from the Plymouth newspaper, the “Record Citizen,” about the bird. How is that for promptness and organization! And yes, her eBird entry was accurate.

When I replied to Sarah to compliment her on her efficiency, she explained that her father, James Hobart, was a life-long birder who taught his children to love birds, nature, and the outdoors. He also was a meticulous organizer of photos, and when she asked him for the hawk owl material a few years ago, he was able to send it to her in minutes! She still had it in a file on her computer labeled “Important Stuff,” so was able to send it on to us. Sarah added, “Dad passed away last fall, but he would be so very happy to know that

his record-keeping is contributing to *New Hampshire Bird Records*.” Thank you to Sarah and her father for adding a Northern Hawk Owl to our list!

12March 31, 1982The Record Citizen, Plymouth, NH

Baker Valley hosts rare Artic Owl

For some weeks now a rare Artic owl has found a temporary home in Rumney.

The owl was first seen at Keniston’s Lumber Mill on the Stinson Lake Road the first week in December. It appeared daily for a week and then disappeared to return infrequently.


Some six to eight weeks ago the owl found a place to its liking along the flood plain of the Baker River at the rear of the Gertrude Deacon property in Rumney Depot. Mrs. Deacon and Mr. Clyde Tebo have hosted a number of birders who have visited from Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island and a variety of towns and cities in New Hampshire.

The Hawk Owl, normally spends its life within the Artic Circle, but occasionally comes south into the upper states of the forty-eight. This year two owls have been seen in Maine, one in Iowa, another in Minnesota and of course the one in Rumney.

Not knowing anything about snowmobiles or people the owl can be approached closely and has been observed close at hand by many people.

Mrs. Deacon and Mr. Tebo welcome interested persons to use their property as access to the owl which has a preferred perch at the top of a tamarack tree.

Visitors are cautioned to treat the bird with respect. Anyone wishing further information can call after 4:00 p.m.



Hawk Owl perched in Tamarack. Note darkly barred breast, white collar and dark outline around facial disc.

[Photo by Jim Hobart]

Newspaper article about the Northern Hawk Owl that James Hobart saved all these years. Express permission granted by Salmon Press Newspapers and the Plymouth Record Enterprise to include this article.

Northern Hawk Owl Sightings in NH

Table 1. Northern Hawk Owl Sightings in New Hampshire 1965 through 2023. Data sources: eBird (2024); Keith and Fox (2013).

Date	Town	Observer
December 5, 2008-March 13, 2009	Meredith/Center Harbor	Karen McClendon/John Merrill*
December 29, 2002	Tamworth	Mark Suomala
December 1, 2000-February 17, 2001	Whitefield	Carl Bretton
November 9, 1991	Stewartstown	Dana Blais
March 1, 1978	Newmarket	Laura Sewall
December 1981 - March 31, 1982 min.	Rumney	Sarah Hobart reporter
January 26, 1974	Temple	Ruth Pratt
January 28-March 25, 1973	Gilford	Vera Herbert
January 5-March 24, 1969	Littleton	John McIlwane
December 17, 1965	Northumberland	Gary Waterhouse
*First photographed 12-5-2008 in Meredith; relocated nearby 1-12-2009 in Center Harbor.		

Photo Gallery: Northern Hawk Owl



Photo by Diane Seavey, 2-23-2024.



Photo by Diane Seavey, 3-28-2024.



Photo by Diane Seavey, 3-28-2024.



Photo by Susan Wisley, 2-16-2024.



Photo by Jim Sparrell, 2-24-2024.

Superbowl of Birding XXI— The Twitchers are out of the Rye Again!

by Kathryn Frieden



The 2024 Twitchers out of the Rye, (left to right) Susan Wrisley, Kathryn Frieden, Becky Suomala (captain), and Jenna Rosen.

Editor's Note: Each January, the "Twitchers" take part in an annual competition called the Superbowl of Birding. After a break in 2023, when team captain Becky Suomala was counting in Antarctica, the Twitchers were back in New Hampshire competing for the Townie Award (the most species in one town). Run by Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center, the Superbowl of Birding took place on January 27, 2024. As usual, it involved looking for as many species as possible in 12 hours in Essex County, MA and/or Rockingham County, NH. The Twitchers also raise money to support New Hampshire Bird Records and eBird review in New Hampshire.

It was 4:30 am on the morning of Saturday, January 27, 2024, and the "Twitchers out of the Rye" team was suited up and (almost) ready to roll. The kick-off was at 5:00 am, and our starting line was at John Stark Lane in Hampton, our chosen town for the competition. Once again, the Twitchers were competing for the Townie Award. Our veteran team players were Captain Becky Suomala, Driver Susan Wrisley, Navigator Jenna Rosen, and Scribe Kathryn Frieden. Behind the scenes, we had a terrific support team. Andrea Robbins scoured eBird reports ahead of time to help with planning our itinerary. Holly Bauer hosted us at her home in Hampton the night before so we could start out rested, warm, well-fed, and close to the starting line. (She was also responsible for our second-ever Common Merganser on Meadow Pond.) Then, at half-time, Catherine Eames brought us a hot lunch at Bicentennial Park, so we stayed warmer and more well-fed than ever before. Thank you support team! Not only that, but because there had just been

a story about The Twitchers in the *Union Leader*, we became minor celebrities for the day.

