

New Hampshire Bird Records





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IN APPRECIATION

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Rebecca Suomala in appreciation of family – those who are no longer with us and much missed, those whose presence is still so much valued, and the new additions who bring great joy.



In This Issue

From the Editor	1
Photo Quiz	1
Fall Season: August 1 through November 30, 2015 by Lauren Kras and Ben Griffith	2
Fall 2015 Field Notes compiled by Rebecca Suomala and Kathryn Frieden	20
Color Banded Birds by Stephen Mirick	
Late Cliff Swallow Fledging by Scott Heron	
Berry-eating Coot	
Leucistic Ruby-throated Hummingbird	
Fall 2015 New Hampshire Raptor Migration Report by Iain MacLeod	21
Concord Nighthawk Migration Study – 2015 Update by Rob Woodward	25
Powder Mill Pond – the Return of the Shorebirds by Eric Masterson	26
The Curious Case of Ruddy Ducks by Robert A. Quinn	28
Field Trip Reports.....	29
Star Island in September by Rebecca Suomala	
Annual Hawk Migration Watch, Lebanon Airport by Blake Allison	
Shorebird Identification by Stephen Mirick.....	30
Spring and Fall Migrations of the Races of Palm Warbler through New England by Hector Galbraith, Chris Rimmer, Steve Faccio, and Trevor Lloyd-Evans.....	33
Birding New Hampshire's Lake Sunapee by Dylan Jackson	35
Research – Does a Reduction in Caterpillars Caused by Exotic Shrubs Lower the Reproductive Success of Common Yellowthroats? by Matt Tarr	40
Answer to the Photo Quiz by David B. Donsker.....	43
Corrections	44

Cover Photo: Western Meadowlark (top and lower left) by David Lipsy accompanied by Susan Wrisley, 11/16/15, opposite North Hampton State Beach, NH. Note the nearly solid yellow malar area and darker cheek. Compare it with the Eastern Meadowlark (lower right) photographed by Len Medlock in Hampton, 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.

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Shorebird Identification

by Stephen Mirick

Sandpipers and plovers are often collectively called “shorebirds” and July through September is the peak of their southbound migration. The New Hampshire coast is the best place to find them and it’s not unusual to see dozens or even hundreds of shorebirds collected in pools or along the beach or rocky shoreline.

Unfortunately, shorebirds can be very challenging to identify. The small “peeps” including the Semipalmated, Least, White-rumped, Western, and Baird’s Sandpipers are sometimes considered the most difficult to identify, but there are many other difficult identifications such as those of the yellowlegs and dowitchers. At times, it may be best to just leave them as unidentified. I offer here a couple of tips for identifying the small “peeps” that you may not find in the field guides.

Age

Shorebirds in the fall can first of all be separated into adults or juveniles. Try to age the bird first if you can. From the beginning of July into the beginning of August, almost all of the migrating shorebirds are adults. Adults for many species are best identified in the fall by their blotchy, irregular, or worn looking plumage. Least Sandpipers in July look very dark above as the pale feather edges on their backs shown in breeding plumage have worn off. Semipalmated Sandpipers have a blotchy looking appearance as they molt into winter plumage and are much paler than Least Sandpipers. The problem you run into is that **none of the major field guides show this**. I consider *The Sibley Guide to Birds* the best field guide for shorebirds; however, it only shows adult birds in breeding plumage and in winter plumage. For the most part, none of the “peeps” we see in the fall are adults in either breeding or winter plumage! *They are in between!!!*

Juveniles (except White-rumped Sandpipers) start to show up along the coast in early August, and by the end of the month, they outnumber the adults. Juveniles are distinctive and can appear more different from adults of their own species than from other species! Juveniles are birds that were born during the summer and they have a bright new coat of feathers. They don’t molt until late in the fall and there is usually very little feather wear. Most have distinct buffy or pale feather edges on their upperparts giving them a striking scaly appearance. When the first juvenile Least Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers appear on the coast, they are very colorful and contrast strikingly from the dull and dingy adults.

We thoroughly enjoyed this weekend trip, despite the low number of migrant songbirds. Given that our weather was not conducive to migration, the Lazuli Bunting was doubly surprising but there had been a good airflow a few weeks previously that brought Western Kingbirds across the northeast, so perhaps it was a holdover from that. As Eric said, “It just goes to show that you can read weather all you want, but you never know for sure.”

Annual Hawk Migration Watch, Lebanon Airport

by Blake Allison

On Saturday, September 12, 2015, about two dozen participants joined a morning hawkwatch held at the Lebanon Municipal Airport on Airport Road in West Lebanon, NH and arranged by the Mascoma Chapter of NH Audubon. At the start, conditions were somewhat foggy. This caused flying birds to disappear into the fog at times. Gradually skies cleared, becoming partly cloudy with occasionally a wide expanse of blue sky in advance of more clouds moving in from the southwest. For much of the observation time, there was almost no wind and temperatures were very comfortable.

