

# New Hampshire BIRD RECORDS



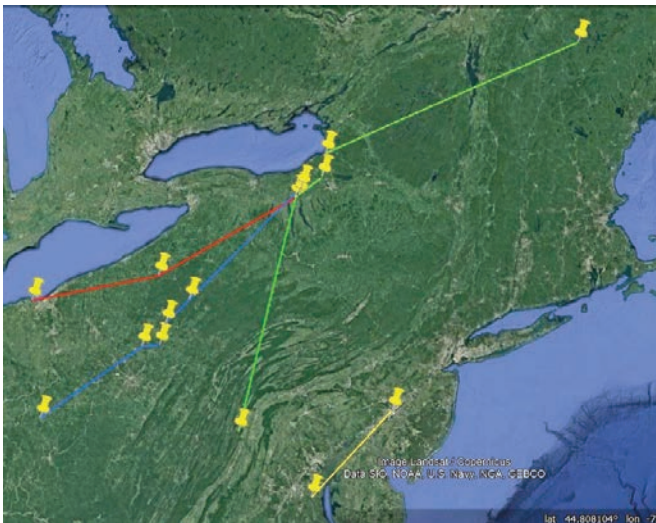
# Article Highlights



A comparison of four male Rose-breasted Grosbeak bibs compiled by Mimi Wiggin from photos of birds at her feeder in May 2020. See the Field Notes for more on identifying individual grosbeaks by their bib.



Mississippi Kite with a tiger swallowtail in its talons. See the article by Steve Mirick on Mississippi Kites in New Hampshire. Photo by Debra Powers, 6-5-20, Durham, NH.



Motus is Underway in New England (see the article inside), Figure 1. Detections of an American Woodcock with a Motus nanotag put on in Ohio near the shore of Lake Erie. The lines show its spring and fall migrations in 2019 and 2020. Red line: 4-24 to 4-27, 2019; Yellow line: 11-9-2019; Blue line: 3-29 to 3-30, 2020; Green line: 10-26 to 11-9, 2020.

## Photo Quiz

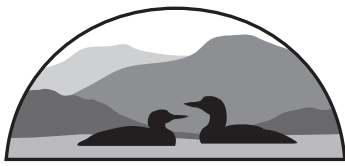


### Can You Identify This Bird?

Photo by Will Broussard, 5-31-20.  
Answer on page 38.

Motus is Underway in New England (see the article inside), Figure 1. Detections of an American Woodcock with a Motus nanotag put on in Ohio near the shore of Lake Erie. The lines show its spring and fall migrations in 2019 and 2020. Red line: 4-24 to 4-27, 2019; Yellow line: 11-9-2019; Blue line: 3-29 to 3-30, 2020; Green line: 10-26 to 11-9, 2020.

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**NEW HAMPSHIRE BIRD RECORDS**

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EDITOR

Rebecca Suomala  
603-224-9909 X309  
rsuomala@nhaudubon.org

TEXT EDITOR

Dan Hubbard

SEASON EDITORS

Eric Masterson, Spring  
Greg Tillman, Summer  
Ben Griffith, Fall  
Jim Sparrell/Katherine Towler, Winter

LAYOUT

Dyanna Smith

PUBLICATION ASSISTANT

Kathryn Frieden

ASSISTANTS

Zeke Cornell, David Deifk,  
Susan MacLeod, Gray Medynski,  
Marie Nickerson, Betsy Robinson

FIELD NOTES

Diana Stephens

PHOTO QUIZ

Susan Wrisley

PHOTO EDITOR

Wendy Chatel

WEB MASTER

Kathy Barnes

WHERE TO BIRD

Phil Brown, Steve Lamonde

EDITORIAL TEAM

Phil Brown, Wendy Chatel, Hank Chary,  
David Deifk, David Donsker, Ben Griffith,  
Dan Hubbard, Pam Hunt, Iain MacLeod,  
Eric Masterson, Robert A. Quinn,  
Rebecca Suomala, Jon Woolf

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This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Diana Stephens in loving appreciation of her mother and father, Dolores and Mallory Stephens, and her brother and sister-in-law, Mal and Claudia LaBrie Stephens.

*From learning to love nature to hiking and cross country skiing to learning to appreciate the wildlife that surrounds us, I would like to honor my family with this issue.*



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Cover Photos: An American Oystercatcher and chick photographed at the Isles of Shoals by Shiloh Schulte on 6-25-20 is the first confirmed nesting of this species in the state. A Red-headed Woodpecker nest photographed by Susan Wrisley, 7-5-20, at Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown, NH, was the first of two – see the story inside.

# From the Editor

## SUMMER 2020

by Rebecca Suomala

### Volunteer Update

**Thank You Greg Tillman** for serving as the 2020 Summer Season Editor. Greg has been birding in New Hampshire for more than 20 years, especially in his home town of Epping. According to Greg, “I have been birding since I was a teenager, however long ago that might be! I hope to add some owl species to my Epping list. Alas, adding shorebirds and ducks in Epping is a constant struggle!”

### Summer Editor Needed

We are still looking for someone to take on the Summer Editor position on a regular basis. The Season Editor reviews the eBird reports for their season and writes the summaries of the season highlights. The job

requires experience birding in New Hampshire, good writing skills, familiarity with eBird and Excel, and the ability to meet deadlines. NHBirds email list subscriber and eBird reporter preferred. If you are interested, please contact me via email: [rsuomala@nhaudubon.org](mailto:rsuomala@nhaudubon.org).



*Great Shearwaters by Leo McKillop, 7-24-20, offshore waters, NH.*

## Promoting an Inclusive Birding Community

NH Audubon and *New Hampshire Bird Records* support an inclusive and welcoming culture for birders of all backgrounds in New Hampshire. Numerous events in 2020 have brought to light some of the challenges faced by Black birders in particular. For an example, see the essay in *The Guardian* from Dr. Carolyn Finney who teaches at Middlebury College:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/03/being-black-public-spaces-outdoors-perils-christian-cooper>

How can we help? We can be aware of the prejudice and make sure it's not part of New Hampshire's birding

community. We can be alert for situations where support may be needed. We can provide support to efforts that break down barriers to participation in birding. We can make sure that we create a positive reputation for the entire birding community.

Dr. Allan Strong of the University of Vermont posted the following list of organizations that work on making nature more welcoming for everyone:

*Outdoor Afro:* <https://outdoorafro.com/about/>

*Diversify Outdoors:* <https://www.diversifyoutdoors.com/>

*Go Fund Me site to purchase binoculars for black birders:*  
<https://www.gofundme.com/ffree-binoculars-for-black-birders>

NH Audubon welcomes your comments and appreciates your efforts to create an inclusive birding community.

# 2020 Goodhue-Elkins Award

*Presented by Bob Quinn for the New Hampshire Audubon Annual Meeting, September 19, 2020.*

The Goodhue-Elkins Award is presented annually by NH Audubon to an individual or individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the study of New Hampshire birds. The award is named for Charles Goodhue, one of the state's great pioneer birders, and Kimball Elkins, the model of critical observation and insightful record-keeping.

As a neighbor, friend, and field companion, I am very proud to be the presenter of this award to Betsy Janeway for her decades of selfless service. She has been an energetic and effective volunteer in the areas of bird study and conservation in New Hampshire for over 40 years. She has volunteered for a multitude of projects, including the State Endangered Species Program (especially during its early years) when she did extensive field work for Northern Harriers, Bald Eagles and Osprey. She was especially noticeable during both the unique Harrier Days and Osprey observation weekends. She also worked on winter Bald Eagle surveys, the statewide wetland surveys, whip-poor-will surveys, and Birdathons. She has participated in local Christmas Counts and other volunteer "bird work."

She has compiled and edited almost 40 years, and counting, of bird data for Webster (a connection to Charles Goodhue as explained below) and she has contributed her data to *New Hampshire Bird Records* for over 30 years. Not only did she work diligently for six years from southern New Hampshire to Lake Umbagog during the New Hampshire

Breeding Bird Atlas, but she also authored 14 Atlas species accounts. All of these efforts total hundreds of hours of volunteer work.

After moving to New Hampshire in the 1970s, she immediately became involved with NH Audubon and was soon volunteering. In addition to all of her field work already mentioned, she had the energy and time to serve on the NH Audubon Board of Trustees, serving as Chair and working tirelessly to support the organization and its policies to protect the birds and other wildlife of New Hampshire. Besides countless hours in meetings, she also testified at the State House on key wildlife and conservation bills, often a daunting task.

Less well known are her contributions beyond NH Audubon. For decades, she has been a leader in many ways for the venerable Concord Bird and Wildflower Club, which is older than NH Audubon! Also, for decades, Betsy has been the moving force behind wildlife conservation and education in the Town of Webster, serving for many years as the Chair of the Conservation Commission, a board that she still serves on. She even created a splendid 70-page book on the roadside wetlands of Webster that includes color aerial photos that she took. Furthermore, she has authored a wildlife-themed

column in the Town newsletter. Betsy's first choice has always been to be in the field and she has hiked and kayaked and camped from Webster to Lake Umbagog for the birds and NH Audubon projects.

Not only does Betsy epitomize what it means to be a volunteer for NH Audubon

and the larger wildlife community, but she also shares a special connection to Charles Goodhue, one of the namesakes of this award. Her many years of service and love of birds has been based in Goodhue's home town of Webster, NH.

Therefore, it is most appropriate and with great honor that we present the 2020 Goodhue-Elkins Award to Betsy Janeway.



*Bob Quinn with NH Audubon's 2020 Goodhue-Elkins Award for Betsy Janeway. Photos by Kelly Wing (top) and Rebecca Suomala (bottom).*

# SUMMER SEASON

June 1 through July 31, 2020

by Greg Tillman



As summer began in 2020, New Hampshire birders, like everyone else in the country, were getting used to the COVID-19 restrictions. The social distancing guidelines limited birding with friends; the suggestion

to avoid travel limited long drives, perhaps reducing our eBird reports from the North Country; restaurant guidelines made it harder to grab a bite on the wing; whalewatch boats were grounded at the beginning of the season and parking on the seacoast was initially blocked off almost completely. Whalewatches did eventually venture forth, albeit with fewer passengers per trip, and pelagic reports were down. Coastal parking opened as reservation-only, but birding the seacoast remained challenging throughout the summer. Several birders attempting to park on Route 1A were ticketed.

It seems likely we missed some lingering coastal migrants as a result of the restrictions, including ducks, grebes, and late warblers, although good migration weather could have been a factor as well. On the other hand, many birders say they learned a lot about their local patches (see *Pandemic Backyard Birding* by Iain MacLeod in this issue)! Unrelated to COVID-19, Little Jack's on Route 1A was fenced off at the end of July and looks to be lost as an easy place from which to look at Hampton Marsh.

Lower than normal rainfall in the spring and throughout the summer meant that New Hampshire also experienced a moderate drought, slightly more severe in the southeast. Many rivers and lakes had unusually low waterlines and some normally wet meadows were dry. The effect on birds was not immediately apparent in most cases, but a short-term drought can impact breeding success for a wide variety of species, especially insectivores. A longer drought could have farther reaching effects.

We'll review vagrants and touch on late spring and early fall migrants, but much of the summer report is about breeding birds. New Hampshire has a remarkable number of isolated but persistent breeding populations. **Least Bitterns**, for example, are restricted to two or three marshes, as far as we know; **Upland Sandpipers** are found in one large grassland in the state; **American Pipits** have sustained a single outpost on Mount Washington for years;

the **Mississippi Kite** colony continues almost miraculously around Great Bay; and **Pied-billed Grebes**, **Horned Larks**,

**Purple Martins**, **Common Nighthawks**, and **Grasshopper Sparrows**, among others, all nest at just a handful of locations. The coast also has its own special set of breeding avifauna and our North Country is the southern breeding edge for many species.

The Best Breeder Award for 2020 (hmm, maybe we should rename



*Least Bittern by Susan Wrisley, 6-26-20, World End Pond, Salem, NH.*

that award!) is a tie. A pair of **Red-headed Woodpeckers** successfully nested in Bear Brook State Park, a rare summer surprise (see Steve Mirick's article in this issue) and Shiloh Schulte found and photographed New Hampshire's first confirmed **American Oystercatcher** chicks!

The summer season had two noteworthy incursions in 2020. When we think of incursive or irruptive species, we often think of the "winter finches," such as siskins, grosbeaks and crossbills; however, crossbills themselves are blissfully unaware that they are winter finches, and the summer saw an amazing incursion of **Red Crossbills** in southern New



*Yellow-billed Cuckoo by Jennifer McKown, 6-7-20, Wolfboro, NH.*

Hampshire. Simultaneously, we were lucky enough to get an unexpected abundance of **Yellow-billed Cuckoos**, probably outnumbering Black-billed Cuckoos in an unusual reversal.

Finally, no season would be complete without those interesting strays, those meandering explorers, that snag our eBird filters and bring birders out in glee and awe. Have wings, will travel. Standouts for the summer of 2020 include the **Swallow-tailed Kites** that graced southwestern New Hampshire in two stunning appearances, a remarkable **shrike** (species unknown) seen at the top of South Pack Monadnock, and an inexplicable inland **Forster's Tern** report from Hillsborough in July.

Let's take a look at all the wonder of the 2020 summer in a little more detail.

## Waterfowl through Grebes (plus Loons)

(Geese, ducks, grouse, grebes, loons)

Sadly, the Trumpeter Swan that spent 2019 in Candia did not return; perhaps it is at a mate's summering area this year. The ecologically problematic **Mute Swan** (non-native) numbers seem down a bit along the coast, where the most being reported this summer was six, although eight Mute Swans flew north through Hinsdale on June 6.



*Common Loon masquerading as a Yellow-billed Loon by Christen Dolloff, 7-6-20, Newfound Lake, NH.*

The Trumpeter Swan was absent, but many birders were excited, at least temporarily, by the July 6 report of a possible Yellow-billed Loon on Newfound Lake. Newfound Lake is fairly large and the bird was not relocated, but there were (oh, thankfully!) photographs. Sadly, after several experts took long looks at plumage characteristics, bill shape and body shape, they ultimately concluded that the bird was a Common Loon, albeit "yellow-billed." Other similar loons have been reported occasionally in late summer, including one in Maine, so the yellow bill may perhaps be a molt aberration of some sort. (Bill "molt" during breeding season, often overlooked, is a topic for another time.) The bird was a lesson in being willing to expect the unexpected and also in being *unwilling* to trust in one

single field mark for identification, especially of rare species (see the story on page 21).

The most interesting breeding record of the summer, for waterfowl, was probably the **two** broods of **Ring-necked Ducks** that Ken Klapper discovered at Meadow Brook Conservation Area wetlands in Sandwich, the southern-most breeding record in quite some time. Ring-necked Ducks have a fascinating history. They were rare in New Hampshire before 1920 and became a common New Hampshire migrant only after they expanded their breeding range eastward from Michigan during the 1920s through the 1950s. The first New Hampshire breeding record was in 1947, although Tudor Richards suspected they bred on Cherry Pond as early as 1940. Richards once found them breeding in New Hampshire, south of the White Mountains, at Turtle Pond in Concord (in 1965). Their expansion eastward seems to have stabilized, and New Hampshire is at the southern edge of their breeding range, at least for now. (Keep those eBird records coming.)

Pickering Ponds in Rochester was the **Wood Duck** hotspot of the state, with a high of 63 reported on July 28, and many other reports of large numbers of Wood Ducks in multiple broods and ages. It's hard to believe Pickering Ponds has the best Wood Duck habitat, but it might be the most frequently birded and/or the most easily visible habitat. The Panorama Golf Course in Coos County had the high count for **Hooded Mergansers**, 22 on June 30, with Deer Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Brentwood a close second. **Pied-billed Grebes**, state-threatened, were reported from a small handful of locations across the state, with chicks being seen at Deer Hill WMA and Fort Hill WMA. High counts for some of our other waterfowl are in the "Sighting Details" section at the end of this summary. (Just for fun, high counts for grouse species are there too.) They are marked with an asterisk next to the species name.

John Cooley, Senior Biologist with the Loon Preservation Committee, reported that **Common Loons** produced 156 chicks in 2020, from 321 breeding territories. See his article in this issue for more details on the breeding season and the oldest known adult loon in the northeastern US.

There were no lingering migrant dabbling ducks reported in early June, but two **Green-winged Teal**, perhaps early fall migrants, spent more than a week at the Rochester Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) in late July, and one Green-winged Teal was seen in Conway on July 27. Some late spring migrant waterfowl are typically reported from the seacoast, and the difficulty in birding the coast in early June may have contributed to the lack of late dabblers. It was almost certainly a factor in the few reports of lingering scoters and grebes, down by roughly half from 2019.



Common Goldeneye by Steve Mirick, 7-25-20, Errol, NH.

A **Common Goldeneye** on July 25 at Lake Umbagog stands out as the only New Hampshire goldeneye of the summer, but goldeneyes *are* summer regulars at Umbagog and the lakes east, more often in Maine than New Hampshire.

