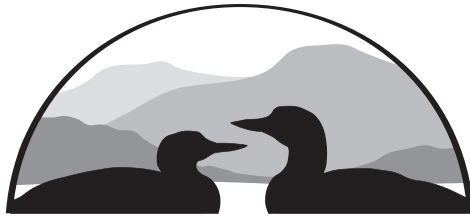


New Hampshire Bird Records



Spring 2010

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White-eyed Vireo by Dick Dionne, 5/12/10, Lake Umbagog NWR, Wentworth's Location, NH.

New Hampshire Bird Records is published quarterly by New Hampshire Audubon's Conservation Department. Bird sightings are submitted to NH eBird (www.ebird.org/nh) by many different observers. Records are selected for publication and not all species reported will appear in the issue. The published sightings typically represent the highlights of the season. All records are subject to review by the NH Rare Birds Committee and publication of reports here does not imply future acceptance by the Committee. Please contact the Managing Editor if you would like to report your sightings but are unable to use NH eBird.

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IN MEMORY OF
Steve Damon

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Pat Niswander in memory of her brother, Steve Damon of Tamworth. He was an avid list maker and kept records of arrivals and departure dates for migrating birds as well as daily weather. He had a great sense of humor and an expansive interest in birds that led him to design a feeder that weighed his goldfinches and build a scale model of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker which he put up in his yard for the enjoyment of the local bird club.



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Birding Newmarket's Newest Wildlife Sanctuaries – “Smith Sisters” and “Kwaks”

by Phil Brown

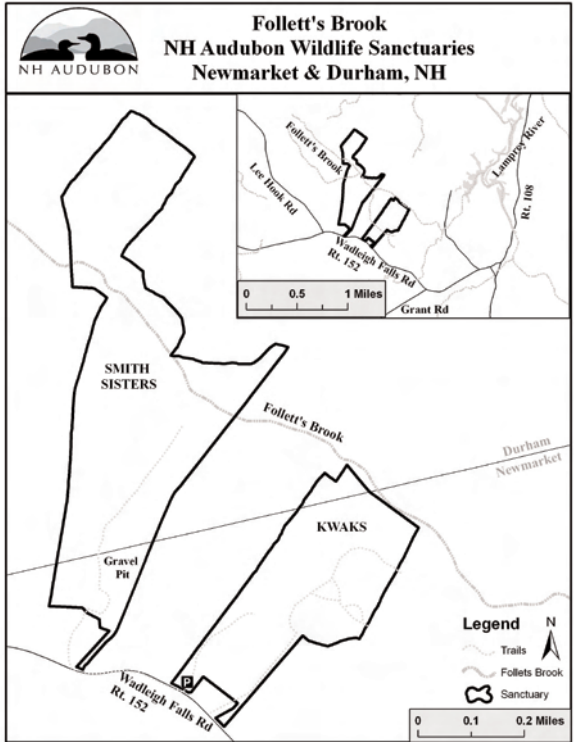
If you are a reader of *New Hampshire Bird Records* or an eBird follower, it should come as no surprise that Newmarket is one of New Hampshire's hotspots, particularly during migration and winter seasons. In 2008, the incredible find of a pair of nesting Mississippi Kites, New Hampshire's undisputed bird of the year, came from a suburban front yard along busy Route 152 in Newmar-

ket. Despite its rarity in the state (the first confirmed record of the species **and** a breeding record!), the Mississippi Kite is not even the most unusual species (that honor goes to Little Egret) to be discovered in this small town located on Great Bay's western shoreline! This sighting, however, opened up the eyes of many birders to the huge range of possibilities in the birding world that might be going unnoticed. Despite the documented history of rare bird occurrences and number of birders covering this town, the birding potential of Newmarket has yet to be fully realized.

In the same year that the Mississippi Kite nest was first discovered, New Hampshire Audubon acquired a 60+ acre parcel of land not one mile west of the kite nest. The acquisition was the first of two in this area facilitated through a sale to the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership (GBRPP), the conservation partnership which is responsible for conserving so many of Newmarket's green spaces; New Hampshire Audubon is a founding partner. Currently, the two new sanctuaries anchor ongoing protection efforts of the Follett's Brook watershed.

