

# New Hampshire

## BIRD RECORDS



SPRING 2021

Vol. 40, No. 1



## Snowy Owl "Squabble"

Zeke Cornell photographed this "owl squabble" and describes it in his article, "A Seven Owl Day in New Hampshire." The barred one prevailed and the whitish one flew off.



## Colors of Spring



*A leucistic Red-winged Blackbird, 4-6-21 at Quincy Bog, Rumney, NH.  
Photo by Elaine Faletta. Also see her Field Note in this issue.*



*Spring warblers in all their finery exemplify spring and bring such joy!  
This is a Northern Parula by Scott Heron, 5-6-21, Kingston, NH.*



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**NEW HAMPSHIRE BIRD RECORDS**

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*Two Barred Owlets in a nest hole that Debra Powers found, photographed and wrote about in the Spring 2021 Field Notes. Photo taken 5-4-21, in Dover, NH.*

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# From the Editor

SPRING 2021

by Rebecca Suomala

## Changes to New Hampshire Bird Records

We're continuing to make changes here at *New Hampshire Bird Records*. As the number of eBird sightings keeps growing we're trying to focus on what will be most helpful to birders that they can't find anywhere else. This spring summary focuses on the major happenings in the bird world. For the first time we've left out the listings of sightings entirely. Pertinent information about the sightings is included in the write-up and further sighting detail can be found in eBird. This should also help us to get the issue out sooner.

We're also adding a couple of features on a trial basis as described below. We're always interested in feedback from our readers, so please send any comments to me, or anyone on the Editorial Team. Thank you everyone for your ongoing support.

## New Feature: What to Watch for Each Season

Another new feature we are experimenting with is something that will help birders to learn what to expect in the season and what events to watch for and when. This is just a beginning and if it seems helpful, we'll add to it. So let us know what you think and what information you'd like to know that would help you with your birding.

## New Feature: Regional Summary

This issue features the first of the Regional Reports, a new feature we are trying out to highlight bird happenings of regional interest that might not be significant on a statewide scale. Dylan Jackson graciously agreed to be the guinea pig and he's done a great job. For quite a while now, the *New Hampshire Bird Records* team has been interested in the idea of featuring seasonal highlights from certain areas of the state. The coast gets a lot of coverage in the season reports, but inland areas don't always get as much. Birders who concentrate on a region are best placed to know what's significant there beyond the big rarities. In some seasons there may not be a lot to discuss, in others there will be more, it all depends on the birds. Please let us know what you think and if you are interested in writing a regional summary, please contact me.

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## New Hampshire's Swallows



Clockwise from far left: Barn, Cliff, Northern Rough-winged, Tree, and Bank Swallows by Leo McKillop, 5-30-21, Exeter WTP, NH. Purple Martin is the only other species of swallow normally found in New Hampshire.

**March 1, 2021 through May 31, 2021**

by Eric Masterson



Extraordinarily warm temperatures in late March (the mercury in Concord hit 74 degrees Fahrenheit on March 26) facilitated an advanced appearance by some traditional early spring migrants, with several

species of swallow setting record early arrival dates. Bob Quinn remarked that the ice-out on Lake Umbagog was the earliest he had experienced, with the water completely open by mid-April, several weeks ahead of the old normal.

As spring is wont to do, it then served up a snowstorm on the night of April 15, which caused a moderate fallout of waterfowl on April 16-17, especially Horned and Red-necked Grebes in Meredith at Lakes Waukegan and Winnepesaukee. Early May was unsettled until May 10, with migration picking up thereafter. With the exception of an early **Magnolia Warbler** found in Pawtuckaway State Park in Nottingham by Andrew McTammany on April 24, May arrivals were more or less on schedule.



*Wilson's Phalarope by Jim Sparrell, 5-16-21, Exeter WTP, NH.*

Season highlights included inland **Wilson's Phalarope** and **Razorbill** (the latter found deceased), a yard-bird **Swallow-tailed Kite**, several spectacular owl showings, some remarkable migration counts from the coast, a **Worm-eating Warbler** in Hooksett, and best of all, a state-first **Virginia's Warbler** in Hampton.

**Waterfowl**

At least two **Greater White-fronted Geese** were observed passing north through the Connecticut River Valley. One

individual was found on March 14 in Westmoreland by Steven Lamonde continuing in the general area north to the Route 123 bridge for several days. A different individual, first reported by Donna Keller, appeared on March 16 at Great Meadows in Charlestown.



*Northern Shoveler by Steve Mirick, 4-3-21, Exeter WTP, NH.*

At least 34 **Northern Shovelers** were recorded from 12 locations, including a rare report by Claudette Morneau of four birds from the Androscoggin River in Dummer on April 8. A drake **Eurasian Wigeon**, found by Robbie Prieto on March 7 was seen on Great Bay on various dates through the first three weeks of March, usually in the company of American Wigeon. The latter peaked with a high count of 125 noted on Great Bay by Rebecca Suomala and Zeke Cornell on March 21. **Canvasback** and **Redhead** were also reported from Great Bay through March 21. The single Canvasback on Great Bay was probably the same individual seen at the nearby Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) that was first reported on the last day of February by Zeke Cornell. The Greater Scaup flock on Great Bay hosted several Redheads, with a peak count of four birds that I tallied on March 6. Hector Galbraith reported a **Common Teal**, the Eurasian race of Green-winged Teal, from Hinsdale on March 26.

Although Powwow Pond is a known site for **Ring-necked Duck** during migration, Scott Heron's total of 718 birds on March 14 set a new high count for the state. The species was virtually unknown in New Hampshire 100 years ago and has increased dramatically during the last 50 years (R.A. Quinn, pers. comm.). The now regular flock of **Lesser Scaup** at Exeter WTP peaked at 78 birds (carefully counted by Chris Duffy) on March 26.

Stephen Hale found a pair of **Harlequin Ducks** at Pulpit Rocks on April 17. A **Barrow's Goldeneye** that spent the



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spring on the Androscoggin River in Errol lingered to May 7 (photographed by Dick Dionne) becoming the latest spring record for the state.



*Barrow's Goldeneye by Dick Dionne, 5-6-21, Errol, NH.*

Always scarce in New Hampshire, **Ruddy Ducks** were reported from four locations. Single birds were reported at Great Bay on April 7-8 (Ed Heustis, Robbie Prieto), Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge on May 1 (Frank Tucker), and the Rochester WTP on May 3 (Alan Murray and Dan Hubbard). Two Ruddys were first reported by Chris Duffy on May 13 at the Exeter WTP, one of which stayed through the month.

## Hummingbirds, Gallinule and Cranes

An early fly-by **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was seen by Jane Mirick in Hampton on April 24. The next reports were several days later but reports really started flooding in on May 2.

Two New Hampshire **Common Gallinules**, one in West Lebanon from May 24 to 29 (first spotted by Katie Towler) and another in the marsh south of Odiorne Point State Park in Rye on May 30 (by Russ and Nancy Christensen and Martha Wilson), were almost four. Another two were seen in



*Sandhill Cranes by Holly Bauer, 3-16-21, Scamman Farm, Stratham, NH.*

the Connecticut River Valley, yards from the state line on the Vermont side of the river.

**Sandhill Cranes** were again too numerous to list, with birds reported from across the state, including a flock of four photographed over Horseshoe Pond in Concord by Stijn Brand on March 31.

## Shorebirds

The overwintering **Semipalmated Plover** in Rye remained until at least April 10, presumably the same bird that overwintered last year. With warming temperatures favoring this bird's migratory strategy, it is perhaps New England's fittest Semipalmated Plover, fitness being defined in the Darwinian sense. Are we seeing similar patterns play out with other species of shorebirds such as the **Piping Plover** that touched down in Hampton on March 12 (reported by Chris McPherson), thereby tying the record early date? Steve Mirick, who has more experience birding coastal New Hampshire than most, reports that his previous earliest sighting in the state was March 26. Continuing the theme, a very early **Lesser Yellowlegs** was reported by Holly Bauer in Hampton on April 11 and another bird was found in Exeter by Rich Aaronian the following day.



*The Semipalmated Plover that overwintered in Rye Harbor, NH. Photo by Marjorie Watson, 3-6-21.*

**Wilson's Phalarope** in New Hampshire is a rare spring transient, rarer again away from the coast, with the last spring record of a bird near Odiorne Point State Park in Rye in May 2015. This year a pair was photographed by John Garrison flying north over Hinsdale setbacks on May 8, Marjorie Watson discovered a pair at the Exeter WTP on May 16, and a single bird was photographed in Keene by Donna Keller on May 24. The *Second Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Quebec* published in 2019 lists evidence of possible breeding from several locations in the province and thus, Wilson's Phalarope seems at best to be a rare breeder to our

immediate north. However, a perusal of eBird spring records through the last 20 years shows a marked increase in reports from the northeast.



*Wilson's Phalaropes by Marjorie Watson, 5-16-21, Exeter WTP, NH.*

## Alcids

A large number of alcids appeared on the coast in mid-April, with 44 **Razorbills** counted by Steve Mirick on April 18. This surge coincided with New Hampshire's first inland record of Razorbill; a dead bird found by Jersey Nickerson in Chocorua on April 8 (see the article in Field Notes). A live Razorbill was found the next day 25 miles away on Sokokis Lake in Maine. Dovekie is the only east coast alcid with a history of being deposited inland after coastal storms. The inland Razorbills appeared on the heels of northerly winds of 20mph or less, not unusual conditions for Atlantic alcids. The species was undocumented in Vermont prior to the first state record Razorbill found on Lake Champlain in early November 2021. This is noteworthy because many species of North American waterbirds, even the most unlikely suspects, have been recorded in Vermont thanks to the presence of Lake Champlain. Telemetry data from a bird tagged on the St. Lawrence Estuary a little more than 100 miles east of Quebec in June 2012 documented a journey of more than 1,200 miles as the bird flew northeast up the St. Lawrence estuary and into the Gulf of St. Lawrence before heading south around Cape Breton Island and hence to Martha's Vineyard where it spent the winter. The same journey as the crow flies is approximately 500 miles, but Razorbills resolutely refuse to fly like crows, and inland occurrences remain extremely rare throughout their range. In short, there is no good explanation for why this bird flew inland to Chocorua. Let the theorizing begin. Razorbill now joins Dovekie and Thick-billed Murre on the list of alcids to have occurred in the interior of New Hampshire.

## Gulls and Terns

The first migrant **Bonaparte's Gull** of the spring appeared on the Lower Connecticut River on March 27 as reported by Hector Galbraith. Multiple observers reported large numbers from the same area on May 5, with a high count of 80 by Coleen Lawlor, and smaller numbers seen north to Haverhill, though the fallout was largely concentrated in the Connecticut River Valley. See the article in this issue for more on the fallout of waterbirds in Hinsdale.

It is rare that I mention the reports of **Iceland Gull** as they are normally too numerous, but the showing this spring was modest, with singles at Exeter WTP, Salem, and Horseshoe Pond in Concord, and only two individuals at the Rochester WTP, in addition to a few seen along the coast. Stuart Varney found a "**Great Lakes Gull**" at Eel Pond in Rye on April 16. This is the colloquial name for the hybrid of Great Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull, and which occurs with regularity from the Great Lakes east to New England. There are a few prior records for New Hampshire.



*Caspian Tern by Steve Mirick, 5-29-21, Rye, NH.*

In addition to a couple of late May reports from the coast, **Caspian Terns** were reported on the Connecticut River from Hinsdale on April 21 by Cory Ross, April 30 by Hector Galbraith, and one on May 29 by Chad Witko from the Vermont side. Away from the Connecticut River, Patrick Marr observed a single bird on Spofford Lake on May 9.

## Hérons

In an excellent spring for **Little Blue Herons**, individuals were seen in Northwood on May 2 by Zacary Coughlin, Rye on May 19 by Sarah Sawtelle, Peverly Meadow in Canterbury from May 22-24 found by Molly Sperduto, East Haverhill on May 24 by Elaine Faletra, and Deer Hill Wildlife Management Area in Brentwood on May 26 by Colin Marchant. A single **Cattle Egret** spotted by Hector



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Galbraith and photographed by Donna Keller was part of a fallout at Hinsdale on May 5 (see the article by Hector in this issue).



*Yellow-crowned Night-Heron by Heather Burns, 5-16-21, Peanut Trail, Newton, NH.*

Heather Burns found a **Yellow-crowned Night Heron** along the Peanut Trail in Newton on May 15 where it continued to be seen until May 19. This species is subject to episodic incursions into the state, mainly involving post-breeding dispersal of juvenile birds in fall. The species is rarer in spring, and rarer again away from the coast. More **Black-crowned Night Herons** were reported away from the coast, with two birds in Keene, three in Hancock, one in Antrim, one in Penacook, and one in East Kingston, with two or three seen along the coast. Similarly, inland **Glossy Ibis** were widely reported, with birds seen in Epping, Hinsdale, Hopkinton, Orford, Rochester and Walpole, and numerous reports from the coast, including many large flocks of 20 or more birds. Steve Mirick counted 26 birds flying over Eel Pond on May 26, part of a total of 37 birds seen on the coast that day.

## Raptors

Continuing what is now a solid trend, spring reports of **Black Vulture** from southern New Hampshire were too numerous to list. Outside of the Connecticut River Valley, where birds ranged north to Hanover, no reports were received north of a line drawn through Concord; however, a rare coastal report by Steve Mirick from Odiorne Point State Park in Rye on April 30 was noteworthy.

Robin Feustal photographed a **Swallow-tailed Kite** from her Antrim home on March 31. Last year, she photographed a Loggerhead Shrike from the same area. What will 2022 bring? There was a strong showing of **Golden Eagles**, with two adults seen in May (Exeter by Patience Chamberlain

and Bethlehem by Wayne Scott) and three immatures seen in March (Mt. Monadnock by Joseph DiBicarri and Alex Lamoreaux, Mud Pond Dublin by Patrick Marr, and Pitcher Mountain in Stoddard by Levi Burford). **Mississippi Kites** returned to Durham and Newmarket on May 15 and Stratham on May 23, with a maximum of two birds at each site.