We arrived at John Stark Lane at 5:03 AM, only three minutes late. The day always begins with owling; after all it is still dark, and the other birds aren't up yet. This is done by hooting an imitation of an owl's own hoots, which can bring them in to investigate, hooting in return. Becky started with what she thought was her best Barred Owl hoot, but no response came. After a few minutes Susan asked, "Wait, isn't that a Great Horned Owl call you're doing?" The answer, much to Becky's chagrin (and much laughter), was yes, and that she meant to do Barred Owl hoots, but the wrong owl just came out by mistake. Owling "protocol" is to start with the smallest owl you are trying to attract since once the larger ones are heard, those small ones are going to steer clear. So—no owls here, but there were five more owling stops to go. Despite doing the correct hoots, we had no owls over the next hour and a half, which was a big disappointment for this Twitcher team.



The Twitcher's five-point Palm Warbler at the Hampton WTP by Susan Wrisley.

We arrived at the Hampton Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) as planned at dawn. Sure enough, there was the Palm Warbler, right where it had regularly been seen, and one of several warbler species over-wintering there. This was a new species for the Twitchers! The WTP really gave us a needed boost for the day with 28 species, partially because it also gives a good view out onto Hampton Marsh. Jenna and Susan caught a glimpse of a Winter Wren, but Becky and I didn't manage to see it, so we couldn't count it. At least three of the four team members must see or hear the bird. We never did find another Winter Wren, but a big boost to our team spirit was the flock of 15 Rock Pigeons we had there. (Does anyone remember that in 2018 in Rye this team did not see a single pigeon the entire day? We certainly do!).

Our next hour or so was spent driving slowly around Hampton roads, which brought us Greater Scaup and Bald

Eagle. A stop at Hampton Harbor and the Hampton Marina looking for waterbirds was successful. From the marina a very distant Great Blue Heron was spotted in the scopes; with binoculars, it just looked like a stump. This was a great find as it is a three-point bird. The next stop was Hampton Beach State Park, which looked very different than usual. The jetty at the south end of the beach was being enlarged and repaired, so there were tall cranes and huge boulders everywhere. The large flocks of Horned Larks usually seen in the RV camping field were absent, probably due to both the noise and the lack of space available for foraging. We did manage to find a few Horned Larks, but we missed Lapland Longspur, which often accompanies the large flock. One of the most enjoyable sights of the day was a flock of 40 Snow Buntings flying, landing, and then swirling up into the air once again.

The swells and rolling seas made ocean birding a challenge all day. The majority of our ocean ducks came from Hampton Harbor where the water was smooth. By 11:00 am, we had managed to find all the common one-point birds that were likely in Hampton, so we were catching up after our slow start. Our next stop was at North Shore Road at the Nilus Brook crossing, where the tall trees make good habitat for Brown Creeper. After a lot of “pishing” there was still no Brown Creeper and despite many scouted locations for them, we couldn’t turn up a creeper all day; however, we did see and hear a large flock of Red-winged Blackbirds filling a treetop with “chucking.” This was a good find since it is a three-point species. There was just enough time left to visit the High Street Cemetery before lunch. A Field Sparrow had been found there during scouting and, miracle of miracles, it was still there! Another new species for the Twitchers as well as a four-pointer. Even better were the three Chipping Sparrows – a five-point bird, our second of the day and the second one ever for the Twitchers. It was a very productive stop as we also saw two Turkey Vultures, a four-pointer, and a Cooper’s Hawk, a three-pointer.

Lunch at Bicentennial Park was a wonderful treat! Thank



you again, Catherine Eames! Hot soup, corn bread, hot drinks, and home-made chocolate chip cookies got us ready to tackle the afternoon’s

The second new species for the Twitchers, Field Sparrow by Susan Wrisley.

search for more birds. While enjoying our winter picnic all decked out with binoculars and scopes, our “celebrity” status became apparent when a passing woman asked with enthusiasm, “Are you the group looking for birds?” After lunch, sea-watching from the park brought us a Red-necked Grebe and a Black Scoter, both two-pointers. From there we headed out to Batchelder Park on Towle Farm Rd. where there is a small duck pond near the road, and sure enough, it contained plenty of ducks. We counted 340 Mallards, but unfortunately, we could only get credit for one of them. We also found the expected American Black Ducks and one of the Northern Pintails we had seen during scouting (a nice three-pointer). The big surprise was the previously unreported American Wigeon, another three-pointer, and only the second one ever for the Twitchers. *Nobody expects the American Wigeon!* (If you don’t get that joke, you really should watch some old Monty Python shows.) From there, it was on to Timber Swamp Rd., which turned out to be a good stop. Becky “pished” in a Golden-crowned Kinglet (two points) as well as a Northern Flicker. Jenna spotted a nearly-invisible Red-shouldered Hawk that the Northern Flicker was upset about, only the second time the Twitchers had recorded one, and four points for the icing on the cake!

