

# New Hampshire

## BIRD RECORDS



WINTER 2020-21

Vol. 39, No. 4

# A "Superflight" of Winter Finches

The winter of 2020-21 saw a big irruption of winter visitors, which began in the fall (see the Fall 2020 issue). Here are a few of the species. See Pam Hunt's article, the season summary, and the Christmas Bird Count report for more information.



*A very colorful Common Redpoll by Debra Powers, 1-31-21, Newmarket, NH.*

*White-winged Crossbill by Steve Mirick, 2-13-21, Greenland, NH.*



*Pine Grosbeaks were one of the stars of the superflight. This male was photographed by Len Medlock, 1-18-21, Epping, NH.*



*Evening Grosbeaks were also part of the superflight. One individual shows xanthochromic coloration. See the Field Notes for more. Photo by David Govatski, 12-30-20, Jefferson, NH.*



*A leucistic Evening Grosbeak in Lyndonville, VT photographed on the same day as the xanthochromic bird, 12-30-20, by Tom Berriman.*

## Where's the Photo Quiz?

It's on hold at present. If you're interested in taking on this feature, please contact Becky Suomala (email on page 1).



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**NEW HAMPSHIRE BIRD RECORDS**

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WINTER 2020-21

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**IN MEMORY OF**

**Frank Nims**

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by Charlie Nims – “It is dedicated to my father who imbued in me a deep passion for the natural world. During my youth, he put out winter feeders which attracted mobs of Evening Grosbeaks, one of my spark birds, and took me fishing for native Brook Trout in the tiniest of streams, memories that I treasure. His military burial plaque reads, ‘Capt. Frank R. Nims, a Lover of Nature.’ That love has carried over to me, expressed in my passions for birding, hiking and the natural world.”



Bea and Frank Nims at their Lake Winnepesaukee cabin on Treasure Island.

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# From the Editor

## WINTER 2020-21

by Rebecca Suomala

### Volunteers Needed

If you are interested in one of these positions, please contact me via email: [r Suomala@nhaudubon.org](mailto:r Suomala@nhaudubon.org).

### Summer Editor

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.

### Field Notes Coordinator

This volunteer gathers stories and photos for the regular Field Notes feature in each issue of *New*

*Hampshire Bird Records*. Responsibilities include reviewing the NHBirds email list for potential stories, contacting authors, obtaining photos, and occasionally writing text. The position requires familiarity/interest in birding, the ability to meet deadlines and good editing skills.

### Photo Quiz Ideas?

Do you have an interesting idea for a Photo Quiz format? We'd like to change what we've been doing, and we would like to hear from you on what you'd like to see. We're also looking for someone to take over this feature.

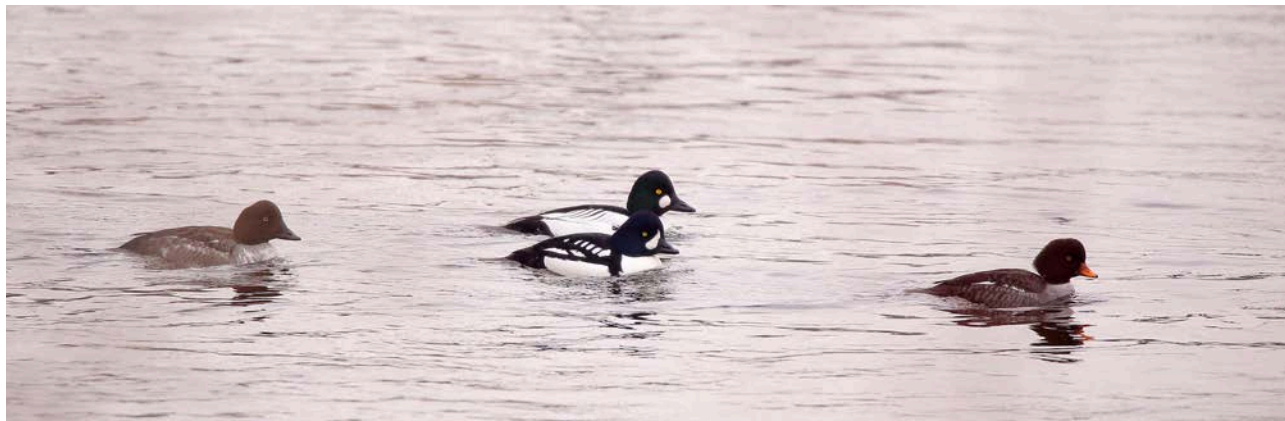
### TIME TO RENEW!

This is the last issue of this subscription year and your renewal notice is enclosed with this issue. (If your subscription is up to date you will have a different notice stating that you do not need to renew.) All subscriptions renew at the same time and encompass the four issues of a given year (i.e. Spring 2021, Summer 2021, Fall 2021, Winter 2021-22). Thank you for your subscription and support of *New Hampshire Bird Records*.

## Which Goldeneye is Which?

In the Winter 2019-20 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, Susan Wisley put together a Photo Quiz comparing Common and Barrow's Goldeneye. Here's a chance to test your knowledge. Both of these photos have both species of goldeneye. Can you identify which one is which? Answer below.

Photos by Scott Heron, 2-5-21, Manchester, NH (below), and by Len Medlock, 2-27-21, Rye, NH (right).



Answer: In Scott's photo, the front male and the right female are Barrow's, the other two are Common. In Len's photo, the front bird is a female Barrow's, the back bird is a Common.

# Thank You to Donors

We are very grateful to everyone who has donated to *New Hampshire Bird Records*, sponsored an issue, or supported the “Twitchers in the Rye” during the Superbowl of Birding. Subscription revenue does not cover the full costs of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, including our eBird quality control work. Your contributions help make it possible for NH Audubon to bring you this publication and maintain the quality of the records. We are especially grateful to those who have contributed to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund and helped us reach the \$50,000 mark. This fund is building a secure base of long-term support for the collection, organization, publication, preservation and storage of New Hampshire bird sighting information.

The following list acknowledges donations received from November 1, 2020 through October 21, 2021. We apologize if we inadvertently omitted you or mis-spelled your name – please let us know.

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*Peregrine Falcon by Kyle Wilmarth.*

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# WINTER SEASON

## December 1, 2020 through February 28, 2021

by Katherine Towler and Jim Sparrell



Katie and Jim in full birding mode on a trip to California. Photo by Bruce Aird.

The 2020-21 winter season continued weather trends of recent years with extremes in variability and warming overall. The year 2020 ended as the fifth warmest year in 126 years of record keeping for Concord, NH. Other New England states recorded their warmest year ever or the second

or third warmest. In New Hampshire, the mix of winter weather made for unpredictable and, in some areas, unusual conditions, with bodies of water freezing early in December and opening up again in January. Snow cover was variable statewide from one month to the next

The first snowfall arrived on December 5 with a nor'easter that brought rain, sleet, and snow across the state and scattered power outages to the north. December remained cold overall for most of the month. A major storm on December 17 set the record for the greatest single day snowfall in Concord since record keeping began, with 25.6 inches there and higher amounts just to the north. The combined storms established December as the seventh snowiest on record for New Hampshire, but the snow cover was washed away by a rain event at the end of the month.

The warm-up at the end of December lasted until the end of January, with a streak of 40 consecutive days of temperatures at or above normal. This streak continues a pattern seen in New England since 2015 of above average temperatures from December through January. Temperatures returned to a more average range in February, with several storms that restored snow cover from central portions of the state to the north.

The most significant story of the birding season was a major southward irruption of northern species. This irruption began in the summer of 2020 with the arrival of crossbills and continued through the winter with widespread numbers and a diversity of species. **Pine Grosbeaks, White-winged and Red Crossbills, Pine Siskins, redpolls, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Evening Grosbeaks** were widely

reported, with record numbers of some species observed on Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). A combination of factors brought these species south for one of the most substantial irruptions in a number of years.



Hoary Redpolls appeared with flocks of Common Redpolls during the "superflight" of winter finches. This Hoary was photographed by Alex Lamoreaux, 2-12-21, Marlborough, NH.

Over the past decade, increasing numbers of warblers have been observed in winter and this year was no exception. The total of nine warbler species reported appears to be the highest winter count recorded, according to eBird data and *The Birds of New Hampshire* by Keith and Fox (see chart and details in the warbler section at the end of this summary). For comparison, five species were seen in the winter of 2019-20. A few of this year's warblers successfully overwintered, including an **Ovenbird** in Portsmouth, the first overwintering record for this species.



Townsend's Warbler by Jim Sparrell, 1-9-21, Derry, NH.

Other notable overwintering birds were the **Semipalmated Plover** at Rye Harbor and an **Eastern**



**Phoebe** presumed to be an overwintering bird in Candia. Half-hardy and related species had a good showing this winter as well, with high numbers for **Red-shouldered Hawk**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Eastern Bluebird**, **Carolina Wren**, and **Northern Mockingbird**.

A **Sage Thrasher** discovered at the Hinsdale Setbacks was the most exciting find of the season, setting a first state record. Another western species, a **Townsend's Warbler**, was present into January in Derry. Both birds appear to have been part of a push of western birds eastward in the summer and fall, possibly caused by the drought and wildfires in the West.

## Data Sources

When we refer to the status of a "record," such as a "first county record in the winter season," we are using public eBird data and information from *The Birds of New Hampshire* by Keith and Fox. There may be other personal records or anecdotal reports, but we are relying on data that is available to us that have had some level of peer review. We have not included possible CBC data when it has not been entered into eBird and has not been reviewed.

## Waterfowl to Grebes (including Coots and Loons)

Despite wild weather fluctuations, there were some conditions that waterfowl could take advantage of. For example, Canobie Lake only had about seven weeks of ice cover and Lake Winnepesaukee didn't have "ice in" conditions until January 31, according to the NH Division of Environmental Services.

While **Snow Geese** can be a nuisance because of their abundance in other parts of the country, New Hampshire birders keep an eye out for them as they tend to be seen inconsistently. In mid-December, Robbie Prieto spotted one with a flock of Canada Geese in Seabrook. In mid-February, Joe Scott and Rick Steber found a small flock of nine in Dover, subsequently seen by Dan Hubbard at Strafford County Farm. On February 21, an observer in Rollinsford had a flock of eight land in her yard, possibly the same flock, minus a defector. She commented, "The Wild Turkeys tried to bully them away, but it didn't work." The flock of eight birds was spotted later on February 28 in Greenland flying to and from Great Bay from nearby fields which it continued to do into March.

Various ducks were able to hang on in the winter, finding open water on lakes or rivers. Peter Paul found one **Wood Duck** on January 21 in Laconia, Ken Klapper observed two on the Squam River in Ashland on February 6, and George and Andrea Robbins noted one on the Winnepesaukee River

on February 13. **Northern Shovelers** were seen off and on at the Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) and from South Mill Cemetery/Little Harbor area in Portsmouth in January. The **Gadwall** that Phil Brown found on Lake Francis on December 15 represents a first winter record for Coos County for this species. **Northern Pintail** were seen across southern counties from early December right through the end of February. Taking advantage of open water, **Buffleheads** were seen in more northerly locations than is typical. Thomas Michel found a nice flock of 17 on Squam Lake in mid-December and there were three in Laconia on February 13. On the Coastal CBC (December 19), Scott and Betsy Heron had a good flock of 151 **American Wigeon** on Great Bay.



*Canvasback by Len Medlock, 2-28-21, Exeter, NH.*

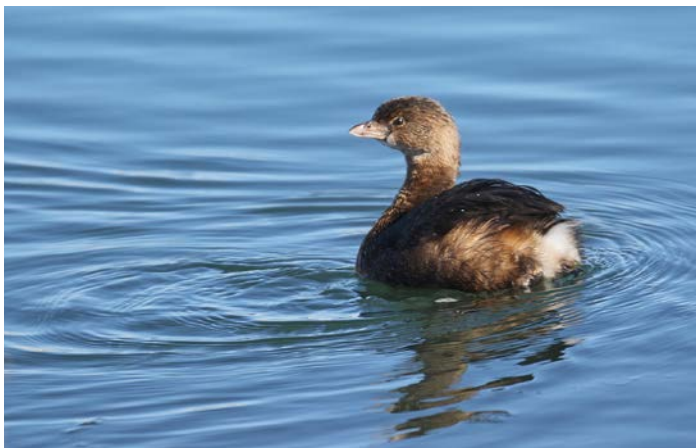
In terms of less common ducks that are regularly seen in small numbers, a **Canvasback** showed up at the Exeter WTP on February 28 and was reported by Angie Krysiak and Zeke Cornell and also seen by 26 other birders on that day alone. A **Redhead**, first reported by Vermont birders, was seen from the New Hampshire side of the Connecticut River in mid-December. This report appears to be a first winter record for this species in Grafton County. In a more expected location, Betsy and Scott Heron photographed three on Great Bay during the CBC. There were numerous reports of **Barrow's Goldeneye** from many of their typical locations, and a less expected one reported by Sam and Damaris Stoddard from the Salmon Falls River in Dover in early February.

On December 13 a rare inland **Pacific Loon** was reported on Lake Winnepesaukee in Meredith and another was seen on January 1 at a more typical location on the coast. As always, such rarities are subject to review by the NH Rare Birds Committee. Sightings of other less typical inland waterfowl included a **Red-throated Loon** photographed by Daisy Paul in Meredith in early December, which is a first winter season record for Belknap County. Three **Long-tailed Ducks** were found on Mascoma Lake in Enfield and a single bird was seen on Third Connecticut Lake in mid-December.

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One on Spofford Lake in early December continued about a month. The Connecticut Lakes bird in Coos represents a first county winter record, while the birds in Grafton County appear to represent second county records for Long-tailed Duck in the winter. In early January, a **Black Scoter** was seen sitting alone above the Gorham Dam, apparently representing a first winter record for Coos County.

**Lesser Scaup** were seen on Spofford Lake by Phil Brown, in North Walpole by Patrick Marr, and a tricky continuing bird spent several weeks near Eager Island in Laconia, reported by Peter Paul and others. In some photos, this bird appeared to have a very rounded head, suggesting Greater Scaup, but in other photos the peak at the back of the head was more distinctive, confirming it as a Lesser Scaup, demonstrating that using a single photograph can be tricky.



*Pied-billed Grebe by Steve Mirick, 1-31-21, Taylor River, Rt. 1, Hampton, NH.*

Spofford Lake also hosted a large flock of **Hooded Mergansers** with a peak number of 160 on December 28. The open water allowed them to hang on into January before it iced-up. A count of 512 **Common Mergansers** on Lake Winnepesaukee on December 21 was a remarkable number even for this large lake. At the end of January, a lone **Pied-billed Grebe** was hanging out in the tidal Taylor River in the Hampton/Seabrook Marsh. This was one of two birds first found by Steve Carlson about a week earlier and reported to Steve Mirick. It was last seen on February 7. Also lingering into early December were a few **American Coot** on Eel Pond in Rye and in Hinsdale, and one on Nutt Pond in Manchester as late as December 14.

### Shorebirds

As if one winter season of record-setting celebrity was not enough, a feisty **Semipalmated Plover** returned for an encore year. While it is difficult to tell for certain, its fidelity to the same site suggests that it is the same bird that overwintered the previous winter. There was some drama on February 7 when it appeared to be hopping on one leg,

and observers were concerned that it could be injured or succumbing to the cold. Fortunately, two days later, when Stuart Varney wrote in his eBird list, “Can confirm both legs still attached and functional. Looks healthy,” the coastal birding community could breathe a sigh of relief. Earlier in mid-January, Leo McKillop found another Semipalmated Plover at Hampton Beach State Park. This was likely a different bird, as Steve Mirick noted that the scaly wing coverts suggested a first-winter bird. This bird was only seen for a few hours on that single day.



*The Semipalmated Plover that has wintered over in Rye Harbor for two years in a row. Photo by Steve Mirick, 1-1-21.*

Solo **Black-bellied Plovers** were seen along the New Hampshire seacoast through mid-February. One intrepid **Greater Yellowlegs** made it into the winter season, spotted by Holly Bauer on December 2, and a lone **Spotted Sandpiper** was spotted on Ossipee Lake in Freedom on December 4, only the third winter record for the state.



*Killdeer by Len Medlock, 2-28-21, Exeter, NH.*

An interesting backyard bird was a **Wilson's Snipe** found by Jennifer Varney in Portsmouth on January 3. It continued to be seen for much of the winter, “probing in the swamp” (see the field note in this issue.) The first northbound

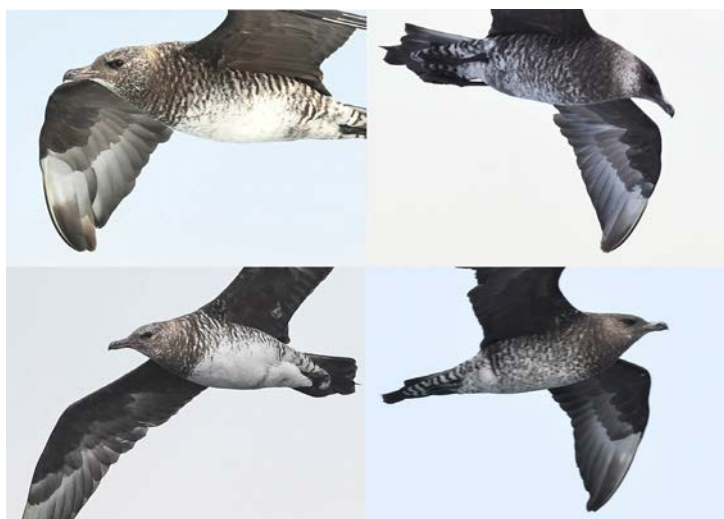


**Killdeer** to return was reported on February 23 from Hollis, pretty much right on schedule. The expected winter shorebirds, **Dunlin**, **Sanderling** and **Purple Sandpiper** were present throughout the season in modest numbers.

### Jaegers, Alcids and Gulls to Tubenoses and Gannets

Pelagic birding is the best way to see most of these seabirds. Unfortunately, winter trips out on the water can be challenging because of weather conditions or trip availability, and sometimes the fishing boats veer into Maine or Massachusetts waters. Despite these obstacles, New Hampshire birders managed to get out on six trips on the Eastman’s fishing boat out of Seabrook (Table 1) before Eastman’s stopped running trips in mid-January so the boat could be taken in for repairs.

The first two trips in December yielded a typical range of alcids with two relatively unexpected finds. On the December 11 trip, a **Common Redpoll** was photographed flying around the boat, and on the December 12 trip, a lingering **Great Shearwater** was photographed. A previous winter season high count for **Great Shearwater** was 90(!) in December of 2013.



*A comparison of plumages of four different Pomarine Jaegers by Susan Wrisley, 12-30-20, offshore waters, NH.*

The January 3 trip was a bit wild with a glaze of ice over the upper deck, and what might be described as “fairly active seas” and gray viewing conditions. Yet, this trip yielded the highest number of **Dovekie** for the season, though well below the extraordinary record numbers from the previous winter. This trip also yielded the third **Pomarine Jaeger** for the season, chasing the boat along with the gulls for a few minutes of the return trip.

Trip Date	Dovekie	Common Murre	Thick-billed Murre	Razorbill	Atlantic Puffin	Pomarine Jaeger	Black-legged Kittiwake	Northern Fulmar
12/11/20	22	5	1	5	0	1	83	1
12/12/20	101	12	2	3	1	1	176	5
12/30/20	28	11	0	5	3	0	28	2
01/03/21	291	54	0	39	5	1	62	27
01/08/21	52	21	0	7	3	0	83	7
01/10/21*	52	5	0	13	3	0	55	2

*Table 1. Reports of selected species in New Hampshire offshore waters from six winter boat trips during the winter of 2020-21. Data from eBird.*

Table 1 Observers:

12/11/20 – Steve Bennett, Jason Lambert, Leo McKillop, Susan Wrisley

12/12/20 – Leo McKillop, Susan Wrisley

12/30/20 – Chris Duffy, Leo McKillop, Jim Sparrell, Susan Wrisley

1/3/21 – Zeke Cornell, Leo McKillop, Jim Sparrell, Rebecca Suomala, Susan Wrisley

1/8/21 – Zeke Cornell, Scott Heron, Leo McKillop, Steve Mirick, Dan Prima, Susan Wrisley

1/10/21\* – Lauren diBiccari, Chris Duffy, Alex Lamoreaux

\* Not clear whether these totals were all from NH waters

Some alcids were seen from land, as well. Steve and Jane Mirick found a cooperative **Dovekie** on Valentine’s Day in fairly close to shore so that a number of people were able to see it as it bounced gently on the waves. Likewise, a few **Black Guillemot**, **Thick-billed Murre** and **Razorbill** were consistently seen throughout the winter in small numbers along the coast.

In terms of gulls, there was a good count of 75 **Bonaparte’s Gulls** along the coast on December 3 and the last winter sighting was on January 22. They migrate short to medium distances to winter in the southern US, Cuba and Mexico. The adult **Glaucous Gull** that rules the roost of the bathhouse near Yankee Fisherman’s Coop was joined variously by one or two immature Glaucous Gulls. The adult has been documented at this site for 12 consecutive years. There were sporadic reports of one **Lesser Black-backed Gull** on the coast throughout the winter, and Robbie Prieto had three in Rochester on the Lee-Durham CBC.

### Hérons, Eagles and Hawks to Owls

A **Great Blue Heron** that Dylan Jackson found in Claremont on December 11 appears to be a first winter record in eBird for Sullivan County. While **Turkey Vultures** are now regular winter residents in New Hampshire, as

## WINTER SEASON

suggested by a count of 140 at a roost in Exeter on January 14, **Black Vultures** tend to be infrequent. This winter, there were two sightings. The most northerly was photographed perched on the bed of a pickup truck in Littleton on December 2. In a more expected location, Eileen Synnott observed three circling and flapping over the farm buildings at Chickering Farm in Westmoreland.

