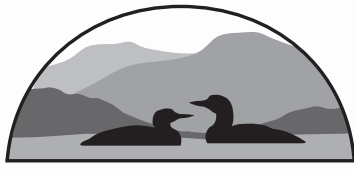


New Hampshire Bird Records





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IN MEMORY OF
Chandler S. Robbins

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored in memory of ornithologist Chan Robbins, in honor of his legendary contributions to the study and protection of birds and to his New Hampshire connections.

continued on page 1



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Cover Photos: These photos represent some of the New Hampshire species whose population trends are tracked by the Breeding Bird Survey created by Chan Robbins, for whom this issue is dedicated. Clockwise: Indigo Bunting by Leo McKillop, Bobolink by Scott Heron, American Redstart by David Forsyth, Rose-breasted Grosbeak by Jane Kelley.

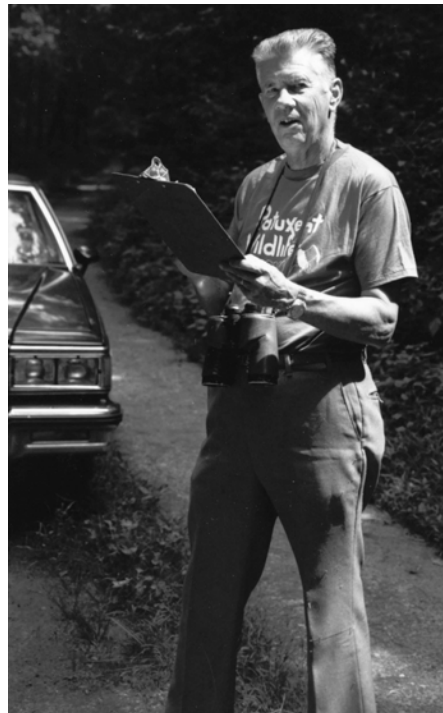
New Hampshire Bird Records is published quarterly by New Hampshire Audubon's Conservation Department. Thank you to the many observers who submit their sightings to NH eBird (www.ebird.org/nh), the source of data for this publication. Records are selected for publication and not all species reported will 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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Chan Robbins created the Breeding Bird Surveys in the 1960s, laying the foundation for what is now the primary source of data on bird trends. His youngest son, George, helped him with the beta testing as they decided on the number of stops, interval between stops, and time allotted for counting birds at each stop. Chan was co-author of the “Golden Guide” – *A Guide to Field Identification of Birds of North America*, wrote about research on the effects of DDT before *Silent Spring*, and banded (and re-discovered) the oldest known bird, a Laysan Albatross named Wisdom. Chan spent summers in New Hampshire since he was a young boy, devoted many hours to the *New Hampshire Breeding Bird Atlas*, and even took part in a couple of now obsolete Christmas Bird Counts in New Hampshire’s White Mountains. His son, George, and wife, Andrea, live in New Hampshire and continue his birding tradition.



Chan running a Breeding Bird Survey route.
Photo by Barbara Dowell.

FROM THE EDITOR

Summer 2016

by Rebecca Suomala

Welcome Chad Witko!

We are very happy to welcome Chad Witko as the new Summer Season Editor. Chad is an avid birder and eBird user who is currently a graduate student at Antioch University New England in Keene, NH. He grew up in Upstate New York and has been a birder for just over 30 years, despite his young age. He has done bird surveys and banding from New York to California. As part of his Master’s, he is conducting research at NH Audubon’s Kensan-Devan Wildlife Sanctuary, doing bird surveys and habitat assessment before and after a forest management harvest to improve wildlife habitat. Chad takes over the Summer Editor reigns from Tony Vazzano and we are glad to have him on board.

PHOTO QUIZ

Can You Identify These Birds?



Answer on page 38. Photos by Jeanne-Marie Maher (left) and Stephen R. Mirick (right).

