

# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*



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# The Connecticut Warbler

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## ABOUT OUR COVER

### **Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*)**

**by Paul Fusco**

Our front cover artwork is again contributed by the talented artist and photographer, Paul Fusco. His artwork has appeared on a number of front covers of *The Connecticut Warbler* as well as in other publications, including the *Connecticut Wildlife*, a magazine published by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

Paul is also renowned as a photographer and his photographs have appeared on and in numerous journals including *Birding*.

# POPULATION DECLINE OF THE LEAST TERN IN CONNECTICUT: Possible Causes and Remedial Actions

Bruce G. Stevenson  
Connecticut Ornithological Association

## Introduction and Management Summary

The Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) is in trouble in Connecticut. In the 1980s, Connecticut had a healthy breeding population of Least Terns. However, both the population of nesting Least Terns and their breeding success have declined significantly since that time, according to surveys conducted by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (which provided the in-state data presented in this report). Presently, rates of reproduction among Connecticut's Least Terns appear to be inadequate to sustain a stable population. The Least Tern is on the Connecticut list of Threatened species and, if current trends continue, it will join a growing list of species that are considered Endangered in the state<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout the United States, the Least Tern is experiencing stress. Of the three subspecies, both the California Least Tern, which breeds on the western coast of the US, and the Interior Least Tern, which breeds along rivers in the central US, are on the Federal Endangered species list.

This report highlights the current status of Least Terns in Connecticut and recommends actions to reverse this species' decline. Although our knowledge of Least Tern ecology is imperfect, the decline is real and its most likely causes—predation, disturbance of nesting sites by humans, and sub-optimal nesting habitat—have been identified.

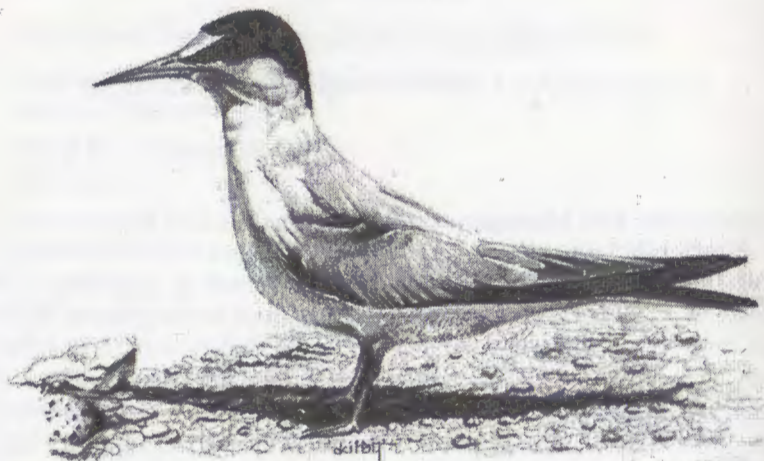
The COA recommends immediate actions to be taken before the 2004 nesting season, including isolating the most productive nesting sites from predators and human pets. Sandy Point in West Haven, Milford Point in Milford, Pleasure Beach in Bridgeport,

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<sup>1</sup> Among colonial waterbirds in the Western Hemisphere, the Least Tern is a species of High Concern (Kushlan et al., 2002).



and Long Beach in Stratford should be the foci of these actions. In short, it is better to act than not.



(Daniel S. Kirby. Least Tern. For general use via National Audubon. [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org))

Further, long-term studies should be undertaken to better understand the ecology of this species and the factors leading to the diminished breeding success in Connecticut. We recommend that remedial management actions be formally incorporated in these studies to determine which are most beneficial to Least Terns.

### Natural History

Understanding the possible causes of population decline in Connecticut's nesting Least Terns, and developing solutions to reverse this trend, must be anchored in knowledge of that species' biology and ecology (see Thompson et al., 1997).

The Least Tern is the smallest species of tern breeding in North America. Three subspecies are recognized (Johnson et al., 1998), with *Sterna antillarum antillarum* occurring in the eastern United States. The interior Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*), which breeds along rivers throughout the central United States, is on the federal Endangered species list, and the California Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum brownii*), which nests along the Pacific Coast from Baja California to central California state, also is federally listed as



Endangered. In Connecticut, the Least Tern is listed as state Threatened.

Least Terns feed primarily on small fish, but also consume shrimp, insects and other invertebrates. They plunge dive from a height of two to ten meters taking prey in the upper 15 cm of water without fully submerging. During the nesting period, terns feed in a variety of shallow water habitats along shorelines and in salt marshes, bays, and estuaries.

Least Terns breed locally in appropriate habitat throughout the continental United States, Central America and the Caribbean, and winter along the coasts of Central and South America. They nest in colonies ranging from several pairs to several thousand pairs on coastal beaches and sandbars along major rivers. They prefer bare areas where vegetation is deterred by seasonal flooding due to tides, storms, and spring runoff (Burger and Gochfeld, 1990). In some areas, however, Least Terns have adopted man-made habitats, such as dredge spoil islands and large, flat rooftops. Studies cited in Thompson et al. (1997) indicate that the birds appear to be most productive at colony sites established for several years, but will relocate nest sites in response to changes in vegetation cover, increased predation, human activities, floods and colony size (see Kotliar and Burger, 1986). Small colonies, for example, can be abandoned if habitat quality degrades or if there is intense predation.

The nesting habitat is subject to natural stresses including flooding and, for coastal populations, tidal action. Nest sites are ephemeral since they are modified or eliminated by these physical forces although, as noted above, periodic removal of vegetation by floods or tides make the habitat attractive to nesting Least Terns.

In New England, Least Terns arrive at nesting sites in late April or early May and begin incubating their first clutches one to two weeks later. Nests are located in a simple scrape in the sand, broken shells or other fragmentary material, and typically contain a clutch of two to three eggs. The birds typically have one successful nest per year, with later nesting limited to individuals that failed in earlier attempts or to younger birds that are nesting for the first time.

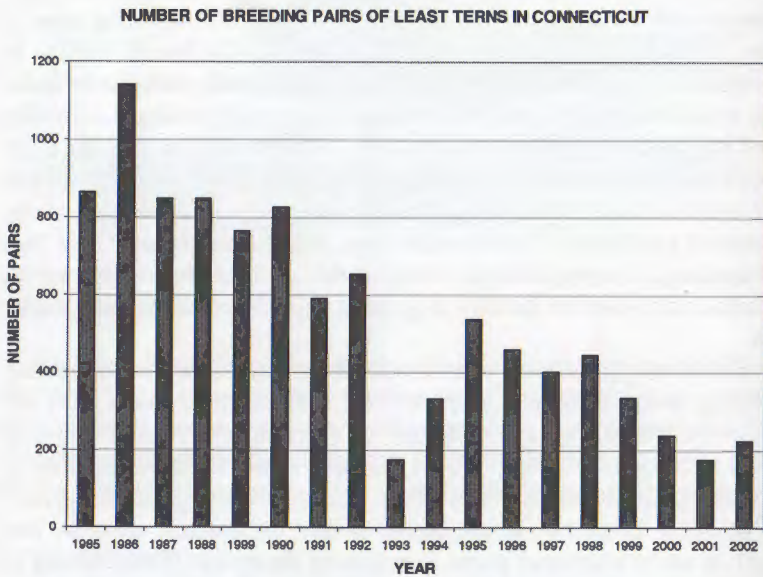
## POPULATION DYNAMICS OF LEAST TERNS

### Population Trends in Connecticut

Over the last 20 years, the population of breeding Least Terns in Connecticut has declined dramatically, and current estimates

suggest that the population has declined by as much as 75% since the mid-1980s. The three years ending in 2002 are especially alarming as the number of breeding pairs is now at historically low levels.

Figure 1 illustrates this decline. The number of breeding pairs dropped from approximately 1,000 in the mid-1980s to 225 in 2002. Connecticut lost an average of 45 Least Tern pairs per year over this 17-year period. Of note is the considerable year-to-year variability in the number of breeding pairs even within the overall downward trend.

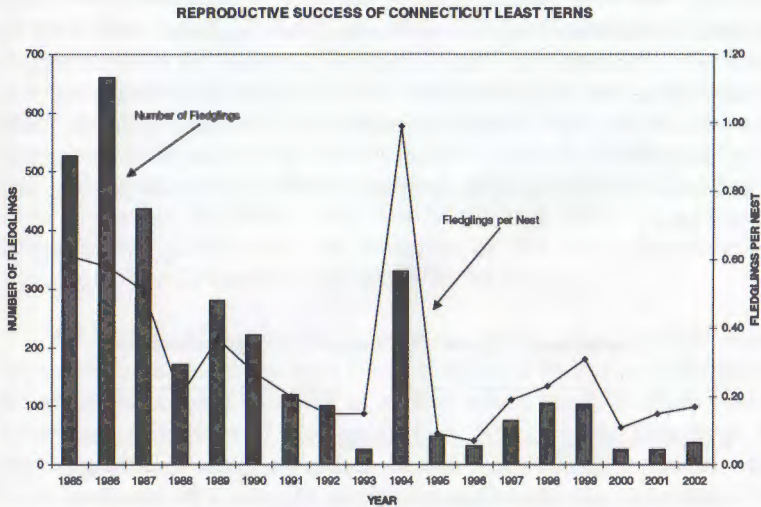
Figure 1<sup>2</sup>

For example, the number of pairs dropped 73% from 1992 to 1993 followed by a pronounced increase in 1994 and 1995, possibly resulting from terns immigrating into Connecticut.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 2003 (Julie Victoria, pers. com.) These data were collected through systematic yearly monitoring of the number of nesting Least Tern pairs and nesting success (number of young fledged) from all known nesting sites in the state.

As shown in Figure 2, the historical record on reproductive success is equally disturbing. From 1985 to 1989, an average of 894 pairs fledged 415 chicks annually, representing a 46% success rate. (Success is defined as chicks fledged per nest expressed in percent.) In the following five years, nesting pairs averaged 516 and the success rate fell to 31%. In the years 1995 to 1999, the average number of nesting pairs declined further to 437 and the success rate to 17%. In 2000 to 2002, the yearly averages fell to 213 pairs and the success rate was only 14%.

Figure 2<sup>3</sup>



The total number of fledglings has declined by 93% since 1985 (527 fledglings in 1985 versus 38 in 2002) and the average number of chicks produced per nest has dropped from 0.61 (1985) to 0.17 (2002). Again, these trends persist despite substantial inter-annual variability.

The declining numbers of adult Least Terns and diminished breeding success are likely related<sup>4</sup>. As the population experiences reduced reproduction, two phenomena occur. First, fewer young

<sup>3</sup> Source: Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 2003 (Julie Victoria, pers. com.).

<sup>4</sup> Across the period 1985 to 2002, the correlation between number of breeding Least Tern pairs and fledgling per nest was 0.341,  $p < 0.05$ . Of note is the importance of the 1994 value for fledglings per nest; by excluding this value the correlation improves to 0.712.

