

New Hampshire Bird Records





NEW HAMPSHIRE BIRD RECORDS
 VOLUME 32, NUMBER 3
 FALL 2013

MANAGING EDITOR

Rebecca Suomala
 603-224-9909 X309,
 rsuomala@nhaudubon.org

TEXT EDITOR

Dan Hubbard

SEASON EDITORS

Eric Masterson, **Spring**
 Tony Vazzano, **Summer**
 Lauren Kras/Ben Griffith, **Fall**
 Pamela Hunt, **Winter**

LAYOUT

Kathy McBride

ASSISTANTS

Jeanine Ayer, Zeke Cornell, David Deifik,
 Margot Johnson, Elizabeth Levy,
 Susan MacLeod, Aiden Moser,
 Marie Nickerson, Carol Plato,
 William Taffe, Tony Vazzano, Phyllis Yaffie

FIELD NOTES

Jane Wing

PHOTO QUIZ

David Donsker

PHOTO EDITOR

Wendy Chatel

WEB MASTER

Kathy Barnes

WHERE TO BIRD

Phil Brown

EDITORIAL TEAM

Phil Brown, Hank Chary, David Deifik,
 David Donsker, Ben Griffith,
 Dan Hubbard, Pam Hunt, Lauren Kras,
 Ed Larrabee, Iain MacLeod, Eric Masterson,
 Robert A. Quinn, Rebecca Suomala,
 William Taffe, Tony Vazzano, Jon Woolf

www.nhbirdrecords.org

IN MEMORY OF

Dot Soule

This issue is sponsored by *New Hampshire Bird Records* and friends in memory of Dot Soule, long-time volunteer for NH Audubon and *New Hampshire Bird Records*. Dot volunteered until she was 92 doing a variety of different jobs behind the scenes for this publication. She will be greatly missed.

Dot Soule receiving her "Golden Binoculars" from NH Audubon in 2002.



In This Issue

From the Editor 1
 Photo Quiz 1
 Fall Season: August 1 through November 30, 2013 2
by Ben Griffith and Lauren Kras
 Fall 2013 New Hampshire Raptor Migration Report 20
by Iain MacLeod
 Photo Gallery – Hawkwatchers at Work..... 22
by Phil Brown
 Field Trip Report – Fall Warbler Walk at the Freedom Town Forest..... 24
by Tony Vazzano
 Fall 2013 Field Notes 24
compiled by Jane Wing and Rebecca Suomala
 Spruce Grouse Dust Bathing..... 24
by Robert A. Quinn
 Comparing Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitcher 25
by Steve Mirick
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird Attends Lunch 25
by Donna Ellis
 Black-and-white Warbler Nest Cleaning..... 25
by Colleen Prieto
 Scavenging Red-tailed Hawk..... 26
by Steve Mirick
 Late Barred Owl Fledgling 26
by Jane Wing
 Concord November Challenge Sets New Record!..... 26
by Pam Hunt
 Spotlight on White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) 27
by Stephen R. Mirick
 Backyard Birder – Insect-eating Birds Eat Berries 29
by Brenda Sens
 Birding World End Pond & Other Salem Hotspots..... 30
by Kyle Wilmarth
 Volunteers and Research – Concord Nighthawk Migration Study 33
by Rob Woodward and Zeke Cornell
 Answer to the Photo Quiz..... 35
by David B. Donsker

Cover Photos: *Calliope Hummingbird* by Christine Sheridan, 10/28/13, S. Mammoth Rd., Manchester, NH. *Rufous Hummingbird* (smaller photo) by Kyle Wilmarth, 9/22/13, Durham, NH.

New Hampshire Bird Records is published quarterly by New Hampshire 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. 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.

New Hampshire Bird Records © NHA September, 2014

Published by New Hampshire Audubon's Conservation Department

Printed on Recycled Paper

Volunteers and Research

Concord Nighthawk Migration Study

by Rob Woodward



Common Nighthawk in migration by Debbie LaValley, 9/3/13, Canterbury, NH.

On the evening of August 29, 2007, Bob Quinn counted 700 Common Nighthawks in a single flock from the legislative parking garage in downtown Concord. Word spread quickly and the following night a small group of us gathered at the garage and counted another 320 nighthawks. Counts from these two nights were the highest number of migrating nighthawks ever recorded in Concord at that time.

Hoping to duplicate these extraordinary numbers, I returned to the legislative parking garage the following year on August 27 and counted 167 nighthawks. Thus began the annual Concord Nighthawk Migration Study, apparently the first and only of its kind in the state, now conducted from the top of the Capital Commons Parking Garage.

My interest in counting migrating nighthawks began much earlier. On August 27, 1997, I happened to notice a flock of nighthawks, 50 strong, passing over my backyard. More may have gone by before I started counting. Each year after that, I sat in a lawn chair in my backyard in late August with pencil and paper and recorded nightly totals. The 70 birds I counted on August 24, 1998 was the daily high-count for the year state-wide! A paltry sum by today's standards!