**Cuckoos through Cranes**

(Pigeons, cuckoos, goatsuckers, swifts, hummingbirds, rails, cranes)

The widespread **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** presence was one of the summer’s highlights. For a change, Yellow-billed Cuckoos may have outnumbered **Black-billed Cuckoos** in New Hampshire (Table 1), giving joy to birders all summer long. Black-billed Cuckoos were reported at about the usual frequency, but reports of Yellow-billed were noticeably higher than usual, and more frequent than Black-billed (by checklist count). They were never reported in great numbers (the high count was four), but there were 428 separate reports. No reports mentioned nests or fledglings and many of the reports were heard-only. A paragraph about the high numbers of caterpillars in a “Valley News” blog, by Dartmouth professor Matt Ayres\*, shed some light on the abundance of Yellow-billed Cuckoo reports this summer, and Pam Hunt, NH Audubon Senior Biologist, expanded (pers. comm.):

*Researchers at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in Woodstock, NH are seeing their highest caterpillar numbers in 20 years\*. Cuckoos are caterpillar specialists, particularly on hairy caterpillars, because they have adaptations to reduce the irritation these hairs can produce. You see more cuckoos in years with gypsy moth or tent caterpillar outbreaks, which are actually both a little below the radar in 2020. In 2019, however, there was*

*a small gypsy moth outbreak in the Connecticut River valley south of here. Presumably Yellow-billed Cuckoos there had a productive breeding season, and we might be seeing the result, more cuckoos than usual returning from the south. In combination with lots of food, these cuckoos are sticking around and breeding in higher than usual numbers, and their offspring will likely wander off to whatever region in the Northeast has abundant food in 2021.*

\* <https://www.notion.so/What-are-all-those-half-eaten-beech-leaves-on-Mt-Cardigan-about-f2258bddfa864ded9aede74c1b0fd2f1>

Table 1. The relative abundance of Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos in June and July for the past three years in New Hampshire. You can see the increase in abundance (bar thickness) for Yellow-billed Cuckoos in 2020 (thicker bars indicate higher abundance). Bar charts provided by eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) and created November 2020.

	2018	2019	2020
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	[Thin green bar]	[Thin green bar]	[Thick green bar]
Black-billed Cuckoo	[Thin green bar]	[Thin green bar]	[Thin green bar]

**Eastern Whip-poor-wills and Common Nighthawks**

were reported from their usual locations and in the usual numbers; see the nighthawk summary in this issue. The 250 **Chimney Swifts** on June 12 from the High Street garage in Nashua is by far the high count of swifts for the season.

In 2019, World End Pond in Salem had most of the state’s **Sora** reports, but in 2020, Soras were found at five different locations in the state, most frequently from the Cranberry Pond wetlands in West Lebanon (a heavily birded destination for Least Bittern watchers). Scott Spangenberg reported a Sora chick at Cranberry Pond on June 24. World End Pond was perhaps less birded in 2020 than it was in 2019, and in 2020 it had just two late-July reports of Sora. **Virginia Rail** is much more widely reported in New Hampshire than Sora, but there is no doubt both species are easily overlooked, and it is difficult to get a complete picture of their distribution in the state, even with a tool such as eBird. In 2020, World End Pond had 11 Virginia Rails on June 15, a count topped only by the 14 found at Airport Road in Swanzey on June 26.

Less common than the rails, but more easily seen, **Sandhill Cranes** have become rare but regular in New England over the past few decades. Since the 1990s, they have nested in small numbers in both Maine and Vermont, but reports of possible breeding in New Hampshire are



always worth a “huzzah!” In 2020, two adult Sandhill Cranes in Sweat Meadows at Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) were seen with a chick on July 9. (Huzzah!) This is presumably the same pair that was seen in the area the previous year. The Monroe pair were *not* reported throughout the summer; despite birders searching, they were surprisingly elusive for four-foot tall birds. They were finally reported with a juvenile in August, another huzzah! The Deerfield/Nottingham swamps also hosted crane activity, as they did in 2019; there were reports in both June and July, but no chicks or breeding activity in 2020. Two cranes around Hollis on June 9 were, as far as is documented, one-day visitors.



*Sandhill Cranes by Roger Frieden, 6-9-20, Woodmont Orchard, Hollis, NH.*

## Shorebirds

(Oystercatchers, plovers, sandpipers)

Shiloh Schulte took a terrific—and let’s admit it, wicked cute! —photo of an **American Oystercatcher** chick on Lunging Island (a privately owned island in the Isles of Shoals) on June 25, documenting the first breeding record of oystercatchers in New Hampshire. Oystercatcher breeding on the Maine portion of the Isles of Shoals was confirmed several years ago (on Duck Island in 2016), and Schulte photographed oystercatcher fledglings again in 2020 on Duck Island. Lunging Island is not publicly accessible, but adult oystercatchers are also seen occasionally from the mainland during the summer.

**Upland Sandpipers** have habitat requirements that are almost as rare in New Hampshire as the oystercatcher’s. For many years now, Upland Sandpipers’ only nesting site in New Hampshire has been the grasslands around Portsmouth International Airport at Pease in Newington, where they continued in 2020. Pam Hunt, accessing the airport interior, counted 24 “Uppies” on June 19, including eight young in four different broods.

It was a challenging year for the federally threatened **Piping Plover** in New Hampshire, as reported by NH Fish & Game. There was some speculation that fewer beachgoers from COVID-19 restrictions might lead to even better

success than the record year in 2019. The season started with a record 12 pair, one higher than 2019. Closed beaches allowed pairs to nest as far north as Highland Ave. in Hampton (near the NH Marine Memorial), but when beaches reopened in June it was a struggle for the plovers in the outlying areas. Several nests were abandoned and newly hatched chicks were vulnerable to beach traffic (at least two were picked up by well-meaning people who thought they were abandoned). Only six chicks fledged from the eight nests on Hampton Beach, but another 10 fledged on Seabrook Beach. See Table 2 for numbers of nesting Piping Plovers.



*Piping Plover and chicks by Debra Powers, 6-12-20, Hampton Beach SP, NH.*

Shorebirds are better known in New Hampshire for migration than nesting. The timing of shorebird migration is intricate, and varies species to species. Some begin moving through (southward) as early as mid-July, although it can be hard to separate migrants from over-summering non-breeding birds. **Short-billed Dowitchers** tend to begin earlier than some other species, but even so, a total of 207 heading south on July 11, in multiple separate flocks, is a little startling. They may perhaps, as Steve Mirick noted in his eBird checklist, have been migrating with the southeast winds that originated in a tropical storm to the west of us. A flock of 58 **Greater Yellowlegs** at Meadow Pond in Hampton on July 18 is probably another good indicator of migration getting started, and a flock of 190 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** on July 24 at the Hampton Salt Marsh Conservation Area is a sure sign of fall migration ramping up.

Jim Sparrell and Katie Towler reported an always-dramatic-looking **Whimbrel** on July 14 at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye. A single **Long-billed Dowitcher** made a one-day appearance and was photographed at the Rochester WTP on July 22. An early **Stilt Sandpiper** was found in the Hampton Salt Marsh on July 11 by Steve and Jane Mirick. There were several other reports a little later in July, including two adults still in breeding plumage on July 21, and one feeding south of Rye on July 23.



Willet by Jim Sparrell, 7-14-20, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

In an example of how specific the timing can be for each species, an unfortunately *unconfirmed* **Pectoral Sandpiper** was reported from the coast on July 11. As a reviewer, the interesting thing to me is how rare this bird would be on July 11, but three weeks later, it would be an uncommon but regular migrant. The record-early southbound date for Pectoral Sandpiper in New Hampshire is July 4, and there are only five other records, ever, before the *last* week of July. For 2020, there was a late spring northbound migrant in New Hampshire on June 9, and the earliest confirmed southbound “fall” migrant was reported on July 27. So, as you document your sightings, it can be helpful to be aware of migration and distribution patterns at a surprisingly detailed level, a reminder at least for me that there is always more to learn.

**Jaegers through Terns**

(Jaegers, alcids, gulls, terns)

The census on White and Seavey Islands estimated 3,280 pairs of nesting **Common Terns**, a record high in the history of the Tern Restoration Project. There were 96 **Roseate Tern** nests on the islands, and one pair of **Arctic Terns**. Nesting success was “moderate” compared to previous years, “likely due to unfortunate timing of storms (immediately after hatch) and abundance



Roseate Tern by Jim Sparrell, 6-8-20, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.

of unsuitably large prey (herring and butterfish),” according to the minutes of the 36th meeting of the Gulf of Maine Seabird Working Group (<http://GOMSWG.org>).

A few Common Terns also nest in the Hampton marshes, and both Common and Roseate Terns can be seen on the coast in the summer. Steve Mirick’s reports of 9 and 12 Roseate Terns at Odiorne Point State Park on June 7 and June 9 is a fairly high coastal concentration. Fifteen southbound adult Roseate Terns on July 11 is also interesting. Two Common Terns at Lake Umbagog on June 9 might possibly have been late migrants heading to an inland nesting colony in Maine or Quebec.

**Least Terns** are our other nesting terns, and their nests are monitored by NH Fish & Game. In 2020, there was a record 10 Least Tern chicks fledged, all from Hampton (Table 2). In 2019 there were only two pair in Hampton but the additional pairs in 2020 likely came from Seabrook Beach where five pair failed in 2019 mostly due to predation. Least Terns were also seen regularly hunting in the Hampton marshes and at Meadow Pond.

Table 2. Piping Plover and Least Tern nesting data from Brendan Clifford (pers. comm.) and Wildlines (<https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/pubs/wildlines.html>), NH Fish & Game Department.

Beach Nesting Success by Year				
	Piping Plover pairs	Piping Plover chicks fledged	Least Tern pairs	Least Tern chicks fledged
2020	12	16	6	10
2019	11	20	7	4

Beach Nesting Success by Location				
	Piping Plover pairs	Piping Plover chicks fledged	Least Tern pairs	Least Tern chicks fledged
2020				
Hampton	8	6	6	10
Seabrook	4	10	0	0

Turning to vagrants, Lillian Stokes reported a **Forster’s Tern** flying over Powder Mill Pond in Hancock on July 14. Forster’s Terns do not breed in New Hampshire at all; their nearest breeding sites are west of us on the Great Lakes (and they may have nested historically on Lake Champlain). New Hampshire’s regular fall influx of Forster’s Terns at the coast is presumably from some of the Great Lakes birds migrating eastward, before heading south down the coast. Summer vagrants are not unheard of, but the other vagrant summer Forster’s Terns in New England have been mostly coastal records, although there was a sighting on the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts in 2013.

As for wandering out-of-season gulls, Mary Dow photographed an **Iceland Gull** in Hampton Harbor on June 9, much more typically seen in New Hampshire as a winter

vagrant. Leo McKillop found and photographed a juvenile **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at the Rochester WTP on July 30. Lesser Black-backed Gulls are more typically casual fall migrants or winter vagrants; they are less common as summer vagrants.



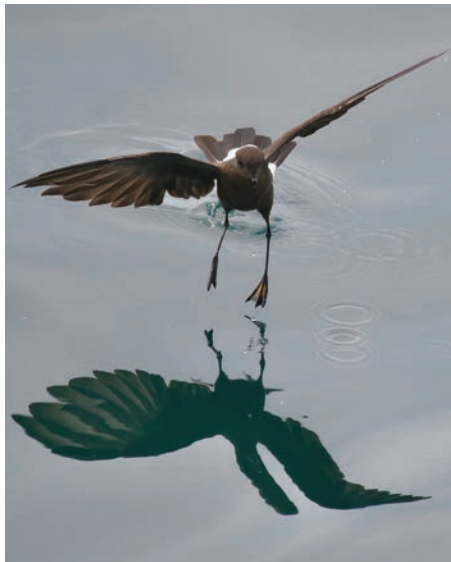
*Iceland Gull by Mary Dow, 6-9-20, Hampton Harbor, NH.*

## Shearwaters through Ibis

(Storm-petrels, shearwaters, gannets, cormorants, herons)

As mentioned, summer pelagic coverage was sparse, in part because of COVID restrictions. Many boats did not go out in early June, and when they did resume, passenger counts were

limited. Our pelagic reports for shearwaters and storm-petrels all come from four trips: fishing charters on June 5 and June 13 and whalewatches on July 10 and July 24. We also have a few sightings from the Isles of Shoals. There was a noticeable uptick in **Wilson's Storm-Petrels** between



*Wilson's Storm-Petrel by Jim Sparrell, 7-24-20, offshore waters, NH.*

July 10 and July 24, from 30 birds on July 10 to reports of 390 on July 24. Unfortunately, there is no other data to use for context.

**Glossy Ibis** were reported on the coast throughout the summer more frequently than in 2019, despite the downturn in coastal birding. Glossy Ibis stopped nesting on the Isles of

Shoals in 2003, but if reports of them continue as frequently in 2021 as in 2020, it may be an indication of renewed nesting somewhere near the New Hampshire coast.

**Least Bitterns** were first reported at the Cranberry Pond wetlands in 2017, behind a shopping center in West Lebanon. From the abundance of reports that poured in during 2020, they seem well settled, and several reports of juveniles indicate continued nesting here, to the delight of birders state-wide. They likely still nest at World End Pond in Salem, where there were as many as four Least Bitterns reported, but no juveniles. They may also nest at the Hinsdale setbacks, which had no reports at all in 2020, but has in the past. There was also a single report of a Least Bittern in Durham on June 7. Multiple possible nesting sites are an interesting change from 1994, when the *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New Hampshire* had Least Bittern as a "potential" breeder in the state, with no confirmed records at all. Although Least Bittern is doubtless not abundant in New Hampshire, it is still possible the bird is underreported, as rails are, because they are so hard to spot.

**American Bittern**, another shy marsh bird, was reported in its usual low numbers from across the state with a high count of five in Plainfield. For **Great Blue Herons**, Horsehide Brook Marsh in Durham was the largest reported nesting colony. High counts for other heron sightings included 38 for **Great Egret**, 31 for **Snowy Egret**, and seven for **Green Heron**.



*Tricolored Heron by Jim Sparrell, 7-11-20, Hampton Salt Marsh Conservation Area, NH.*

A **Tricolored Heron** was seen in the Hampton Salt Marsh on July 11, and possibly the same bird was seen again on July 14. A juvenile **Little Blue Heron** spent the last two weeks of July at Pickering Ponds and the Rochester WTP, well seen and photographed by birders. Chris McPherson also had a juvenile on July 10 in Brookline and Steve Mirick had an adult flying offshore on June 9. Inland **Black-crowned Night-Herons** are unusual but nearly annual; one was seen near Winnepesaukee in late June and one in Lebanon near the Connecticut River in mid-July. Similarly, Great Egrets

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regularly disperse surprisingly far in July; the bird reported at the Airport Marsh in Whitefield on July 21 seems far, but did not even match the one reported from Dixville Notch in 2019.

### Vultures through Falcons

(Vultures, osprey, hawks, eagles, owls, kingfisher, woodpeckers, falcons)

Sitting near the top of our vagrant leaderboard, a stunning **Swallow-tailed Kite** was reported on Deer Meadow Road in Webster on July 24! It was not immediately relocated (spoiler alert for our Fall issue, the bird was relocated in August), but on July 29, Jonathan Hayden reported a presumably *different* Swallow-tailed Kite in Claremont, a bird which may have meandered up the Connecticut River valley and been seen farther north, in Lebanon, in August. It seems to have been a pretty good year in the Northeast for peregrinating Swallow-tailed Kites, but New Hampshire certainly got its share!



*Mississippi Kite by Steve Mirick, 6-21-20, Newmarket, NH.*

Also, we have more kites to discuss! The astounding and yet annual **Mississippi Kite** colony continues in the Durham-Newmarket area, as it has since it was first documented in 2008 (see the article by Steve Mirick on the history of these kites in this issue). In 2020, the Durham pair continued at the same nest and successfully fledged one chick. The Stratham and Newmarket pairs both moved to nearby locations; the Stratham pair fledged one chick, but the Newmarket nest failed around hatching time, for unknown reasons. A fourth nest was discovered in Greenland, which also successfully fledged one chick. We can all hope New Hampshire continues to be an attractive summering spot for these long-distance migrants.

**Black Vultures** were reported from five towns in the summer of 2020. The most intriguing sightings were from the lower Connecticut River valley where two birds have been reported somewhat consistently in the past few years suggesting possible breeding. Turkey Vultures are of course

more common, even abundant, but two separate kettles of 80 or more birds in July are roughly twice the size of the next largest group of **Turkey Vultures** that were reported. One kettle was seen on July 31 in Conway over the dump, heading northwest (not migrating); the other was seen on July 18 from Cranberry Pond in West Lebanon.

New Hampshire Audubon keeps a watchful eye on some of our state's breeding raptors, notably Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons, and in 2020 they began a project monitoring Northern Harriers as well. Chris Martin, Senior Biologist with NH Audubon, reports:

**Bald Eagles:** *Biologists and volunteers confirmed 76 territorial pairs of Bald Eagles in New Hampshire in 2020, up from 72 in 2019. We found 64 pairs incubating and counted 51 successful nests. A total of 76 young fledged, less than 2019's record high of 81 young, but the second-most ever documented in the state since recovery efforts began in the 1980s. One reason for this slight decline in young fledged in 2020 was that there were no New Hampshire nests that fledged three eaglets, unlike 2019 when a record five nests fledged three young apiece. Over one-third of all the young eagles produced in the state since 1989 have fledged in the past three breeding seasons alone! We topped 60 incubating pairs and 50 successful pairs for the first time in 2020. Bald Eagles were removed from the state's Threatened Species list in 2017.*

**Peregrine Falcons:** *Spring 2020 marked the 40<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of Peregrine Falcon breeding season monitoring and management in New Hampshire in the post-DDT recovery era. Roughly 25% of New Hampshire's Peregrine pairs now nest on human-created structures, including on buildings, bridges, stacks, and quarries. NH Audubon staff and volunteer observers confirmed 24 territorial pairs in 2020, the same number as found in 2019. We confirmed 21 incubating pairs and 16 successful pairs that fledged at least one young each. A total of 36 young fledged statewide, second only to the record-high 43 fledged in 2018. Peregrine Falcons remain on the state's Threatened Species list.*

**Northern Harriers:** *In 2020, NH Audubon staff and volunteers confirmed at least 10 Northern Harrier breeding territories scattered across the state. Most sites were in Coos County, but we found three territories located south of the White Mountains in Conway, Lyme, and Tuftonboro. Four breeding pairs*

were unsuccessful, but six successful pairs fledged a total of at least nine young, including four pairs in Coos County, as well as two pairs nesting in Carroll County. Northern Harriers are on the state's Endangered list.

