

New Hampshire Bird Records





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IN MEMORY OF

Chandler S. Robbins

The 2018 issues of *New Hampshire Bird Records* are sponsored by George C. Robbins in memory and honor of his father, Chan Robbins. Each issue has an article by George about his father, highlighting his father's phenomenal accomplishments in the field of ornithology and connections to New Hampshire.



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Cover Photos: The Golden-winged Warbler (top) provides a link to Chan Robbins for whom this issue is sponsored (see the article on Chan). Photo by Jason Lambert, 5-10-18, at the Milford-Hollis line, NH. Hooded Warbler (left) by Len Medlock, 5-7-18, Exeter, NH. Kentucky Warbler (right) by Scott Turnbull, 5-6-18, Great Bay Discovery Center, Greenland, NH.

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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Spring 2018

by Rebecca Suomala

Thank You George!

We are very grateful to George Robbins for sponsoring all four 2018 issues in memory of his father, Chandler S. Robbins. Although he did not live in New Hampshire, Chan spent time in the state and helped with the Breeding Bird Atlas and other endeavors. His contributions to our knowledge of birds and their conservation are legendary and it will be a pleasure to read about them in George's articles. Thank you for this wonderful tribute!

Welcome Gail Coffey!

We are excited to welcome Gail Coffey as the new compiler for the Field Trip Reports. In this feature, we like to highlight the interesting sightings and events on field trips that are not always captured by the list of birds seen. If you are interested in writing up a trip that you were on, please contact her at gcoffeywriter@gmail.com. Gail is also helping with some

eBird review and has already made a dent in some of the older *New Hampshire Bird Records* data that we've uploaded to eBird. If you would like to help with historical eBird review, please contact me.

Welcome New Subscribers...

...and **Thank You** to those who have renewed their subscription. A reminder that the password to access the back issues will be enclosed with this issue (if your subscription is up to date). The archives are under "The Journal" tab on the web site.

Where's the Photo Quiz?

Thanks to George Robbins' sponsorship of all four 2018 issues with lots of advanced notice, we are excited to offer a color Photo Quiz for the first time. See the Back Cover!

Chan Robbins: The First 25 Years

by George Robbins

I am sponsoring and dedicating the 2018 *New Hampshire Bird Records* issues to my father, Chandler S. Robbins. The year 2018 is the 100th anniversary of his birth. He died in 2017, a few months shy of his 99th birthday. In each of the four 2018 issues, I will attempt to portray Chandler S. Robbins' life – who he was, his phenomenal accomplishments in the field of ornithology, and his ties to one of his favorite states – New Hampshire. Each issue will look at a 25 year period of his life. From here forward, I will refer to him simply as Chan or Dad.

His first 25 years – 1918-1943

Chan was born in Belmont, MA, just outside of Boston, the eldest of three brothers. His parents, Samuel and Rosa Robbins (professionals in the speech therapy department at Emerson College), instilled a sense of the natural world and its environment in their sons. They would go for walks in the woods and mountains of Massachusetts and New Hampshire and always carried their "field glasses" with them, studying not only the birds, but mammals, reptiles, insects and plants as well. Dad had a distinct and profound fascination with birds at a very young age. So, it is not at all surprising that I found, in Dad's logbook of birds, entries starting when he was 11 years old, a page for each species. On each species' page was listed

the first time he saw that species, as well as subsequent times, mostly the first for the year, and notable numbers and places where the species was observed. In addition, who he was with during that observation and any other notes on the sighting were included. Unfortunately, entries are encoded, with no key, so some of my interpretations can only be conjecture. For example, one person with whom he birded was KCE in the 1930s – more on that later as I refer back to that log book.

At age 14, Dad was instrumental in forming the Washington Bird Club, to be renamed the Belmont Bird Club two years later. He was the secretary for the club for its first six years, until he moved out of the area. Dad also was instrumental in the formation of the Christmas Census (Christmas Bird Count, or CBC, as it is known today) in Belmont and Fresh Pond, MA. He also started the North Carter Mt. and Mt. Washington CBCs (in NH) as well. Although I don't believe any of those counts are still viable today, Belmont is currently included in the Greater Boston CBC.

While still in high school, Dad wrote a letter to Fred Lincoln at the National Bird Banding Lab in Washington, DC. He (Dad) inquired if a bird banding permit might be issued to his father, Samuel Robbins, so that he (Chan) might be able to band under him, because Dad was only 17 at the time. (One needed to be 21 years of age.) Surprisingly to Dad,

the permit was granted! So at age 17, he started a lifelong career of banding birds. Although he may not have had the expertise at the time, he would later become one of the strong advocates for additional data collected for every bird banded (weight, wing chord length, age, sex, etc.), because, after all, you had it in the hand already.