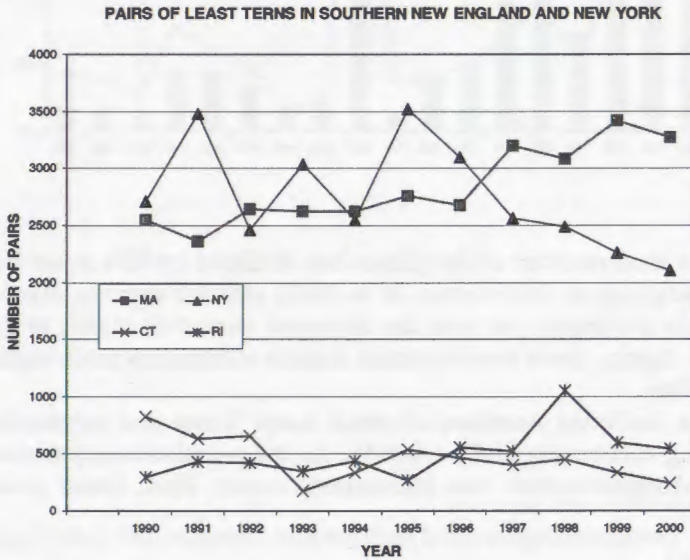


birds are available for recruitment, leading directly to a net loss in the number of breeding individuals as adult mortality reduces the population. Second, the factors contributing to diminished breeding success (see discussion below) are likely to drive adults to alternative locations with more favorable breeding conditions (emigration).

### Population Trends in Southern New England

It is important to understand the dynamics of Connecticut's Least Tern population in the context of this species' regional population. Since Least Terns are highly mobile and will move their breeding locations in response to adverse conditions, we should consider fluctuations across southern New England and Long Island, NY. Statistics on Least Tern populations in selected north-eastern states are available since 1990 (Figure 3). During the ten-year period through 2000, the number of breeding pairs of Least Terns dropped by 71% in Connecticut. The year-to-year changes varied significantly but the long-term average rate of decline was 7% per year.

Figure 3<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Source: Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 2003 (Julie Victoria, pers. com.).

Data from neighboring states over these ten years show solid increases in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island and a modest decline in New York (2.2% per year on average). These trends are clear despite the greater variability of Least Tern populations in the two smaller states.

Overall, the aggregate Least Tern population in the four states remained relatively stable (only 3.6% total decline over the ten years with considerable year-to-year variability), suggesting that some Connecticut birds might be relocating to other states. Possibly, adverse factors are at work on Least Terns in Connecticut and New York that are not occurring in other parts of the region. Alternatively, positive factors may be at work in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. For example, active management for Least Terns in Massachusetts is partially responsible for the increase in that state's Least Tern population (Scott Hecker, pers. com.). In light of this success, Massachusetts' management approach should be examined to evaluate its potential effectiveness for Connecticut.

#### **Least Tern Breeding Success In Other Parts of the United States**

Connecticut is not the only location with declining reproductive success among Least Terns. Some data suggest a national decline in Least Tern reproductive success. As reported in Thompson et al. (1997), Least Tern fledgling success in the late 1990s was about 50% in diverse locations as New Jersey, the Gulf Coast, and the North Platte River. In addition, the number of nesting pairs has declined nationally, with both factors leading to a drop in number of chicks fledged.

More recently, studies in specific localities suggest a worsening condition. Least Terns breeding on two islands in the Arkansas River in Tulsa, Oklahoma have experienced dramatic declines in the number of young birds fledged per nest since 1998<sup>6</sup>. Factors contributing to this decline include flooding and disruption of Least Tern nests by Canada Geese that also nest on these islands.

In California, breeding success of Least Terns dropped dramatically in the late 1990s. Keane (2001) reported that fledglings per pair dropped from approximately 1.0 in 1991 to 0.21 in 1999, the lowest level since breeding was first monitored in 1976. Factors influencing lower breeding success include high levels of predation of eggs and chicks, nest abandonment, and other sources of chick mortality. Low fledgling success in California Least Terns is

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<sup>6</sup> Tulsa Audubon Society. 2002. 2002 Least Tern Report. Tulsa, Oklahoma. <http://www.tulsaaudubon.org/leاستterns.htm>. June 3, 2003.



correlated with low recruitment of breeding adults in subsequent years (Massey et al., 1992).

Initially, one might conclude that less than one fledgling per nest or per pair indicates a breeding population in trouble. However, research on the interior Least Tern suggests that population stability can be achieved if the average number of fledglings produced per nest ranges from 0.5 to 0.7 (Mitchell, 1998). If these success rates are applicable to coastal Least Terns, then Connecticut's population (with fledglings per nest ranging from 0.1 to 0.4 from 1995 to 2002) will continue to decline and may be in serious jeopardy. Other coastal populations, such as the one in California, may also be at risk.

Notably, Burger (1984) reported fledgling success rates for Least Tern ranging from 0.0 per year to 1.0 per year for 43 sites in New Jersey from 1976 to 1982. The average rate of success was 0.46 young fledged per pair and Burger suggested that this rate might be sufficient to maintain a stable population, absent human disturbance.

### **The Ecological Context of Least Tern Population Dynamics**

Least Tern populations normally are volatile, even without direct impact from humans, for several reasons. First, the ephemeral nature of nesting habitat can result in nest and chick loss (Mitchell, 1998). Second, as ground nesting birds, young encounter variable rates of predation that impact fledgling success. Even survivorship of fledglings to adults is low in some Least Tern populations (Schweitzer and Leslie, 2000). Third, periodic large-scale weather events, such as El Ninos, can have major adverse impacts on population dynamics even well after the event itself (Massey et al., 1992).

The number of Least Terns in Connecticut is small and there is great year-to-year variability (see above). As such, the local sub-population is vulnerable to local extinction due to a number of factors including random variation in mating, failed reproduction, migration, disease, and predation (see, for example, Schweitzer and Leslie, 2000). In fact, if Least Terns in New England represent a metapopulation<sup>7</sup>, then ecological theory predicts that a local sub-population, such as the one in Connecticut, is subject to turnover (extinction and recolonization). Variability in population size and reproductive success can be expected.



## Possible Causes for the Decline in Nesting Success

Scientific studies of Least Terns in the northeastern United States and in other locations give evidence to possible causes for Connecticut's declining population. The two most important factors are likely to be predation and human disturbance of nesting colonies. Studies of Least Terns nesting on New Jersey beaches suggested that both factors were important in influencing nesting success (Burger, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1989; Kotliar and Burger, 1986; Burger et al., 1995) while studies of Connecticut's Least Terns emphasized predation (Brunton, 1997, 1999).

## Predation

Least Tern nesting sites are subject to predation by birds, such as crows, gulls, raptors and herons, as well as mammals, such as rats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, rats, chipmunks, and domestic cats and dogs. Studies cited by Thompson et al. (1997) show that a single, efficient predator (particularly a nocturnal one) can harm the productivity of a Least Tern breeding colony.

Predation is often a very significant factor impacting nesting success of large tern colonies, in part because large colonies are stable (being consistent sources for predators) and accessible (Burger, 1987). The terns may desert the colony site after repeated predator attack, especially if the colony is small.

At Sandy Point, Connecticut, Brunton (1997, 1998) demonstrated that Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) were particularly significant predators of Least Terns<sup>8</sup>. The former were indiscriminant predators, taking both eggs and chicks, typically from the center of the tern colony, whereas the latter preyed on eggs along the colony edge. Crows also are important predators of Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) chicks and eggs in New York

<sup>7</sup> A *metapopulation* is defined as a population that consists of several sub-populations linked together by immigration and emigration (a "population of populations"). Some sub-populations may exist in *source* areas where ecological conditions meet all the needs of the species and the population growth rate is positive. Other sub-populations may exist in *sink* areas where the individuals can exist but where some important ecological need is not met and the population growth rate is negative. Thus, individual sub-populations routinely go extinct (e.g., local sinks) and dispersal from other sub-populations (typically, sources) replenishes the local sub-populations or creates new ones. The California Least Tern population is recognized as a metapopulation (Akçakaya et al., 2003) as is the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) population in the northeastern U.S. (Spandalow et al., 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Black-crowned Night-Herons also are significant predators of Roseate Terns in Connecticut (Jeff Spandalow, pers. com.).

(Lauro and Tanacredi, 2002). These authors recommended a population control program for crows to facilitate the recovery of the plovers.

Least Terns are impacted by predation in other regions as well. In Orange County, California in 1988, three Least Tern populations suffered 75% mortality due to predation by red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*).<sup>9</sup> Mammalian predators adversely affected Least Terns nesting on an alkaline flat of the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma (Schweitzer and Leslie, 2000), in other parts of coastal California (Keane, 2001), and at military installations in the southeastern U.S. (Mitchell, 1998). However, active management to limit predation of Least Tern eggs and chicks by crows has been shown to help fledgling success in California.

Least Terns often respond to some predators by mobbing (dive-bombing) them, behaviors which provide some benefit to the colony and to other species nesting in the colony, such as Piping Plovers (Burger, 1987). However, predators can indirectly cause lower fledging success if adult terns spend time defending the nesting site or are absent for prolonged periods of time. During such absences, young are exposed to other opportunistic predators and inclement weather.

Nocturnal predators can cause adult terns to abandon their nests at night, returning only at dawn. This "nocturnal abandonment" is harmful to chicks in a variety of ways even if they do not become prey. First, chicks will die after extended exposure to rain or cold, particularly prior to the development of body and flight feathers (Kress and Hall, 2002). Second, nocturnal abandonment can result in delayed maturity of tern chicks, which may hamper their ability to survive migration. In fact, once a colony carries out nocturnal abandonment over a period of time, the behavior becomes habitual and even if the predator is removed, abandonment continues throughout the nesting season (Kress and Hall, 2002).

There may be a synergy between human disturbance of tern nesting sites and rates of predation on terns (see below and Burger, 1987; Kotliar and Burger, 1986). First, pets and wild predators often associate human-frequented areas with food sources. For instance, feral cats are significant predators of Least and Common Terns at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore (U.S. Department of Interior, 1999). Second, such conditions produce favorable openings for opportunistic predators to attack while dogs or humans distract adult terns.

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<sup>9</sup>[http://www.pacificbio.org/ESIN/Birds/CaliforniaLeastTern/CALeastTern\\_pg.htm](http://www.pacificbio.org/ESIN/Birds/CaliforniaLeastTern/CALeastTern_pg.htm). June 3, 2003.



However, this relationship is not always synergistic. In Massachusetts, the most productive Least Tern colonies tend to be in locations with human activity (Scott Hecker, pers. com.). Terns will adapt to the presence of humans, but if humans are excluded, predation may increase.

### Human Disturbance

Least Terns are highly sensitive to disturbance in their nesting colonies and, if disturbance is persistent, these birds will abandon the colony (Burger, 1987; Kotliar and Burger, 1986). In fact, human disturbance is a known factor causing colony abandonment in areas as geographically diverse as Florida, New Jersey, California and Oklahoma.<sup>10</sup> Among Least Tern colonies in New Jersey, for example, the single largest factor causing colony abandonment was human disturbance (accounting for 45% of failed colonies) and was especially important in small colonies (Burger, 1984). Habitat selection and foraging behavior of Piping Plovers also is adversely influenced by human activity on coastal beaches (Burger, 1991, 1994).

