

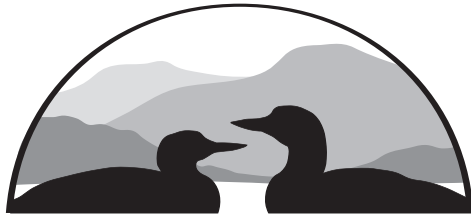
# New Hampshire Bird Records



**Summer 2008**

**Vol. 27, No. 2**

---



# **New Hampshire Bird Records**

## **Volume 27, Number 2**

### **Summer 2008**

<i>Managing Editor:</i>	Rebecca Suomala 603-224-9909 X309, <a href="mailto:bsuomala@nhaudubon.org">bsuomala@nhaudubon.org</a>
<i>Text Editor:</i>	Dorothy Fitch
<i>Season Editors:</i>	Pamela Hunt, Spring; Tony Vazzano, Summer; Stephen Mirick, Fall; David Deifik, Winter
<i>Layout:</i>	Kathy McBride
<i>Production Assistant:</i>	Terry Bronson
<i>Assistants:</i>	Marie Nickerson, Jeannine Ayer, Lynn Edwards, Margot Johnson, Susan MacLeod, Carol Plato, Dot Soule, Jean Tasker, Tony Vazzano
<i>Photo Quiz:</i>	David Donsker
<i>Photo Editor:</i>	Jon Woolf
<i>Where to Bird Feature Coordinator and Maps:</i>	William Taffe

**Cover Photos:** *Mississippi Kite perched, by Mark Szantyr, 6/25/08, Newmarket, NH.*

*New Hampshire Bird Records (NHBR)* is published quarterly by New Hampshire Audubon. Bird sightings are submitted by volunteer observers and edited for publication. All rarity records are subject to review by the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee and publication of reports here does not imply future acceptance by the committee. A computerized printout of all sightings in a season is available for a fee. To order a printout, purchase back issues, or submit your sightings, contact the Managing Editor, or visit our web site.

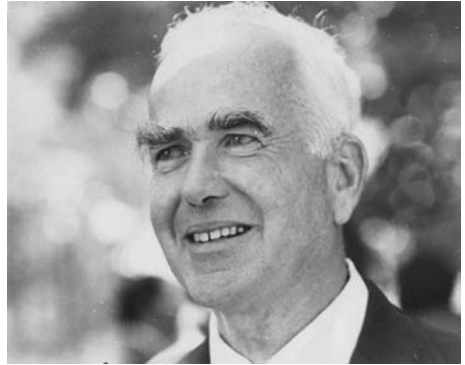
*New Hampshire Bird Records* © NHA December, 2008  
[www.nhbirdrecords.org](http://www.nhbirdrecords.org)



Printed on Recycled Paper

IN MEMORY OF  
*Herb Damon*

**T**his issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Pat Niswander in memory of her brother, Herb Damon, avid birder, farmer, forester, and all-around conservationist.



## In This Issue

From the Editor .....	2
Photo Quiz .....	3
Summer Season: June 1 through July 31, 2008 .....	4
<i>by Tony Vazzano</i>	
Mississippi Kites in New Hampshire.....	34
<i>by David B. Donsker</i>	
Breeding Season Monitoring 2008 .....	40
Common Loon .....	40
Osprey .....	41
Bald Eagle .....	42
Peregrine Falcon .....	44
Common Nighthawk .....	46
Whip-poor-will .....	47
Rusty Blackbird.....	48
Fledgling Vocalizations of New England Landbirds .....	48
<i>by Hope Batcheller</i>	
Photo Gallery – A Visit to New Hampshire’s Tern Colony .....	52
<i>by Jon Woolf</i>	
Backyard Birder – Powder Down .....	54
<i>by Brenda Sens</i>	
Answer to the Photo Quiz .....	55
<i>by David B. Donsker</i>	

# Rusty Blackbird Surveys

by *Laura Deming, Project Co-Leader, New Hampshire Audubon*

In the summer of 2008, New Hampshire Audubon biologists hiked into remote wetlands in the White Mountain National Forest in search of Rusty Blackbirds. This reclusive species breeds in swamps, bogs, and beaver ponds throughout the spruce-fir forests of Canada, Alaska, and the northern United States. Despite the remoteness of their breeding habitat, Rusty Blackbirds are in trouble. Historical records and more recent studies across North America indicate that the Rusty Blackbird decline began in the early 1900s. Over the past forty years, however, this species has declined by about 95%, making it the fastest declining songbird in the northern forest.

The most likely causes of this decline are habitat loss and “blackbird control” programs conducted in the wintering grounds of the southeastern U.S. However, researchers are investigating potential problems with migration habitat and breeding habitat, where climate change, acid rain, and mercury deposition pose serious threats to northern ecosystems.