Time was now getting short, and there were a few places we needed to revisit to try for species we had missed earlier in the day. At Taylor River, Susan spotted a Belted Kingfisher, and the Yellow-rumped Warbler showed up this time at the Hampton WTP. This was a three-point species and the first one for the Twitchers in Hampton. We tried for the Harlequin Ducks that had been seen in Hampton Harbor but just missed them by minutes! Then, back to the cemetery where there were still no owls answering our hoots, and then suddenly it was 5:00 and the competition was over.

How did we do in the competition? Our final tally was 62 species and 108 points. We had good weather, good food, and great companionship for the day. The official compilation was by Zoom the following night. We knew we’d have some tough competition for the Townie Award from Jim Sparrell and his team in Rye, but we lost the Townie Award for the first time to a team birding Ipswich, MA. As far as we know, it was the first time there was a team from Massachusetts competing for the Townie Award and the first time there were three Townie teams, so we hope that’s a trend. It will keep us on our toes for next year, and after all, we aren’t really doing this for the award, are we?

Thank you to everyone who made this an even more meaningful event by supporting the team with a donation. We raised \$4,799 for *New Hampshire Bird Records* and NH eBird. For more information or to read the full summary of the day with the complete species list and many more photos, go to: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/twitchers/>

New Hampshire's Own Patagonia Picnic Table Effect

by Melissa Moore

On December 5, 2023, Steve Mirick spotted a Virginia's Warbler at Bicentennial Park in Hampton, NH—a rare sighting as it was only the second time a Virginia's Warbler has been seen in the Granite State. He spread the word and immediately other birders flocked to this hotspot to add this species to their life list and catch a photo.

With so many active birders in the park, a number of other rare birds were sighted. An Ash-throated Flycatcher was one *mega-rarity* recorded for this area. (See Steve Mirick's Species Spotlight on this bird in this issue.) Several lingerers were also sighted including Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. While none of these birds were observed in big numbers, their appearance so late in the season was noteworthy. With so many rarities found it seems that Bicentennial Park in Hampton experienced a bit of the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect.

The Patagonia Picnic Table Effect is a phrase coined by birders more than half a century ago. In 1971, a group of birders were eating lunch at a picnic table located on Rt. 82, in southeast Arizona, near Patagonia and the Patagonia Mountains. From this vantage point, the group observed a pair of Rose-throated Becards, a rarity for that area. Word quickly spread throughout the birding community. Birders flocked to the area to catch a glimpse of the becard. While they searched for the shy and furtive bird, the discovery of



The Bicentennial Park Virginia's Warbler by Christopher MacPherson, 12-8-2023, Hampton NH.

other rare species followed. Records from this time show that birders at this Arizona hotspot observed rare species such as a Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Thick-billed Kingbird, Five-striped Sparrow, and Yellow Grosbeak. Remember this was well before the digital age and sightings were recorded in paper journals and phoned into hotlines. Digital tools like eBird and Google-groups were non-existent. The intensity of birding in this area and subsequent discovery of rare species



Birders flock to see the Virginia's Warbler at Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH. Photo by Rebecca Suomala, 12-9-2023.



The original Patagonia Picnic Table in Patagonia, AZ. Photo by Roger Frieden, 4-8-2024.



Orange-crowned Warbler by Jim Sparrell, 12-23-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH.

gave birth to the phrase Patagonia Picnic Table Effect. Birders understand the phrase to mean one rare sighting often begets another as birders move into the area to catch a glimpse of the initial rarity and end up finding new ones.

In 2021, researchers at Oregon State University and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology set out to discover if there was any truth behind the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect (Laney et al. 2021). These modern-day scientists based their research on a ten-year period (2008-2017) of sightings recorded in eBird, focusing on 273 rare bird events. They looked to see if each event drove up the number of other rare bird discoveries

in the same area. They concluded that the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect was more myth than scientific theory. Birders had no greater chance of spotting a new rarity at the location than anywhere else. You can read about the study in the scientific article, “The Influence of Rare Birds on Observer Effort and Subsequent Rarity Discovery in the American Birdwatching Community.” A full reference is included below. While the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect may not be real, the myth lives on with the amount of attention rarity hotspots receive only increasing.

Back at Bicentennial Park, the Virginia’s Warbler and Orange-crowned Warbler continued to be seen through early January 2024. eBird checklists feature a number of high-quality photos of the attention-grabbing warblers. The intensity of birding at this hotspot, however, cooled when record breaking astronomical tides combined with a powerful storm wreaked havoc at this location on January 13, 2024. The cleanup along Rt. 1A was extensive.

Who knows what Bicentennial Park will have in store for us this winter or where the next spot to host this phenomenon will be?