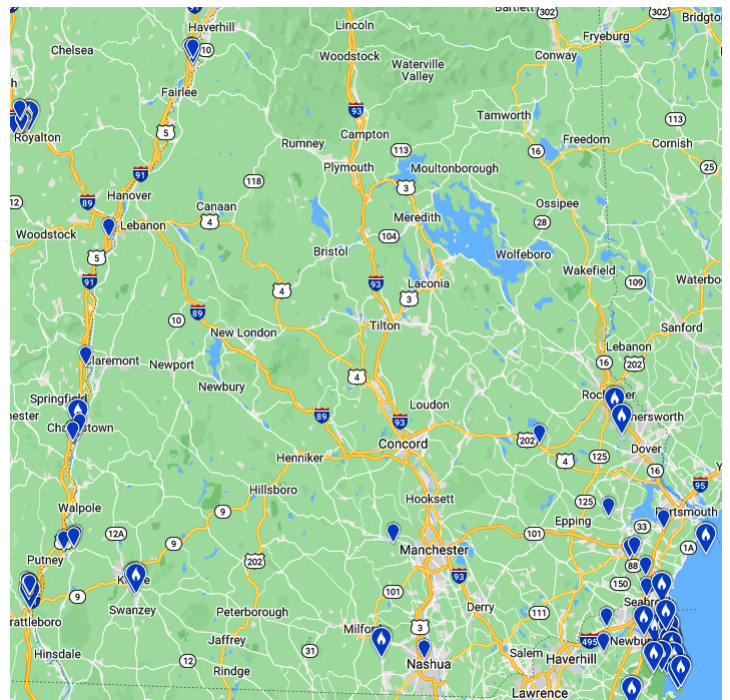
There were two reports of **Golden Eagle** this winter, one on December 19 that Rick Van de Poll found in Jackson on the North Conway CBC. On January 21, Kevin Murphy saw a large, dark raptor being harassed by a Common Raven at Miller State Park and was able to photograph an immature Golden Eagle. After many years, the winter **Bald Eagle** survey in New Hampshire has been discontinued because this species has rebounded so successfully (see the article in this issue). The last time the survey was conducted in January of 2020, 101 Bald Eagles were counted in the state! It's great to have an example of bird numbers heading in a positive direction that demonstrates the potential effectiveness of conservation strategies.



*Red-shouldered Hawk by Len Medlock, 12-17-20, Exeter, NH.*

**Red-shouldered Hawks** continued to be widespread across the southern counties, often seen perched up and catching some sun. The northernmost report this season (and the northernmost winter report in eBird) was of a juvenile bird in Sandwich on December 3. There were scattered **Rough-legged Hawk** reports throughout the winter (Figure 1) highlighted by two hunting at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport in Swanzey on January 25.

Adding to the excitement at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport, a **Snowy Owl** showed up there on December



*Figure 1. Rough-legged Hawk reports in eBird for winter 2020-21. Image provided by eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) and created 8-18-21.*

13. The day before brought the first report of a Snowy Owl for the winter in New Hampshire with a bird in the Hampton Beach State Park/Seabrook area that was seen erratically throughout the season. In general, it was not a big irruption year for Snowy Owls, despite far-flung birds showing up in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. In early December, a **Long-eared Owl** was photographed by Kimberly Wierauch near Canobie Lake and stirred considerable interest but was not seen again despite diligent searching. In the “more cooperative owl” category, Joshua Jarvis found two **Short-eared Owls** at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport on February 6 that continued to be seen by many observers. In the eastern part of the state, while watching the Snow Geese and scanning around Great Bay, Zeke Cornell spotted a Short-eared Owl sitting on the ice on February 28. It appeared to be best seen from the Portsmouth Country Club. As observers approached the general area it flushed from the ice and flew further out on the bay where it sat. There were a number of Bald Eagles in the area as well, and at one point the owl was (very distantly) photographed sitting on the ice with four Bald Eagles in the background. Short-eared Owls continued in both locations in the state, leading to additional interesting observations that will be shared in the next exciting Spring 2021 installment of *New Hampshire Bird Records*.





*Nervous Short-eared Owl with four Bald Eagles on the ice at Great Bay, by Jim Sparrell, 2-28-21. Jim's story about this amazing sighting and the four Portsmouth Short-eared Owls will be in next issue of New Hampshire Bird Records. – Ed*

## Woodpeckers to Waxwings



*Yellow-bellied Sapsucker by Keith Chamberlin, 12-29-20, Ashland, NH.*

**Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers**, a short to medium distance migrant typically headed to the southern US, Mexico and Central America for the winter, were seen periodically at feeders across the southern part of New Hampshire. A bird in Intervale that came to the feeder periodically from January 25 to February 14, made it one of the more northerly birds

this winter and one of a handful of Carroll County records. This species was first reported on a Christmas Bird Count in 1990 in Peterborough (Keith and Fox, 2013).

While **Red-headed Woodpeckers** are common in other parts of the country, their dramatic coloration and sporadic nature in New Hampshire continue to make them of interest to birders. They tend to be a short-distance migrant, moving during the day, sometimes with flocks of Blue Jays. A good mast crop may keep them from moving in the winter (Frei et al., 2020). In the winter of 2019-20, there was a reliable young bird frequently seen stashing acorns in dead trees at Burley Farm in Epping. This past winter (2020-21), there were two reliable birds that stayed in very local areas. One was in Keene, first reported on December 20, joining just a couple of previous Cheshire County winter records. In Henniker, Nicole Currier first reported one on January 8 that continued at that site through the end of February. This and a sighting in Concord in January appear to be first winter records in eBird for Merrimack County.

At Sherman's Farm in Conway, Kathy Seymour and Jane Sender found an **American Kestrel** in mid-December that along with one in Wolfeboro in January appear to be first records for Carroll County in the winter season in recent years. Elaine Faetra photographed one in Lyme that continued for a week in mid-December and represents one of only a few winter eBird records for Grafton County.



*Eastern Phoebe by Patricia Wood, 2-24-21, Abe Emerson Marsh WS, Candia, NH.*

An intrepid **Eastern Phoebe** found in the Abe Emerson Marsh in Candia by Angie Krysiak on February 14 continued for the rest of the winter season and on into spring. This may indicate it was an overwintering bird rather than an early returning migrant. There were two other winter phoebe reports, one in Lee in December and one in Durham on February 13; neither was reported again.



# WINTER SEASON

Always a fascinating bird to watch in the winter, reports of **Northern Shrike** peppered the state, including observations from Lebanon, Plainfield, Tilton, Concord, Swanzey, Hollis/Brookline, Stratham and the Pease Tradeport in Newington.

While **Fish Crows** tend to be regular in the southeastern part of the state in the winter, Bob Quinn had a nice flock of 12 in Manchester, where he estimated about 1,000 American Crows as well, at a large crow roost at Piscataquog River Park (see the Crow Chronicles article in this issue).

This winter saw first modern county records of **Boreal Chickadee** in Hillsborough and Cheshire Counties. Steve Lamonde found two on the Thumbs Up Trail near the Skatutakee Mt. summit, while Kevin Schwartz had one on Mt. Monadnock in the beginning of December. These were likely the same birds found by Phil Brown in the fall. Nora Hanke also found one or two on Mt. Monadnock in mid-January and again in late February. There is some evidence that southward movement of Boreal Chickadees in New England occurs when there is a significant movement of Black-capped Chickadees as well, suggesting that they may both be responding to fluctuating food shortages (Keith and Fox, 2013).

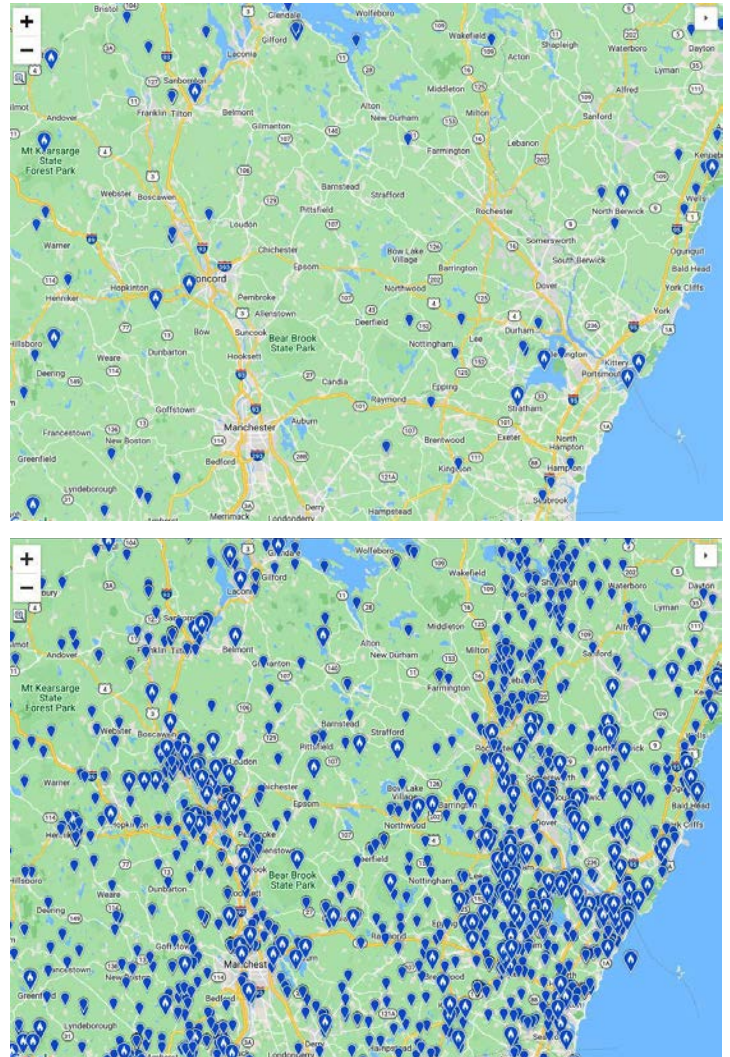
While Boreal Chickadees represent more of a “northern” bird traveling south, **Tufted Titmouse** is a more “southern” bird that has expanded its range to the north. This species has been reported from Coos County for over 20 years. Several birds were reported from the Akers Pond area in Errol this winter.



*Red-breasted Nuthatch by Scott Heron, 12-22-20, Kingston, NH.*

**Ruby-crowned Kinglets** make themselves scarce in the winter in New Hampshire, but this year there were about a dozen reports of individual birds in the southern counties throughout the winter. The gentle tin-horn nasal tooting of **Red-breasted Nuthatch** delighted birders seemingly on almost every bird outing in southern and central parts of the state this winter. As it was an irruption year for them, they were present in good numbers.

To get a rough idea of how frequently they were reported, for example, compare a screen shot of sightings in southern NH from the winter of 2019-20 with those of 2020-21 (Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Red-breasted Nuthatch reports in eBird for winter of 2019-20 (top) compared with the winter of 2020-21 (bottom). Images provided by eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) and created 12-15-21.*

While not a precise comparison, these two screenshots of eBird data do show a dramatic increase for 2020-21. There was a previous irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the winter of 1993-94. In discussing that irruption, Davis and Petersen (1995) explain that for several years prior to an irruption there is an excellent food crop allowing for high breeding success. When that food crop falls off, the birds shift to where they can find food. Red-breasted Nuthatches are known for winter foraging on white pine cones which were plentiful along the southern part of the state this year.

The only **Brown Thrashers** for the winter season were seen at Odiorne Point State Park, one on January 3 and



one on February 28, but the big news in thrashers was the **Sage Thrasher** found by Cory Ross in Hinsdale, NH, on a Vermont CBC route on December 19 (see the story in this issue). This represented a first state record for this species and was a very exciting find, drawing observers from nearby states as well. In the fall, one was seen in New York State just to the west of Pittsfield, MA from November 4-18, and one was found in Massachusetts on December 14 and continued to be seen through March 8. There is speculation that some eastward movement of a bird species such as this was driven by wildfires out west, but there is no way to really tell for sure. There was one report of a **Varied Thrush** this winter that visited feeders in Rochester on February 6.



*Sage Thrasher by Jim Sparrell, 1-10-21, Hinsdale, NH.*



*Varied Thrush by Jennifer McKown, 2-6-21, Rochester, NH.*

**Bohemian Waxwings** sometimes cruise the state in large flocks looking for crabapple trees, and this season an impressive flock reaching 400 to 500 birds built in downtown Gorham. This flock did not have many Cedar Waxwings mixed in. In Plainfield on True Road, a nice flock of Bohemians was first reported in December, and it built to a flock of 100 in mid-February, with some Cedar Waxwings,

European Starlings and Red-winged Blackbirds joining the action.

## Pipits, Finches, Sparrows and Orioles to Blackbirds



*American Pipit by Rebecca Suomala, 12-19-20, at Odiorne Pt. SP during the Coastal CBC.*

As winter progressed past mid-December, only a few **American Pipits** lingered. There was one at Odiorne Point State Park on the Coastal CBC December 19, three on the Lee-Durham CBC a week later, and two in Keene on December 27. There was only one report in January, a flyover along the New Hampshire coast on January 26.

The winter of 2020-21 will be remembered as the winter of an amazing winter finch irruption that occurred across the entire country. The winter finches which typically stay to the north were widely seen in New Hampshire as well (see the article by Pam Hunt in this issue). To show how widespread this irruption was, **Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, Red Crossbill, and White-winged Crossbill** were reported from *each* and *every* county in New Hampshire. Even the more elusive Hoary Redpoll was reported in flocks of Common Redpoll in every county in the state except Sullivan County. Some of these birds, such as Common Redpolls, are extremely abundant. They just breed and live in the boreal and taiga regions of the Arctic and tend to overlap with human populations only in the winter. Evening Grosbeaks were historically only found in the western United States until the mid-19th century when they showed up in the east. This winter one Evening Grosbeak was documented as far south as Orlando, Florida. New Hampshire's state bird, the **Purple Finch**, was reported from nine counties, with Sullivan being the only county without a record this season.

**Lapland Longspurs** tend to clear out of the state as winter progresses, but a group of four was reported in

## WINTER SEASON

January and February in North Haverhill mixed in with a flock of about 30 Horned Larks.



*Clay-colored Sparrow by Rebecca Suomala, 2-2-21, Concord, NH.*

Some interesting sparrows lingered into the winter season. A **Chipping Sparrow** was in the same yard where a Townsend's Warbler was hanging out in Derry. There were seven other Chipping Sparrow reports in the southern part of the state and one northerly individual in Lebanon at the end of February. A **Clay-colored Sparrow** found by Becky Suomala in the fall coming to her feeders continued to be seen periodically until the end of February. Steve Mirick had a late **Field Sparrow** on January 23 and February 7 in Portsmouth. A **White-crowned Sparrow** was seen in Lancaster, coming to a feeder through mid-February. A flock of ten White-crowned Sparrows was seen at a farm in Greenland on January 31 and then again on February 7. Relatively warm temperatures at that time allowed the flock to forage on the open ground and in weeds. Bare ground also appeared to be advantageous to a **Lincoln's Sparrow** at



*Baltimore Oriole by Teri Lambert, 1-30-21, Merrimack, NH.*

Odiorne Point State Park in Rye that was first reported on December 19 and last seen near the end of January in the same area. A few **Swamp Sparrows** were scattered around the southern counties through much of the winter season. An **Eastern Towhee** was reported from Hollis at the

Woodmont Orchards by Steve Lamonde on January 14 and continued to be seen for about 11 days. Another one was seen periodically under feeders throughout the winter season by Gail Colozzi in Center Sandwich.

Always a colorful bird in winter, a **Yellow-breasted Chat** first reported by Andrew McTammany was seen in Exeter from December 29 to February 1. An **Eastern Meadowlark** seen on New Year's Eve in Newmarket was this winter's only record. There were two **Baltimore Orioles** that visited feeders for several weeks this winter, one in Merrimack and the other in Stratham.

Less colorful, but still quite stunning, **Rusty Blackbirds** were seen frequently in Hinsdale when people were viewing the Sage Thrasher. They likely benefited from wetlands that were not frozen over. A Rusty Blackbird in Bethlehem on December 17 is one of very few winter records for Coos County. While **Common Grackles** tend to winter just a bit to the south of New Hampshire, this winter they remained and were periodically seen in small flocks throughout the season.



*Black-throated Blue Warbler by Len Medlock, 1-30-21, Rye, NH.*

### Warblers

While there were no reports of tanagers or buntings this year, the nine warbler species reported, a presumed record (Table 2, photos on the inside back cover), raise questions about why we are seeing more warblers now in the winter months. This count does not include sightings of Yellow-rumped Warbler, an expected species in winter. Records from *The Birds of New Hampshire*, *New Hampshire Bird Records*, and eBird show that between 1951 and 2012, 18 species of warbler were observed in winter seasons, with a total count of 101 individuals (Lauren A. Kras and Benjamin Griffith, "Spotlight on 'Winter' Warblers," *New Hampshire Bird Records*, Vol. 31, # 4). In just nine seasons, between 2012 and 2021, this species number has been nearly matched. The count for individual records of 84 between 2012 and 2021 is close to the total for the previous six decades combined. The



Species	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	Total 2012-21	Total 1951-2012
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)										0	3
Pine Warbler	8	7	1	4	5	2	5	1	5	38	20
Townsend's Warbler	1							1		2	1
Prairie Warbler	1									1	0
Black-throated Blue Warbler	1		1			1	1			4	3
Cape May Warbler	1			1						2	3
American Redstart	1					2				3	0
Common Yellowthroat	1	2	2		1	1	2		1	10	27
Orange-crowned Warbler	2	2	1	1	1	1	2			10	10
Ovenbird	1	1								2	7
Northern Waterthrush										0	1
Palm Warbler			1			1	2	1		5	15
Nashville Warbler					1	1				2	1
Black-throated Green Warbler					1					1	1
Wilson's Warbler					1					1	0
Yellow Warbler				2						2	1
Yellow-throated Warbler				1						1	3
Black-and-white Warbler										0	2
Tennessee Warbler										0	1
Hooded Warbler										0	1
Northern Parula										0	1
Total Number of Species	9	4	5	5	6	7	5	3	2	15	18
Estimated Total Number of Individual Records	17	12	6	9	10	9	12	3	6	84	101

Table 2. Records of less expected warbler species in New Hampshire during the winter season (December through February) from Winter 2012-13 through Winter 2020-21. Data from eBird. CBC data may not be included unless it was also in eBird.

bottom line is an increase in sightings and a record winter in 2020-21.

Climate change may be one cause for this trend in warbler sightings. Warmer temperatures overall may allow warblers to navigate New Hampshire winters more easily. Extreme weather events and patterns may also play a part in pushing birds north or keeping them from moving south. The prevalence of bird feeding and bird feeders may also contribute to enabling these species to survive the winter. Whatever the cause, keep an eye on your feeders in the winter for that bright, unexpected bird.

The **Ovenbird** that overwintered in Portsmouth was seen continuously from December through February coming to a backyard feeder. Most winter records of this species are of birds in residential neighborhoods seen at feeders. The Portsmouth Ovenbird is the first known individual to overwinter in a single location. A **Prairie Warbler**, found by Steve and Jane Mirick on the coast in December, is the

first December record for this species in the state, and an **American Redstart** seen at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye, also by Steve Mirick, was the fourth December record for the state. A **Cape May Warbler** observed by Scott and Betsy Heron at a suet feeder in Kingston for five days in December is the fifth winter record for this species. The **Townsend's Warbler** seen coming to a feeder in Derry from December 30 to January 11 is a fourth winter record and the first record in January. A **Common Yellowthroat** was reported by Andrea Robbins in Pittsfield on December 1. A **Yellow-rumped Warbler** observed on the Pittsburg CBC is the northernmost winter record for this species in New Hampshire. A **Black-throated Blue Warbler** successfully overwintered at the same Rye residence where a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** had overwintered for two years in a row in 2016 and 2017. Homeowners Bud and Helen Blanchard have graciously welcomed birders to their yard, especially during the Superbowl of Birding. Also significant were two

# WINTER SEASON



*Pine Warbler by Zeke Cornell, 2-7-21, Lake Massabesic, Auburn, NH.*

sightings of **Orange-crowned Warbler** and several **Pine Warblers**, including one that overwintered in Epsom.

## References

- 2020/2021 Ice In and Out Reports, NH Department of Environmental Services, <https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/2020-2021-iceinout.pdf>
- Davis, W. and W. Petersen. 1995. Red-breasted Nuthatches and the Winter of 1993-1994. *Bird Observer*, p. 38-42.
- Frei, B., K. Smith, J. Withgott, P. Rodewald, P. Pyle, and M. Patten. 2020. Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (P. Rodewald ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.rehwoo.01>
- Keith, A. and R. Fox. 2013. *The Birds of New Hampshire*. Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, MA.

## Sighting Details

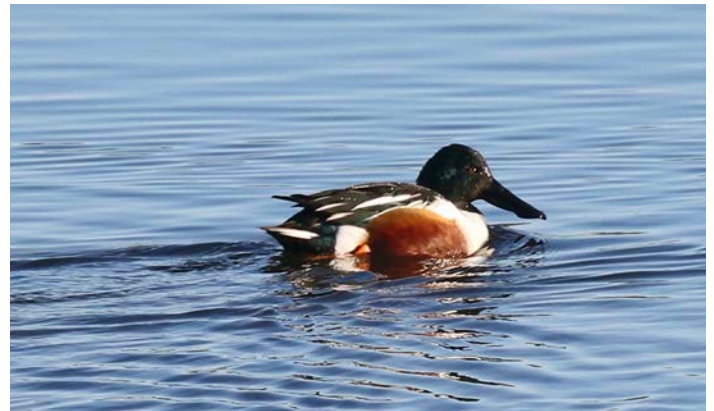
The following listings provide details for only the specific sightings *mentioned in the summaries*. Note that all sightings from the season are viewable in eBird. To view the reports of a species, go to the Explore tab and select Species Maps. Fill in the species and when the map appears, you can choose 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
12-18	1	Seabrook	R. Prieto
02-18	9	Bayview Rd., Dover	J. Scott, R. Steber

Date	#	Location	Observer
02-18	9	Strafford County Complex, Dover	D. Hubbard
02-21	8	Rollins Rd., Rollinsford	L. Janetos
02-28	8	Newington Rd., Greenland	S.& J. Mirick, et al.