In Connecticut, human disturbance probably is one of the principal causes of declining numbers and breeding success of Least Terns. Commercial, residential and recreational development has reduced most beach areas to narrow strips along Long Island Sound. Further, people use Connecticut beaches intensely, particularly in the summer months when Least Terns are nesting, and their recreational activities adversely impact Least Tern colonies in a variety of ways. Adult Least Terns may be scared away from the colony in response to Fourth of July fireworks, leaving eggs and offspring to fend for themselves. Family dogs, when not restrained, may disturb the colony and kill young and adult terns. Finally, off-road vehicles harm Least Terns by distracting adults, crushing offspring and creating ruts, in which the young may be trapped.

Importantly, Least Terns show some flexibility in nesting behavior, often in association with disturbance of existing nest sites (Burger, 1984; Mitchell, 1998). In Florida, these terns have been known to nest on the flat roofs of buildings near the coastline, especially in areas where nesting colonies on natural beaches have been extensively disturbed (Schaefer, 2001). Roof colonies tend to be larger (and colony size is positively correlated with reproduc-

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<sup>10</sup> Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. 2001. Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*). <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/BOW/LEATER> June 3, 2003. Also see Caffrey, 1998 and Burger et al., 1995.



tive success) and to have lower levels of predation and disturbance than nearby beach colonies. Terns often have greater reproductive success in roof colonies, as well (Gore and Kinnison, 1991).

Least Terns also nest on manmade islands created from dredge spoil (Schaefer, 2001). Often, predation from terrestrial animals is reduced in tern colonies nesting on both man-made and natural islands. However, active management, such as periodic removal of vegetation, is necessary to enhance nesting success (Kotliar and Burger, 1986).

### **Habitat Vegetation and Tidal Action**

Coastal Least Terns nest above the normal high tide levels in areas where storms have reduced or eliminated beach vegetation. These sites are balanced between vegetation cover and high tide disturbances. Without sufficient tidal action, vegetation cover increases in the nesting areas, making them less desirable and ultimately unsuitable. Strong flooding from storms or full-moon tides can also sweep away the nests and any fledglings, potentially causing failure of an entire colony. Although these processes occur naturally, they can have drastic effects on already stressed populations.

In Connecticut, the number of Least Tern nesting sites is shrinking. In the 1980's, there were 14 nesting sites in Connecticut. In the three years of 2000-2002, Least Terns used only 10 sites (and only one pair used one site in one year with no young fledged). Declining habitat quality may be one reason why some of these nesting locations have been abandoned.

### **Food Supply**

The Least Tern population in Connecticut may also be limited by possible adverse changes in its food supply. Studies have shown that turbid or choppy waters limit prey accessibility to Least Terns. As a consequence, marinas and other areas heavily used by boats and jet skis are usually avoided by feeding terns. However, any conclusion that Connecticut's Least Tern population is limited by its food supply needs further scientific study (see, for example, Banner and Schaller, 2003). In fact, Brunton (1999) suggested that predation was much more important than food supply in limiting Connecticut's Least Terns.

### **Conclusion**

Certainly, there are multiple potential causes for the decline of Least Terns in Connecticut, with the most likely ones identified in

this report. More analysis is required to determine the relative importance of these factors in the decline of this species. A working hypothesis includes predation, human disturbance, and degraded habitat quality as the most likely causes.

### **Recommendations for Management of Connecticut's Least Terns**

This report is not intended to be a formal recovery plan for Least Terns in Connecticut. However, the COA recommends that the state act swiftly to create and implement such a plan. Active management of Least Tern populations and nesting locations can stabilize and reverse recent population trends. For example, a formal management program for Least Terns breeding on military lands in California led to a nearly four-fold increase in breeding pairs between 1970 and 1993.<sup>11</sup> This benefit also has been seen in Massachusetts, as noted above.

A recovery program for Least Terns in Connecticut should consist of five elements:

- Immediate actions, to be adopted before the 2004 breeding season, that are designed to stabilize and restore Connecticut's Least Tern population.
- Additional analysis on a site-specific basis to determine local viability and reproductive success at key nesting sites.
- Creation of a long-term management plan for Least Terns in the state by a Least Tern Working Group and developed in the context of regional programs for the preservation of this species.
- Site-by-site conservation plans for key nesting sites in the state, including listing of the most significant ones as Important Bird Areas.
- Formal scientific study to address the conservation biology of Least Terns as well as specific management actions to promote the viability of Least Terns in the state and region.

### **Immediate Actions to Stabilize the Least Tern Population**

The dramatic decline in the Connecticut Least Tern population warrants several immediate actions. These actions should be undertaken in a scientifically designed framework. In fact, properly structured scientific studies, as recommended below, can analyze the effectiveness of these remedial actions, even as they are imple-

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.pacificbio.org/ESIN/Birds/CaliforniaLeastTern/CALeastTern\\_pg.htm](http://www.pacificbio.org/ESIN/Birds/CaliforniaLeastTern/CALeastTern_pg.htm). June 3, 2003



mented (see Long-Term Management Program below).

The most pressing issue is protection of key nesting locations (see Table 1). Beginning with the 2004 breeding season (and extending beyond), the most significant colonies of Least Terns (Sandy Point in West Haven, Milford Point in Milford, Long Beach in Stratford, and Pleasure Beach in Bridgeport) should receive elevated levels of protection. Immediate actions should include:

- These primary breeding locations should be isolated from terrestrial predators by ringing nesting sites with snow fencing<sup>12</sup>. Human access to these locations should be monitored carefully and controlled as necessary to prevent disruption of tern colonies. Dogs and cats should be excluded from nesting sites under all circumstances.
- Active removal or relocation of predators (especially domestic pets) at these nesting sites should be initiated (see Burger, 1989). Special attention should be paid to crows as they are a demonstrated source of predation on Connecticut Least Terns (Brunton, 1997, 1999) and New York Piping Plovers (Lauro and Tanacredi, 2002). In addition, nocturnal terrestrial predators should be removed as soon as they are found, since quick removal will limit the possibility that nocturnal abandonment will be institutionalized in a tern colony. Normally, nocturnal avian predators, such as Black-crowned Night Herons and Great Horned Owls, are hard to remove.
- Programs of education and outreach should be initiated to inform the beach-going public of the Least Tern and its status in the state. Enhanced signage which includes information about tern biology and seasonal usage of these key nesting locations by terns would be extremely helpful (see, for example, Kotliar and Burger, 1986).
- Investigation of Massachusetts' successful management program for Least Terns and determination of those additional elements that may be applicable in Connecticut.

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<sup>12</sup> Electric fencing has been effective in limiting predation at colonies of the California Least Tern (Minsky, 1980), although it may be a liability for the Connecticut municipalities that own the beaches on which Least Terns nest. Permanent chain link fencing also benefited Least Terns in California (Massey et al., 1992), being largely responsible for the three-fold increase in Least Terns in that state (Patricia Baird, pers. com.). Snow fencing deterred most dogs and foxes at Least Tern nesting sites in New Jersey while electric fencing kept out all dogs, foxes and racoons (Burger, 1989).



Beyond these immediate actions, four steps should begin in the 2005 breeding season, coordinated with the Long-Term Management Program for Least Terns (see below). First, there should be active programs for managing vegetation removal at existing nesting sites<sup>13</sup>. Such action will require resolution of potential legal and regulatory limitations on removal of beach vegetation.

Table 1

**Average Annual Population Characteristics of Least Terns  
At the Major Nesting Locations in Connecticut  
(1985 – 2002)**

		AVERAGE NUMBER OF BREEDING PAIRS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF FLEDGED YOUNG	AVERAGE NUMBER OF FLEDGLINGS PER NEST
NESTING SITE	TOWN			
Sandy / Morse Point	West Haven	286.3	128.3	0.45
Milford Point	Milford	57.0	9.5	0.17
Long Beach	Stratford	47.2	14.8	0.31
Pleasure Beach	Bridgeport	41.9	7.4	0.18
Griswold Point	Old Lyme	26.7	8.2	0.31
Sand Island	Greenwich	24.6	4.0	0.16
Menunketesuck Island	Westbrook	22.2	1.9	0.09

(Source: Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, 2003 [Julie Victoria, pers. com.]. Data for Milford Point represent totals for three specific beach sites in the vicinity of the Connecticut Audubon property at Milford Point.)

Second, sites with lower numbers of breeding pairs should receive elevated levels of protection as per the recommendations for the primary breeding locations. Griswold Point in Old Lyme and Menunketesuck Island in Westbrook should be the focal points of this effort in 2005. Burger (1984) noted that Least Terns will return to nesting sites in which fledgling success has been high but may abandon sites that have low or marginal nesting success. As such, efforts should be made to maintain and improve the quality of these intermediate sites, including active management of beach vegetation (Burger, 1989; Kotliar and Burger, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Natural forces that remove vegetation from Least Tern nesting sites promote enhanced reproductive success in this species. Storms in the winter of 2002 – 2003 removed much of the vegetation at Sandy Point in West Haven and the vegetation removal appears to have contributed to greater reproductive success for the Least Terns nesting there in the spring and summer of 2003 (based on anecdotal observations).

Third, consideration should be given to restoration of historical nesting locations (those that were productive in the past, such as Sand Point in Greenwich). Restoration could include actions to restore the physical appeal of the sites to terns, such as management of vegetation, enclosure of appropriate habitat with snow or electric fencing and exclusion of people and their pets.

Fourth, creation of new nesting habitats should be considered. In this regard, the COA recommends exploration of the development of artificial nesting habitats on dredge-spoil islands. These islands can be created by placing dredge-spoil in barges anchored offshore from known nesting locations or, more appropriately, national wildlife refuges or state parks. Since water barriers that protect Least Tern colonies from land-based predators lead to greater fledgling success (Schweitzer and Leslie, 2000), such islands should be isolated from the mainland. Dredge spoil also should be used to supplement and manage existing nesting sites or restore historical ones, so long as it matches the substrate characteristics preferred by terns (Kotliar and Burger, 1986).

Setting up tern decoys and broadcasting tern vocalizations has been used to encourage terns to establish new colonies or repopulate old ones (Burger, 1988; Kotliar and Burger, 1984). Decoys have been associated with successful re-population of Least Tern colonies in Florida, Maryland, Rhode Island, Maine and California<sup>14</sup>. A decoy program could result in more rapid colonization of artificial or restored nesting habitats in Connecticut.

### **Additional Analysis of Key Nesting Locations in Connecticut**

A handful of nesting sites account for the majority of nesting pairs of Least Terns in Connecticut, as well as the most of the fledged young (see Table 1). In fact, since 1985 Sandy Point in West Haven alone has accounted for more than half of all nesting pairs in the state, and nearly 70% of all fledged young.

Not only is it important to take immediate action to preserve these sites (see above), but it is critical to analyze the performance of all nesting sites in the state and use that information in the management plans for these locations (see below).

This analysis must be conducted in the framework of a regional - or landscape-scale study of Least Terns in the northeastern United States. For example, it is possible that adult Least Terns are forsaking breeding sites in Connecticut for locations in adjacent states. This possibility is suggested by the decline in Connecticut's

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, <http://www.madriverconsulting.com/decoy/decoys.htm>.  
December 5, 2003



Least Tern population despite the relative stability of the total population in the overall region. Improvement of nesting conditions in our state could be beneficial to the species within the region, including reducing the risk associated with local disasters destroying individual nesting colonies.

