

New Hampshire Bird Records





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IN CELEBRATION OF Pamela D. Hunt

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by the many people who have appreciated Pam's contributions to this publication and to birds and birding in New Hampshire during her long tenure as Season Editor.

Pam's Renaissance Fair alter ego, still keeping track of the birds she sees at the Fair.



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Cover Photos: Western Tanager (top left), by William Kramer (www.williamkramer.com), 1/31/16, Hollis, NH. American Redstart (top right) by Stephen Mirick, 12/19/15, Greenland, NH. The bottom photo by Terri Fratus shows both Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture (right) on the Lincoln Street school chimney, 2/2/16, Exeter, NH (see the Superbowl of Birding article for more).

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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Owl Harassment

by Rebecca Suomala and Kathryn Frieden



The star attraction! A Snowy Owl perched on the roof of the “pink house” near Rye Harbor State Park attracted a crowd on 12/14/15, arousing the curiosity of the homeowners, both young and old. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.

Over the past few years, there has been increasing concern over negative attention paid to owls, both those nesting in New Hampshire and special winter visitors such as the Snowy Owl. This is such a charismatic and photogenic bird that it attracts a great deal of attention. Unfortunately, this attention can have negative consequences, as many of us have seen. This is often due to photographers crossing the boundaries of ethical birdwatching.

During the winter of 2015-16, we were once again privileged to have a Snowy Owl wintering in Rye as we have for several years. Multiple incidents of inappropriate and potentially harmful behavior were observed, both toward nearby homeowners and the owl itself. Many people approach the bird too closely, with frequent reports of photographers approaching the bird until it flies. But some of the more egregious examples witnessed this past winter included people throwing snowballs at the bird in order to get a flight photograph, shining 1-million candle-power flood lights on the bird at night, and trespassing on private property despite objections expressed by the homeowner from her doorstep. There are also reports of someone buzzing the bird repeatedly with a drone as it tried to roost on the rocks at low tide and dog owners allowing their dogs to flush and then chase the bird.

One day in December, an observer counted 27 cars stopped to view the Rye Harbor Snowy at 7:30 am (only three were from New Hampshire, one from Maine, and the rest from Massachusetts). That same week, NH Audubon received a call from a Rye homeowner who was very upset about people trespassing on private property to view and photograph the Snowy next to Rye Harbor State Park. She considered NH Audubon to be at fault for “publicizing” the owl’s appearance (by including it in the Rare Bird Alert).

How many of us have been scanning the ocean for birds only to be asked if we are looking at the “Snow White Owl?”

It’s not only Snowy Owls that have been affected. In the spring of 2016, a Barred Owl nest was discovered at Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge. According to one birder, the nest was observed without incident for several weeks until discovered by a photographer late one afternoon. By 6:30 the next morning, photographers were lining up with their big lenses and clearing the view corridor. Photographers chased the owlets through the woods resulting in an attack by an adult owl that left one photographer with a lacerated scalp, requiring a trip to the hospital! A large amount of vegetation was also removed from the nest area, including small trees and brush, in order to afford unobstructed views of the nest. This could have endangered the owlets by removing cover and exposing them to predation. Consequently, the trail was closed, preventing respectful owl-viewing by anyone else.

Another example is the disturbance of an Eastern Screech-Owl in Nashua after its location was posted on the NHBirds e-mail list. Despite being clearly visible from at least 50 feet away when it was perched in its hole, people went right up to the tree, evidenced by trampled snow. Eventually, it left its roosting area.

Some of this bad behavior is based on ignorance about owls and birds in general. From the incidents reported, it appears that photographers are the worst offenders. There is a wide spectrum of owl photographers, ranging from drive-by people who see the commotion and, armed with iPhones, walk right up to the bird to get the photo; to people who spend hours waiting for the ideal photo; to birder photographers who stop, take a few shots from a safe distance and move on. We learned that owl photos and owl merchandise are much more lucrative than any other type of bird, so professional photographers may have a financial incentive. For perhaps the majority, who don’t know they could be causing harm, conscientious birder-photographers can help educate these folks about owls. We also want to set a good example and make sure members of the birding community are not a part of the problem. Be aware of good birding etiquette (see the American Birding Association’s Birding Code of Ethics, summarized on the NH Audubon web site at: <http://www.nhaudubon.org/get-outside/birding/birding-basics/>). Speak out (courteously) when someone is misbehaving! Sometimes peer pressure can be a good thing. It may not seem successful or be received well, and you may be ignored (or even laughed at), but it may give the person pause the next time.

