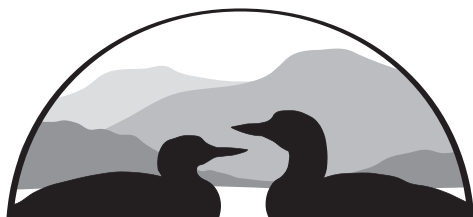


New Hampshire Bird Records



Winter 2009-10

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<i>Managing Editor:</i>	Rebecca Suomala 603-224-9909 X309, bsuomala@nhaudubon.org
<i>Text Editor:</i>	Dan Hubbard
<i>Season Editors:</i>	Pamela Hunt, Spring; Tony Vazzano, Summer; Stephen Mirick, Fall; David Deifik, Winter
<i>Layout:</i>	Kathy McBride
<i>Assistants:</i>	Jeannine Ayer, Lynn Edwards, Margot Johnson, Susan MacLeod, Marie Nickerson, Carol Plato, William Taffe, Jean Tasker, Tony Vazzano
<i>Photo Quiz:</i>	David Donsker
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Peregrine Falcon by Jon Woolf, 12/1/09, Hampton Beach State Park, Hampton, NH.

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IN MEMORY OF Tudor Richards

This is the fourth and final 2009 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* honoring Tudor Richards. We are so pleased to have been able to recognize Tudor and his many contributions to birding.



Left - Tudor Richards (President of NH Audubon) and Ralph Carpenter (Director of NH Fish & Game Dept.) at the dedication of the Pondicherry Wildlife Sanctuary in 1964.
Right - Tudor on his last visit to Pondicherry, November 2006. Photo by David Govatski.

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by Lauren A. Kras

Lauren's Big Year

Mark Obmascik, author of *The Big Year*, once noted that the big year is "the grandest birding competition of them all, the most grueling, the most expensive, and occasion-



Lauren Kras in the field during her Big Year, by Jessie Knapp, at Exeter WTP, 9/4/09.

ally the most vicious." At its very simplest, a big year is an attempt to see as many species as possible from January 1 to December 31 in a given calendar year within any designated geographical boundary. A big year is not just keeping track of a year list, it is a concerted effort to see every bird possible no matter the energy that it requires. It is exhausting, stressful, and all consuming, but it is also a lot of fun.

Most people who have done a big year on the state or national level start the year with the intentions to do so. I never even considered attempting a big year, however, until March 15, 2009, the day of the Spring Pelagic trip (see the Photo Gallery on page 56). Several birders on the boat were chatting about their year lists and whether or not anyone would break Mike Harvey's 2003 record of 280 species. The birders on the boat speculated that it would be either Steve Mirick or Eric Masterson who would break 280. I was reminded of how a young Kenn Kaufman encountered a similar situation in the 1970s in response to discussion about the possibility of a single year total of 600 species within North America. Instead of deflecting the challenge to the most famous birders in the country at the time, Kaufman thought, "Why don't I do it?"

At the time, Len Medlock and Jason Lambert were in the lead followed closely by Steve Mirick and Eric Masterson. What no one realized was that my species total was right in the middle. At that moment I thought, "Why don't I do it?"

As a relatively new birder who had only lived in New Hampshire five months, I knew others had the advantage of experience. Yet, I also knew that I had the advantage of sheer insanity; I was willing to do anything and go anywhere. I also had a favorable schedule and a flexible job that required my "work" time be spent in marshes all along the New Hampshire coast. I knew that to break the record, I would need to do more than keep a year list and lazily tally birds, so immediately my strategy changed. From that day forward, I attempted to see new birds as soon as they showed up in the state and to spend any free moment in the field searching for migrants, breeding birds, and rarities. I once drove three hours to Chatham, New Hampshire at the drop of a hat (in

fact I started driving before I even knew where Chatham was!) to see eight Tundra Swans in Maine for five minutes and in New Hampshire for fifteen seconds.

By the end of May, this approach landed me a total of 250 species and on August 7, I tied the state record with a Western Sandpiper on Foss Beach. Seventeen days later, I was doing my laundry when I got a call from Steve Mirick informing me that Mike Harvey had just found a Franklin's Gull at the Rochester wastewater treatment plant. I was so frantic that I even left my iced coffee on the top of my car (fortunately it survived the drive). When I arrived, I ran over to Mike who had the bird in his scope. It was meaningful to me that it was Mike who found the bird that allowed me to break his record – it seemed as if he was passing the torch on to me.

Two months later, I saw my 300th bird for the year in the form of a *Selasphorus* hummingbird. My last bird species of the year came in the small and adorable form of four Dovekies on the Winter Pelagic (see page 56), where I also had my closest miss – an Atlantic Puffin which was seen by three people on the boat before it dove out of sight never to be seen again. My final chase of 2009 was on December 31 when Ben Griffith, Jason Lambert, Denny Abbott, Davis Finch, and I went looking for a “Sooty” Fox Sparrow which was visiting a feeder in Barrington. This is the rare Alaskan race of Fox Sparrow which had never been recorded in New Hampshire. In fact, there is only one record for the subspecies prior to this bird in the eastern United States. We got to see it and it stands as one of the rarest birds I saw in 2009. I could not add it to my list as it's not considered a distinct species; however, it was one of my best memories in 2009.

When I got home on December 31, I was utterly worn out, but had tallied 308 species (including 64 life birds) in New Hampshire; thirteen more than the next highest count that I was aware of that year. I woke up on January 1 to a total of zero species for 2010; five species behind Jason Lambert who got out to an early head start. I felt rejuvenated and started jotting down species the moment I walked outside; not because I wanted to catch up or try to end 2010 on top, but because being a birder is who I am.

Some people may criticize “big years” and say that trying to set a record, or listing in general, is more about numbers than the birds themselves; however, for me, 2009 and my big year was about much more than tallying 308 species. It was about birding every single day and enjoying everything I saw. It was about being inspired to learn and improve my skills as a birder to a point that I would be able to earn respect and actually deserve it. It was about learning about bird distribution and observing bird behavior that I had not seen before. It was about finding myself and my place in this world while making memories that are truly unforgettable. Finally, and most importantly to me, it was about getting to know a group of people who I now count as my closest friends: Steve and Jane Mirick, Len Medlock, Jason Lambert, Jessie Knapp, Mike Harvey, and of course, Ben Griffith— I couldn't have done it without you all.

Lauren Kras is a Master's candidate in Plant Biology at the University of New Hampshire and is currently a Board Member of New Hampshire Audubon's Seacoast Chapter. She is constantly tripping over her own feet while attempting to find birds and plants.

Abbreviations Used

BBC	Brookline Bird Club	R.	River
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey	Rd.	Road
CA	Conservation Area	Rt.	Route
CC	Country Club	SF	State Forest
CFT	NH Audubon Chapter Field Trip	SP	State Park
FT	Field Trip	SPNHF	Society for the Protection of NH Forests, Concord
IBA	Important Bird Area	T&M	Thompson & Meserves (Purchase)
L.	Lake	TNC	The Nature Conservancy
LPC	Loon Preservation Committee	WMA	Wildlife Management Area
NA	Natural Area	WMNF	White Mountain National Forest
NHA	New Hampshire Audubon	WS	NHA Wildlife Sanctuary
NHBR	New Hampshire Bird Records	~	approximately
NHRBC	NH Rare Birds Committee	WTP	Wastewater Treatment Plant
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge		
PO	Post Office		

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