In an effort to determine the Rusty Blackbird’s status and distribution in New Hampshire’s spruce-fir forests, New Hampshire Audubon initiated surveys of historic and potential breeding sites in 2006. These surveys, which were funded by the New Hampshire Fish & Game Nongame Program, focused on the northern part of the state, and resulted in just three occupied sites out of 23 breeding sites surveyed. In 2008, New Hampshire Audubon staff and volunteers found Rusty Blackbirds in two out of the three historically occupied sites surveyed in the White Mountain National Forest. Plans are underway to expand surveys in the White Mountains in 2009. If you are interested in volunteering to survey for Rusty Blackbirds in 2009, please contact Laura Deming at New Hampshire Audubon, (603) 224-9909 x335; [ldeming@nhaudubon.org](mailto:ldeming@nhaudubon.org).

## Fledgling Vocalizations of New England Landbirds

by *Hope Batcheller*

**F**ledgling birds are a virtually unknown realm. Why is this, given the impact they could have for monitoring breeding birds? Fledglings are young birds that have recently left the nest, but are still dependent on parental care and feeding. Therefore, the presence of fledglings is an indicator of breeding success, and understanding this key stage of birds’ lives could have huge consequences for Breeding Bird Atlases and similar breeding surveys.

Last year, as I was developing my project for an independent study, I met Carol Foss, Ph.D., Director of Conservation for New Hampshire Audubon. She had become



Hope Batcheller recording fledgling vocalizations in the field, photo by Mary Batcheller.

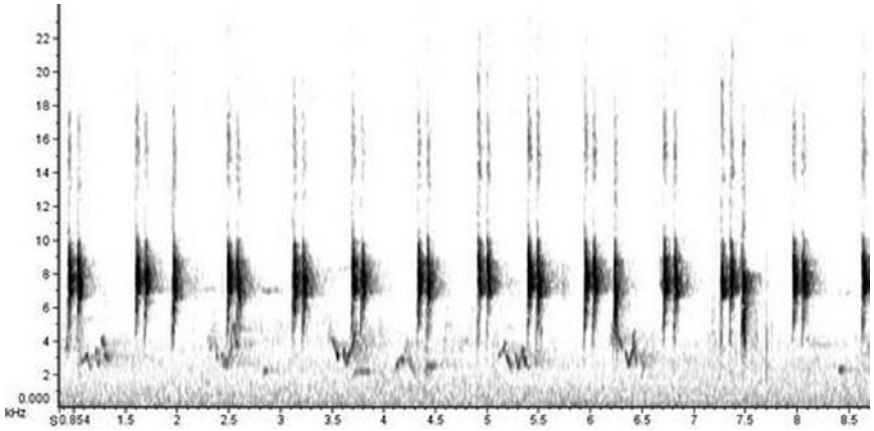
interested in fledglings during her doctoral research and was enthusiastic to help. Her knowledge of fledgling behavior was invaluable, and we have collaborated closely ever since.

I received a grant from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) Environmental Science Research Fellowship Program in the winter of 2008 with NH Audubon as my sponsoring organization. My proposed project was to record fledgling landbirds in New England, thereby starting an archive of their vocalizations. Through the grant I purchased audio recording equipment, which included a digital recorder, headphones, and a directional microphone. In early summer I met with Lang Elliott, an expert nature recordist from Ithaca, NY, and creator of *Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs: Eastern Region*. He not only tutored me in field techniques and recording strategies, but also loaned me a high-quality parabolic reflector for the summer.

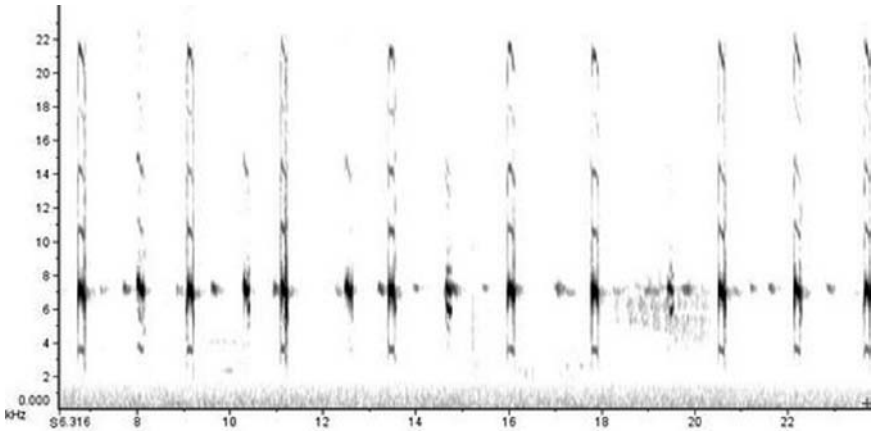
With so much support, the 2008 summer field season was very successful. I spent all of July (the peak time for fledglings) in the field. To maximize species variety, I traveled to several locations throughout Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. From open fields in central Vermont, to the deciduous forest of Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in the White Mountains, to the spruce bogs near Errol, New Hampshire, I visited a great diversity of habitats.