For more details on the 2020 breeding season for each of these species, see the Notes from the Field online at: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/notes-from-the-field/>

Owls, like rails, often fly in the dark and under the radar. Barred Owl is by far the most noticeable of the summertime owls, with its loud and histrionic call, and that visibility more than its abundance is probably reflected in the quantity of owl reports. For the summer, there were three reports of **Eastern Screech-Owl**, 15 reports of **Great Horned Owl**, 17 reports of **Northern Saw-whet Owl**, and 371 reports of **Barred Owl**.



*Red-headed Woodpecker nest (with a fledgling in the hole) by Steve Mirick, 6-28-20, Bear Brook SP, Allenstown, NH.*

Working through our taxonomic order, let's mention the remarkable find of **nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers** in Bear Brook State Park. The pair was present during the spring and then confirmed nesting by Steve Mirick on June 4 when he saw the adults bringing food to the nest hole indicating they were feeding young. By July 25, two young successfully fledged and the pair began a second brood (see Steve Mirick's article in this issue). Never common in New Hampshire, we typically see Red-headed Woodpeckers in the fall and winter following post-breeding dispersal. There are less than 10 documented nesting records since 1950.

Exciting as the rarity of a nesting Red-headed Woodpecker is, almost equally exciting, when put into the context of the past 30 years, is the common-ness of a nesting **Red-bellied**

**Woodpecker**. Red-bellied Woodpeckers' first confirmed state record ever was in 1966. The first confirmed nesting wasn't until 2002, less than 20 years ago, although possible breeding was suspected before then. As of 2020, Red-bellied Woodpeckers are common nesters in southeast New Hampshire. They are present, if not abundant, farther north and west, around Keene, Concord, and Lake Winnepesaukee and there are regular reports from north of Winnepesaukee, especially along the Connecticut River valley. The northern most reports in summer 2020 were from Bartlett and Bethlehem. It's not clear that this dramatic range expansion is finished. So far, they seem to co-exist with New Hampshire's other woodpeckers and certainly the Red-bellied range overlaps Downy, Hairy, and Pileated south of here, but it is unlikely there was an empty ecological niche just waiting to be filled, and New Hampshire's story is still unfolding.

### Flycatchers through Pipits

(Flycatchers, vireos, jays, crows, tits, swallows, nuthatches, creepers, gnatcatchers, wrens, starling, mimics, thrushes, waxwing, pipit)

Robin Schulman reported a **shrike** (either Northern or Loggerhead) on July 5, atop South Pack Monadnock in Miller State Park, Peterborough. The bird was seen just once, but along with Swallow-tailed Kite, this sits at the top of the vagrant leaderboard for the season! Both Loggerhead and Northern Shrikes would be terrifically out of their usual summer range (although Loggerhead Shrike did have a brief expansion into New Hampshire at the height of forest clearing in the late 1800s). The previous summer record of Loggerhead Shrike was more than 20 years ago in 1997 in Newington. There has not been a New Hampshire summer record of Northern Shrike. It seems at least plausible that this could be the Loggerhead Shrike that was reported in Antrim on May 24, 2020.

Kurk Dorsey found an **Acadian Flycatcher** at the Gile Road Marsh in Lee, which put on a show for most of July (if a drab and fairly quiet bird can put on a show). Dorsey doubled down and found another one in Durham on July 31 and Rob Lowry reported one from Madison on July 28.

Among nesting flycatchers, there was a high count of six **Olive-sided Flycatchers** at Church Pond Bog in Albany on July 7 and a high of 13 **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** on June 13 at the Mittersill Ski Area in Franconia. A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher on July 5 at the McDaniels Marsh WMA in Springfield is an interesting southern record. **Willow Flycatcher** is rare and localized in northern New Hampshire. For 2020 in Coos County, there was one Willow Flycatcher report from Pondicherry NWR and several reports from Fort Hill WMA in Stratford, near the Connecticut River.



*Olive-sided Flycatcher by Steve Mirick, 6-13-20, Church Pond Bog, Albany-Livermore, NH.*

More slowly than Red-bellied Woodpeckers, **Fish Crows** have been colonizing southern New Hampshire over the last 40 or 50 years. The first state record was in Kingston in 1971 and the first nesting was seen in Durham in 1982. West Ossipee has been their northern-most regular location for several years now; Ken Klapper reported 20 Fish Crows there on July 16.



*Purple Martin by Debra Powers, 7-28-20, Seabrook, NH.*

Pam Hunt, NH Audubon Senior Biologist, updates us on our localized and colonial breeding swallows, the Purple Martin and the Cliff Swallow:

**Purple Martins:** *The two core Purple Martin colonies at Seabrook and Awcomin Marsh in Rye held 34 pairs (18 and 16, respectively). Less frequent monitoring of Seabrook means that we don't have 100% confidence in the productivity there, but taken together the two sites fledged around 150 young. This is almost twice the previous high set in 2019 and a clear sign of all the good volunteer landlord efforts paying off. Because of COVID, gourds in Hampton were not put up. Two pairs of*

*martins appeared at a condo-style martin house along Old Beach Road in Rye and in late July at least one was still there and feeding young. We hope to get better housing up there (the house in question wasn't even raised to the top of its pole when Steve Mirick discovered the birds using it).*

**Cliff Swallows:** *The total number of Cliff Swallow colonies statewide was estimated at 25, which supported 160-170 pairs. Exciting news was a handful of new colonies on bridges, particularly the apparent re-colonization of the Scammel Bridge over the Bellamy in Dover that was last occupied in 2013. Over half the colonies and birds are in Coos County, with most of those in Pittsburg.*

For more details on the 2020 breeding season for these species, see the Notes from the Field online at: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/notes-from-the-field/>

**Horned Larks**, another localized breeder, were reported from three sites, including an isolated report of two birds from Panorama Golf Course in Colebrook. Unlike 2019, there were no reports from the White Mountains.

**American Pipits** are about as localized as it gets in summer in New Hampshire. They are known to breed in only two disjunct alpine locations in the eastern United States, on Mount Katahdin in northern Maine and on Mount Washington in northern New Hampshire. The next closest breeding site is in the Chic-Choc Mountains of the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec. Chris Martin, NH Audubon Senior Biologist, reports:

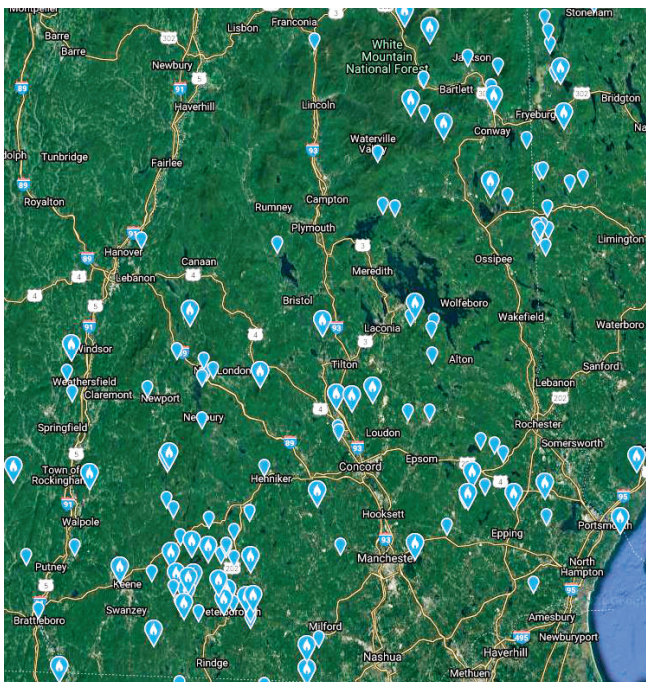
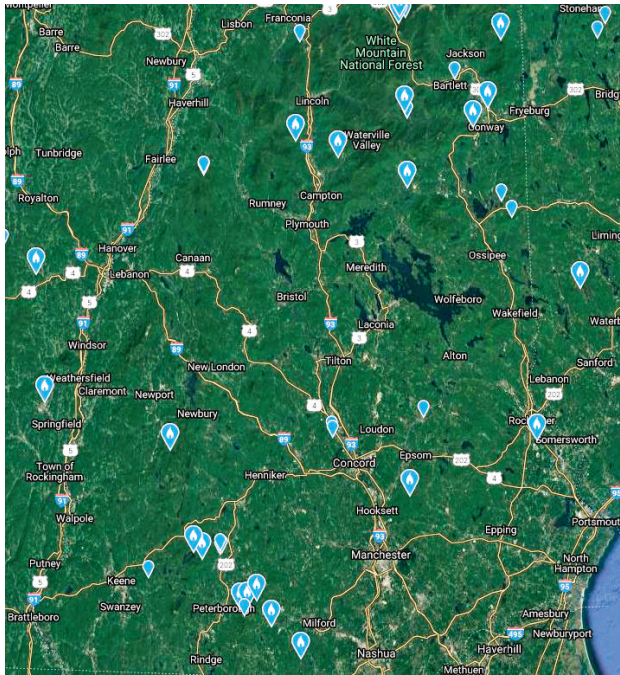
*David Govatski and I spent roughly five hours wandering across the alpine zone on Mount Washington (5000-6000 feet) on June 18 in search of breeding American Pipits. The near-absence of wind helped us see and hear display flights in areas from Nelson Crag to the Cow Pasture to the Gulfside Trail. Most birds we found were likely males, since females do almost all of the incubation in hidden ground nests. We didn't see any food-carrying activity, which suggests most pairs were still incubating. Based on our admittedly brief survey, we estimated roughly 11 breeding territories during our visit.*

## Finches: Crossbills

Let's talk about crossbills! Crossbills are notorious for wandering in response to the boom-bust conifer crop. They depart when food is scarce and show up when it is abundant. In the summer of 2019, there was a movement of **Red Crossbills** into western and northern New Hampshire. It

built up into the fall and winter, eventually leading to nesting in January(!) and February. (Crossbills nest any time of year, in response to the availability of conifer seeds.)

Beginning in 2020, there were some spring reports from southwestern New Hampshire. The summer records for southern New Hampshire started on June 12 near Pack Monadnock. Our 2020 crossbills could be the same ones that arrived in 2019 and nested in the north over the winter, or their offspring, or a combination of the two, that were here because of a bumper crop of white pine cones, or they could be new immigrants from elsewhere.



Red Crossbill sightings in June (top) and July (bottom), 2020. Maps provided by eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) and created April 15, 2021.

Throughout the summer, the largest southern cluster of Red Crossbills remained centered in the highlands of the Monadnock region in Hillsborough and Cheshire counties, although whether this reflects the relative abundance of birds, or birders, is hard to determine. Crossbill reports came in from Cheshire and Sullivan counties in late June and early July and from Rockingham County in July (the first summer report was on July 4). They may have generally moved through the state from west to east, or maybe they just descended on the Monadnock area and dispersed. By the end of July, they were being reported in most of the state except the very southeast. High count in the south was a flock of 40 on Pack Monadnock in Hillsborough on July 13; a flock of 50 was reported from Gunstock Mountain in Belknap on July 4. Massachusetts seems to have had a much smaller White Pine cone crop, and correspondingly fewer crossbill reports than New Hampshire. **White-winged Crossbills** were reported in about their usual numbers and only from the northern part of the state.

Recent studies divide Red Crossbills into “types,” based on bill variations associated with foraging preferences and slight differences in calls. In June and July, four different “types” of Red Crossbill were verified by Tim Spahr (of the Finch Research Network) from New Hampshire eBird recordings: types 1, 2, 3, and 10. Type 1 is Appalachian; type 2 is Ponderosa Pine; type 3 is Western Hemlock; and type 10 is Sitka Spruce. According to eBird’s crossbill summary (<http://ebird.org/news/recrtype>), type 1 is generally found in the East, as the name suggests. The other types are more common elsewhere, but are “moderately irruptive” to “highly irruptive,” so they are not entirely unexpected in New England. Based solely on the summer’s eBird comments, it seems that Sitka Spruce (type 10) may have been the most common type reported, followed by Appalachian (type 1), although that is a distinctly unscientific assessment.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of crossbill reports were flyovers, “jip-jip-jip”. Only Bob Quinn and Scott Young made any mention of breeding behavior, which was restricted to courtship with no evidence of nesting. Reports on foraging were likewise scarce, but one reporter mentioned feeding from white pine, one mentioned red pine, and one mentioned balsam fir. Scott Young also reported crossbills feeding on webworm:

*I witnessed many forays to a canopy black cherry tree full of fall webworm. They were feeding on the proximal ends of the tents, often while a male kept guard.*

Where did these birds come from, and why? How did they find New Hampshire? What are they eating? How does this

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modest “irruption/incursion” compare with others in recent years? What are the age/sex ratios? Are they nesting? Will we see further nesting next year, or young, or a post-breeding dispersal? How long will they stay? Despite the seeming abundance of data in eBird, answering many of these questions is incredibly difficult.

### (Other) Finches through Blackbirds

(House sparrow, finches, sparrows, bobolink, meadowlark, orioles, blackbirds)

A **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was our only notable vagrant from this set of taxa, first reported by a homeowner on June 4 coming to a feeder in Loudon. Remarkably, both Maine and Massachusetts had a Yellow-headed Blackbird the same week.

Sparrows, finches, and even blackbirds tend to be more grassland than forest birds and many of New Hampshire’s grassland specialists probably thrived in New Hampshire only when the state was more intensively farmed. The more specialized of them, for example Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows, persist today only in a few relic grasslands that places like airports provide. **Vesper Sparrow** was reported multiple times only from Concord Airport; other sites were just single reports. **Grasshopper Sparrow** has about six outposts in the state, including three airports (Concord, Keene, and Pease), the “cemetery fields” in Amherst, and a newly found site in Canterbury at Brookford Farm where a Vesper Sparrow was also reported. Woodmont Orchard in Hollis, one of their other nesting locations, showed a nice increase in birds in 2020; continued success there will depend on some intensive and detailed farm management decisions over the next few years.



*Grasshopper Sparrow by Christopher McPherson, 6-10-20, Woodmont Orchard, Hollis, NH.*

Both **Eastern Meadowlark** and Grasshopper Sparrow are now state-listed as “threatened.” Meadowlark was reported almost exclusively from the southern third of the state, at 10 or so locations and many of those reports were just single sightings. The species was most reliable at Pease, but it should

(we hope) be breeding at several other locations. There was also one unusually northern Eastern Meadowlark reported in Gorham on June 7.

**Fox Sparrows** were reported from the Turbine Access Road, Millsfield/Dixville, where they have been reported for the past five years, and from several trails in the White Mountain National Forest. Some nesting in at least one of these areas seems likely. A **Field Sparrow** at Umbagog NWR was unusual for this more southerly species; there are only a handful of eBird records this far north in the state. **Lincoln’s Sparrow** is a shy and retiring sparrow, at the southern edge of its range; as usual, there were about 15 scattered reports from around the North Country.

**Rusty Blackbird** is also at the southern edge of its



*Read about this tagged female Rusty Blackbird in the Motus story on pg. 36. Photo by Levi Burford, 5-16-20.*

breeding range in New Hampshire and is a species in some decline. eBird has the usual small number of scattered reports from the northern part of the state. The southernmost records in 2020 come from June 25 in Orford, and multiple June sightings from two separate locations in Sandwich, but looking at all of northeastern United States and Canada, there are distressingly few records in eBird. Dedicated research efforts in their breeding habitat provide more thorough coverage as reported by Carol Foss, the Rusty Blackbird Project Leader at NH Audubon:

*Thanks to the hard work and determination of field technician Levi Burford, we were able to complete a modified Rusty Blackbird field season in 2020. He surveyed more than 60 areas of suitable habitat, documented activity at 40 sites, and confirmed fledging from 17 nests, an impressive achievement for a single pair of boots on the ground! Particularly notable was the location of four individuals that received nanotags in 2019 and returned to nest in 2020.*

Excerpted from: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/2020-rusty-blackbird-breeding-season/>



**Orchard Oriole** normally reaches its northern limit in southern New Hampshire, but in 2020, there was one report from Squam Lake on June 7, and multiple reports of a single bird in Haverhill. (Orchard Orioles have been seen on the Vermont side of the river near Haverhill for the past 3 or 4 years.) **Baltimore Oriole** reached its northernmost point for the summer at Fort Hill WMA in Stratford, the same location in Coos County that hosted Willow Flycatchers.

## Warblers through Cardinals

(Warblers, tanagers, cardinal, rose-breasted grosbeak, bunting)

Overall, there is nothing unexpected to report for warblers, but for a rather surprising number of warblers, New Hampshire contains a breeding range edge. It is often an amorphous, fluctuating, and gradual edge, but that makes summer reports and breeding records for many of our warbler species all the more important, so let's discuss briefly.

Birds at the southern or southeastern edge of their range



*Palm Warbler  
(juvenile) by Steve  
Mirick, 7-25-20,  
Errol, NH.*

in New Hampshire (breeding in the northern/western part of the state) include Wilson's Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Palm Warbler, and the three budworm specialists: Cape May, Tennessee, and Bay-breasted. **Palm Warblers** were first documented breeding in New Hampshire in 1955 and have gradually expanded their range southward. The scattered summer reports from Coos, Carroll, and Grafton counties suggest that they are at least maintaining their southern territorial gains. The southernmost Palm Warbler was reported from Effingham on July 4. **Wilson's Warbler** was reported from just four locations in Coos County and one late migrant on June 1 in Portsmouth, far from its breeding range.

