

New Hampshire Bird Records





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This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Pat Niswander with gratefulness for the return of our feathered friends each summer bringing song and color to our backyards, gardens, forests and fields.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (and their young) are one of the delightful visitors that Pat welcomes to her feeders. Photo by Jane Kelley.

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Cover Photo: Two remarkable first-state records: A Brown Booby by Jason Lambert, 6-11-17, Windham, NH (top), and a Yellow-nosed Albatross by Elizabeth Ford, 7-3-17, Seavey Island, Isles of Shoals, 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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larger lakes throughout the state in the early 1800s. The widespread deforestation of the southern half of the state to create sheep pasture reached a peak in the mid-1800s, reducing nesting habitat for eagles. Sheep farming would not have been compatible with a healthy eagle population as they were regarded as predators of lambs. Eagles were shot and their nests plundered. Mature white pines (favored by eagles) were specifically targeted for lumber and for ship's masts. Eagles did not receive any kind of protection until well into the twentieth century.

Declining water quality also affected eagles, as pollutants from mills and other industries were pumped into rivers causing huge fish die offs. Overfishing on the coast and damming of rivers inland reduced natural spawning runs of anadromous fish. Eagles lost both food resources and nesting sites. The last documented successful nest in New Hampshire prior to the modern era was in 1949 at Lake Umbagog. The widespread use of DDT in the 1950s and 60s was the death knell for eagles in many parts of North America. It took major conservation efforts, including active reintroductions in many states in the 1980s, to bring them back.

A variety of factors combined to make a dramatic resurgence possible. Thanks to the Clean Water Act and other environmental protections, our rivers and lakes are now cleaner and more productive. Fish stocking and management provides plenty of food and, perhaps most importantly, the age and canopy height of white pines, which now dominate our New Hampshire forests, provides an almost unlimited number of nesting trees for eagles. It's probably not a stretch to say that there is barely a lake, pond, or one-mile section of river in the state that doesn't have at least one white pine that an eagle could nest in.

Chris oversees monitoring of the state's eagles and recently observed that we are now witnessing a doubling of the population every five years (Figure 1):

"In 2017, we confirmed a record-high total of **59 territorial pairs** of Bald Eagles in New Hampshire. This is a 5% increase from the 56 territorial pairs documented in 2016, and twice as many pairs as we had just six years ago. In 2017, we confirmed a record-high **53 pairs incubating**, up 26% in one year from the 42 incubating pairs found in 2016, and more than double the 26 incubating pairs we found five years ago. In 2017, we found a record-high **38 successful nests**, up 23% in one year from the 31 successful nests in 2016, and nearly double the successful nests we found five years ago. In 2017, we confirmed a record-high **59 young fledged**. This is also up 16% from the 51 fledglings counted in 2016."

Similar population growth is being seen in neighboring northeastern states and beyond, so we can all celebrate an amazing resurgence of our national symbol.

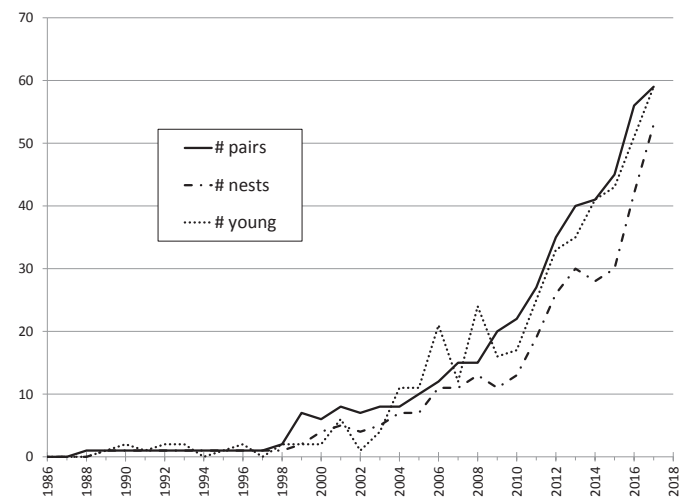


Figure 1. New Hampshire Bald Eagle Productivity, 1987-2017 from NH Audubon.