## Wood Duck

01-31	1	Winnepesaukee R., Laconia	P. Paul
02-06	2	River St. by Squam R., Holderness	K. Klapper
02-13	1	Winnepesaukee R., Laconia	A.& G. Robbins



*Northern Shoveler by Jim Sparrell, 1-1-21, South St. Cemetery, Portsmouth, NH.*

## Northern Shoveler

01-01		South St. Cemetery, Portsmouth	J. Sparrell, K. Towler
01-09		Exeter WTP	C. McPherson

## Gadwall

12-15	1	Lake Francis, Pittsburg	P. Brown
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## American Wigeon

12-19	151	Greenland Sector, Coastal CBC	S.& B. Heron
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## Canvasback

02-28	1	Exeter WTP	A. Krysiak, Z. Cornell, et al.
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## Redhead

12-14	1	Lyme Rd., Hanover	M. Waugh, J. MacQueen, L. Morin
12-19	3	Greenland Sector, coastal CBC	S.& B. Heron

## Lesser Scaup

12-28	1	Spofford L., Chesterfield	P. Brown, et al.
01-19	1	Connecticut R., Walpole	P. Marr, E. Synnott
02-12	1	Eager Is., Laconia	P. Paul

## Black Scoter

01-06	1	Androscoggin R., Gorham	C. Morneau, K. Dube
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## Long-tailed Duck

12-02	1	Spofford L., Chesterfield	L.& J. diBiccari, A. Lamoreaux
12-13	3	Mascoma L., Enfield	W. Scott
12-13	1	Third Connecticut L., Pittsburg	G. Chretien

## Bufflehead

12-12	17	Squam Lake	T. Michel
02-13	3	Eager Is., Laconia	B. Hillman, A.& G. Robbins

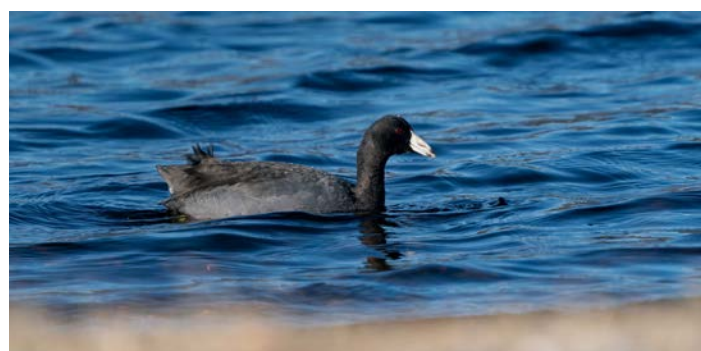
## Barrow's Goldeneye

02-05	1	Salmon Falls R., Dover Rd., Dover	S.& D. Stoddard
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## Hooded Merganser

12-28	160	Spofford L., Chesterfield	L.& J. diBiccari, A. Lamoreaux
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Date	#	Location	Observer
<b>Common Merganser</b>			
12-21	512	Leavitt Park/Beach, Meredith	I. MacLeod
<b>Ruddy Duck</b>			
12-02	1	Village Rd., Madison	S. Lee
12-12	5	Arlington Pond, Salem	K. Wilmarth
12-28	1	Hampton Beach SP	E. Lai
<b>Pied-billed Grebe</b>			
02-07	1	Taylor R., Rt. 1, Hampton	S. Mirick



American Coot by Leo McKillop, 12-3-20, Eel Pond, Rye, NH.

<b>American Coot</b>			
12-14	1	Nutt Pond, Manchester	K. Murphy
<b>Semipalmated Plover</b>			
01-16	1	Hampton Beach SP	L. McKillop, et al.
02-07	1	Rye Harbor	S. Mirick
<b>Killdeer</b>			
02-23	1	Main St., Hollis	N. Hanke
<b>Wilson's Snipe</b>			
01-03	1	Lens Ave., Portsmouth	J.&S. Varney
<b>Spotted Sandpiper</b>			
12-04	1	Ossipee Lake, Freedom	A. Johnson
<b>Greater Yellowlegs</b>			
12-02	1	Meadow Pond, Hampton	H. Bauer
<b>Dovekie</b>			
02-14	1	Concord Pt., Rye	S.& J. Mirick, et al.
<b>Bonaparte's Gull</b>			
12-03	75	Jenness/Sawyer's Beach, Rye	S. Varney
01-22	2	NH coast	R. Prieto
<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b>			
12-26	3	Gonic Section, Lee-Durham CBC	R. Prieto
<b>Red-throated Loon</b>			
12-05	1	Lake Waukegan, Meredith	P. Paul, et al.
<b>Pacific Loon</b>			
12-13	1	Leavitt Park/Beach, Meredith	I. MacLeod
01-01	1	Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye	S.& J. Mirick, et al.
<b>Great Shearwater</b>			
12-12	1	Jeffreys Ledge	L. McKillop, S. Wrisley

Date	#	Location	Observer
<b>Great Blue Heron</b>			
12-11	1	South St., Claremont	D. Jackson
<b>Black Vulture</b>			
12-02	1	Littleton	B. Hadlock
02-08	3	Chickering Rd., Westmoreland	E. Synnott
<b>Turkey Vulture</b>			
01-14	140	Michael Ave., Exeter	B. White
<b>Golden Eagle</b>			
12-19	1	Dundee Rd., Jackson	R. Van de Poll
01-21	1	Miller SP parking lot, Peterborough	K. Murphy
<b>Red-shouldered Hawk</b>			
12-03	1	Top of the World Rd., Sandwich	K. Klapper
<b>Rough-legged Hawk</b>			
01-25	2	Dillant-Hopkins Airport, Swanzey	L. diBiccari, A. Lamoreaux



Snowy Owl by Len Medlock, 2-13-21, Seabrook, NH.

<b>Snowy Owl</b>			
12-12	1	Hampton Beach SP	S.& J. Mirick, et al.
12-13	1	Dillant-Hopkins Airport, Swanzey	S. Lamonde, et al.
<b>Long-eared Owl</b>			
12-06	1	Canobie Lake, Windham	K. Weihrauch
<b>Short-eared Owl</b>			
02-06	2	Airport Rd., Swanzey	J. Jarvis
02-28	1	Great Bay, Greenland	Z. Cornell, et al.
<b>Yellow-bellied Sapsucker</b>			
01-25	1	Skyline Dr., Intervale	J. Carlson
<b>Red-headed Woodpecker</b>			
12-20	1	Jordan Rd., Keene	L.& J. diBiccari, A. Lamoreaux
01-08	1	Old Concord Rd. fields, Henniker	N. Currier
01-13	1	Dimond Hill Farm, Hopkinton Rd., Concord	M. Richard
<b>American Kestrel</b>			
12-14	1	Sherman's Farm, Conway	J. Sender, K. Seymour
12-15	1	N. Thetford Rd. at River Rd., Lyme	E. Faletra



# WINTER SEASON

*Date # Location Observer*

## American Kestrel (continued)

01-29 1 Brackett Rd., Wolfeboro M. Murray

## Eastern Phoebe

12-12 1 York Ln., Lee J. Lambert  
 02-13 1 Old Piscataqua Rd., Durham N. Hermann  
 02-14 1 Abe Emerson Marsh WS, Candia A. Krysiak, et al.

## American Crow

02-15 1000 Piscataquog River Park, Manchester R. Quinn

## Fish Crow

02-15 12 Piscataquog River Park, Manchester R. Quinn

## Boreal Chickadee

12-02 1 Do Drop Trail, Mt. Monadnock K. Schwartz  
 12-19 2 Thumbs Up Trail, Skatutakee Mt., Hancock S. Lamonde  
 01-22 2 Thoreau Trail, Mt. Monadnock N. Hanke  
 02-28 1 Thoreau Trail, Mt. Monadnock N. Hanke

## Tufted Titmouse

12-01 2 Tracey Dr., Errol L. Charron

## Brown Thrasher

01-03 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye S. Mirick, et al.  
 02-28 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye S. Mirick

## Sage Thrasher

12-19 1 Hinsdale Setbacks C. Ross

## Varied Thrush

02-06 1 Rochester P. Simms, et al.



*Bohemian Waxwings by Steve Mirick, 12-31-20, Gorham, NH.*

## Bohemian Waxwing

12-06 21 Jenney Rd. at True Rd., Plainfield S. Hardy  
 01-07 500 Gorham L. Charron  
 01-28 417 Mechanic St., Gorham W. O'Brien  
 02-14 100 True Rd., Plainfield D. Jackson

## American Pipit

12-19 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye Z. Cornell, R. Suomala  
 12-26 3 Rochester WTP R. Prieto  
 12-27 2 Krif Rd., Keene D. Keller  
 01-26 1 Concord Pt., Rye R. Prieto

## Common Redpoll

12-11 1 Jeffreys Ledge S. Bennett, J. Lambert,  
 L. McKillop, S. Wisley



*Common Redpoll by Leo McKillop, 12-11-20, Jeffreys Ledge, NH.*

*Date # Location Observer*

## Lapland Longspur

01-07 4 Mace Hill Rd., N. Haverhill W. Scott  
 02-01 4 Rt. 10, N. Haverhill E. Marie

## Chipping Sparrow

01-04 1 Dexter St., Derry H. Bauer  
 02-28 1 Interchange Dr., Lebanon W. Scott

## Clay-colored Sparrow

01-02 1 Noyes St., Concord R. Suomala

## Field Sparrow

01-23 1 Portsmouth City Park, Harvard St. S. Mirick  
 02-07 1 Dodge Ave., Portsmouth S. Mirick

## White-crowned Sparrow

01-03 1 Summer St., Lancaster A. Griffin  
 01-31 10 Great Bay Farm, Greenland K. Towler, J. Sparrell  
 02-07 10 Great Bay Farm, Greenland S. Mirick

## Lincoln's Sparrow

12-19 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye Z. Cornell, R. Suomala  
 01-30 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye R. Prieto

## Eastern Towhee

12-12 1 Partridge Hill Rd., Ctr. Sandwich G. Colozzi  
 01-14 1 Woodmont Orchard, Hollis S. Lamonde

## Yellow-breasted Chat

12-29 1 Green St., Exeter A. McTammany

## Eastern Meadowlark

12-31 1 Loiselle CA, Newmarket A. Weber

## Baltimore Oriole

01-30 1 Linda Ln., Merrimack T. Lambert  
 02-17 1 Stratham Heights Rd., Stratham S. Mirick

## Rusty Blackbird

12-17 1 Rt. 302 at Blueberry Hill Rd., Bethlehem J. Merredew  
 12-27 4 Hinsdale Setbacks J. Pettipas, S. Wisley, J. Dearborn

## Ovenbird

01-12 1 Tidewatch Condominium, Portsmouth S. Mirick,  
 R.& L. Schweikart

## Orange-crowned Warbler

12-04 1 Great Bay Farm, Greenland S.& J. Mirick  
 12-04 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye S.& J. Mirick

## WINTER SEASON

Date # Location Observer

### Common Yellowthroat

12-01 1 Tilton Hill Rd. by Suncook R., Pittsfield A. Robbins

### American Redstart

12-12 1 Odiorne Pt. SP, Rye S. Mirick

### Cape May Warbler

12-13 1 Great Pond, Kingston S.& B. Heron

### Black-throated Blue Warbler

12-19 1 West Rd., Rye B.& H. Blanchard, P. Hunt, U. Dienes

### Pine Warbler

12-07 2 Kings Row, Epsom L. Raby

### Yellow-rumped Warbler

12-15 1 Pittsburg CBC L. Charron

### Prairie Warbler

12-04 1 Great Bay Farm, Greenland S.& J. Mirick

### Townsend's Warbler

12-30 1 Dexter St., Derry A. Anthony



Townsend's Warbler by Christopher Gagnon, 1-10-21, Derry, NH.



Yellow-rumped Warbler by Stuart Varney, 2-9-21, New Castle, NH.

## Winter Warbler Research: Community Science Opportunity

by Chad Witko



Pine Warbler at a feeder in Brookline, NH on 12-7-20. Photo by Sharon Harvell.

Scientists at the Smithsonian Institution, National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and USDA are banding together with community scientists to investigate clusters of winter warbler sightings far north of their usual winter range. These clusters are often in urban areas and associated with warm microclimates with green plants and active insects (e.g., aphids) or other food sources.

As birders and community scientists, the best way to contribute observations towards this new research project is through standard eBird checklists that automatically register locality and observer effort. As suggested for documenting birds outside of their normal range, photographs are helpful to include. If you cannot obtain a picture, please provide detailed notes on the bird's identification. Adding notes on foraging behavior, habitat, and potential food sources for the overwintering warblers to the observation details for each species or the checklist comments field will enhance your observations' value.

Photos of plants and insects associated with any foraging warblers are especially valuable. If non-bird images are obtained and not appropriate for eBird, feel free to send them directly to me or link me to another resource housing the images (e.g., iNaturalist). When sharing photos or notes on warbler food sources or associated plants, please include any relevant eBird checklists.

If you have any questions or would like to share your photos, please email me at [chad.witko@audubon.org](mailto:chad.witko@audubon.org).

*Chad Witko works for the National Audubon Society as part of its Migratory Bird Initiative.*

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# Christmas Bird Count Summary 2020-2021

by David Deifk



*The Sage Thrasher photographed during the Brattleboro CBC by Cory Ross on the day he discovered it, 12-19-20, at the Hinsdale setbacks, NH.*

New Hampshire's Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) were held this year between December 14, 2020 and January 1, 2021 (count period extends to January 5). This was the winter of COVID-19 with special guidelines and requirements. Counts could only be run if local rules allowed, and compilers had to wait until November 15 to confirm that their CBC could take place. Carpooling could only take place within your "pod" and most compilations were canceled or held remotely. There are 19 counts whose center is within New Hampshire borders. Only 18 counts were run as the Isles of Shoals count was cancelled for the sixth year in a row because of the pandemic. It is unfortunate that the count has been completed only three times in the last 11 years.

Although centered in Vermont, the Barnet and Saxton's River CBCs overlap into New Hampshire as well. Previously unappreciated, the Brattleboro Vermont Count also has a tiny extension across the river into New Hampshire. The Hinsdale Setbacks have traditionally been included in the Brattleboro Count. This year it produced a spectacular record of a **Sage Thrasher**. Not only was this a new CBC species, but it was also a new record ever for the state. That's a unique event at least in recent memory. It persisted for several weeks affording great looks by many observers (see the article in this issue by Cory Ross who found the bird). Two of the New Hampshire counts have substantial overlap into neighboring states. The Hanover-Norwich CBC extends into Vermont and the Isles of Shoals CBC substantially extends into Maine. Three other counts have minor overlap into neighboring states as well, those being Errol-Umbagog and North Conway into Maine and a tiny bit of the Nashua-Hollis

Count into Massachusetts.

Total species across all counts was 133 versus 135 last year and 137 two years ago. The weather for all counts was generally good with basically seasonal temperatures throughout. Precipitation was relatively minimal with only some light snow on three counts. Total participation was up modestly this year by about 10 percent over last year. The Conway Count was responsible for the bulk of this increase, almost doubling from 42 participants to 82. This might partially explain their great results adding two new species and setting 12 new count highs.

The overall results this year were little short of spectacular, at least compared to the rather average 2019 count. First, two new species were added to the count. The previously mentioned Sage Thrasher being the first and a Black-throated Blue Warbler on the Coastal Count being the second. This raises the total to 255 species ever seen on New Hampshire CBCs. There were 17 new state highs (10 of which were set by the Coastal Count) compared to seven last year which was more typical. This includes two species that shared the record between two counts this year. Five species tied state highs from previous years. There were 11 species new to their respective counts versus six last year. Individual count highs more than tripled last year's result going from 30 to 107.

Practically all species groups showed major increases over last year and some historically so. In terms of waterfowl, Canada Goose was over double last year's total. The bulk of the total came from the Coastal Count. Both American Black Duck and Mallard were substantially higher as well. A single Gadwall in Pittsburg and four Ring-necked Ducks on the Sandwich Count were notable first occurrences for their counts. American Wigeon set a state high on the Coastal Count. The rest of the commonly seen waterfowl saw increased numbers this year, in particular Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, and Hooded and Common Mergansers. Wild Turkey made a modest recovery from a relatively low number last year; however, it is still at half of the record number of two years ago.

Bald Eagles had a banner year. The numbers have been for the most part steadily rising over the last several years reaching a record number of 80 last year. That mark was surpassed by 119 seen this year, breaking 100 for the first time. The overlapping Vermont counts saw another 12, the bulk of which were probably seen in New Hampshire territory. It was recorded on all counts save two (one of which had a count week bird) and four counts set individual count highs. The only Golden Eagle was found on the Conway count this year. As for other raptors, Red-shouldered Hawk set a state high shared by two counts (Coastal and Concord). Red-tailed Hawk was up by about 50% in total versus last year. The Coastal Count set a new state high of 91



with two other counts setting individual count highs as well. American Kestrel was again absent from count day as they have been in recent years. Only one was found during count week. Merlins continue their modest presence with three birds. Peregrine Falcon was present on six counts for a total of 11 birds, a sizable increase from last year's three birds.

Both Rock Pigeon and Mourning Dove were substantially higher this year. Woodpeckers were another group that were substantially to greatly increased. Almost 500 Red-bellied Woodpeckers were found in total, up from 276 last year. This includes eight individual count highs for the species. A new state high of six for the Coastal Count was notable given that it would be a decent total for the entire state only a few years back. Downy Woodpecker had a remarkable year with the Keene and Coastal Counts sharing a new state high of 220. Besides that, four other counts set count highs. The total of 1,506 was 600 birds higher than last year. Although not record setting, Hairy Woodpecker doubled its total from last year with four counts setting individual highs. Pileated Woodpecker increased 50% over last year with four counts setting count highs. Every count recorded the species although two of those were count week only. Blue Jay was dramatically increased, more than double last year's total. It was seen on all counts, four of which were new count highs.

The results for small passerines were also quite notable.



*Red-breasted Nuthatch by Rebecca Suomala, 1-30-21, Seabrook, NH.*

Most of us are aware of the huge influx of Red-breasted Nuthatches, but many species including Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, and Eastern Bluebird had impressive increases as well. Black-capped Chickadees were up by almost 4,000 birds over 2019. Tufted Titmouse

numbers increased from 2,073 last year to 3,804 this year. The Peterborough-Hancock Count set a state high with another 10 counts setting individual count highs, including second and third highest counts for the state. The top three all-time titmouse state high counts were set this year (Lee and Keene being the others). The high counts of Red-breasted Nuthatch were indeed at historic levels. Again, Peterborough led the way with another state high while another three counts exceeded the previous record number (Keene, Coastal, and Lee-Durham). The total is up by over a factor of five compared to last year. White-breasted Nuthatch numbers were almost as impressive with a total almost double that of last year. A state record high was set by the Lee-Durham Count with Keene coming in at the second highest ever. Six counts set individual count highs. Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren and Eastern Bluebird also had new state high counts with impressive total increases.

In terms of warblers, the Black-throated Blue Warbler on the Coastal Count was one of the outstanding records for the year providing a first for the state CBC records. According to *The Birds of New Hampshire* (by Keith and Fox), there are only four previous winter records known. A Yellow-breasted Chat on the Lee-Durham Count was a first for the count and only the fourth ever for CBCs.

A Fox Sparrow which appeared to be of the Sooty subspecies was found on the Manchester Count. This would be the first of this western subspecies ever found on a New Hampshire CBC and likely only the second record ever for the state. The Coastal CBC was the only count to record White-crowned Sparrow, but its 15 set a state high. The Coastal Count also set a new state high for Song Sparrow with a very impressive 213. The last time the species set a state high was in 2000 when 177 were recorded, also on the Coastal Count. A count of 226 Common Grackles on the Coastal Count also set a new state high. The previous high was only 82 set back in 2000.

By all accounts, this was an historic year for irruptive finches and the numbers for several species bear this out. Starting with Pine Grosbeak, there was a total of 754 birds tallied versus none seen last year. It was seen on all but one count with Lee-Durham setting an individual count high. Red Crossbill was seen on 13 counts and was up by a factor of five with a new state high set by Keene. The Coastal Count had the third highest ever. Five other counts set individual high counts and Manchester recorded its first one. White-winged Crossbills were also widespread and seen on 13 counts. A total of 321 were seen versus 88 last year. Three counts set individual count highs. Common Redpoll also had a good year and was seen on all counts except one. It went from two seen last year to 1,580 this year. In addition, two Hoary Redpolls were picked out, one of which was new

for the Hanover-Norwich Count. Lastly, Evening Grosbeak had a very fine year. Over 900 individuals on 14 counts were seen versus a total of four last year. The total of 375 from two years ago had been the best in recent years. Otherwise, the total hasn't been over 100 since 2009. Pam Hunt wrote an excellent article about the winter status of Evening Grosbeak. This appears in *New Hampshire Bird Records* Winter 2015-16 issue (Vol. 34, #4), page 28.