*Swallow-tailed Kite by Robin Feustal, 3-31-21, River Rd., Antrim, NH.*

## Owls and Woodpeckers

It was a great spring for “eared owls” in the genus *Asio*. Four **Long-eared Owls** were discovered by Steve and Jane Mirick roosting in Seabrook on March 7 and at least one remained through March 19 (see Steve’s article in this issue). Additional individuals were seen (and photographed) on March 13, one by Kirk Elwell in East Kingston and the other by Ellen Kenney in Concord.

Not to be outdone, **Short-eared Owls** put on spectacular displays at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport in Swanzey and the Portsmouth Country Club, with a maximum of three



*Red-headed Woodpecker by Geoff Niswander, 3-7-21, Henniker, NH.*

birds in Swanzey and four birds at the Portsmouth site (see the article in this issue). The Portsmouth birds were first spotted on February 28 and stayed for about a week in early March, while the Swanzey birds were found in early February and remained through March 23, long enough for field trips to be scheduled to witness the incredible evening displays. Four additional sightings were reported at several locations on the NH coast during the month of March.

**Red-headed Woodpeckers** put in a strong showing again this spring, with birds noted from Henniker and Keene (continuing from winter), a pair in Bear Brook State Park in



Allenstown (repeat nesters from last year), and individuals in Chichester (Diane Perry-Mann on May 26), Rochester (Erin Mahoney on May 13), and Salem (Kyle Wilmarth on May 18) with another bird photographed in the Lakes Region.

## Flycatchers through Swallows

Kurk Dorsey found an **Acadian Flycatcher** at the Oyster River Forest in Durham on May 15 and Roger and Kathryn Frieden found a pair the next day at Gile Road Marsh in Lee in the exact same spot where they occurred in 2020. Birds persisted into the summer at both sites, raising hopes of the potential for breeding.



*Acadian Flycatcher by Jim Sparrell, 5-16-21, Lee, NH.*

Steve Mirick recorded a large flight of **Eastern Kingbirds** on May 14, with 74 birds counted flying north over the Seabrook dunes. Continuing the theme, Steve witnessed **Black-capped Chickadee** and **Tufted Titmouse** migration from a pinch point near the northern flank of the Pease Golf Course in Portsmouth on March 27. This point provides the shortest route across the relatively hostile territory of the Portsmouth International Airport at Pease, which, with no cover, exposes slow flying passerines like chickadees to hawk predation. See Steve Mirick's article in this issue for more on this remarkable migration. Two **Boreal Chickadees** continued from the winter at the southerly location of Skatutakee Mountain in Hancock to March 27 (Phil Brown).

Several species of swallows, which tend toward an earlier arrival relative to other neotropical migrants, benefited from the warm weather in late March. Pam Hunt found six **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** at Horseshoe Pond in Concord on April 1, besting the previous record early date of April 3. **Barn Swallows** at the Portsmouth Country Club spotted by Steve Mirick and the Exeter WTP spotted by Ed Burgess on March 27 set a new record by one day. More remarkable was a **Cliff Swallow** found at Odiorne Point State

Park in Rye by Steve Mirick on April 2, which was almost a week ahead of the previous record of April 8 set in 1954.



*Cliff Swallow by Steve Mirick, 4-2-21, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.*

## Finches, Sparrows and Blackbirds

Common Redpoll persisted in Errol to May 15 (photographed by Dick Dionne). Steve and Jane Mirick recorded a huge migration of **American Goldfinch** on May 9, with 3,640 birds flying north over Seabrook in four hours, possibly returning birds from a large southern flight the previous fall. **European Goldfinch** is commonly kept as a cage bird, and feral populations occur in California, Illinois, and the northeastern US, where birds have been reported since the early 1970s. There are multiple records from New Hampshire, including one reported by Holly Bauer from Hampton on April 28, all presumed to be escapees.

Major sparrow flights occurred during the night of March 27 (**Song Sparrow**) and April 28 (**White-throated Sparrow**), evidenced by reports on the ground and nocturnal flight recordings I obtained in Hancock.

A **White-crowned Sparrow** reported in Lancaster on March 1 at Ann Griffin's feeder, appeared to be an overwintering bird. The individual on March 25 in Canterbury (Pam Hunt and Unity Dienes) is not as easy to explain; it was about a month before the next White-crowned was seen. Hector Galbraith reported three **Swamp Sparrows** singing in Hinsdale on March 12 which were several weeks early and possibly undetected overwintering individuals.

Ann Powers found a male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** coming to her birdfeeder in Raymond on May 13 where it remained until May 16. Steve Mirick recorded a huge flight of 218 **Bobolinks** flying north over Seabrook Dunes on May 14.

## Warblers through Grosbeak

If rarity is the criterion, and it usually is, then the highlight of the season was without doubt the **Virginia's Warbler** found by Holly Bauer on April 29 in Hampton, a

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first record for her yard, a first record for New Hampshire, and only the third record for New England. See her article in this issue on finding this bird.



*Yellow-throated Warbler with a Pine Warbler by Earl Johnson, 4-28-21, Orford, NH.*

Dennis Tsiorbias photographed a **Worm-eating Warbler** at Dube's Pond in Hooksett on May 15, a rare spring record of this southern overshoot and the first since 2004. Patience Chamberlin found a male **Hooded Warbler** at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye on May 3, with the bird continuing through the next day. Scott Heron discovered another male at the Split Rock Conservation Area in Brentwood on May 17. Earl Johnson found a **Yellow-throated Warbler** coming to his suet feeder in Orford on April 28, with the bird remaining until May 2.

An **Ovenbird** that overwintered in Portsmouth continued through March with the last sighting on April 14 (Robin Schweikart) about two weeks before the first spring migrant Ovenbirds arrived.



*Summer Tanager by Scott Santino, 4-30-21, Raymond, NH.*

**Summer Tanagers** were documented on April 30 in Raymond at the Riverside/Camnet Recreation Area by Scott

Santino, on May 3 at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye by Steve Mirick and on May 9 in Dover by Nicholas Raimondi. Two **Blue Grosbeaks** were found this spring: a male in Concord seen by Linda King at her feeder on April 29 and a female found by Steve Mirick and viewed by many at Odiorne Point State Park on April 30.

## Sighting Details

Details for all sightings mentioned in the Spring 2021 summary are available 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.

## Regional Report, Spring 2021

*Regional Reports feature significant bird happenings of regional interest that might not get highlighted in the statewide report. A big thank you to Dylan Jackson for being the first to write such a summary. Send along any feedback to me and if you're interested in writing a regional summary yourself, please contact me.*

*– Rebecca Suomala, Editor*

### Sullivan County and Lake Sunapee

*by Dylan Jackson*

If I had to sum up the spring season in this area using one word, I think I would choose lackluster. We missed out on a lot of the spring excitement shared by most of the other counties around the state. We had almost no rare species even in the Connecticut River Valley, which usually hosts the most glamorous of our spring surprises. The odd weather we had this spring, with on and off periods of warm and cold weather, certainly played a role in making this spring seem particularly out of whack. That said, there's always something to highlight in the spring season.

As far as rare species go, we really missed out when other areas did particularly well. The Connecticut River Valley is kept under close watch as it's usually very productive for rare birds in the spring, but alas, it only provided a Greater White-fronted Goose. This bird showed up on March 16 in the cornfields around the Charlestown water treatment plant (WTP) and a blast of winter weather kept it there until March 21. The only other mentionable sighting from the spring came when I found two Short-billed Dowitchers on May 22, also at the Charlestown WTP, which were my first and only the third



eBird record of this species in Sullivan County.

This spring was certainly unusual because of the weather we had. March saw a lot of warm weather and next to no winter weather which caused waterfowl migration to start early. A lot of good waterfowl surely passed through before we were ready to see them. This early warmth brought birds like phoebes, woodcock, and Pine Warbler back fairly early, but returning wintery conditions throughout April definitely disrupted the normal flow of birds and probably made life miserable for the birds that did come early. This erratic weather also affected the movement of northern breeders with few sightings. I had no Cape May, Wilson's or Bay-breasted Warblers

at all and few others reported any. Tennessee Warblers usually pass through in good numbers, yet I and others only walked away with a handful.



*Eastern Meadowlark by Zeke Cornell.*

While lackluster, our spring did have some positive take always. Moody Park in Claremont continues to be a positive spot in the county. While it has probably been a good area for a long time, it's only recently being discovered by birders, including me. The forest in the park appears to be managed very intelligently, allowing for great species diversity. It continues to be the only reliable spot in the county I know of that hosts both Blue-winged and Prairie Warblers. It even hosts Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warbler hybrids, including a Lawrence's Warbler discovered there last year and which returned this spring. The mix of new growth and mature forest provides a fantastic mix of species, from migration to the breeding season. The park entrance is off Maple Ave. and it is an eBird Hot Spot (<https://ebird.org/nh/hotspot/L5932043>).

This spring did show some promising signs for Eastern Meadowlarks. They have been reliable in spring at the Morningside Flight Park in Charlestown for the last few years which has seemed like a likely spot for potential breeding for this locally dwindling species. They've shown up in the past in other areas like Trask Brook Road in Sunapee, but have only passed through during migration. A sighting I had in hayfields off Old Newport Road in Claremont on May 22 seems to indicate that it could be a promising site. Meadowlarks are fairly early migrants and birds seen this late hold hope for a breeding effort.

While this spring in the Sullivan County and Lake Sunapee area lacked drama, even a boring spring is welcome after our long and dreary winters.

## Virginia's Warbler

by Holly Bauer



*Virginia's Warbler by Holly Bauer, 4-29-21, Meadow Pond, Hampton, NH.*

Shortly after moving to Hampton about four years ago, I accepted a New Year's Day challenge from eBird to submit a checklist every day for the year and I have been at it ever since. Most of those checklists are from my own yard because: a) you can't beat it for convenience and b) my yard is a great spot for seeing birds as it is between a tidal pond (Meadow Pond) and North Beach.

I was at my usual posts on April 29, 2021 checking for birds from various windows because it was rather cold and gray; my checklist notes from the day say it was 46°F and cloudy with northeast winds at 2 mph. There were a few migrants that morning including a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a White-crowned Sparrow and a Gray Catbird, but given the northeast winds, I wasn't expecting too much.

After over an hour, I was about ready to stop when I noticed something moving among the emerging leaves on the bushes. It wasn't as flitty as a kinglet, so I was hopeful that it might be a new warbler for the year. The bird had a very bold eye-ring and bright yellow undertail coverts, so my first thought was a Nashville Warbler. But it had a gray back and wings, with a white belly, so it was not like any Nashville that I had seen. I quickly took a few photos and went to consult *The Sibley Guide to Birds* to see if drab first-year Nashvilles could ever be this gray. According to Sibley, first year Nashvilles can have a whitish belly, but they still have greenish wings, so not my bird. Conveniently, Sibley has placed Virginia's Warbler right next to the Nashville, so I didn't have far to go to find a match. The bird looked like the Virginia's illustration almost exactly, even down to the little rufous patch on the head of the male. The only difference was that the yellow wash on the breast was less prominent on this bird.

My thoughts went something like: “Okay, deep breath.. Wow.. maybe I’m wrong...Wow...text photos to Steve Mirick to see what he thinks...I hope this bird sticks around!” Steve thought it looked good for a Virginia’s Warbler, so I rapidly texted my neighbors to ask if it was okay for a bunch of strangers with binoculars to go wandering around their backyards. At least half a dozen people arrived to search, but without any luck. I kept a close eye on the bush where the bird first showed up for the next 48 hours, but unfortunately the bird never reappeared.

What I didn’t know at the time was that this Virginia’s Warbler was a first state record for New Hampshire. Virginia’s Warblers breed primarily in the southwest and winter in Mexico. Even in their normal range, they’re uncommon. The name Virginia’s Warbler doesn’t come from the eastern states; the bird was named after the wife of

W.W. Anderson, the man who collected the first specimen in 1858 (according to All About Birds, [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org), Cornell Lab of Ornithology). In the northeast, eBird shows only a few previous records: two from Monhegan Island in Maine, one from Rhode Island, and three from New York.

Side note: One of those New York records was from inside a department store in December. It was photographed on poinsettias, so perhaps that bird did not arrive on its own power but hitched a ride on a Christmas display?

So where did this Virginia’s Warbler go? I never saw it fly in and I never saw it fly out, so it probably just worked its way along the bushes and trees to someone else’s backyard. After 1,272 consecutive checklists and a lot of interesting sightings, I can highly recommend keeping an eye on your own backyard, rare bird or not, it’s amazing what you can discover.

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## Long-eared Owl – My Nemesis Bird

by Stephen Mirick

*Photos by Steve Mirick taken on 3-7-21 at Beckman’s Island in Seabrook, NH.*

By March of 2021, I had been birding for close to 40 years in New Hampshire and had accumulated a New Hampshire State bird list of roughly 394 species. This is certainly one of the largest lists for anyone in New Hampshire and included nine species of owls with breathtaking views of four different Great Gray Owls, three different Northern Hawk Owls and one of the most exciting discoveries of my life, the shared discovery of nesting Boreal Owls in the White Mountains in 2001! In more recent years, I’ve been privileged to see many other mega-rarities in New Hampshire including White Wagtail, Redwing, and Common Shelduck. But one species had eluded me over all those years, the Long-eared Owl!

Long-eared Owls are not at all common in New Hampshire. In fact, most birders would agree that they are relatively rare. They are regularly reported every winter in Massachusetts, however, especially just over the border in Salisbury. They even nest routinely in western parts of Vermont toward Lake Champlain. Even in New Hampshire, they seem to be reported from time to time on a somewhat regular basis, *just not by me!* The number of times I’ve missed them is large, and the number of times I’ve tried to find one on my own is even larger.

On September 20, 1992, I was on Star Island with many other birders when John McIlwaine accidentally flushed a

Long-eared Owl out of some sumac, but the bird was never relocated. On November 20, 1995, a Long-eared Owl was photographed as it roosted for the day in the Home Depot garden area rafters while I was working about one-half mile down the road and didn’t even know about it until it was gone. In December 1996, Denny Abbott and Davis Finch found a roost of three Long-eared Owls in Durham on a Christmas Bird Count. They were gone the next day. Another Long-eared Owl discovered by David Deifik and Phred Benham roosting in alders in North Hampton on a Coastal Christmas Bird Count in 2007 was also gone the next day. More recently, there was the Long-eared Owl found on private property by Ben Griffith in April 2015 for which the location couldn’t be disclosed, the Long-eared Owl photographed in Hollis on October 28, 2015 by Chris McPherson, the injured Long-eared Owl on Cross Beach Road in Seabrook on November 2, 2016, the Long-eared Owl photographed by Debbie Crowley on King’s Highway in Hampton on January 21, 2019, and finally the Long-eared Owl photographed near Canobie Lake in Salem on December 6, 2020, where the exact location was not disclosed and for which Jane and I drove around in vain, searching for the tree it was perched in.

