

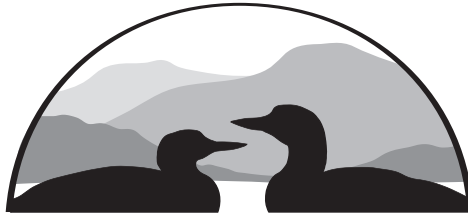
# New Hampshire Bird Records



**Winter 2011-12**

**Vol. 30, No. 4**

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# **New Hampshire Bird Records**

## **Volume 30, Number 4**

### **Winter 2011-12**

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*Cover Photo: Cape May Warbler by Karen Batchelder, 1/22/12, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.*

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IN MEMORY OF

*Kay Dymont*



This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Pat Niswander on behalf of the Concord Bird and Wildflower Club in memory of long time member, Kay Dymont. Kay was a long time birder who led many field trips for the Club, and was a long-time volunteer for NH Audubon, both in the office and in the field.

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## A Review of Electronic Bird Guides for the iPhone/iPad

by Jon Woolf

**P**icture it, a bird guide, complete and unabridged, that fits into any pocket and includes bird sounds as well as illustrations. With a smartphone, you don't have to picture it. You can have it. But which one to get?

I set out to find out. A bird guide was the second or third app I bought for my iPod Touch; the Sibley guide, to be exact. It was good, but not perfect, so eventually I decided to try the e-versions of three more top-notch printed guides: Peterson, National Geographic, and National Audubon's. Here's what I found.

First off, all four of these are intended as electronic counterparts to the printed guides. They include everything the printed guides do – species illustrations, range maps, and descriptive text. All add bird sounds, songs, calls, and behavioral sounds like bill-clacking, etc. All incorporate sophisticated search functions that allow you to enter features such as size, shape, color, and habitat, and then show you a list of possible matching birds. All are available on both the iPhone/iPad platform and the Android platform. At the Apple App Store, the Sibley guide is the most expensive at \$20 (at the time this article was written), while the other three are \$15 each. Like many apps, all four may go on sale for much less.

*(PLEASE NOTE: What follows are my opinions of the four guides I chose to review, reflecting my experiences with these guides, the level of birder that I am, and the type of birding that I do. Your experience may be very different.)*

### The Sibley eGuide to the Birds of North America

**Pro:** Everything that makes the big Sibley guide great is also in the e-version, including the illustrations of multiple plumages for every species. The e-guide even adds detail in the descriptive text for most species at very little cost, since text takes little memory to store. The sounds include a variety of songs and calls from different parts of the bird's range, so you can get an idea of the dialects. The name-search function is quick and efficient, allowing for finding any species from just a few letters of its name. You can filter the species list by location. For example, if you specify New Hampshire, then species that aren't usually found in New Hampshire don't show in the species list. You can also select two birds and display them side-by-side for comparison purposes.

**Con:** There's only one list, a life list, and using it is somewhat clumsy. You have to go to the bird's entry, then tap a 'checkbox' icon to add it to your life list. There is no separate feature for simply checking off birds from a long list of species, like a printed checklist. The Sibley suffers greatly from the small screen size of the iPhone/iPod Touch. The bird illustrations are presented as a vertical scrolling image, and it can be tough to compare images of the same bird in different plumages. The illustrations can't be enlarged on the screen either. The comparison feature, as nice as it is, is limited to only two species. There are times when having three or four birds onscreen at once is nice, for example, when you're trying to identify a peep sandpiper. The loca-

tion filter is rigid and screens out anything that isn't supposed to be in your area. This can make it harder to identify vagrants such as the Curlew Sandpiper spotted in fall 2011 at Plaice Cove.

Verdict: Very good if you know what species you want to look at. Not so good for scanning to identify an unfamiliar bird, because it's so difficult to quickly look at several species. All in all, the Sibley guide seems aimed at the experienced birder. Novices should probably look elsewhere for their first e-guide.