**Cape May, Tennessee, and Bay-breasted Warblers** are all, anecdotally at least, more numerous in recent migrations, but for the summer season New Hampshire is seeing just a handful of records. Birders reported Cape May at four locations, Tennessee Warbler at seven locations in Coos and Grafton counties, and Bay-breasted Warbler at eight locations. It is possible that we may have fewer than

usual eBird reports from the North Country as COVID-19 reduced people's inclination to travel, but the North Country is under-birded in general.

Several warblers reach a northern breeding edge in New Hampshire, including Louisiana Waterthrush and Blue-winged, Prairie, and Cerulean warblers. The most uncommon of these, **Cerulean Warbler**, may not have bred in New Hampshire at all in 2020. The only summer report of a Cerulean Warbler in the state was a presumably single bird reported three times, unusually far north near Squam Lake between June 9 and June 14. **Prairie Warbler** and **Louisiana Waterthrush** both reached their northernmost points in New Hampshire around Conway. **Blue-winged Warbler** had a couple of unusually northern reports from Webster on June 3 and New London on July 9, but generally reports of Blue-winged Warblers are clustered in the southeast. Including the reports from Webster and New London, there are just six summer reports of Blue-winged Warblers west of Route 125 in New Hampshire; it would be interesting to check some of those western sites next year for possible breeding.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that even birds whose field guide maps cavalierly show them as statewide summer residents are not always evenly distributed across the state and submitting eBird reports from where they are less common is both important and requires more diligence. Pine Warbler and even Yellow Warbler, for example, can be found in Coos County, but not widely. Conversely, birds like Yellow-rumped and Blackburnian Warblers are much less common south and east than they are in the north and west.

Tanagers and cardinals conclude our taxonomy. More commonly a spring overshoot than a summer vagrant, a single brief sighting of a **Summer Tanager** was reported from Hooksett on July 20. Still unusual north of the notches, let's give a nod to the single **Northern Cardinal** reported from Back Pond in Stewartstown, the northernmost report this summer by about 50 miles.

## Final Word

Two things strike me as I finish this summer report. First, New Hampshire avifauna can be surprisingly fluid, and summer distributions surprisingly subtle, both of which highlight the importance of accurate and frequent eBird reports. There have been significant changes within my lifetime to New Hampshire distributions of Ring-necked Duck, Fish Crow, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Palm Warbler, just to mention a few. eBird reports will be an amazing part of documenting ongoing changes.

Second, despite the vast array of eBird data, reports from low-birded areas and reports of reclusive species are still quite

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sparse. For the summer of 2020, we had just five reports of Horned Lark, 17 reports of Northern Saw-whet Owl, 25 reports of Philadelphia Vireo and even Virginia Rail had just 100 reports. We had 117 Red Crossbill reports and only three mentioned foraging behavior. For comparison, we had about 4,000 reports of Black-capped Chickadees and Red-eyed Vireos! So, explore – and keep those eBird reports coming!

## Sighting Details

The following listings provide details for the specific sightings mentioned in the summaries. Note that all sightings from the season are viewable in eBird. To view the reports of a species, go to the Explore tab and select Species Maps. Fill in the species and when the map appears, you can choose which season you want to see by selecting the Date tab and clicking the appropriate month button and selecting the year. Zoom in to see the New Hampshire reports until you see blue pins, or check off “Show Points Sooner.” Click on any pin to see the sighting details. The species with an asterisk indicate the high counts as mentioned in the summaries (waterfowl and grouse).

*Date # Location Observer*

### Mute Swan

06-03 6 Eel Pond, Rye L. McKillop, D. Prima  
06-06 8 Hinsdale Setbacks S. Mirick

### Wood Duck

07-06 55 Mt. Sunapee, Newbury B. Hopkins  
07-28 63 Pickering Ponds, Rochester R. Garrigus

### Mallard\*

07-04 250 Exeter WTP J. Berry  
07-06 62 Lake Wentworth, Wolfeboro S. Heron

### American Black Duck\*

07-04 17 Finisterre Pt., Holderness T. Michel  
07-22 15 Ossipee Park Rd., Moultonborough T. Hitchcock

### Green-winged Teal

07-22 2 Rochester WTP A. Murray, M. Fleming, D. Hubbard  
07-27 1 Dahl WS, Conway E. Clevon

### Ring-necked Duck\*

07-03 20 Sweat Meadow, Umbagog NWR, Errol S.& J. Mirick  
07-04 15 Meadow Brook wetland, Rt. 25, Sandwich K. Klapper

### Common Goldeneye

07-25 1 Magalloway R., Umbagog NWR, Errol S.& J. Mirick

### Hooded Merganser\*

06-09 18 Deer Hill WMA, Brentwood C. Duffy  
06-30 22 Panorama Golf Course, Colebrook L. Charron

### Common Merganser\*

06-28 20 Connecticut R., Monroe J. Meigs

### Ruffed Grouse\*

*Date # Location Observer*  
07-04 14 Mountain Pond Rd., Errol J. Dougherty

### Spruce Grouse\*

07-18 5 Baldface Trail, WMNF J. Longo  
07-28 5 Lincoln Woods Trail, Mt. Bond, WMNF D. Allard

### Wild Turkey\*

07-12 29 Newington Rd., Greenland R. Suomala

### Pied-billed Grebe

07-14 4 Deer Hill WMA, Brentwood E. Burgess  
07-19 7 Fort Hill WMA, Stratford P. Hunt, U. Dienes

### Chimney Swift

06-12 250 High St., Nashua J. Maher

### Virginia Rail

06-15 11 World End Pond, Salem K. Wilmarth  
06-26 14 Airport Rd., Swanzy S. Spangenberg

### Sora

06-24 3 Cranberry Pond wetlands, Rt. 12A, W. Lebanon S. Spangenberg  
07-29 1 World End Pond, Salem K. Wilmarth  
07-31 1 World End Pond, Salem K. Wilmarth

### Sandhill Crane

06-09 2 Woodmont Orchard, Hollis R.& K. Frieden  
07-09 3 Sweat Meadow, Umbagog NWR, Errol L. Burford, N. Moreau  
07-14 2 Great Brook Trail, Deerfield M. Iber

### American Oystercatcher

06-25 5 Lunging Island, Isles of Shoals S. Schulte

### Upland Sandpiper

06-19 24 McIntyre Rd., Portsmouth Int'l. Airport at Pease P. Hunt, B. Ferry

### Whimbrel

07-14 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye J. Sparrell, K. Towler

### Stilt Sandpiper



*Stilt Sandpiper by Steve Mirick, 7-11-20, Hampton, NH.*

07-11 1 Hampton Salt Marsh CA S.& J. Mirick, et al.  
07-23 1 Rt. 1A pools s. of Odiorne SP, Rye S. Varney

Date	#	Location	Observer
<b>Pectoral Sandpiper</b>			
06-09	1	Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye	L. McKillop
07-27	1	Rochester WTP	J. Maher
<b>Semipalmated Sandpiper</b>			
07-24	190	Hampton Salt Marsh CA	P. Hunt
<b>Short-billed Dowitcher</b>			
07-11	207	NH coast	S.& J. Mirick
<b>Long-billed Dowitcher</b>			
07-22	1	Pickering Ponds, Rochester	J. Sparrell, et al.
<b>Greater Yellowlegs</b>			
07-18	58	Meadow Pond, Hampton	H. Bauer
<b>Iceland Gull</b>			
06-09	1	Hampton Beach SP	M. Dow



Lesser Black-backed Gull by Leo McKillop, 7-30-20, Rochester WTP, NH.

<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b>			
07-30	1	Rochester WTP	L. McKillop
<b>Least Tern</b>			
06-16	11	Hampton Beach SP	L. Medlock
07-29	8	NH coast	S.& J. Mirick
<b>Roseate Tern</b>			
06-07	9	Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye	S.& J. Mirick
06-09	12	Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye	S.& J. Mirick
07-11	15	NH coast	S.& J. Mirick
<b>Common Tern</b>			
06-09	1	Leonard Marsh, Umbagog NWR, Errol	B. Griffith, P. Hunt
07-22	1000	White Island, Isles of Shoals	G. Clucas
<b>Forster's Tern</b>			
07-14	1	Elmwood Rd., Hancock	L. Stokes
<b>Common Loon</b>			
07-06	1	Newfound L., Bristol	C. Dolloff
<b>Wilson's Storm-Petrel</b>			
07-10	30	offshore waters, NH	C. Duffy, L. McKillop, J. Sparrell
07-24	390	offshore waters, NH	J. Sparrell, L. McKillop
<b>American Bittern</b>			
07-03	5	Old County Rd., Plainfield	P. Ackerson

Date	#	Location	Observer
<b>Least Bittern</b>			
06-07	1	Horsehide Brook marsh, Durham Pt. Rd., Durham	S. Spangenberg
07-18	4	Cranberry Pond wetlands, Rt. 12A, W. Lebanon	C. McPherson
07-18	5	World End Pond, Salem	S.& J. Mirick, K. Wilmarth
<b>Great Blue Heron</b>			
06-07	58	Horsehide Brook marsh, Durham Pt. Rd., Durham	S. Spangenberg
<b>Great Egret</b>			
07-21	1	Airport Marsh, Whitefield	D. Forsyth, D. Govatski
07-30	38	Hampton marshes	R. Stephenson
<b>Snowy Egret</b>			
07-29	31	Meadow Pond, Hampton	H. Bauer



Little Blue Heron by Jim Sparrell, 7-22-20, Rochester WTP, NH.

<b>Little Blue Heron</b>			
06-09	1	Jeness Beach, Rye	S. Mirick
07-10	1	Lancy Brook wetlands, Brookline	C. McPherson, et al.
07-16	1	Pickering Ponds, Rochester	A. Murray, K. Faucher, D. Hubbard, S. Wrisley
<b>Tricolored Heron</b>			
07-11	1	Hampton Salt Marsh CA	S.& J. Mirick, et al.
<b>Green Heron</b>			
07-22	7	Deer Hill WMA, Brentwood	C. Duffy
<b>Black-crowned Night-Heron</b>			
06-24	1	Back Bay, L. Winnepesaukee, Wolfeboro	B. Campbell
07-17	1	Centerra Pkwy., Lebanon	K. Jones, S. Griesemer
<b>Black Vulture</b>			
06-15	1	Great Bog WMA, Greenland Rd, Portsmouth	S. Bennett
06-20	2	Mt. Wantastiquet NA, Chesterfield	C. Marks-Fife, J. Curtis
06-30	1	Rt. 108, Newmarket	K. Wilmarth
07-07	2	Spit Brook Rd., Nashua	S. Miller
07-26	2	Woodward Rd., Westmoreland	R. Burnett

# SUMMER SEASON

*Date # Location Observer*

## Turkey Vulture

07-18 80 Cranberry Pond wetlands, Rt. 12A, W. Lebanon  
C. McPherson  
07-31 80 E. Conway Rd., Conway W. Broussard

## Swallow-tailed Kite

07-24 1 Deer Meadow Rd., Webster D. Floyd  
07-29 1 Winter Street Farm, Claremont J. Hayden, A. Clarke

## Red-headed Woodpecker

06-04 2 Bear Brook SP, Allenstown S. Mirick  
07-25 4 Bear Brook SP, Allenstown S. Wisley

## Red-bellied Woodpecker

06-01 1 Mt. Stanton trail, Bartlett C. Nims  
07-24 1 Mt. Field, WMNF, Bethlehem J. Gant

## Olive-sided Flycatcher

07-07 6 Church Pond Bog, Albany J. Maher

## Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

06-13 13 Mittersill Ski Area, Franconia P. Hunt  
07-05 1 McDaniels Marsh WMA, Springfield P. Hunt, U. Dienes



*Acadian Flycatcher by Jim Sparrell, 7-8-20, Gile Road Marsh, Lee, NH.*

## Acadian Flycatcher

07-03 1 Gile Road Marsh, Lee K. Dorsey, et al.  
07-28 1 Boulder Rd., Madison R. Lowry  
07-31 1 Oyster R. Forest, Durham K. Dorsey

## Willow Flycatcher

06-07 1 Cherry Pond access trail, Jefferson D. Govatski  
06-23 2 Fort Hill WMA, Stratford K. Fenton

## Fish Crow

07-16 20 Rt. 16, W. Ossipee K. Klapper

## Horned Lark

06-17 2 Panorama Golf Course, Colebrook L. Charron

## Loggerhead/Northern Shrike

07-05 1 Pack Monadnock, Miller SP R. Schulman

## Cliff Swallow

06-19 7 Scammel Bridge, Rt. 4, Dover P. Hunt

*Date # Location Observer*

## American Pipit

06-18 11 Mt. Washington Auto Rd. D. Govatski, C. Martin

## Red Crossbill

06-12 12 North Pack Monadnock Mtn., Greenfield  
R. Lockwood  
07-04 6 Great Brook Trail, Deerfield R. Suomala  
07-04 50 Gunstock Mountain Resort, Gilford V. Zollo  
07-13 40 Pack Monadnock, Miller SP S. Spangenberg

## White-winged Crossbill

06-05 12 Mt. Moosilauke, Benton E. Johnson  
06-13 20 Crawford Path, WMNF N. Tepper

## Grasshopper Sparrow

06-04 8 Woodmont Orchard, Hollis N. Hanke  
06-10 4 McIntyre Rd., Portsmouth Int'l. Airport at Pease  
R. Steber, W. Broussard

06-12 1 Dillant-Hopkins Airport, Swanzey Z. Cota  
06-15 2 Brookford Farm, Intervale Rd., Canterbury P. Hunt, U. Dienes

06-21 10 Concord Airport S. Brand  
07-31 5 Merrimack Rd., Amherst J. Ahearn

## Field Sparrow

06-26 1 Rt. 16, Wentworths Location L. Burford, K. Fenton

## Fox Sparrow

06-21 1 Turbine access road, Millsfield/Dixville  
P.& L. Charron, D. Dionne  
07-03 2 Caps Ridge Trail, WMNF J. Sparrell, K. Towler, M. Suomala

## Vesper Sparrow

06-15 1 Brookford Farm, Intervale Rd., Canterbury P. Hunt, U. Dienes  
07-11 2 Concord Airport D. Jackson

## Yellow-headed Blackbird

06-04 1 Clough Hill Rd., Loudon M.& J. DiTomaso

## Eastern Meadowlark

06-07 1 Main St., Gorham J. Dougherty  
06-17 7 Portsmouth Int'l. Airport at Pease C. McPherson

## Orchard Oriole

06-01 1 Bedell Bridge SP, Haverhill S. Turner  
06-07 1 Squam Lake, Center Harbor T. Michel

## Baltimore Oriole

06-07 1 Fort Hill WMA, Stratford L. Charron, D. Dionne

## Rusty Blackbird

06-04 1 Thompson WS, Sandwich K. MacLean  
06-23 1 Guinea Pond Trail, Sandwich K. Klapper  
06-25 6 Thomson Family Tree Farm, Orford J. MacQueen

## Louisiana Waterthrush

06-06 1 1785 Inn trails & fields, N. Conway W. Broussard

## Blue-winged Warbler

06-03 1 Couch Pond, Webster J. Kolia, R. Quinn  
07-09 1 Colby-Sawyer College, New London A. Castriotta

## SUMMER SEASON

Date	#	Location	Observer
<b>Cerulean Warbler</b>			
06-09	1	Range Rd., Sandwich	K. Klapper
<b>Palm Warbler</b>			
07-04	1	Watts WS, Effingham	K. Klapper
<b>Prairie Warbler</b>			
06-11	3	North-South Rd., Conway	L. Smith, W. Broussard
<b>Wilson's Warbler</b>			
06-01	1	South Mill Pond, Portsmouth	J. Sparrell
06-08	2	Smith Brook Rd., Pittsburg	E. Nielsen, S. Sweet
06-11	3	Scott Bog Rd., Pittsburg	K. Dorsey
06-20	1	East Inlet, Pittsburg	K. Fenton
07-21	1	Day Rd., Perry Stream, Pittsburg	H. Bauer
<b>Summer Tanager</b>			
07-20	1	Briar Ct., Hooksett	D. Williams
<b>Northern Cardinal</b>			
07-03	1	Back Pond, Stewartstown	K. Fenton

## Red-headed Woodpeckers Nesting at Bear Brook State Park

by Stephen R. Mirick



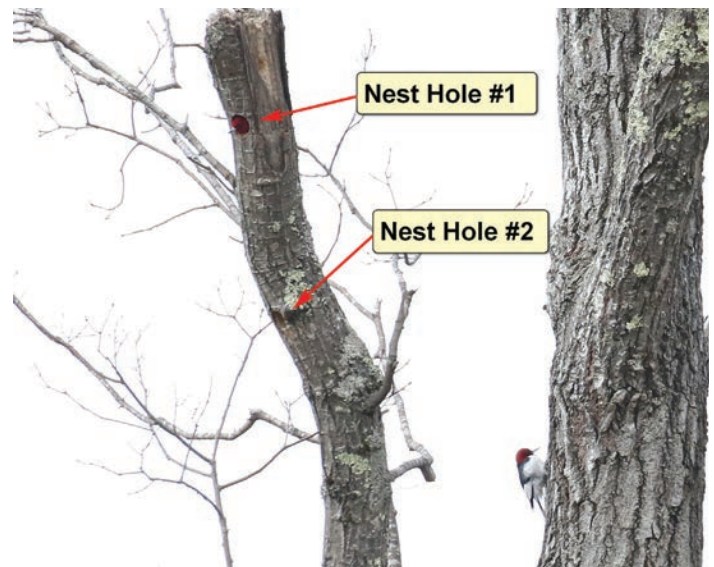
One of the young Red-headed Woodpeckers raised at Bear Brook State Park in Allentown, NH. Photo by Stephen Mirick.

