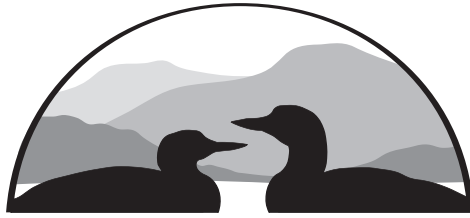


New Hampshire Bird Records



Fall 2011

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Cover Photo: American Avocet by Stephen R. Mirick, 9/4/11, Hampton Harbor by the Yankee Fisherman's Coop., Seabrook, NH.

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IN HONOR OF
Stephen R. Mirick

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by the friends of Steve Mirick in honor of his well-deserved receipt of the 2011 Goodhue-Elkins Award, and in appreciation for his many contributions to the understanding of New Hampshire birds, and for his unbounded enthusiasm for birding in New Hampshire which has benefitted the entire birding community.



Steve Mirick, birding the NH coast with his wife, Jane.

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The Photo Quiz and Where to Bird features will return in the next issue.

Hurricane Irene, August 2011

by Marshall Iliff

It is a rare hurricane that affects New Hampshire, but this year Tropical Storm *Irene* made landfall in New York and tracked northeast to New Hampshire on August 28, and passed over the state on August 28-29. Observers were out birding along the coast and in the Connecticut River Valley on August 28, in the hope that some rare birds entrained in the storm (“moving with the



Sooty Tern found dead at the south end of Rye Pond off Rt. 123 in Antrim on 8/30/11 by Bob Sturgis and reported by Betsy Smith. Photo by Eric Masterson.

storm” as opposed to birds grounded or displaced by the storm) might get transported northwards. As always, extreme caution should be exercised for those who intentionally go birding in such weather. Not only are wind, falling trees, and flying debris potential hazards, but flooding occurs very suddenly and can quite literally sweep your car away or strand you in an unsafe location as flood waters continue to rise. Unfortunately, this scenario played out for numerous New Englanders and New Yorkers during *Irene*, though thankfully all birders stayed safe.

Hurricane *Irene* formed and became a Category 1 storm east of the Lesser Antilles and then made successive landfalls in the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas as it strengthened to a Category 3 storm. Weakening to a Category 1 storm, it made landfall on the Outer Banks of North Carolina on August 27 and then moved northward over the coast to make another landfall near Brigantine, New Jersey at about 5:35 am on August 28. Maintaining Tropical Storm strength, it moved up the coast and passed right over New York City at about 9:00 am. Moving northeastward from there, the weakening storm passed just west of Amherst, Massachusetts at about 4:00 pm. The center of the storm reached the Connecticut River at the Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont borders a few hours later, just as it was getting dark. Although winds were not much over 40 mph by the time the storm reached New England, the heavy rains caused historic local flooding and made *Irene* one of the costlier storms on record, especially in Vermont and New York.

Irene's most noteworthy Granite State bird was an adult **White-tailed Tropicbird** that was found moribund in Charlestown, August 29 and later expired, becoming New Hampshire's first record for the species. Another product of *Irene*, an adult Sooty Tern was found dead August 30 in an Antrim driveway. The tern specimen will be preserved at the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, Massachusetts and the tropicbird will be preserved at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Neither of these records is without context. Although several past hurricanes have transported White-tailed Tropicbirds to New England, *Irene* smashed all previous

records by transporting 12 or more, including two in Delaware, three in New Jersey, four or five in New York, one in Connecticut, and two in Massachusetts! Sooty Terns, too, were widespread, with numerous birds around New York City and the south shore of New England, and two reaching western Massachusetts. Other sightings in nearby states included: an amazing state-first Band-rumped Storm-Petrel picked up dead in Vermont, and others in New York and Connecticut; an adult Northern Gannet found moribund in Vermont; and a wide scattering of Bridled Terns, all along the New York and southern New England shores (i.e., none transported inland). The only displaced Black-capped Petrel was in Cape May, NJ, where the other major rarity was an apparent Black Swift, perhaps transported from the Caribbean!

Coastally, perhaps the only species likely to have been “transported” north by the storm were six Black Skimmers in the Hampton Harbor area August 29 (two remaining on August 31). Although displaced southern species, like tropicbirds and Sooty Terns, are what many birders hope for, “groundings” are another avian event to watch for in such storms. Even localized thunderstorms can “ground” migrating waterbirds and shorebirds that travel overland, often at great heights. When huge storm systems like a Tropical Storm occur, these groundings can happen widely, as *Irene* showed us.

Numbers of Black Terns seemed to be elevated overall this year, perhaps due to a particularly good breeding season in the prairies. Incredible numbers in New Hampshire on August 28, however, were all directly attributable to *Irene*, and included birds at three inland sites (including a flock of 18 in Concord) and state record high counts on the coast topped by 275+ at Hampton Harbor. Steve Mirick estimated 328 in a full day of birding on the New Hampshire coast (including the 275+ in Hampton Harbor – see box). Although some of these birds were almost certainly migrants grounded by the large storm system (especially those in Concord), the exceptional count on the coast may also have involved birds transported by the southerly and southeasterly winds from offshore waters at Cape Cod, where unusually large numbers had been staging this fall. Either way, Black Tern was certainly the highlight bird of *Irene* in New Hampshire. Hudsonian Godwits, similarly, posted amazing numbers, with 109 counted along the New Hampshire coast during an all-day storm watch August 28. See Steve Mirick’s notes in the box.