“Kwaks Wildlife Sanctuary”

The first of these conserved lands, affectionately called the “Kwaks Wildlife Sanctuary” because of the seller and neighbor's name, was the first significant acquisition



within the Follett's Brook wetland system. Follett's Brook is an ecologically important tributary of the Lamprey River where many rare species of wildlife and plants thrive. An ecological inventory of the Follett's Brook watershed conducted during the 2004 breeding season by NH Audubon revealed the presence of American Black Duck, Canada Warbler, Wood Thrush, American Woodcock, Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Blue-winged Warbler, and Red-shouldered Hawk, as well as the more expected species. The Kwaks Sanctuary has several habitat types that may be of importance to these species. A 5-acre golf driving range that was converted to hayfield has attracted Bobolink during migration. The site, however, may be too small to sustain a potential breeding population of any true grassland bird species.

Parking for both sanctuaries is located at the Kwaks Sanctuary on Route 152, 1.5 miles west of the Rt. 152 and Rt. 108 junction in downtown Newmarket. The parking lot is identified by a sign displaying the NH Audubon logo and name just past the mailbox for #332 Route 152 (coming from downtown). Birders often need not venture beyond the parking lot to begin noticing avian activity. A Northern Mockingbird that nests in planted maples around the parking lot most often greets the visiting birder during warmer seasons. During January of 2009, Bohemian Waxwings (rare and irruptive) fed alongside Cedar Waxwings in roadside crabapples adjacent to the parking lot. Red-tailed Hawks and the occasional accipiter glide over the field in search of food, while Wild Turkeys roam the grasslands in ever-growing numbers; a flock of 14 poults were seen in July of 2010. In fall, this can be a great location to view the famous "river of blackbirds," one of New Hampshire's greatest bird spectacles, when grackles (the majority) fly from feeding areas to a large evening roost in Portsmouth. An estimated 50,000 Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds, and other species were observed flying overhead in October of 2009. Also, large numbers of American Robins can be seen flying towards a Newmarket roost on autumn and winter evenings.

To bird the property, follow a mowed trail that leads from the parking lot along the west side of the field. Woodland edge and fruiting shrubs bordering the field attract a wide diversity of species during the breeding season and in migration. Some local breeders that can be observed here include Yellow-throated Vireo, Eastern Bluebird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Scarlet Tanager. At the bottom of the field is a small wetland lying perpendicular to the access path that often hosts Red-winged Blackbirds in breeding season. The mowed path crosses the wetland and traverses a second smaller, weedy field that is remaining unmanaged to provide a "soft edge" for wildlife, a gradual transition between field and forest. Currently this area is fairly unproductive for birding, but it has potential to host species that inhabit early successional forest. Typical woodland warblers and other songbirds have been noted in the "back 40" acres of oak/hickory/pine forest which is accessed from the mowed field path at the woodland edge past the second field. This trail, which is planned to be a marked trail, eventually leads to an interesting impounded part of Follett's Brook. This wetland contains many dead snags and some cattail marsh where wetland-dependent bird species like Green and Great Blue Heron should be found. Quite likely, Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawk frequent this area for feeding during the breeding season. Barred Owls call from the wetlands during the breeding season and Great-horned Owls have been heard calling from the woodland edge around the fields.

“Smith Sisters Wildlife Sanctuary”

The “Smith Sisters Wildlife Sanctuary” lies about two-hundred yards west of the Kwaks Sanctuary along Route 152 on the same northern side of the road; however, parking is currently limited to the parking area at the Kwaks Sanctuary. As with the Kwaks parcel, the Smith Sisters Sanctuary takes its current name from the sellers of the property. In this case, the sellers were five sisters that were descended from the Smith family. Birders must currently access the property from a long driveway that leads past an old gray farmhouse (mailbox #358 on Rt. 152) with a brown barn and mowed field on the right. After the buildings and field, visitors may pass through the sanctuary gate entrance and along a dirt road that leads through a 4-acre gravel pit that is currently being restored to a more natural condition. This property contains a mosaic of habitats of regional importance to birds, including early successional forest, grasslands, and shrub wetlands, all of which are becoming increasingly scarce.

