

## An Introduction to the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee

As mentioned in the Fall, 1994 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* (NHBR), the state finally has a Rare Birds Committee (NHRBC). It was formed late in 1994 by the four seasonal editors, George Robbins, and Kimball Elkins (subsequently replaced by Dennis Abbott).

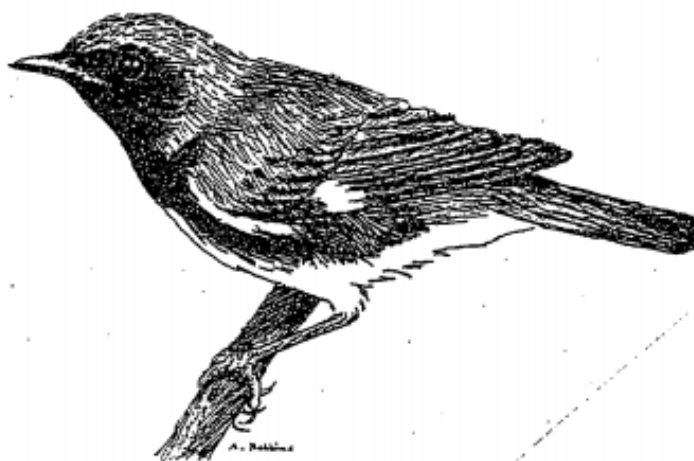
The purpose of the NHRBC is twofold: to serve as a storehouse of details on rare bird sightings in the state, and to decide which reports are well-documented and therefore admissible. Just as reports of common species to NHBR add to our knowledge of their distribution and abundance in New Hampshire, reports of rare species may be important when trying to understand bird movements on the regional or continental level. For example, the three Rufous Hummingbirds that visited New Hampshire in 1994 were but a subset of the unprecedented numbers that visited the eastern U.S. last fall. In such cases, well-documented sightings may ultimately help us decipher avian phenomena.

Documentation is the key word here—the word that separates Rufous Hummingbird sightings from records of more common species. Because rare species are by definition seldom seen in New Hampshire, and because many are similar to more familiar species, it is that much more important that we are sure about the identity of each. This is why we send out documentation forms to get more details on rare, hard-to-identify, or out-of-season sightings. Please do not view these forms as expressions of our disbelief but rather as a way of getting as much detail on the sighting as possible. In many cases, the actual identification is not in doubt, but we still wish to have information on habitat, weather conditions, and behavior that may shed light on the circumstances surrounding the rarity's appearance in our state. In other cases, the species is sufficiently similar to a much more common species that we need to be positive about its identity before accepting the record. To this end it is imperative that observers provide *full* documentation when requested for such by NHBR. (See the Winter 1991–92 issue of NHBR for further discussion on documenting rare birds.)

At present, the NHRBC reviews only those records which NHBR seasonal editors feel are unusual enough to warrant several expert opinions. As a result, many of the species for which documentation is requested are never actually reviewed by the committee, although the documentation is saved for future reference. Species sent on to the committee include those that are generally reported less than annually in a given season, those for which there are only a few records for the state (determining these baselines is another job the NHRBC is working on), and those that are significantly out of season. Keep these categories in mind when sending slips to NHBR. If you see a rare species, make notes *as soon as possible* and even send them in with your sighting slips. Our experience is that good and timely notes on a sighting can greatly improve its chances of acceptance.

Because the NHRBC is still in its formative stages, we are constantly fine-tuning our procedures and purpose. We have voted on the rarities for Fall, 1994 and Winter, 1994-95 as of this writing and included the results in the appropriate issue of *NHBR*. We are still working on a system of providing feedback to the observers in the hopes that we can expedite the processing of documentation and make it easier and more informative for all of us. Bear with us during this period, and by all means continue to support both *NHBR* and the NHRBC by sending in your reports.

*Submitted for the NHRBC by Peter Hunt*



### NHBR Subscription Form

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

ASNH Member \$10.00

Non-member \$15.00

*All renewals take place annually in October*

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

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

Family/\$45

Individual/\$30

Senior/Teacher/Student/\$18

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Make check payable to ASNH and return this form with payment to:

Membership Department, ASNH, 3 Silk Farm Road, Concord, New Hampshire 03301-8200