It had become common knowledge that Steve Mirick needed Long-eared Owl for his State list. Everyone knew it! Len Medlock had even made it a challenge to himself to find me my State Long-eared Owl and had marched through the winter snow in many areas along the seacoast hoping to find me one! I knew I would see one in New Hampshire one day, I just wasn’t sure how.

On March 7, 2021, Jane and I headed out for a day of birding and contemplated where to go. I had become extremely frustrated by the large crowds along the coast, but



we decided to fight the crowd and go to Odiorne Point State Park for a long walk. When I grumbled about that option, Jane suggested we walk around Beckman's Island in Seabrook first and I agreed.

Beckman's Island is a roughly six acre forested "island" surrounded by saltmarsh. It is accessed by a short trail from Beckman's Landing at the end of Farm Lane in Seabrook. The island is privately owned; however, the owners allow recreational use by the public, and there is a footbridge over a tidal creek that leads from the public landing. The island is covered by a mature forest with large white pines and red oaks, and areas along the southern and eastern edges have some thick stands of red cedar. A short trail runs through the middle of the island, and clam diggers often wear down a trail through the adjacent saltmarsh in order to access the Hampton Harbor mud flats. The island is not often birded, but can be good for migrants in spring and fall. From late fall to early spring, most birders only visit here to look for owls. There are historic records of winter owls here, including Long-eared, Short-eared, and Northern Saw-whet Owl; however, almost all reports in the last 30 years have been of only Great Horned Owls.

I finally overcame my "nemesis bird" that morning as Jane and I scoured the island. As I approached the easternmost stand of red cedars, I poked my head through the thick branches and looked up at the trees and there was a set of eyes staring down at me. I'm not sure who was more shocked, the owl or me! Sitting next to it were three more! Four Long-eared Owls roosting together! I quickly fired off a photograph and backed away slowly for fear of flushing

them. I called Jane over and we found a spot where the birds could be watched from a safe distance without disturbance.

There is considerable danger if a Long-eared Owl is flushed. They can be harassed or even killed by crows or Red-tailed Hawks, and Great Horned Owls are known to feed on them. Suitable roosting sites are also rare as they require dense cover. Sightings of Long-eared Owls are often kept secret in New England in order to protect the roost areas during the winter. We weighed the pros and cons, but decided to "get the word out." We figured that the birds would only continue for a short time given the date, and this could be a rare opportunity for many birders to see this beautiful species without disturbing them. Over the course of the rest of the day, we escorted dozens of birders from the parking lot to the viewing location being careful not to disturb the birds. We also did our best to

educate birders about the dangers of disturbance to the birds, and to keep the roost location quiet in order to protect the area from even larger numbers of unescorted birders and reckless photographers. The roosting site was monitored over the next couple of weeks and at least one bird continued to use the roosting site for 12 days until the last report of a single bird was documented on March 19.

I always enjoy seeing a new bird for my New Hampshire list, and with the growing popularity of birding and the increasingly fast way we communicate, these new birds keep coming each

year, but finding my own Long-eared Owls, my "nemesis bird", was an extremely rewarding experience!



*This photograph is taken just after I first saw the roosting owls. They are in an upright, alert posture due to my disturbing them and this is dangerously close to flushing them. After backing away, they settled down to a relaxed posture for the rest of the afternoon.*



*This is a photograph of three of the four birds in a more relaxed posture.*



*Bonaparte's Gulls, cormorants and a Common Tern – all part of the Hinsdale Fallout, 5-5-21. Photo by Donna Keller.*

## The Hinsdale Waterbird Fallout of May 5, 2021

by Hector Galbraith

Hard-won experience has taught birders in southeast Vermont and southwest New Hampshire that certain weather conditions in the spring and fall can result in exciting fallouts of migrant waterbirds. These have occurred at a number of sites including Spofford Lake, Herrick's Cove (VT), the Brattleboro Retreat Meadows (VT), and Hinsdale Setbacks (on the edge of what is called Lake Wantastiquet above the dam on the Connecticut River). Weather conditions were shaping up to produce such a fallout during May 3 and 4 this year. Overcast skies and light to intermittent drizzle were important ingredients in the mix. At Hinsdale, the cake was not fully baked, however, as few birds had arrived beyond four Long-tailed Ducks and six Bonaparte's Gulls. At least one additional ingredient was needed. That arrived on the night of May 4 and early morning of May 5, with strong winds from a northerly quarter and persistent rain. On the morning of May 5, several local birders arrived to see what, if anything, had been brought down by these conditions.

Peering through poor visibility and dripping binoculars and scopes, it became immediately obvious to Dave

Johnston and Coleen Lawlor on the Vermont side of Lake Wantastiquet, and Hector Galbraith and Donna Keller on the New Hampshire side in Hinsdale, that we were not going to be disappointed. There are a few grounded tree trunks in the center of the lake and it came as a shock to see that all were lined with resting Bonaparte's Gulls, 73 in total, the highest count ever at the site (where less than a dozen is a good count), and all in spectacular breeding plumage. Sharing the logs and the water were almost 50 Double-crested Cormorants, a Common Tern, four Red-necked Grebes, four Surf Scoters, a White-winged Scoter and, most thrilling of all, the site's first Cattle Egret. This last bird was sitting hunch-shouldered and disconsolate-looking on the log with the cormorants, no doubt wondering why it had come this far north. During the rest of the day, in clearing weather, all of the birds moved on, except for a few cormorants.

It is worth noting that the fallout of waterbirds on May 5 was not confined to Hinsdale. Equally large or larger fallouts were noted on that day throughout western Massachusetts, with grand totals of at least 200 Bonaparte's Gulls, 34 Common Terns, three Caspian Terns, seven Long-tailed Ducks, four Surf Scoters, 17 White-winged Scoters, and three Red-necked Grebes (all data from Massbird, May 6, 2021). Further north of Hinsdale, five Bonaparte's Gulls occurred on May 5 at Brattleboro Retreat



*Cattle Egret in the Hinsdale Fallout, 5-5-21. Photo by Donna Keller.*



Meadows, Vermont, along with four Surf Scoters, two Red-breasted Mergansers, a Common Tern and two Lesser Scaup. Numbers of birds were much smaller farther north than Brattleboro. It looks as though the fallout extended throughout much of the middle and upper Connecticut River Valley from Brattleboro south, and involved many hundreds of birds, at least.

We have known ever since the days when Tudor Richards was counting birds in New Hampshire in the 1950s and 1960s that inland fallouts of waterbirds occur in spring and that they are typically associated with overcast skies and rain; however, much remains uncertain. Not all days with apparently suitable weather conditions result in fallouts. Other factors may be important, for example the location, movement, and intensity of frontal systems that the birds collide with on their journey to New England. Also, the inclement weather conditions that occur in southern New England might seem promising to birders, but if they extend south to the birds' last stopover areas, they may result in the birds being grounded. Fallouts remain enigmatic and predicting them is an uncertain business. Perhaps, a serious study combining bird movements with weather radar could help reduce the unknowns.

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## Coastal Migration – Spring, 2021

by Stephen Mirick



*Black-capped Chickadee migrating in Portsmouth by Steve Mirick, 4-18-21.*

Geographically, the New Hampshire coastline doesn't seem to have as much to offer for birders as compared to that of neighboring states. Massachusetts has the prominent coastal capes of Cape Ann and Cape Cod which attract vagrants and stick out into the ocean to provide better opportunities to see pelagic birds. In Maine, the jagged contours of the coastline provide concentration points for migrants and the islands, especially Monhegan Island, are

some of the finest for birding in the eastern United States. With only 18 miles of coastline, the New Hampshire coast has perhaps one minor geographic advantage for birders, the relatively smooth coastline and the small, but distinct bend at the Massachusetts border. These two attributes provide for a natural "pinch point" and migration route for diurnal bird migrants that don't like crossing water, but need to head north toward their "summer homes" in "Downeast" Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Ducks, loons, hawks, blackbirds, swallows, and a few other species of passerines can all be seen migrating north along the coast.

My wife Jane and I spend a lot of our time watching bird migration in both the spring and fall. During the spring of 2021, we managed to get out a bit more than usual, particularly as compared to the terrible "Pandemic Spring of 2020." We didn't record as many hawks and swallows as we hoped for, but we had some nice migrations of more common passerine species that are not as well known for their migration. Peak migration occurred in mid-May, but we counted (when we could) from March 27 to June 1. Just like hawkwatching, weather played a critical role in migration with westerly components to the wind essential for a good flight. Most of these counts were also from the early morning hours when migration seems to be the best for these species. We counted migrating birds wherever we were on the coast, but most of the migration was observed from three key spots.

**Rt. 1A in Seabrook** – Most of our observations were from the Haverhill Street access to Seabrook Beach. Here, we watched from the top of the dunes, or closer to Rt. 1A or even on the west side of Rt. 1A in the Seabrook Back Dunes. This was particularly good for our goldfinch migration. Birds were observed in groups flying directly up the dunes, or right along Rt. 1A as they headed north in the early morning.

**Frost Point at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye (referred to in this article as Odiorne)** – This spot requires a hike, but was an excellent spot to watch migration, especially Cedar Waxwings in late May. The nice part about this spot was being able to watch the migrants cross the water from Frost Point as they headed over to New Castle on their way north. While many species don't see this as an obstacle, some of the weak flyers like Blue Jays and Black-capped Chickadees were reluctant and were comical to watch as they would fly half way over and then double-back and dive to the safety of the trees at Odiorne.

**South End of Portsmouth International Tradeport at Pease in Portsmouth** – This spot is technically inland a bit from the coast and is at the turnaround circle near the entrance to the Pease Golf Course. We found it while looking for a good spring hawkwatching location. It still

may be good for hawk migration, but we “discovered” this to be excellent for chickadee migration, purely by accident. The spot is a pinch point for birds that won’t cross Great Bay or the Tradeport. This specific spot concentrates chickadees as they need to cross an open area of grassland over Grafton Road.

Below is a summary of our results for the spring of 2021.

**American Goldfinch** – 8,783 birds total. Goldfinches were observed migrating through the entire period including 19 birds in several small groups seen migrating past Frost Point on the seemingly late date of June 1. The peak period was May 6-16 with an amazing record high count of 3,640 moving north from Seabrook in four hours on May 9. On that morning, birds were continuously flying by and a total of 215 flocks of birds were recorded moving north in sizes between eight and 80 birds per flock. Surprisingly, observation of coastal goldfinch migration had not been historically well documented in the literature. The phenomenon was brought to light by Rick Heil with his observations from Plum Island in Massachusetts. Now Jane and I have documented it as well for the New Hampshire seacoast over the last 15 years. Goldfinches fly low over the dunes or along Rt. 1A on their journey north and can sometimes be quiet and extremely hard to see as they pass overhead quickly. They do not hesitate in their migration. American Goldfinch migrations are annual, but the numbers likely fluctuate with peak years occurring following a fall incursion.

**Blue Jays** – 809 birds total. Blue Jay migration was observed from May 9 through June 1 including 77 late migrants passing Frost Point on June 1. The peak period was mid-May with a high count of 322 flying north along Rt. 1A in Seabrook on May 16. Group sizes varied from

six to 50 birds. Blue Jays are “chickens” when it comes to crossing water or even large open areas. This is best observed from Odiorne when they attempt to cross the short distance to New Castle. They often double-back several times before finally crossing. Blue Jay migrations are well known from across the State, but coastal flights can sometimes be enormous. Historic counts for New Hampshire include 2,000 migrating in Rye on 5-21-66 as reported by Vera Hebert and an incredible pulse of 513 flying north in 30



*Blue Jays migrating at Frost Point in Rye on 6-1-21 by Steve Mirick.*

minutes in Rye on 5-10-70 (Keith & Fox 2013). Blue Jay migrations are annual, but likely fluctuate with peak years following a fall incursion.



*Cedar Waxwings migrating at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye on 6-1-21 by Steve Mirick.*

**Cedar Waxwing** – 933 birds total. Cedar Waxwings were observed mostly from the second half of May until June 1 with the peak daily count of 541 on June 1. Unfortunately, no counts were made after June 1, but it is likely that significant numbers continued moving north into June. Birds generally migrate in flocks of two to 80 birds and do not hesitate as they fly north. It has been reported that Cedar Waxwings exhibit a bi-modal migration with peak migration periods of January-March and again in May (Keith & Fox 2013). I have not observed clear coastal migration during January to March; however, I have observed a regular migration during late May into very early June (i.e., 960 migrating at Odiorne on 5-26-10, 538 migrating up the coast on 5-30-10, 286 migrating at Odiorne on 5-25-18, 264 migrating at Seabrook on 5-25-11, and 201 migrating up the coast on 6-2-18). It is believed that Cedar Waxwing migrations likely consist of annual migrants, but fluctuate with peak years following a fall or winter incursion.

**Black-capped Chickadee** – 234 birds total. Most were moving northeast from the south end of the Pease Tradeport in Portsmouth. The peak total was on April 10 when 120 birds crossed Grafton Road in groups as large as 13. There are very few significant May migrations documented, so I was surprised to see clearly migrating chickadees as late as June 1 when two birds gathered at Frost Point at Odiorne and together crossed the water north into New Castle. Unfortunately, most of our observations didn’t start until late morning in Portsmouth and we suspect a lot more could have been counted. Chickadees are very wary about



crossing open areas and migrate cautiously from tree to tree. The Pease spot was good for watching them stage in nearby shrubs before making the “big crossing” over Grafton Road. Like the Blue Jays, they frequently double-back before finally crossing.

Although thought of as a “resident” species, chickadee movements have been reported over the years. Banding data from Canada indicates that 90% of recaptured birds between 1921 and 1995 hadn't moved at all. However, long distance movements (best termed “irruptions” rather than true migrations) do occur when young birds disperse southward, possibly after big reproductive years. These irruptions occur every two years or so (Foote, et al. 2020). The fall of 2020 was believed to be a big year for southbound chickadees which may partly explain the northbound movement we observed this spring.