The now so-called citizen science was not yet in existence, but Dad was one of the early on, true believers in it, as I will expound upon in a future issue.

At age 18, as published in the March 1937 edition of the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Audubon Society*, Dad ended 1936 with 246 species for the state of Massachusetts, finishing in fourth place for the year behind Ludlow Griscom (a very famous ornithologist of the day) who had 291. Dad had entered Harvard University in the fall of 1936, so he couldn't devote as much time to birding and don't forget, neither Dad, nor his parents, had a car in those days.

By this time, 1936-1940, there were many entries in Dad's log book of birds, including many from the state of New Hampshire. But by far the majority of entries were from the state of Massachusetts, where Dad grew up, including probably the most from Belmont, his home town. One particular record which I found noteworthy was a flock of 2,000+ blackbirds, 1,000+ Grackles and 1000+ Rusties (Rusty Blackbirds) that flew over his house on October 31, 1937. Knowing Dad, the Rusties were, I am sure, identified largely by call notes. Another story relayed by family through the years took place on April 28, 1938 when they were all sitting down for dinner. Dad jumped up and ran outside, saying, "Dinner will have to wait! There's a Golden-winged Warbler singing!" Another Massachusetts entry took place on December 7, 1941, at Halibut Point in Rockport, MA. Their list for the day included Snowy Owl, five Black Guillemots and 53 Dovekies. Who was birding with Chan that day? His father and one KCE, whom I happened to have mentioned earlier, also known as Kimball C. Elkins, of Goodhue-Elkins Award fame and a long time New Hampshire birder. Dad knew Kimball from his days at Harvard, where Kimball was the Senior Assistant in the Harvard University Archives. From then and all his years afterward, Dad always

referred to Kimball as his friend, Kim. I have never heard anyone else ever refer to him as Kim, but that's what Dad always called him. (With no TV and no cell phones, I doubt that they had any idea what was happening at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii that day!)



Chan Robbins, High School

His other Massachusetts records included 120 pipits (American Pipits) on burned peat at Rock Meadow in Belmont on November 2, 1939, 77 Eastern Bluebirds migrating over his house in Belmont on October 31, 1937, and a greater number of records (12) for Short-billed Marsh (Sedge) Wren than Long-billed (Marsh) Wren (10), including four Sedge Wrens in Belmont (all singing). One significant Marsh Wren record was of 22 he had in Lynnfield Meadows on June 14, 1940. Another log entry was under Snowy Owl (Belmont, Oct. 20, 1934.). He noted: "It sat all day in field and wall. In late PM it flew off toward Arlington. Shot in wing at E. Boston Airport

1 or 2 days later by a cop for disturbing the gulls. Taken to Franklin Park Zoo where we saw it next summer." There are four records of auk – that would be Razorbill, not Great Auk – Dad wasn't that old! (Great Auk became extinct in the mid-1800s). On November 11, 1936, there were 750 Red-backed Sandpipers (Dunlin) in Newburyport Harbor, and on September 7, 1940, 600 Black-bellied Plovers on Castle Neck in Ipswich. A week later, on September 13, 1940, 30 (American) Golden Plovers were seen on Plum Island. On February 2, 1939 at Monomoy (Cape Cod, MA), there were 1,000 American (Black) Scoters in with 39,000 White-winged Scoters, in addition to 25,000 American (Common) Eiders. Another interesting observation occurred in 1939, from March 8 - May 2. Between March 10 and 15, Dad estimated 1,000 Purple Finches around the feeders at his house in Belmont, but, during that nearly two month period, he banded a total of 1,665 Purple Finches there. Knowing that Dad's estimates were always conservative, there were probably well over that number actually present. The last Massachusetts species that I'll mention here is Golden-winged Warbler, a species that is in drastic decline today.

Dad has 19 different entries in his log book, 14 of which are from Belmont. On June 2, 1940, he had 12 Golden-winged Warblers in Essex County, MA, yet on that same date, he recorded no entries for Blue-winged Warbler. Today, those numbers for Golden-winged and Blue-winged would likely be reversed. Also noteworthy was his sighting of one female Golden-winged Warbler in Central Park, New York City on August 20, 1940.