Early successional forest at the Smith Sisters Sanctuary includes an abandoned and soon-to-be-restored gravel pit and adjacent pitch pine-dominated stand (both of which may prove to be good places to find Whip-poor-will and Common Nighthawk), and also areas of shrubland surrounding Follett’s Brook. In the sandy edges of the old gravel pit during breeding season, look for the expected Prairie Warbler and Field Sparrow, as well as the rapidly declining Eastern Towhee and Brown Thrasher (uncommon). Keep an eye out for Bank Swallow and Belted Kingfisher utilizing cavities as nesting sites on the upper portions of the old gravel pit. In migration, the gravel pit can be good for sparrows and warblers. An old woods road leaves the gravel pit to the northwest and passes through a mature white and red pine stand which often has Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet (mainly winter), Pine Warbler (breeding season), and Pileated Woodpecker. Red-bellied Woodpecker has become an expected bird species in the general area and can be found fairly reliably between the gravel pit and Rt. 152. Another species that has seen dramatic range expansion in recent years is the Common Raven, which is often heard or seen flying over this part of the sanctuary. It’s likely that a pair now nests in the general vicinity, but the nest has yet to be found!

The woods road through pine-dominated forest soon gives way to the property’s largest open field of eight acres that supports Bobolink during the breeding season. The breeding highlight here, however, is Blue-winged Warbler, which frequents the field edges and small clusters of shrub “islands” in the middle of this field. Indigo Buntings are common around the field edges, particularly in the large stand of invasive black locust that is slated for removal. The flowering apple trees in their understory draw in warblers, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker during spring migration, and sparrows have been observed in large numbers in the weedy vegetation during fall migration. Farther into the field, a large wet portion of the field appears to be good habitat for migrant Wilson’s Snipe, but this is yet to be affirmed by a documented sighting.

The main path through the field soon leads to another stretch of forest, which is dominated by relatively young hardwoods and is somewhat unremarkable from a birding perspective. The trail descends gradually over a short distance into another large expanse of open fields. This historic hayfield borders the Follett’s Brook wetland

system and is often wet. Stands of alders and wetland herbaceous vegetation stretch from the main tributary into the field. In the breeding season, listen for Alder Flycatcher, and Canada (uncommon), Black-and-white, and Blue-winged Warblers in addition to several other species of songbirds. Hermit Thrush, Veery, and Wood Thrush can all be heard in the surrounding forests, particularly in more inaccessible woodlands across Follett's Brook. Walking to the northeast, you are able to walk across a very narrow section of Follett's Brook on a grated bridge. From here, scan the early successional forest to the east (mainly located on private property) for many of the aforementioned species. One of several prominent snags located along the property boundary is typically a great place to observe Eastern Kingbird, Black-and-white Warbler, and much more. Ruffed Grouse may be found with some persistence around the alder stands and dense shrublands, and American Woodcock undoubtedly breed here.

Follett's Brook is impounded in several places upstream (west) of the bridge, and the vegetation forms a dense area of protection from human disturbance, likely creating nesting locations for American Black Duck and other wetland-dependent species. In addition to the known rare species of plants and reptiles found in this area, these relatively large and undisturbed wetlands seem to be an attractive place for rails and bittern; however, it is doubtful that any birder has spent enough time here to confirm this possibility. Likewise, there is undiscovered avian potential in the forested upland areas to the north of Follett's Brook. Access here is limited to a wetland crossing of Follett's Brook or from adjacent conservation land on the north side of Follett's Brook.

NH Audubon's two newest wildlife sanctuaries are hidden gems that demonstrate some of the bird diversity in Newmarket. An official breeding bird survey is being planned for these properties in an effort to develop a long-term stewardship plan that will better guide future management decisions for both. To volunteer, or for more information, please contact Phil Brown (Director of Land Management) at pbrown@nhaudubon.org or at (603) 224-9909x334. Thanks to the work of conservation partners like NH Audubon and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, we may all have the chance to discover the avian potential of these places.

References

Zankel, M. 2004. *Ecological Inventory of the Cocheco River Watershed (Dover) and the Follett's Brook Watershed (Durham, Newmarket, and Lee)*. The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of New Hampshire, New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau.

Phil Brown is completing a Master's Degree from Antioch University New England in Conservation Biology, where his focus is spring-migrating waterfowl of the Middle Connecticut River Important Bird Area in NH and VT. A resident of the Monadnock Region, he enjoys leading field trips in search of birds and exploring natural areas around the state. Phil works as Director of Land Management for NH Audubon.

Abbreviations Used

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

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