Normally, it's not a good idea to wander off the trail in a remote forest, but if you're experienced and know the area well, then sometimes you can discover some interesting things. Such was the case for Susan Dionne and her son-in-law Dave Shoemaker when they decided to explore a forested area of Bear Brook State Park in Allentown while hiking

in the park on March 27, 2020. While they were cutting through the forest in order to connect with another trail, they came into a recently clear-cut area and were shocked to see an adult Red-headed Woodpecker fly across in front of them and land in an oak tree. When Susan revisited the site on April 4, she noted that there were *two* adult Red-headed Woodpeckers. Additional visits eventually confirmed the first nesting of Red-headed Woodpeckers in New Hampshire since 1995!

Although the location was rather remote, it was not too far from a maze of nearby trails and the long hike provided a wonderful retreat during a difficult summer with a pandemic that left many birders frustrated by the closures of other birding locations. A few birders regularly visited the area to keep tabs on the pair as they incubated eggs and raised two young and then started a second nest and successfully fledged two more young!

The nest holes were located in a 24± acre managed clear-cut area of the park (cut ca. 2018) that had purposely left isolated standing American Beech, White Pine, Red Oak, and White Birch trees. This type of habitat is ideal for nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers. The birds chose to nest in an isolated Red Oak tree within the clearcut and the nest hole was located in a broken off snag of the tree roughly 25 feet high. Interestingly, both nest holes (for each brood) were located in the same snag and both were at least started well before incubation began. In fact, both nest holes were present at least a month before incubation of the first brood and three months prior to the start of incubation of the second brood! Could they have been reusing old nest holes of other species? Perhaps more interestingly, did they also nest here in 2019?



The location of the two nest holes of the Red-headed Woodpecker pair at Bear Brook State Park, Allentown, NH. Photo by Stephen Mirick.

The nesting comes on the heels of a "good" fall and winter for immature Red-headed Woodpeckers in 2019-20. A total

of five individuals were reported during this time including two birds in Durham, one in Epping, one in Hampstead, and one in Seabrook.

Exact time estimates are difficult to say with certainty due to the intermittent visits; however, a rough estimate can be deduced. Below is an estimated nest chronology based on observations by Susan Dionne, Dot Currier, Chris Duffy, Mark Suomala, Susan Wrisley, and Steve Mirick.

### First Brood

*March 27* – First discovery of Red-headed Woodpecker at nest tree by Susan Dionne.

*April 4* – First confirmed sighting of two birds at nest tree.

*April 22* – Both birds going in and out of nest hole.

*May 21* – Incubation is estimated to have started based on hatching date of June 4 and two weeks of incubation.

*June 4* – Numerous forays in and out of nest hole by both birds. Small food was finally observed being brought back to the nest hole confirming hatch.

*July 8* – Fledging confirmed at 34 days old with birds seen in hole on July 7, but out of the hole on July 8. This is beyond the normal fledging time which is 24 to 31 days (Frei 2020). Is it possible the young fledged a bit earlier than this and returned to the nest hole?

*July 25* – Fledged young from brood #1 still being fed at roughly 17 days old despite incubation having started on brood #2. This is the last sighting of young from brood #1.

### Second Brood

*April 22* – Future brood #2 nest hole photographed below hole for brood #1.

*July 7* – Excavation of second hole noted even though babies still in first hole!

*July 12* – It is suspected that adults were incubating a second brood, roughly four days after fledging of brood #1!

*August 1* – Hatching of brood #2 confirmed with sounds of chicks in hole. Estimated actual hatch date a few days earlier, perhaps closer to July 27.

*August 24* – First chick from brood #2 fledged at roughly 28 days old and the next day a second chick fledged.

*September 6* – Last reported visit to nest site for the fall. One adult and two juveniles from brood #2 still present 13 days after fledging.

Double-brooding of Red-headed Woodpeckers occurs in about 50% of nests in southern parts of their range (Frei 2020); however, it is believed to be very rare in northern parts of their range and this is the first confirmed double-brood in New Hampshire. The success rate for the birds at Bear Brook of two fledged per nest is roughly in-line with published references. Red-headed Woodpeckers average five eggs per nest and fledge roughly two chicks per nest (Frei 2020).

Red-headed Woodpeckers have been present in New Hampshire since colonial times, but have gone through many fluctuations in population over the years and have never been considered common. Changes in population have been associated with many factors including clearing and regrowth of forests, periodic changes in mast (acorn and beech nuts) production, and increases in nest predators including European Starlings. They are currently considered rare and irregular in New Hampshire, as well as in all of New England, during all seasons. There are numerous summer records from as far back as the 1800s and they almost certainly nested in New Hampshire earlier; however, the first documented nesting in the State was in 1939 from Fitzwilliam (Foss 1994). Since 1950, there had been fewer than 10 nesting attempts in New Hampshire (Keith & Fox 2013). During the New Hampshire Breeding Bird Atlas in the early 1980s, two confirmed breeding records were recorded from Munroe and Rumney. Before the summer of 2020, the last confirmed breeding record for New Hampshire was from Moultonborough in 1995. That pair reportedly raised two young. Since then, there had been no confirmed nesting attempts in the State.

Red-headed Woodpeckers show strong site fidelity to nest sites and the habitat is excellent for them to nest again. Let's hope for their return in 2021!

### Data Sources & References

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*Red-headed Woodpecker by Susan Wrisley, 6-19-20, Hooksett, NH.*

# Is it a Yellow-billed Loon?

compiled by Rebecca Suomala



This loon was photographed by Christen Dolloff on 7-6-20 at Newfound Lake, NH. See the back cover for a color photo.

New Hampshire birders were excited when this photo came in – a loon with a yellow bill, so it must be a Yellow-billed Loon, right? It quickly became apparent that the identification was not as straight forward as it seemed. A yellow bill does not necessarily make it a Yellow-billed Loon. Doug Hitchcox reported that Maine has seen photos of loons with yellow bills that turned out to be Commons, so multiple features are needed to confirm such a mega-rarity.

After much review of the photos, and in particular the shape of the bill, the neck markings and the spots on the back, it was decided that this bird was a Common Loon. Steve Mirick described the features that made this a Common Loon in a post to the NHBirds email list on 7-10-20.

- 1) The overall size and shape of the bill. A Yellow-billed Loon should show a sharp angle on the lower mandible and a slight re-curve on the upper mandible that gives the appearance of an up-turned bill as if it

is looking to the sky. The Newfound Lake loon has a bill held more level, the upper mandible appears de-curved, and the size and angles are well within the range of a Common Loon.

- 2) The color of the bill. The Newfound Lake bird appears to have a yellowish bill, but it is not the brilliant ivory yellow color of a Yellow-billed Loon. The yellow on the Newfound Lake bird is a bit more gray-yellow.
- 3) The white collar markings are too finely marked and numerous. According to the *Birds of the World*, “white lines in mid-neck patch should be less than 12 for Yellow-billed Loon and greater than 12 in Common Loon.” The Newfound Lake bird shows many narrow black and white stripes consistent with Common Loon.
- 4) The back pattern. The back pattern of a Yellow-billed Loon should have larger white checkering patches. The Newfound Lake bird is darker with a smaller white checkering pattern, typical for Common Loon.

For comparison, see the photo of Maine’s first accepted Yellow-billed Loon.

The rhamphotheca is the outer surface of the bill. In most birds, it grows continuously but some parts may be shed each year. We’re probably most familiar with it in puffins, which shed part of the rhamphotheca every year after the breeding season. The impact of wear and the extent of shedding on the rhamphotheca can impact the appearance of the bill. It is thought that this may be the reason behind the yellow looking bill of the bird on Newfound Lake.

Thanks to Ben Griffith, Louis Bevier, Steve Mirick, and Doug Hitchcox for providing information and confirmation of the identification.



Maine’s first record of a Yellow-billed Loon by Luke Seitz, 10-26-10.

# Common Loon 2020 Breeding Season Highlights

by John Cooley



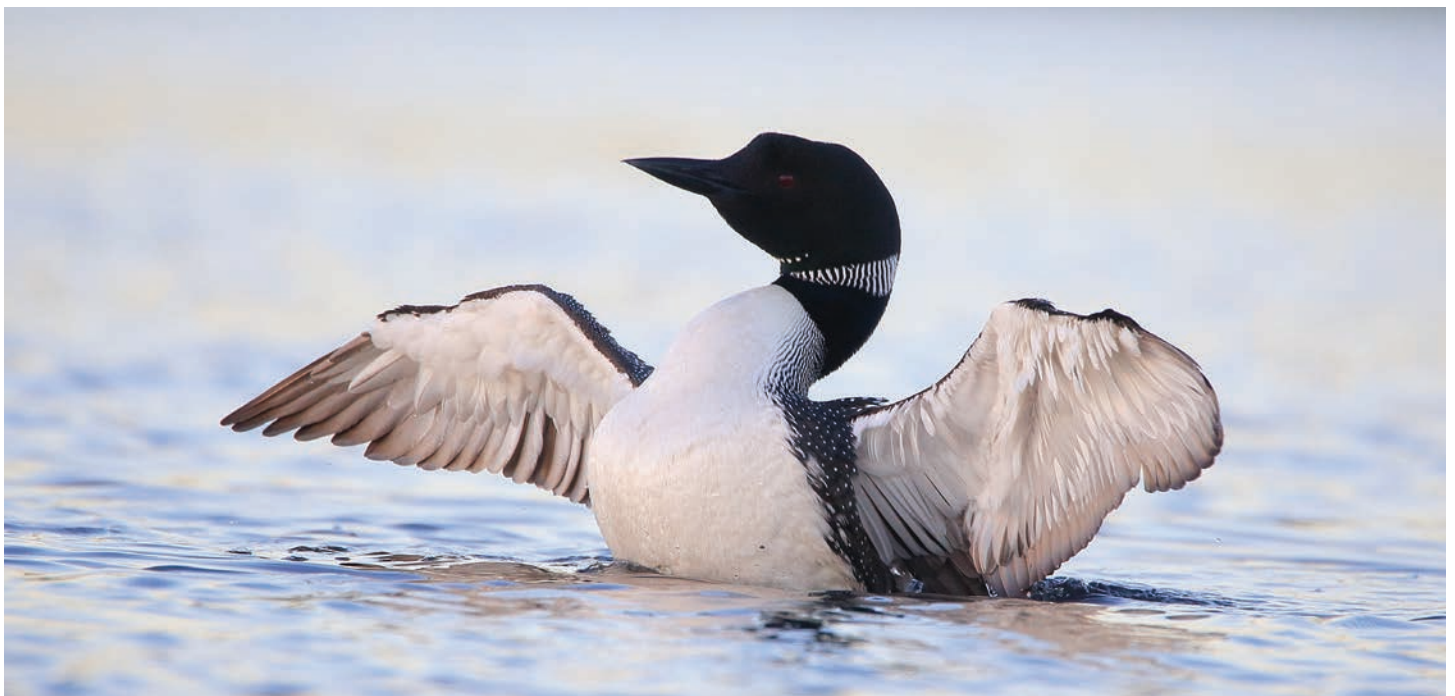
*This adult male Common Loon was originally banded in 2001 on Martin Meadow Pond, in Lancaster, NH. It was rescued as the ice formed in December 2014, rehabilitated in Maine, and released in Penobscot Bay (ME). It returned to eventually (in 2016) regain his territory on Martin Meadow Pond and continue to breed, fledging one chick in 2020. He is at least 22 years old in 2020, likely (based on average age at first breeding) at least 25. Photos by Jean Despres, courtesy of LPC.*

Surveys and photos from volunteers helped re-sight the oldest known adult loon in the northeastern US, a female on Lake Umbagog originally banded in 1993 [Ed. Note: wow!] and now in her early 30s. Trained volunteers and Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) field biologists surveyed a record number of lakes (382) and occupied or potential territories (532). They also identified banded adults dispersing into New Hampshire from Maine and Massachusetts, and several adult loons rescued, rehabilitated, and now successfully breeding again.

Buoyed by a rebound in breeding success on Squam Lake, New Hampshire's state-threatened Common Loon population produced 156 chicks (surviving to mid-August) in 2020, from 321 breeding territories. This productivity (0.49 chicks surviving per territorial pair) was slightly below average, but within the range needed to sustain the population. Observers recorded a slight gain of eight breeding pairs across the state. Almost a third (31%) of all loon chicks hatched from a man-made "nest raft," and over half of chicks (60%) benefited from a nest- or brooding-area warning sign. Unfortunately, rescues of loons entangled in fishing line continued, although rescues and collections of lead-poisoned loons were lower in 2020, with four cases, hopefully an indication that New Hampshire's lead-free fishing regulations and outreach are starting to benefit loons and other vulnerable wildlife.

To get involved or find more information, please visit: <http://www.loon.org/>.

*John Cooley is the Senior Biologist with the Loon Preservation Committee.*



*Common Loon by Scott Heron.*



# Nighthawk Breeding Summary 2020

by Rebecca Suomala, Project Coordinator



Two Common Nighthawk chicks at a nest in the Concord area, 7-3-20, Rebecca Suomala.



A female Common Nighthawk doing a distraction display to lure us away from two nearby chicks, 7-3-20, Rebecca Suomala. Watch the video on NH Audubon's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xgmGz6nDEw>

Common Nighthawks had a good nesting season in 2020, perhaps because of the warm summer and lack of storms. Most years, NH Audubon's Project Nighthawk monitoring shows a decline in the state's Common Nighthawks, but this year numbers held steady or even increased in some areas. Despite COVID-19, NH Audubon staff and volunteers were able to do some limited monitoring.

There were ten confirmed nests in the state – a fantastic number. We were able to confirm fledged chicks at four of the sites and failure at two sites (cause unknown). There were four additional sites with probable or possible nesting.

Keene confirmed a rooftop nest with one chick that stayed on site for 48 days, a record for Project Nighthawk. Brett Thelen of the Harris Center led the effort in Keene which included following the chick's progress. No other nighthawks were found in Keene this year. In the Concord area, we had five confirmed nests, the most in many years. Most nests were confirmed by the behavior of the adults, but we did find one nest with two chicks. The female did a distraction display to lure us away. This year Concord males were active as late as 11:00 pm, much later than the usual 9:30 quiet time, making for late watches. Why was this year different, and only in Concord? We have no idea!

The Ossipee Pine Barrens area was the usual hot bed of activity and we tallied a total of 13 males and 2-3 females during one watch. The Nature Conservancy did some management which improved the habitat for nighthawks at one site, resulting in a remarkable five males and at least one female at that site. The pine barrens is the only natural area with a strong population of Common Nighthawks in the state.

Nighthawk males display over a potential nest site with a fluttery flight, loud peents, and regular dives which result in a whooshing noise called a boom. One Concord site had a male displaying loudly and persistently. Check the video to hear it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1On-CRxLNC> (note that it's dark so you can't see the bird, you can only hear it).

For a copy of the full breeding summary, contact me or check the monitoring page on the Project Nighthawk web site: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/project-nighthawk/>. This project was funded by private donations and NH Fish & Game.



Female Common Nighthawk with a chick, by Brett Thelen, 7-7-20, Keene State College, NH.

# Mississippi Kites of Southeastern New Hampshire

by Stephen Mirick



*Adult Mississippi Kite feeding a fledged chick in 2008, the first year nesting was documented in New Hampshire. Photo by Jason Lambert.*

*This article first appeared in the February 2020 issue of Bird Observer (Vol. 48, #1) and is reprinted with permission. It was updated by the author in January 2021 for New Hampshire Bird Records.*

The small town of Newmarket, New Hampshire, which lies about 14 miles north of the Massachusetts state line, became famous in the birding world in 1998 with a visit from a Little Egret that stayed for several weeks and entertained hundreds of birders from all across the country. Newmarket is also famous as the former residence of many noteworthy birders including Ben Griffith, Lauren Kras, Kurk Dorsey, Christopher Ciccone, and yours truly. But starting in the early 2000s, the town has become famous for new residents—Mississippi Kites.

The story of Mississippi Kites nesting in New Hampshire is a remarkable one that dates back to 2004. At that time, there had been only two single observer sightings ever for the state and both of those came from the 1980s (Keith & Fox 2013). There were no unambiguous state records, so the species was on the hypothetical list according to the NH Rare Birds Committee.

The story began on May 30, 2004, when Robert Roy was fishing from a boat along the Lamprey River in Newmarket, NH. He reported that he saw a Mississippi Kite land in a tree 100 feet away, where it broke off a branch and carried it away as if building a nest. The record, with good descriptive details, was belatedly submitted to the NH Rare Bird Committee; however, the committee could not in good conscience accept this record due to the implausible nature of the sighting. After all, how could it be possible that a Mississippi Kite would be building a nest in New Hampshire?

Unfortunately, Roy's record was disregarded and I had just moved out of Newmarket, so there were no birders ambitious enough to try to relocate or confirm this report in subsequent years. The story would grow stale until the spring of 2008.

On June 3, 2008, Darin Franceschini reported in his first post to the NHBirds email list that he had seen a pair of Mississippi Kites along the Lamprey River in Newmarket on May 28, 2008 (Donsker 2008). He described them as having “an unmistakable white band across the secondaries and the male had bright fiery red eyes.” Once again, the birding world seemed to turn its collective head and deny the implausible. How could anyone see the fiery red eyes of a Mississippi Kite in New Hampshire? Absurd!

