New Hampshire Bird Records
Volume 30, Number 4
Winter 2011-12

Managing Editor: Rebecca Suomala
603-224-9909 X309, bsuomala@nhaudubon.org

Text Editor: Dan Hubbard

Season Editors: Eric Masterson/Iain MacLeod, Spring; Tony Vazzano,
Summer; Lauren Kras/Ben Griffith, Fall; Pamela Hunt,
Winter

Layout: Kathy McBride

Assistants: Jeannine Ayer, David Deifik, Dave Howe, Margot Johnson,
Elizabeth Levy, Susan MacLeod, Marie Nickerson,
Carol Plato, William Taffe, Tony Vazzano

Field Notes: Robert A. Quinn

Photo Quiz: David Donsker

Photo Editor: Ed Larrabee

Web Master: Kathy Barnes

Where to Bird: Phil Brown

Editorial Team: Phil Brown, Hank Chary, David Deifik, David Donsker,
Ben Griffith, Dan Hubbard, Pam Hunt, Lauren Kras,
Iain MacLeod, Eric Masterson, Robert A. Quinn,
Rebecca Suomala, William Taffe, Tony Vazzano,
Jon Woolf

Cover Photo: Cape May Warbler by Karen Batchelder, 1/22/12, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, 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 typi-
cally represent the highlights of the season. All records are subject to review by the NH Rare Birds Committee and publi-
cation 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.

New Hampshire Bird Records © NHA September, 2012
www.nhbirdrecords.org

Published by New Hampshire Audubon’s Conservation Department

 Printed on Recycled Paper
IN MEMORY OF
Kay Dyment

This issue of New Hampshire Bird Records with its color cover is sponsored by Pat Niswander on behalf of the Concord Bird and Wildflower Club in memory of long time member, Kay Dyment. Kay was a long time birder who led many field trips for the Club, and was a long-time volunteer for NH Audubon, both in the office and in the field.

In This Issue

From the Editor ................................................................. 2
Thank You to Donors .......................................................... 2
Photo Quiz ................................................................. 4
Winter Season: December 1, 2011 through February 28, 2012 ..................... 5
 by Pam Hunt
Christmas Bird Count Summary 2011-2012 .................................................. 29
 by David Deifik
112th Christmas Bird Count Table & Map .................................................. 34
2011 Isles of Shoals Christmas Bird Count .................................................. 41
 by Ben Griffith
Backyard Birder – Do Birds Have Teeth? .................................................. 43
 by Brenda Sens
A “Superbowl” Strategy for Coastal Birding .................................................. 44
 by Stephen R. Mirick
Field Notes ................................................................. 48
 compiled by R.A. Quinn
Photo Gallery – A Snowy Owl Winter .................................................. 51
 by Iain MacLeod
Volunteers and Research – A Surprising Late-Winter Eagle Watch .................. 55
 by Rebecca Suomala
Satellite Tracking Answers Questions about NH Raptors .................................. 56
 by Iain MacLeod and Chris Martin
Birding by (smart) Phone .................................................. 62
 by Jon Woolf
Answer to the Photo Quiz .................................................. 64
 by David B. Donsker
Corrections ................................................................. 68
Birding by (smart) Phone

A Review of Electronic Bird Guides for the iPhone/iPad

by Jon Woolf

Picture it, a bird guide, complete and unabridged, that fits into any pocket and includes bird sounds as well as illustrations. With a smartphone, you don’t have to picture it. You can have it. But which one to get?

I set out to find out. A bird guide was the second or third app I bought for my iPod Touch; the Sibley guide, to be exact. It was good, but not perfect, so eventually I decided to try the e-versions of three more top-notch printed guides: Peterson, National Geographic, and National Audubon’s. Here’s what I found.

First off, all four of these are intended as electronic counterparts to the printed guides. They include everything the printed guides do – species illustrations, range maps, and descriptive text. All add bird sounds, songs, calls, and behavioral sounds like bill-clacking, etc. All incorporate sophisticated search functions that allow you to enter features such as size, shape, color, and habitat, and then show you a list of possible matching birds. All are available on both the iPhone/iPad platform and the Android platform. At the Apple App Store, the Sibley guide is the most expensive at $20 (at the time this article was written), while the other three are $15 each. Like many apps, all four may go on sale for much less.

(PLEASE NOTE: What follows are my opinions of the four guides I chose to review, reflecting my experiences with these guides, the level of birder that I am, and the type of birding that I do. Your experience may be very different.)

The Sibley eGuide to the Birds of North America

Pro: Everything that makes the big Sibley guide great is also in the e-version, including the illustrations of multiple plumages for every species. The e-guide even adds detail in the descriptive text for most species at very little cost, since text takes little memory to store. The sounds include a variety of songs and calls from different parts of the bird’s range, so you can get an idea of the dialects. The name-search function is quick and efficient, allowing for finding any species from just a few letters of its name. You can filter the species list by location. For example, if you specify New Hampshire, then species that aren’t usually found in New Hampshire don’t show in the species list. You can also select two birds and display them side-by-side for comparison purposes.