References

- Laney J., T. Hallman, J. Curtis, and W. Robinson. 2021. The influence of rare birds on observer effort and subsequent rarity discovery in the American birdwatching community. *Peer J* 9:e10713 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.10713>
- Wilson, H. 2021. The Patagonia Picnic Table Effect. *Maine Birds: A Resource for Maine Birds and Birding*. <https://web.colby.edu/mainebirds/2021/04/01/the-patagonia-picnic-table-effect/>



Bicentennial Park is a great hotspot to check out for lingering warblers. Steve Mirick photographed this Nashville Warbler at the park on 11-8-2022, a year before the flurry of Virginia’s Warbler excitement.

Birding Wetherby Road in Charlestown

by Dylan Jackson

It's no secret that New Hampshire's major river valleys are known hot spot areas during spring and fall migration. The Merrimack and Pemigewasset River Valleys that run through the middle of the state and the Connecticut River Valley that forms most of the border of New Hampshire and Vermont are the most notable of these migration flyways. Every spring, these avenues host scores of ducks and geese in the early months of migration followed by shorebirds, neotropical migrants, and everything else once the month of May approaches. These renowned flyways contain several "hotspots" that draw birders; they just seem to attract the best birds. In the Connecticut River Valley, Wetherby Road in Charlestown, NH, has quickly become one of these spots.

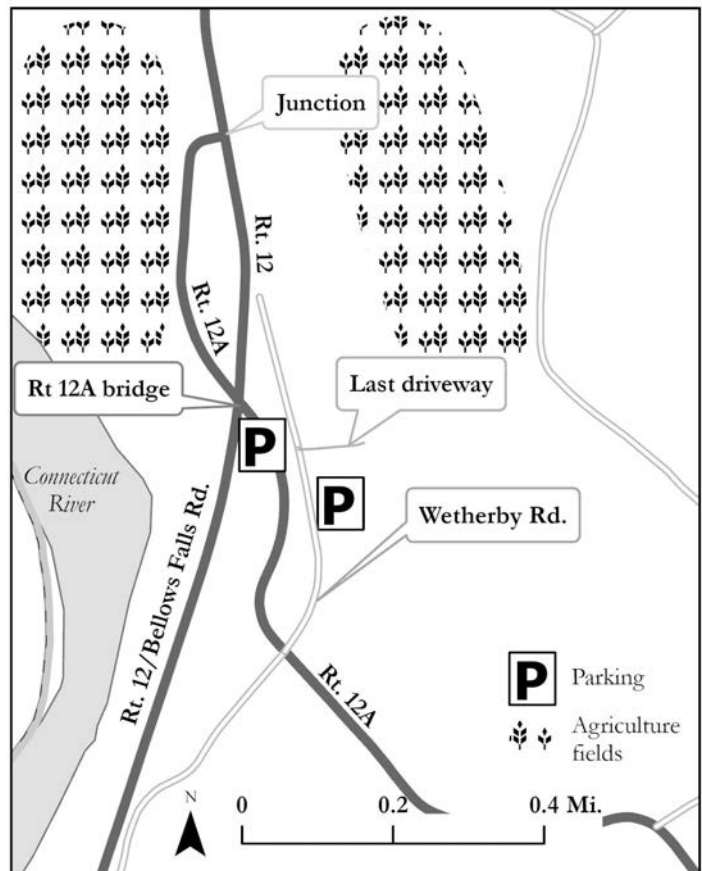
Wetherby Road is a small dead-end road off Route 12A (Langdon Road) in Charlestown. It's a typical neighborhood road with a handful of residences near the entrance. As you go down the road it leaves the neighborhood setting and is surrounded by swampy and scrubby brush areas on either side. Just past the last driveway, the road turns into an unmaintained portion that runs into some cornfields before ending where it meets the active railway along Route 12. The good birding spots are in these scrub areas and cornfields.

As the snow begins to melt in late March and early April, the cornfields at the end of the road flood and host thousands of migrating ducks, geese, and other waterbirds. When spring approaches, the scrub area between the last two driveways on the road seems to work as a major migrant trap. This is likely due to the mix of pines, farm area, bog, alder thickets, and flowering trees that provide a perfect mix of habitat to condense a remarkable diversity of species in one spot. This area also holds true as a migrant trap for passerines in the fall.

As of May 2024, this location has hosted 163 species according to eBird (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L7253668>),



Snow Goose by Len Medlock.



Map by Nora E. Hanke.

with many of them being quite notable. There are always a lot of Canada Geese here in the spring, but this spot has hosted Snow, Greater White-fronted, and Cackling Geese as well. Sullivan County's first Redhead was found here in 2023 as well as the county's second Eurasian Wigeon in 2022. Glossy Ibis, an occasional county visitor, was found here in 2018 and a very rare Ruff was found here in 2011. In just the last year, this location has boasted its first record for Little Blue Heron, one of the few county records of Black-crowned Night Heron and most notably, the state's second record for MacGillivray's Warbler found on November 25, 2023.