Finally, the “cork came out of the bottle” and the story unfolded to the birding world, when birder Ben Griffith, along with Charlie Wright, were driving through Newmarket on June 14, 2008 and spotted two Mississippi Kites flying across South Main Street. Thanks to a few phone calls and the Internet, the entire New England birding community learned of their presence and scores of birders swarmed to Newmarket and saw the birds that day.

The story became more and more amazing almost by the hour. That first day, June 14, the kites were observed gracefully feeding together all afternoon and coming down to roost and spend the night in the same area. The next day they were found again and were seen and photographed copulating. By the third day, they were seen copulating again and also building a nest. On or shortly after June 17, it was thought that an egg or eggs had been laid and incubation had started. On July 18, hatching was confirmed when a single chick was seen being fed (Ben Griffith, pers. comm.). The chick fledged in August.

With an increase of eyes focused on Newmarket, incredibly, a second nest was discovered in August of 2008, and a minimum of five adult or sub-adult Mississippi Kites were confirmed—all in Newmarket. Not only that, both nests successfully fledged a single chick.

The successful nesting of two pair of kites in 2008, combined with the number of adult and sub-adult birds in the area that year, all support the 2004 sighting and suggest that kites had been nesting, or at least attempting to nest, in Newmarket since 2004 or earlier.

Between 2008 and 2016, the kites returned to nest each year and the town of Newmarket continued to be the nexus of all kite activity. There were only a few scattered reports from individual kites in nearby towns. The primary areas of kite nesting activity were along South Main Street and Gonet Drive, less than two miles apart and near the center of

town. Each year, no more than one or two nests were found. Birders, however, spent little time in searching for additional territories or nests, which can be surprisingly difficult to find.

The 2017 nesting season was disastrous. Only a single nest was located in Newmarket. The male of that pair was struck by a car and after a long period of rehabilitation, the bird died when it flew into the wall of a flight enclosure. The female tried to raise a single chick by herself; however, the partly-grown chick fell out of the nest and the female would not feed the baby on the ground. The chick ultimately succumbed despite my best efforts, with help from others, in placing the baby up in a makeshift nest in a nearby tree. See the Summer 2017 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, Vol. 36 No.2 for the photo-illustrated story of the attempted rescue and the trials of this kite family.



*Mississippi Kite chick during the attempted rescue and relocation to a makeshift nest in a basket. Photo by Steve Bennett, 7-26-17, Newmarket, NH.*

Despite this nest failure and the death of an adult, encouraging reports were received at the end of the 2017 season of kite activity from the nearby towns of Durham and Stratham. In 2018, three nests were found with one each in Newmarket, Durham, and Stratham. The new sites in Durham and Stratham were within five miles of downtown Newmarket. All three nests successfully fledged a single chick—the first time that three chicks were confirmed to have ever fledged in the state. During the summer of 2019, New Hampshire again had three known nest territories in the same locations; however, only two of the nests were successful and two chicks fledged.

During the summer of 2020, a fourth nesting territory in the town of Greenland was discovered. This nest, like others, was in a front yard in a residential neighborhood. The nest was placed high in a Shagbark Hickory and successfully fledged a single chick. Two other nests succeeded in Durham and Stratham during 2020, but the nest in Newmarket failed. A total of three young were fledged for the summer.

Below are a few observations I've made over the 13

years since the kites were first confirmed as nesting in New Hampshire in 2008.

**Spring Arrival Dates:** Arrival dates at nest territories are generally in mid-May. My earliest recorded date is May 13; however, there are eBird reports from as early as May 9.

**Nest Location:** 100% of the nests in New Hampshire have been in residential subdivisions with mature trees. Nests almost always have been in the front, side, or rear yards of homes. This has been convenient for monitoring the nests, most of which have been visible from the road or sidewalk.

**Nest Tree:** The type of tree that the kites chose for their nests has varied considerably and nests have been found in a variety of species including Red Oak, White Pine, Sugar Maple, and Shagbark Hickory. The nest is always relatively high in the tree, under the canopy, and often difficult to see. The small scraggly nest of twigs is sometimes located in forks of outer branches and vulnerable to high wind disturbance.

**Nesting Behavior:** Unlike Mississippi Kites in other parts of the country, these kites are tolerant of human activity. The birds are oblivious to anything going on below them, including dogs barking, lawn mowers blasting, kids screaming, or hordes of birders watching them from the street nearby. Some homeowners have been tolerant as well, with youngsters setting up lemonade stands for visiting birders. Photographers, however, have proven to be invasive of the privacy of some homeowners and nest locations, for the most part, have been kept secret.

**Site Fidelity:** Site fidelity is strong, as would be expected, but the birds don't always use the same nest tree. Sometimes they take over the old nest or build a new nest in the same tree, or they may choose a nest tree up to a hundred yards away or even at a different street address.

**Number of Young:** Only a single chick per nest has ever been confirmed for all of the nests I have observed or heard about. No one has ever seen a second head sticking up out of a nest. This suggests that the kites in New Hampshire lay only a single egg. This is noteworthy because in their usual breeding range, the normal clutch size is almost always two eggs (sometimes one and rarely three [Parker 1999]). Is this a modification in their egg-laying behavior to accommodate a shorter breeding season this far north, or could it reflect a scarcity of food when the kites arrive in May and a subsequent lack of resources that the female can put into egg laying?

**Food:** Food items I've seen brought to the nests have been mostly dragonflies, cicadas, and indiscernible flying insects. One memorable observation was of one of the kites eating a bat that it dropped, then swooped down to try to catch

(unsuccessfully) before it hit the ground at my feet. In 2019, I saw an adult feed a chick a fledged juvenile Eastern Bluebird, which was the first time I saw a kite eating a bird.

**Post-Fledgling Period:** Adult care and feeding of the single chick continues well after fledging. The family group moves around the neighborhood, but generally stays in the vicinity



*Mississippi Kite fledgling by Stephen Mirick.*

of the nest. Parental care is a long process that continues right up into early September, or roughly one month after fledging. The overall reproductive process appears to take about three months: one month of incubation, one month until fledging, and one final month until independence.

**Nest Success:** Nest success seems good

considering the northerly latitude for this southern species. Accurate data has not been carefully monitored over the years; however, I think that approximately 17 young kites have successfully fledged and I know of only five nest failures (eBird). Two of the failures seem to have occurred during incubation and three occurred with young in the nest. Other than the young bird that fell out of the nest in 2017, the reasons for the nest failures have been difficult to identify. I suspect at least one or more additional failures have been the result of strong storm activity with young or eggs falling from the nest; however, avian and mammalian predators are always a possibility.

**Fall Departure Dates:** Successful adult Mississippi Kites care for their young into the first or second week of September and then all birds seem to disappear at once. The latest reported observation I can find for territorial birds is of a family group of three on September 11, 2016 (eBird).

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# The Rockingham Recreational Trail, Newfields Section

## Hiking, Biking, and Birding in Southeast New Hampshire

by Kathryn Frieden

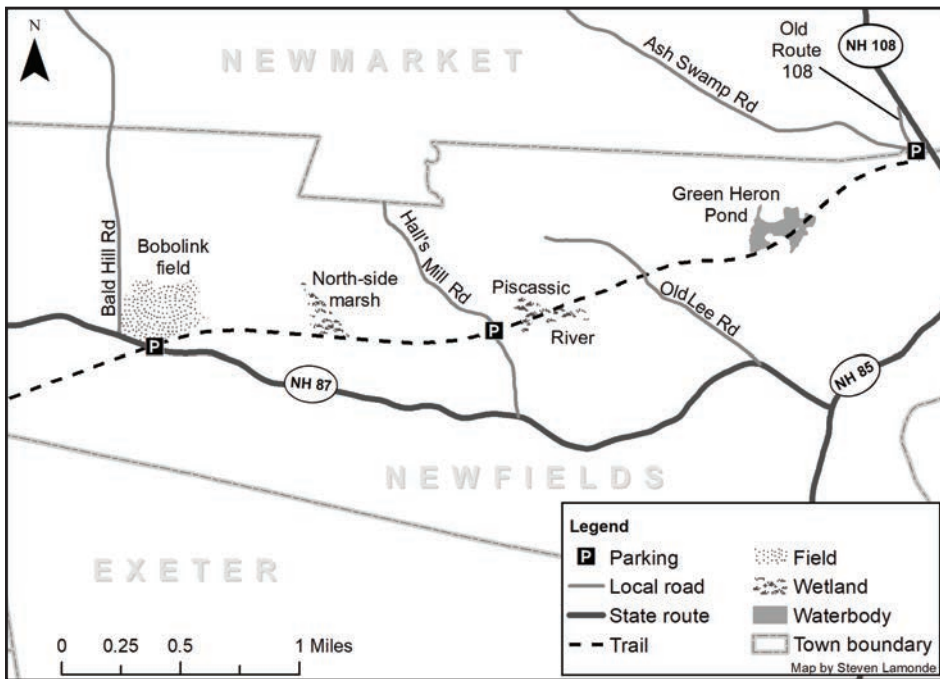
The Rockingham Recreational Trail stretches 28 miles from Newfields to Manchester and is great for birding as well as a resource for community recreation. Although one often encounters runners, bikers, and dog-walkers on weekends, there are many times when we have not met a single soul while birding early in the morning and on weekdays. The trail surface is packed dirt with a few graveled areas and of course occasional roots and rocks that need to be avoided. Most of the trail is wooded but there are also lakes, ponds, marshes, and fields that provide a good variety of birding habitats. Although some energetic adventurers could bike the entire length of the trail and back in one day, birding is probably more enjoyable and productive when the trail is divided into more manageable segments.



*One of the wetlands on the Rockingham Recreational Trail in Newfields, by Roger Frieden.*

Travel notes:

1. Always bring water. You never know when you might inhale a black fly (this is New Hampshire).
2. If you are biking, use a hybrid or mountain bike. Some parts would be difficult on road bikes.
3. Be aware of snowmobiles in the winter which are allowed in some areas (it's not like you could miss them), but no other motorized vehicles are permitted.
4. There are a few short but dark underpass tunnels. Always walk your bike through or around them.
5. Stop and look both ways before you cross a road (but you already knew that).



## Newfields

The Newfields section of the trail is a designated Hot Spot in eBird (Rockingham Recreational Trail, Newfields, Rockingham, US-NH) and deservedly so. It is 4.4 miles in length which makes a nice distance for a bike outing, but there are also good birding spots within reasonable walking distance of several access points. There is a small parking area off of Ash Swamp Road near Route 108, just south of the Rockingham Golf Course and near the old Rockingham Junction B&M Station. To get to the parking area from Rt. 108 turn onto Ash Swamp Road on the west side of the road. Follow Ash Swamp Road a short ways and, when the road curves to the right, stay straight south onto a short, dead end spur. The parking area is on the right at the end of this spur. If you are coming from the west, you can also take Rt. 152, turn right onto Ash Swamp Road and follow it all the way southeast; make a right hand turn onto the dead end spur after you pass the golf course.

In the parking area you may encounter some common but always beautiful species such as Northern Cardinal and Gray Catbird, and you will certainly start to hear birdsong. The trail heads west from the parking area, shortly entering mixed woods of pine and oak where you find many common woodland species. It is only 0.5 miles to the first major attraction, a pond with no official name, but we like to call it “Green Heron Pond” because this is where we have seen the highest count for that species at one location in New Hampshire. It is reliable for Green Herons from May through September and of course, a few Great Blue Herons. There is water on both sides of the trail which, like a causeway, is somewhat elevated, so there is a mostly unobstructed view in all directions. In the spring this is a good spot for

warblers and vireos. Eastern Kingbirds are abundant and there is usually a Belted Kingfisher or two, as well as Baltimore Orioles and Scarlet Tanagers. At the far western end of the pond, there is a more secluded section that gives a different view of the pond, so it is definitely worth checking that out. We have seen Eastern Bluebirds nesting in the marshy area on the south side of the trail there, as well as Osprey nesting to the north.

Continuing west on the trail brings you through more mixed woodlands and then across Old Lee Road. From here, it is another 0.4 miles to a crossing of the Piscassic River, which at this point is really a small stream and wetland area. The woods are filled with birdsong and it is easy to pick out Great Crested Flycatchers, Eastern Phoebes, Northern Cardinals

and a variety of woodpeckers and, of course, Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmice are everywhere. One of the pleasures of birding here is the lack of traffic noise so you can really hear the birds. If you continue biking (or walking) west, the woods become more dominated by evergreens with taller trees and less deciduous growth. The trail crosses Hall’s



*Green Heron by Steve Mirick on the Rockingham Recreational Trail in Newfields, NH.*

Mill Road and after another 0.6 miles you will reach another birding gem. There is a large marsh that stretches more than a half-mile to the north, although the line of sight probably doesn’t extend that far. In the spring, we have seen both an American Bittern and a Virginia Rail here. There are probably many more wetland species just waiting to be discovered! Two Barred Owls were once observed perched in a tree at the far north end before they were driven away by Blue Jays. There

are abundant Swamp and Song Sparrows, as well as various thrushes. Veerys seem to particularly like this area. A Solitary Sandpiper turned up once in the fall. Other less common woodland species seen here include Pileated Woodpecker, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

It is worth traveling another half-mile west to “Bobolink Field.” On the north side of the trail, there is a large unmown farm field that is good habitat for Bobolinks. We have had a high count of three, but with patience, I suspect many more could be found. This is also a good place to see an occasional soaring raptor. At the west end of the field, the trail crosses Route 87 and in another 0.75 miles you will reach Epping. There is no marker on the trail for the town line, but once you get to the back side of the Star Speedway, you will know you are no longer in Newfields.

If you are walking the trail rather than biking, a strategy that optimizes habitat variety with fewer miles to walk, would be to park at the Ash Swamp Road entrance, walk the half-mile to “Green Heron Pond” and then return to the car. Drive west on Route 87 and park at the small pull-off near the trail crossing. You can now walk back east past “Bobolink Field” and continue on to the north-side marsh, which would be a total of just under two miles out and back.

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## Backyard Birder

### Grape Jelly ... Not Just for Orioles Anymore

*Text and photos by Dan Hubbard*

On August 4, 2020, after the Baltimore Orioles and their progeny were long gone and the grape jelly dish was left to the catbirds, I was sitting on my deck in Rochester, NH reading and passively birding, when I observed a bird behavior I had never seen before. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird landed on the edge of the jelly dish and proceeded to dip its bill into the jelly. It returned periodically over the next couple of days to feed on the jelly. I knew hummingbirds had a sweet tooth, but for a liquid not a semi-solid.

Unfortunately, yellow jackets also are enamored of jelly. The hummer would use its vaunted maneuverability to try to avoid them, but to no avail. The yellow jackets also commandeered the nearby hummingbird feeder leaving the hummingbirds with just the all natural nectar of flowers. Even the catbirds were banned from the jelly. The yellow jackets were very tidy and would clean the jelly dish of every morsel.

A positive note for the hummingbirds is that they subsequently were at least able to get to their feeder again. Hopefully, they will eventually be able to sample the jelly again also.

*Editor’s Note: We did a little research on feeding jelly to birds. There were some accounts of birds falling into the jelly and getting stuck. To avoid this, put out just small amounts of jelly in small containers. Provide a bowl with a sturdy edge that small bird feet can easily grasp and isn’t slippery. It may also work to put some type of “grate” over or in front of the bowl so the hummers don’t fall in, but be sure the mesh is large enough that a hummer bill will not get stuck in it!*

*Note that there is no research on the pros and cons of feeding jelly (with its high sugar content) or whether to use jelly that is sugar-based or has high fructose corn syrup. To be on the safe side, you may want to use a jelly with no artificial ingredients that is low in sugar (there are some jellies made for feeding birds). Don’t use jelly with artificial sweeteners. You can also try putting out crushed grapes instead of the favored grape jelly.*



*A Ruby-throated Hummingbird is spotted eating grape jelly set out by the author in his yard in Rochester, NH.*



*The Ruby-throated, seen here dipping its beak into the bowl of grape jelly.*

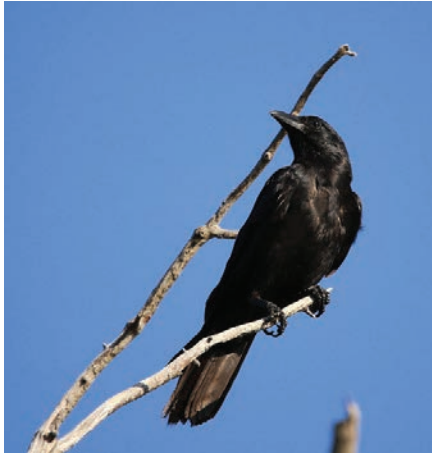
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# Summer 2020 Field Notes

Diana Stephens, Editor

## Fish Crow Predation

by Scott Heron



*Fish Crow by Scott Heron, 8-08-14, Great Pond, Kingston, NH.*

Fish Crows are cool. I first discovered them when I first moved to Great Pond in Kingston. Coincidentally, that's where Fish Crows were first recorded in the state over 40 years prior by my friend, Davis Finch. So naturally, I have a soft spot for the species, but

recently, that soft spot has become a bit sore.

Earlier in May, I spotted a Blue Jay nest conveniently placed within eyesight of my east-facing windows. I thought it a good chance to observe the nesting process. Those observations didn't last long as on one occasion, I witnessed what can only be described as a ravenous horde of Fish Crows advance on and pillage the unsuspecting Blue Jay nest. The attack started off innocently enough. An inquisitive scout hopped from branch to branch closing in on the nest, all the while being relentlessly pestered by the jays. The defenders' efforts were in vain as the crow eventually reached its target completely undeterred. Once there, it was rewarded with a prize in the form of an egg or a small nestling; I couldn't quite tell. Immediately after, three more crows showed up and one by one, they cleaned out the nest. This behavior is evidently a specialty for which Fish Crows are well-known. At any rate, that was the last of the Blue Jay nest.