One Hundred Years of Cerulean Warblers in New Hampshire

by Pamela Hunt

It's a beautiful morning in late May and you're walking through a forest of oaks and pines. All of a sudden you hear an unusual warbler song from high in the trees ahead of you. It's a rapid series of buzzy notes, speeding up and ending in a rapid trill. Although it sounds a little like a Northern Parula or Black-throated Blue Warbler, something's not quite right, so you stop to look for the bird. It sings again, almost directly overhead, and you crane your neck and back to search for movement in the canopy. After what seems an eternity, you finally spot the bird as it forages among the bright green leaves. All you can see at first is a white belly, but at least now you know where it is. You just hope your neck holds out until it presents a better view. An instant later, as it hangs sideways to grab a caterpillar, you catch a glimpse of a black necklace and sky blue top to its head. Your suspicions and hopes are confirmed, a Cerulean Warbler!

The Cerulean Warbler is well named, since its upperparts indeed take on the hue of the sky against which it is often silhouetted. This relatively small warbler is primarily found in the Appalachians and Midwest, although it also just reaches southern Canada. Within this range, it tends to be found in two very different habitats: floodplain forests and upland forests dominated by oaks. Not all forests are equal, however, and the warblers tend to occupy larger tracts and those with some gaps in the canopy. In the fall, Ceruleans migrate to