### Long-Term Management Plan for Least Terns in Connecticut

The COA recommends the creation of a new committee for the purpose of overseeing the restoration of Least Terns ("The Least Tern Working Group").

The Least Tern Working Group should consist of representatives from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state universities, non-profit conservation organizations (including the COA) and other groups currently working on Least Tern research and/or management projects. The mandate of the Least Tern Working Group would be to:

- Create a management plan for the preservation of the Least Tern in Connecticut. This plan should be completed by September 30, 2004 so that scientific studies could begin with the 2005 breeding season.
- Identify and implement long-term strategies to preserve and improve nesting colonies of Least Terns in Connecticut, including active management programs for limiting human disturbance, reducing predation of terns, and maintaining nest sites<sup>15</sup>. Specifically, a special program should be formed to facilitate the management of coastal vegetation for improvement of Least Tern nesting habitat. Plans should be in place by February 28, 2005 for the 2005 nesting season.
- Identify and fund a formal program of study to determine the causes of population decline, including as-yet-unexplored issues as contaminants in food that may be harmful to Least Tern reproductive success (see Formal Scientific Study below).
- Coordinate with ornithologists and ecologists in other New England states to ensure that Connecticut's Least Tern management actions are integrated on a regional basis.
- Create and maintain centralized information resources on issues of regional importance, such as identification and protection of foraging grounds and nesting colonies.

<sup>15</sup> Active management of vegetation at Great Gull Island in Long Island Sound has benefited Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Roseate Terns nesting on this island (Hays, 2003).

In fact, expanded regional communication with other New England groups managing Least Terns is necessary to compare population trends and identify regional problems this species faces in the near future. Individuals from the Least Tern Working Group should actively participate in regional meetings dealing with New England's water birds.

The Least Tern Working Group also can be an agent for enhancing public awareness of Least Terns and their plight. In order to protect existing Least Tern colonies, it is necessary both to educate the public on the fragility of the colonies and, where possible, to create greater restrictions to keep the public from disturbing the nesting sites. In suitable locations (e.g., those not closed to human access), observation areas (including platforms) should be set up in order for the public to generate support for protection of Least Terns and other wildlife (so long as such platforms do not disturb nesting colonies).

#### Site-by-Site Conservation Plans

The major nesting sites for Least Terns in the state have different ecological characteristics and different rates of breeding success (see Table 1). In addition, people use these sites differently, creating variable levels of disturbance to Least Terns.

The COA recommends that site-specific conservation plans be developed for each of these sites, taking into account their individual characteristics. As in the immediate recommendations, controls on the use of these sites by humans during the Least Tern's breeding season should be implemented. For example, attempts to reduce human disturbance to Least Terns must be accompanied by a public outreach program, including signs, brochures and the use of beach stewards to better inform the public about Least Terns and what they can do to help protect this state-threatened species<sup>16</sup>. A major focus of this program should be the danger of pet dogs. Of course, the extent of these actions should vary from site to site based upon the specifics of each location.

The conservation plans should be conducted in the priority sequence associated with current breeding success of Least Terns. That is, plans for Sandy Point and Milford Point should be developed first, followed by conservation plans for Long Beach and Pleasure Beach. Sites that have been productive in the past, such as Sand Island, should follow in priority.

<sup>16</sup> During the 2002 breeding season, a large bonfire was found less than five feet away from rope fencing and "please keep away" signs meant to protect a tern colony (CT DEP, 2002). Increases in the sizes of fenced areas may be warranted.



### Formal Scientific Study

Much is unknown about the biology and ecology of coastal Least Terns in New England. The COA recommends that research funds be raised and spent, under the direction of the Least Tern Working Group, for four purposes:

1. Specific analysis of elements identified as contributing to population decline in the state. The impact of human recreation activities on terns and their breeding behavior should be analyzed as soon as possible. This research should also be constructed to measure the success of immediate actions taken to stabilize the Least Tern population (see above).
2. Detailed analysis of key nesting sites in the state, including the ecological and human-induced factors affecting reproductive success at these locations. Such analysis may require an in-depth understanding of beach ecosystems, not just Least Tern ecology.
3. Analysis of long-term management actions including predator control, vegetation management programs and enhancing public awareness. These management actions should be undertaken in the context of a properly structured scientific design addressing specific questions such as:
  - Which predators cause the greatest mortality of Least Terns and what are the socially acceptable ways to control them?
  - Which management actions are most beneficial to Least Terns and why?
  - What is the success of Least Terns in delivering food to their offspring?
4. Determination whether factors specific to Long Island Sound, such as potential contamination by persistent organic chemicals, contribute to lower breeding success of Least Terns.

### Conclusion

The declining Least Tern population in Connecticut likely is the result of predation, disturbance and loss of nesting habitat. Some of these effects emerge from human activity or as the product of synergies between humans and other creatures.

The state's Least Terns are unlikely to rebound without well-planned and funded<sup>17</sup> management programs. In fact, immediate actions need to occur before the local population becomes extirpated, including enhanced protection for Sandy Point in West Haven, Milford Point in Milford, Pleasure Beach in Bridgeport, and Long Beach in Stratford.

Formal scientific study of Connecticut's Least Terns and the causes of their population decline, such as human disturbance, predation, food supply shortage and inaccessibility, flood activity, and vegetation, should be initiated as soon as possible. With the formation of a Least Tern Working Group, data can be centralized and used to form a regional Long Island Sound management plan for Least Terns and possibly other beach-nesting species (Piping Plover, etc.). Such a network would be prepared to make responsible management decisions for the future as well as to enhance public awareness of Least Terns.

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<sup>17</sup> The sources of funding for these important programs are diverse. Potential sources might include state wildlife grants matched by funds from the new wildlife license plate program.



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BRUCE STEVENSON, 43 Mollbrook Dr., Wilton, CT06897  
Bsteve6890@aol.com

# JUNCO FOOD HABITS IN WINTER

Paul Carrier

I have always had an interest in the life-style of the Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) especially with respect to food and foraging habits during the winter months. The junco, a common winter resident throughout Connecticut, is closely related to sparrows, and embraces many of their same feeding habits and food preferences.

As winter progresses, juncos shift their feeding habits to accommodate the changing demands winter imposes on them. I have broken down these changes into three categories:

Figure A - Ground Feeding

Figure B - Plant Feeding

Figure C - Snow-surface Gleaning

During summer and fall, **ground feeding** (Figure A) is the junco's most commonly used feeding habit. Many seeds and insects are gleaned there; and further scratching within the leaf and

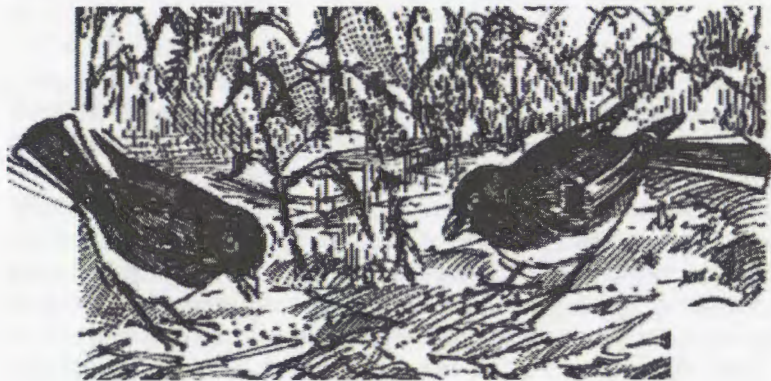


Figure A

debris litter will expose much more. As winter approaches, the likelihood of snow increases and with it the ground becomes a more difficult place to explore for available food. Scratching continues to provide exposure to the ground, but when the snow depth increases, even this method becomes futile, and other feeding methods must be explored.

As the snow depth continues to accumulate, juncos (and most all other ground-feeding birds such as sparrows) shift their efforts to a new feeding habit - **plant feeding**. This method takes advantage of seeds still attached on tall plants whose seeds have not yet



fallen to the ground.

As juncos are forced to change their feeding habits to this method (Figure B), the accessibility and quantity of food becomes progressively scarcer. The shorter and ground hugging seed producing plants become covered with snow and birds must now depend on taller plants whose seeds are still available above the snow pack.



Figure B

deepening snows include crabgrass and sheep sorrel among many other low growing, seed producing, plants.

**Plant feeding** (Figure B) is accomplished by birds landing on or climbing up a tall seed producing plant stem, foraging there, or causing the stem to bend down to the ground, where the seeds are easier to glean. This method will be exploited until the available seeds are depleted or eventually covered with snow.

As the snow cover deepens the next and last resort method available to juncos is **snow surface gleaning** (Figure C). Little is written on the use of tree seeds by juncos (although use of tree seeds by several sparrow species is well documented). I have found that snow surface gleaning compels juncos to search for available food fallen or wind blown onto the snow pack surface. Often, the most common seeds on snow pack are tree or shrub seeds. Some of the



Figure C

winter foods used by juncos that come from trees and shrubs include sumac, pine cones, and poison ivy berries. From my own observations over many years I would add to this list birch and other tree seeds.

Another rarely observed or recorded habit juncos utilize for procuring food is foraging within trees. I have often seen juncos within hemlock and birch trees feeding directly from cones and catkins. On one occasion, I observed several juncos feeding with many Pine Siskins, gleaning seeds from cones at the top of a large hemlock. The juncos seemed to be successful at this venture, as were the siskins. At the same time, many more juncos were gleaning seeds that had fallen onto the snow surface under the hemlock tree, apparently with much success. On other occasions I have observed juncos amongst many American Goldfinches gleaning seeds from the catkins on tall birch trees.

Throughout past winters, I have also studied the snow pack surface for examples of potential available foods. Amongst the detritus are often found seeds from pine, hemlock and birch. This I believe is the junco's last resort for finding available food, especially when the snow is deep, and all other past foraging areas are no longer available to them.

Though juncos are often seen feeding on weed seeds at the edges of woods and fields, they prefer the protection of cover while feeding. Feeding within dense forests upon snow pack searching for fallen and wind blown seeds seems to be a method used by juncos when all other measures of foraging are no longer available to them.

In conclusion: all wild creatures must adjust their foraging methods to accommodate changing weather and available food conditions. The junco is no exception. It has astonished me that little has been written about juncos use of foraging the snow surface for available food, specifically tree seeds.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone who might also have observed juncos feeding from trees, gleaning from the snows' surface, or possibly the writing of such occurrences. Please remember that bird feeders and the junco's habits around them, are not the issue here.

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PAUL CARRIER, 80 High View Dr, Harwinton, CT 06791





## CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

SUMMER, JUNE 1 THROUGH JULY 31, 2003

*Greg Hanisek*

The recent breeding trends continue. In broadest terms this involves strong showings, including some notable increases, by upland forest birds, and the continued marginalization of grassland breeders caused by loss of farmland. Coastal breeders also remain under intense pressure, although American Oystercatcher, and to a lesser extent Black Skimmer, have bucked the trend. Perhaps the most striking increase in the past few years involves Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, with Common Raven a close second. Several of the upland warblers, such as Black-throated Blue and Magnolia Warbler, also appear to be doing well. For additional insight on breeding populations, please see the analysis of the state Summer Bird Counts in *The Connecticut Warbler* Vol. 23 No. 4.