Worm-eating Warbler	5/25/2013	New Castle
Summer Tanager	5/6/2013	Exeter

Record not accepted by the Committee

Yellow-headed Blackbird	5/28/2013	Stratham
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This bird was seen briefly in flight from the road with no optics. Given this out-of-season sighting, a more detailed sighting would have been preferred to accept the record.

Summer 2013

Records accepted by the Committee

Long-tailed Jaeger	7/4/2013	Between Jeffreys Ledge and Isles of Shoals
Chuck-will's-widow	6/3/2013	Newton
Red-headed Woodpecker	6/2/2013	Belmont
Acadian Flycatcher	6/9/2013	Concord
Yellow-headed Blackbird	6/2/2013	Hinsdale
Yellow-headed Blackbird	7/16/2013	Benton

Records not accepted by the Committee – None

Fall 2013

Records accepted by the Committee

Leach's Storm-Petrel	10/12/2013	Rye
Clapper Rail	9/24/2013	Rye
American Oystercatcher	9/20/2013	Rye
Long-billed Dowitcher	10/3/2013	Hampton
Wilson's Phalarope	8/31/2013	North Hampton
Black Skimmer	10/1/2013	Seabrook
Calliope Hummingbird	10/6/2013	Manchester
Rufous Hummingbird	9/14/2013	Durham
Rufous Hummingbird	10/9/2013	Langdon
Western Kingbird	11/2/2013	Sutton
Sedge Wren	9/29/2013	Concord
White-eyed Vireo	11/10/2013	Exeter
White-eyed Vireo	11/10/2013	Portsmouth
Yellow-throated Warbler	8/10/2013	Rye
Blue Grosbeak	9/23/2013	Concord
Lark Sparrow	10/5/2013	Penacook

Records not accepted by the Committee

Gray-cheeked Thrush	9/5/2013	Pittsfield
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This was a nocturnal heard-only bird. The Committee felt that it is very difficult to separate Gray-cheeked and Bicknell's Thrushes by call only, and thus Bicknell's could not be eliminated.

Gray-cheeked Thrush	9/28/2013	Beans Grant
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This was a heard-only bird in song. Given the extreme rarity of a singing Gray-cheeked in fall in NH, a visible sighting and/or a more detailed description of the song would have been required to accept the record.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by David B. Donsker

The herons (family *Ardeidae*) are one of the more characteristic bird families to recognize, so identifying these long-necked, long-billed, white wading birds as members of this rather uniform appearing family is the easiest part of this exercise. The purpose of this Photo Quiz, however, is to show just how difficult it can be at times to distinguish between similar species in this group.

Although there is no scientific distinction between the birds that we refer to as “herons” and those that we call “egrets,” in general, the more delicately proportioned and/or white plumaged birds are considered egrets and the larger and/or darker species, herons. But it’s not that simple. Great Egret, though a pure white bird, is more closely related to Great Blue Heron than it is to our other egrets. Great Blue Heron has a pure white morph that breeds in southern Florida called “Great White Heron,” which has recently been recorded once as a rare vagrant to New Hampshire. Reddish Egret, which is extralimital to New Hampshire, famously has both white and dark morphs. Little Blue Heron and Tricolored Heron, both dark birds in adult plumage, are in the genus *Egretta* and are actually “true” egrets as is Snowy Egret. This relationship is more easily appreciated in the former, at least, by its white juvenile plumage.

So, approaching the identification of a white-plumaged egret-like member of the heron family requires more than a cursory glance. It requires an understanding and knowledge of the seasonal and age variation of the plumages and the soft part coloration of the bill, face and legs of the members of this group, and the structure, posture and foraging behavior that is typical of the various species.