Because this is a residential neighborhood, proper viewing etiquette is essential to keeping this spot available for future birders. For early spring during waterfowl migration, the best viewing is actually from the nearby overpass of Route 12A where it passes over Route 12. There is a wide shoulder here which is great for roadside parking and provides a panoramic view of the cornfields which is fantastic for scoping the waterfowl below. It also allows for optimal viewing that won't flush the birds by trying to walk into the fields themselves.

In regard to birding the scrub patch for passerines and other migrants, it's best to park just past the second to last driveway on the road where the scrub area begins. From here, one can walk through the whole area that's worth birding, including the cornfields after the waterfowl have moved on, without disturbing the residents. Most importantly, it's just

wise to use common sense and not disturb the residents that live in this birding hotspot.

While Wetherby Road has eBird records spanning back to 2011, it only recently gained recognition as a birding hotspot in the last five or six years, so it certainly has many more surprises in store for birders in the future. With new species still being added regularly to its overall list, with time it will surely become one of the top spots in the area. Considering this, it's important to stress proper birding etiquette to continue this harmonious relationship between resident and birder, ensuring it can be enjoyed for years to come.

Winter Bird Surveys: Count your Birds this Winter!

by *Melissa Moore*

When deciding where to report bird counts in the winter, bird watchers have a choice between a trio of surveys or they can do all three. The winter bird surveys highlighted here differ in observation time requirements, date, cost to participate, and location. None duplicate and all provide essential information.



Pine Siskin and Purple Finch by Stephanie Tickner on the 2024 Backyard Winter Bird Survey.

NH Audubon's Backyard Winter Bird Survey

New Hampshire's own Backyard Winter Bird Survey is run by NH Audubon every year on the second weekend in February. No fee is required, but donations are the sole source of support for the survey. First begun in 1967 to count Northern Cardinal and Tufted Titmouse, this survey has evolved into a bird count for all bird species seen from backyards across the state. There is great flexibility in deciding

how little or long to observe the birds over the designated weekend. The data provides information on wintering bird populations in the Granite State and their distribution. NH Audubon staff analyze the data and all participants receive a summary of the previous year's results in the survey mailing. There is space in the survey to record squirrel sightings and weather notes. New Hampshire bird watchers may submit paper tally sheets to the NH Audubon at the McLane Center in Concord or report online. Photographs are encouraged and some are used in the summary reports. This highly successful bird survey attracted more than 1,500 observers in 2024. Seventy-five different bird species were sighted that year. Learn more about the Backyard Winter Bird Survey at www.nh Audubon.org/BWBS.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Global in scope, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) has collected data for 26 years and was first launched in 1998 in the US by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The event expanded to a global bird count in 2013. The GBBC is always scheduled for four days in February. Participants are asked to watch birds for 15 or more minutes at least once over the designated four days. Participants create an account at the GBBC website and enter their data there. No paper data is accepted. The location for bird watching is extremely flexible. You can watch from your own backyard or you can watch at a local park or wildlife refuge. If participants move around to different locations, participants complete a separate count for each habitat they visit. For example, one bird count is completed at a wetland and a second bird count at a forest habitat. The number of participants has grown dramatically over the years. In 2023, people counted birds in over 200 countries, and 7,538 different species were reported. The United States, led by California, tops the list of countries worldwide submitting the most checklists. The US is followed by India and Canada. Learn more about the survey at www.birdcount.org

Project FeederWatch

Project FeederWatch is focused on Canada and the US. This survey is active over the longest period kicking off on November 1 each year and concluding April 30. Bird watchers must designate one single area in their yard that will be used for observations. From beginning to end, all observations are made in this same locale. Participants are asked to do something that will encourage birds to visit. Hanging a feeder is not required but, if there are no bird feeders, then observers might consider installing a water feature or plant bird friendly trees and shrubs. During the six-month survey period, participants are asked to observe

birds over two consecutive days, preferably once a week but there is no minimum required. Observers can fill their schedules with multiple two-day observation periods throughout the six months. All data is valid. Observers are asked to space all two-day observation periods at least five days apart. US observers are required to pay an \$18 fee to participate. In Canada, individuals are asked to contribute to Birds Canada. The funds go directly to keeping the survey operational. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada operate the program. The website for Project FeederWatch offers a wealth of information on how to attract birds to your yard and other useful tips. This survey also asks about any visiting mammals, snow cover, and bird behavior. Observers create an account to submit their data. A tally sheet is provided and can be printed out to help record the information, but the sheet is for personal use only. All data is mapped electronically at the Project FeederWatch website. Go to www.feederwatch.org to learn more.

The valuable information community scientists gather in these surveys supports many different research projects. Bird watchers are encouraged to do at least one but, if time allows, consider all three.

The Next Ten . . . Second Update

by Iain MacLeod

Editor's Note: Since Iain wrote this article one new bird has been added to the list—Bridled Tern (Seavey Island, 7-9-2024). You will see that this species wasn't on the Next Ten list either! Read all about this New Hampshire first in the upcoming Summer 2024 issue of New Hampshire Bird Records.