### **Peterson Birds of North America**

Pro: Roger Tory Peterson has left us, but his influence remains. For the beginning birder, there isn't any better field guide in print or electronic form. The species paintings and descriptions are the same familiar, high-quality material as the printed *Field Guide to the Birds*, line for line, almost smudge for smudge. These illustrations can be enlarged on the screen, giving you much closer looks should you need that. The listing function allows multiple lists, year lists, state lists, day lists, etc. There's a useful Help function. There's also a long list of 'extra' articles and other materials, including a very nice guide to bird appearance and all the terms used to describe it. Searching can be done by species name or by group. The use of pages from the field guide allows you to see several related species at once, making it easier to examine similar birds in a hurry.

Con: The controls are not immediately intuitive; you need to read the Help function to figure them all out. The illustrations really suffer from the small screen of a smartphone, although they'd be right at home on a tablet such as an iPad. You can't go directly to the page with the species that you're interested in. You can either see a single species at a time using direct search, or you can jump to the beginning of a section, and then scroll through pages until you find what you want.

Verdict: While the Sibley guide is probably a better guide for experienced birders, this Peterson guide is a better "birding assistant," field guide, reference library, and field checklist all in one.

### **National Geographic's Handheld Birds**

Pro: The printed National Geographic guide has some good illustrations. The e-guide reproduces those illustrations very well. Unfortunately, once you get beyond that, this guide has little else to recommend it.

Con: No user guide or on-line help. No listing feature that I could find. Some of the controls are counter-intuitive. For example, when you go to a species page, most of the screen is an illustration of a typical adult bird of that species. The obvious thing to do is tap that to see other illustrations. That's not how it works, however. You have to scroll down to a separate 'Images' link and tap there in order to see any other illustrations of the bird.

Verdict: The weakest of the four in my opinion. Like the Sibley eGuide, the National Geographic eGuide is useful for reviewing birds you know, but not very good for identifying unfamiliar birds, and useless for keeping lists.

### **Audubon Birds – A Field Guide to North American Birds**

Pro: As with the printed National Audubon guides, the illustrations are photographs, not paintings, which can give a better impression of the live bird. There's an extensive set of online literature, including a user guide, how-to articles on birding,

and more. A powerful listing feature gives you the ability to enter multiple lists and share them with others.

Con: To save space the photos are small, with little room for enlargement to study details. Response time is slow, probably because of the use of photos instead of paintings. The listing feature, while fairly extensive, requires you to register with the National Audubon Society (not New Hampshire Audubon which is an independent state Audubon Society) before you can use it. It also seems to require a live Internet connection, so it won't always be available.

Verdict: Not the worst, but far from the best. A good concept hampered by inefficient design.

### General Summary

Which is best? Which is worst? As usual with field guides, that's a matter of personal preference. These reviews are only my own opinion; yours may be very different. Nor are these the only e-guides that are available for smartphones or tablet computers. With those caveats, my conclusion is that the Sibley e-guide and the Peterson e-guide are both worth the money. Both have stayed on my iPod Touch. Just as with the printed guides, I use the Peterson for building lists and for looking at several birds at a time, while I use the Sibley for looking at all the different plumages that a bird might appear in.

Still, while they're useful tools, I don't think any of these e-guides will replace book and notepad anytime soon. It's still much faster to scan several pages worth of birds with a printed guide, and (at least for me) it's much faster to note species and numbers seen with a pen and pad, rather than trying to tap it out on the iPod's tiny screen and keyboard.

*Jon Woolf is a database programmer and web-designer who spends much of his off-work time pursuing several hobbies, including photography and birding.*

## Answer to the Photo Quiz

*by David B. Donsker*

**T**he subject of this issue's Photo Quiz is clearly swimming on the surface of the water in a duck-like manner. Its body is strongly speckled dark gray and white with the exception of a contrasting brilliant white breast, sides of neck, and face. The gray crown and back of neck contrast with the white foreneck and face. The white of the face extends above the eye which leaves the dark eye completely surrounded by gleaming white. The bill is pale and is long and tapered, resembling a dagger blade. It is held slightly upturned from horizontal. The body of this bird is proportionally long with a tapered, seemingly tail-less rear end. Careful examination, peering through the water, shows that the legs of this bird are set quite far back on the body.

Swimming behavior is shared by a diverse range of unrelated waterbirds in our state including grebes, loons, shearwaters, cormorants, gannets, waterfowl (ducks, swans and geese), gulls, jaegers, alcids and phalaropes. Most of these forms can be

## 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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