With that in mind, let’s more carefully examine the images of these two birds. At first impression, they are extremely similar. Both are pure white. Although size is hard to judge without other birds in the photos by which to compare, both of these birds appear to be small to medium sized species of superficially similar structure, which are assuming an upright stance. Neither has any evidence of head plumes, back plumes or aigrettes (head plumes) so they are most likely juveniles or adults in non-breeding plumage. Both have long, tapered, bicolored bills, which are pale gray in their basal portions, but are black at the tips. We can see the entire lower extremities of the bird on the left, which are fairly uniformly pale from thighs to toes, but the front part of the lower legs of this bird is subtly darker than the back sides. If you are examining the colored image on line, you can see that the legs are olive green, but the toes are subtly yellowish. Although the legs of the bird on the right are partially

submerged, its thighs and ankle are also rather pale (greyish-green in the colored image). If you could see its lower legs and toes, I will tell you that they would be essentially identical in color to the exposed thighs. In the black-and-white photos, the skin of the lores (the space between the eye and the base of the bill) appears pale gray in both birds. In the colored images, however, we can see a difference between these two individuals. The lores of the bird on the left are yellowish, but they are gray in the bird on the right. There are other, more subtle features that distinguish these birds from each other, but those will be discussed later in this article.

So, which white herons/egrets can we eliminate from our consideration?

Great Egret, in addition to its tall stature and very long neck, is characterized by a long, pure yellow bill. That feature alone would eliminate it as a candidate for either of these individuals with their distinctly dark-tipped bills. Great Egret, regardless of age or time of year, also has distinctive blackish legs and feet, which are not present in either of these birds.

“Great White Heron,” the white morph of Great Blue Heron, is rather similar to Great Egret, but is even larger and more heavily built with a massive yellow bill and yellow to buffy legs. Structure, bill size and leg color eliminates this one-of-a-kind vagrant to our state as a possibility.

Similarly, adult Cattle Egret also has a pure yellow bill. In juvenile plumage, its bill is black, but it never demonstrates the bicolored bill of these birds. Besides, the structure of Cattle Egret is different from that of these birds. Cattle Egret is stockier, with a proportionally shorter bill and neck. Also, the color of the legs is different. Adults in breeding plumage have red-orange legs. Non-breeding adults and juveniles have blackish legs and feet.

Little Egret is a rare vagrant to New Hampshire from the Old World, which has been reported only a handful of times in the last several decades. The adult in breeding plumage has a pair of longish head plumes, grayish or yellow lores, and a thin black bill. The non-breeding adult and juvenile lack the plumes but always have grayish lores. Juveniles are similar to the non-breeding adults, but show a pinkish base on the lower mandible. The upper mandible is totally black, however. Their blackish (or greenish-brown in the juvenile) legs have yellow feet. Even though we cannot see the legs and feet of the individual on the right, the distinctly bicolored bill of either bird eliminates this rare species.

That leaves us with only two species of white “egrets” to consider: Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) and Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) in its white juvenile plumage. These two species are surprisingly similar. They are virtually identical in size and can be similar in plumage and soft part coloration. As such, they are frequently confused with each other. Many

field guides tend to illustrate the more typical appearances of these similar species, which further contributes to confusion in their field identification for the unwary.

For simplicity of the discussion, it is best at this point to reveal that the left bird is a juvenile Snowy Egret and that the bird on the right is a juvenile Little Blue Heron. We know that the Snowy Egret must be a juvenile because it lacks the shaggy head plumes, has greenish, rather than black legs, lacks bright yellow toes and has a bicolored bill. We know that the Little Blue Heron must be a juvenile because it is white rather than slaty-gray.

So, let’s re-examine the images of these two individuals and look beyond their striking similarities more to the subtler differences that separate these similar species in soft part coloration, structure and foraging behavior/posture. We’ve already pointed out the differences in the color of the skin of the lores which is yellowish in the Snowy Egret and gray in the Little Blue Heron, but this is not always the case. Juvenile Snowy Egret typically has yellow to yellowish-green lores and, although the lores of Little Blue Heron are usually gray, they may rarely be yellow-green as well. Toe color does help, but only if the toes can be seen which is not always the case when the birds are wading and the feet are submerged. But Little Blue Heron never has yellowish toes. Snowy Egret in all plumages does, but this can be hard to distinguish at times, especially in juvenile birds, in which the toes are more greenish-yellow.