## Individual Count Highlights



*Red Crossbill on the Nashua-Hollis CBC, 1-1-21. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.*

### Nashua-Hollis

- Count High: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red Crossbill

### Peterborough-Hancock

- State High: Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper
- Count High: Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Merlin, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill

### Keene

- New to Count: Long-tailed Duck, Red-headed Woodpecker
- State High: Barred Owl, Downy Woodpecker (tied with Coastal this year), Red Crossbill
- Count High: Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, White-winged Crossbill, House Sparrow

### Coastal NH

- New to State: Black-throated Blue Warbler
- State High: American Wigeon, Red-shouldered Hawk (tied with Concord this year), Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker (tied with Keene this year), Carolina Wren, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Common Grackle
- Count High: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, Pine Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill



*Lincoln's Sparrow on the Coastal CBC, 12-19-20. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.*

### Lee-Durham

- State High: White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird
- New to Count: Yellow-breasted Chat
- Count High: Red-tailed Hawk, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Common Grackle, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill

### Concord

- State High: Red-shouldered Hawk (tied with Coastal this year)
- Count High: Rock Pigeon, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Peregrine Falcon, Common Raven, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal

#### Peregrine Falcon data for Concord CBCs in 2019 and 2020

I inadvertently omitted the single Peregrine Falcon seen on the 2019-20 Concord CBC but that omission was made up for during the CBC in 2020-21 when the same observers (Bob Vallieres and Tom McShane) saw three on the count, which was a new record high for Concord. — Bob Quinn, compiler



## Laconia-New Hampton

- New to Count: Gray Catbird
- Count High: Bufflehead, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk



Gray Catbird on the Laconia CBC, 12-29-20. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.

## Hanover-Norwich

- Count High: Bufflehead, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird

## Baker Valley

- Third record for Red-bellied Woodpecker

## Littleton

- Second highest count for White-throated Sparrow



Common Redpoll by Rebecca Suomala on the Grafton-Bristol CBC, 12-25-20.

## Grafton-Bristol

- Count High: Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren

## Errol-Umbagog

- Count High: Bald Eagle, Tufted Titmouse

## Pittsburg

- New to Count: Gadwall

## A Black-throated Blue Warbler on the CBC

by Pam Hunt



Black-throated Blue Warbler by Steve Mirick, 1-12-21, West Rd., Rye, NH.

Pam describes the chain of events that led she and Unity to add a Black-throated Blue Warbler to the Coastal CBC on 12/19/20.

It was almost 4:00 pm, the light was dimming, and we decided we'd had a long enough day and would not try some more owling. And then the plan changed. Unity found a voice message on her phone from a woman in Rye who was reporting a **Black-throated Blue Warbler**. The fact that this call went to Unity was a little bizarre, but attributable to her being a Volunteer Naturalist for NH Audubon and using *her* phone to answer people's questions since the office is closed. Unity's connection cut off before we could get the address (we hadn't moved from inside the car at Pulpit Rocks, mind you), and frantically tried to reconnect in the event we could get the address and get there before it got too dark. We got the address and headed southwest to 150 West Road, the same address that hosted a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (named "Flitty") for two winters in a row a few years back.

We got there, learned the bird had "just been seen" and proceeded to pay very careful attention to a dense stand of hemlock that seemed a perfect place for a wayward warbler to spend the night. We could also see the mealworm feeder on the back porch. It got darker. Then Helen came out onto the back porch to inform us: "Ladies, he's out in front." We ran without running and there it was, a very lost but seemingly healthy male Black-throated Blue Warbler, barely visible in the fading light. It turns out he had been there for a month or so, and successfully survived a major snow storm and deep freeze in quick succession. The remarkable coincidence of Helen deciding to call the day of the CBC and having Unity's number from a previous call, led to our finding this new species for the New Hampshire CBC.



## Conway

- New to Count: Northern Saw-Whet Owl, Belted Kingfisher
- Count High: Canada Goose, Barred Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Cardinal

## Sunapee

- Count High: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird

## Manchester

- New to Count: Fox Sparrow (Sooty), Red Crossbill
- Count High: Red-breasted Nuthatch

## Sandwich

- New to Count: Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Gray Jay
- Count High: Mallard, Ring-necked Pheasant, Bald Eagle, Ring-billed Gull, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Tufted Titmouse

## Christmas Bird Count Compilers

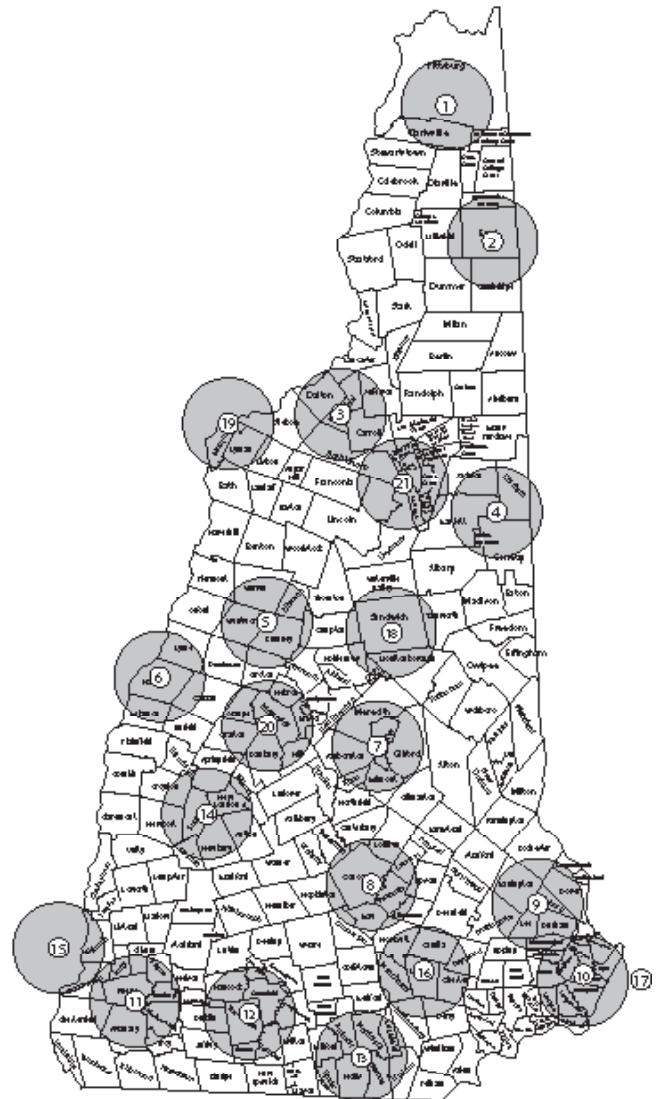
1	Pittsburg	Phil Brown
2	Errol-Umbagog	Chris Martin
3	Littleton	David Govatski
4	North Conway	Tin Mtn. Conservation Ctr.
5	Baker Valley	Steve Rounds
6	Hanover-Norwich	Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin
7	Laconia-New Hampton	Pam Hunt
8	Concord	Robert Quinn
9	Lee-Durham	Kurk Dorsey
10	Coastal	Len Medlock
11	Keene	Phil Brown
12	Peterborough-Hancock	John Ranta
13	Nashua-Hollis	Richard Bielawski
14	Lake Sunapee	Dylan Jackson
15	Saxton's River, VT	Donald Clark
16	Manchester	Richard Bielawski
17	Isles of Shoals	Ben Griffith
18	Sandwich	Ken Klapper
19	Barnet, VT	Charlie Browne
20	Grafton-Bristol	Bill Belanger
21	AMC Crawford Notch	Craig Repasz

## AMC-Crawford

- Count High: Black-backed Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeak



*Moonrise on the Laconia CBC, 12-29-20, by Rebecca Suomala.*



# 121<sup>st</sup> Christmas Bird Count: Dec. 14, 2020 - Jan. 5, 2021

Species	Nsh	Pet	Kee	Cst	Lee	Con	Lac	Han	Bak	Lit	Grf	Erl	Pit	Cnw	Sun	Man	San	Amc	Total
Snow Goose	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Canada Goose	403	-	-	4549	705	43	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	92	12	78	2	-	5888
Mute Swan	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Wood Duck	-	-	-	2	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Gadwall	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*1	-	-	-	-	-	2
American Wigeon	-	-	-	**183	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	183
American Black Duck	16	11	8	1529	339	33	1	20	-	-	-	-	1	6	-	-	2	-	1966
Mallard	475	60	66	781	423	301	428	299	5	1	39	-	120	8	53	342	146	10	3557
Northern Pintail	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Redhead	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Ring-necked Duck	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*4	-	7
Greater Scaup	-	-	-	1196	-	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1207
Lesser Scaup	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Common Eider	-	-	-	217	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	217
Surf Scoter	-	-	-	55	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	55
White-winged Scoter	-	-	-	52	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52
Black Scoter	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Long-tailed Duck	-	-	*1	140	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	141
Bufflehead	-	-	-	119	30	-	12	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	*1	-	169
Common Goldeneye	44	-	1	231	18	28	261	7	-	-	-	9	-	-	-	29	3	-	631
Barrow's Goldeneye	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
Hooded Merganser	6	-	107	42	26	8	165	21	-	-	2	1	4	-	6	-	35	-	423
Common Merganser	39	-	26	5	4	28	254	33	-	4	10	5	12	-	3	26	273	-	722
Red-br. Merganser	-	-	-	127	64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	191
Ring-necked Pheasant	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	4	-	11
Ruffed Grouse	-	5	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	5	2	18	3	4	-	-	-	2	42
Spruce Grouse	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Grouse sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Wild Turkey	91	150	137	176	236	51	220	77	26	30	62	18	75	34	86	73	83	6	1631
Red-throated Loon	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
Common Loon	-	2	3	63	2	-	2	CW	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	75
Horned Grebe	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Red-necked Grebe	-	-	-	19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19
Double-cr. Cormorant	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Great Cormorant	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Great Blue Heron	5	-	-	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Turkey Vulture	-	-	-	25	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34
Golden Eagle	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1

Total Number of Species Across all CBCs: 133

CW = Count Week

Nsh = Nashua-Hollis (1/1/2020)

Pet = Peterborough-Hancock (12/19/2020)

Kee = Keene (12/20/2020)

Cst = Coastal NH (12/19/2020)

Lee = Lee-Durham (12/26/2020)

Con = Concord (12/20/2020)

Lac = Laconia-New Hampton (12/29/2020)

Han = Hanover-Norwich (1/1/2020)

Bak = Baker Valley (12/20/2020)

Lit = Littleton (12/20/2020)

Grf = Grafton-Bristol (12/26/2020)

Erl = Errol-Umbagog (12/22/2020)

Pit = Pittsburg (12/15/2020)

Cnw = North Conway (12/19/2020)

Sun = Lake Sunapee (12/19/2020)

Man = Manchester (12/19/2020)

San = Sandwich (12/27/2020)

Amc = AMC-Crawford Notch (12/19/2020)

+= New Species to New Hampshire

\*= New Species to a Count

\*\*= New high species count for the state

***Bold italic=new individual count high***



# 121<sup>st</sup> Christmas Bird Count: Dec. 14, 2020 - Jan. 5, 2021 — continued

Northern Harrier	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Species	Nsh	Pet	Kee	Cst	Lee	Con	Lac	Han	Bak	Lit	Grf	Erl	Pit	Cnw	Sun	Man	San	Amc	Total
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	2	6	13	6	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	1	CW	36
Cooper's Hawk	9	<b>5</b>	7	20	6	9	1	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	2	CW	-	65
Northern Goshawk	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	CW	-	1	-	3
Bald Eagle	3	<b>11</b>	7	18	17	8	<b>14</b>	4	2	<b>2</b>	1	<b>9</b>	9	3	CW	2	<b>9</b>	-	119
Red-shouldered Hawk	-	<b>2</b>	1	<b>4</b>	CW	<b>**4</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	12
Red-tailed Hawk	33	7	21	<b>**91</b>	<b>58</b>	20	<b>16</b>	15	2	1	1	-	-	2	1	14	3	-	285
Rough-legged Hawk	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	CW	-	1	-	1	-	4
Hawk sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Black-bellied Plover	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Sanderling	-	-	-	32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
Dunlin	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
Purple Sandpiper	-	-	-	43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	43
Razorbill	-	-	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
Ring-billed Gull	23	-	CW	140	125	8	215	CW	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	44	<b>9</b>	-	564
Herring Gull	9	-	-	595	1682	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	2292
Iceland Gull	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Lesser Black-bkd. Gull	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Glaucous Gull	-	-	-	1	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Great Black-bkd. Gull	21	-	-	70	584	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	675
Rock Pigeon	687	142	88	1431	606	<b>1527</b>	186	877	26	199	38	-	2	36	142	281	24	27	6319
Mourning Dove	311	170	<b>485</b>	492	183	379	101	217	39	103	23	21	-	145	51	108	102	<b>6</b>	2936
Eastern Screech-Owl	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Great Horned Owl	1	-	1	7	-	3	-	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	15
Barred Owl	-	8	<b>**16</b>	7	1	1	-	1	-	2	1	-	-	<b>5</b>	CW	-	6	-	48
N. Saw-whet Owl	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	CW	-	<b>*1</b>	-	-	-	4
Belted Kingfisher	6	-	2	<b>**16</b>	2	2	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	<b>*1</b>	-	1	-	-	34
Red-hea. Woodpecker	-	-	<b>*1</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Red-bel. Woodpecker	52	<b>38</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>113</b>	91	<b>47</b>	11	<b>16</b>	1	CW	-	-	-	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	13	<b>17</b>	-	498
Yellow-bel. Sapsucker	1	-	<b>2</b>	<b>**6</b>	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	12
Downy Woodpecker	100	<b>136</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>**220</b>	180	<b>124</b>	70	87	8	22	13	13	15	<b>101</b>	44	52	<b>91</b>	10	1506
Hairy Woodpecker	29	85	<b>98</b>	39	67	<b>73</b>	23	44	16	33	14	14	4	<b>73</b>	44	15	<b>85</b>	10	766
Black-bkd. Woodpecker	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	<b>3</b>	6
Northern Flicker	4	-	<b>3</b>	15	10	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33
Pileated Woodpecker	16	14	19	14	7	25	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	CW	4	3	6	3	<b>14</b>	4	4	17	CW	158
American Kestrel	-	-	CW	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	CW
Merlin	-	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Peregrine Falcon	2	-	-	3	1	<b>3</b>	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	11

Total Number of Species Across all CBCs: 133

CW = Count Week

Nsh = Nashua-Hollis (1/1/2020)

Pet = Peterborough-Hancock (12/19/2020)

Kee = Keene (12/20/2020)

Cst = Coastal NH (12/19/2020)

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+ = New Species to New Hampshire

\* = New Species to a Count

\*\* = New high species count for the state

***Bold italic=new individual count high***

Species	Nsh	Pet	Kee	Cst	Lee	Con	Lac	Han	Bak	Lit	Grf	Erl	Pit	Cnw	Sun	Man	San	Amc	Total
Gray Jay	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	16	1	-	-	*1	-	<b>30</b>
Blue Jay	333	<b>1048</b>	<b>1096</b>	682	637	507	312	455	132	208	234	23	31	<b>675</b>	310	175	<b>617</b>	26	<b>7501</b>
American Crow	91	67	114	451	552	556	772	417	31	88	28	26	11	122	75	37	99	15	<b>3552</b>
Fish Crow	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
Common Raven	7	30	<b>59</b>	<b>23</b>	25	<b>27</b>	29	34	1	47	9	94	33	25	5	8	42	12	<b>510</b>
Horned Lark	-	-	-	406	47	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>460</b>
Black-cap. Chickadee	445	1560	<b>1503</b>	1131	1281	655	757	936	-	441	423	569	323	<b>1232</b>	555	185	1110	165	<b>13271</b>
Boreal Chickadee	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	16	1	-	-	9	16	<b>45</b>
Tufted Titmouse	190	<b>**668</b>	573	492	598	303	181	183	25	12	51	3	-	157	103	85	180	-	<b>3804</b>
Red-br. Nuthatch	<b>119</b>	<b>**544</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>149</b>	58	<b>176</b>	28	86	25	89	21	<b>242</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>57</b>	167	14	<b>3333</b>
White-br. Nuthatch	168	<b>286</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>**430</b>	<b>182</b>	91	186	22	35	40	9	1	<b>277</b>	<b>90</b>	54	249	8	<b>2798</b>
Brown Creeper	13	<b>**70</b>	<b>66</b>	26	<b>39</b>	19	7	14	3	10	10	10	5	13	4	6	21	2	<b>338</b>
Winter Wren	1	-	-	1	6	1	CW	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>11</b>
Carolina Wren	29	6	<b>36</b>	<b>**43</b>	36	<b>15</b>	1	14	-	1	<b>3</b>	-	-	1	1	6	1	-	<b>193</b>
Golden-cr. Kinglet	-	19	2	7	5	-	-	-	-	15	1	16	10	1	1	3	9	-	<b>89</b>
Eastern Bluebird	112	<b>86</b>	82	<b>265</b>	<b>**324</b>	<b>78</b>	36	<b>20</b>	-	-	8	-	-	2	7	42	29	-	<b>1091</b>
Hermit Thrush	-	-	2	13	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>19</b>
American Robin	456	49	142	1989	243	277	275	23	CW	8	13	1	-	34	<b>5</b>	79	30	-	<b>3624</b>
Gray Catbird	-	-	-	-	3	1	*1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>5</b>
N. Mockingbird	28	1	<b>20</b>	65	26	24	13	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	<b>188</b>
European Starling	639	135	410	2395	1189	873	366	651	CW	19	23	-	7	24	38	748	64	-	<b>7581</b>
American Pipit	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>4</b>
Bohemian Waxwing	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	7	-	-	20	-	<b>36</b>
Cedar Waxwing	62	4	284	93	82	168	55	166	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	10	1	-	<b>933</b>
Lapland Longspur	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
Snow Bunting	-	-	CW	98	11	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	18	54	-	<b>192</b>
Black-thr. Blue Warbler	-	-	-	+1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
Pine Warbler	-	-	-	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>2</b>
Yellow-rumped Warbler	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
Yellow-breasted Chat	-	-	-	-	*1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
Am. Tree Sparrow	48	27	46	278	75	75	9	32	6	4	-	-	9	8	13	9	8	-	<b>647</b>
Chipping Sparrow	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	<b>3</b>
Field Sparrow	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>2</b>
Fox Sparrow	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*1	-	-	<b>4</b>
Dark-eyed Junco	324	480	1073	1219	614	553	111	41	7	4	11	-	-	64	45	269	46	-	<b>4861</b>
White-cr. Sparrow	-	-	-	<b>**15</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>15</b>
White-thr. Sparrow	34	12	64	249	85	40	3	10	-	7	3	-	-	2	2	28	2	-	<b>541</b>

Total Number of Species Across all CBCs: 133

CW = Count Week

Nsh = Nashua-Hollis (1/1/2020)

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+ = New Species to New Hampshire

\* = New Species to a Count

\*\* = New high species count for the state

***Bold italic=new individual count high***



# 121<sup>st</sup> Christmas Bird Count: Dec. 14, 2020 - Jan. 5, 2021 — continued

Species	Nsh	Pet	Kee	Cst	Lee	Con	Lac	Han	Bak	Lit	Grf	Erl	Pit	Cnw	Sun	Man	San	Amc	Total
Savannah Sparrow	-	-	-	8	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Song Sparrow	<b>25</b>	5	22	<b>**213</b>	49	19	1	6	-	-	-	1	-	3	-	9	1	-	354
Lincoln's Sparrow	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Swamp Sparrow	-	-	1	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Eastern Towhee	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>	-	1
Northern Cardinal	138	<b>142</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>338</b>	236	<b>190</b>	61	93	6	5	13	4	4	<b>47</b>	38	73	33	-	1684
Red-winged Blackbird	167	5	6	<b>113</b>	3	-	-	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	313
Rusty Blackbird	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	CW	-	3
Common Grackle	1	-	-	<b>**226</b>	<b>13</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	240
Br.-headed Cowbird	-	-	-	12	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
Pine Grosbeak	10	20	108	32	<b>43</b>	119	104	71	8	29	-	64	50	23	45	-	13	15	754
House Finch	210	18	203	487	188	168	45	99	-	-	-	-	-	1	20	41	13	-	1493
Purple Finch	14	1	1	8	2	1	8	CW	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	38
Red Crossbill	<b>9</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>**83</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>17</b>	6	1	<b>46</b>	-	-	-	3	-	2	4	*1	7	-	280
White-wing. Crossbill	1	<b>172</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>57</b>	13	4	22	17	-	-	3	-	6	16	-	-	1	3	321
Common Redpoll	34	113	134	111	49	138	123	148	9	35	8	154	140	154	25	-	199	<b>6</b>	1580
Hoary Redpoll	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2
Pine Siskin	41	26	29	57	30	8	-	22	1	56	6	-	-	11	-	15	-	8	310
American Goldfinch	167	82	164	606	430	249	76	92	97	4	6	1	2	60	15	70	17	-	2138
Evening Grosbeak	-	32	131	1	30	-	12	44	46	75	-	122	281	89	22	-	11	<b>28</b>	924
House Sparrow	784	158	<b>446</b>	1512	885	535	258	434	-	11	15	-	-	77	-	226	49	-	5390
Number of Species	61	52	62	108	79	61	57	54	27	35	37	34	36	54	39	49	60	22	133
Number of Participants	29	47	26	39	36	18	25	18	7	12	6	12	11	82	17	10	28	17	440



Roads were flooded on the Grafton-Bristol CBC, 12-26-20. Photos by Rebecca Suomala.

Total Number of Species Across all CBCs: 133

CW = Count Week

Nsh = Nashua-Hollis (1/1/2020)

Pet = Peterborough-Hancock (12/19/2020)

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+= New Species to New Hampshire

\*= New Species to a Count

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# The Winter Irruption of 2020-21

by Pam Hunt



*Pine Grosbeak by Scott Heron, 12-26-20, Exeter, NH.*

One of the highlights of birding in winter is the appearance of the “winter finches” – species that breed primarily to the north of New Hampshire and are seen here usually only in the winter. All of our “winter finches” are what ornithologists call “irruptives,” meaning that the numbers we see south of their breeding grounds fluctuate widely – typically in response to food supplies. They move south in larger numbers when food is scarce in Canada and congregate in the northern US when food is plentiful here. The food involved varies by species, but includes cone crops (crossbills, Pine Siskins, Red-breasted Nuthatches), mountain ash (Pine Grosbeaks, Bohemian Waxwings), birch and alder (redpolls and siskins), and even an insect – the Spruce Budworm (Evening Grosbeak).