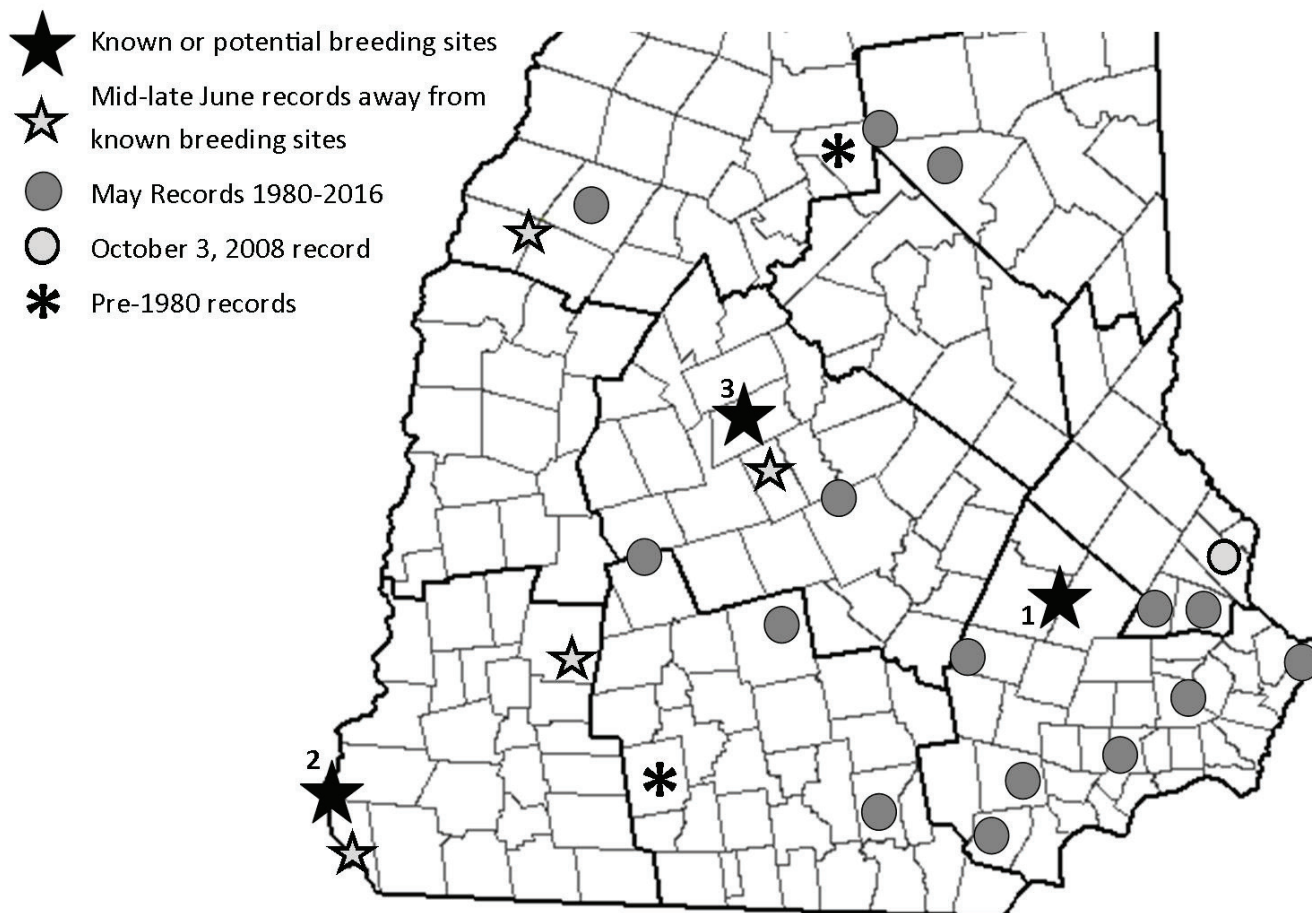


Figure 1. Map of southern New Hampshire showing all known locations of Cerulean Warbler in the state from 1918 to 2016. Known or potential breeding sites are: 1) Pawtuckaway State Park, 2) Wantastiquet Mountain Natural Area, and 3) Blackwater River floodplain. See text for more details.

South America, where they winter in broadleaf forests in the Andean foothills as far south as Bolivia. Like many other Neotropical migrants, they are declining, at roughly 2% per year according to Breeding Bird Survey data. Over 50 years, this has resulted in an estimated loss of over half the population.

Cerulean Warblers have never been common in New Hampshire, although for almost two decades they were reliable at Pawtuckaway State Park in Nottingham. I'll return to Pawtuckaway momentarily, but the story begins considerably earlier. On May 27, 1918, G.W. Hagar reported one from Peterborough and as far as anyone can tell this was the first record of the species in the state. Eleven years later, the second was collected in Holderness in early June, but 50 years followed before the third (although there are probably a couple we don't know about during that half-century).

From 1980 to 2016, there were 21 reports of Cerulean Warblers away from known or suspected breeding areas, with roughly six per decade through the 2000s. The vast majority of these birds (16) were found in May (dark circles on Figure 1). They range in date from May 5-29, with a median around May 22-23 (Figure 2). Another four were in the second half

of June (pale stars in Figure 1) and these are a little more intriguing. Birds in Webster and Hinsdale were near breeding areas, while those in Stoddard and Lebanon were not. The Lebanon bird is noteworthy because it was detected at two locations near Mascoma Lake, 1.3 miles and seven days apart. It was presumed to be a wandering unmated male, which is likely the case for other June records. Cerulean Warblers are early fall migrants. They can be hard to find even at breeding sites after mid-August and are largely gone from the northeastern United States by early September. In light of this, New Hampshire's only fall record, from Dover on October 3, 2008, is remarkable. There are no August or September records for the state and only 4-5 from July (the latter is at least partially because people aren't looking as intently).

Although Cerulean Warblers are declining overall, their range expanded slightly at its extreme northeastern edge (e.g., n. New York, s. Quebec, and w. Massachusetts) during the 1970s and 1980s. Shortly afterward, the species became a reliable summer resident in New Hampshire. Since 1986, three locations have hosted Ceruleans for multiple years and during the breeding season: Pawtuckaway State Park

