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Cover Photos: A rare hybrid flycatcher believed to be a Couch's/Tropical Kingbird x Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, found in Dover, NH. Top photo by Ken Faucher, 11-14-21; bottom right by Steve Mirick, 11-15-21; bottom left by Paul Karwowski, 11-14-21.

Steve Mirick photographed these two juvenile Black-backed Woodpeckers chasing each other at Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge on 8-15-21.
The Merlin App Sound ID
by Iain MacLeod

Identification of bird songs and calls is a skill that requires patience and many years of careful study. For beginning or casual birders, it’s a skill they may never fully master. I have long wondered when the technology would be perfected that would allow a digital identification of songs.

In the past year, a major technological advance came along in the form of the Merlin app’s song identification feature. The Merlin app (from Cornell Lab of Ornithology) has already made its mark as a go-to phone app for visual identification (including its Photo ID feature). The new Sound ID feature makes it a soup-to-nuts app for all birders.

I was eager to try out the Sound ID. It is very simple to use. Within the normal app interface there is now a Sound ID icon. Click on it and it immediately uses the microphone built into your phone to pick up the sounds around you. I was surprised how sensitive the app and mic were, managing to pick up sounds that were really very quiet. Obviously, you are going to get better results where there is little extraneous background noise. I haven’t tried the app in a noisy city environment, but I would imagine that its effectiveness would be impaired. Here in the nice quiet Lakes Region, I found it very effective.

As each bird calls, the app offers real-time suggestions for what the bird is (Figure 2). “Suggestions” is an important word here. That is how the app describes the process. A list of the species is created and each recording is automatically saved to your phone. It also creates a simple sonogram of the sounds.

**Figure 1. The Merlin App home screen.**

**Figure 2. Merlin app Sound ID suggesting four species heard in my yard on a February morning.**

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**Tips for using the Merlin App**

- The best success will be when there’s an isolated song with little background noise.
- The App is fallible. Examples include a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker identified as a Gray Catbird and children’s sounds as gulls. Do not assume that Merlin is always correct.
- Use Merlin as a prompt for what to look for (or what you are missing if you are hard of hearing) then try to get a visual confirmation of the bird. This will also help you learn the song and store it in your memory.
- When species first arrive in spring, check eBird to see if they are here yet. Go to Explore – Species Maps and change the date to the current year. The map will show where they have been reported so far.
- Beware similar species such as Chipping Sparrow, Pine Warbler, and Dark-eyed Junco, or Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos.
- Remember that bird songs can vary, and not all birds make the classic noises. Don’t forget mimics like Northern Mockingbirds, European Starlings, and Blue Jays that have exceptionally good imitations.
- In your eBird checklist indicate which sightings were identified by Merlin and upload the recording.
- **If Merlin was the only basis for identification, please don’t enter it in eBird** – wait until you are able to hear and identify it yourself or visually confirm the species.
- There’s no substitute for a visual confirmation – even the experts get fooled!

See the eBird article on Merlin Sound ID best practices: https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001214056-merlin-sound-id-best-practices
The Black Tern (Chlidonias niger) is the rarest breeding tern in Maine and nests in just a handful of freshwater marshes in the state. Since 1989, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) has been monitoring the number of nesting pairs. The population peaked in 2006 with 115 nesting pairs, but has since declined to an all-time low of just 30 pairs at three sites in Maine in 2021. This decline is not just occurring in Maine, which is somewhat on the periphery of the Black Tern’s North American range. The Black Tern has experienced a long-term decline throughout its range, even in the core of its range in the Prairie Pothole Region of the US and Canada. It is unclear what may be causing the decline. While habitat loss and degradation have occurred, the available breeding habitat does not appear to be a primary limiting factor. In areas where survival and productivity have been studied, estimated vital rates fall far below those required to maintain a stable population.

To better understand the return rates of Maine’s Black Terns to their breeding wetlands, MDIFW began color banding adults this summer. Each adult has a unique color band combination on one of its legs and a silver metal USGS band on the other leg. In addition, to contribute to a larger migratory connectivity project in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan, MDIFW also equipped five adults with geolocators which were attached to a plastic leg band. The geolocators have a light sensor and use changes in ambient light levels to estimate the times of sunrise and sunset, from which latitude and longitude can be calculated.

The derived locations will shed light on where the birds go during migration, identify areas of mixing of different sub-populations, highlight important stopover and overwintering locations, and potentially discover priority conservation issues at these sites.

Volunteers and Research

Black Tern with Color Bands
by Danielle Dauria

The Black Tern with metal leg band on its right leg and two color bands (orange over yellow) on its left leg. Photo courtesy of MDIFW.

Black Tern with a geolocator attached to the yellow plastic band. Photo by Don Lyons, 6-17-21.
New Hampshire Bird Records

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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

New Hampshire Bird Records is published quarterly by NH 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. The published sightings typically represent the highlights of the season. Not all species reported will appear in the issue. All records are subject to review by the NH Rare Birds Committee and publication here does not imply future acceptance by the RBC.

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