In the winter of 2020-21, we witnessed something called a “super flight,” when nearly all the winter finches moved south at roughly the same time. This was largely because seed and fruit crops in Canada (and much of northernmost New England, i.e., Coos County, NH) were poor. With the exception of the Purple Finch, which was common during fall migration but kept on going south, all the irruptive species were present in greater numbers than usual, although they were not all widespread. There was often a lot of natural food so that, even though they were here in numbers, they were not necessarily at feeders.

A short summary follows.

1. Red-breasted Nuthatches moved south in late summer, and remained common south of the White Mountains where there was a huge crop of White Pine cones.
2. Bohemian Waxwings are generally late on the scene, especially south of the White Mountains. They were in scattered pockets of the North Country but appeared in more “southerly” locales like the Upper Valley in mid- to late February.
3. Evening Grosbeaks have been slowly increasing over the last few years in response to a growing Spruce

Budworm (a moth) outbreak in Quebec. Many may remember the grosbeak hordes in the 1980s and 1990s that were during the last budworm outbreak (which eventually reached New Hampshire). By February, Evening Grosbeaks were mostly north of the White Mountains, with a few in the west and otherwise widely scattered in the south.

4. Pine Grosbeaks were one of the stars of this super flight in terms of their distribution. They were scattered statewide wherever there were fruiting trees.
5. Common Redpolls were also locally abundant, but scarce at feeders south of the White Mountains. This was largely because there were *lots* of natural seeds around in the form of birch, alder, and assorted weeds. Every now and then observant and lucky birders found the much rarer Hoary Redpoll mixed in.
6. Red Crossbills invaded during the summer of 2020 and remained common through November, and likely bred in many southern areas in late summer and early fall. They responded to a bumper crop of White Pine cones. By February, a few were still present but the large numbers appeared to have moved on, as is the wont of crossbills, even though there were apparently lots of cones still available.
7. Those remaining White Pine cones (and some spruces) were enjoyed by White-winged Crossbills, which increased from mid-fall through February and then slowly dispersed again.
8. Pine Siskins came south in huge numbers in the fall of 2020, but most continued on. That said, there were still scattered pockets statewide and seemed to be the mostly likely winter finch to visit feeders in the south.
9. Two other species are not part of this irruption. As already mentioned, Purple Finch were essentially absent and American Goldfinches were far less common than the winter of 2019-20.

Irruptives go as far as they need to (or feel like?) in search of food. In the late fall of 2020, there was even a report of an Evening Grosbeak in northern Florida, where they’re almost unheard of (even back in the last irruption). We often see a pattern of long-distance overshoots like this during irruption years, possibly because of birds wandering widely to get a better assessment of where they can find food. Those early prospectors tend to disappear before the main push of birds show up later in the winter.

The best way to find winter finches (unless you’re lucky enough to have them in your yard!) is to be out walking in the morning when they often fly between feeding areas and utter their distinctive call notes.

More on irruptives can be found here:

<https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2020>



# Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey Discontinued

by Chris Martin



Banded immature Bald Eagles in April of 2007 by Judy Lombardi.

NH Audubon has decided (as have many other states over the past several years) that the time has finally come for us to discontinue the winter eagle count, after 40 consecutive years of participating in the national Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey (<http://gis.nacse.org/eagles/>).

In January 2020, New Hampshire surpassed 100 Bald Eagles tallied in the count for the first time (101 Bald Eagles, plus 2 Golden Eagles!). We also had 100 participants

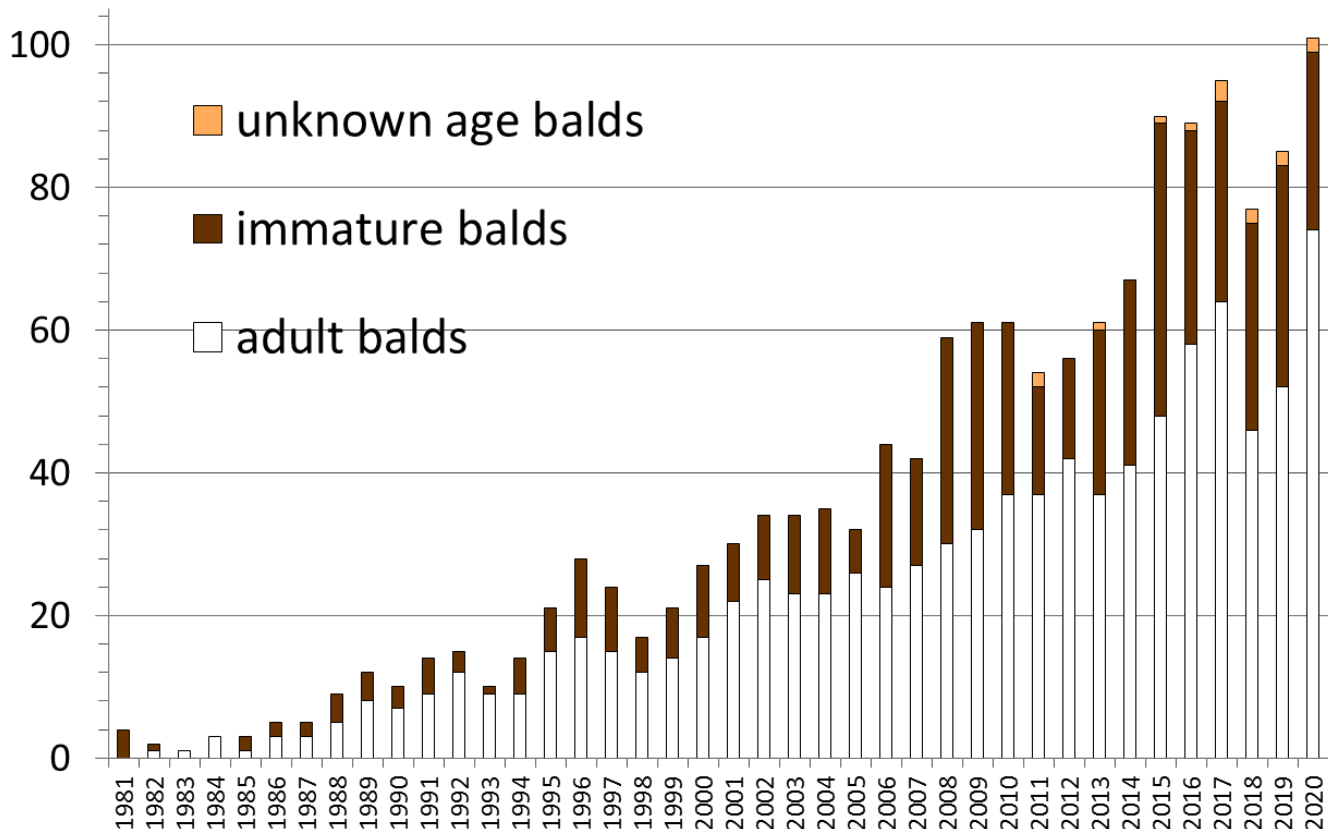


Exeter sub-ad Bald Eagle by Len Medlock, 12-25-09.

involved on Count Day! Figure 1 shows the progress we've made in NH Count Day results for all 40 years beginning in 1981. One clear sign that our Bald Eagle population continues to thrive is the fact that the top six Count Day totals since 1981 all occurred in just the past six years (2015-2020).

Several observers have been involved for at least as long as I have (that's 30 years!) and at least one volunteer (Dawn Stavros) has participated in all 40 counts! Also a salute to the various NH Audubon staff members (Carol Foss, Diane De Luca, and Laura Deming) who coordinated this effort in the early years! Please know that NH Audubon and NH Fish & Game are both so grateful to all the volunteers who participated in this survey. NH Audubon couldn't have done this without you!

## New Hampshire Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey Results: Count Day Results Jan 1981 through Jan 2020



# Finding New Hampshire's First Ever Sage Thrasher

by Cory Ross



*The Sage Thrasher, found 12-19-20, welcomed in the New Year in this photo on January 1, 2021 by finder Cory Ross, and was last reported on February 6 by Phil Brown.*

The 2020 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was unlike any other, much like 2020 was unlike any year in memory. The ongoing pandemic forced us to make significant changes to our count day plans. The Brattleboro CBC has always been a popular event in the birding community. While some bird count circles are surveyed by small, dedicated groups of birders, ours is covered by seven teams of often more than 30 people. Many more report feeder counts from their homes on count day. The event culminates with a potluck where we swap stories of the day's birding and total our results.

The team I join each year covers the Brattleboro, VT and New Hampshire portions of the circle. We often dedicate nearly equal parts of the day to birding as we do to stopping for breakfast and lunch. Eating and socializing are important parts of the tradition! All of this was different in 2020, however. To support social distancing guidelines, we chose to primarily bird alone on count day this year, December 19, 2020. We split our usual routes into smaller portions that each birder could survey alone. For me, this meant I was free to bird from before sunrise (I started owling at 3:00 am) until the last bit of day light was gone, since I had no social obligations. I took it as a point of personal pride to survey as much of the usual route as possible, albeit less thoroughly with only one set of eyes. This change also meant I was all by myself when I spotted a very unusual bird at the Hinsdale Setbacks (NH) near the end of the day.

The Hinsdale setbacks are arguably the best birding hotspot in our count circle. More than 240 species have been reported there all-time; however, most of these occur in migration. We stop at the setbacks each count day mostly to

record the Bald Eagles and a few ducks and gulls present if there's open water. I was climbing down a snow bank towards the Connecticut River, my eyes focused on the river, when a small group of birds flew up into some bushes ahead. As I scanned them with my binoculars, I quickly identified them as bluebirds. The last bird in the group was oddly different, though. I had no clue what it was, but my first instinct was to get a picture in case it turned out to be something special. I snapped a few photos before it took flight and vanished into the shrubs to the north of the trail.

I convinced myself it was probably just an unusual bluebird, or maybe a mockingbird that I had not gotten a good enough look at. I finished the day's route and hurried home for our online compilation. It wasn't until late that night, when I began to transfer photos off of my camera to my computer, that I really started to scratch my head. The pale eye on the bird really stood out. All I could think of was Rusty Blackbird, or pipit, but neither of these were quite right. I emailed the picture to another area birder to see what she thought. By morning, I had an email back saying that it looked like a Sage Thrasher. I had seen one in my life, in Eastern Oregon, and hadn't really considered the possibility here. The picture was circulated among a few more serious birders and eventually the eBird reviewer for the area. By the end of the day, I knew that I had found the state's first ever Sage Thrasher.

The bird stuck around for several weeks to the delight of birders who came from far and wide. The year 2020 was unusual in so many ways and I think we all mourned things we lost to the pandemic over the past year and half. This rare bird from across the continent helped make this unusual bird count memorable for me. I'll be happy to return to a more "normal" bird count in 2021, complete with the socializing and eating, but I'll always remember this bizarre year and this unusual bird.



*Some of the many birders who saw and photographed a cooperative Sage Thrasher. Photo by Steve Mirick, 1-10-21, Hinsdale, NH.*

# Inland Pacific Loon at Leavitt Park Beach, Meredith

by Iain MacLeod

Leavitt Park Beach in Meredith, NH has become one of my favorite early winter birding spots. It offers an expansive view of open water on Lake Winnepesaukee from Center Harbor Bay, over Black Cat Island and across to Moultonborough Neck, with the Ossipee Range (and a big sky above) as a back drop. In November and December there is lots of bird activity. Bald Eagles are always in sight (with up to seven visible at once) and big flocks of Common Mergansers fish in the shallows with some Common Goldeneye mixed in. Several loons linger until freeze.

December 13, 2020 started out with thick fog draping the lake in flat calm conditions. Mild temps made for pleasant viewing and I set up the scope for a scan. There was not a ripple on the lake. It was like glass and I could see several waterbirds scattered between the islands. I quickly honed in on a loon that struck me as “different.” It was distant, close to the shore of Black Cat Island, therefore about a mile from me, but with zoom eye piece on my Swarovski scope (no shake), I was able to see good detail of shape and coloration. The immediate impression was of a “small” loon or large grebe, although the initial observation in the fog was particularly challenging. I was able to go through a process of elimination to rule out a variety of options. Right away, the proportions between head, beak and body made it very different from a Common Loon (which of course I am very familiar with in all seasons and plumages). The head was more rounded than a Common and the bill was smaller. It lacked the “angular” look of the head of a Common Loon. At times, I was able to directly compare it with a non-breeding adult Common Loon (sometimes in the same scope view). I was able to compare shape and dive style. On several occasions, the bird reared up and flapped its wings (as loons do) and even there I could discern a difference in speed of the flap and even the length of the wings.

Coloration was discernible, even at the great distance, because of the favorable viewing conditions and lighting. Overall impression was of a “sooty gray/brown” bird overall. I focused on why it wasn’t a Red-throated Loon (another bird I am very familiar with). Head pattern wasn’t right for Red-throated. The dark cap extended down over the eye. There was no white around the eye (which would also be present in Common). Bill shape and head posture were not right for Red-throated. It did not have the usually obvious upturned bill/head of Red-throated either.

Once I eliminated Common Loon and Red-throated Loon, I was beginning to focus in on Pacific Loon. I pulled

out my Sibley field guide and went to the Merlin app on my phone and began to double check for characteristic features of Pacific to make sure of what I was seeing before calling in backup. I knew this would be a very rare bird for the area and wanted to be sure in my own mind before making a call for others to see it. In referencing the guides, I noted the mention of Pacific usually having a “chinstrap.” I then focused in on the neck and noticed that this bird had a slight “chinstrap.” The clean line between the back of the neck and throat was also mentioned and observed (although I have to say that at that distance, that feature was not a slam dunk).

By now, I had been staring at the bird for close to an hour. During that time, I never lost it. It was frequently diving, but was always predictably back in view after a couple of minutes and I was able to reinforce my observations. I decided to call Ken Klapper, who is often out and about in the area. By chance, he was less than ten minutes away and quickly joined me. With his scope, he was able to quickly get on the bird and he walked through the various identification features with me. I systematically went through “why it isn’t a Red-necked Grebe and why it isn’t a Red-throated Loon, etc.” Ken saw all the features that I was seeing and we decided to call Tony Vazzano and Bob Ridgely.

I had not posted the bird to the NHBirds email list at that time and, with the “cavalry” coming, I decided to wait until they were able to agree on the bird too. Tony arrived first and was able to get on the bird and quickly see all the features I was seeing (although he was concerned about how far away the bird was). Bob arrived and was very exhaustive and appropriately skeptical/careful. By this time, the cloud cover had broken up and there was more sunlight and reflection which made viewing more difficult (less favorable light). It took a while for Bob to see all that I was seeing. Finally, the bird got into better light again with bright water behind, which allowed Bob to see the shape, posture and wing flap. We again all walked through the features we were seeing and why we could eliminate other possible species. After a while, all present were in agreement on my identification as a Pacific Loon and fully satisfied that all the necessary identification features were observed. Only then did I post to NHBirds.

Overall, I watched the bird almost continuously for four hours in perfectly calm conditions. I was able to constantly reinforce my observations and confirm all the necessary characteristics and features of Pacific Loon, the first documented inland record for New Hampshire.

A search the next day by several other birders and me did not relocate the loon. It was the classic “one-day-wonder.”



# Winter 2020-21 Field Notes

*Diana Stephens, Editor*

## Barred Owl Visits a Backyard Feeder

*Text and photos by Nancy Allenby*

*This homeowner spotted a Barred Owl on her backyard feeder hunting for voles in New London, NH on February 9, 2021.*

I noticed the owl sitting on top of our bird feeder post about 4:00 in the afternoon. In total, he was up there for at least 90 minutes hunting what I believe are voles, dark brown, short-tailed rodents larger than a mouse. I didn't film the catching of the first vole, but I took a series of photos. He was looking down at the ground on both sides of the pole, then landed on the ground to the right of the pole. He caught the rodent and took it back up to the top of the pole and proceeded to tear it apart bite by bite. I could see strings of intestines hanging.

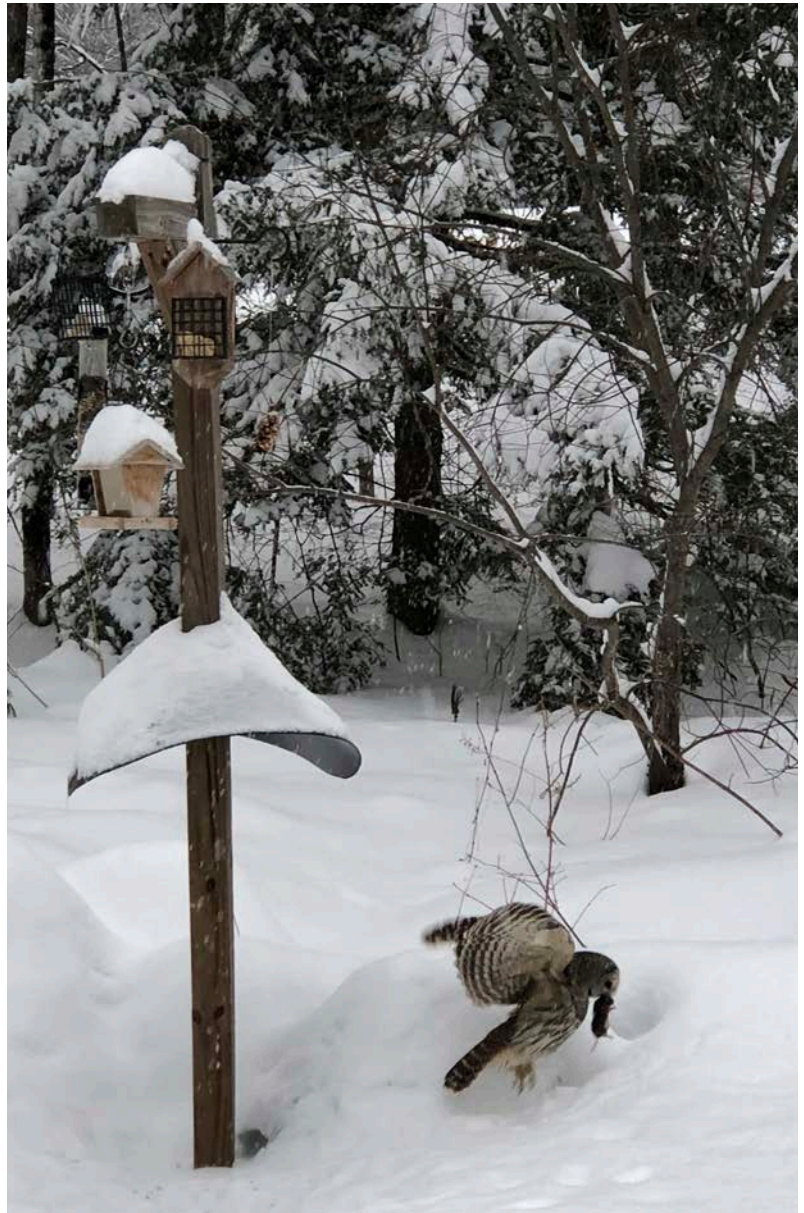
I was able to film it when he caught the second vole. This time, he caught the rodent to the left of the pole and he ate it on the ground in about six gulps, no tearing or dismembering this time. He flew to a tree branch for just a minute after devouring the second vole, then went back to the top of the pole until it was too dark to see him.



*A Barred Owl sitting on a post at a backyard bird feeder in New London, looking at the homeowner and photographer while hunting.*



*Here, the Barred Owl searches for voles under the snow.*



*The owl captures two voles and devours the second vole in six gulps. Yum!*



## Wreath of Robins

by Michelle Roberge

*A wreath made of bittersweet, with its orange-red berries, became a real, live, "Wreath of Robins." Goffstown homeowner Michelle Roberge writes about her experience below.*



*Ten American Robins gather on a homemade wreath placed on a shed by Michelle Roberge of Goffstown, NH. Michelle's mother, June Fabre of Exeter, explained that the photos were a bright spot during the worst of the pandemic when she shared them with her friends. June sent one friend, who was recovering from COVID-19, a get-well card with the "wreath of robins" photo on the front. The photo was taken February 18, 2021.*

Last fall, I was cutting down some bittersweet that was growing in my yard and thought the berries would make a pretty wreath for our shed. So I cut the vines carefully into smaller lengths, shaped them into a wreath and tied it with wire. It hung on the shed most of the winter and looked really pretty with the bright orange-red berries contrasting with the white snow.

Due to COVID-19, my husband and I had been working from home almost exclusively. One day in mid-February, while making our lunch, we noticed that the robins were congregating on the wreath. We have large windows that look out onto our back yard from the kitchen. I was hesitant to go close to take photos since I didn't want to scare them off, but with my zoom lens on the sport setting, I could capture them in motion. I was able to get a great series of

photos this way.

The next day, the wreath was almost completely stripped of berries. Not long after, I took it down. We were grateful we were able to witness this unique event.

*Editor's Note: Most bittersweet is the invasive Oriental Bittersweet (Celastrus orbiculatus), but there is a native American Bittersweet (Celastrus scandens). Be sure to plant the native species which also has attractive red berries.*

## Why Blue Jays Eat Paint

by Diana Stephens



*Linda Charron photographed four Blue Jays peeling (and eating!) the white paint off her backyard shed, 12-8-20.*

Linda Charron of New Boston posted the following Question to the NHBirds e-mail list on December 8, 2020 (see the photo above):

*We have had many Blue Jays this year. One annoying thing they've been up to is stripping the paint off our shed. Does anyone have any idea why they do this? They do seem to be eating the paint. It is not lead-based paint. My husband thinks it's the calcium in the paint that the jays are after. Is this true?*

We did some research of our own and found the answer in David Allen Sibley's new book, *What It's Like To Be A Bird*:

*Jays are sometimes seen knocking bits of light-colored paint off of houses and eating the paint chips. They are seeking calcium, which is an ingredient in most paint, and is especially important for female birds forming eggshells. Females of many species are known to select grit with higher calcium content in the spring when they are producing eggshells. This paint-chipping behavior is most prevalent in northeastern North America, where natural calcium is relatively scarce, partly because acid rain leaches calcium out of*

the soil. This behavior also occurs when there is deep snow cover, making any natural sources of calcium unavailable. You can help the jays (and stop them from chipping paint) by offering crushed eggshells, which are a better source of calcium.