In the Spring 2016 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* (Vol. 35, No. 1), I wrote an article posing the question: "What will be the next ten new species of birds added to the New Hampshire Bird Checklist?" I asked members of the *New Hampshire Bird Records* Editorial Team to weigh in with their opinions on this topic. That group suggested a total of forty-three different species. Those with three or more votes made the cut and I narrowed down that list to thirteen.

Here is that 2016 list: Brown Booby, Great Skua, South Polar Skua, Crested Caracara, Red-necked Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Eurasian Golden Plover, Fieldfare, Magnificent Frigatebird, Tropical Kingbird, and Yellow-billed Loon. Then in the Summer 2019 issue (Vol. 38 No. 2), I did a check in to see how we had done. At that time, two of the 13 species we listed had indeed been added to the Official New Hampshire



Roseate Spoonbill by Lori Charron, 8-31-2021, Gorham, NH.

bird list: **Brown Booby** (Cobbetts Pond, Windham, June 2017) and **South Polar Skua** (Jeffreys Ledge, 9-4-2018).

Well, here we are in 2024 and it's time to check in again. Two more from the list of 13 have been added: **Magnificent Frigatebird** (Hampton, 8-19-2021), and **Tropical Kingbird** (Greenland, 11-13-2022). Seven other species not on our final list have also been added: **Cassin's Sparrow** (Star Island, 9-21-2019), **Brambling** (Strafford, 12-4-2019), **Anna's Hummingbird** (New London, 11-6-2020), **Sage Thrasher** (Hinsdale, 12-19-2020), **Virginia's Warbler** (Hampton, 4-29-2021), **Roseate Spoonbill** (Gorham, 7-30-2021), and **Vermilion Flycatcher** (Rochester, 7-13-2023).

Interestingly, Sage Thrasher and Vermilion Flycatcher were part of the original list of forty-three, but none of the others were even considered by the group. So . . . I would say, that after eight or so years, we have a mixed bag in terms of success. Eleven new species have been added, but only four were on our final list. Just two more were even on the first cut . . . and five came out of left field.

Who knows what will be next! We'll check in again in a few years.



Sage Thrasher by Rebecca Suomala, 12-24-2020, Hinsdale NH.

Photo Gallery: 124th Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place annually between December 14 and January 5. Each count occurs within a designated “count circle” on a specific day chosen by organizers. Coordinators assign teams to survey different sections of each circle, which spans 15 miles in diameter around a central point and remains the same year after year. Organized and compiled by the National Audubon Society, the CBC is an international event, with count circles carefully coordinated to avoid overlap. Many birders eagerly anticipate the CBC each year. Enjoy some highlights from the 124th CBC in the photos below.

Typically, *New Hampshire Bird Records* provides you with the results of the New Hampshire counts, but we were unable to do so this year. After 37 years, Geoff LeBaron, the National Audubon Society’s CBC director, retired in June 2024. While we haven’t received the data in time for this issue, we hope to resume our reporting next year. If you’re interested in writing a summary of the New Hampshire CBC results, please contact Grace McCulloch (see inside front cover).



Northern Shrike by Kyle Wilmarth, 12-16-2023, Coastal CBC, NH.



Pine Warbler by Kyle Wilmarth, 12-16-2023, Coastal CBC, NH.



Evening Grosbeak by Benjamin Griffith, 12-20-2023, Pittsburg CBC, NH.



Great Horned Owl by Kyle Wilmarth, 12-16-2023, Coastal CBC, NH.



Black Scoters by Steve Mirick, 1-1-2024, Star Island, NH, during the Isles of Shoals CBC.

What to Watch for in Winter

Winter is the time for Snowy Owls, winter sea ducks, and alcids on the ocean. The New Hampshire coast offers the most diversity in winter and there is always something to see. Inland can be more variable. In some years, there's the hoped-for arrival of "winter finches" invading from the north in huge flocks, although it may require a trip north of the White Mountains to find them. Watch for waterfowl to linger on open bodies of water and gather in unfrozen sections of rivers. A few half-hardy birds (species present in small numbers during mild winters) linger, providing a welcome surprise. Unexpected birds such as orioles, towhees, or Yellow-breasted Chats are often at feeders so be sure to watch for them and keep your camera handy to document their identification. While it may seem quiet, there are fun birding activities to keep us going—the Christmas Bird Counts, the Superbowl of Birding at the end of January, and NH Audubon's annual Backyard Winter Bird Survey on the second weekend in February.

December

- Wintering sea ducks and other waterbirds arrive and will stay all winter. For some species, it is the only time we see them in New Hampshire: Long-tailed Ducks, scoters, Horned and Red-necked Grebes, and Red-throated Loons.
- Purple Sandpipers are one of the few shorebirds that winter along the coast. Watch for them in rocky areas, not sandy beaches. They blend in very well and are often easiest to find at high tide in Rye or the jetty at the outlet of Hampton Harbor.
- American Tree Sparrows arrive from the north, taking the place of Chipping Sparrows. Dark-eyed Juncos join them at feeders.
- Greater Scaup gather in large numbers (1,000 or more) on Great Bay. Try looking from the Great Bay Discovery Center or the Osprey Cove trail in Greenland, or Adam's Point in Durham. You will want a scope as birds can be distant.
- Barrow's Goldeneye are sometimes seen with large flocks of Common Goldeneye. Stark Landing on the Merrimack River in Manchester can be one of the best spots to see them, but one or two are also usually in Laconia if there is open water, and sometimes at the coast or Great Bay.
- Hampton Beach State Park usually hosts a flock of Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and an occasional Lapland Longspur. Farms along the Connecticut River Valley from Westmoreland to Walpole and open areas



Long-tailed Duck by Stephen Mirick, Hampton Beach, NH.

near the Berlin Regional Airport in Milan are also good places to check for these species.