The following month, a similar incident took place. This time, it was a bit more personal. Back in March, I erected my first bluebird box. Within a day, the neighborhood Eastern Bluebird pair began building a nest and two months later the first brood had fledged. Shortly after, they were busy laying the second brood. Time had passed and all seemed well until a commotion grabbed my attention. The bluebirds were up in arms over the presence of a Fish Crow. I could see a little something in the bill of the crow as it flew off. I assumed the worst. I decided to put a hole guard over the face of the nest box hoping that that would be enough to keep the remaining nestlings safe.

The next morning, I woke up to find the hole guard ineffective. I looked out the window to the calls of a Fish Crow as it landed on the box, jockeyed itself over the nest hole, and snatched up another nestling. Feeling helpless, I wasn't sure what to do. I scrambled to find a way to fix the situation. I ended up rummaging in my garage and grabbing the first suitable object I could find, a stiff wire basket. It was just the right width to fit over the front of the nest box. Bluebirds could fit through it, but hungry Fish Crow faces could not. I hastily tied the basket in place while both mother and father bluebird dive-bombed me. Escaping unscathed, I watched from a window for the next couple of hours as they took their time to settle down and become accustomed to the new addition. I was relieved when the male first entered the box and both parents eventually resumed food deliveries.

While it's not the sleekest or prettiest piece of engineering, it's been effective. Brood #2 had fledged and shortly after, brood #3 was being incubated. I'll probably install a short piece of PVC "tunnel" over the hole for a less obtrusive guard in the off-season. In any case, the bluebirds are happy and there have been no more Fish Crow incidents. As Robert Frost once wrote, "good fences make good neighbors."

## Identify Your Rose-breasted Grosbeak

by Rebecca Suomala

Mimi Wiggin sent NH Audubon a composite photo of four male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at her feeder in May of 2020 (see the inside front cover). It is a wonderful comparison showing the variation in the color, size, and shape of the bib. It was something I had never noticed before, even as a bird bander (their formidable bills give a painful bite that is quite distracting when they are in the hand). After doing a little research in *Birds of the World*, I was able to track down two banding publications that had a little information on the variation on grosbeak bibs.

It turns out that the male's bib varies from a rounded shape to a more triangular one with the streak of color extending downward for a variable length in the middle of the breast (Mutchler & Mutchler 1987). The size and the shape of the bib stays the same and can be used to identify individuals from year to year (Smith 1966). The depth of the color may increase with age but should stabilize at some point, although that could take three years or even longer.

The next time you see a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at your feeders, pay attention to the breast and take a photo. You may be able to follow "your" bird through the summer and see if it continues to visit your feeder or comes back the next year. If it's a locally breeding bird with typical site fidelity to its nesting area, it's likely to return each year and you could document how long it lives with annual photos.

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## Bluebird Helpers

by Diana Stephens and Rebecca Suomala

**D**o older bluebird siblings (fledglings) help care for their younger siblings? That was the question Jean Mullen of Portsmouth asked her fellow birders on the Massbird and NHBirds email list on June 21, 2020. Here is an excerpt from her post:

*In late March, a bluebird pair used a nest hole that was excavated in a White Birch snag by a male Downy Woodpecker. The bluebirds fledged two young. The pair started another nest in a neighbor's box but abandoned that and returned to the birch site. Both parents bring food to the nest hole. Yesterday and today, there was a fledgling with them. I assumed one bird had fledged and there was at least one that remained in the nest that stuck its head out. However, the fledgling also came to the nest hole with food.*

The question is, do bluebird fledglings help with caring for current nest mates or is it from the first brood? I did notice some blue in tail feathers of the fledgling. It still has its spotted breast and overall appears gray.

Research in *Birds of the World*\* produced the following information. Juvenile helpers are rare in Eastern Bluebirds in contrast to that of Western Bluebirds. Almost all reports are of juveniles entering nesting cavities when adults are feeding later broods. Jean's juvenile may have been checking out the cavity as much as trying to feed the young. Anecdotal reports suggest that juvenile helpers are "hindering" rather than "helping"; they do not place food far down the throat of nestlings and many items are poorly prepared (still alive and wriggling) when delivered.

Adults can be intolerant of fledglings around nest sites, but that dies down later in the breeding season. That may be why the adults were not aggressive towards Jean's fledgling at the nest cavity.

The helper bird would not be a nest mate of the young still in the cavity. Fledglings typically remain in or near cover for a week or more after leaving the nest and would not be

well enough developed to find and deliver food back to the cavity. The young only become more mobile later, as they follow the adults over longer distances.

The family group will stay together for up to three weeks. Fledglings from early-season broods often leave parental territories when they become independent. There's the possibility that Jean's "helper" bird is actually the fledgling of a different pair. It's the fledglings from later broods that are more likely to stay with parents over the winter.

- \* Gowaty, P. and J. Plissner. 2020. Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A. Poole, ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.easblu.01>

## Osprey Fledging at Great Bay NWR

Text and photos by Steve Bennett



Avid birder Steve Bennett took this photo of Ospreys learning how to fly at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, NH on July 28, 2020.

**T**here are two long-established Osprey nests at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, both inside the former weapons storage area. In 2020, one nest had three chicks, the other had two. On July 26, I watched two chicks from the front nest either fly for the first time or they were both very recently fledged.

They could fly pretty well, but neither had mastered the art of landing. They were overshooting the nest and then trying to drop in at the last second. Once that resulted in the bird bouncing right back out of the nest. A couple of times they were short of the nest and crashed into the side.

One of the adults was perched on a crossbar a couple of hundred feet from the nest. It took each of the fledglings at least three attempts before they finally landed on the crossbar with the adult who was waiting there with a fish.

As none of them appeared to get hurt, all in all, it was pretty entertaining.



## A Virginia Rail in Epping?

by Greg Tillman

Rails are notoriously under-reported. They are shy, rarely fly, and inhabit squishy and un-walkable places. They are one of those birds you have to actually look for, and many of us (including me) don't do that enough, unless you get a little push, maybe.

One morning in mid-June, I was doing my usual dog-walk at the Burley Farm in Epping, near the beaver bog, when I heard the distinct "kiddick" call of a Virginia Rail. I was pretty excited, I haven't had a rail there in years. Sure enough, as I crested the hill, I heard it again, clear as could be. "Kiddick, kiddick," and I was staring right at a mockingbird giving the call!

The question was, just where did the "mocker" learn that? I was now well motivated! On my next walk there several days later on June 21, I brought my equipment and, sure enough, an actual Virginia Rail responded to a brief recording. I never did see it. Clever mockingbird! I wonder how many years I missed a Virginia Rail here, because I never looked.

## The Pine Siskin and the Goldfinch

Photos by Peg Ackerson

On May 15, Peg Ackerson observed a female Pine Siskin and a male American Goldfinch mating on her tray

feeder in Center Lyme, NH. Peg noticed the single Pine Siskin over several days and then observed it mating with the goldfinch. After she spotted this odd couple mating on her feeder, she had to take her feeder down because of bears. Unfortunately, she did not see any hybrids later on. As this bird watcher told us, "The Pine Siskin ruled the feeder. When she was present, only her mate was allowed to stay."



## A Very Surprised Sanderling

by Jon Woolf



A Sanderling trying to land on the back of a Humpback Whale named "Spoon." Photo by Jon Woolf, 7-21-20.



On July 21, 2020, I went out with Granite State Whale Watch on their afternoon whalewatch out of Rye Harbor. It was a fairly ordinary whalewatch for midsummer: a few gulls, a few terns, a scattering of Wilson's Storm-Petrels and whales, of course. Around 3:15 pm, we came across two Humpback Whales, identified as "Spoon" and "Pinball," peacefully enjoying an afternoon nap. They were drifting at or just below the surface, coming up every couple of minutes to breathe, a behavior called *logging* by whale biologists.

After we had been following Spoon and Pinball for about ten minutes, a third player came on stage, a small sandpiper. My guess is that it was migrating and was kind of tired, flying low and looking for a place to land and rest. Whatever the reason, it saw a large black rock just above the water's surface and decided to land there.

What it didn't know was that the "rock" was Spoon's back. Now, you might think that a thirty-ton whale wouldn't even feel the touch of a two-ounce bird landing on its back. You'd be wrong. Spoon jerked awake instantly and flinched violently, scaring the bird back into the air. Pinball also woke up. Both whales dove, then breached several times before settling back down. Spoon then spent the next ten or fifteen minutes in energetic behaviors like flipper-slapping.

I managed to snap a couple of pictures of bird and whale. The extreme range made for fuzzy pictures, but enough detail is visible to identify the shocked shorebird as an adult Sanderling.

I've been going on whalewatches four or five times a year for more than ten years and I've never seen anything like that before. I've seen gulls get too close to a feeding whale as they tried to snatch up stray fish, but I've never seen, or even heard of, a migrating bird trying to *land on* a whale.

Amazing just amazing!

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# Pandemic Backyard Birding

by Iain MacLeod

One of the *very few* upsides of this pandemic was spending more time at home...in the spring...when birds are migrating and arriving on their nesting territories. As the weather warmed and I could crack a window or leave a door open while working from home and eventually move my laptop to the screen porch, I was very aware of (perhaps eager for anything normal) the birds in my yard.

I added five new species to my Ashland yard list in 17 days between May 17 and June 3: Eastern Whip-poor-will, Alder Flycatcher, Brant and both Louisiana and Northern Waterthrush. In 2019, I added just one new yard species all year. In 2018, I added five, same in 2017, just four in 2016, five in 2015, and four in 2014. You get the picture. Spending more time at home meant I was there when that Alder Flycatcher was calling for just 20 minutes rather than being in the office.

My adding of whip-poor-will was probably less to do with the Pandemic than the adding of a screened-in section of the porch, allowing me to spend time late into the evening mosquito-free, when the “whip” started calling.

Other birders noted the same home birding uptick. Phil Brown added three new species to his yard list: a Snow Goose flock in March; an “overdue” Peregrine Falcon in April during the HMANA Raptorthon; and an “overdue” Yellow Warbler in May. That brought his Hancock yard total to 155 “...after 10 months of stagnation with the yard list, and almost nine years in this yard.” Phil added, “The other measure I see as interesting is the monthly totals that I’ve been tracking since we moved here. Since the pandemic, I’ve set new monthly species records seven months in a row with some large increases over the past highest total for a given month. May of 2020 was a good example as 108 yard species that month shattered the previous high of 91.”

I loved how Phil described the advantage of spending more time at home:

*I'd say the real story for me was the connection to individual birds during spring and their life histories through a newfound interest in the 'slow birding' approach. I made several nest videos for NH Audubon during this time as I was finding many nests around the house. A Broad-winged Hawk pair that nested just a few hundred feet from the house was the most exciting and we had the incredible opportunity to watch two nestlings grow and be fed – meals such as moles, birds, and a bat! We also discovered nests of Ovenbird, Pine Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Phoebe (four attempts to finally raise a successful brood by early July!), Eastern*

*Bluebird (the male was killed by the local Cooper's Hawk), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-eyed Vireo, Hairy Woodpecker, Mourning Dove, and House Wren. We saw fledglings of Winter Wren, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Blue Jay. It was amazing to see just how many nests had failed on their first attempt.*

In Webster, Bob Quinn too had lots of time at home:

*Life in 2020 has often been bleak but being home almost every day from March through October has allowed me an unprecedented opportunity to observe the behavior of my local birds. After years of creating a bird friendly yard, I had time to add a simple, but very effective, running water feature and it has been a resounding success, especially for warblers. I have seen (and video-recorded) at least 18 species of warblers out of a total of 20 species of warblers that have visited my yard this fall. The initial response from the birds was instantaneous, perhaps because of the drought and the daily antics and entertainment has been priceless. Some of the best “aquatic” moments have included:*

- *Unusual species and/or plumages of Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler (showing its red crown), a confusingly dull Cape May Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Canada Warbler.*
- *Combinations of birds including Bay-breasted and Blackpoll Warblers side-by-side; two Ovenbirds together; four species together, twice; and one memorable day when there were **six** species of warblers bathing at the same time (Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Nashville, Blackpoll, Northern Parula, and Blackburnian).*

*It has been a fabulous show and I am now looking forward to next spring's version!*

I too had opportunities to observe more closely some of the daily activities of the common birds around my home. The House Wrens were a highlight. The male claimed several boxes around the house and escorted the female to each. She eventually chose a box right outside the garage. I was surprised to see both wrens constantly skulking in the flower beds around the porch. They looked like little mice running along the ground as they hunted for spiders. I got to witness the fledging of their five chicks and photographed them as they crowded in the hole and each took the “great leap.”

The most intriguing thing to me was the behavior of the male at the end of the day. I assumed it was the male . . . perhaps I should just characterize it as the one in the pair “not incubating or brooding during the night.” It would go



One of the highlights of backyard birding during the pandemic – nesting and fledging House Wrens. Photo by Iain MacLeod, 6-26-20.

to the same nest box near dusk (not the one they raised their brood in) and go through an elaborate “dance” around the hole, flicking its wings repeatedly which made an audible sound as the feathers hit the rim of the hole (like a hand fan being flicked). It would go through this ritual for upwards of 20 minutes before apparently dropping out of sight into the shrubs nearby. I never actually saw it go into the hole to roost. I still don’t know what that was all about. Was it drawing attention to that box (as opposed to its actual nest)? It seemed counter-productive to make such a fuss at a box you intended to roost in. It was nice to have the time to observe this mystery.

So, as we head into year two of this pandemic, try to seek the silver linings wherever you can and enjoy the fascinating birds in your yard.

## Nesting Stories

*Text and photos by Robert A. Quinn*

*Bob Quinn was the former Summer Editor for New Hampshire Bird Records and knows that the summer season is all about nesting – at least for the birds. He brings that focus to his observations also, paying attention to nesting behavior, even if it begins during the peak of spring migration in May. Here are just a few of his observations of breeding behavior that show how much there is to watch for no matter when we are birding. Thanks to Diana Stephens for compiling these stories. – Ed.*

### Three Species Use Caterpillar Silk for Nesting

Being home every day during the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed me to see more bird behavior than is typical for me and these incidents exemplify that fact. Over ten years ago, I planted dozens of crabapple trees in my yard in Webster. Many of them are now quite sizeable and productive. In May 2020, I observed **three different species** taking Tent Caterpillar “silk” from the same crabapple tree for nesting material.

**Pine Warbler** on May 7 and 10, 2020. I watched it as it came back repeatedly for silk. This warbler, or possibly another, was also seen gathering dry nesting material from the ground on May 10.

**Eastern Phoebe** on May 16, 2020. What is most interesting about this is that these phoebes had started construction of their nest on May 4, 2020 (itself a fun observation opportunity), therefore this silk was the final lining before egg laying which began on May 20.

**Black-throated Green Warbler** on May 25, 2020. This sighting was a classic “where’s the bird?” moment because



*Black-throated Green Warbler gathering silk from a Tent Caterpillar nest on May 25, 2020.*

even though I know that Black-throated Green Warblers nest near my house, they had been very inconspicuous this spring. This female, however, was persistent in coming in for the fine silk. See the video on NH Audubon's YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/5zUakzIfkwU>

## Red-breasted Nuthatches at Nest Hole

Birding in northern New Hampshire on May 20, I spied a Red-breasted Nuthatch with food in its bill. But it did not eat this food, instead it flew closer to us. "Aha!" I said to my field companion. "Watch this bird because it is probably going to feed someone else." Sure enough, it flew to a hole in a nearby tree and fed a female who was just visible in the cavity. Bingo! Nesting. Fast forward to June 9 and we are back at the same tree. Almost immediately, a Red-breasted Nuthatch appeared with food in its bill and flew right into the nest hole. Double Bingo! Feeding babies. The bird popped out and flew off just as another adult was cleared for landing and repeated the "touch and go" maneuver. This happened repeatedly in rapid succession which means that whatever the adults were feeding their young could be found quite close to the nest tree. Bingo, Bango, Bongo!

## The Trials and Tribulations of a Feisty Killdeer



*This nesting Killdeer braved crowds, dogs and horses to keep its eggs safe on a sandbar in Boscawen, NH.*

On June 22, 2020, I brought my grandkids down to the Merrimack River in Boscawen. While exploring an extensive sandbar, we discovered a very vocal Killdeer. We immediately backed off to observe her. She soon returned to a particular spot and crouched down. We slowly moved closer and eventually saw that she was sitting on four eggs. Backing away once again, we left her alone to incubate her clutch. It was an exciting and memorable experience for the junior naturalists.

I went back two more times to check on her status and each time all was well. This was true even as the sandbar grew larger and the weather warmed, which lured more people, dogs, and even horses (!) to visit. I never did find out the rest of her story because by my third-time follow-up visit, the Killdeer had moved on. I suspect they were successful, though, because as the summer progressed, so did the number of post-breeding Killdeer on the sandbar, culminating with a maximum of 20 on August 23.

## Red-eyed Vireo Found on Nest



This Red-eyed Vireo was found sitting on a nest at Pawtuckaway State Park in Nottingham, NH on 06-17-20 in almost the *same* spot where I found one nesting in 2015. That same morning, we watched a pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks building a rickety looking nest directly over the road. A few weeks later, that nest was completely gone. Perhaps because of inexperienced birds? Poor quality construction? Poor location? We shall never know.