*Migrating Eastern Kingbird by Steve Mirick.*

**Eastern Kingbird** – 123 birds total. Although Eastern Kingbirds appear to be strictly diurnal migrants, their movements are rarely recorded in New Hampshire. They are commonly reported in small numbers moving northward along the coast during mid-May, often single birds or pairs of birds on mornings with a good migration. But in 2021, there was an exceptional day that set a new record for New Hampshire. On the morning of May 14, 74 birds were counted migrating north along Rt. 1A in Seabrook with a constant flow of kingbirds heading up Rt. 1A ranging in size from single birds to flocks as large as 5, 6, 7, and even 9! The previous high daily count of Eastern Kingbirds for the State was 57 (not migrating) from a field in Concord on 8-19-07 (Keith & Fox 2013). My previous high count for migrating kingbirds was 15 on 5-18-08. Eastern Kingbirds are long distance migrants that regularly arrive in New Hampshire in early May. Their migration can last into early June and on June 1, three high flying migrants were observed together at Odiorne.

**Bobolink** – 252 birds total. All of the migrants were counted in two days on May 14 and May 16. Like kingbirds, Bobolinks are often reported in small numbers along the coast moving north in mid-May. This year, however, there was a big migration of Bobolinks which coincided with the Eastern Kingbirds migrating in Seabrook on May 14. A total of 218 were counted that morning in flocks of up to 40 in size. This is my highest spring count by far and most of the migration happened early in the morning between 7:00 and 8:00 am. Historically, large counts of 100 or more are sometimes reported during the spring or fall; however, the record high count for New Hampshire appears to be of 300 Bobolinks counted by Bob Quinn migrating north along the coast on 5-18-86.

**Other Migrants of Note** – Many other species were counted migrating north along the coast during the spring of 2021, mostly in average or below average numbers. One species of note observed moving north was Tufted Titmouse. Not normally considered a migratory species, 10 birds were counted moving north with Black-capped Chickadees in Portsmouth. Other birds of note seen moving north included five Caspian Terns (three on 5-29 and two more on 6-1) and four Red Crossbills in Seabrook on May 9. Another big migration involved 115 Lesser Yellowlegs on May 16 with flock sizes as large as 21, 14, 22, 26, and 12. Lesser Yellowlegs are generally not recorded in high numbers in spring and this is an exceptional total that represents a record high count for New Hampshire in the Spring.



*Tufted Titmouse migrating 3-27-21 by Steve Mirick.*

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# Spring 2021 Field Notes

Diana Stephens, Editor

## Songbirds and Squirrels Enjoy Maple “Popsicles”

Text and photos by Sally Bertrand



Sally and Mike Bertrand of Derry observed this Black-capped Chickadee and other small songbirds and critters enjoying maple-flavored icicles that were hanging from the branches of their backyard maple tree on March 19, 2021.

We have a Red Maple in the bird feeder area behind our house in Derry. On March 19, 2021, I noticed there were several “sapsicles” that were attractive to Red Squirrels, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and Red-breasted Nuthatches. I was not sure if the birds were drinking the drips or biting the ice. Eventually most of the icicles were knocked off by the birds or melted and fell off the tree. There were no “sapsicles” the following day, but the Red Squirrel and a few birds were drinking the sap where it was dripping out of the tree!



A Tufted Titmouse contemplates the delicious dessert.



Here, a Red Squirrel holds a maple flavored “sapsicle” in both hands while it bites or licks the sweet treat. Who knew that squirrels liked popsicles, too?

## Ospreys Relocated to New Nest in Portsmouth

by Iain MacLeod

On May 8, 2021 Iain MacLeod, Executive Director of the Squam Lakes Science Center in Holderness wrote to the NHBirds e-mail list to explain what happened to a pair of nesting Ospreys on Exit 3 off Rt. 95 in Portsmouth, NH that was quite visible from the highway.

That pair [of Ospreys at Exit 3 on Rt. 95] built a new nest on an energized electric pole and caused a power outage. Eversource did a fantastic job dealing with the issue. After flying a drone over the area to ensure there were no eggs in the nest, and in consultation with USDA, USFW, NH Audubon and me, they removed the nest. By chance, there was an unused (not energized) pole nearby on which they placed an adapted wood pallet. They moved the nest onto the new platform. The pair of Ospreys immediately accepted their new home and hopefully should be laying eggs soon.

Over the years, I have worked with Eversource, NH Electric Coop and other local electric companies to manage “problem” Ospreys and they always look out for the birds while also dealing with hazards and safety concerns. Once again, we have a happy outcome for this pair of Ospreys.



## Hairy Woodpeckers Do “Line Dance” in Warren

Elaine Faletta of Warren, NH wrote to the NHBirds e-mail group (5-10-21) about two Hairy Woodpeckers she observed and photographed engaged in interesting behavior. According to Elaine, “they were mostly silent and at the end both flew off squeaking.” She described it as a kind of “line dance,” but in fact, it is a territorial dispute. If only humans could express disputes in this manner! What she saw was the “bill-waving display” that is used in territorial defense (as described in *Birds of the World*, below). These are both female Hairy Woodpeckers, although both sexes have been known to engage in this behavior.

Here is what we found in *Birds of the World*\*:

### Manner of Establishing

**and Maintaining Territory.** *Drumming often used in establishment and maintenance of a territory by either sex. In close encounters, Hairy Woodpeckers perform a bill-waving display that includes jerky movements of body with extended neck and wings and waving of raised bill as if dueling. Such encounters can last for several minutes, and birds may stop for a minute or more, remaining motionless, each with its body pressed against tree trunk and with bill pointed forward and slightly raised as if crouched for attack or defense.*

Northern Flickers also engage in similar behavior (the “waggle” dance) described in the Backyard Birder feature of

*A series of photos in quick succession of two Hairy Woodpeckers as they performed the “bill-waving display” for about five minutes. Photos by Elaine Faletta, 5-10-21, Warren, NH.*



the Spring 2014 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records*, with a video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdhW\\_WrmLvE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdhW_WrmLvE)

\*Jackson, J., H. Ouellet, and B. Jackson. 2020. *Hairy Woodpecker* (*Dryobates villosus*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (P. Rodewald, ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.haiwoo.01>

## Dead Razorbill Found in Chocorua

by Jersey Nickerson

On April 8, Jersey Nickerson of Tamworth found a beautiful Razorbill by the side of the road in Chocorua, but unfortunately it was deceased. Word came to us through Ned Beecher who initially sent in the photo. The Razorbill was sent to Tin Mountain Conservation Center to be mounted and used for educational purposes. Below, Jersey describes her experience in finding this bird that is rarely seen inland.



*In early April, a dead Razorbill was found by Jersey Nickerson by the side of the road in Chocorua. Normally an ocean bird, it is very rare for Razorbills to be seen inland, and so, she sent the bird to the Tin Mountain Conservation Center in Albany, NH, who decided to mount it. Photo by Larry Nickerson.*

I drive down Philbrick Neighborhood Rd. in Chocorua, NH twice a day, every day to feed horses. I was heading home an hour after feeding, on a perfectly clear day. As I was zooming up the hill near the end of the road, I saw something very black and bright white on the side of the road (that was not trash), so I backed up, realized it was a bird and was hoping it was just stunned. The angle of his neck was not good. There wasn't a scratch or feather out of place otherwise. I picked him up, gently straightened his head, pet his silky feathers, took him home and started calling people to report the situation.

Ned Beecher suggested I contact Tin Mountain Conservation Center and they were thrilled (and pretty sure I hadn't found a Razorbill!). When I found it, I was baffled



as to what it was. It was large like some exotic parrot with that rounded bill, but it had webbed feet like a duck and its coloring was like a penguin. It took two or three times through the bird book to identify it. All in all, it was amazing to hold in my hands, but it was so sad its life was over.

*Editor's Note: This ocean bird is rarely, if ever, seen inland, alive or dead. We don't know why it was here (see the Spring Summary). The cause of death is unknown, but this unfortunate alcid may have been hit by a car.*

## Four Barred Owlets in Dover

*Text and photos by Deb Powers*



*One of the Barred Owlets at the nest hole, May 4, 2021, that Deb Powers found near her family's home in Dover.*

I was born and raised in Dover, where my father still lives in our family's home. Being in a rural area, I have fond memories of all sorts of wildlife. Hearing Barred Owls calling back and forth this spring, I decided to explore more of the surrounding woods and boy was I treated to an amazing experience!

Within a short distance of the house, I saw an adult Barred Owl sitting high in a pine tree. It did not appear to be looking at me, however, it was looking towards an oak tree farther in. Seeing a large hole, I got excited but reminded myself that I had seen holes before but never owls. I could see what appeared to be owl feathers. I looked through the camera lens and sure enough they were! Over the next month, I checked the nest each week, often seeing one adult's head peeking out of the hole with the other adult standing guard high in the pine tree above. My father would "report" to me each night during our evening phone call if he had heard them calling or saw them flying. Finally on April 27, I saw what appeared to be a one-week-old owlet, covered in white downy feathers, rise up quickly in the hole to look around. When I returned the next week, a larger owlet



*On May 16, she found these juvenile Barred Owls staring down at her. Initially, Deb spotted two owlets, then three, then eventually **four** owlets near the nest hole. The adult Barred Owl sat on a branch nearby.*

appeared. How could this be, growing so quickly? Over the next few weeks, I observed not one, but two, owlets peaking out and preening each other.

On May 14, I arrived to an empty nest, finding the adult sitting on its usual perch. I looked up and was thrilled to see two large owlets looking back at me. I took a few quick pictures and left. It was clear that the Barred Owl adult was distressed about me being there, producing a quiet, whining call. My amazement continued on May 16, when looking in from the road, it appeared that there were several "blobs" in that same tree. I walked in and to my utter shock there were four owlets! How did I miss that? How did four baby owls fit into that little hole? The adult stayed low on the branch, almost chest high and appeared to be following me, hopping from limb to limb as I tried to get a better angle to see all four of the young. I got the hint and left immediately. That was the last time we saw or heard the owls for the season. What an amazing experience and thrill to experience with my dad.

## Ospreys Arrive to Nest at Heron Rookery

*by Susan Poirier*

*There is a heron rookery in Wolfeboro that has hosted nesting Great Blue Herons for over 20 years. This year, however, the Ospreys moved in. Photos by Diana Stephens, 5-9-21.*

The Great Blue Herons have nested in our backyard marsh in Wolfeboro for at least the past 20 years. They usually return to the beaver impoundment in March,



sometimes early in the month, sometimes late. This spring the first heron arrived on March 24. It circled the area, alit on one of the tall, dead trees for a few minutes, then flew off towards the lake. It was at least two weeks before we saw herons again. A pair arrived and chose one of the smaller nests left from previous seasons. In prior years, we have watched the herons spruce up their nests with dead branches and live ones from firs and pines. This year, we did not see any such activity.

About two weeks after the herons began sitting on the nest, a pair of Ospreys arrived. They chose the largest, highest nest, about 30 feet away. Since herons tolerate fish-eating Ospreys, I was not concerned about losing the herons. Unfortunately, the Ospreys did not tolerate herons that close to their nest. The female (and sometimes the male) Osprey began harassing the herons. Throughout the day, the black and white bird would fly off her nest, circle around, and swoop down on the sitting heron, screeching the entire time. The heron would either jump up and squawk or crouch down and squawk. The harassment continued through all of April, May, and early June. Another pair of herons arrived in the area in May, but after sitting in a nearby tree for half an hour assessing the situation, they flew off and did not return.

In mid-June, the two heron chicks hatched and began their characteristic “ack, ack, ack” call. On June 20, I observed an adult heron fly to the Osprey nest, carefully remove a branch, and return with it to its own nest. The Osprey parents were absent. Later in the day, the Ospreys returned. One was on the nest while the other hung in the air nearby, with prey in one talon. The hovering bird then flew to the nest, dropped the food and landed. The sitting bird lowered its head toward the food, then quickly took flight and left the area, heading toward the lake. The second bird walked around the nest, checked branches, then settled down before jumping up again and just standing.

If the Osprey chicks had hatched, as seemed likely, the nest was too high up for me to see into it. Meanwhile, an adult heron stood guard over the rapidly growing young herons. They doubled in height since first observed on June 6.

*Editor's Note: Susan told us that in 2020, there were four pairs of nesting Great Blue Herons at this location in Wolfeboro. In 2013, the number of successful nests was as high as 19 with 60 young. For unknown reasons, the number of nesting pairs has steadily declined since then.*



*Great Blue Herons have nested in this marsh in Wolfeboro for over 20 years, but only one pair nested here in 2021. Instead, there was a new arrival, an Osprey.*



*Here, the female Osprey can be seen flying over the Great Blue Herons' nest, harassing the heron on its nest.*



*Again, the Osprey circles over and harasses the Great Blue Heron. This behavior continued throughout April, May and early June.*



## Flash Freeze on the Magalloway

Photos by Bob Quinn

*It is interesting to note that a large, open expanse of river can freeze (or re-freeze) in less than 24 hours. Bob Quinn captured the difference from one day to the next in mid-March on the Magalloway River in Errol, NH.*



*Common Mergansers swimming in the Magalloway River on March 14, 2021 right before the water froze over.*



*The next morning, on March 15, the river was completely frozen over.*

## Migration in Errol, NH

### Daytime arrival of a spring Greater Yellowlegs

Text and photo by Bob Quinn

I was paddling around Sweat Meadow near Lake Umbagog in Errol, NH on the morning of April 19, 2021, when I heard a distant Greater Yellowlegs. Conditions were calm and quiet, and its calls grew louder and louder. I eventually spotted this high-flying bird. It circled lower and lower then finally flew right by me. It initially landed on top of a tussock of marsh grass, apparently due to high water flooding the meadow. Ultimately, it found a small patch of mud to rest on. I believe that this bird was a migrant that had *just* arrived as I sat in my canoe and enjoyed watching it.