As has been our practice in recent years, the summer season report is broken down into four categories to better examine the avian crosscurrents at work at a time when many birders ease off after the excitement of May migration. Also, for the first time, this report includes some sightings culled from eBird, an online database operated by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in conjunction with National Audubon Society. COA is participating by providing consultation on unusual reports submitted from the state.

### Northbound Migration

Two Lesser Yellowlegs were very late June 2 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (RK, JE). A Solitary Sandpiper was still in Southbury on June 1 (RN). The only **Marbled Godwit** report involved a single June 16-19 at Sherwood Island State Park, Westport (PS et al.). Single Red Knots were at Milford Point (NB) and Sandy Point, West

Haven (MSt), on June 1, with six at Sandy Point June 8 (FMA et al.). Milford Point held six White-rumped Sandpipers June 6 (DS, NB et al.); six were at Sandy Point June 8 (SHr) with five still present June 10 (GN).

A **Wilson's Phalarope**, probably still northbound, was at Milford Point June 11 (DG); the intentions of one July 10-11 in Stratford were less clear (CB

et al.). Southport Beach in Westport held eight Bonaparte's Gulls June 5 (LM, FMa). A Black Tern was at Sandy Point June 12 (MB).

Common Nighthawks continued to push through the Bantam Lake area in early June, with a noteworthy late count of 116 on June 2 at Little Pond (DRo, JE) and 34 as late as June 8 (DRo et al.). Smaller numbers were reported during that period in other parts of the state.

An Alder Flycatcher singing June 6 at Hartmans Park in Lyme, well south of known breeding sites, was indicative of this species' late migration schedule (DC). Single Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, typically late migrants, were still on the move June 6 in Fairfield (CB) and June 8 in Chester (DPr). A group of 10 Cliff Swallows fed over Little Pond in Litchfield, far from any known breeding sites, on June 7 (RN, SHa).

American Pipits regularly, if rather surreptitiously, move north through mid-May, but one on June 1 at Sandy Point, West Haven, was decidedly late (MA). Late-moving warblers included a Tennessee Warbler June 7 in Newington (AS, RZ), a Blackburnian Warbler June 2 at Old Greenwich (JWe) and a Wilson's Warbler June 1 in Colchester (ADa).

#### **Southbound Migration**

A Blue-winged Teal appeared to be an early arrival

July 20 at Lord's Cove in Lyme (HG). The first signs of shore-bird movement inland were a Lesser Yellowlegs and a Solitary Sandpiper July 5 at Little Pond (DRo et al.). An Upland Sandpiper stopped at Sikorsky Airport in Stratford July 26 (TK et al.) On the coast, July 6 produced three Semipalmated Sandpipers at Milford Point (NB), as well as 12 Least Sandpipers and two Short-billed Dowitchers in the Stratford area (NB). The season's first Whimbrel was reported July 16 from Lord's Cove in Lyme (HG), and a flock of seven passed southwest over Compo Beach in Westport the same day (FMa). Other Whimbrels were at Sandy Point July 23 (JMe), at Griswold Point, Old Lyme, July 27 (DPr) and at Hammonasset Beach State Park (hereafter HBSP), Madison July 31 (EN). The earliest Pectoral Sandpiper was July 22 at Bafflin Sanctuary in Pomfret (KE). On July 27 Sandy Point held one Red Knot, one White-rumped Sandpiper and two Pectoral Sandpipers (RN, SHa), while two Stilt Sandpipers were in Stratford the same day (RN, SHa). Another Stilt Sandpiper was at Sandy Point July 13 (LB).

A Black Tern was three miles off Stamford July 12 (AC). The season's only Caspian Tern appeared July 27 at Sandy Point (MSt), and in a belated report,



two were at Rocky Neck State Park in Old Lyme May 18 (PCr).

### Lingerers, Wanderers and Strays

A Snow Goose was at Station 43 in South Windsor June 7 (CEk et al.). Lingering ducks included a Lesser Scaup at Bantam Lake from June through mid-July (DR et al.); a drake Long-tailed Duck at Compo Beach in Westport June 7 (FMa); a male and female Long-tailed Duck at Sandy Point July 22-23 (JG, JMe); a Common Golden-eye June 24 at HBSP (DPr); and a Bufflehead June 4 at Snipsic Lake in Tolland (CEk).

Common Loons regularly summer in Long Island Sound, but a Red-throated Loon was unusual June 29 at Long Beach, Stratford (FMa). A Connecticut Audubon cruise June 15 turned up six **Wilson's Storm-Petrels**, now regular in Long Island Sound, off of Old Saybrook (AG). One was in the Norwalk area the same day and again on July 6 (NB), while three were off Stamford July 12 (AC). Another was off New London the next day, placing them from one end of the Sound to the other.

A Tricolored Heron was present through June in Stratford with no evidence of breeding (CLv&TL et al.). One of the season's best finds was a banded adult **White Ibis** June 14 at HBSP (CR, JC et al.).

Vying with the **White Ibis**

for bird of the season was a **Black-necked Stilt** June 20 at HBSP (B&CA). It was reported there again June 24 (DS et al.), and there was a report the same day from Great Island in Old Lyme which may refer to the same bird (fide CEL). A flock of 36 Willets July 17 at Milford Point represented a large post-breeding concentration (FMa). The first report of Forster's Tern was July 3 at Lord's Cove in Old Lyme (HG). A Royal Tern was at Sandy Point July 22 (JG); there have been very few reports in state in past few years.

An adult **Red-headed Woodpecker** of unknown origin visited a Guilford yard July 6-8 (JL). An unseasonable **White-throated Sparrow** sang in a Branford yard July 20 (CLe).

### Breeding Season

Two **Green-winged Teal** July 13 at Wyndham Land Trust's Bafflin Sanctuary in Pomfret could have been indicative of either local breeding or an early arrival (RD). There was no question that **Blue-winged Teal** nested at Bafflin; a hen with 11 ducklings was seen from late June through mid-July (RD).

Juvenile **Hooded Mergansers** in June at Cedar Swamp in Sterling and Bafflin Sanctuary in Pomfret indicated successful nesting at both sites (RD). **Common Mergansers** are well estab-

lished as nesters in the Northwest Corner (i.e., 88 on the Barkhamsted June Count). They're sparser in the northeast, but two on an apparent prospecting mission landed on a chimney in Sterling June 7 (RD). Up to two also were noted at Quinebaug Fish Hatchery in Plainfield in June (RD).

There is no modern proof of Common Loons breeding in Connecticut, but the large reservoirs of the Metropolitan District Commission, with their limited public access, offer possibilities. On June 26 & 28 an adult in breeding plumage was found at Barkhamsted Reservoir, and a second bird in breeding plumage was present June 29 (DRo). Both were present to at least July 13, but no nest or young were discovered.

A Great Blue Heron colony in Middlebury/Southbury held about 10 pairs (BD). The best count of Little Blue Herons was four July 20 in Old Saybrook (J&AO). An American Bittern was at Little Pond in Litchfield June 6 (RN, SHa), and one flew over Stratford Great Meadows June 27 (CB). A pair of Least Bitterns nested successfully at Stratford Great Meadows with two very young chicks seen out of the nest July 2 (CB); a total of four young eventually was seen on July 8. Singles were noted in July at Lord's Cove in Lyme and Watch Rock in Old Lyme

(HG); another was in Quinnipiac marshes in Hamden June 18 (FMc, NR).

Three Bald Eagle nests in northeastern Litchfield County produced a total of four fledglings (DRo). A Northern Goshawk showed itself June 6 at Bent of River Audubon Center in Southbury (PCo). Northern Harriers' nesting attempt at the state's lone confirmed site in Stratford apparently failed (CB).

A Sora was in the Quinnipiac marshes in Hamden June 18 (NR, FMc). American Oystercatchers, well established as breeders at several coastal locations, had at least two chicks at Cockenoe Island in Norwalk in early June (AH). Black Skimmers bred again at Sandy Point, West Haven. Mating by one pair was observed June 9 (MSt). Up to 10 adults were present in late June with the first report for two chicks on July 11 (NB).

Despite continued concern about Whip-poor-wills, new territorial locations turn up every year, such as five in one area of Wolcott in early June (JSw). The southward expansion of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker continues, with three to five pairs noted in Southbury (RN). As further evidence of this species' success, the Barkhamsted June Count recorded 214, compared to the following counts of other woodpecker species: Red-bellied



Woodpecker - 37; Downy Woodpecker - 119; Hairy Woodpecker - 59; Northern Flicker - 82; and Pileated Woodpecker - 33.

An Acadian Flycatcher was territorial near Colebrook Reservoir in late June (RN, SHa). A Bank Swallow colony on Main Street in Southbury held 50+ birds, and about 30 were in a colony at the town's Heritage Village (RN). The Cliff Swallow colony at Shepaug dam in Southbury peaked at 150+ birds in early July, with dispersal by mid-month (RN).

Common Raven added another apparent new breeding site, this one in Southbury (RN). The North Shore marshes and Little Pond boardwalk at White Memorial Foundation in Litchfield produced an excellent count of 50 Marsh Wrens June 7 (DR et al.).

The season's only Lawrence's Warbler turned up on the Greenwich-Stamford Summer Count (PD). Proof of nesting Northern Parula has been elusive, but on June 28 at Barkhamsted Reservoir a pair was found carrying food into a hidden nest site where young birds could be heard chipping as the adults approached (DRo). Another bird was in good habitat at Bent of the River Audubon Center in Southbury June 12, but no breeding evidence was ascertained (CLO). Magnolia War-

bler, another northern breeder that appears to be expanding its range, was at a possible nesting site in Woodbury through June (RN). A **Yellow-throated Warbler**, which appeared to be on the interior *albilora* race, was seen and heard June 6 at Bent of the River. The sycamore-lined Pomperaug River there is a good place for a breeding attempt (this race after all is known as "Sycamore Warbler"), but the bird apparently did not linger (PCo). A Yellow-breasted Chat was on territory in Groton in June (LV et al.), and one was in Milford July 5 (RJ).

A Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow was banded June 2 in Guilford, helping to elucidate the species' spring migration schedule through the state. The species is supposed to be a late migrant, but we don't have a lot of records (CG fide CEL). A survey of the Quinnipiac marshes in Hamden in mid-June reported three Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows and 11 Seaside Sparrows (NR, FMc); this is probably these species' farthest point of occurrence from Long Island Sound. The Colebrook Reservoir area held at least three breeding pairs of Dark-eyed Juncos in June (RN, SHa), and a pair was in Barkhamsted into early July (DPe).

Southbury, a stronghold for Orchard Oriole, held at least 40 individuals during nesting season, with most gone by the last

week on July (RN). **Boat-tailed Grackles** continue to nest at Stratford Great Meadows. A female was seen taking food to a nest about 18 inches above the surface of a pond, in Phragmites, June 20 (CB). A fledgling was seen June 23, and a female was observed nest-building July 13 for an apparent second brood, with juveniles from a first brood present (CB).

[Editor's Note: Reports of rare or unusual bird species in Connecticut (species with an asterisk on the most recent COA checklist) require that documentation be submitted to the Secretary of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (Mark Szantyr, 145 Farmington Ave., Waterbury, CT 06710) if they are to be included in the field notes].