*Tufted Titmouse with a beak full of fluff. Photo by Bob Quinn.*

# A Birdbath with Karma

*Text and photos by Ruth Smith.*

In the summer, the only bird feeders I put out are for hummingbirds. There is a lot of natural food in my rural yard to help birds meet their dietary needs – native shrubs with berries and nuts, flowers that produce seeds, and insects throughout the meadow, woods, and in the garden (I count on the birds to “harvest”



*Ruth Smith's granite birdbath.*

them). Plus, I don't want one more reason for bears to visit. My perspective on wildlife has changed a lot since I became a chicken keeper! Over the years, however, I've put out various birdbaths during the summer, all with limited success. The summer of 2020 was a different story.

In spring of 2020, I inherited a rustic stone birdbath that had been hand chiseled for my grandfather many years ago. I don't ever remember it not being in his yard, on the ground under a large spruce tree near his bird feeders. He loved to watch and spoil “his” birds. I guess that passion runs in the family.

In deciding where to place the birdbath in *my* yard, I looked for a location with similar characteristics to where it had been in my grandfather's yard. It should be under a tree or shrub for cover, but in an area that was open enough for the birds to find it and for us to watch the comings and goings of those who visited. I guess we chose well because that hunk of carved out granite became a magnet for birds throughout the summer.

Perhaps the bird activity was heightened by the drought and limited options for finding water. Maybe I was seeing more avian visitors because I was working from home and able to watch more closely (a silver lining to the pandemic stay-at-home order). Or it could be that my grandfather's birdbath, created lovingly by a man who admired Grampa as a mentor and teacher, came with special karma.

Whatever the reason, the birdbath provided constant distraction for me and a wonderful resource for feathered

visitors. I normally tally an annual yard list, but the constant flutter around the granite basin inspired me to keep a “birdbath list” as well. Over the course of the spring, summer and fall, I recorded 32 species that drank and/or bathed in Grampa's birdbath. One day in September (9-22-20), there were 15 species that paraded through the water.

Highlights included the entire bluebird family that had fledged from the nest box near the garden. Parents and three or four young splashed about so vigorously I almost always had to refill the bath when they were through. They looked like they were having such fun, like a bunch of kids at the beach. Later in the season the Tufted Titmouse parents brought their family too – seven of them all together on a daily basis, about the same time each afternoon.

Most of the visits were by solo bathers though. A parade of warblers made their appearances including Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, and Black-and-white Warblers, a Northern Parula, Common Yellowthroat and my personal favorite, the Louisiana Waterthrush. The list goes on. Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos came down from the canopy to drink. So did the Scarlet Tanager! Such a close view, and without the usual neck strain, made that sighting particularly rewarding. A male Indigo Bunting and an oriole added to the rainbow of colors that adorned the gray stone.

Both species of local nuthatches and two kinds of woodpeckers (Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Downy) added some variety. The usual yard birds, Black-capped Chickadees, Blue Jays, robins and catbirds, were more entertaining than usual when they took turns dipping their beaks or flapping their wings and preening in the water. Sparrows (Chipping and White-throated), goldfinch, and Purple Finch joined the list as well.



*The local fowl at the birdbath.*

It turns out that birdbaths, like bird feeders, also attract squirrels and chipmunks. Watching them lap water was fun and I never felt the urge to shoo them away as I do when

they are consuming purchased sunflower seeds. Oh, and I must not forget the domestic fowl; my chickens were regular visitors and the only ones that stayed long enough for me to get a photo.

The constant use of the birdbath required some vigilance on my part; cleaning and refilling it several times a week was common during the hottest part of the summer, but I didn't mind. It was a small task that provided an astounding reward.

I look forward to spring when the birdbath will once again hold water instead of ice. I wonder if my birdbath list will grow or shrink in 2021. I plan to take better notes and pay attention to the variety of behaviors that are displayed. When we provide resources that bring the birds closer to us, we have an opportunity to observe field marks and behaviors that aren't always easy to see in the field. Like the various feeding strategies that we witness at the bird feeders, I now know that drinking and bathing behaviors vary between species as well.

Watching birds helps me slow down, be more observant and feel connected to nature, but I also love the way it connects me to people. I'm grateful that Grampa's birdbath has brought more birds to my yard, but also that a piece of hard granite can keep alive the memory of a kind and gentle man who passed on his love of birds to me.

*Ruth Smith has been watching and enjoying birds for as long as she can remember (thanks in part due to her grandfather's influence). She spent 24 years working as an environmental educator with NH Audubon. As author of the "Take Me Outside" column in the Concord Monitor, she shares her natural history knowledge monthly with the public.*

Species observed at Ruth Smith's birdbath from spring through fall, 2020.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Yellow-rumped Warbler*
Downy Woodpecker*	Black-throated Green Warbler*
Easter Phoebe	Blackburnian Warbler
Blue Jay*	Black-and-white Warbler*
Black-capped Chickadee*	Louisiana Waterthrush
Tufted Titmouse*	Common Yellowthroat*
Red-breasted Nuthatch*	Scarlet Tanager
White-breasted Nuthatch	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Indigo Bunting
Eastern Bluebird	Chipping Sparrow*
American Robin	White-throated Sparrow*
Gray Catbird	Dark-eyed Junco
Blue-headed Vireo*	Baltimore Oriole
Red-eyed Vireo*	Purple Finch
Northern Parula*	Pine Siskin
Black-throated Blue Warbler	American Goldfinch*

\*seen on 9/22/20 (among other days) - largest single day count

## Motus is Underway in New England

by Carol Foss

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is undergoing a major expansion in New England. Originally designed to track shorebird migration, the automated radio telemetry network has become an international collaboration supporting research on songbirds, bats, and even migratory insects such as Monarch butterflies and green darners. While satellite transmitters can document the travels of larger birds such as raptors and seabirds, the transmitters are too heavy for small songbirds. The lightweight Motus nanotags can be attached to very small birds and even large insects, revolutionizing the tracking potential. We may finally be able to determine when and where our small songbirds go, if we have a wide enough network of Motus antennas.

NH Audubon is at the forefront of a regional collaborative creating an inland network of Motus receiving stations in the northeastern US. This ongoing effort received funding in 2020 from the US Fish and Wildlife Service through a \$998,000 Competitive State Wildlife (C-SWG) grant, matched by \$357,000 of private funds and in-kind services, which will provide funding to install 50 Motus receiving stations throughout New England over the next three years. NH Audubon's Carol Foss, Marc Nutter, and collaborators are in the process of planning and implementing the installation of New Hampshire's receiving stations in 2021. The goal is to arrange the receiving stations in several "fence lines" across the region, designed to detect any nanotagged animals migrating through the region.

Nanotags are tiny radio transmitters that all transmit on the same frequency, but with different pulse patterns. Receiving stations have antennas that record data from tags that pass within an approximately 15-km radius. Volunteers download the data and send it to a data center where signals are matched with the associated animals. What's more, most stations will be connected to the cellular network and can upload this data directly to the Motus servers, making important migratory data available to both researchers and educators in near-real time.

Motus technology has already been deployed in our Rusty Blackbird research with fascinating results. Four individuals that received nanotags in 2019 returned to nest in 2020. One of these individuals was never detected at any Motus receiving stations during fall or spring migration, but arrived safely back on the breeding grounds and nested about a third of a mile from her 2019 nest site. Eight other nanotagged individuals were detected by 18 receiving stations in seven states from Connecticut to Georgia,

four on both spring and fall migrations and four on fall migration only.

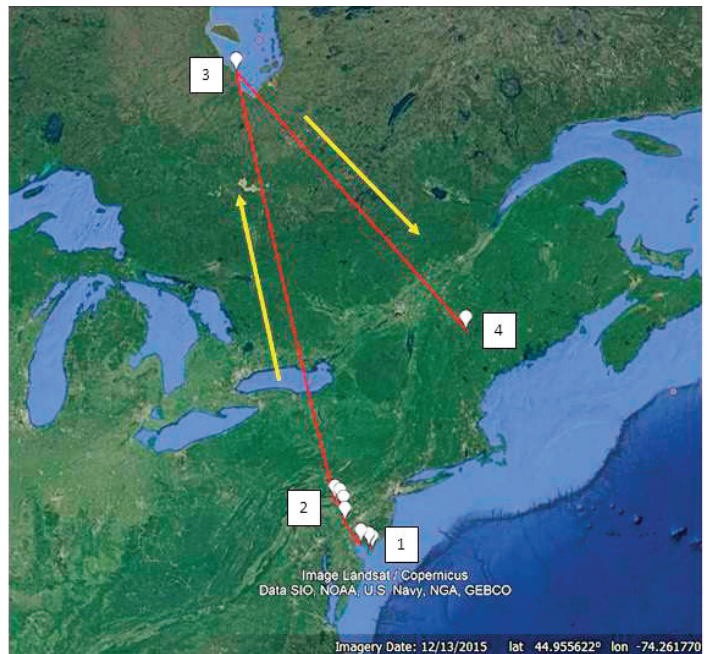


*This tagged female Rusty Blackbird was detected once during fall migration and spent nine days in the vicinity of a Motus receiving station on the way back north. She built her nest this year less than 200 ft. from her 2019 nest site. Photo by Levi Burford, 5-16-20.*

A receiving station in Dixville installed in 2019 located not only local Rusty Blackbirds but also detected passage of migrating Semipalmated Sandpipers tagged in Canada and Brazil, an American Woodcock on its migration (see Figure 1 on the inside front cover), Red Knots tagged in South Carolina and New Jersey (Figure 2), a Whimbrel tagged on the shores of Hudson Bay, and a Willow Flycatcher tagged in Colombia. We look forward to learning about the travels of other migrants passing over New Hampshire and New England when the New England Motus network is up and running!

To learn more about the New England Motus Project or how you can help, contact Carol Foss ([cfoss@nhaudubon.org](mailto:cfoss@nhaudubon.org)) or Marc Nutter ([mnutter@nhaudubon.org](mailto:mnutter@nhaudubon.org)).

You can read more about Motus and the 2020 Rusty Blackbird field season at: <https://nhbirdrecords.org/notes-from-the-field/>



*Figure 2. Red Knot tagged on Cape May, New Jersey, by Motus receiving stations in the United States and Canada.*

- 1 – May 21-31, 2019, migration stopover, Cape May, NJ.
- 2 – June 1, 2019, passage through eastern Pennsylvania.
- 3 – June 2, 2019, west shore of James Bay, Ontario.
- 4 – August 9, 2019, passage over Dixville, NH!

## Rusty Blackbird Nest Photos

Nest site photos from the Rusty Blackbird research project led by NH Audubon Biologist Carol Foss. Photos by Levi Burford described by Carol Foss.



*This Rusty Blackbird nest (left) is in a typical location, on intertwined branches of two young spruces. The other nest (above) in a small speckled alder is the first Rusty Blackbird nest we have found in a hardwood in 10 years of research!*

# Answer to the Photo Quiz

by Susan Wrisley



See the Inside Front Cover for a color version of this photo.

Spring brings in colorful birds with breeding plumage that's so distinct they can't be mistaken for anything else. We could talk about something like that, but it would make for a very short article, leaving me with time on my hands and no excuse to avoid cleaning my house. So, in the interest of saving myself from vacuuming, let's take a look at this nice, nondescript, gray quiz bird instead.

Our quiz bird is presenting us with its back and the lower part of its bill is in shadow, making it difficult to see if there's any color; however, there are still clues that will give us a positive identification. The shape of a bird's bill will usually bring us to the correct family of birds, so we'll start there. It has a medium length bill that is heavier based than a warbler's, more pointed than a vireo's, not chunky or wedge shaped like a sparrow or finch, but is just right for a bird in the tyrant flycatcher family *Tyrannidae*. This family of birds includes Empidonax flycatchers (Willow, Alder, etc.), kingbirds, phoebes, pewees and larger flycatchers such as Great Crested.

Now that we know which family our bird belongs to, we can start eliminating the obvious mismatches to narrow the field further. The first to go are kingbirds. Their larger size and more massive bills don't fit our bird at all. Empidonax flycatchers are the next to go, since they are quite a bit smaller than our quiz bird and generally have more prominent wing bars and eye ring. This leaves us with just three possible birds that occur regularly in New Hampshire: Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Classic field marks for Olive-sided Flycatcher include a "vest," or the darkly streaked patches to either side of their breast, a proportionally large bill, and short tail. While we can't see the quiz bird's breast, we can see that its bill isn't particularly large, nor is its tail very short. This means we can confidently rule out Olive-sided Flycatcher (see the Fall 2007

issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, Vol. 26 #3, for the Olive-side Flycatcher Photo Quiz).

We are now down to just two possibilities, Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Wood-Pewee. This should be fairly simple because we know that phoebes bob their tails and pewees have orange lower mandibles, except, phoebes sometimes don't bob their tails, and juvenile pewees can have all dark bills, so it's helpful to know other ways to identify them.

Checking the calendar is a good way to start. Wait, check the calendar, not a field guide? Yes, check the calendar because phoebes are early migrants and begin showing up in New Hampshire in March, while pewees don't arrive until May. If the quiz photo had been taken in March or April, this would almost certainly be a phoebe and I could end the article here. However, in the interest of avoiding housework, I selected a photo that was taken on May 31, which means it could be either bird. Likewise, in the fall, pewees depart by the end of September, while phoebes stay through October, with some lingering into November.

It's not possible to discuss phoebes and pewees without mentioning their songs, mostly because their songs are their names. Phoebes sing loudly and often, belting out a quick, raspy "fee-bee", not to be confused with the slow but clear, mournful "fee-bee" of a Black-capped Chickadee. I was once told that phoebes sound like frantic mothers calling their children – a fitting description. Pewees also sing their name, but have a more relaxed, whistle-like "peeeea-weeeea" which almost sounds like a complaint. Although their songs are definitive, they often occur in the same areas, so beware of hearing one while seeing the other.



Eastern Phoebe (L) by Alan Murray; Eastern Wood-Pewee (R) by Charlie Nims.

When we put a phoebe and pewee side-by-side, it's easy to see that despite looking similar, there are some obvious differences. Starting at the top, we can see the back part of the phoebe's crown is more rounded, while the pewee's is more peaked. Of course, birds can raise and lower the feathers on their head, so this may not always be a reliable field mark.

The next thing we see is the phoebe's small, finely pointed, all black bill, as opposed to the pewee's heavier bill with



orange on the lower mandible. The pewee's orange lower mandible is generally a reliable field mark, but as noted above, beware of juveniles with all dark bills or birds that have only a little orange at the base of the bill. Lighting conditions and shadows can also hide color.

As we move down the bird, we can see the phoebe has only weak wing-bars while the pewee has more obvious, buffy (juvenile) or whitish wing-bars. A little further down the wing, we can see that the primary extension (the distance the primary feathers extend past the end of the longest tertial) on the phoebe is much shorter than on the pewee. This is one of my favorite field marks since it tends to be obvious and it holds true for both adults and juveniles.



*Eastern Phoebe (L) by Alan Murray; Eastern Wood-Pewee (R) by Charlie Nims.*

The tail is a fitting place to end, and here we see that the phoebe outshines the pewee with a noticeably longer tail. The tail length can be a handy field mark when a bird is perched on a thin branch with its breast facing forward and its tail hanging down. Even if you cannot see the bill color or the primary extension, the tail will help you determine which one you are looking at. Finally, no description of an Eastern Phoebe can be complete without mentioning tail bobbing. Yes, phoebes are almost always bobbing their tails...except when they're not.

Now that your mind has been filled with visions of primary extension and tail lengths, let's go back and take another look at our quiz bird. It has a peaked crown, medium size bill, long primary extension, and medium length tail. If the bill were in better light, orange would be visible on the lower mandible. Yes, our quiz bird is an Eastern Wood-Pewee!

Bonus challenge: Is this a phoebe or pewee? Once again, we can't see the color of the lower mandible, but enough other clues are there. Photo by Alan Murray. Answer at the end.



### Eastern Wood-Pewee

- Peaked hind-crown
- Medium sized bill with orange lower mandible
- White-ish or buffy (juvenile) wing-bars
- Long primary extension
- Medium length tail
- No tail bobbing
- Song is a whistle-like "peeea-weeeea"
- Arrives in New Hampshire in May
- Departs by the end September



### Eastern Phoebe

- More rounded hind crown
- Small, finely pointed, all black bill
- Weak or no wing-bars
- Shorter primary extension
- Long tail
- Tail bobbing
- Song is a quick, raspy "fee-bee"
- Arrives in New Hampshire in March
- Departs by the end of October

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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

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# Photo Gallery:

## Nesting Least Terns



6-20-20

A record ten chicks fledged from the beach in Hampton in 2020. Least Terns are federally endangered and returned to nest on New Hampshire beaches in 2015 after being absent since 1960. We did a Photo Gallery of that first nest back in the Summer 2015 issue (in black-and-white) and we're delighted to present more irresistible images, in color this time, of the nesting Least Terns at Hampton Beach State Park, NH in 2020.

*Photos by Debra Powers.*



6-22-20



6-26-20



7-6-20

# Summer 2020 Rarities



*Swallow-tailed Kite by Abigail Clarke, 7-29-20, Winter Street Farm, Claremont, NH.*



*Is this a Yellow-billed Loon? See the article inside for the answer. Photo by Christen Dolloff, 7-6-20, Newfound Lake, NH.*



*Yellow-headed Blackbird by Steve Mirick, 6-6-20, Clough Hill Rd., Loudon, NH.*



*Sandhill Crane pair with a colt – the first confirmation of breeding at Umbagog NWR. Photo by Nancy Moreau, 7-9-20, Sweet Meadow, Errol, NH.*



*Long-billed Dowitcher by Charlie Nims, 7-22-20, Rochester WTP, NH.*



*Little Blue Heron by Debra Powers, 7-21-20, Pickering Ponds, Rochester, NH.*