There are many entries in Dad's log from times he spent in New Hampshire, from his teenage years forward. Some significant records include an American (Common) Goldeneye on June 26, 1939 at Rye Beach, a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers on Lake Winnisquam in Meredith on July 19, 1937, 107 Common Nighthawks flying over Lake Ossipee on August 29, 1937, two male Prairie Warblers in Ossipee on June 27, 1939, and a pair of Bald Eagles in Ossipee in August of 1937 (don't forget, this was long before the widespread use of DDT). He also saw two Philadelphia Vireos and a Semipalmated Plover at Berry Bay in Freedom, NH (one of Dad's favorite places) on August 26, 1937. The following week, at age 19, Dad hiked the Presidential Range in the White Mountains with his brother Roger. Some of the more notable log entries from that trip were a (Northern) Goshawk near the summit of Mt. Clay, a Pigeon Hawk (Merlin) on Mt. Pleasant (Mt. Eisenhower as it is known today), Acadian (Boreal) Chickadees (referred to as common, with a note that a Black-capped Chickadee was seen at even higher elevation on the summit of Mt. Pleasant – maybe chased there by that Merlin?), as well as two life birds: Spruce Grouse and Bicknell's Thrush. Bicknell's Thrush was only a subspecies of Grey-cheeked Thrush at that time, but was specifically noted as Bicknell's by Dad.

Some additional New Hampshire entries include:

- three records of Barred Owl, including 2 at Pinkham Notch and one on the Mt. Washington CBC 12-26-1942;
- a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and three Olive-sided Flycatchers on 8-16-1942 on Mt. Monadnock;
- two Olive-sided Flycatchers, 8-21-1937, Freedom;
- a House Wren singing in Laconia, noted by Dad as being "north for that species" in July of 1937.

On October 25, 1942, Dad was at the Great Gulf area of Mt. Washington where he had his last of the year for that location Song Sparrow, three White-throated Sparrows, and two Savannah Sparrows. He also saw 36 Fox Sparrows there that day and a Spruce Grouse. He saw a pair of (Northern) Rough-winged Swallows and their nest in Barnstead on June 30, 1939, and noted Purple Martins last date for the year of August 27, 1937 in Effingham Falls. That colony of Purple Martins nested there for the next 70 years, but is unfortunately now gone. Lastly, I have no idea when this observation

occurred as it was not in his logbook. It's even possible it was years after his early years in the state, but I know the actual location; Dad had a Sedge Wren in Eaton.

While at Harvard, from 1936-1940, Dad's birding prowess was already well known; however, his advisor, who just happened to be none other than Ludlow Griscom, strongly advised Chan not to go into Ornithology as a vocation, because there were just no jobs to be had in that field. So Dad changed his major to Physics, and graduated from Harvard in the class of 1940, which just happened to be the same Harvard graduating class as one John F. Kennedy. Go ahead, Google it if you don't believe me!

After college, Dad would move to the vicinity of Manchester, Vermont to teach. I believe it was high school Physics, Chemistry and Math. There are, once again, several records from his log during those years. Some of the more noteworthy include:

- a Duck Hawk (Peregrine Falcon) in March and April of 1941;
- Mourning Dove (rare in northern New England at that time), 4-14-1941;
- both Black and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, 5-17-1941;
- (Eastern) Whip-poor-will, 5-6-1941;
- Purple Martin, 5-16-1941;
- Winter Wren (Dad's favorite bird), 4-12-1941;
- Northern Shrike, 10-26-1940 in Arlington, VT;
- 30 Blackpoll Warblers, 6-18-1941 on Mt. Equinox, VT;
- the first county record for Louisiana Waterthrush, 4-22-1941;
- 35 Pine Grosbeaks, 3-9-1941;
- Henslow's Sparrow in three places on 6-18-1941;
- 130 Snow Buntings, 1-18-1941.

Except where noted otherwise, all of those records were from Manchester, VT. He also had a rare spring record of Golden Eagle there on April 15, 1941.

Early in 1942, after the United States entered World War II, Dad declared himself a conscientious objector and worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC as it was known). He worked in the White Mountains of New Hampshire until early in 1943 when Fred Lincoln (remember him, from the National Bird Banding Lab?) said to someone, "Get me Chan Robbins!" So in April of 1943, at age 24, Dad transferred to Maryland with the CCC, to a newly-formed wildlife research station called Patuxent, and thus began a nearly 75 year long affiliation with the world-renowned research facility known today as Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, MD. You will learn more about those years in the next three issues of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, as I continue the story of his outstanding contributions to the field of Ornithology.

New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund

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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Great Egret by Len Medlock, 4-13-18, Hampton, NH.

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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