The Concord Nighthawk Migration Study has grown in effort since 2008. In that first modest year, the watch only lasted from August 27 through August 31, and just 339 birds were counted. The next year, we started on August 24 and counted through September 8 for a total of 785 nighthawks.

In 2010, the legislative parking garage was closed for repairs, so we moved the count to the Capital Commons Parking Garage a few blocks away and began the first year of a full-scale systematic nighthawk migration study. Counts were conducted almost every evening from August 18 through September 7, although, lacking any big flights, the total count dropped to only 357 birds. The method and

system for counting and recording, however, was developed by this time. More importantly, I now enjoyed the very able assistance of Zeke Cornell on a daily basis, making a huge improvement in my ability to locate and count nighthawks.

The counts start between 5:30 and 6:00 pm and go until 7:30 or 8:00 pm. Telescopes are essential as the view from the top of the garage extends a few miles and most birds are distant. Few things are more difficult to count than migrating nighthawks! Unlike raptors, nighthawks often turn direction, even 180 degrees, after we count them, leading to the risk of a double count. They often feed in a large swirling flock, making an accurate count nearly impossible.

In 2011, the number of hours of observation for the season increased to 29 from 19.5 the year before. But the total of 1,059 birds only barely exceeded the two-day total for 2007. Then a new season record of 1,480 nighthawks was set in 2012 over 36 hours of counting. But again there were no really big flights; the highest count was 345 on August 23.

Figure 1. Total number of Common Nighthawks observed migrating during the evenings in August and early September in Concord, NH. The number in parentheses below the date is the number of viewing days.

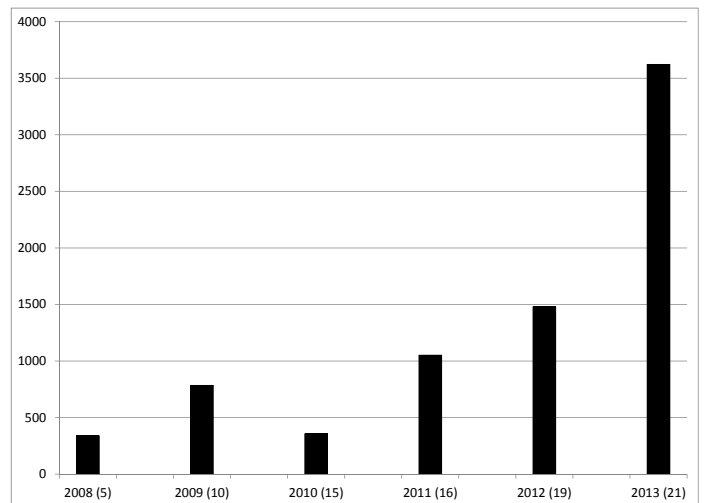
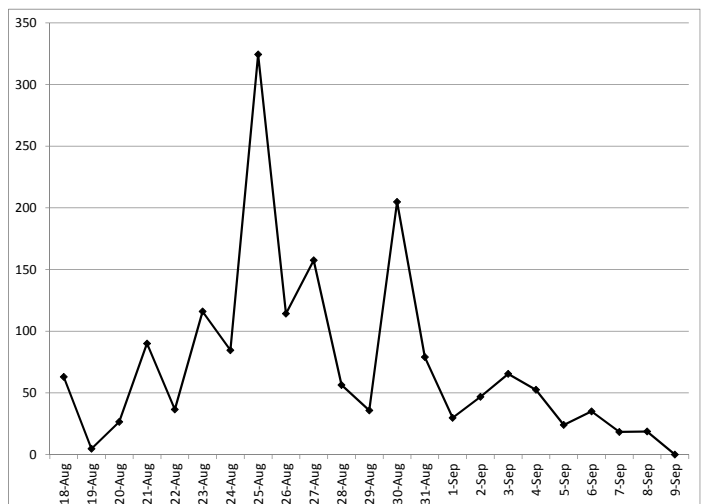


Figure 2. Average number of Common Nighthawks observed migrating during the evening in August and early September in Concord, NH from 2008-2013.



The flight of 700 in 2007 was beginning to look like a once-in-a-lifetime event. Then came the 2013 season!

The year began with good solid counts, including 203 on August 21 and 310 on August 24. The skies opened on August 25 when 966 nighthawks were counted, with another 640 on August 27 and 790 on August 30. These were the kind of numbers we dreamed about and knew were possible but until then had never seen before (Figure 1).