## OBSERVERS ,

CONTRIBUTORS ( **boldface** )

Bill Ahrens, Claudia Ahrens, Tim Antanaitis, Mark Aronson, **Rene Baade**, Jim Bair (JBa), **Charles Barnard**, Mark Barriger, Larry Bauscher, Barbara Bear, Joe Bear (JBe), **Nick Bonomo**, Tom Bravo, Dexter Chafee, Al Collins, **Patrick Comins** (PCo), Jerry Connolly, Paul Cross (PCr), Neil Currie, Andrew Dasinger (ADa), Buzz Devine, **Angela Dimmitt** (ADi), **Robert Dixon**, Patrick Dugan, **Carl Ekroth** (CEk), Ken Elkins,

Chris Elphick (CEl), John Eykelhoff, Kevin Finnan, Jim Ford, John Gaskell, Ted Gilman, Carina Gjerdrum, Daniel Goldenberg, **Hank Golet**, Andy Griswold, AJ Hand, **Greg Hanisek**, Roy Harvey, Seth Harvey (SHa), Simon Harvey (SHr), Julian Hough, **Elsbeth Johnson**, Richard Julian, Rich Kania, **Jay Kaplan**, Tom Kilroy, **Betty Kleiner**, Jonas Lai, Carol Lemmon (CLe), Carolyn Longstreth (CLo), Christopher Lovell (CLv), Todd Lovell, **Frank Mantlik** (FMa), Linda Mantlik, John Maynard (JMa), Flo McBride (FMc), **Jamie Meyers** (JMe), **Russ Naylor**, Gina Nichol, Fred Norton, Elaine Nye, **Anders Ogren**, John Ogren, Dave Pelletier (DPe), **Dave Provencher** (DPr), **Charlie Rafford**, Shirley Rafford, Nancy Rosenbaum, Arne Rosengren, Dave Rosgen (DRo), Dean Rupp (Dru), Maryanne Rupp, **Meredith Sampson** (MSa), Anita Shaffer, Penny Solum, **Dori Sosensky**, Steve Spector, Jerry Stage (JSt), **Maria Stockmal** (MSt), Jack Swatt (JSw), **Mark Szantyr** (MSz), Linda Vegliante, Jack Wells (JWe), Charley West, Joe Wojtanowski (JWo), Terry Wojtanowski, Alice Anne Wormald, Roy Zartarian

GREG HANISEK, 175 Circuit Ave., Waterbury, CT 06078



# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

## Editor

Betty S. Kleiner - 5 Flintlock Ridge, Simsbury, CT 06070  
(860) 658-5670 - CTWarbler@cs.com

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Send manuscripts to the Editor. Please type double spaced with ample margins, on one side of a sheet. Submit a copy on a computer disk, if possible. Style should follow usage in recent issues. All manuscripts receive peer review.

Illustrations and photographs are needed and welcome. Line art of Connecticut and regional birds should be submitted as good quality prints or in original form. All submitted materials will be returned. We can use good quality photographs of birds unaccompanied by an article but with caption including species, date, locality, and other pertinent information.

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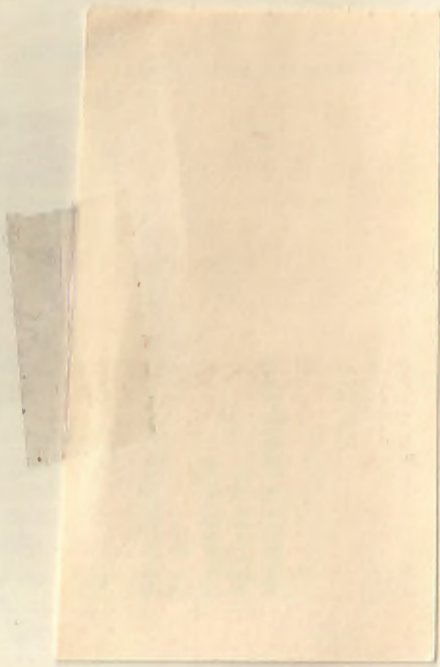
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# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*



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# The Connecticut Warbler

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## ABOUT OUR COVER

**Sora (*Porzana carolina*)**

**by Michael DiGiorgio**

Mike is a well-known artist whose work has appeared in many publications as well as front covers of national magazines. His color rendition of Blackburnian Warblers appears on the cover of the May/June issue of *Bird Watchers Digest*. Mike also illustrated *The Breeding Bird Atlas of Connecticut*.

Mike's paintings can be seen at Brick Gallery, 10 Main St., Essex, CT and at The Audbon Shop, 907 Boston Post Rd., Madison, CT.



## THE MABEL OSGOOD WRIGHT AWARD 2004

*The following is the presentation of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award by Milan Bull at the Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Ornithological Association on March 20, 2004*

Welcome and thank you all for being here on a day when we could all be out watching spring migrants that wish they were still back in Central America.

Mabel Osgood Wright was the early driving force in bird protection in Connecticut at the turn of the last century when almost everyone promoted bird diversity....on hats. Mabel not only changed the fashion industry, but organized the national campaign that resulted in the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. She is perhaps best known for her work as founder and first President of the Connecticut Audubon Society. We honor her efforts and success in bird conservation from time to time by giving an award in her name to someone who has done an outstanding job in promoting avian conservation, education and research in Connecticut. The list is surprisingly long. Our goal is to make it longer!

This year the honor is proudly awarded to Jay Kaplan. It is extremely gratifying to be able to present this award to someone who has done so much over so many years to inspire, motivate and encourage young people's curiosity and interest in birdlife in Connecticut and beyond.

Most of us know Jay as a dedicated and active birder who has been the Director of the Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton for nearly 30 years. As such, he has taught literally thousands of young people to appreciate and conserve our environment principally by using the example of birds as an important filament in the web of life.

Besides the fabulous financial rewards of a Nature Center Director, the personal reward of seeing kids that you inspire, go on to become environmental leaders and outstanding birders is one of the greatest fulfillments in anyone's career. Jay has seen this time and time again.

But more than that, Jay gives outside the Nature Center world as well. He has been associated with COA since 1989, serving as Field Notes Editor from 1989-1995, Avian Records Committee member from 1993-1999, Board member from 1990-2003, Vice President from 1993-1995, and as President from 1995-1997.

Jay has also been active with the Hartford Audubon Society since 1974 where he also served as Vice President and then President from 1983-1985. He was voted "Member of the Year" in 1989. He served on the Governor's Advisory Committee on Non-Harvested Wildlife.

Above and beyond his ornithological interests, Jay also has a strong sense of civic responsibility as well, serving as member, then Chairman, of the Canton Conservation Commission and member of the Canton Land Conservation Trust since 1984. In 1990, he was invited to Russia with a group of Canton officials to serve as a local ambassador and environmental expert.

Jay holds a BS in Environmental Education from Cornell and a MS in Outdoor Education from Pennsylvania State University.

Jay is an outgoing, enthusiastic, successful educator who has effectively promoted the mission of this organization throughout the state and beyond. He is exactly the kind of person this award was designed for and I am proud to be able to present it to him today.

Please join me in congratulating this year's Mabel Osgood Wright Award recipient Jay Kaplan.



# CONNECTICUT'S 2003 FALL HAWK MIGRATION

Neil Currie

The fall hawk migration through Connecticut and the northeast always produces excitement, surprise, and disappointment, and last fall's was no exception. The major disappointment, and mystery, was a drastically reduced number of Broad-winged Hawks at all lookouts, (Tables 1 and 4), especially at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich where only 1044 passed. The only "normal" count of all hawks (Table 2) was at Lighthouse Point in New Haven (Table 3), where annual Broadwing counts are unpredictable. Large flights occur only rarely and low numbers such as the 623 in fall 2003 are the norm.

The fall migration at Lighthouse did produce its share of surprises. Notably, there were six Swainson's Hawks seen on five different days; one in September, three in October, and two in mid-November. This was the second year in a row that Swainson's have appeared at Lighthouse Point (Table 3). A lone Black Vulture, birds now seen regularly in Connecticut, was spotted on November 7, a first for Lighthouse. Over the years the Bald Eagle count has been growing, with 47 seen in the fall of 2003. The count of 1170 Cooper's Hawks was the highest in ten years. Thirty Northern Goshawks was a record and four Rough-legged Hawks was a sign that some would be wintering in Connecticut. Ninety Peregrine Falcons was the second highest count ever at Lighthouse Point.

From late August through the end of November a steady parade of hawks migrated past the Point. September totals were lower than usual, but October brought a heavy push and on three days, October 10, 11, and 13, more than 1000 hawks passed each day. On the eleventh a remarkable 1907 hawks, including 980 Sharpies and 372 Cooper's Hawks, were counted by disbelieving watchers. On those days a slow moving storm, that produced northerly winds and rains on the twelfth, advanced from Cape Hatters past Nova Scotia.

Quaker Ridge, in southwest Connecticut is at the end of a migration funnel created by the general southwestward movement of hawks and the Long Island Sound coastline. It becomes a concentration point and is a great place to see and monitor hawks flights (Table 4). At Quaker numbers were in the normal range for most

species. Exceptions included Broadwings, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and Black Vultures, with a record number of seven seen. A near record low of 1044 Broadwings, migrating through the Quaker Ridge funnel, reflected what was happening, or not happening, at lookouts to the north.

Where were the Broadwings? So far there are no answers, only questions. Did they pass to the north and west of their normal route through Connecticut (reversing the pathway of their spring migration) with large numbers moving to our southwest towards Texas, somewhere not too far south of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie? Evidence for this theory were low counts at Bear Mountain near West Point, in New York, at Mount Peter on the New York-New Jersey border and at Montclair, New Jersey. Also, a heavy flight of Broadwings through Vermont was not part of the usual pattern. Perhaps the hawks were too high to see, especially against the clear blue skies that prevailed in mid-September. That guess doesn't hold up well, however, as hawks must rise in the morning and come down in the late afternoon when they can be easily seen. Perhaps reports, yet to come in, will help to solve the mystery.

Many thanks to Ron Bell, who keeps detailed weather data, for his help. And thanks to all the following birders, who enjoy the thrill of a good hawk flight: Eric Adam, Lois Aldi, Ralph Amodie, Renee Baade, David Babington, Larry Bailey, Bill Banks, Tom Baptist, Lissa Barker, Dan Barvir, Trudy Battaly, Mike Beath, Ray Belding, Chester Billings, Mike Bisignano, Andrew Block, Tom Bravo, Polly Brody, Tom Burke, Paul Carrier, Mathew Cerreta, Neil Currie, D. and A. Denny, Angela Dimmitt, Cynthia Ehlinger, Dick English, John Bykuhoff, John Farrell, Larry Fischer, David and Ann Fiske, Steve Foisey, John Groboski, Jeff Greenwood, Frank Guida, Tony Hager, Greg Hanisek, Brian Hardiman, Ernie Harris, Gary Himer, Lukas Hyder, Lynn James, Elsbeth Johnson, Roger Johnson, Matt Kabash, Seth Kellogg, Paul Kennedy, Dina Kennedy, Bob LaTulipe, George Letis, Bill Liedlich, Lois Lounsbury, Jane and Bill Low, Lisa Lozier, Bruce MacWhorter, Steve Mayo, Robin McAllister, Patty McCurdy, Tom Meyer, Marty Moore, Nancy Nichols, Pat Owen, Drew Panko, Janet Petricone, Matt Popp, Mike Reese, Tom Renner, Al and Betty Root, Arne Rosengren, Dave Rosgen. Jere Ross, Meredith Sampson, Fred Schroeder. Joe Scordato, Donna Rose Smith, Judith Stevens, Tony Tortora, Dave Tripp, Steve Walter, Mike Warner, David Wright, JoeWojtanowski, Ed Yescoff, Janet Zepko, Joe Zeranski, Chris Zimmerman and Jim and Carol Zipp. As always, if I have omitted names, my apologies.