This front porch in Wolfeboro is another example of Blue Jays having peeled and eaten white paint for its calcium content. Photo by Diana Stephens.

Note that eggshells may contain salmonella bacteria and it is best to boil the shells for 10 minutes or heat them in the oven for 20 minutes at 250 degrees, let them cool and crush them. There is more on NH Audubon's Ask the Naturalist web page:

<https://www.nh Audubon.org/education/ask-the-naturalist/>

We hope this answers Linda's questions about why Blue Jays eat paint and what to do about it. Thanks for asking the question, Linda!

## A Different Kind of Blue Jay

Longtime NH Audubon supporter Ben Haubrich sent in these photos of a leucistic Blue Jay that spent the winter on his lawn in Franconia, NH.



This almost-white Blue Jay arrived in November and stayed all winter, visiting the feeders daily.



Ben and his wife Robin named the bird "Phantom," and photographed him again on February 11, 2021. The bird stayed until at least April.

*Editor's Note: Leucism is a condition in birds that results in the lack of usual pigments. For more information about leucism in birds, please see the New Hampshire Bird Records article by Aiden Moser in the Fall 2014 issue entitled, "Why Does That Bird Look Different?" To view the article online, please go to the link below:*

[https://nhbirdrecords.org/all-articles/Vol33\\_No\\_3\\_Leucism\\_article.pdf](https://nhbirdrecords.org/all-articles/Vol33_No_3_Leucism_article.pdf)

## Xanthochromic and Leucistic Coloring in Evening Grosbeaks

These two Evening Grosbeaks were both photographed on the same day. A xanthochromic Evening Grosbeak was photographed by David Govatski and is contrasted here with a leucistic Evening Grosbeak photographed by Tom Berriman. Bird xanthochromism is excessive yellow coloration in feathers that is usually related to the lack of typical red pigmentation. The cause is typically genetic but may be related to diet.



Xanthochromic coloring in an Evening Grosbeak in Jefferson, NH. Photo by David Govatski, 12-30-20. See the inside front cover for a color version of this photo.





*This photo of a leucistic Evening Grosbeak was taken in Lyndonville, VT on the same day that the xanthochromic bird was photographed, 12-30-20. Photo by Tom Berriman. See inside cover for color version.*

## A Wilson's Snipe Spends the Winter

by Stuart Varney



*This photo of a Wilson's Snipe was taken in Portsmouth by Stuart Varney. The snipe survived the winter and was photographed here on March 15, 2021.*

First noticed by my wife outside the kitchen window in early January, a snipe over-wintered in my yard's swamp in Portsmouth. "Captain Pecky" was observed as an almost daily occurrence in the same swampy spot through the end of January, at which point he was not seen again until March 3.

In February, the spot where he was typically found was frozen hard, so apparently he found some other soft spots. On March 4, he flushed as I walked out onto the frozen swamp in search of Winter Wrens (I found at least two, possibly three, in the swamp). Throughout March,

the snipe was present most days, apparently successful in overwintering. During this time, he survived a fox strolling right through his pecking spot and evaded a stalking by "Peaches" the neighbor's cat. My kids were tickled that throughout March they were the only people in New Hampshire to have seen a Wilson's Snipe in 2021 (according to eBird, at least). As yet, I have been unable to add him to my "hot tub bird list."

## Three Glaucous Gulls (in Three Different Plumages)

Text and photos by Robert A. Quinn



*First-year Glaucous Gull, spotted by Bob Quinn in Seabrook on 11-14-20.*



*The Glaucous Gull on the left is an adult bird that has been regularly present at the bath house in Seabrook for many years. It was joined here by a bright white first-year Glaucous Gull (on right). An adult Glaucous is larger than a Herring Gull, is very pale gray and has no black on the wings.*

Considering that I rarely bird the coast, I thought it was unusual to see and photograph three different Glaucous Gulls in the exact same spot in Seabrook. The first individual was a less-than-bright-white first year bird seen on the relatively early date of November 14, 2020. It was floating close to shore from the Route 1A, Seabrook, parking lot at Hampton Harbor.

My next "Fun with Glaucous" started with the adult seen at its traditional site (the Seabrook parking lot) on February 6, 2021. It was as accommodating as it has been for the 10+ years it has been wintering there, but the bonus that day was a gleaming bright white first-year Glaucous that joined the



adult that same day. I must give credit to the clam diggers who were out in droves on February 6 because their diggings in the mud brought up food that drew in the gulls.

Identification note: Young Glaucous Gulls vary a lot in their “whiteness” yet these two distinct individuals can be identified as first-year birds (a.k.a. first-cycle) by their dark eyes. Two-year-old birds (second cycle) have similar plumage but pale eyes.



*This is the same bright white first-year Glaucous Gull that was seen with the adult in the previous picture.*

## Wintering Ovenbird, Portsmouth, NH

*by Lynn and Robin Schweikart*

Imagine our excitement at seeing an Ovenbird hanging around under our bird feeders! Not to mention that it was November! We were participating in the Cornell FeederWatch program and we were thrilled that it decided to show up on November 22, one of our report days. Of course, they are so rare at that time of year that we had to add it to the list by hand. We posted it on the NH rare bird alert too and got a call from Steve Mirick, who wanted to stop by and confirm our sighting. He came and found it hanging around with a bunch of juncos in the evergreens behind our small water garden. Fortunately, it continued off and on that day and again briefly early the next morning.

We began to see it more frequently, usually with the juncos and almost always out back. We worried about him or her every time it snowed or got particularly cold. Sometimes, days would go by without our seeing it and we feared that something had happened, but then it would reappear. We started sitting on our window seat near the end of the day and were often rewarded with a view of it feeding in the fading light. It liked to sit under a little rock overhang

that was protected from the elements and not too far from our heating system exhaust. We took to putting seeds and chopped up dried meal worms there for it.

Winter turned to spring and the Ovenbird was still with us, living a relatively event-free life except for the time we left the garage door open, and wouldn't you know, the one bird that flew in and had to be carefully rescued, was the Ovenbird! By early April, we were seeing it less and less. One morning, I was awakened to the sound of “Teacher, Teacher, Teacher” from the woods across the street. We imagined it was our bird and that maybe it was preparing to stay! A few days later, however, we realized we'd not seen or heard it again and also the junco buddies were gone too.



*Wintering Ovenbird in a Portsmouth, NH back yard by Lynn Schweikart, 2-14-21.*



*Ovenbird by Robin Schweikart, 2-27-21, Portsmouth, NH.*

# A Canada Jay in Sandwich, NH

by Robert Ridgely



The Canada Jay, previously known as Gray Jay, that appeared at the author's home in North Sandwich in December 2020. Photo by Sue Francesco, 12-15-20.

I've always loved to put out food to feed birds and loved having them come quite close with some degree of regularity. With experience, I came to realize that rarely do they develop a real dependence on it, except under very unusual circumstances. Rather, I guess it was I who was somewhat dependent on them, whether I was gazing out windows from the confines of the house in Providence, RI where I grew up, or my college dorm in New Jersey (just starlings and sparrows there), or our various homes in the Northeast, including here at our treasured home in North Sandwich, NH.

You always dream of attracting a rarity to your feeders, but, by definition, hardly ever does one appear. So feeders were far from my thoughts on December 13, 2020, when I received a call from Iain MacLeod that he and Ken Klapper were at Leavitt Beach in Meredith watching an unusual loon out in Lake Winnepesaukee. I, of course, wanted to go see it too and, though the bird was far away, concurred with their identification that yes, it was a basic-plumaged Pacific Loon. This is a real rarity anywhere in New Hampshire and essentially unheard of inland – wonderful and brilliant spotting by Iain.

On the drive down to Meredith, I noticed that there were several roadkill Gray Squirrels and on the way back I stopped and picked them up for my “meat feeder.” The reality is that we see remarkably little road kill in our area

(I'm not sure why that would be) so, when it's safe, I usually stop and retrieve whatever I've spotted. Three Gray Squirrels was rather a bonanza. Late in the afternoon I laid them out below the house where I've regularly attracted ravens and the occasional eagle.

Next morning, Iain and Ken went back to try to relocate the vagrant loon, while I did errands around town awaiting their call, but they had no luck on finding it. I drove back home, parked, and glanced at the pile of carcasses, noting that a raven had just flushed and that some smaller bird was on one of the squirrels. I had a hunch, but no binoculars, isn't that almost always the case! So, I hustled back to the house, grabbed the bins, and – thank God! – the bird was still there and yes, it actually *was* a Canada Jay!

Now it was up to me to call Ken and Iain about *my* unexpected bird! I got through to them and both, especially Ken, dropped everything to race up to our place on Beede Flats Road. Meanwhile, my jay remained close by, not always in sight but always reappearing after a few minutes, usually from over towards NH Audubon's Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary across Rt. 113. They were able to get good photographic documentation for, typically, the bird was relatively tame.

“My” jay proceeded to come to the meat pile almost daily until January 12, 2021 though there may have been a gap in early January. Others came to see it. It never associated with the Blue Jays that were so numerous that winter and which frequently partook of the meat. It never appeared at my seed feeders. It hardly ever uttered a sound. I kept hoping it would tame down (one of my greatest delights hiking in the White Mountains or elsewhere has been having a jay suddenly appear and, with any luck, pluck a morsel of food from my hand), but it never did, perhaps not remaining long enough to become fully accustomed to my presence. I always provided plenty of food, but nonetheless, just shy of a month, it left of its own accord. About two months later, on March 13, 2021, a Canada Jay was found by J. Carlson (eBird report) at NH Audubon's Watts Wildlife Sanctuary in Effingham, rather a surprise as so few are seen south of their normal mountainous range. Who knows, maybe it could have been my bird?

The Canada Jay, known for a time as the Gray Jay, is a scarce resident of the coniferous forest at higher elevations in our White Mountains and more broadly across much of Canada; the name reversion is a good one! A few pairs may reside on Sandwich's highest peaks such as Sandwich Dome (none of them reported recently), but the species is notably sedentary and it is very unusual to have one appear down lower. My father, in his *Guide to the Birds of the Squam Lakes Region, New Hampshire* (Beverly S. Ridgely, 1988), noted that as of then, there were some winter records of Canada





*The Canada Jay is seen here feasting on a squirrel which was part of the Ridgely's meat pile near their home. Photo by Iain MacLeod, 12-14-20, North Sandwich, NH.*

Jays frequenting feeding stations in Sandwich and around Squam, but since the 1980s no further records were known until the appearance of our December 2020 individual. With the milder and less snowy winters we are now experiencing (and which seem destined to continue), it is possible that Canada Jay populations are declining, especially here at the southern limit of their distribution.

As most know, I am fundamentally a creature of the tropics, but I've also always loved snow and the North Country. For years, the thought of attracting a Canada Jay to my own feeder seemed an impossible dream, but then it happened. Next year maybe a Boreal Chickadee?!

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## The Semi-Superbowl of Birding 2021

In 2021, some changes had to be made for the Superbowl of Birding due to COVID-19 (hence the name change to Semi-Superbowl). The competition still involved looking for as many bird species as possible in 12 hours and was run by Massachusetts Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center. Teams could compete in Essex County, MA and/or Rockingham County, NH providing they followed state quarantine rules. Team members had to be people in your "bubble" and the rules were changed to allow teams of 1-7 people.

This was the year that the Townie Award really took off. Ten of the 21 teams in the competition were competing for this award, searching for the most species in a single town. Usually there's only one – the Twitchers! There were fewer

teams competing for the entire competition and county awards, which ultimately benefited the New Hampshire townies (a team can only win one award). Massachusetts teams had some pretty impressive totals and took home top honors for the most points and species region-wide. "Birding with Impunity" (Pam Hunt and Unity Dienes, a Twitcher Team) took home the coveted Rockingham County Award and the "Townie Solitaire" (Becky Suomala, another Twitcher) won the Townie Award in Seabrook.

Where were the other Rockingham County competitors? Steve Mirick was restricted to Massachusetts and others stayed closer to home, birding outside the competition area. Below are highlights from the Twitchers and two other Townie competitors. Many thanks to Dave Larson, Melissa Vokey and everyone at Joppa Flats who made this happen!



*One of the "Townie Solitaire's" four species of owls – the Snowy Owl flew from Seabrook to Hampton so "Twitch-n-Dip" also got to see it. Photo by Susan Wrisley, 1-30-21.*

## Twitchers Win Two Awards!

*by Becky Suomala*

It was great fun to have so much competition for the Townie Award this year. We all had a great day on January 30, 2021. With team members restricted to people in your "bubble," the "Twitchers" had to split up resulting in three teams in three different towns:

- "Birding with Impunity" in Rye, Pam Hunt and Unity Dienes

- "Townie Solitaire" (aka The Lone Twitcher) in Seabrook, Becky Suomala

- "Twitch-n-Dip" in Hampton, Susan Wrisley and Jenna Pettipas

There were many great stories from the day, capped off with winning two awards. Wow! The three Twitcher teams combined to tally 83 species, six of which were new for the Twitchers, and four of which were 5-pointers. (Each species

has a point value with the rare species worth more points than common ones.) Five-pointers, the rarest, must be called in and if you're the first to call in that species you receive a 3-point bonus (we collected on three of those).

A big thank you to everyone who sponsored the Twitchers.



*One person pledged a bonus if we saw an Ostrich and we knew we'd have to provide documentation. You just never know what we'll find! Photo by Susan Wisley, 1-30-21.*

The Twitcher teams raised over \$5,000 (a new record) for *New Hampshire Bird Records* and NHeBird. We had some creative and fun pledges, including a bonus if we got pooped on by a bird, saw an Ostrich, or found a Crested Caracara. Of course we photo-documented our finds for these pledges.

A few highlights from individual teams are below, but you can read the full summary and see more photos on the *New Hampshire Bird Records* web site:

<https://nhbirdrecords.org/the-twitchers-go-viral-in-2021/>

## Birding with Impunity Takes Home the Rockingham County Award!

by Pam Hunt



*"Birding with Impunity" finally spotted this Semipalmated Plover that had been spending the winter at Rye Harbor. It was a first for the Twitchers and a 5-point species (with the 3-pt. bonus). Photo by Pam Hunt 1-30-21.*

I "retired" from the Superbowl of Birding in 2017 but given a few COVID-related changes I was back in the fray in 2021. The big difference was that teams didn't need to be at least four people – COVID don't cha know – and so Unity and I formed "Birding with Impunity" and returned to my old "Twitchers" stomping grounds of Rye. While teams were obviously smaller, it was certainly no less work than usual and we still had to deal with sometimes inhospitable January weather. In fact, with wind chills taken into account, this was the second coldest any Twitcher team has been in eleven

years. Thankfully, the winds weren't all that bad (generally less than 10 mph), but it was certainly a cold day. Range was 7-19 F, with wind chills from -5 to a positively balmy 7 degrees.

In the end, we had an absolutely fabulous day, starting with Great Horned and Northern Saw-whet Owls on Bracket Road

The Twitcher Numbers				
Team	Twitch-n-Dip	Birding with Impunity	The Townie Solitaire	Combined Total
Town	Hampton	Rye	Seabrook	(3 towns)
total species:	58	63	64	83
total points:	96	121	118	184
5-pointers		3	1	4
Unique species	3	12	8	23
New species	2	3	2	6*
Species seen by all teams				43
* two teams both got the same new species				



around 5:45 am and ending – with three minutes to spare – with a mid-distant look at a Common Murre (5-pointer) off Odiorne Point. In between we had a couple of great staked out birds: the Rye Harbor Semipalmated Plover (another 5-pointer) and West Road Black-throated Blue Warbler (our third 5-pointer, which gave a *very* brief view), but missed out on the Lincoln’s Sparrow that had been at Odiorne Point State Park despite some pretty extensive searching. As the first (and actually only) team to call in the plover and warbler, we were awarded an additional three points each.

Two major “saves” came late in the day, with our *only* pigeon at Rye Harbor around 3:00 pm (and only because we lingered to take photos of nearby ducks and loons!) – Whew! One pledge was a 5-point deduction if any Twitcher team missed pigeon (and it has been missed in Rye). Our second save was a pair of mockingbirds near Wallis Sands as we drove north along Rt. 1A at 4:20 pm.

Other reasonably good finds were a pair of Northern Pintail in the marsh near the Odiorne Point State Park boat launch, the female Barrow’s Goldeneye at Seal Rocks, and Brown Creepers and a Golden-crowned Kinglet.

### **Twitch-n-Dip in Hampton**

*by Susan Wrisley*

Jenna Pettipas and I formed team Twitch-n-Dip and covered Hampton, NH – a town the Twitchers had competed in for the last two years. After struggling into 20 layers of warm clothing, we were toasty warm and headed off to our first owling location. The warmth lasted for about 30 seconds in the frigid 7 degree F temps, but we were rewarded with a Northern Saw-whet Owl at our second stop, and two Eastern Screech-Owls at our final owling spot. Despite hooting efforts that were good enough to upset some small farm animals (all were safe in barns), we dipped on both Barred and Great Horned Owls, but did have a nice look at two coyotes.

As we drove toward the coastline, the Hampton water tower came into view and we began lamenting how everyone says Peregrine Falcons are “always” on the water tower, but we never see them there. Just as we finished griping, a Peregrine came soaring in and landed on the water tower! Wow! At the coast, we quickly collected the standard gulls, all the scoters and most other expected ducks. Big waves and rough seas dashed our hopes of finding alcids, but we did manage to turn up a single Horned Grebe.

At the Hampton/Seabrook town line “Glaucy,” the resident Glaucous Gull, didn’t disappoint and we had nice views of him on top of a siren. We also had a confirmed sighting of Becky Suomala, The Lone Twitcher, in Seabrook. By then, temps were so cold we weren’t entirely surprised when we spotted a couple of penguins. Unfortunately, they waddled across the town line into Seabrook so we had to

hand them off to Becky. Rumor has it some shenanigans may have taken place, but I don’t believe it.



*Twitcher High Jinks! Becky Suomala (top), the “Townie Solitaire” in frigid Antarctic Seabrook adding the newly discovered “Hampton-Seabrook Penguin” to her list after “Twitch-n-Dip” in Hampton (left, Jenna Pettipas) first spotted them. Photos by Susan Wrisley, 1-30-21.*

### **Townie Solitaire in Seabrook**

*by Rebecca Suomala*

I had a great day despite the 3:20 am wake-up call and the frigid starting temperature. Any four-owl day is a good one, especially on the Superbowl of Birding. My first bird of the morning was a Great Horned Owl and I coaxed out a Barred Owl “Whoo-Ah” a few stops later. My fantastic-looking final owl spot turned out to be a dud, but it was great for songbirds at dawn, yielding my only 5-pointer – a Red Crossbill flying over. The excitement warmed up everything except my feet which were blocks of ice.

My third owl came in the afternoon. I was pishing at some open water and finding nothing new when I finally noticed the Blue Jays and chickadees making alarm noises behind me. I turned around to see them clustered by a hole in a tree, with a chickadee actually looking inside the hole. I figured there had to be an owl but despite my increasing pishing, nothing appeared. I returned two hours later to check again



and there it was, an Eastern Screech-Owl looking out at me.

On a late afternoon check of Seabrook Beach, I found my fourth owl. I caught a quick glimpse of a large white bird as it flew by me between the houses in Seabrook headed to Hampton. I was sure it was a Snowy Owl but I needed confirmation. I tracked it down a block away just over the town line in an evergreen. Owl #4! Twitch-n-Dip was able to get a stunning photo and add it to their tally also.

My last species of the day was Northern Harrier at Cross Beach Road where I was hoping for owl #5 (Short-eared), but the harrier was a treat at sunset.

How was it being a team of one? I still enjoyed the competition day immensely and had a very fun time. A second set of eyes would have been helpful at times. It was fun to meet up with Susan and Jenna and have a laugh with fellow Twitchers. After the competition, we zoomed together with other New Hampshire competitors on Sunday before the compilation so we all got to share stories that way.



*Eastern Screech-Owl in Seabrook by Rebecca Suomala, 1-30-21.*

## More Townie Competitors

Since this was the first year with multiple Townie Award competitors, we wanted to bring you highlights from two other Townie competitors who weren't directly on the coast. Kurk Dorsey covered Newmarket which includes part of Great Bay, a large body of salt water just inland from the coast. For the first time since the Superbowl began Steve Mirick was not in New Hampshire, but he was just over the border in Massachusetts. His results provide an interesting contrast.

### "Unnecessary Ruff Nest"

*by Kurk Dorsey*

*Taken from a post to the NHBirds email list 1-30-21*

I covered Newmarket for the Townie segment of the Superbowl, spending enough time at the Moody Point boat house to submit that for the Sitting Duck award. Like Charlie Brown vs. Lucy or the Jets vs. pretty much anybody, I came in a serious underdog and went out planning for a high draft pick next year.

The morning started at 5:00 am along Ash Swamp Road and then Grant Road. I didn't record any owls, although at one point I heard three noises that sounded a lot like the saw-whet bill snap. I had read that they gave that usually when in the hand, and that didn't seem to be the case just then, although my fingers were already numb so maybe I was holding an owl. As I debated what the noise was, I recalled Abe Lincoln's wise words: "A house divided against itself can't count a bill snap as an owl." Maybe next year I'll know better.