Fledglings are captivating, yet enigmatic. Sometimes they are difficult to detect, but at other times they cooperate perfectly. Expert ventriloquists, they are extremely difficult to locate, a trait that presumably helps them evade predators. Their vocalizations are generally short, repeated notes, which become faster when an adult brings food. Most species have distinctive calls, which are identifiable in the field with practice.

**Figure 1.** Spectrograph of Black-throated Green Warbler fledgling calls, recorded by Hope Batcheller on July 20, 2008 in Ossipee, NH.



**Figure 2.** Spectrograph of Winter Wren fledgling calls, recorded by Hope Batcheller on July 18, 2008 at Pondicherry NWR.



Figures 1 and 2 are spectrographs of fledgling calls from two species I recorded. They offer a visual representation of the birds' vocalizations. The horizontal x-axis represents the passage of time, in seconds. The vertical y-axis shows the frequency (pitch), measured in kilohertz (kHz). Darker areas indicate greater intensity (volume).

Behaviorally, fledglings are usually clumsier and less active than adults. A young fledgling often sits stationary, with fluttering wings and beak wide open whenever an adult brings food. Older birds follow their foraging parents, begging constantly. Fledglings are fascinating, and a delight to work with in the field.

The Red-winged Blackbird fledgling shows many characteristics typical of fledglings. Most young songbirds show a brightly colored gape, though this feature is gradually lost as the bird ages. Note the downy plumage, short or non-existent tail, and clumsy perching posture.



*Juvenile Red-winged Blackbird photo by Hope Batcheller.*

Of course, like any fieldwork, there were ups...and downs. Finding the 2-inch-long Winter Wren fledglings at Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge in northern New Hampshire...then getting caught in a hailstorm

later that day. A fledgling Eastern Towhee calling a foot from the path...but with construction noise in the background that made it impossible to get a perfect recording. The recently fledged Common Yellowthroat four feet away...that wasn't vocalizing. By the end of the summer, however, I had recorded 35 species of fledglings, a very satisfying total.

This fall (2008), I have been working with Lang Elliott to edit my field recordings. By reducing unwanted noise and selecting the best call sequences, even low-quality recordings can become usable. With this preparation, they will be suitable for use on Web sites and audio guides.

As our ability to identify fledglings increases, projects such as a Breeding Bird Atlas will be vastly improved. Much information for such projects is currently lost simply because volunteers cannot identify fledglings. Further studies could also provide insight on call development, adult behavior, and species relationships.

I hope that making these recordings available, along with information on visual identification and behavior, will result in greater attention being paid to fledglings. With so much potential in this field, I encourage birders, scientists, and citizens alike to pursue this new frontier.

Many thanks go to Carol Foss, Lang Elliott, and VINS for their support of this work. For field stories, recordings, and more information, visit [www.fledglingbirding.blogspot.com](http://www.fledglingbirding.blogspot.com).

*Hope Batcheller is a high school junior who has been an avid birder since the age of eight. She lives in Petersburgh, New York, near the Vermont and Massachusetts borders.*

## Abbreviations Used

BBC	Brookline Bird Club	Rd.	Road
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey	Rt.	Route
CA	Conservation Area	SF	State Forest
CC	Country Club	St. Pk.	State Park
FT	Field Trip	SPNHF	Society for the Protection of NH Forests, Concord
L.	Lake	T&M	Thompson & Meserves (Purchase)
LPC	Loon Preservation Committee	TNC	The Nature Conservancy
NA	Natural Area	WMA	Wildlife Management Area
NHA	New Hampshire Audubon	WMNF	White Mountain National Forest
NHBR	New Hampshire Bird Records	WS	NHA Wildlife Sanctuary
NHRBC	NH Rare Birds Committee	~	approximately
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge		
PO	Post Office		
R.	River		

**Rare Bird ALERT**  **224-9909**

**Available twenty-four hours a day!**

**Also online at [www.nhaudubon.org](http://www.nhaudubon.org)**

### 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 in July. 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

***Make check payable to NHA and return this form with payment to:***

Membership Department, NH Audubon  
84 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, NH 03301-8200

*Subscribe online at [www.nhbirdrecords.org](http://www.nhbirdrecords.org)*