Another fascinating migration note in Errol was the sighting of at least *seven* Great Blue Herons *roosting in the*

*pinetrees across the street from the Errol Motel* at 6:00 am on April 18, 2021. These birds were flushed by a young Bald Eagle and dispersed, probably a little earlier than they wanted to! They had not been seen there on April 17 and are not regular in that spot, therefore, they were clearly migrants that had arrived during the night of April 17.



*Greater Yellowlegs arriving at Sweat Meadow in Errol, NH on 4-19-21.*

## Leucistic Red-winged Blackbird at Quincy Bog

Elaine Faletra spotted and photographed this leucistic Red-winged Blackbird at Quincy Bog in Rumney on April 6, 2021. Leucism in birds is a genetic condition in which a bird lacks at least some normal pigmentation. This particular bird is mostly white but its red wings are still apparent. Elaine was “110% certain” that she saw the same bird on March 22, 2021 but could not confirm the sighting because of the distance. See the inside front cover for a color photo of this bird.





# A Seven Owl Day in New Hampshire

*Text and photos by Zeke Cornell*



*This Snowy Owl was the victor in the “owl squabble” described below. See the inside front cover for more of Zeke’s photos of the encounter.*

**O**n March 7, 2021, I had an incredible owl day – seven species in New Hampshire!

It was my intent to look for some owls for the year (Snowy) and the month (Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl). I had Barred Owl, Short-eared Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl a few times over the previous week and, as the day evolved, that prompted the pursuit of a Big Owl Day.

I was filling my bird feeders at 3:14 am before leaving the house and the local Barred Owl started calling spontaneously. Cool! What a great start to the day. I stopped in Exeter (NH) to try for an Eastern Screech-Owl, but a friend had given me the wrong location and I had no luck so it was onwards to the coast.

My first stop was in Rye at Massacre Marsh where I’ve had good luck in the past. Sure enough an Eastern Screech-Owl was whinnying. I had no luck with Great Horned Owl which was a bit surprising since they are often spontaneously calling here. Oh well, but since it was migration time, I tried Long-eared Owl, which I often do, because I had never had one in New Hampshire (a bit of foreshadowing?). The result was two more Eastern Screech-Owls on the other side of the road (I heard all three talking at the same time)!

Off to another owl spot in Rye, Love Lane. There was nothing calling when I arrived, but in short order a Great Horned Owl pair had a duet going and, in about 3-5 minutes, a Barred Owl started carrying on. Sunrise was imminent, so it was time to visit Hampton Harbor in hopes of a Snowy Owl (they were scarce in New Hampshire over

the winter).

Hampton Beach State Park has dunes, fields, a good view of the Hampton River channel and rooftops where Snowys seem to frequent. Sure enough, a barred Snowy was eating something (later determined to be a rabbit) in the middle of the open field. Within a minute or two, the bird began to fly right in front of me and suddenly there was an owl squabble. A very white Snowy came flying in and the two birds engaged with talons up, wings flapping and, at least one of the birds, hissing madly. The barred one prevailed and the whitish one flew off. An extraordinary and lucky encounter! Scott Heron and Dylan Jackson who were in the park and watching, said this was chapter two. I had missed chapter one. The whitish Snowy had flown in with the rabbit and was set upon by the barred Snowy. The barred one chased the whitish one off during the first encounter as well and had taken possession of the rabbit.

Now it was time to poke around and look for other birds; maybe some early spring arrivals or a Rough-legged Hawk. Instead, a Steve Mirick text broadcast came in, four Long-eared Owls in Seabrook! This is a bird Steve had never seen in New Hampshire despite 35+ years of searching! He was on site to guide birders to a site where the owls could be viewed without disturbing them. Indeed, there were four in the group and two were giving a semi-open view. This species is a tough encounter in New Hampshire and to have four was spectacular!



*Two of the Long-eared Owls, owl species number five, by Zeke Cornell, 3-7-21, Seabrook, NH.*

So, I had five owl species for the day and one of the remaining targets was the Short-eared Owls that had been seen for the previous seven days at the Portsmouth Country Club (actually in Greenland, NH). In a bit of serendipity, I had found the first one on Sunday, February 28, while searching for Snow Geese that had been reported in the

area of the Great Bay. One of the holes on the golf course protrudes into the bay and that is where I spotted the owl. Over the course of the next week, as many as four were seen hunting on the course and in the nearby marsh. So Becky Suomala and I (and other friends) began walking out the golf course at about 3:00 pm. She had not seen the birds at this site yet and they had been reliable. Three hours later we were leaving without success and Becky suggested checking the nearby fields at Great Bay Farm, just a couple of minutes away. We talked Charlie Nims into caravanning with us, and off we went. Becky was out of her car for not even thirty seconds, when she began to jump up and down. Turns out it was a very good suggestion on her part. In the evaporating light, we could see a very white under-winged bird hunting over the fields. We called others who were still out on the golf course, but they didn't make it in time before the Short-eared disappeared. In was a near miss, but I had owl number six for the day!

It was time for a Northern Saw-whet Owl. There had been reports along the coast and in the Concord area near home, so I had some good possibilities. I struck out at the first two stops and I went back to Massacre Marsh for the third stop. I got out of my vehicle and immediately heard a Great Horned Owl duet (where were they this morning?) and a trilling Eastern Screech-Owl, but no Northern Saw-whet Owl. So I took another shot at Love Lane in Rye, which can be very good for saw-whet. I had to resort to tape playing, but a saw-whet began tooting back. Interestingly, none of the earlier owls piped up.

Inspired, I wanted to give the Concord area a try for another Northern Saw-whet Owl (when you are on a roll, you are on a roll!). We'd been having them at several sites and Pam Hunt had one at Mast Yard State Forest that day. In five stops, I had only one saw-whet (Pam's bird), but it was so close that I thought it wanted to get in the truck and warm up!

So, a seven owl species day! Becky's first question was, "How are you going to top that?" This was followed by, "Where was the Great Gray or Boreal or Hawk Owl?" Jeez, some folks are hard to please. What a fun day!



*Short-eared Owl by Steve Bennett, 3-6-21, Portsmouth Country Club, Greenland, NH.*

## Short-eared Owl Show

*In New Hampshire, encounters with Short-eared Owls are usually brief, one-day occurrences with single birds that are never seen again. It's rare to have more than one at the same location and practically unheard of to have them for more than a day, but in March of 2021, there were multiple owls at two spots putting on a great show for birders as described in these two accounts. See the inside back cover for more photos. – Ed.*

### Portsmouth Country Club

*by Jim Sparrell*



*Short-eared Owl by Leo McKillop, 3-6-21, Greenland, NH.*

Short-eared Owls on the New Hampshire seacoast can be notoriously difficult to relocate after an initial sighting. So at the end of the 2020-21 winter season, on February 28, Katie and I zipped over to Great Bay when we heard that Zeke Cornell had found a Short-eared Owl sitting on an ice bank while he was scanning the bay. The scope views were okay and the owl remained there for a while. We ran into Chris Duffy, who tirelessly gets up in the early morning hours looking for owls. We wondered if we could get any better views of the owl from the Portsmouth Country Club (in Greenland, NH) that generously allows folks to walk their trails during the winter months. Gray skies hung overhead and Chris, Bob Marley (the dog), Katie and I were racing the remaining daylight to get out to the point. I wasn't seeing anything, but then Chris called out that the owl had flown out from right below the banking at the point. We were all able to see it fly out and land on the open ice on the bay. Overhead, a mature Bald Eagle flew in and landed awkwardly in one of the few trees at the point, struggling to keep its balance. As the eagle took off toward the owl, we saw Steve Bennett coming toward us and waved him on quickly, fearing that the eagle might try to pick the "little" owl off the



ice. As the eagle sailed low over the owl, the Short-eared took off with its fluttery bat-like flight. The eagle just kept going. At one point, I took a very distant photo of the owl sitting on the ice with four Bald Eagles also sitting on the ice (see Winter 2020-21 issue *New Hampshire Bird Records*).

Subsequent observations over the next week ultimately confirmed that there were at least four Short-eared Owls at this location. They were seen every day that week except for March 2 when there was a ferocious wind that discouraged anyone from taking the exposed one-mile walk out to the point. In the late afternoon, the owls flew around some of the brushy areas on the golf course and on several occasions were photographed posing on top the bluebird boxes. On March 7, none were observed from the country club, but just at dusk one was seen hunting over the nearby fields on Newington Road. The owls provided much cold weather excitement for an early week in March.

## Dillant-Hopkins Airport

by Rebecca Suomala



*Short-eared Owl by Alex Lamoreaux, 3-7-21, Airport Rd., Swanzey, NH.*

Two Short-eared Owls were first reported at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport (Swanzey, NH) on February 6 by Joshua Jarvis, but it was early March when the action really heated up. Most of the time there were two individuals, but three were seen at the same time on March 6 by numerous observers. The third one appeared to move on, but two remained and were seen almost daily until March 23, 2021. A Northern Harrier was also at the airport often interacting with the Short-eareds making for a great show.

I parked at the airport on February 28 and took a nap while I waited for owl time, only to get a phone call from Zeke Cornell that he had a Short-eared on the coast (see Jim's story above)! Arghh! I thought that would jinx any chance I had to see one here in Swanzey but my anxiety was unfounded. His call prompted me to stop napping and get out there looking. It was 3:45 pm which seemed early, but when I checked the runways there was a Short-eared Owl

hunting near the windsock. Yay! It hunted for about 5-10 minutes, landed out of sight and then put up with a rodent in its talons and disappeared. It reappeared a few minutes later, interacted with a Northern Harrier, then landed in a tree on the edge of the runways. I had it in my scope but no other birders were there to share it with. It stayed there until put up by a Bald Eagle. The eagle was chasing an American Wigeon across the runways and back! That was a surprise.

Meanwhile I saw the harrier chase a smaller bird (robin?) and catch it just out of sight over the edge of a runway. I could just see its wing tips when it extended them upwards after it landed. At 5:00 pm one Short-eared Owl reappeared on one of the wooden structures by the windsock, then a second one arrived. Both took flight, hunting. By this time, many people had arrived to look for the owls and we all got to see them from the "terminal" fence. It was a great show!



*Short-eared Owl by Donna Keller, 2-28-21, Dillant-Hopkins Airport, Swanzey, NH.*

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## A Hoot of a Night

by Charlie Nims

At 5:02 pm on a pleasant early March evening (3-9-21), my phone beeped indicating an incoming text message. It was from my good birding buddy, Joe Scott, who lives in Chatham, asking if I wanted to do some owling. Historically, he regularly gets owls in his neighborhood beyond the common Mt. Washington Valley Barred Owl. After a couple of text exchanges, I indicated I would join him around 8:15 pm.

It was a perfect evening to look and listen for owls with moderate temperatures and almost no wind, albeit a partly cloudy sky. Upon arriving, I walked up the side steps to Joe's deck and he came out to join me. It did not take long before we started hearing the toot-toot-toot-toot of a Northern Saw-whet Owl, my first of the year. That made my evening, regardless of what might or might not come next. Over the next 10-15 minutes, we heard at least two saw-whets and probably a third! There was continuous tooting with one owl

coming in close, although we were never able to spot it.

Suddenly, a large bird swooped in, a Barred Owl! It landed in a close tree allowing us to get flashlight visuals and binocular views. Within a few minutes, it started, unprompted, making its “who cooks for you” call. In almost no time, a female responded and we listened to an avian antiphonal call/recall. This continued for some time and we even had one of the saw-whets tooting in the background, a surprise to me as they can be prey for Barred Owls.

Emboldened by our success, we decided to try for a Great Horned Owl, trying for the equivalent of a hockey hat trick. So, we attempted to call in a Great Horned but after about 15 minutes with no success we headed inside to celebrate our good owling evening.

Joe and I both have a fondness for port wine so we enjoyed a “night owl’s” glass of Graham’s Six Grapes port along with some cheese and crackers, well deserved after such a rewarding night of owling, but, as it turned out, that was not the end of our adventure.

While enjoying our reward and discussing the evening, Joe cocked his ear and I stopped talking – he had heard something. We immediately got up, went back on the deck where, not only did we have a very close Great Horned Owl calling, but we also had a female duetting back!! Somewhat farther away, one of the Saw-whets was still tooting. We listened to the Great Horned Owl for about 10 minutes, went back inside, clinked our wine glasses to celebrate a great owling evening and to enjoy the remainder of our port.

As a postscript, when I left at 10:15 pm to go home, both the saw-whet and Great Horned Owls were still calling, a truly memorable evening of owls and birding camaraderie.

Generally speaking, in the “Near North” of New Hampshire (by this I mean the Mt. Washington Valley area, which is at the north end of central New Hampshire), the Barred Owl is the easiest of the owls to find. They are regular year round and can even be heard occasionally calling in the daytime. While it is possible that the Northern Saw-whet Owl is more numerous, it is more difficult, in my experience, to find. It is a local breeder and can be found in most, if not all, months of the year in a variety of habitats. For me, March seems to be the month when I have had it most frequently, probably due to the combination of breeders and migrating birds. Great Horned Owl is a much scarcer species, very spotty in its occurrence. Eastern Screech-Owl has not been reported on eBird north of Tamworth in Carroll County. Two rare owl species that I have had in the “Near North” are Snowy Owl, once in Jackson during migration, and Northern Hawk Owl which I have seen twice, one at the Whitefield Airport and the other in Sandwich.

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## Horned Lark Nest at Concord Airport

*Text and photos by Rebecca Suomala*

**H**orned Larks are known to nest at Concord Airport and in early April, 2021, I headed to a spot just outside the fence to see if I could hear the male singing and see his courtship song flight. When I arrived, there were three Horned Larks, a male and female and a third adult that soon flew. As I watched the pair feeding in the grass, I was shocked to see the female walk behind a tuft of grass and settle into what looked like a nest. In my scope, I could barely see her head and tail in the grass. It was April 3, way too early for a nest I thought. Wow, was I wrong!

I walked towards her for a better view and to confirm she was really (not) on a nest. She jumped up before I realized how close I was. I took a quick look, expecting to see an empty nest depression or eggs, but there were three fuzzy, yellow *young* in a nest! I had missed courtship by several weeks. The young looked newly hatched; they had no pin feathers and their eyes were closed which means they were one-two days old. Estimating hatch on April 2 and counting backwards (incubation is 11-12 days plus three days for egg laying), the female would have been laying the first egg around March 18. Next year, I’ll have to up my time table about a month if I want to see the song flight.