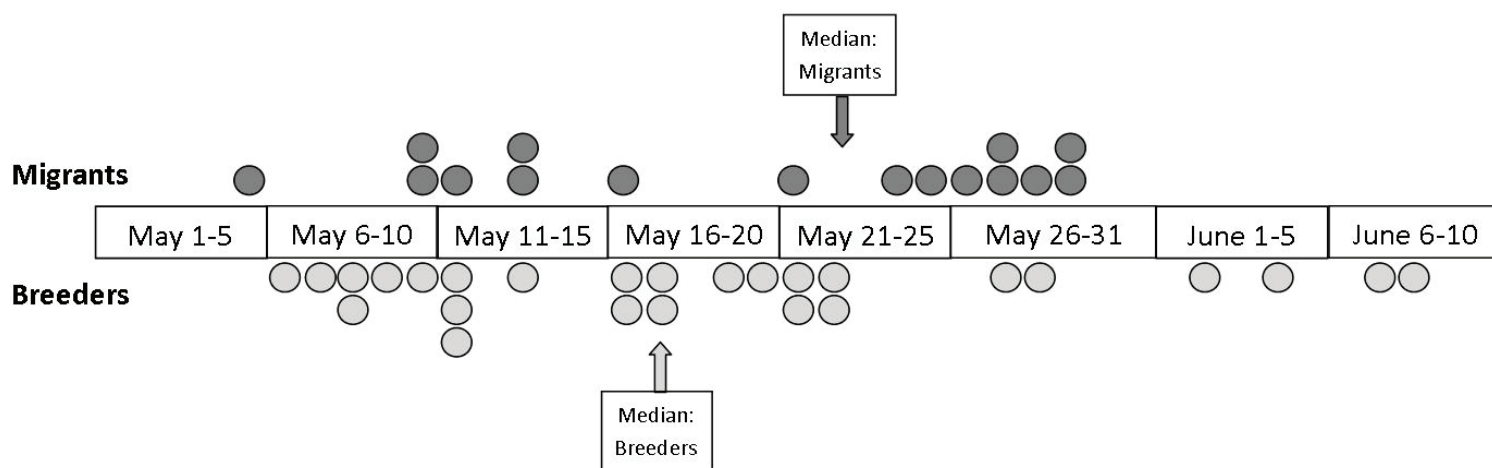


Figure 2. Arrival dates for Cerulean Warblers in New Hampshire, 1980-2016. The dark circles above the bar are single May records away from breeding areas. Pale circles below the bar represent the first date birds were reported at a breeding area in a given year.

(SP), Wantastiquet Mountain Natural Area, and along the Blackwater River in Salisbury (Figure 1). Of these, Pawtuckaway is by far the most well-known, so I'll start there.

Pawtuckaway SP is located in the towns of Nottingham and Deerfield and the area used by Ceruleans is the high elevation portion in the northwest. The most reliable spot has been the area along Tower Road near the Middle Mountain trailhead and up the trail a variable distance. Extensive searching in 2001 also found warblers near North Mountain and Round Pond, but they have never been regular at either site. The first Cerulean found at Pawtuckaway was in May 1986, but none were seen again until 1992. At that point the species became regular and was annual from 1994 to 2010. On May 18, 1996, a female was observed building a nest and Cerulean Warbler was officially added to the list of species officially known to breed in the state. At least three young were produced from this nest. The only other breeding confirmation came in 2004, when a pair was seen feeding two fledglings near the start of the Middle Mountain trail.

At the far southwestern corner of the state lies the second regular Cerulean site in New Hampshire, the Wantastiquet Mountain Natural Area in Chesterfield and Hinsdale. Like Pawtuckaway, the habitat here is a dry oak-pine forest on a slope, but unlike Pawtuckaway, it is visited far less often by birders. Ceruleans have been at Wantastiquet just as long, however, although not as regularly, with records from 1987, 1991, 1992, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2016. Most years only a single male has been reported, although there were two in June of 2010. Unfortunately, because Wantastiquet is not birded as regularly, we don't have a very good idea whether Ceruleans are there each year or not, or how long they stay into the summer.