Neil Currie, 10 Mountain Laurel Lane, Sandy Hook, CT 06482



## HAWK FLIGHT SITE LOCATIONS

SITES	TOWN
Booth Hill	West Hartland
Taine Mountain	Burlington
Johnnycake Farm	Burlington
Middle School	Torrington
Chestnut Hill	Litchfield
White Memorial	Litchfield
Good Hill	Woodbury
Botsford Hill	Bridgewater
Briggs Hill	Sherman
Heritage Village	Southbury
Bent of the River	Southbury
Huntington State Park	Redding
Flirt Hill	Easton
Lighthouse Point	New Haven
East Shore Park	New Haven
East Rock Park	New Haven
Maltby Lakes	Orange
Waveny Park	New Canaan
Quaker Ridge	Greenwich



Figure 1. 2003 Hawk Flight Lookout Sites



**Table 1: Broad-winged Hawk Flights - Fall 2003**

DATES		Pre 8	SEPTEMBER													Post 24	2003 Total	2002 Total
			8	9	10	11	12	16	17	18	20	21	22	24				
SITES	Hrs.																	
Booth Hill	12										43	148				191		
Taine Mountain	15					13		11				35		7		66	80	
Johnnycake Farm	19		14		2	2	26	20						17		81	1221	
Middle School	103	26	39	37	17	15	10	23	51	32	6	233	794	55	140	1478	10715	
Chestnut Hill	61		56	45	1	2	12	31	27	10		9	84	8		285	12686	
White Memorial	19	12	21	59					4		4				10	110	879	
Good Hill	25				7	24		11	17		18	94		16		187	811	
Botsford Hill	40		6	36				8	3	5			25	39	3	125		
Briggs Hill	19										10	101			7	118	179	
Heritage Village	37				13		6	111	78		6	10		14		238		
Bent of the River	35		55	12		4	11	14	5							101	2039	
Huntington State Park	15										7	4				11	218	
Flirt Hill	42														58	58	24	
Lighthouse Point	623	18	8	15		1							6		379	427	737	
East Shore Park	14														25	25	515	
East Rock Park	4									3						3	20	
Maltby Lakes	84	24	8	10	12	8	21	9	20	8	7	35	6	107	12	287	1746	
Waveny Park	28					7			2			7				16	138	
Quaker Ridge	452	74	35	6	1	19		60	115	5	4	46	4	45	630	1044	5222	

Table 2: Connecticut- All Sites - Fall 2003

SITES	Hrs.	SPECIES																		2003	2002
		BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	SW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	UR	Total	Total
Booth Hill	12			4	1	1	18	2			221					5	2	1		255	
Taine Mountain	15			11			5				66		1	1				1	1	86	93
Johnnycake Farm	19			25	10		27	3			81				28	1				175	1500
Middle School	103	2*		43	7	8	90	44	2	5	1478		32		33	3			26	1771	11036
Chestnut Hill	61			24	5	11	63	6		6	285				8				12	420	12982
White Memorial	19	4*		15	2	1	13	13		1	110		2		6					163	917
Good Hill	25			8	1	1	5	8			187			1	6	1			3	221	839
Botsford Hill	36			19	1	4	38	2			125			1	17	1			7	215	
Briggs Hill	19	4*		5	1	1	14	10		2	118		11		8				1	171	222
Heritage Village	37	2*		14	1	1	23	2		5	238		23		7				12	326	
Bent of the River	35	3*		11	2	2	17	4		6	101		11		1	6			14	175	2108
Huntington State Park	15			3	1	1	4	5		2	11		1		47	2				77	254
Flirt Hill	42			5	4	23	47	15	1		58		37	1	156	1				348	655
Lighthouse Point	623	1*	462	1268	47	724	7715	1170	30	153	427	6	928	4	2	1724	355	90	355	15460	15062
East Shore Park	14		31	43	2	19	538	48		6	25		40		48	5	6	4		815	1879
East Rock Park	4			5		2	7	2			3		1		2					22	43
Maltby Lakes	84			175	7	2	69	7			287				15	2	1	3		568	2352
Waveny Park	28			21	2	1	16	7	1		16		6		22	4	3	3		102	243
Quaker Ridge	492	7*	475	313	30	152	1434	206	2	64	1044		255	1	4	343	41	17	164	4545	9627

\* Not counted on total.

SPECIES ABBREVIATIONS

BV - Black Vulture  
 TV - Turkey Vulture  
 OS - Osprey  
 BE - Bald Eagle  
 NH - Northern Harrier

SS - Sharp-shinned Hawk  
 CH - Cooper's Hawk  
 NG - Northern Goshawk  
 RS - Red-shouldered Hawk

BW - Broad-winged Hawk  
 SW - Swainson's Hawk  
 RT - Red-tailed Hawk  
 RL - Rough-legged Hawk

GE - Golden Eagle  
 Ak - American Kestrel  
 ML - Merlin  
 PG - Peregrine Falcon  
 UR - unidentified raptor



**Table 3: Lighthouse Point, New Haven, CT - Fall 2003**

MONTH	Hrs.	SPECIES																	Total	
		BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	SW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG		UR
August	38		8	58		19	6	6			15		3			6		1	4	126
September	187		41	627	10	149	1390	136		37	47	1	18			742	122	22	108	3450
October	236		274	574	28	412	5486	928	20	26	358	3	173	2	2	942	181	54	165	9628
November	162	1*	139	9	9	144	833	100	10	90	7	2	734	2		34	52	13	78	2256
Total 2003	623	1*	462	1268	47	724	7715	1170	30	153	427	6	928	4	2	1724	355	90	355	15460
Total 2002	566		471	1418	76	413	8096	796	10	90	737	3	750	1	10	1807	332	50	202	15062
Total 2001	552		178	852	23	506	8143	707	3	87	307		503	1	1	1699	326	84	193	13613

\* Not counted in total.

**Table 4: Quaker Ridge, Greenwich, CT - Fall 2003**

MONTH	Hrs.	SPECIES																	Total	
		BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	SW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG		UR
August	40		2	12	2	3	1				26		5			2			1	54
September	183	2*	6	159	11	54	541	43	1	14	854		4			186	24	4	98	1999
October	196		404	139	17	75	816	153	1	16	164		151	1	3	154	16	12	54	2176
November	73	5*	63	3		20	76	10		34			95		1	1	1	1	11	316
Total 2003	492	7*	475	313	30	152	1434	206	2	64	1044		255	1	4	343	41	17	164	4545
Total 2002	464	4	520	585	53	159	1748	292	8	69	5222		206		5	453	46	23	234	9627
Total 2001	597	3	618	502	49	154	2460	297	14	172	4487		228		5	594	44	16	101	9744

\* Not counted in total.

## THE 2003-2004 CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Stephen P. Broker

The latest edition of the National Audubon Society-sponsored Christmas Bird Count was memorable for birders in Connecticut and adjacent regions of New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island in many respects. The occurrence of a good share of rare and noteworthy species in many count circles, the addition of one new species to the Connecticut CBC species list, and the vicissitudes of weather are included among the highlights of the 2003-2004 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count. Mention must also be made of the partial collapse of the newly reconstructed National Audubon Society BirdSource database, which has confounded the submission of count results by compilers and access to data by birders for the last four months. The transition in presentation of CBC results from the printed page (*American Birds*) to the electronic medium, without question the way to go in the long run, has become a bumpy ride in this 104<sup>th</sup> year of the world's greatest and longest running wildlife census.

Those bird species that generated the most interest on Connecticut CBCs, all occurring on coastal counts, were Barnacle Goose at New London, King Eider at Old Lyme-Saybrook, Pacific Loon at New London, Snowy Egret at Napatree, Willet at Old Lyme-Saybrook, Black-legged Kittiwake at Napatree, Razorbill at New London (1), Old Lyme-Saybrook (8), and Napatree (1), Blue-headed Vireo at Napatree, Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco at New Haven, Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Greenwich-Stamford, and – incredibly – Summer Tanager at Old Lyme-Saybrook. Blue-headed Vireo was previously seen in 1999-2000 at Oxford and 2001-2002 at New Haven. Rose-breasted Grosbeak has been seen 12 times in the last 33 years, most recently during count week in 1991-92 at Westport.

The occurrence of a Summer Tanager in Connecticut in late fall or early winter is almost without precedent. Zeranski and Baptist (*Connecticut Birds*, 1990) refer to "a unique report of one from November 29 to December 10, 1977, at a Cheshire feeder." Summer Tanager in Connecticut is "a very rare migrant from late April to early June" and is "accidental in fall from late August to mid-October." This species winters in Middle America and South America (from Mexico south through Belize, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, and portions of Bolivia and Brazil), and casually in South



Florida (AOU. *Check-List of North American Birds, Seventh Edition*). A check of BirdSource for recent years' CBC occurrences of Summer Tanager in North America indicates that individual stragglers are found in southern California, southwestern, southeastern, and central Arizona, South Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Florida, including the Florida Keys. The greenish, orange-tinged female found in an Old Lyme yard feeding on beehive bees was superbly photographed, then captured, measured and banded, and put in the care of a wildlife rehabilitator for a Spring 2004 release back into the (warmer) wild.

The list of nearctic-neotropical migrants with winter occurrences in the eastern United States that have made very rare appearances in the last three decades on a Connecticut CBC is surprisingly long, numbering some thirty species. Uniquely occurring lingering migrants of the past ten years include Purple Gallinule, Sandhill Crane, Rufous Hummingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, and MacGillivray's Warbler. Not one of these finds presents such an intriguing story as the winter appearance in Connecticut of Summer Tanager. (See Bent. 1958, 1965. *Life Histories of North American Blackbirds, Orioles, Tanagers, and Allies* for a discussion of the Hymenoptera-eating proclivities of Summer Tanager.)

Connecticut's northern counts also found some good rarities, including Greater White-fronted Goose at Hartford (also seen coastally at Stratford-Milford), Northern Bobwhite at Storrs, Merlin at Hartford, Red-throated Loon at Barkhamsted, and Black Vulture count week at Litchfield Hills. The best finds on mid-state counts were Osprey at Salmon River, Red-headed Woodpecker at Woodbury-Roxbury (Lakeville-Sharon had one, also), Brown Thrasher and Lapland Longspur (8) at Salmon River, and Baltimore Oriole (2) at Woodbury-Roxbury.