I thought it would be fun to follow the progress of the young, so I stopped by regularly to watch from a distance. Pam Hunt and Zeke Cornell also submitted reports to fill in the gaps. On April 10, there were only two young in the nest when the parents brought food. On April 14, they were out of the nest but only taking short hops and still being fed by the parents. Later sightings were of just one chick, with the final report of the male feeding a full-sized fledgling (25 days old) on April 27.

On April 27, I noted something that got my attention. While the male was feeding the well-feathered fledgling, I saw the female, but she disappeared. I wondered if she was feeding the other fledgling, or, would she possibly be incubating a second clutch already? I thought it was way too soon for another nest, so I didn’t do any close watching. I was wrong once again.

On May 5, the pair was feeding on the ground and I watched the female walk to a new nest and sit on it, not far from the first nest. Wow! A few days later, on May 9, I confirmed three newly hatched young, looking about the same age as the chicks had been when I found the first nest. I was shocked yet again. That seemed like a very quick turn around by my human perspective. It means the female began laying the second clutch about April 23 while the male was





*The female is incredibly hard to see when she's on the nest. The inset shows her outline. Nest #1, 4-3-21.*



*The depth of the nest cup shows in this photo of nest #2, 5-9-21, with chicks.*



*One or two-day-old chicks in nest #1 on 4-3-21.*



*One or two-day-old chicks in nest #2 on 5-9-21.*



*The first Horned Lark nest with its lining pulled out, showing the hole the female dug with her feet and bill, and some of the dirt she dug out. Taken 5-9-21.*

still feeding their first fledgling. It may not be that quick when you consider that the first fledgling would have been mostly independent about April 30 (four weeks old), leaving the male free to feed the new chicks when they hatched on May 8.

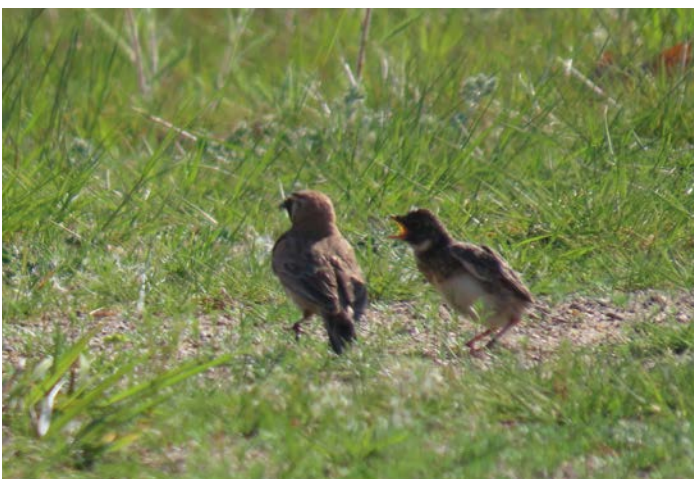
When I confirmed the location of the second nest, I went back to the first nest site to look at the nest cup. It was an amazingly deep cup in the bare ground at the base of a grassy clump. Something had pulled out the nest and I could see the fully excavated cup. It was fascinating. I've never seen a ground nest like it.

On May 19, the male was feeding two (possibly three) semi-fledged chicks from the second nesting attempt. There was no sign of the female. If she went on to a third nesting attempt, it was in a different area. This was the last time I saw Horned Larks at this location (but I failed to make a note of when I next checked – I should know better).





Adult Horned Lark with 25-day-old fledgling from nest #1, 4-27-21.



Adult Horned Lark feeding 11-day-old fledgling from nest #2, 5-19-21.

## Appendix

### Estimated Nesting Chronology

#### Nest #1

- 3/16/21 – female digs nest cup
- 3/18/21 – female lays egg 1
- 3/19/21 – female lays egg 2
- 3/20/21 – full clutch of 3 eggs, female starts incubation
- 4/2/21 – hatch, based on 1-2 day-old chicks observed  
4/3/21
- 4/13/21 – young leave nest; young observed in nest  
4/12/21, out of nest 4/14/21
- 4/30/21 – young fully independent

#### Nest #2

- 4/21/21 – female digs nest cup
- 4/23/21 – female lays egg 1
- 4/24/21 – female lays egg 2
- 4/25/21 – full clutch of 3 eggs, female starts incubation
- 5/8/21 – hatch, based on 1-2 day-old chicks observed  
5/9/21
- 5/18/21 – young leave nest; young observed out of nest  
5/19/21
- 6/5/21 – young fully independent

### Key Times

- Nest digging 1-2 days
- Egg laying – one per day
- Incubation – 11-12 days
- Young leave nest – 8-10 days old (young can hop)
- Young take short flights – 16-18 days old
- Young fully independent – 4 weeks old

### References

- Beason, R. 2020. Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (S. Billerman, ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.horlar.01>

## The Lost Birds of Merrimack County

by Rob Woodward

I found the perfect rainy (snowy?) day project. I rely on eBird regularly, mostly to enter data and discover where certain species are found and when. I also like the daily rare bird alert feature so I can see what species are being seen in my county and state. For those of you with something of a competitive streak, you can see how you rank in your county and state in terms of number of species seen. Don't confuse this with a rating of your birding skills, which would be hard to assess anyway. I happened to notice recently that I am ranked seventh for Merrimack County with 202 species.

I'm in the top ten without even living there anymore, but it seemed low. Part of the reason I don't have more species is that I started birding in Merrimack County long before eBird came along and part of the reason is that I didn't enter everything I saw. I still don't, but I'm getting better. What if I went through my old records in my birding journals and entered those that were never entered, how far would it boost my county standing?

I compared my county list on eBird with a blank checklist and drew up a list of birds that I thought I had seen but were not there on my list. Then I had to find written proof of when and where I had seen each one. A tedious search through my records revealed that it wasn't just old records that were never entered into eBird, but also plenty of recent sightings. At last, I finalized a list of 21 species that I had seen for which I had a written record of date and place in Merrimack County, almost all in Concord.

Cattle Egret – I saw this bird adjacent to the Mormon Church on Clinton Street on April 16, 1994, along with Kimball Elkins and others.

Red Crossbill – A pair seemed to be engaged in



nesting activity in the pines behind the Department of Transportation building at the Concord Heights on April 27, 1994, but I never followed up to confirm.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – This one I remember well, maybe for the same reason as the Cattle Egret sighting. Kimball Elkins and his AMC Gremlin were there at the Canterbury Sod Farm on August 27, 1994.

Iceland Gull – On my way back from the seacoast, I stopped at the now closed Route 4 rest stop in Epsom on November 23, 1997 and saw it in the adjacent marsh. Notice how this site is just in bounds for Merrimack County.

Greater Scaup – I never recorded this species on my Turkey Pond survey, but I saw three of these at Turkey Pond on the afternoon of April 8, 2000.

Greater White-fronted Goose – We saw this on April 15, 2000 on a chapter field trip, when we ran into a Soonipi Chapter field trip at Horseshoe Pond. This was a first Concord record for this species.



*Ash-throated Flycatcher by Steve Mirick, 10-26-01, Concord, NH.*

Ash-throated Flycatcher – A crowd gathered at NH Audubon's Silk Farm Wildlife Sanctuary on October 26, 2001. I saw it on my way home from work, only the second state record.

Black-crowned Night-Heron – I found a juvenile on July 29, 2003 in a small cove while canoeing on the Merrimack River in Concord. I have other records of this species in Concord, but surprisingly never entered them into eBird.

Surf Scoter – Three birds were on Turkey Pond (but not on my weekly survey – all of that data was entered into eBird) on October 23, 2003. My notes say many scoters were reported state-wide on this date, probably storm-related.



*Spotted Towhee by Steve Mirick, 12-16-03, Concord, NH.*

Spotted Towhee – I saw this long-staying bird under a feeder at Garvin's Falls Road, Concord on December 16, 2003, the second state record.

Red Phalarope – Floods of historical proportions hit the state on Mother's Day of 2006. A state-wide fallout of phalaropes was recorded in association with this massive rain event. I found three Red Phalaropes on May 14 at various ponds around Concord.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – This bird was probably part of the same storm event that brought the phalaropes to Concord. I saw it on May 20, 2006 at the post office fields that were flooded into a lake.

Eastern Screech-Owl – After getting only poor looks in July 2007 of what I believed was a screech-owl, I returned to School Street on July 15, 2008 and found at least three juveniles for a rare breeding record for Concord.

American Golden Plover – There were five at Horseshoe Pond on September 15, 2007.

Painted Bunting – A surprise visitor to my back yard on October 1, 2007. A female but it still counts.

Brant – While assisting Pam Hunt with the Whip-poor-will Project at Mast Yard State Forest on the Concord/Hopkinton town line, I heard a flock of Brant high overhead on May 25, 2008 migrating north in the dark.

Black Scoter – I counted 11 on the Merrimack River from the railroad track above Horseshoe Pond in Concord on October 18, 2008.

Nelson's Sparrow – On one of my sparrow field trips for NH Audubon, we found this rarity on October 11, 2008 at the Birch Street Community Gardens.

Townsend's Solitaire – One was seen by many at Sterling Place in Bow on January 2, 2011. I have no memory whatsoever of seeing this bird, but it's in my journal, so I will have to take my word for it.



*Canvasback by Len Medlock, 1-15-13, Hall St., Bow, NH.*

Canvasback – I saw one on the Merrimack River from Hall Street near the sewage treatment plant on January 19, 2013.

Barrow's Goldeneye – I recorded a female on January 19, 2013 at the bridge above Sewall's Falls.

Every bird list has its painful misses. Here are the worst

ones:

Tundra Swan – A bird was seen on March 27-28, 1991 at Turkey Pond. I have a distinct memory of driving by Turkey Pond on or about those dates and seeing a large white “object” in the Turee Brook inlet adjacent to Clinton Street, but I didn’t stop! I have only seen this species one other time in New Hampshire.

Black Tern – Another big miss at my own local patch. On August 28, 2011, Mark Suomala called me at home to tell me a group of birders was at the boat ramp at Turkey Pond looking at 20 Black Terns. I couldn’t have been closer to the site and rushed over in two minutes – too late! Every one of the 20 terns disappeared by the time I got there.

Snowy Owl – This one is very painful! I have seen this bird in Concord! The first time was in the 1980s when some NH Audubon ladies on Main Street were pointing out a bird perched on the State House. During the winter of 1992-93, a Snowy Owl was seen by many over the course of three months on Stickney Avenue. I saw it. I even took my secretary to see it, but I don’t have a specific date, so I can’t enter it into eBird.

Then there are the exotics, hybrids, subspecies and miscellaneous that don’t count:

Yellow-fronted Canary – One visited my feeder sometime in the early 1990s. I took a picture of it so I could positively identify it. Someone left the cage door open!

Bar-headed Goose – One at Horseshoe Pond on April 4, 2000 in a large flock of Canada Geese with the above-mentioned Greater White-fronted Goose.

Helmeted Guineafowl – Several were seen running around Clinton Street.

I missed the Emu that escaped in Bow and was sighted multiple times in my neighborhood.

Based on a good description from a co-worker, I scoured Concord’s South End for a Black-billed Magpie without luck.

I have seen several in Concord, but I have a good record and memory of a “Black-backed” Robin (*Turdus migratorius nigrideus*) in my yard on January 31, 2009.

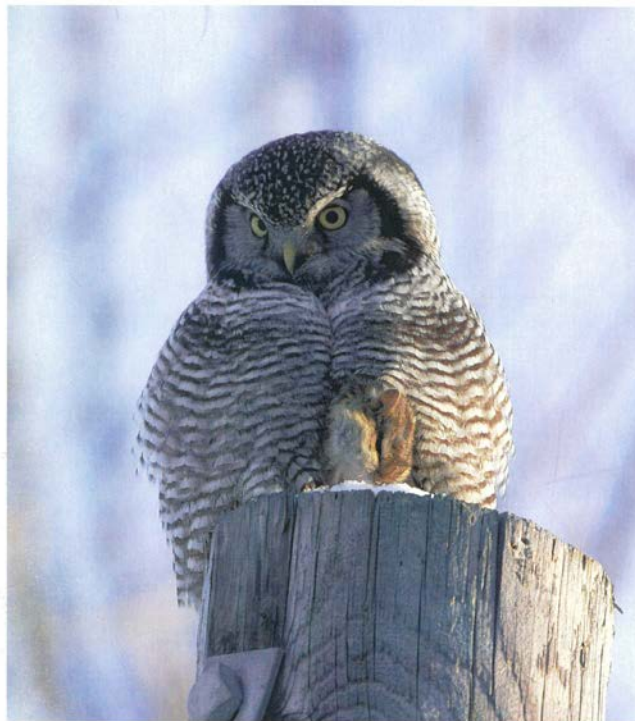
I found the rare Blue-winged/Golden-winged Warbler hybrid, “Brewster’s” Warbler, on May 11, 2014 at Cilley State Forest in Concord.

The twenty-one species I “found” gives me a total of 223 for Merrimack County, which propels me from seventh to fifth place. I need just seven more to claim fourth place, but this will be hard to do now that I no longer live in this county. Instead, my attention has turned to Belknap County where I live a good part of the year. I am also in seventh place in Belknap with 135 species. Sure enough, a review of my records turned up three more I can add to this list:

Northern Hawk Owl – This rare visitor stayed in Center Harbor for two months in early 2009 when I saw it on

February 10. This is a bird I can expect to see again in Belknap County about a week from now, so it is a good one to have on the list.

## New Hampshire Bird Records



Winter 2008-09

Vol. 27, No. 4

*The Northern Hawk Owl in Center Harbor graced the cover of New Hampshire Bird Records. Photo by Jason Lambert, 1-12-09.*

Purple Martin – I’m so glad I bothered to stop at Fun Spot in Laconia on June 2, 1998 to count the birds at the nest box (between 12 and 20). The box is long gone and so is your chance of seeing this species in Belknap County.

Barrow’s Goldeneye – I knew I had seen this one on the river above Silver Lake in Tilton at some point and indeed, I found a record on February 26, 2001. It’s probably annual here but only in winter.

These additions move me up one notch to a tie for sixth place. Ten more and I’ll be in fifth place.