By late morning, hawks were on the move, but some were at a great distance and hence challenging to identify. Numerous Turkey Vultures were seen early during the watch, but disappeared later in the morning. These vultures apparently were flying up from their West Lebanon roost and not migrating. Here’s our list of migrating raptors:

- Turkey Vulture – 25 (probably an underestimate)
- Accipiter species – 1 (probably Sharp-shinned or Cooper’s)
- Broad-winged Hawk – 14 (7 was the largest number in a single group)
- Red-tailed Hawk – 1
- Unidentified distant hawks – 8
- Falcon species – 1 (likely American Kestrel or Merlin)

Waterbirds included two unidentified flying ducks believed to be mergansers and a Double-crested Cormorant flying swiftly southward. Non-raptor landbirds included numerous American Goldfinches in flight. A flock of European Starlings put on a good display. A number of them were molting and showed a mixture of the drab juvenile plumage and the more conspicuous speckled adult plumage of fall. It was enjoyable to be out to see an early part of the Broad-winged Hawk migration.

Blake Allison is Chair of NH Audubon’s Mascoma Chapter Steering Committee. He leads birding events for the chapter and regularly posts his sighting activity to the Upper Valley Birders list-serv and NHBirds e-mail list. He occasionally writes bird-related articles for local blogs.



Least Sandpiper
Adult (top) and Juvenile (bottom)



Semipalmated Sandpiper
Adult (top) and Juvenile (bottom)



White-rumped Sandpiper
Adult (top) and Juvenile (bottom)

Above are three comparisons of Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, and White-rumped Sandpipers in adult and juvenile plumages.

Size and Shape

Direct comparison of size and shape can provide good clues, but a single shorebird can be difficult. Fortunately, shorebirds are often in mixed flocks for a more direct comparison. Least Sandpipers are just slightly smaller than Semipalmated Sandpipers with a short fine-tipped bill, but this can be difficult to appreciate unless they are side by side with a different species. With experience, the long-legged and long winged appearance of White-rumped Sandpiper is distinctive from Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. Baird's Sandpipers have a similar shape and size to the White-rumped Sandpiper, but the back and breast patterns of the juvenile Baird's Sandpipers we get here are distinct and adults almost never occur in New Hampshire. If you get a close look at a shorebird, note the wing tips relative to the tail length. White-rumped and Baird's Sandpipers are the only species where the wing tips extend beyond the tail.

Leg Color

If it is a small, peep-sized shorebird with distinctively yellow or greenish yellow legs in August, it is a Least Sandpiper or a Pectoral Sandpiper (larger than peeps but this can be less obvious for a single bird). Other peep-sized shorebirds have black legs. Unfortunately, mud can often cover the legs of Least Sandpipers making them look black, so be aware of this limitation in determining leg color.

Timing and Status of Shorebirds

This is a very complex topic as each of the different species has different characteristics with respect to timing of migration, preferred habitat, and rarity in New Hampshire. It is perhaps one of the most important factors, however. Below are some generalizations about New Hampshire's "peeps" in the southbound (July through November) migration.

Least Sandpiper – Common, especially in coastal salt marshes. Adults start migration in early July and are joined by juveniles in early August. By late August, almost all are juveniles. Leaves the state before other shorebirds and most are gone by early October. Most common peep found inland in the state.

Semipalmated Sandpiper – Common to abundant, especially on coastal mudflats and rocks. Adults start migration in early to mid-July. Joined by juveniles in early to mid-August. Almost all are juveniles by early September. Lingers into late October or early November.

White-rumped Sandpiper – Uncommon, on coastal mudflats and rocks. Adults start migration in early August and often look very gray above by September. First juveniles don't appear until late September or October. Lingering juveniles often seen into mid-November.

Western Sandpiper – Uncommon to rare. Almost all sightings are of juveniles. First juveniles generally appear in late August and peak in late August and early September. Most are gone by early October, but may rarely linger later than other peeps.

Baird's Sandpiper – Rare. Most often seen along coastal rocks and beaches. Almost all sightings are of juveniles. First juveniles generally appear in mid to late August and peak in late August and early September. Lingers very rarely into early October.

Also remember that 95% of the “peeps” we see in the state are either Semipalmated or Least Sandpipers, so get to know each of these species very well, including the age differences

and variations in plumage! White-rumped Sandpipers make up another 4% and the remaining 1% is left for Western and Baird's Sandpipers.

Obviously, shorebird identification can be challenging..... but also fun! Southbound shorebird migration happens from July through November. Be sure to spend some time to study them. They are wonderful birds that are making a long journey.



8/30/08



8/23/14



8/30/14



8/21/09



8/22/15



9/12/13

A comparison of Western Sandpiper profiles by Steve Mirick.



A comparison of Willets subspecies by Steve Mirick. A Western Willet (right) in N. Hampton and Eastern Willet (left) at Rye Harbor, both taken 8/22/15. Notice the overall paler gray appearance of the Western as compared to the slightly darker, browner appearance of the Eastern.

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For more information, contact the Managing Editor (see inside front cover).

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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
PMRO	Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory
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

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