- Northern Shrikes can appear anywhere in the state but good places to check are the Great Bay NWR in Newington or Airport Marsh in Whitefield.
- In milder winters, look for lingering birds including Gray Catbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, and even a few warblers like Pine and Yellow-rumped.
- Moore fields on Rt. 155A in Durham is a great place to look for unusual geese (such as Snow Geese), mixed in with flocks of Canada Geese.

January

- If the fishing boats are still running (e.g. Eastman's Docks, Seabrook), an offshore trip can produce Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Dovekie, Common Murre, and an occasional puffin or Thick-billed Murre. These species are rare from shore and a boat trip is often required to see them.



Razorbill by Leo McKillop, 12-10-2023, Rye Harbor, NH.

- Razorbill and Black Guillemots are the most likely alcids to see on the ocean from shore. Scan from pullouts such as Pulpit Rocks and Seal Rocks in Rye, Rye Harbor State Park, Hampton Beach State Park, or Seabrook Beach. Great Island Common in New Castle is also a good spot for Razorbills.
- White-winged Gulls (Glaucous and Iceland) visit in the winter but are seldom reliable on any given day. Hampton Harbor and Rochester WTP (only open on weekdays) are the most likely places to find them.
- The best places to look for Snowy Owls are Rye Harbor State Park and Hampton Beach State Park. Numbers vary each year and they can be absent some winters.
- Winter finches, such as Pine Siskins or Common Redpolls, can arrive in big flocks or not at all. Watch for them at feeders and stands of Birch trees with catkins.
- As rivers and lakes ice up, Bald Eagles gather at remaining open water on the major rivers, the largest lakes, and the coast. Great Bay is a winter hotspot for eagle watching, and eagles are regular along the Merrimack River from Concord to Nashua, as well as southern stretches of the Connecticut River, and the Lakes Region.



Can you tell which is which? See answer at the bottom of this page. Waxwings by Jim Sparrell, 2-27-2022, Coos County, NH.

February

- Check fruit trees for waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks. Cedar Waxwings are the most common. Downtown Gorham and Plymouth, NH, are especially good places to look for Bohemian Waxwings which are typically seen in Coos county. Pine Grosbeaks appear in some years but typically in low numbers.
- Black-capped Chickadees start to sing their spring “fee-bee” song making it easy to think that your Eastern Phoebe’s are back, but they won’t return until April.
- Hinsdale can be one of the first places for returning waterfowl as open patches appear on Lake Wantastiquet above the dam on the Connecticut River.
- Short-eared Owls can occasionally be seen at the seacoast or the Dillant-Hopkins Airport in Swansey in winter but are more likely as we transition from February to March.
- South winds can bring the first influx of Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles. If there is some open ground the first Killdeer and American Woodcock may arrive in the southernmost parts of the state.



Listen for the Barred Owl’s “who-cooks-for-you-who-cooks-for-you-all” calls as their courtship begins late February. Photo by Debra Powers, 1-27-23, Newmarket, NH.

**Answer: The bird on the left is a Bohemian Waxwing. The bird on the right is a Cedar Waxwing.*

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by Greg Tillman

Photo 1

It can be hard to judge the size of birds in a picture, but here we can see some leaves and a twig just barely poking out of the snowbank, suggesting we have a small or medium-sized bird, smaller than a Blue Jay as a first guess. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of other clues to help us assess habitat or behavior.

The clues we do have are the overall shape of the bird, a nice side view of a thick conical bill, and a clear tuft, or crest, on the back of the head. The bird's shape, especially when combined with that bill, gets us into what I sometimes think of as the "back half of the birdbook." In other words, we're not looking at a hawk or heron or sandpiper or gull or any of the other "front half of the birdbook" birds, we're looking at a perching bird.

Bills are always helpful for sorting a bird into a family, and our bird clearly has a bill that's meant for cracking seeds, so we can further narrow down our mystery bird into something in the general sparrow, finch, or bunting category.

It's too bad we can't see the tail length, that's another shape-based clue that can be helpful for finches and sparrows, but what we can see is that distinctive crest. There are very few New Hampshire birds with a crest that flares behind the head like that. Since we're looking for something in the finch group, we are not looking at a Blue Jay or titmouse or waxwing, and certainly not a Pileated Woodpecker. (Let's also note that we're factoring in location here and ruling out some exotic cage birds and a few wild birds that have never been found in our state.) In January in New Hampshire, this crested finch-like bird is often a welcome spot of color!