While I’m at it, I could go back and add more to my state list, many more, including the outliers like Little Stint, Leach’s Storm Petrel, Western Reef Heron, American Avocet, and Fork-tailed Flycatcher, but I think I’ll leave that for another rainy day (no snow for me).



# Birding the Periphery of Pawtuckaway State Park

by Kathryn Frieden

Pawtuckaway State Park is a wonderful resource in southeastern New Hampshire. Most of the park is in Nottingham, but there is a small area stretching west into Deerfield. It is a great place for camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and of course, birding. The most commonly birded areas are the central loop of Reservation and Round Pond Roads, and the North, Middle, and South Mountain trails. These “mountains” are actually remnants of a ring dike left from the collapse of an ancient volcano. This is the only confirmed breeding site for Cerulean Warblers in New Hampshire, but they have been seen only infrequently over the past ten years, with the last sighting in 2019 near North Mountain.



Dead Pond overlook and memorial bench at the end of the Howard Swain Memorial Forest trail. Photo by Kathryn Frieden.

Pawtuckaway State Park is a large place (5000 acres), and there is much more to explore than just the center of the park. This article will introduce some of the interesting birding areas that can be accessed from along the northern and eastern periphery of the park.

1. **Dead Pond:** From Rte. 107 in Deerfield turn east onto Nottingham Rd., then very shortly turn right onto Mountain Rd.

Dead Pond is a marshy pond in the northwest corner of the park, and is now “famous” for a few sightings of Sandhill Cranes over the past three years. It can be reached by car at the end of Mountain Road. Here, one can get a good view of Dead Pond as it stretches east, but there is no other access. The north side of the pond can be reached from the Howard Swain Memorial Forest trail, and the east side from Boulder Trail in the park.

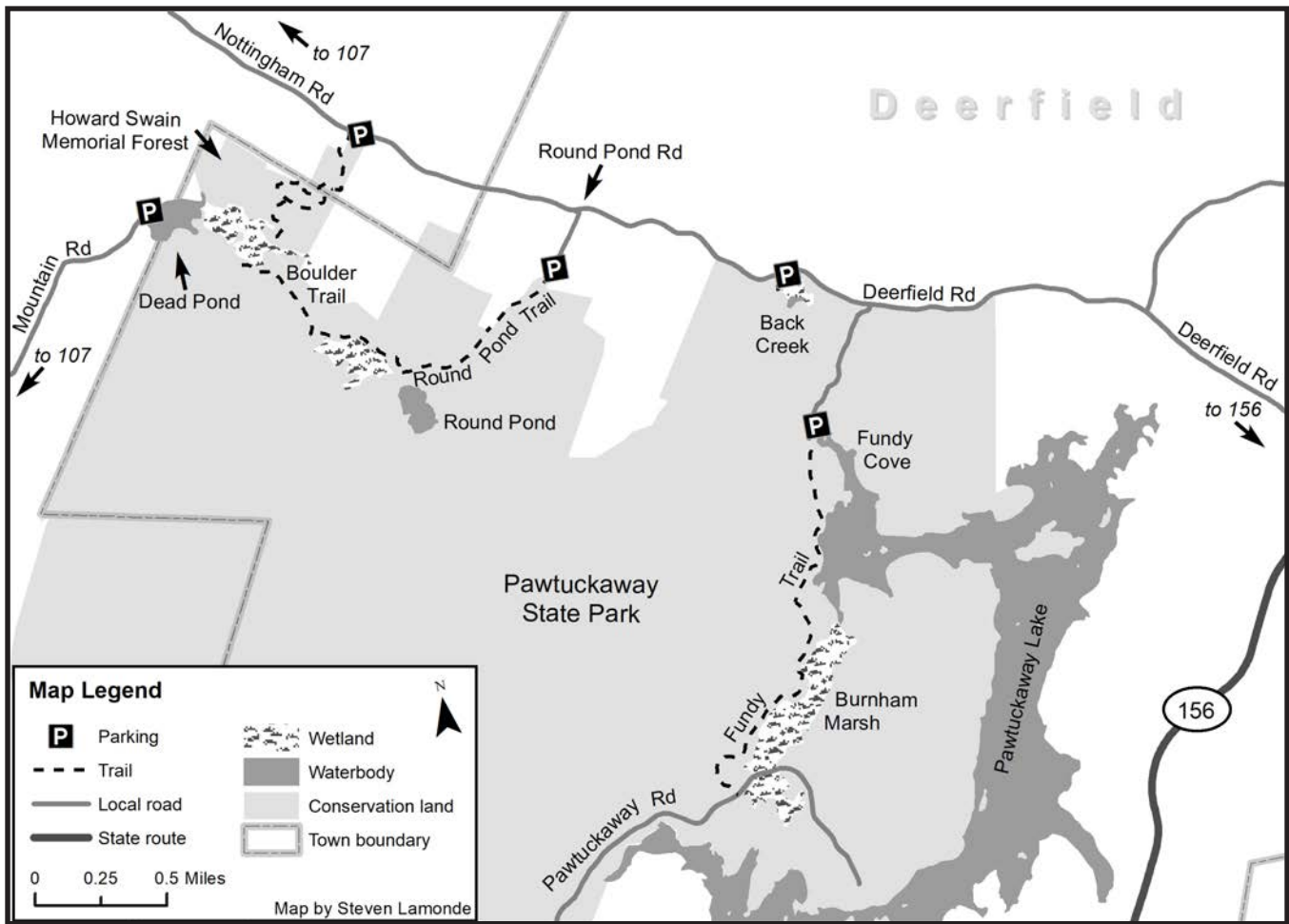
2. **Howard Swain Memorial Forest:** From the west on Rt. 107, follow Nottingham Rd. 3.4 miles to the east; the parking area is on the right. From the east, take Rte. 156 north from Raymond into Nottingham. Turn left onto Deerfield Rd. at Nottingham Square (this is the intersection where Sandhill Cranes have been seen in the surrounding fields.). Deerfield Rd. becomes Nottingham Rd. once it crosses into Deerfield. After 4 miles, you will reach the parking area on the left.



Ovenbird by Roger Frieden, taken at Pawtuckaway State Park, NH.

My favorite short hike is the Howard Swain Memorial Forest trail, which has been a Southeast Land Trust property since 2012. There is a small parking area at the trailhead off Nottingham Road in Deerfield, which is now easier to find due to a new sign that is visible from the road. It is a fairly easy loop trail, about 0.8 miles to Dead Pond. The trail leads south across a brushy area that is good for sparrows. It then dips down to pass a beaver pond where Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers are often seen. This is where the loop in the trail divides as it continues through woods that are mixed pine and deciduous. In the spring and summer, these woods are filled with warblers, woodpeckers, and flycatchers. There is a spur at the far end of the loop that leads to the north side of Dead Pond. Here, on a rocky outcropping overlooking the pond, there is a memorial stone bench that is perfect for picnicking and viewing not only the pond, but the ridge of North Mountain beyond. Turkey Vultures are often roosting on the slope or soaring above the ridge, along with an occasional Common Raven. Song Sparrows and Common Yellowthroats flit among the grasses, and Tree Swallows swoop over the pond. Eastern Bluebirds sit in the treetops along with Eastern Kingbirds. It is a lovely place!

3. **Round Pond Road/trail and Boulder Trail:** From Rt. 107, go east along Nottingham/Deerfield Rd. about 4 miles, turn right onto Round Pond Rd., continue 0.25 miles to the well-marked parking area. Do not park along the road. From Rt. 156, go west 3.3 miles on Nottingham Rd. and turn left onto Round Pond Rd.



Round Pond Road used to traverse the park from Reservation Road heading north to Deerfield Road, but now stops at the pond. What once was the northern section of the road is now a hiking track that leads from the parking area off Deerfield Road south to the pond. The walk to Round Pond is 0.75 miles. There are several small ponds along the way that are worth searching for waterfowl. Round Pond itself is often busy with rock-climbers, fishermen, and sometimes even swimmers, but can still be a good place to find warblers, including Louisiana Waterthrush. As you turn to the west onto Boulder Trail, there is a large swampy area south of the boulders. It can be good for mergansers and Wood Ducks, as well as many flycatchers and an occasional Red-shouldered Hawk. The Boulder Trail heads northwest through mixed woods for about 0.75 miles, where it reaches the junction with North Mountain Trail and overlooks Dead Pond, this time from the east. Along the trail are many common woodland birds, including raptors and an occasional Scarlet Tanager. The round trip hike from the Round Pond Road parking area to Dead Pond is about 3 miles.

**4. Back Creek Area:** *Head west on Deerfield Rd. for 2.3 miles from the intersection with Rt. 156 in Nottingham.*

*There is a small unsigned pullout on the south side of the road shortly after you cross a small bridge over the creek.*

The Back Creek area is within the northeastern corner of Pawtuckaway State Park that abuts Deerfield Road in Nottingham. It includes a small pond, some brushy areas, and a short trail in the woods. It is best visited in the spring before the access area gets too overgrown with tall grasses. As you walk south from the road in early May, Least Flycatchers seem to be everywhere; there are Wood Ducks on the small pond to the left, and many warblers, including Ovenbirds, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Palm Warbler. It is worth exploring here a little, although there are no official Pawtuckaway State Park trails.

**5. Pawtuckaway Lake and Fundy Trail:** *There is a dirt road leading to the Fundy Boat Launch south off of Nottingham Road about 2 miles west of the intersection with Rt. 156. The sign by the road shows a drawing of a boat launch.*

Fundy Cove is at the northern tip of Pawtuckaway Lake. The boat launch is public, so this is a good place to put kayakers in for some “birding while paddling.” The northern half of the lake is surrounded by conservation area and the state park, and has a “No Wake” rule, so is a quiet place to



enjoy by kayak. A Common Loon pair nests here and in the summer, the young loons can often be seen with their parents. There are always Eastern Kingbirds and Cedar Waxwings to be found, and during fall migration there is a wide variety of waterfowl including Common Mergansers, Hooded Mergansers, and Buffleheads. Double-crested Cormorants are always fun to see standing on the rocks with their wings outstretched. There is always a chance to see a Bald Eagle flying overhead or perching in a tree on an island.



*A Black-throated Green Warbler on the Fundy Trail near Burnham Marsh.*

The boat launch anchors the north end of the Fundy Trail, which can also be accessed at the south end from within the park off of Pawtuckaway Road. The trail is 1.7 miles and is a comfortable walk through the woods with views of the northern end of the lake, and then Burnham Marsh. The woods have produced many warblers, all six species of woodpeckers found in southern New Hampshire, and both Eastern Screech-Owl and Barred Owl. Red-breasted Nuthatches and Blue-headed Vireos are frequently heard, and near the south end of the trail there is a small glen that is reliable for Winter Wren. Burnham Marsh is large, about 0.7 miles long. It is a good place to find raptors such as American Kestrel and Northern Harrier in the fall, Cooper's Hawk in the winter, and Red-tailed Hawk all year long. It is probable that Bald Eagles nest somewhere around Pawtuckaway Lake, since both adults and immatures are frequently seen, but this has not yet been confirmed. Chris Martin thinks Burnham Marsh is a likely nest location, so be sure to check for that eagles' nest!

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## Volunteers and Research

### The Finch Research Network

*by Matthew A. Young*



*Red Crossbill by Len Medlock, 3-13-21, Rye, NH.*

The Finch Research Network (FiRN) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) international conservation organization devoted to the study of finches and to education about their biology globally. The idea was hatched several years ago and then started to germinate in the last few years with encouragement from several in the bird and nature-observation community, especially Tim Spahr and Holger Klinck.

We want FiRN to be for everyone with an interest in finches. The community of people that want to be involved in a global research network interested in observing and studying finches is most important. Whether you are a finch enthusiast, citizen-scientist, writer, illustrator, sound-recorderist or a researcher, we want everyone to be part of this. We officially launched FiRN around Tyler Hoar's Winter Finch Forecast on September 20, 2020 and what a year it was to launch it – it was a superflight year where all eight winter finches irrupted out of the boreal forest into the eastern part of North America!

Winter finch irruptions have long been major events in the birdwatching community thanks, in part, to veteran naturalist Ron Pittaway, who founded the Winter Finch Forecast in 1999 to predict the winter flights of finches in eastern North America and popularized finches beyond the world of ornithology. Building on that effort, birders and ornithologists across the country are collaborating through the Finch Research Network (FiRN) to document, study, and protect these charismatic songbirds from threats such as climate change, disease, and habitat destruction. FiRN also works to help new and veteran birders learn to identify finches, acts as a news source for finch-related science, and

encourages naturalists to document encounters with these birds. FiRN now hosts the Winter Finch Forecast, managed by Tyler Hoar since Pittaway's retirement in 2020. To see FiRN's 2021–2022 Winter Finch Forecast,

<https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2021-2022-by-tyler-hoar>

“The Crossbill Project” is the flagship project of FiRN, whose main purpose is to provide a stable, long-term home for Red Crossbill research over a broad front: field observations, recordings, assortative mating, and call type delineation by sound and range. It also provides information to the scientific community on the validity of call types and potential full-species separations for flight call types in geographically isolated populations (old world versus new world, etc.). Another purpose is to serve as arbiters of flight call determination via audiospectrographic analysis and machine learning/AI for this worldwide complex.

In 2017, ornithologists from the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) and Powdermill Avian Research Center at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History (CMNH) initiated the first migratory connectivity and tracking study of Evening Grosbeaks. This project aims to shed light on the species' annual cycle, local and widescale use of the landscape and habitats, linkages between winter and breeding populations, survival, and winter site fidelity.

This research was further bolstered in 2021 when WPC and CMNH teamed with FiRN to expand the scope of their Evening Grosbeak project and secured additional resources from the Knobloch Family Foundation through the Road to Recovery bird conservation initiative. Over the next few years, WPC, CMNH, and FiRN will collaborate to create an Evening Grosbeak Working Group focused specifically on developing conservation strategies and needs.

We encourage anyone encountering Red Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks to attempt audio recordings. While we welcome recordings from those with professional grade recording equipment, even smartphones can adequately document the call types. It is always better to download a sound recording app that makes .wav files, which prevent loss of important audio information (see the links at the end for articles on making recordings with your smartphone). However, even using the “voice memo” feature can get a decent recording that can help to type the crossbill. For example, on an iPhone just open your audio recording app, hit record, hold your phone as steadily as possible with the speaker facing the crossbill and then email the recording for analysis along with a link to your eBird checklist! External microphones can be purchased that improve the recording quality even more; check out recommendations from the Macaulay Library.