Over the years, we have witnessed other interesting bird sightings from our high perch. Double-crested Cormorants and Ring-billed Gulls daily commute over the Merrimack River to unknown roosting sites. Thousands of Red-winged Blackbirds move in flocks of hundreds toward their roost at the South End Marsh. On August 25, 2009, two Great Egrets flew at eye-level right in front of us. On August 18, 2013, a Peregrine Falcon chased and dove at a Chimney Swift. Then it had the gall to chase and attack a nighthawk! One of the most memorable sightings was on August 21, 2010, when a hummingbird inexplicably chased and attacked a crow!

Dozens of birders have visited us at the garage to witness the spectacle and help with the count. One night, the watch turned into an ice cream social! A visit on a busy night is the most rewarding, but predicting the peak night or nights is difficult (Figure 2). My advice is to visit on more than one night. If you want to win the lottery, buy more than one ticket!

The Common Nighthawk has suffered a long-term population decline throughout its North American breeding range. Downtown Concord hosted over two dozen breeding nighthawks as recently as the 1980s. In 2013, there were no nighthawks regularly flying and calling over downtown on warm summer nights.

No one should mistake the increasing numbers counted in Concord as an indication of an increase in the nighthawk population. Instead, these counts must be placed within the context of a region-wide system of counts measured over the long term. Nighthawk migration studies are still in their infancy. I predict that in coming years, systematic study sites of nighthawk migration will increase in number, just as raptor counts have, providing us with a greater measurement of their population changes and an increased understanding of their complex and enigmatic migration patterns.

Rob Woodward has been a volunteer field trip leader for New Hampshire Audubon for over 20 years. In addition to his interest in nighthawk migration, he runs a weekly bird survey at Turkey Pond and has a particular interest in studying the status and distribution of the birds of Concord.

The Common Nighthawk 2013 Spectacle and Other Sightings

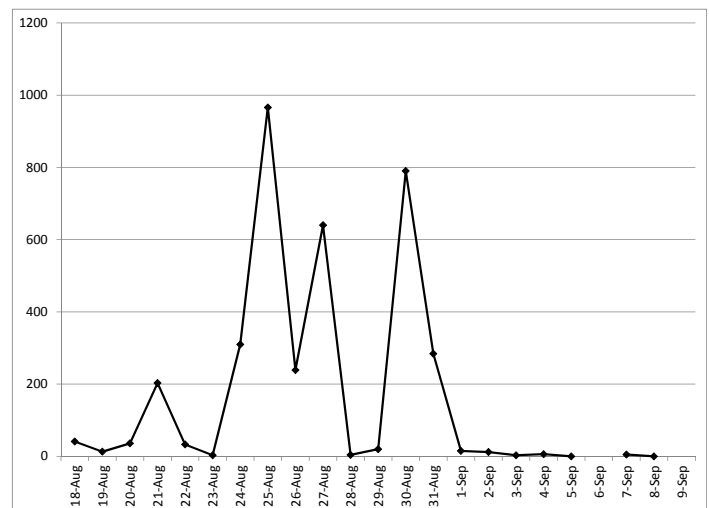
by Zeke Cornell

The Common Nighthawk migration monitoring for 2013 had spectacular numbers in the context of the six years since Rob has initiated these observations. On the evenings when nighthawks were present, we had very good showings of birds in migration. The largest count of 966 on the evening of August 25 nearly equaled the total sightings for other years. It was an amazing site and challenging to count! Only time will tell if this year was an exceptional fall-out, but many viewers had incredible looks at the nighthawks, and in significant numbers.

Rob has found that warm, southerly breezes correspond to good movements of the nighthawks in late August and early September (the time of the year when we monitor). One challenge, however, is to determine where the birds will appear relative to our viewing station. The nighthawks can be anywhere around us and at a variety of distances. On the calmest days, there can be smog or heat haze making it difficult to spot distant birds. It is a bonus to have birds flying close by or directly overhead. In the previous years when I have assisted Rob, this has not happened very often. This was another difference in 2013; we had hundreds of birds flying directly overhead or in very close proximity to the parking garage. A good number of visitors were able to witness this phenomena (and help with the counting), and this contributed to a sense of the spectacle for this season.

On the other hand, as the graph in Figure 3 demonstrates, there are wild swings from night to night as to how many birds might be seen. This feast or famine makes it difficult to predict when there will be a good showing, but the data over

Figure 3. Total number of Common Nighthawks observed migrating during the evening for each night from August 18 to September 9, 2013 in Concord, NH. There were no observations on September 6.



Answer to the Photo Quiz

by David B. Donsker

Male waterfowl are among the most distinctive of all birds to identify in breeding plumage. Many are colorful. Most are boldly patterned. Female ducks, however, are often much more cryptically patterned and colored, and very few are similar in plumage to their male counterparts. As such, they are often a challenge to identify. When associated with the males, which is often the case, either as a mated pair or as part of a larger flock, the identification of these birds is fairly simple. But when seen alone they can be puzzling. The quiz bird in this issue features one of these female ducks.