Not transported by the storm, but pushed to shore by ESE winds of up to 50 knots on August 28, was a remarkable count of 27 jaegers. Of those, three were identified as Parasitics, including one adult photographed inside Hampton Harbor! Other species observed, which were likely pushed to shore by the winds (although some shorebirds may have been “grounded” or driven from feeding areas), included: 20 Great and 4 Manx Shearwaters, along with a number of distant unidentified shearwaters; 30 American Golden-Plovers; 11 Whimbrel in several groups; 105 Northern Gannets including one seen on the **west** (inland) side of Route 1A; 21 Red Knots in several groups; three Red-necked Phalaropes; and 700 Common and 20 Roseate Terns. Three Least Terns, uncommon after mid-August, set this year’s late date for New Hampshire and were probably gifts of the storm as well, maybe pushed with Black Terns from staging areas on Cape Cod.

Despite being a relatively weak storm, *Irene* was a very large storm and maintained hurricane strength for a comparatively long time. How and why certain storms result

Two Amazing Fall-outs

Steve Mirick's paraphrased notes to the NHBirds e-mail list after a day of storm-birding during Irene on 8/28/11 (posted 8/29/11).

Hudsonian Godwit

“Amazing fall-out of godwits before and during storm. The precise number of birds is still uncertain as it became confusing when birds appeared and disappeared and there was no directional movement for some of them. Break down of sightings is: 9 adults flying north very close at North Hampton State Beach at about 8 am; 18 (most/all adults) circling continuously around Little River salt marsh at about 1 pm; 45 circling Little River salt marsh later; 12 sitting and 2 flying in on Hampton flats at about 4 pm; 15 flying by in a single group and landing in flats; 11 spotted in back of harbor making 26 at one time on flats; 15 flying by and continuing southward.”

Black Tern

“AMAZING fallout of Black Terns. Started slowly with 11 seen flying over our heads at Ragged Neck, heading north at about 10 am. A flock of 50 were seen by Ben Griffith and others at the Little River saltmarsh and we had 8 on Eel Pond. The finale, however was at Hampton Harbor where I estimated 275+. We arrived just as flats were being exposed to find 14 Black Terns in close on beach. From there, the numbers continuously grew over the next four hours as flock after flock flew in from the north, following the channel. Many birds stayed on the flats, but many birds continued southward. Late in the day before leaving, I counted 160+ Black Terns at one time, and I suspect that there were many more located in a large flock in a back channel.

in lots of rare bird sightings and why others do not remains poorly understood, but larger storms that maintain their strength across a large distance usually transport more tropical seabirds northward. The track of a storm is important as well, and the leeward islands and Gulf Stream (both of which *Irene* transited a few days before reaching New England) are areas rich in birds, including Sooty Terns and White-tailed Tropicbirds. Perhaps related, observers on boats off the mid-Atlantic and Southeastern US coasts this year saw very high numbers of White-tailed Tropicbirds, although the cause of this apparent “up year” for tropicbirds is unknown.

It is perhaps not surprising that coastal New Hampshire observers saw no obviously displaced (i.e., southern or tropical) birds from the storm, since its center was so far to the west. The only obvious coastal storm bird away from southern Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, was a lone Sooty Tern in Boston. However, why did observers along the Connecticut River not manage to see a Sooty Tern, White-tailed Tropicbird, jaeger, or storm-petrel? All of these were seen by me and others in an all-day vigil at Quabbin Reservoir, just 29 miles south of the New Hampshire border! The answer may lie in the timing of the storm. Weakened though it was, the very first suggestion of a bird transported by the storm at Quabbin Reservoir was a Parasitic Jaeger seen around 1:15 pm when the stronger northeastern quadrant of the storm seemed to reach the area. Jaegers, however, migrate overland and this bird may have been put down by the rain clouds rather than being truly “entrained” in the storm. In

fact, the only clearly entrained birds were the White-tailed Tropicbird, Sooty Tern, and Leach's Storm-Petrel; the first two appeared together at 4:30 pm just after the storm passed, the skies cleared, and the winds switched around to be northwesterly. The storm-petrel followed about one hour later. This seems to be a regular pattern in hurricanes, that the rarer entrained birds "drop out" as the storm passes over a water body like a large river or reservoir. This exact same timing was noted for tropical species (including Bridled and Sooty Terns, White-tailed Tropicbird, and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels) in New York City (Andy Farnsworth, personal communication). Since it took the storm another three hours or so to reach New Hampshire, this seemingly magical moment in the storm probably did not occur during daylight hours for Granite State birders, although birds like White-tailed Tropicbird and Sooty Tern were clearly still entrained in the storm and found dead or dying the next morning. By the next morning, clear skies and northwesterly winds made for poor bird-finding conditions on lakes and rivers, affording the healthier birds a chance to return to the ocean. If the next storm to follow such a track occurs during daylight hours, it will be interesting to see if New Hampshire birders find more southern rarities in the moments immediately following the passage of the center of the storm.

The 2011 October Coastal Fallout

by Marshall Iliff

From September 30 to October 1, a strong low-pressure system developed over the southeastern United States, setting up a strong clockwise flow around its center. The result, at the 500 mB level (about 18,000 ft. where many birds presumably migrate) was a flow from the southeast (Alabama, Georgia, and Florida) directly to the Canadian Maritimes and waters off New England. The low deepened over the central Appalachians on October 1 setting up a strong south-southwesterly jet flowing directly to New England. As the low moved slightly northward on October 2, winds weakened somewhat and became more southeasterly. The low basically remained stationary for the next three days, with winds weakening some, but continuing the flow from the Southeastern United States to New England. Southerly winds and rain predominated in coastal New England and offshore from September 29 to October 5, with the system finally clearing out to the north bringing clear skies and northwesterly winds behind it on October 6.



Worm-eating Warbler by Len Medlock, 10/2/11, Odiorne Point State Park, Rye.

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
CTF	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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