If you record a Red Crossbill, please enter it as “Red Crossbill” in eBird, upload the recording to your checklist and send the link to the checklist to me for assistance with identification to specific call type. If identification to Type can be confirmed via the recording, you can easily use the new “Change Species” feature to search for the correct crossbill type and revise the identification. If you try to identify the type yourself, do not worry if you misidentify the proper call type; one of the authors will contact you after listening to your recording. Keep in mind, many crossbills can be typed from very poor recordings, so don't be afraid to submit low-quality media, as these often turn into high-value data.



*Evening Grosbeak by Steve Mirick, 12-31-20, Jefferson, NH.*

FiRN is committed to researching and protecting these birds including threatened finch species like the Evening Grosbeak and Rosy-finches. If you have been enjoying all the blogs and identifications of Red Crossbill call types, redpoll subspecies and green morph Pine Siskins that FiRN has helped with, please think about supporting our efforts and making a small donation.

Information about FiRN can be found at <https://finchnetwork.org/> and @thefinchmasters on Facebook and Instagram, and also at Finches, Irruptions and Mast Crops on Facebook.

Helpful tips on recording with a smartphone:

<https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001064305-smartphone-recording-tips>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-to-record-bird-sounds-with-your-smartphone-our-tips/>

*Matthew A. Young is a researcher, conservationist and educator who specializes in finches, warblers and orchids. He is an instructor at Cornell University and worked at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology over 15 years as a field technician and collections management leader at the Macaulay Library. Matt has published several papers about finches (in particular, about vocalizations of the Red Crossbill complex) and is president and founder of the nonprofit Finch Research Network (FiRN). In summer, he can often be found in bogs, fens, and other wilderness areas looking for orchids and finches.*



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# Backyard Birder

## Yellow-rumped Warblers at Suet Feeder

*Text and photos by Diana Stephens*



*Sitting on her deck in early May, Windham resident Diana Stephens sees the first of two Yellow-rumped Warblers appear on the deck railing to check things out.*



*Six Yellow-rumped Warblers fight each other for the fat-laden suet at this backyard feeder in Windham.*

It had been a long, cold and dark winter throughout the worst of the pandemic, but spring had finally arrived and I was able to sit outside on my back deck to enjoy the birds. All winter long, the Red-bellied, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers had visited, and devoured, the peanut butter suet. When the peanut suet got low, I decided to put out a beef flavored suet and beginning in April, the Pine Warblers began to arrive, with others. This spring had already

brought some very nice surprises to my yard. Two Pileated Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers and a calling Barred Owl were the highlights.

One day in early May, to my surprise, a few Yellow-rumped Warblers appeared. Two days later, as I was sitting at my desk, I counted six Yellow-rumped at the feeder! Later that day, I grabbed my camera (as I am wont to do), sat on my deck and staged a “photo shoot” with the Yellow-rumped. This species hung around the suet feeders for two or three weeks until I took them down at the end of May.

Paul Kursewicz, of Epping, also spotted some Yellow-rumped Warblers at his feeders in April. As he stated in a later post to the NHBirds e-mail list (7-3-21), “I find myself putting new suet in the feeders about every three days. The incessant desire to eat suet all began this year in the early spring with Yellow-rumped Warblers coming to our beef suet feeders, and staying for a long period of time.”

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## A Flicker of Life

*by Kurk Dorsey*



*Northern Flicker by Debra Powers.*

Many of you may remember this morning, March 3, 2021 for what it wasn't; namely it wasn't the frigid day before, which opened with single digit temperatures and roaring winds that left a tree sticking out of a neighbor's roof and lights out in other parts of the neighborhood. On the frozen morning of March 2, I was pleased to see the neighborhood Northern Flicker under our feeders, with his belly pressed tight against the icy snow. I had seen the bird maybe a couple of times a

week most of the winter and it was my favorite visitor, even more than the less common Common Redpoll with the bright red breast. I did enjoy the nice range of other birds, including the three Eastern Bluebirds that made the rounds several times per day, but there was something about that flicker that always made me stop and watch, maybe because his visits were so brief and erratic.

So on the morning of March 3, which was 15 degrees warmer and 25 mph calmer, I was really happy to hear old yellowhammer yammering away from the neighbor's yard for the first time this winter. Not only was the call a sign of spring, but it meant that he had lived through the worst day of the winter (well, at least from a human standpoint—who knows how flickers rate such things?). I filled the feeders and came back in to feed my domestic critters. As I set down the bowls, I looked out the kitchen window to see among a zillion juncos that the flicker was back, looking much more relaxed than the day before.

Maybe too relaxed, because in that second that I looked up there was an explosion of juncos, a leap from the flicker, and a brown streak that shot across the ground at about four inches of elevation. My last glimpse of the flicker was of it in rapid flight, but not under its own power.

I went straight to the kitchen window and looked in the direction the tandem had flown, and sure enough, there in the snow, maybe 10 yards from the crime scene, was a flicker with a juvenile accipiter pinning it down. My first thought was gratitude that I got to witness a really incredible avian moment—who catches a flicker when there is easier prey right there? Right behind that thought came regret that “my” flicker had just gone to the great ant farm in the sky.

My third thought was “whoa, the flicker is not happy about this.” I could see it hopping, trying to get the hawk off its back, and I could hear it calling even from inside, hoping for a miracle flotilla of flickers to descend and rescue it. The hawk picked at its neck and pulled off feathers, but didn't seem to be able to do more damage.

David Sibley says that a Northern Flicker averages 4.6 ounces, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk comes in at 5 ounces, although the accipiters of course have a big range. What we had here was a bird of pray, because it did not have a prayer of flying off with its cargo. I stepped out on the porch to get a clear view and the image was truly unique. The flicker's call was recognizable but changed in tone so that it hit me like a child crying. It was moving as much as it could, trying to turn its beak to strike the hawk with no success, but it was large enough that the hawk could not hold it still. At one point, the tangled duo sort of bounced under a lawn chair that was frozen in place. For its part, the hawk was alternating between trying to fly off with the woodpecker, and not getting more than a few inches, and trying to kill it by beak snaps at the

neck, tearing off a few more feathers at a time.

Like most birders, I have seen predators kill prey a few times. Normally, it happens so fast that I can only wonder at the spectacle. Last summer, we had an odd moment when our dogs found a garter snake trying to swallow a big toad that never was going to go down the hatch. Fortunately it was on the outside side of the fence, but our family saw what was happening and decided that the toad should not die in the jaws of a snake that could not handle it. I intervened and pried the toad from the snake.

I watched the featherweight battle carry on and started thinking that maybe I needed to step in. I know that I was partially motivated by the flicker's pathetic call and partially because I did not want to lose “my” flicker, but I think I was also motivated by the sense that this battle was not going to end well. I did not see how the hawk was going to kill the flicker, much less fly away with it from the middle of the open yard. The flicker did not seem able to get away on its own. I started to conclude that the likely outcome was a flicker with a broken wing and maybe a wounded hawk too. And, well, that was my favorite feeder bird calling and looking at me (OK, maybe looking toward me, not at me). Why couldn't it have been one of the Mourning Doves; we could spare one of those?

So in my slippers, on a slope with icy snow, I started to pick my way toward the battle, which had been going on for a couple of minutes now. The hawk tried dragging away the flicker and I started worrying that maybe it was stuck to the woodpecker. As I got about 15 feet away, the hawk let go and stepped away. The flicker gave an angry squawk and hopped onto the cross supports under the lawn chair. It flapped a couple of times, then flew out, straight over my head, with the hawk in hot pursuit. The hawk broke off as it approached me and the two headed in different directions.

I don't know whether I did the right thing. Is a flicker worth more than a junco? Should I have let nature run its



course no matter the outcome? Might I have made it worse if the hawk injured itself trying to get away from me? I don't know the answers to any of those things, but I will wake up tomorrow with the hope of hearing the flicker.

*Kurk Dorsey by Paul Hackett.*



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# What to Watch for in Spring

Spring is migration time and different birds arrive at different times. Huge concentrations can sometimes occur, but it's often hard to know where or when. Here are a few events that often highlight the spring season and when to watch for them. See also Steve Mirick's migration article in this issue.

## March

- Waterfowl migration is in full swing. Every week can bring different species. Watch for fallouts on open water in rainy weather, especially on large inland lakes. Flooded corn fields can also be quite good. Major river valleys and the coastal plain are the best areas. In warm springs with little ice or snow, the migration can pass through quite quickly and you can miss it.
- American Woodcocks start displaying as soon as the ground is open (or even before). Look for them at the edge of open fields, especially adjacent to wet meadows or brushy swamps.
- Black-capped Chickadees start to sing in late February or early March. Their "fee-bee" song can be mistaken for Eastern Phoebes which don't return until early to mid-April.
- Red-shouldered Hawks return and can be mistaken for Broad-winged Hawks which don't come back until mid-April.

## April

- Winter visitors like American Tree Sparrows and redpolls or siskins are usually gone by April. Chipping Sparrows, the tree sparrow look-alike, arrive around mid-April.
- Watch for Broad-winged Hawks in the third week of April, especially on a warm, south wind. You can follow their progress north in eBird to know when they are getting close.
- The earliest warblers arrive mid-month: Pine, Palm, and Yellow-rumped, followed quickly by Louisiana Waterthrush. The first warblers of the main May wave often appear at the very end of the month, including Black-and-white, Northern Parula, and Black-throated Green Warblers.
- Inclement weather in late April can bring fallouts of migrating Horned and Red-necked Grebes as well as winter sea ducks such as Red-breasted Mergansers and Long-tailed Ducks. Look for them on large lakes such as Newfound, Spofford, or Lake Winnepesaukee.

- Tree Swallows are the first swallows to return in early April (and often late March), followed by Northern Rough-wingeds. Look for huge flocks over waterbodies if there's a cold spell or rainy weather. The Merrimack River, waste treatment plants, and even local ponds can provide quite a concentration.

## May

- The main push of warblers happens in May and it can be spectacular. Watch for south winds that can bring in a flood of birds. A few of the northernmost species won't peak until later in the month: Blackpoll, Wilson's, and Tennessee.
- Our eagerly-awaited Ruby-throated Hummingbirds start showing up reliably in the first week of May.
- The colorful Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and Baltimore Orioles arrive around May 5-10 and often come visit feeders when they first arrive, but then disappear as the weather warms.
- Although some shorebirds arrive by late April, their peak migration isn't until mid-May. Numbers in spring generally pale in comparison to fall, but sometimes you get lucky. Most of the action is on the immediate coast, but as with other waterbirds there are sometimes significant inland fallouts associated with rainy weather.
- Nighthawks return to nest sites around May 20-25 but migrants heading farther north can continue to mid-June.
- Of the small *Empidonax* flycatchers, Least are the first to arrive in early May but Alder, Willow and Yellow-bellied won't arrive until mid to end of May.
- Blue Jays are daytime migrants in the last two weeks of May.



*Snow Geese by Jim Sparrell, 3-6-21, Greenland, NH.*

# New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund


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

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I give and bequeath \_\_\_\_ % of my residuary estate (or a specific sum of \$ \_\_\_\_ ) to the New Hampshire Bird Records Endowment Fund, a permanently restricted fund of the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, 84 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, NH.

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

# Rare Bird ALERT

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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

## Long-eared and Short-eared Owls



*Long-eared Owl by Jim Sparrell, 3-10-21, Seabrook, NH.*



*Long-eared Owl by Kirk Elwell, 3-13-21, East Kingston, NH.*



*Long-eared Owls by Len Medlock, 3-8-21, Seabrook, NH.*



*Short-eared Owl by Steve Bennett, 3-6-21, Portsmouth Country Club, Greenland, NH.*



*Short-eared Owl by Donna Keller (right), 2-28-21, Dillant-Hopkins Airport, Swanzey, NH. Short-eared Owl by Jim Sparrell (left), 3-6-21, Portsmouth Country Club, Greenland, NH.*

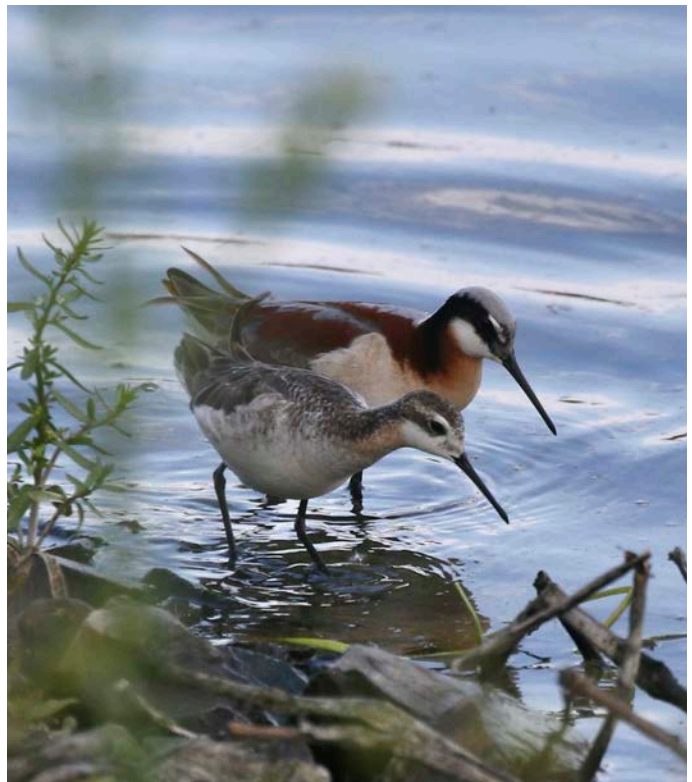




# Spring 2021 Rarities



*Worm-eating Warbler by Dennis Tsiorbas, 5-15-21, Hooksett, NH.*



*Wilson's Phalaropes by Jim Sparrell, 5-16-21, Exeter WTP, NH.*



*Summer Tanager by Susan Wisley, 5-3-21, Odiorne Point SP, Rye, NH.*



*Yellow-headed Blackbird by Steve Bennett, 5-15-21, Raymond, NH.*