Conclusion: Northern Cardinal



*Northern
Cardinal by
Roger Frieden,
1-24-2024,
Nottingham,
NH.*

Photo 2

We have a nice side-view silhouette of this bird. There's all kinds of information here about the bill, wings, and tail, but clearly this is a small, compact little bird! Before we dive in on any other details, look at that pose. Our bird is perched almost horizontally, with its tail cocked nearly straight up. There is one family of small, pugnacious birds known for a cocked-tail pose (and loud songs) and that's the wrens!

Let's exercise due caution; the pose is suggestive, but not diagnostic. Many birds can perch horizontally and raise their tail. It's not an uncommon pose for mockingbirds and catbirds, and Hermit Thrushes will also cock their tail. Certainly there are a few warblers, for example redstarts, that will hop around with their tails up, but this bird is much smaller than a mockingbird, and it looks more compact and, well, rounder than a warbler usually looks. As is often the case, a look at the bill is very helpful. That long bill does not belong on any warbler. It is certainly too long and thin to be a chickadee or a kinglet, or a sparrow. This is definitely a wren!

Can we go any further? A quick look at eBird might help determine what wrens to consider. In New Hampshire, the Carolina Wren and the Winter Wren are moderately likely during the winter, Marsh Wren is possible, and the other two wrens (House Wren and Sedge Wren) have no winter eBird records at all. That's helpful information, but nothing definitive.

The wings look pretty short on our bird, barely sticking out behind the undertail coverts, but that's more or less standard on all our wrens. The bill, so helpful in getting us to the wren family, doesn't do much to narrow down the species, but the tail! What a remarkably short tail! That short tail, among the New Hampshire wrens, is a key shape-based field mark.

Conclusion: Winter Wren

The thin pale eyebrow, barred flanks, and beige belly are also important field marks, but that short tail is, with a little experience, surprisingly easy to pick out, and a helpful field mark even on such an active and sometimes reclusive little bird.



*Winter Wren by
Jim Sparrell,
2-28-2024,
Portsmouth, NH.*

New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund

Donations to this fund provide long-term support for all facets of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, from the publication to the collection, organization, quality control, dissemination, preservation, and storage of New Hampshire bird sighting information.

Leave a Legacy for the Birds with a bequest in your will to the Fund:

I give and bequeath ____ % of my residuary estate (or a specific sum of \$ ____) to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund, a permanently restricted fund of the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, 84 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, NH.

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

New Hampshire Bird Records Payment Form

☐ I would like to join NH Audubon and receive a free digital copy of *New Hampshire Bird Records*.

☐ Family/\$60 ☐ Individual/\$45 ☐ Senior/\$30

As a member of NH Audubon I would also like to receive *New Hampshire Bird Records* in print for an additional fee (helps cover our printing costs and postage).

☐ NH Audubon Member \$25.00

Name:

Phone:

Address:

City, State:

Zip:

Payment is by:

☐ Check enclosed— payable to NH Audubon

☐ MC ☐ VISA ☐ AMEX ☐ DISCOVER

Card #:

Exp. Date:

Return to: Membership Department, NH Audubon,
84 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, NH 03301

Information at www.nhbirdrecords.org

Rare Bird ALERT

 603-224-9909

Available twenty-four hours a day!
Also online at www.nhaudubon.org

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

New Hampshire Bird Records is published quarterly by NH Audubon's Conservation Department. Thank you to the many observers who submit their sightings to NH eBird (www.ebird.org/nh), the source of data for this publication. All records are subject to review by the NH Rare Birds Committee and publication here does not imply future acceptance by the RBC.

New Hampshire Bird Records © NH Audubon October 2024
Published by NH Audubon's Conservation Department



Winter Waterbirds



Atlantic Puffin by Jim Sparrell, 1-1-2024, Isles of Shoals Christmas Bird Count (CBC).



Northern Pintail by Len Medlock, 1-27-2024, Exeter, NH.



Red-breasted Merganser by Steve Mirick, 2-17-2024, Exeter, NH.



Green-winged Teal by Len Medlock, 12-16-2023, Exeter, NH.



Harlequin Ducks by Steve Mirick, 1-1-2024, Star Island, NH during the Isles of Shoals Christmas Bird Count (CBC).



Canvasback by Pam Geiger, 2-26-2024, Horseshoe Pond, Concord, NH.

Winter 2023-24 Rarities



The second-ever state record of a Virginia's Warbler, documented at Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 12-10-2023.



Yellow-throated Warbler by Lois Semrau, 1-20-2024, Exeter, NH.



Painted Bunting by Zeke Cornell, 1-13-2024, Manchester, NH.



Ash-throated Flycatcher by Steve Mirick, 12-5-2023, Bicentennial Park, Hampton, NH.



Long-eared Owl by Catherine Holland, 2-25-2024, Grafton County, NH.



Varied Thrush by Tom Momeyer, 1-21-2024, Common Pathway, Peterborough, NH.