Con: There’s only one list, a life list, and using it is somewhat clumsy. You have to go to the bird’s entry, then tap a ‘checkbox’ icon to add it to your life list. There is no separate feature for simply checking off birds from a long list of species, like a printed checklist. The Sibley suffers greatly from the small screen size of the iPhone/iPod Touch. The bird illustrations are presented as a vertical scrolling image, and it can be tough to compare images of the same bird in different plumages. The illustrations can’t be enlarged on the screen either. The comparison feature, as nice as it is, is limited to only two species. There are times when having three or four birds onscreen at once is nice, for example, when you’re trying to identify a peep sandpiper. The loca-
tion filter is rigid and screens out anything that isn’t supposed to be in your area. This can make it harder to identify vagrants such as the Curlew Sandpiper spotted in fall 2011 at Plaice Cove.

Verdict: Very good if you know what species you want to look at. Not so good for scanning to identify an unfamiliar bird, because it’s so difficult to quickly look at several species. All in all, the Sibley guide seems aimed at the experienced birder. Novices should probably look elsewhere for their first e-guide.

Peterson Birds of North America

Pro: Roger Tory Peterson has left us, but his influence remains. For the beginning birder, there isn’t any better field guide in print or electronic form. The species paintings and descriptions are the same familiar, high-quality material as the printed Field Guide to the Birds, line for line, almost smudge for smudge. These illustrations can be enlarged on the screen, giving you much closer looks should you need that. The listing function allows multiple lists, year lists, state lists, day lists, etc. There’s a useful Help function. There’s also a long list of ‘extra’ articles and other materials, including a very nice guide to bird appearance and all the terms used to describe it. Searching can be done by species name or by group. The use of pages from the field guide allows you to see several related species at once, making it easier to examine similar birds in a hurry.

Con: The controls are not immediately intuitive; you need to read the Help function to figure them all out. The illustrations really suffer from the small screen of a smartphone, although they’d be right at home on a tablet such as an iPad. You can’t go directly to the page with the species that you’re interested in. You can either see a single species at a time using direct search, or you can jump to the beginning of a section, and then scroll through pages until you find what you want.

Verdict: While the Sibley guide is probably a better guide for experienced birders, this Peterson guide is a better “birding assistant,” field guide, reference library, and field checklist all in one.

National Geographic’s Handheld Birds

Pro: The printed National Geographic guide has some good illustrations. The e-guide reproduces those illustrations very well. Unfortunately, once you get beyond that, this guide has little else to recommend it.

Con: No user guide or on-line help. No listing feature that I could find. Some of the controls are counter-intuitive. For example, when you go to a species page, most of the screen is an illustration of a typical adult bird of that species. The obvious thing to do is tap that to see other illustrations. That’s not how it works, however. You have to scroll down to a separate ‘Images’ link and tap there in order to see any other illustrations of the bird.

Verdict: The weakest of the four in my opinion. Like the Sibley eGuide, the National Geographic eGuide is useful for reviewing birds you know, but not very good for identifying unfamiliar birds, and useless for keeping lists.

Audubon Birds – A Field Guide to North American Birds

Pro: As with the printed National Audubon guides, the illustrations are photographs, not paintings, which can give a better impression of the live bird. There’s an extensive set of online literature, including a user guide, how-to articles on birding,
and more. A powerful listing feature gives you the ability to enter multiple lists and share them with others.

Con: To save space the photos are small, with little room for enlargement to study details. Response time is slow, probably because of the use of photos instead of paintings. The listing feature, while fairly extensive, requires you to register with the National Audubon Society (not New Hampshire Audubon which is an independent state Audubon Society) before you can use it. It also seems to require a live Internet connection, so it won’t always be available.

Verdict: Not the worst, but far from the best. A good concept hampered by inefficient design.

General Summary

Which is best? Which is worst? As usual with field guides, that’s a matter of personal preference. These reviews are only my own opinion; yours may be very different. Nor are these the only e-guides that are available for smartphones or tablet computers. With those caveats, my conclusion is that the Sibley e-guide and the Peterson e-guide are both worth the money. Both have stayed on my iPod Touch. Just as with the printed guides, I use the Peterson for building lists and for looking at several birds at a time, while I use the Sibley for looking at all the different plumages that a bird might appear in.

Still, while they’re useful tools, I don’t think any of these e-guides will replace book and notepad anytime soon. It’s still much faster to scan several pages worth of birds with a printed guide, and (at least for me) it’s much faster to note species and numbers seen with a pen and pad, rather than trying to tap it out on the iPod’s tiny screen and keyboard.

Jon Woolf is a database programmer and web-designer who spends much of his off-work time pursuing several hobbies, including photography and birding.

Answer to the Photo Quiz

by David B. Donsker

The subject of this issue’s Photo Quiz is clearly swimming on the surface of the water in a duck-like manner. Its body is strongly speckled dark gray and white with the exception of a contrasting brilliant white breast, sides of neck, and face. The gray crown and back of neck contrast with the white foreneck and face. The white of the face extends above the eye which leaves the dark eye completely surrounded by gleaming white. The bill is pale and is long and tapered, resembling a dagger blade. It is held slightly upturned from horizontal. The body of this bird is proportionally long with a tapered, seemingly tail-less rear end. Careful examination, peering through the water, shows that the legs of this bird are set quite far back on the body.

Swimming behavior is shared by a diverse range of unrelated waterbirds in our state including grebes, loons, shearwaters, cormorants, gannets, waterfowl (ducks, swans and geese), gulls, jaegers, alcids and phalaropes. Most of these forms can be
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. 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 ________

Payment is by:

☐ check enclosed— payable to NH Audubon   ☐ MC   ☐ VISA

Card # _____________________________ Exp. Date _______________

Return to:

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

Subscribe online at www.nhbirdrecords.org