Our featured bird is a small duck with a short upturned tail and small, triangular bill. It is uniformly dark with the exception of its face pattern which is quite boldly marked. The pattern of the face is characterized by a large white patch at the base of the bill extending onto the cheek and two smaller patches, one in front of the eye and the other on the “ear” or the space behind and just below the level of the eye.

New England ducks can be broadly divided into four groups, each with its own distinctive structure and behavior. These are the dabbling ducks, diving ducks, mergansers and stiff-tailed ducks.

The fish eating, thin-billed mergansers are quite distinctive and present no problem here. Our only stiff-tailed duck, Ruddy Duck, cocks its tail. The tail of Ruddy Duck is long, however, and it has a large, spatulate bill which is quite unlike the small triangular bill of this bird. Ruddy Duck does have a large white cheek patch, but it is much larger in proportion to the rest of the face than our featured bird, and it lacks the other two face spots.

Dabbling ducks favor relatively shallow freshwater or brackish creeks, ponds, and marshes. They feed by dabbling their bills on the surface of the water and tipping forward to grab subsurface food. They take off from the water directly, often in explosive flight. This group of ducks includes largish, large-billed species such as American Black Duck and Mallard and smaller-billed, compact species such as American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal. The featured bird is unlike the large, large-billed species. The smaller, more compact teal have a thin rather than triangular bill, so they cannot be considered. On the other hand, wigeons do have short rather triangular bills. But female wigeons, like all female dabbling ducks, have very subtle markings. No female dabbling duck has such a bold face pattern.

Diving ducks are, in general, rather compact species that prefer the deeper open water of our bays, inshore ocean or larger lakes. They dive for their food and take off from the water by first running along its surface. This group comprises



Rob Woodward (far right) and Zeke Cornell (far left) counting migrating Common Nighthawks with several other birders from the roof of the Capital Commons Garage, 8/23/13. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.

the six years suggests the window of best possibilities is in late August.

This unpredictability of nighthawk migration also extends across our region. There is another monitoring station along the Vermont side of the Connecticut River (Westminster Station, Westminster, VT, which is across the river from Walpole, NH; the latitude here, is similar to Concord, NH). It has been interesting to note that the two sites often have big count nights on totally different days.

As Rob mentioned, our five story platform gives us the opportunity for watching other bird activity when there is a dearth of nighthawks. Besides the birds Rob noted, we have seen an occasional Bald Eagle in the river corridor, and I am always scanning the vultures for a Black Vulture.

Additionally, we have had sightings of all three of the smaller falcons most years. Merlins and Peregrine Falcons have chased prey and had enough success for us to watch them de-feather and feast on their catches, while perching on one of the local church spires.

Chimney Swifts are the other most common evening visitors. These birds are widespread in our viewing area. Unfortunately, when at a good distance, the shape and flight style of this swift can be confused with nighthawks. A little practice can usually sort out this challenge. A few times, we also have been fortunate enough to watch these birds congregate around and then enter a local chimney.

Let me encourage everyone to save a day or two in late August and help us find nighthawks in migration.

Zeke Cornell has been birding for four plus decades, but only recently in New Hampshire. He is enjoying becoming acquainted with the birding nooks and crannies of the Granite State and New England and helping with the fall nighthawk migration watch in Concord.

Your Support Makes a Difference — New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund

What is the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund?

The Fund was established by two donors and approved by the NH Audubon Board of Trustees to provide long-term support for the collection, organization, quality control, distribution, dissemination, publication, promotion, preservation and storage of New Hampshire bird sighting information. *New Hampshire Bird Records* is the current vehicle and umbrella for these functions and the initial focus of the fund is on supporting all facets of *New Hampshire Bird Records* (both the publication and data aspects).

Why is the Fund needed?

Funding for the *New Hampshire Bird Records* publication and the data collection effort behind it is an ongoing challenge. Subscription fees do not cover the entire costs. The goal of the Fund is to provide long term stable funding and to help ensure the continuation of this valuable program.

The Fund has doubled since it was first established in 2011. Please help it continue to grow by making a contribution. You can make a donation by using the form in the brochure enclosed with this issue, or contacting the Managing Editor (see inside front cover).

Abbreviations Used

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
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

NHBR Subscription Form

I would like to subscribe to *NH Bird Records*.

NHA Member \$25.00 Non-member \$35.00

All renewals take place annually.

Mid-year subscribers will receive all issues published in the subscription year.

I would like to join NHA and receive *NH Bird Records* at the member price.

Family/\$55 Individual/\$39 Senior/\$24

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____

Zip _____

Payment is by:

check enclosed— payable to NH Audubon

MC VISA

Card #: _____

Exp. Date: _____

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

Subscribe online at www.nhbirdrecords.org