

Spotlight on Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*)

by Rebecca Suomala and Kathie Palfy

Background

Franklin's Gull is a member of the *Laridae* family, which includes Auks, Murres, Guillemots, Puffins and Terns in addition to Gulls. It occurs mainly in interior North America in the summer and winter on the Pacific coast of South America from central Peru to northern Chile.

Breeding Status

This species depends on prairie marshes for breeding. Its breeding range is primarily the Great Plains of central Canada and northern United States, but it has expanded southward to the Great Basin. There are no documented records of its breeding in New Hampshire.

Occurrence in New Hampshire

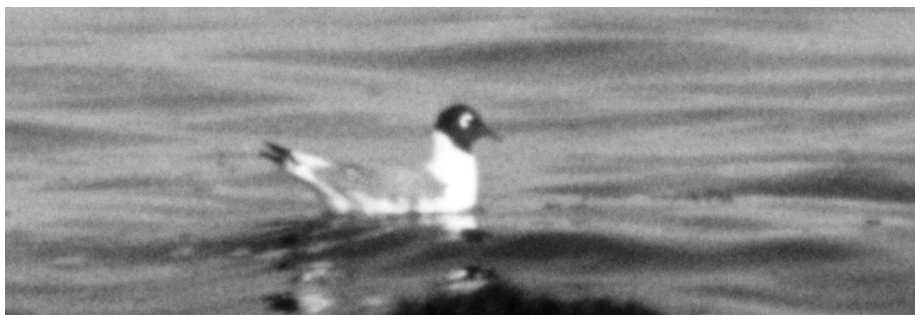
Franklin's Gull has only been documented five times in New Hampshire (Table 1). According to the *New Hampshire Audubon Quarterly*, the first state record occurred in 1970 when a bird was present at South Mill Pond in Portsmouth from November 25 through December 3. It was seen by many birders and photographed. Since that time there have been four other documented reports, as shown in Table 1, all of which were accompanied by photographs. They have been seen in three of the four seasons and the two summer records are for the exact same date (and by the same observer, Steve Mirick). All records are from the coastal region except for the 2005 sighting, which occurred at the Rochester Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), a location adjacent to a large landfill that is known for large numbers of gulls.

Table 1. Franklin's Gull records for New Hampshire.

Date	#	Town	Location	Age
Nov. 25–27, 1970; Dec. 3, 1970	1	Portsmouth	South Mill Pond	Adult, non-breeding
June 1, 1991	1	Rye	harbor & Jenness Beach	Adult, breeding
Sept. 12 & 17, 1991	1	Rye	Jenness Beach, opposite Eel Pond	Adult, changing
June 1, 2000	1	Newmarket	center of Great Bay	Adult, breeding
Nov. 8–14, 2005	1	Rochester	Rochester WWTP	Juv., 1st winter



*Franklin's Gull
by Stephen R. Mirick,
11/8/05, Rochester WWTP,
Rochester, NH.*



Franklin's Gull by Stephen R. Mirick, 6/1/91, Jenness Beach, Rye, NH.



*Franklin's Gull by Dick
Hughes, 9/17/91,
Jenness Beach, Rye, NH.*



*Franklin's Gull by Davis Finch, 11/25/1970, South
Mill Pond, Portsmouth, NH.*

Comments

Franklin's Gull is a rare vagrant to the East Coast, but the small number of records in New Hampshire gives us little basis for establishing a pattern of occurrence for the state. Most records from Massachusetts come from the first two weeks of September, which is consistent with the species' post-breeding wandering and the beginning of migration; however, New Hampshire's records do not fit this pattern. With the exception of the September sighting, most New Hampshire records are outside the typical migration period for Franklin's Gull. Breeding colonies often shift locations due to annual drought conditions, which might account for the June 1 records, but this is purely speculation.

It is interesting to note that the New Hampshire sighting on November 8, 2005 followed Hurricane Wilma at the end of October. There were other Franklin's Gulls reported in the region at the same time including three in Massachusetts (all in November), one in Rhode Island, at least one in Maine, and more than ten in Nova Scotia (prior to that there had only been seven provincial records, B. Maybank pers. comm.). The sightings all appear to be linked to Wilma, as were a number of records in the eastern Atlantic from the Azores to Ireland, but there is speculation on the origin of the birds since Wilma's path did not take it through the Franklin's Gull range (B. Maybank, pers. comm.).

The species has been nearly annual in Massachusetts since 1985 but there are fewer than ten records for Maine (J. Despres pers. comm.) and it remains an extremely rare vagrant in New Hampshire.

Data Sources

The following data sources were searched for records of this species:

New Hampshire Bird Records and archives, circa 1963 through 2005. Audubon Society of New Hampshire, Concord, New Hampshire.

The New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee has not reviewed all records presented here.

References

- Burger, J. and M. Gochfeld. 1994. Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcam*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 116 (A. Poole and F. Gill eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Smart, R. 1971. Fall Season 1970. *New Hampshire Audubon Quarterly*. Vol. 24:1.
- Veit, R. and W. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, MA.