So having dipped on any owls despite the very owl friendly conditions, I headed over to Moody Point, arriving just as the sun was rising over the bay. As I walked out to my Sitting Duck spot, I noticed how calm the bay was, which of course was because it was frozen pretty much solid. Nevertheless, with the scope, I was able to find most of the expected bay ducks, but the scaup flock that had been so close Thursday might as well have been halfway to Maryland. Still, I had flyover White-winged Crossbills and Common Ravens, as well as plenty of eagles before I realized that the toe and hand warmers I had pulled out of the closet last night might have been way past their prime and were basically cold little bags of sand (good for traction, but not much else). In three visits to that site, I ended up with 28 species (I think), which was OK given that the sheet of ice had just a few open spots in reasonable scope distance.

As with any such day, the misses for the rest of the town amaze me. How can one spend a day in January in Newmarket and not find a Hairy Woodpecker, a vulture, or any accipiter? OK, 75% of that day was spent with my face jammed up next to the car's heater, but the birds needed warmth too, and I was happy to share. From a Superbowl standpoint, I dipped on the 5-pointers that I had seen in the last week: Pine Grosbeak and Red Crossbill, as well as redpolls and Purple Finch.

All was not lost however: eBird tells me that the best bird of the day was a Red-shouldered Hawk sunning itself (hence the red shoulders) near the fire station on Young Drive with the Gray Catbird still on Mastin Drive as a close second. My highlight was the Merlin at the Elm St. Cemetery, followed closely by a surprise Fox Sparrow along Cushing Road. At the end of a cold but enjoyable day (now that I have regained feeling in most of my extremities), I had 49 species and 90 points and it's not like I blew a huge lead in the 4th quarter or anything....

## The Haverhill Pish-n-Chips

*A New Hampshire Birder Trapped in Massachusetts*

by Steve Mirick



*Red Crossbill by Steve Mirick during the Superbowl of Birding (1-30-21) in Haverhill, MA.*

*Taken from a post to the NHBirds email list 1-31-21*

As most of you may know, Jane and I spend most of our waking hours birding in New Hampshire, but live in the border town of Haverhill, MA. In order to comply with Massachusetts COVID regulations and Superbowl rules, we couldn't cross over the State line into New Hampshire. So we decided to cover our "home turf" and try to see what we could find in the City of Haverhill. We had a great time!

I was able to do a little bit of scouting, but had very little to show for my efforts. Fortunately, almost all of the "good" birds I scouted (Wild Turkey, Northern Flicker, Pine Siskin, Gray Catbird) all worked for us and other birds seemed to "fall in line" with lots of nice discoveries. We ended the day with an excellent total of 55 species. I doubt we could have done much better with the notable exception of owls. For some reason, I never get owls in the winter.

Perhaps our personal highlight of the day was Red Crossbill, my first ever for the City of Haverhill. Not a big surprise considering their abundance this winter, but the White Pine cone crop in the City is very poor, in contrast to the White Pines of western Rockingham County, NH which are laden with cones in some areas. The crossbills were working a Norway Spruce which seemed to have some nice cones.

Other nice surprises (not previously reported or scouted) for the day included a female Northern Pintail, a Turkey Vulture, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, two Peregrine Falcons, a Hermit Thrush, four Common Redpolls, a Swamp Sparrow, and an Eastern Towhee.

The complete list with hits and misses as well as a couple of documentation photos as follows:

<https://ebird.org/nh/checklist/S80150867>

## Birding New Castle, NH

by Patience Chamberlin

The town of New Castle sits at the very northern end of the New Hampshire seacoast. It would be the last (or first) stop if one is birding the entire New Hampshire coast. New Castle is the only New Hampshire town that is comprised entirely of islands. While it only totals about 500 acres in size, it holds some diverse habitats and good birding opportunities in a small area.

The waters surrounding New Castle hold much of the birding possibilities. The Piscataqua River, whose mouth opens to the Atlantic, borders the island to the north and east. The south and west is bordered by Little Harbor and the "back cove." These waters have very different characteristics that enhance the diversity of species throughout the seasons.

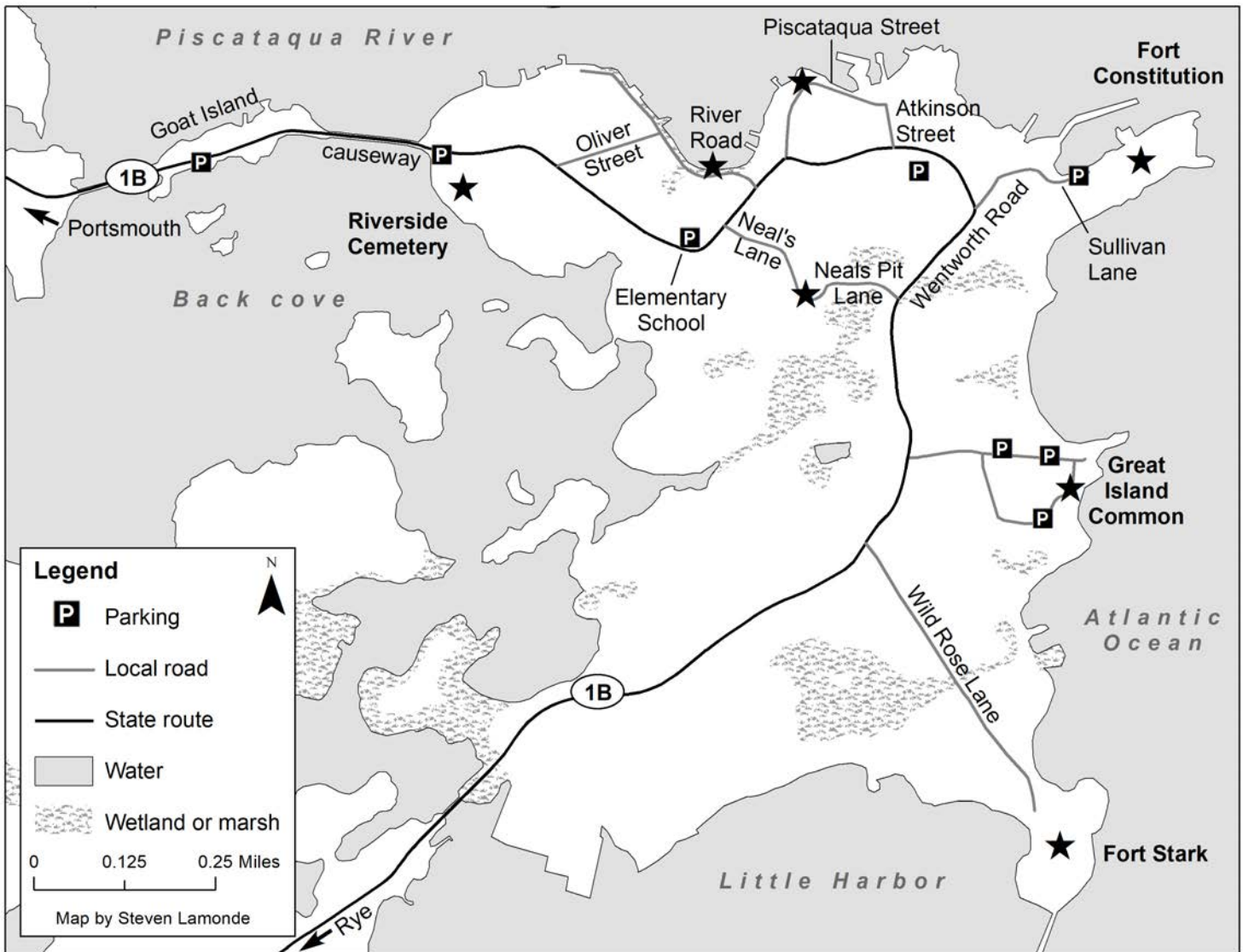
Please note parking in New Castle is somewhat challenging for non-residents. Heed the parking signs! You will be ticketed.



*Ring-billed Gulls eating crabapples at Great Island Common. Photos by Rebecca Suomala.*

As one enters New Castle from the south on Route 1B over the bridge from Rye, the first stop is Fort Stark, located at the end of Wild Rose Lane (right turn off Rt. 1B). If the gate is closed, parking on the road at Fort Stark is reserved for New Castle residents with stickers. In that case, the best option is to park at the Great Island Common (just north of Wild Rose Lane) and walk down Wild Rose Lane to Fort Stark. Wild Rose Lane can offer excellent birding, so it is a worthwhile route to Fort Stark. For a single location, Fort Stark offers the best views of Little Harbor, the mouth of the Piscataqua River, and the ocean anywhere on the island. Be sure to walk up and around the entire Fort for all the water views. Seabirds in all seasons are here in good variety and numbers, with the shelter of Little Harbor often providing





a different selection of birds than those on the open ocean. Wild Rose Lane offers more habitat for land birds, so the two areas make a fantastic combination.

About 0.2 miles north of Wild Rose Lane on Rt. 1B, Great Island Common is the next stop. This is New Castle's public park. There is a fee per vehicle during the summer season, but the best birding there is off-season. The Common has a large open area, which can attract geese, of course, but also birds such as Horned Larks and Snow Buntings in the fall and winter, just not in large numbers. It's also a decent spot for migrating raptors in the fall. The northern corner of the Commons near the cemetery has a fairly productive brushy, wooded area, including some fruit trees, that is worth investigating particularly in the spring. The beautiful long beach that is also part of the Commons does not seem to be a favorite stop for shorebirds, but you never know...

As I write this, an adult Bald Eagle just flew by my window, cruising up the river. You have a good chance of seeing an eagle anytime in New Castle. They have nested in the area for years and are present year round.

Continuing north on Rt. 1B, Fort Constitution lies on

the Piscataqua River. When Rt. 1B curves left, stay straight on Wentworth Road, then take the right fork onto Sullivan Lane, following signs for the Coast Guard Station. This is a state park which features another abandoned fort. The fort is within the gates of an active Coast Guard facility. There is parking on the right just outside the gate and a walking path for entering the fenced area (be sure to follow the lines delineating the walking path inside the gate). Unfortunately, the fort has been closed for the past year plus. Hopefully this will change. If the access gate is open, one can wander inside the grounds, checking the river and the fort itself whose most interesting occupants in the recent past have been Cliff Swallows. If there is no obvious place to park by the Fort, proceed into "downtown" New Castle on Rt. 1B and park on the street in legal spaces, or in the lot between the Town Hall and the Congregational Church, also on Rt. 1B. Walk back to the Fort.

As you drive through town on Rt. 1B, pass the post office on the right and take a right on Atkinson Street and then a left on Piscataqua Street, which will keep you on the Piscataqua River. Do a quick check of the river from the road



near the Portsmouth Yacht Club. Wintering loons and ducks can be in good numbers on the river, along with occasional grebes, scoters, and razorbills. After returning to Rt. 1B, take an immediate right onto River Road. The cove here can also be productive for ducks, particularly Buffleheads in fall and winter. A left on Oliver Street will return you to Rt. 1B. Back track with a left on Rt. 1B (heading east) to get to our next stop.

The hotspot in New Castle for land birds is Neal's Lane to Neal's Pit Lane. This is not a through road, so park at the Maude Trefethen Elementary School on the north side of Rt. 1B when it is not in session and walk across Rt. 1B and down Neal's /Pit Lane. I would not advise parking anywhere on the lane. The lane has some wet areas, brush, and wooded areas. It also is bordered by two marshes. Although they are somewhat frustratingly inaccessible, the marshes bring in diverse species that are often active near the lane. Spring migration can be surprisingly productive here.

The last available stop before leaving New Castle on the Portsmouth end of the island is a walk along the causeway and in the Riverside Cemetery located just before the causeway. There's a small pullout on the south side of the road where the corner of the cemetery meets the causeway. Some people keep their dinghies there and they don't seem to ticket. Walk through the cemetery for views of the back cove and look for Eastern Screech-Owls in the big old trees. They're around here somewhere! Walk on the causeway (if the wind isn't howling) for viewing both the back cove (also known as the Back Channel), its islands, and the river. An additional way to access the causeway is to use the pullout on Goat Island, which is on the left as you cross the causeway on Rt. 1B towards Portsmouth. This is a very busy spot in the summer, however parking is usually available off season. Check the cove and islands in all seasons. A Western Reef-Heron was spotted from here in 2006!

New Castle is seacoast birding in a nutshell. My advice is to find a legal parking place and just walk if you are able. Stop for a snack or lunch and you'll have spent the day well.

*Patience has been birding for about twenty years, first in Exeter, and now in New Castle with her (patient and supportive) husband, Tom.*



*American Wigeon  
by Steve Mirick,  
1-24-21, New  
Castle, NH.*

## Old Man Knowles – The Dangers of Discarded Fishing Tackle

*by Janice Landry*



*“Old Man Knowles,” the Knowles Pond loon and his chick, by Jan Landry, 6-29-20.*



*The same Knowles Pond chick, three months later showing a lure is visible in the chick's bill. Photo by Jan Landry, 9-26-20, just prior to rescue.*

My husband and I relocated to the Lakes Region in 2016 after raising our family in our hometown of Berlin, NH. Shortly after settling in to our new location, I researched conservation areas, trails and kayaking spots that would be easily accessible from our home. One of the highlights I discovered was Knowles Pond, a small conservation area in Northfield that offers beautiful walking trails and access to the pond for non-motorized boats. I spent many hours paddling around Knowles, binoculars and camera in hand, ready to take a closer look or capture a photo of the abundant birds and wildlife that could be spotted along the shores. One of the highlights was watching the established Common Loon pair that made Knowles Pond their home. Watching and photographing these particular loons led to my relationship with the Loon

Preservation Committee (LPC) as well as establishing a friendship with a fellow loon-watcher, Mark Chaffee.

Mark had been watching and documenting these particular loons since 2006. He has kept data on nesting as well as volunteering to place signs and float lines around the loon nesting site each year for the LPC. This particular male loon on Knowles had been the “resident male” since Mark began watching many years prior. Mark affectionately named him “Old Man Knowles.” Old Man Knowles was easy to distinguish from other loons as he had a broken lower mandible and had been banded by the LPC in 2012. Old Man Knowles had quite the personality....ornery, feisty and very protective of the chicks he raised over the years. It was all part of his charm.

In 2020, Mark and I placed the nesting signage and float lines around the nest. We enjoyed early morning paddles watching Old Man Knowles and his mate incubate two eggs from a safe distance. We were elated when one egg hatched producing a female chick. Over the next month, I visited Knowles on a regular basis to check on the progress of the chick. All was going as expected. The chick was growing. Mark and I shared observations via text and would run into each other paddling at Knowles on a regular basis.



*Old Man Knowles with visible monofilament fishing line wrapped around his bill. Photo by Caroline Hughes, August 2020.*

On August 6, the story of Old Man Knowles took an unfortunate turn. Caroline Hughes, a Biologist at LPC, contacted both Mark and me to let us know that Old Man Knowles had been rescued on Silver Lake in Tilton. Several residents on Silver Lake had been watching him for a few days. He was acting “odd” and they

were concerned. When he was rescued, he was wrapped in monofilament fishing line. He was untangled, his lead level checked (which came back low) and released in hopes that he would catch some fish and regain his strength. Mark and I diligently checked Knowles Pond in hopes that he would fly home to continue helping his mate care for their chick.

On August 24, it was relayed to both Mark and me that Old Man Knowles had turned up as a mortality on Silver

Lake the previous day. We were devastated. The following day, Mark and I met up at Knowles to kayak. We paddled and told our favorite stories about Old Man Knowles and his “antics” to say goodbye to this special loon. The female and chick were both present and we enjoyed watching her feed and care for the chick. We still looked forward to watching the chick grow and fly to the Atlantic Ocean in the fall.



*Knowles Pond female caring for chick after the untimely death of Old Man Knowles. Photo by Jan Landry, 8-25-20.*

Mark and I continued to communicate via text, updating each other with the progress of the chick. She continued to grow and become more independent and we felt positive about her chances of flying to the ocean in the fall. On September 26, I set out for a kayak paddle on a beautiful fall day. As I was photographing the chick, I noticed she was not acting normally and I paddled closer. The loon chick was entangled in a large fishing lure. One end was embedded in her bill, the other end was embedded in her wing. I immediately contacted Caroline Hughes at LPC as well as my friend Mark. Per Caroline’s direction, I was able to get the chick into my kayak and met Mark and Caroline at the boat landing. The chick was brought to a vet where the lure was removed, then brought to Wings of the Dawn for overnight observation. It was decided the best course of action was to release her the next morning. Mark and I met up with Caroline at Knowles and were present when the chick was released. The chick proceeded to beach herself and our hopes of her recovery sank. After Caroline made several calls, it was decided the chick would be brought to Avian Haven, a wild bird rehabilitation facility in Unity, ME in an attempt to save her. Despite all of the efforts made for this chick, she died on her way to Avian Haven.

Two loon deaths from the same family in one season. Both deaths linked to human-related causes. There had to be something that could be done to raise awareness of properly disposing monofilament line and fishing lures. Not just for the sake of loons, but for the sake of all wildlife,



including eagles, hawks, owls, kingfishers, and marine life, that could potentially be impacted. Public education regarding the dangers of lead tackle as well as proper disposal of monofilament fishing line should be an integral factor for all of New Hampshire residents who recreate in our beautiful outdoors.



*Mark Chaffee and Jan Landry holding the chick with head covered, just after the rescue (top). The chick's beak after removal of the fishing lure, showing the damage (left). Photos by Caroline Hughes, LPC biologist, 9-26-20.*

## Lead Tackle

The statistics of lead ingestions for New Hampshire loons each year is staggering. Lead poisoning has accounted for 42% of loon deaths in NH since 1989 (Loon Preservation Committee website, loon.org). NH RSA 339:77 and NH RSA 211:13-b ban the sale and use of all lead fishing sinkers or jigs that weigh less than one ounce for all freshwater within NH.

The Loon Preservation Committee partnered with NH Fish and Game and several retailers to initiate a Lead Tackle Buyback Program. An individual can exchange one ounce or more of banned lead fishing tackle for a \$10 merchandise voucher redeemable at participating tackle shops. More information regarding this program as well as a list of participating retailers is available at Loonsafe.org

## Monofilament Fishing Line

Monofilament line is frequently used by anglers as it is incredibly strong and durable. It is so durable, that it can take up to 600 years to break down once discarded. Problems arise for wildlife if the line is lost while fishing or if the line is discarded overboard. The line can become entangled around fish, waterfowl or birds. It can also be consumed by a variety of animals, causing blockages and malnutrition which ultimately can lead to death. The line can also cause injury to people if left in areas where people recreate, as well as possibly becoming entangled in motors causing extensive damage.

What can be done to prevent the impact of discarded monofilament fishing line on New Hampshire's wildlife? New Hampshire has no formal Monofilament Line Recycling Program, but there are steps that can be taken to decrease the impact on wildlife. Education and awareness of its potential impact is key. Currently, 26 states have a formal "Monofilament Line Recycling Program."

The program is simple to run. Monofilament Line Receptacles are built and installed in accessible areas where fishing occurs. When a fisherman is done using his line, he can recycle it in this bin. Volunteers or paid staff collect and clean the line from the bins and mail the clean fishing line to Berkley Recycling. The company is located in Spirit Lake, Iowa and has been recycling monofilament line since 1990. Their website states that they have recycled over nine million miles of fishing line! Once the cleaned monofilament line arrives at Berkley, it is melted down into raw plastic pellets and made into toys, tackle boxes, spools for fishing line, and artificial fish habitats used in both freshwater and saltwater.

Mark and I are both members of our respective town's Conservation Commissions and are in the early stages of planning a workday to build a few Monofilament Line Receptacles to collect monofilament line in our towns. My hope is for the tragic outcome of both Old Man Knowles and his chick to be the catalyst to implement this program in New Hampshire.

If anyone is interested in spearheading a project in their area, please contact me: [janlandry1972@yahoo.com](mailto:janlandry1972@yahoo.com)

*Jan grew up in the Great North Woods of New Hampshire. She is an avid hiker, birder and general lover of the outdoors. She currently lives in the Lakes Region with her husband where in her spare time you can find her exploring the Lakes Region or spending time in Dummer, NH at her family's remote camp on Sessions Pond. Her love for loons started at a young age while spending time with her family fishing on remote lakes in the Great North Woods.*



# Crow Chronicles

by Dana Fox



American Crow flock on West Side Road in Conway, NH. Photo by Charlie Nims, 10-8-20.

Since 2013, my husband Bob Fox and I have been studying crows at the Lawrence, MA winter crow roost. For four winters, we have visited Lawrence just before sunset on over 400 afternoons. During summers, we enjoy our simple cabin on the shores of Lower Beach Pond in Tuftonboro, New Hampshire where I am known as the “loon lady,” but come fall, we migrate south. In late fall and winter, I become the “crow lady.”

## Migrating Crows in New Hampshire

For years, I have been trying to see migrating crows or to find current reports of migrating crows from New Hampshire and Maine. I finally observed the phenomenon of crows on their way south on October 25, 2020 from the Woodmont Orchard parking lot in Hollis, NH where I was sitting while Bob unsuccessfully searched for the Chestnut-collared Longspur. Over a thousand crows went by from 9:00-11:00 am. They came up low from the northeast, crossed Rt. 122 and then went up over the hill of Woodmont Farms to the southwest and out of sight. There was a steady stream of them with periodic pods of 40 or so. A few landed in the apple trees, but most just flowed over. A few flocks swirled.

