

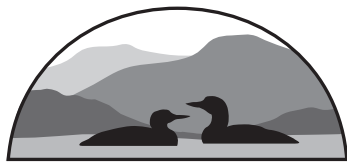
New Hampshire

BIRD RECORDS



SUMMER 2023

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NEW HAMPSHIRE BIRD RECORDS

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IN MEMORY OF

Bob Crowley

The Summer 2023 issue is sponsored in memory of Bob Crowley by his many birding friends, remembering his good humor, his passion for birding, and his friendly smile. He will be greatly missed. Photo courtesy of Tony Vazzano.

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coffee can and succumbed) had finally flown from the garage and were being fed by the parents in the nearby shrubbery. I removed what I thought of as a “poor excuse for a nest” from the plastic bags, thinking that would be the end of it, but a few weeks later, I began seeing an adult wren in the garage again! I reached down into the plastic bags and sure enough, there was another nest that already had a couple of cold eggs in it. A few days later, there were at least four warm eggs, indicating that the adult female had already begun to incubate them. Here we go again!!! The eggs hatched, the parents continued to enter with food through the crack under the garage door, the young left the nest still unable to fly, but at least this time they all exited the garage without incident after I raised the door and left it open the following day. I was very glad the parents stopped after two broods, unlike our bluebirds that have been producing three broods for each of the past few years, but at least having enough sense to utilize the outdoor nesting boxes. We are very glad to have our garage back!

The Merlin App: Pitfalls of Summer

by Jason Pietrzak

Bernd Heinrich described the sensation of finding a bird with telemetry equipment for the first time in *Mind of the Raven*, likening it to a superpower. I felt the same thing the first time I found a condor with a telemetry antenna, and I can raise the same feeling when I really think about Cornell’s Merlin app. Merlin uses your phone’s microphone to analyze bird sounds and suggests identification with remarkable accuracy. Keyword “**suggests**.” In capable hands, Merlin is a modern miracle, but beware it can lead you astray! I’ve never been a natural ear-birder. Every year, just before spring, I gather up all my resources and re-train using all the tricks and I still struggle and sometimes forget and embarrass myself. This is where I seek suggestions from Merlin.

Walking through the wood in early spring in New Hampshire can be a little overwhelming on the ears. A dozen or more songs coming from every direction, many high up in the leaves. The ears and mind tire after filtering copious vireos and warblers. Lifting my phone before me, Merlin begins listing birds: Chipping Sparrow, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Pine Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo... I’m connecting the dots between the listed birds and the songs I’m hearing. Sometimes my ears are picking up a Red-eyed Vireo right above me and another one just a little ways farther down the trail and a third one in the other direction, but I’m not sure I actually hear that Philly Vireo, and I certainly don’t see one. I guess it’s best to trust

Merlin and just put it on my list, right? Not.

Here’s where birders must engage their other resources, because Merlin should be just one of your birding tools. How well do you know your vocalizations? Is it the right time of year to find this bird here? Is the habitat right? Should you get a visual confirmation? Based on some preliminary research, it appears that Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos are not distinguishable by vocalization alone in New Hampshire. As Red-eyeds are ubiquitous here, they are by far more likely and NHeBird reviewers won’t typically accept a Philadelphia report without visual confirmation. Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireo songs are similar enough that I’ve literally been looking at a singing Red-eyed and watched Merlin report it as both species simultaneously.



Philadelphia Vireos sound so similar to Red-eyed Vireos that a visual confirmation is needed to confirm the identification. Photo by Zeke Cornell, 6-11-2023, Dixville, NH.

Merlin takes location into consideration when suggesting IDs, so be careful if you’ve recently traveled. I’ve experienced glitches with this feature and Merlin reported a Mountain Elaenia in Concord and a Eurasian Eagle-Owl on the coast. I’ve also had Merlin mistake background sounds like cars or kids as birds. Again, consider Merlin’s suggestions, but use your other tools to confirm (preferably visually) before filling out your eBird list. Here are some Merlin mistakes I picked up during the summer of 2023 that Merlin users should watch out for.

The above discussed **Red-eyed Vireo/Philadelphia Vireo** issue came up for me a few times a month. On a couple of occasions **Blue-headed Vireo** was added to the mix. Range is a good clue in scrutinizing this Merlin ID. Philadelphia Vireos migrate all across the state and nest in the far north, so finding one anywhere is a possibility, but visual confirmation is essential.

I occasionally experienced confusion between **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and **Yellow Warbler**, typically at the start of a Merlin recording, as if the app had to warm up a little

before making the correct ID. Chestnut-sided Warblers have an alternate song that sounds a little like a Yellow Warbler, and Yellow Warblers have an alternate song that sounds a little like a Chestnut-sided. Habitat is a good clue with these species, although there is overlap. Patience in listening to more vocalizations may clear things up.

Confusion between **Cerulean Warbler** and **Black-throated Blue Warbler** vocalizations has been discussed in previous issues of this publication, and I have seen Merlin make this error in southern areas of the state. Cerulean Warblers are rare and any suspected birds need to be visually confirmed.

Orchard Oriole and **Baltimore Oriole** each have an exciting repertoire of whistles and rattles with some overlap. Knowledge of status and distribution is the place to start. Baltimore is widespread whereas Orchard is limited to a handful of reliable spots. When in doubt, get visual confirmation.

Lastly, a frequent issue from traveling birders in the summer was confusion between **Swamp Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Pine Warbler, and Worm-eating Warbler**. Again, birders can use their knowledge of range and habitat to judge Merlin's accuracy, then try for a visual confirmation.

These are just the most common errors I encountered. Since Merlin is constantly being updated and (hopefully) improved, some of them may be addressed. The vast majority of the time, Merlin can be relied on to accurately get you in the ballpark, if not on an exact ID, and that alone makes it an incredible tool for most birders. It's vital to remember that Merlin is only one tool in your birding kit and it takes some skill to use it well. I personally use Merlin all the time, juggling my phone, binoculars, and one-year-old. Next time you see somebody meandering through the woods, phone held straight up to the sky, stop and say hello!

Gannet Iris Color impacted by Bird Flu

by Iain MacLeod

Every year, I lead birding trips for Squam Lakes Natural Science Center to my homeland in Scotland. In 2023, I led two excursions to the Orkney and Shetland Islands. One of the highlights of the trip is a boat expedition to the spectacular seabird cliffs on the Isle of Noss. Thousands of Northern Gannets breed there and gather around the boat on the way back to harbor for a fish treat. Getting so close to the gannets was a photographer's dream.

I noticed that several of the gannets had oddly-colored irises. A normal gannet has a light blue iris, but several of the ones I saw had black irises. I soon found out why.

Researchers at the Bass Rock in southern Scotland (home to the largest Northern Gannet colony in the world) noticed this phenomenon last year. The team took blood samples from 18 apparently healthy adult gannets with both normal and black irises which were tested for bird flu antibodies to determine whether the birds had been previously infected. Eight tested positive, of which seven had black irises.

Why gannets that have survived bird flu should have black irises is a mystery and scientists don't yet know if the iris color impacts the vision in that eye.

I discovered first hand that it doesn't always impact both eyes. I took the photo of a gannet that shows only one impacted iris. Someone on the trip christened it the "David Bowie bird."



Northern Gannet with only one eye impacted by avian flu. Photo by Iain MacLeod during his 2023 trip to Scotland. See this photo in color in the print version on the inside front cover.

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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
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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