The final "reliable" location is even less visited and the only reason we know about Ceruleans there is because

biologists were conducting floodplain forest bird surveys in the Merrimack River watershed in the late 1990s. At one of the study sites, along the Blackwater River in Salisbury, they found a singing male through June and into early July in both 1998 and 1999. The bird was clearly on territory, but no further evidence of breeding was obtained and the area has not been visited since. There is one other record in the same general area from May 1988 and a June record from nearby Webster (Figure 1) is also intriguing.

As shown in Figure 2, arrival dates for Cerulean Warblers at breeding areas are almost a week earlier than those for other spring records. This is not atypical for many migrants and birds away from breeding areas later in the season, especially at the extreme edge of the range, may be overshoots from farther south or prospecting for new breeding territories. Presumably, this is how new sites like those in New Hampshire get started, but the same stochastic events can also operate in reverse. After 17 years of regular sightings at Pawtuckaway, Cerulean Warblers all but disappeared from the park after 2010. There was a single report from North Mountain in May of 2012 and another from the traditional Middle Mountain site in June 2015. Given that the latter area still receives considerable birder visitation, this lack of data strongly suggests that Ceruleans no longer breed at this historic location. There has been speculation that a partial timber harvest near the Middle Mountain trail in the winter of 2008 may have influenced the warbler, although there is no direct evidence for this. As noted earlier, Ceruleans appear to prefer areas with canopy gaps and forest management is a common tool to improve habitat conditions in the core of the species' range. Given that the New Hampshire population has always been small, it is equally possible that the birds at Pawtuckaway simply "blinked out," meaning that random events led to fewer birds and their eventual abandonment of the site.

Because of the species' decline in New Hampshire, and across the range as a whole, Cerulean Warbler was listed as "threatened" in New Hampshire in 2017. In order to get a better handle on its statewide status, NH Audubon initiated surveys of historic sites in the summer of 2017. I visited the historically occupied area of both Pawtuckaway and Wantastiquet twice between late May and the end of June and used a combination of playback and careful listening to search for Ceruleans. None were detected and two visits to potential habitat in nearby towns also came up empty. Near the end of June, a singing male was reported from the campground at Pawtuckaway, far from the species' traditional haunts. A follow-up search at the end of the month failed to turn up any evidence, but we'll be checking in 2018. We also still need to revisit the Blackwater River.

Are there still Cerulean Warblers in New Hampshire? We honestly don't know, but efforts to relocate them will intensify in 2018-19. Some of these surveys will be conducted by staff, but more eyes (or ears) are always better and volunteers are encouraged to lend a hand. Be forewarned, as indicated at the start of this article, the song of the Cerulean Warbler can sound a lot like other species, so it will be imperative to get **visual confirmation** of any records, even from Pawtuckaway at this point. If interested in helping out, contact me at phunt@nhaudubon.org.

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Cerulean Warbler by Scott Heron.

Backyard Birder

An Unusually Tall Eastern Phoebe Nest

by Rebecca Suomala



Delores Schnarr took this photo of an Eastern Phoebe nest at her home in Acworth, NH on 6-14-17. The nest is remarkably high but looks normal in all other regards. In researching this odd nest, I found an article by James Hill* describing a similar nest. Phoebes are known to build new nests on top of an old one to cover a Brown-headed Cowbird egg, but the author was able to rule that out by x-raying the nest. The most likely cause is that phoebes prefer to have their "nest rim close to the overhanging ceiling." In the photo above, the ceiling is quite a ways above the support that the nest is built upon. The phoebes appear to have added to the nest until it was not only was close to the ceiling, but also at the same angle as the ceiling. Hill went on to speculate why this behavior may have developed:

"The Eastern Phoebe historically nested along stream banks with rocky outcroppings (among other places) and continues to do so... At such relatively exposed sites, any mud nest not placed close beneath some protective overhang would be vulnerable to destruction by rain."

Special thanks to Delores for sharing this unusual nest photo.

* Hill, J. 1987. An exceptionally tall Eastern Phoebe nest. *Wilson Bulletin* 99(3), pp. 501-502

<https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/wilson/v099n03/p0501-p0502.pdf>

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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
RA	Recreation Area
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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