There are other differences that were not pointed out earlier. Let’s start with the general structure of the birds. Note that Little Blue Heron has a subtly rounder crown compared to the flatter crown of Snowy Egret. Little Blue Heron also has a proportionally larger eye than Snowy Egret which can give it a “wide-eyed” expression. Less subtle is the structure and appearance of the bill. Compared to the bill of a Snowy Egret, that of a Little Blue Heron is proportionally shorter and is thicker at the base, so it appears more tapered. It is more crisply bicolored and has a slightly rounded upper mandible or culmen. This difference in bill shape and coloration is one of the better morphological features to use to separate these similar species. In Little Blue Heron, the lower legs are uniformly dull grayish-green. Snowy Egret in juvenile or non-breeding adult plumage lacks the completely black legs of the adult. Rather, the foreparts of the lower legs are usually blackish, however, when seen from the back, as when the bird is walking away, the legs of juvenile Snowy Egrets appear greenish-yellow, so be careful.

Perhaps the most reliable feature of all is to be aware of the differences in posture and foraging behavior that distinguishes these birds. Snowy Egret typically feeds actively with a shuffling gait as it stirs up material from the bottom. It frequently crouches when feeding. Although both species

have necks that show the classic heron “S” curve when not fully extended, the Snowy Egret neck is much more coiled than that of Little Blue Heron. This is particularly notable while the bird is foraging. Snowy Egret forages with a tightly coiled neck which, as in a rattlesnake, is ready to spring into action when it stabs at its prey. In contrast, Little Blue Heron has a relaxed, slow and deliberate foraging style. It typically forages with its neck outstretched and held at an upward angle with its bill pointed downward. This feature can be nicely seen in the photograph that is below. This difference in foraging behavior and style is often helpful when looking at distant birds. Juvenile Little Blue Heron can often be picked up by this behavior alone.



Snowy Egret is a common and familiar resident in coastal New Hampshire throughout the spring, summer and early fall. Little Blue Heron is most often encountered as an irregular post-breeding visitor in our coastal marshes in late summer and early fall from its more southern nesting grounds or from rare and local breeding sites in Maine and Massachusetts. Discovering a white juvenile Little Blue Heron amidst the scores of Snowy Egrets that frequent these marshes at that time of year is a challenge and satisfaction worth the effort, but be mindful of the pitfalls in making the identification and beware of juvenile Snowy Egrets!

The image of juvenile Little Blue Heron was taken by Steve Mirick on August 24, 2014 in the marshes in North Hampton. The photographs of foraging juvenile Little Blue Heron (above) and juvenile Snowy Egret (page 1) were obtained by Jeanne-Marie Maher. The former on August 10, 2016 at the saltmarshes south of Odiorne Point; the latter on July 28, 2016 at the first pullout south of Odiorne Point.

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Corrections

The following corrections were found after the issue was published. Minor typos are not included. Please let us know of any inaccuracies you find in any issue so we can correct the data.

Spring 2015

- p. 19 Varied Thrush on 03/01, S. Spangenberg was misspelled.
- p. 33 Photo credit should read “Photo by Dave Govatski” not Charlie Nims.
- Back Cover The date for Summer Tanager should be 04/14/15, not 4/14/16.

Summer 2015 – None

Fall 2015 – None

Winter 2015-16

- p. 4 The Green-winged Teal and Green-winged Teal (American) should be combined with no sub-species. Not all records listed as (American) were designated as such in the data.
- p. 7 The Turkey Vultures on 12/20 were observed by K. Dorsey, not Dorse.
- p. 8 The Sandhill Crane was observed by A. Murray not Murra.
- p. 9 The Iceland Gull and Iceland Gull (kumlieni) should be combined with no sub-species. Not all records listed as (kumlieni) were designated as such in the data.
- p. 15 The White-crowned Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow (*leucophrys*) should be combined with no sub-species. Not all records listed as (leucophrys) were designated as such in the data.
- p. 28 The Belichukars Win the Cup was excerpted from a post to NHBirds on 1/31/2016, not 1/1/2016.

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Abbreviations Used

AMC	Appalachian Mountain Club
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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