Then a chain of fascinating events took place. It began with an email from Wayne Petersen of Mass Audubon telling me the Wachusett Mountain Hawk Watch had reported 1,200 crows flying over the site that morning. The compiler Eric

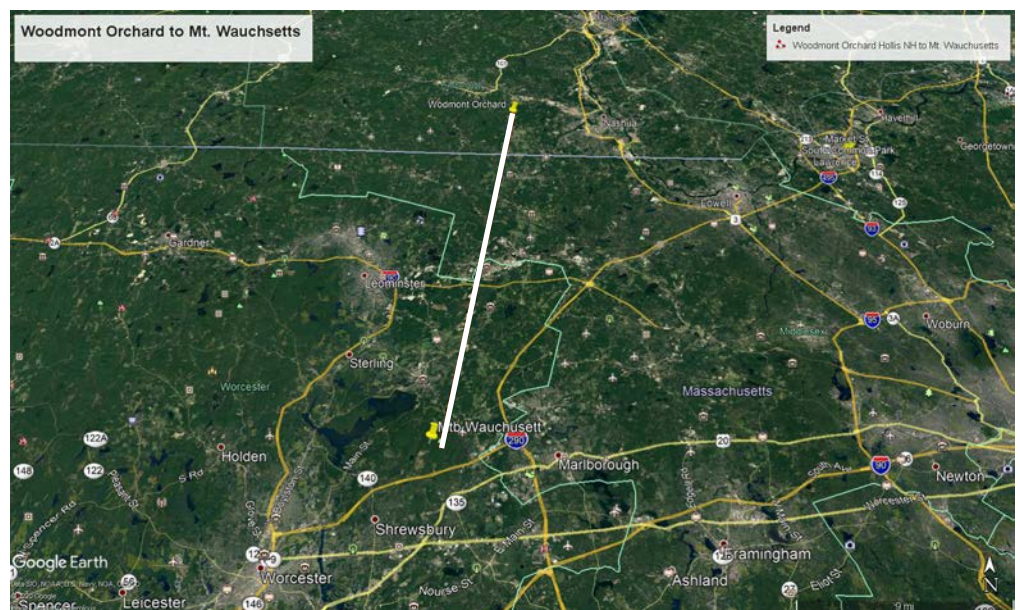
Mueller reported:

*My memory of our Sunday crow sightings was that they were coming primarily from the northeast, passing north of our viewing area on Mount Wachusett, then heading west-southwest and southwest, so it seems likely that many of these were the same birds that you saw. They came through in many separate groups. I remember a couple of groups in the 100+ range, but I believe that most of the groups were smaller than that. The Barre Falls (MA) hawkwatch site, which is about 10 miles southwest of us, reported seeing at least 650 crows that day.*

Crows fly about 30 miles per hour so it appears that not only had I seen migrating crows, but they were seen an hour later by the hawkwatchers heading further west-southwest or southwest (Figure 1). Where were they headed? We will never know. According to the *Birds of the World*, they often spend the night in existing roosts on their way north or south. Springfield, MA and Hartford, CT both have winter crow roost sites that lie quite a ways to the west.

Another fun observation of an aggregation of crows occurred October 8, 2020. At about 10:00 am, Bob Fox, Bob Quinn and I were passing through North Conway on West Side Road when we saw a large flock of crows. We stopped to see many of them feeding along the ground and even along some railroad tracks. I called Charlie Nims who lives just to the north in Bartlett only to find he had just passed by the same crows and had taken a picture.

Figure 1. The north-south line shows the 30 miles between Woodmont Orchard in Hollis (NH) and the Wachusett Mountain Hawk Watch site (MA).





## Historical Crow Migration/Winter Numbers

*The following information is from The Birds of New Hampshire by Allan R. Keith and Robert P. Fox.*

In New Hampshire, crows begin flocking in late summer. This is followed by fall southward daytime movement. Some examples include 500 in the Connecticut River Valley in Monroe on October 21, 1989; 450 in the Merrimack River Valley in Concord on October 25, 2009; and 500 on the coastal region in Durham on October 20, 2009. November counts are low; examples include 48 in Londonderry and 70 in Derry on November 15, 1975 and 35 in New Hampton on November 18, 1964. There were 7,000 in Manchester on October 24, 1969 and 600+ in Greenland on November 23, 1969 at nighttime roosts.

Statewide Christmas Bird Count totals ranged from 5,136 to 17,141 with a mean of 7,128 in the 1960s. In January and February, high winter counts were 1,000 at both Concord on January 16, 1998 and Manchester on February 26, 2004.

In spring, crows are the earliest birds heading north, migrating in February through March, sometimes into mid-April. High counts usually are 200-250; exceptions were 350 in 20 minutes in Dover on February 24, 1985; 350 in Monroe on February 25, 1989; 400 in Keene on March 11, 1979; and 800 in Portsmouth on March 16, 1997.

## Winter Roosts

In winter (October to March), crows spend the night in large communal roosts. At the Lawrence, MA roost, both American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and Fish Crows (*Corvus ossifragus*) fly into the city each afternoon starting an hour before sunset. We refer to this period as staging, an hour before sunset until just after sunset, when the crows gather, socialize, are vocal, eat if they can find something, and swirl around. Each night, the initial staging areas change. After dark, the crows move into their nightly roost site. This roosting site also changes suddenly each winter, usually in December-January. The crows in this roost are made up of resident crows that nested within 20 miles of the city, and migrant crows that arrived from the north.

According to a study by Townsend, et al. (2018), which used satellite tags, feathers and droppings, 86% of the crows coming into the winter Utica, NY roost were migrants, some from as far away as 793 km (as far as Quebec City). We surmise the vast flocks coming into Lawrence in December, January, and February are migrants coming from areas as far northeast as eastern New Brunswick.

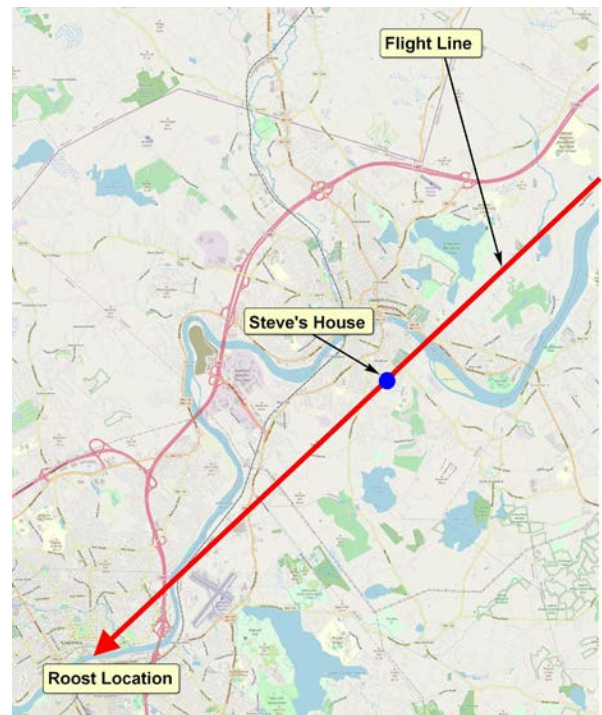
The crows stream into the roost area in the late afternoon. Imagine lying on your living room couch and being able to document a flight line of crows headed to the Lawrence

roost? This is an amazing report from Steve Mirick:

*12/11/19 – exact ‘couch’ count of 1,018 birds heading back to roost. Counted while watching TV and lying down on couch. All seen through small southeast and southwest corner facing windows. Started at 3:40 pm and likely missed some at the start. Ended at 4:30 pm when it was getting dark and flight appeared done. It is the typical flight path for these birds heading back to the Lawrence roost [Figure 2].*

*The crows continue on a remarkably consistent route over our neighborhood. The ‘river’ of crows seems to change slightly, but it appears they follow the river [Merrimack] somewhat and then cut across the hillside where we live to continue on a more direct route rather than following the bend in the river.*

Figure 2. Map of the crow flight line over Haverhill, MA towards the roost in Lawrence, MA. Map by Stephen Mirick.



## Staging

- Initially, American Crows seem to come into that night's main staging area singly or in small groups. I am postulating that these are resident crows based on research by Caccamise, et al. (1997) showing that family members of resident crows leave their nesting territory in winter each day individually and fly to the nightly roost.
- Later, large flocks of American Crows enter the main staging area closer to sunset. These I suspect are the

migrant crows that went out during the day to find sources of food.

- The crows do not move from their main staging area directly into the roost site. They have a final staging area close to the roost site from where they move very slowly after darkness into the roost.

## The Manchester, NH Winter Crow Roost

*In trying to learn more about winter crow roosts in New England, I encouraged Bob Quinn to study a roost in Manchester, NH. Here is his report.*

*November 18, 2020 by Robert A. Quinn*

I arrived at the Fishways above Amoskeag Falls about 4:25 pm and had several flocks of between 50-100 birds in the nearby trees. They all flew south along the Merrimack River and landed in some trees on the east side of the river. So, I pulled behind the mill buildings into the “Riverwalk” parking lot just north of the Bridge Street bridge. I spotted the birds to the north in riverside hardwoods (presumably Silver Maples) and estimated 1000+ at 4:35. About 4:45, an eagle flew by and that caused many of the crows to flush. They went east into the mill buildings immediately adjacent to the river and landed on the roofs. At 4:50, hundreds of the birds flew a short distance east, just across Canal Street, and perched in some bare hardwoods overlooking the street and a residential neighborhood of low, refurbished mill buildings.

*Estimated number of birds: 1500.*

Notes: All the birds I saw arriving came from the north but that was only 10% of the total so it is possible (likely?) that many birds came from a different direction. Next time, I need to start earlier.\* I did *not* detect any Fish Crows. The late afternoon/evening was partly cloudy, calm, and pleasant.

\*Sunset was 4:20 pm that day and we recommend starting to view the staging an hour earlier (3:20 pm).

Bob Quinn reported in December that he could not find any crows roosting in the city, indicating that they had moved:

*February 17, 2021 – after receiving a tip on crows in Goffstown, I went in search of a new site for roosting American Crows. I found a decent number with two staging areas, upwards of 500 birds at St. Anselm’s College and a similar number about a mile away just east of Mast Road (in Manchester). As sunset approached, they massed together in trees along the nearby Piscataquog River. It seems that the crow roost I saw in late November along the Merrimack River in downtown Manchester has moved to this new site.*

## Observing Crow Roosts

Hopefully, this article will inspire you to keep an eye out for migrating and roosting crows. Please note the date, time of day and sunset and report it so that more information about these species will help answer the many still unanswered questions.

Based on our observations in Lawrence, we believe that if you need to determine the total number of crows coming into a roost on a particular afternoon, such as is needed for a Christmas Bird Count, it must be done with as much daylight as possible and when all the birds are visible. This means that you can count them *either* as they enter the final staging area (after sunset) as a continuous river of birds *or* when they are all in the final staging area (as darkness falls). Since they move into the roost very slowly after it is dark, the roost may not always be visible and it is difficult to count them in the dark. You are likely to miss a significant number of birds if you try to count them after dark as they start entering the roost.

Additional articles about the crows in Lawrence, MA by Dana Duxbury-Fox:

*Bird Observer* February 2018

American Birding Association’s *Birding Magazine*  
November 2020

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*Dana and Bob Fox preparing to watch the winter crow roost in Lawrence, MA during COVID-19. Photo by Charlie Nims, 02-11-21 by the Merrimack River.*



# Birding at the Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant

compiled by Rebecca Suomala

Special thanks to Matthew Berube and Joshua Scotton from the Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant for providing information for this article, Chris Duffy for collecting the material, and Steve Mirick for creating the photos and providing comments.

There have been big changes at the Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) and birds and birders have noticed. There are still great birds showing up but the composition is changing, especially for ducks and gulls. This article highlights the changes so birders know more about why things are changing and future researchers will understand why there were changes in the bird data from the site.

In Spring of 2017, the Exeter WTP started construction of a new wastewater treatment facility. It was the largest construction project the town had ever undertaken with a cost of \$53.5 million. The project upgraded the existing lagoon treatment facility to a process that removes nitrogen. The former system was unable to remove nitrogen down to required levels for discharge into the Squamscott River. The new system is a huge step in protecting the environment, and Great Bay specifically.

Figure 1. The Exeter WTP before construction of the new treatment facility. Created by Stephen Mirick from a photo on the Exeter WTP web site: <https://www.exeternh.gov/publicworks/wastewater>



When the former system was in operation (Figure 1), birds congregated in the lagoons (often referred to as ponds by birders), sometimes in huge numbers, especially in winter. According to Matthew Berube, Exeter's Water & Sewer Manager these lagoons "were the main wastewater lagoons. They were used for settling solids and a small amount of nutrient removal through natural processes within each

lagoon. There was no control over nitrification or denitrification." Not only was the water kept open by aerators, but the bio-solids likely provided food for waterfowl.

The new system was fully operational in July of 2019 and the old lagoon style system has been taken out of service. Lagoons 1 and 3 were dredged during the summer of 2020 to remove the bio-solids that had accumulated, and the dredged sludge material was then placed into large giant "pillows" that appeared in September 2020. The pillow areas were very attractive to shorebirds. These pillows (Geotextile bag) remain in place as the water leaches out of the sludge in the pillows and drains back into the treatment system. The material inside the geotextile bags were being hauled away for disposal as this was written.

Figure 2. The Exeter WTP after construction of the new treatment facility. Created by Stephen Mirick from a Google photo.



Lagoon 3 was somewhat reduced in size at the south end. It is now used as an equalization pond for extra wastewater when the plant can't treat all incoming flows. The wastewater is pumped from Lagoon 3 back into treatment when capacity is available. The former lagoon 4 in the southwest corner was eliminated during the construction. Before the construction, it had been mostly filled in by vegetation, but the southeast corner had open water bordered by cattails where Virginia Rail was often reported (see Figure 1). Lagoon 2 will eventually be dredged, and more sludge may need to be removed from Lagoon 1. The future of the Lagoons 1 and 2 is uncertain at this time.

## Anticipated Changes in Birds

Winter duck use will likely be influenced by whether aerators are running and creating areas of open water for them. Mallard numbers appear to be decreasing already (a high of 2,500 in the winter of 2016-17 pre-construction versus 600 during the winter of 2020-21 after the lagoon system was taken off line). Waterfowl still use the three lagoons, but with no incoming source of nutrients, there will also be less food for them over time. (Winter numbers are also tremendously influenced by a feeding station on nearby Wheelright Creek.) Gull numbers and variety are already showing signs of decreasing based on a quick comparison of winter gull numbers pre- and post-construction. There is no longer access to the southern fence line which is bordered by dense bushes and was a good spot for songbirds, especially in migration. Rarities and sought-after ducks are still attracted by the open water of the three lagoons and birders are hoping that will still continue.

## Access to the WTP

The plant was often closed during construction but the facility is once again open to birders. We are very grateful to the Exeter WTP for allowing birders to access the plant. A reminder that no vehicles are allowed inside the plant and on the dikes – ***even if the gate is open***. Please park and walk in. The best place to park is in the lined parking toward the north gate into the lagoons (by the Sugar Maples with the sap collection tubing). Drive straight into the plant past the solar panels and the multiple bay garage. The parking area is on the left just before the gate (see Figure 2). There is additional parking in the central parking lot. Be sure to stay out of the way of any vehicles or workers at the plant.



*The construction at the Exeter WTP where Lagoon #4 used to be on 9-2-18 (top) and the “pillows” on 10-12-20 (bottom). Photos by Rebecca Suomala.*

## Birding the Exeter WTP

Birders have been extremely fortunate to have the privilege of birding at the Exeter WTP over the decades. To ensure safety and continued access, please follow these rules, as requested by the plant management.

1. Do not, under any circumstances, drive in to the lagoons, even if the gate is open.
2. Park in the lined parking spots only and do not block any buildings, even on the weekends.
3. Stay along the main dikes/trails. Do not walk down into the rocks to get photos, etc. Do not walk across fields.
4. Be alert for vehicles and stay out of their way. Never leave your scope unattended on the road where it could block vehicles.
5. Don't interrupt the work flow at the plant.

A reminder that duck hunting occurs around the WTP in fall. Hunters are not allowed to hunt on the WTP property, but plant workers still suggest that birders stay clear of the southeast corner of the WTP during hunting season. Birders should be aware of the possibility of hunting from the other side of the river, especially during early morning hours.



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# How Birding Saved Me During the 2020 Pandemic

*Text and photos by Diana Stephens*



*One of my life birds during the 2020 pandemic, a Bobolink on 9-21-20 at the Birch Street Community Gardens in Concord, NH.*

My life and everyone else's changed drastically in 2020. Birding saved my sanity during a time when we were all advised to stay at home, inside our houses and not venture out. Well, a person can do that for a while, but then the urge to get outside and connect with other living

creatures takes over. As human beings, we are really not meant to remain inside our homes for very long. We are built to be active, connect with others and expand our worlds. During this tough time, these "others" for me consisted mostly of birds and other wildlife.

Because I am a writer and have no children living at home, I pretty much just worked from home and tried to be careful. As I watched friends around me succumb to depression, I resolved to do things differently. I was forced to look outdoors for exercise like everyone else and it was spring, so naturally I yearned to get outside. Birding fit the bill and it was exactly what I needed to get through the pandemic of 2020. So, I stowed my bike in the car, drove to the local rail trail and rode several miles each week while stopping to birdwatch.

As some recent studies have found, birds are not susceptible to COVID-19. But I didn't know that in 2020. Even if the birds I saw and interacted with did carry the virus, it's not as if they were breathing down my neck. Most birds I watched were at least six feet away, if not sixty. They did not have to wear face masks or social distance. Human beings did not usually frequent the areas I birded. Thus, I did not have to wear a mask while I was out birding and I could bird, and breathe, freely. Connecting with nature refreshes my spirit during normal times, but birding during the pandemic had quite literally saved my sanity. It had

brought not just a sense of normalcy to my life, but it had also inspired me at the same time.

In May, I took to the local trails and sanctuaries to search for birds. This turned out to be an amazing journey because I observed local migratory birds I had never seen before. I got really good looks at a Blue-winged Warbler, a Wilson's Warbler and Pied-billed Grebes at the Deerhill Wildlife Management Area in Brentwood, NH. At Burley Farm in Epping, I saw the Red-headed Woodpecker that everyone on the NH Birds email list had been talking about, as well as some beautiful Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. In my backyard alone, I added some new yard birds that included a Winter Wren and some American Tree Sparrows.

On a few occasions, I ventured out to birdwatch with others. We all wore masks and did our best to stay away from one another. The only close call was when one of us pulled his Merlin ID app out to check a bird and we forgot to social distance. Oops ... this was hard! But we all emerged happy and healthy and had a great time birding together.

As the leaves drifted down, turning different shades of red, yellow and orange, I added at least five new birds to my Life List. Those birds were Red-breasted Nuthatch, Warbling Vireo, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow and Bobolink. Fall migration was a fun-filled outdoor adventure for me, even (or especially) during a pandemic. These wonderful days of birding also brought me through the coldest days of winter and hopefully through the end of this pandemic.

*Diana Stephens is a nature writer and wildlife photographer who lives in Southern New Hampshire. She volunteers for New Hampshire Bird Records and has also written for the Concord Monitor, Windham Magazine and other publications.*



*Another life bird, a Swamp Sparrow, that I also found at the Birch Street Community Gardens in Concord, NH, 10-6-20.*

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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:

## Warblers of Winter 2020-21

There were more warblers seen in the winter of 2020-21 than usual. See the season summary for more details.



*Black-throated Blue Warbler, 2-6-21, Rebecca Suomala, Rye, NH. Amazingly this warbler was coming to Bud and Helen Blanchard's feeder where a Ruby-crowned Kinglet had successfully wintered over two years in a row (2015-16 and 2016-17).*



*Cape May Warbler by Scott Heron, 12-17-20, Kingston, NH.*



*American Redstart by Steve Mirick, 12-12-20, Odiome Pt. SP, Rye, NH.*



*This Ovenbird spent the winter in Portsmouth, NH; see the Field Notes for more. Photo by Steve Mirick, 1-12-21.*



*Prairie Warbler by Steve Mirick, 12-4-20, Great Bay Farm, Newington, NH (right). Orange-crowned Warbler by Steve Mirick, 12-4-20, Great Bay Farm, Newington, NH (left).*





# Winter 2020-21 Rarities



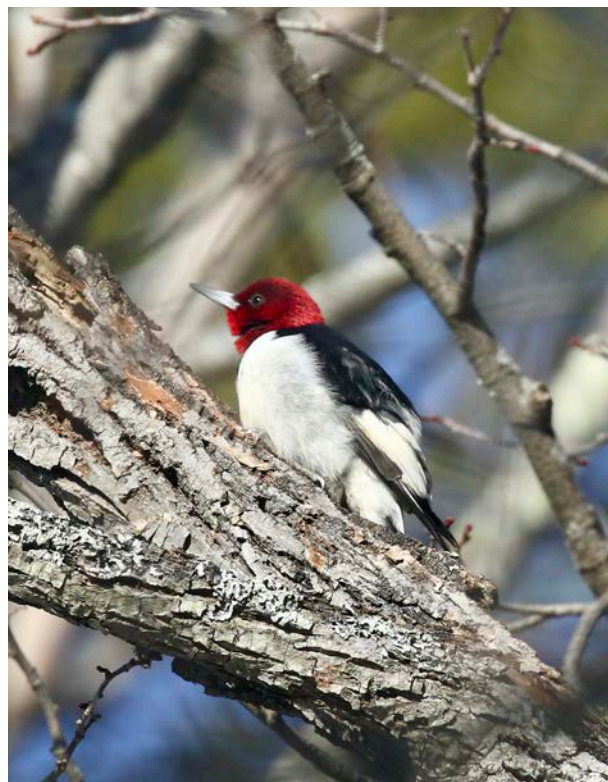
*Townsend's Warbler by Susan Wrisley, 1-4-21, Derry, NH.*



*Yellow-breasted Chat by Len Medlock, 1-30-21, Exeter, NH.*



*Varied Thrush by Jennifer McKown, 2-6-21, Rochester, NH.*



*One of two Red-headed Woodpeckers that were regularly reported in the Winter of 2020-21. Photo by Jim Sparrell, 1-10-21, Keene, NH.*