The article which follows is about Snowy Owl Viewing and is also available on the NH Audubon website (<http://www.nhaudubon.org/snowy-owl-viewing-observe-without-disturbing/>). This can serve as a guideline for other species

as well and as an educational aid that is worth sharing as widely as possible, especially if you are connected to a photography group. Not all photographers are disrespectful and some love the owls as much or more than any birder. At least one photographer has shared the above article with her photography group.

Photographers regularly search for owls and word spreads quickly when one is located. We also know that owl locations are being mined from our online birding information sites such as the NHBirds e-mail list and eBird. This raises the question of how much information to share about owl viewing locations. Other places, such as the Ontario bird list, no longer post specifics about owl roosting or nesting sites, but that makes it challenging for respectful birders to experience the wonderful sighting of an unusual owl. Owl viewing can provide a special experience that leads to caring and conservation – something that can benefit birds in the long term. Detailed entries in eBird help identify important owl habitat. Should we include detailed location information in our posts to NH Birds and our eBird entries? Does the potential benefit outweigh the impacts to one particular bird? There may not be one best answer for every situation. Various options include posting a sighting to NH Birds with specific details available by request. eBird entries can be done at a Town Level initially, then made more specific when the bird is gone. Nesting owls may be particularly sensitive to disturbance and warrant extra caution in reporting their location.

We can help by making sure the New Hampshire birding community's behavior is above reproach and by providing information about owl harassment. Protecting and being respectful of the birds we love to watch is the ultimate goal.

Thanks to Steve Mirick, Steve Bennett and Zeke Cornell for their assistance with this article.

Snowy Owl Viewing – Observe without Disturbing

From the NH Audubon web site: <http://www.nh Audubon.org/snowy-owl-viewing-observe-without-disturbing/>

Snowy Owls are magnificent birds and attract considerable attention when they visit New Hampshire in the winter. Enthusiastic observers and photographers need to remember that these birds are already stressed by hunger and cold temperatures, so it is important to resist the temptation to get too close for a clearer look or better picture.

Snowy Owls, often inexperienced young birds that hatched the previous summer, wander south during the



Snowy Owl by Len Medlock.

winter months when food is scarce in their Arctic habitat. The southward journey and cold temperatures require a lot of energy, as does finding prey in unfamiliar territory. Human disturbance can add significantly to their energy demands. The effects of disturbance can be obvious – causing a bird to “flush” or leave its perch – or invisible – making a bird too nervous to leave the safety of a high perch to pursue prey, or increasing metabolism and stress hormones. While a single incident may not be life threatening, the cumulative effects of repeated disturbances, which are likely to occur when an owl perches in highly visible, public locations, reduce the likelihood that they will survive to return north to breed.

Observers and photographers should practice good ethics by keeping a respectful distance from any bird. In general, if the bird reacts to your presence, you are too close. When the bird starts staring at you, you're close enough and it's time to back up. For birds on the ground this is about 100 feet. Flushing the bird is direct interference with its roosting and foraging behavior and deprives others of the opportunity to observe the owl.

An automobile makes an excellent blind, so watch from your car if possible. If this isn't practical, approach the owl with the wind in your face. Owls take off into the wind and, if the bird chooses to fly while you are approaching, it will not want to fly toward you. Always give the bird room and back up as soon as it responds to your presence.

Don't get carried away by excitement – always respect private property and area-closed signs. Snowy Owls at the coast often roost in fragile dune habitat, which is closed to foot traffic.

It is possible to love owls to death. Flushed birds have collided with stationary objects and once airborne they attract the attention of crows, gulls and hawks, which will pursue and harass them, reducing opportunities to hunt. Be responsible and give owls the privacy they need.

Seeing a Snowy Owl is a rare privilege. Set a good example for others by following and sharing these guidelines and have a wonderful Snowy experience!

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Donations to this fund provide long-term support for all facets of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, from the publication to the collection, organization, quality control, dissemination, preservation, and storage of New Hampshire bird sighting information.

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For more information, contact the Managing Editor (see
inside front cover).

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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
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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