To the above-mentioned species lists, one can add sightings of Northern Gannets at Old Lyme-Saybrook (3) and Stratford-Milford (5), admittedly paling in comparison with the 714 gannets at Napatree, and also American Oystercatcher at New Haven, Black-headed Gull at New London, Lesser Black-backed Gull at two coastal counts and one northern count, Barn Owl at New Haven and Stratford-Milford (overlapping counts but different birds), Northern Shrike on four counts, Pine Warbler at Old Lyme-Saybrook, three Yellow-breasted Chats at New London and one at Napatree, and two Lincoln's Sparrows at Pawling. It was a far better than average year for rarities and uncommon species. All told, 170 count day species were observed with no additional species be-

ing found statewide during count week. Hartford led all northern counts with 94 species. Woodbury-Roxbury led mid-state counts with 89 count day plus 1 count week species. New Haven had a once-in-a-generation total of 135 count day species, third highest ever and approaching its New England record species total of 138 count day plus three count week species (1980-81).

This CBC season, the number of bird species recorded in record high numbers statewide (based on a twenty year analysis of results) were outnumbered two to one by species recorded in record low numbers. Horned Grebe, Iceland Gull, Monk Parakeet, and Common Raven were the significant species counted in record high numbers. (In addition, Turkey Vulture was at a new high in the north, and Northern Saw-whet Owl and Lapland Longspur were at new highs mid-state.) The Horned Grebe total was due to large numbers at New Haven and New London. Iceland Gull was found on two northern, one mid-state, and six coastal counts. Monk Parakeet showed an 18% increase over last year's record high count. The 102 Common Ravens counted represent a 57% increase over the 2001-02 record total. The New Haven raven (there's a good name for a sports team) was one member of a pair that successfully bred at West Rock Ridge in 2003. Ravens have now been found on coastal counts at New Haven, Old Lyme-Saybrook (three times, beginning in 1996-97), and Napatree. This majestic avian, considered the most intelligent of all birds on the planet, is increasing its breeding range fastest of all bird species in our state. Better yet, Connecticut!

Of the dozen species whose numbers fell to record low twenty year totals, American Black Duck, Ring-necked Pheasant, American Kestrel, and Eastern Meadowlark give cause for concern. Regional drops in several other species occurred mid-state, for Ruffed Grouse (missed count day and count week for the first time), Killdeer (completely missed for the first time in 23 years), Great Black-backed Gull, Rock Pigeon (a 34% decline over the previous 20 year low count), European Starling (a 31% decline), and Eastern Meadowlark (missed for the first time in at least 28 years)). Thirty years ago, 10,000 to 13,000 Black Ducks were fairly commonplace on Connecticut counts. Over the course of the last twenty years, 6,000 to 8,000 black ducks were counted statewide each year. This year, fewer than 3500 black ducks were recorded on CBCs. Inclement weather may have played a role in the low total, but the news is not good, however one looks at it. Ring-necked Pheasant may go the way of the Chukar if restocking efforts are not picked up. This is an exotic introduction that many birders feel comfortable about.



Kestrels and meadowlarks continue precipitous slides that reflect our on-going war on grasslands, meadows, and other open space. They are among the avian indicator species that speak the loudest to the realities of our land stewardship policies and practices.

The population changes of American Crow are more ambivalent. Birders have commented that major crow roosts of many years past are shrinking rapidly. Gary Palmer reported that the 2002-03 CBC count for American Crow at Greenwich-Stamford (1067 individuals) was the lowest since 1977. "This year's [221 individuals are] most likely low due to weather. So hard to compare and make a judgment on West Nile effect for this count. But, we know there was a significant die-off." Lee Schlesinger, who has served as area captain for New Haven's Area P (which includes the huge crow roost off I-95 in Orange) for many years, commented particularly on the low crow numbers of this and immediately preceding years. The news reports of dead crows in the eastern United States are being matched by at least some field observations on Christmas Bird Counts. (As *South Pacific's* Luther Billis might say of crows, "they're scarce as hens' teeth." They're bigger, too!) Yet, well away from the coast the situation is far different. Jay Kaplan wrote that "whereas some counts are reporting a decline in crow numbers, that is certainly not the case here in Hartford. A drive along I-84 in the vicinity of exits 44-45 continues to amaze travelers, with approximately 20,000 crows appearing each evening at dusk!" It should be noted that Blue Jay numbers were at a twenty year low this year, but this corvid's off year can be explained away as the result of inclement weather and difficult birding conditions, unless and until further information becomes available. Such widespread species as Mourning Dove, Black-capped Chickadee, and Northern Mockingbird also were in record low or near-record low numbers. Undoubtedly, the population biologists and epidemiologists will help clarify the extent of declines in crow numbers along coastlines and up major river valleys in the several years ahead.

According to the Northeast Regional Climate Center ([www.nrcc.cornell.edu](http://www.nrcc.cornell.edu)), the period October 2003 through January 2004 experienced dramatic monthly changes in weather. Briefly, October offered cold and wet conditions, November was warm and dry, December was warm and wet, and January was cold and dry. How boring it must be to live in a part of the world where every day and every month are the same as the previous ones. Weather is certainly an important factor in any Christmas Bird Count year, but the inclement weather occurring in our part of the country during the start of the count period, on Sunday, December 14, contributed to

substantially reduced numbers of species and individual birds counted for four of the seven counts held on that day. Temperatures ranged from 23° to 30°F on the coast to 16° to 28° in the north. Trouble was, the second major storm of winter struck on Sunday, early in the day for counts in the western part of the state and by early afternoon for counts to the east. Greenwich-Stamford recorded 99 count day and four count week species, its lowest species total since 1972. This count averages 111 species on count day and has a record high count of 119 species (1984-85). Greenwich-Stamford compiler Gary Palmer wrote, "we were severely hampered by bad weather. Snow developed shortly after dawn, and with temperatures in the 20s and strong winds peaking at 33 mph, it made birding very difficult. We were unable to have a boat party out on Long Island Sound, and not long after 8:00 A.M. visibility from the shore was greatly reduced. Roads, especially in inland areas, became very difficult to travel with six inches of snow by late afternoon, and with the winds, much drifting. Thus, some areas only received spotty coverage at best."

Litchfield Hills, Lakeville-Sharon, Oxford, and Quinnipiac Valley also were severely affected by the December 14 weather, necessitating a rare rescheduling for a later day or just plain toughing it out. Oxford's species count was its lowest in 25 years in spite of the fact that the count set 20 year record highs for total party hours and total party miles. Roy Harvey called the weather "abysmal - the count numbers were way, way, way down." Bob Moeller wrote of the Lakeville-Sharon count, "by 10:00 A.M. light snow had started northerly winds had picked up, and by 11:00 A.M. the snow had become heavy and continued the rest of the day. Most observers were home by early afternoon." Salmon River birders were far enough to the east that the developing blizzard did not shut down coverage of the count circle until the last two hours of daylight. By then, driving had become hazardous. Stratford-Milford field observers (December 27) had to deal with fairly powerful northwest winds that hampered birding severely. Steve Mayo's teams of birders "all commented about the incredible lack of birds." Edwin Way Teale-Trail Wood (January 4) also had a low species total and would welcome more field observers in future years.

Several counts fared much better with the weather. Chris Loscalzo's summary of the New Haven count drew attention to the fine weather enjoyed in the near-record tabulation of species, noted above. Jay Kaplan noted of the December 27 Hartford count that it was "when compared to the frigid weather conditions of early and mid-January [2004], a delightful experience. Temperatures reached



the low 50s under sunny skies and a light breeze. In fact, it was almost too nice, with several of the 121 field observers commenting that it was hard to locate birds as they were not concentrated in ice-free coves or sheltered thickets." Angela Dimmitt, compiler of the Connecticut portion of the Pawling, New York/Hidden Valley, Connecticut CBC, agreed that "it was almost too warm! The main oddity was there were no feeder birds."

Christmas Bird Count participants welcome the following new compilers of Connecticut CBCs: Carena Pooth for Pawling, Roy Harvey for Oxford, Joe Morin sharing duties with Dave Titus for Salmon River, and Jim Hunter for Westport. Sybill Gilbert, Tom Sharp and Buzz Devine, and Frank Mantlik previously assumed responsibilities for the Pawling, Oxford, and Westport counts for a remarkable span of time. This year's collection and analysis of CBC data were especially dependent on the reports submitted by mail or e-mail by count compilers. In that regard, Gary Palmer deserves particular recognition for the highly comprehensive and informative summaries of the Greenwich-Stamford CBC, with supporting details, that he submits in timely fashion every year. The reports received from Jay Kaplan for Hartford's CBCs are similarly detailed and helpful. There is, quite simply, no substitute for the descriptions of Christmas Bird Counts that are made by the count compilers, who know these counts best.

STEVE BROKER, 50 Hidden Place, Cheshire, CT 06410-3723  
[ls.broker@cox.net](mailto:ls.broker@cox.net)

104TH ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON SOC CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2003-2004

SPECIES	Northern Counts						Mid-state Counts					Coastal Counts						State	Coast	Grand
	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE	Total	NA	Total
Gr. Wh.-fronted Goose			1													1		2		2
Snow Goose			4		50			2	1		3		4		4		1	69		69
Canada Goose	227	722	7695	1714	7938	1257	534	1405	5263	385	3223	2098	4617	1420	573	1490	1585	42146	1204	43350
Canada Goose (small)											10							10		10
Brant												18	250	200	121	133	657	1379	36	1415
Barnacle Goose														1				1		1
Mute Swan	1	2	12	41	6		2	52	46	152	12	40	435	400	81	19	64	1365	283	1648
Wood Duck			8					2	6		3	2	7	2	1		CW	31	3	34
Gadwall			2									83	114	31	7	92	60	389		389
Eurasian Wigeon													1					1		1
American Wigeon			1						2			37	160	19	CW	153	64	436		436
American Black Duck	46	24	125	72	62	17	14	11	26	183	56	379	534	389	323	641	443	3345	421	3766
Mallard	399	307	1932	603	354	285	91	394	308	451	606	732	1570	978	445	942	391	10788	381	11169
Mallard Hybrid				6								1	19		3	9	2	40		40
Blue-winged Teal																	2	2		2
Northern Shoveler													9	3	1	4		17		17
Northern Pintail	1		7								1	1	8		4	1	4	27		27
Green-winged Teal (Amer.)			1	CW									24	3	5	12	CW	45	6	51
Canvasback												9	6	1	7	53	0	76	4	80
Redhead												1				1		2		2
Ring-necked Duck	2	50		62	111	42	11	40	CW	33	11	136	68	55	3	27	33	684		684
Greater Scaup				1	8							21	1686	20	633	208	372	2949	21	2970
Lesser Scaup		4		6				1		6	1	12	10	6	10			56		56
Scaup, sp.														13				13		13
King Eider															1			1		1
Common Eider																		0	553	553
Surf Scoter													3	153	24	5	4	189	150	339
White-winged Scoter												1	3	10	2	9	13	38	103	141
Black Scoter														27	CW			27	166	193
Scoter, sp.														50				50		50
Long-tailed Duck				CW								50	34	84	50	66	100	384	10	394

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SPECIES	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE	Total	NA	Total	
Bufflehead	2			1		5		4		9		130	105	413	60	70	157	956	547	1503	
Common Goldeneye	6	1		6	10			16		8		73	274	210	160	491	191	1446	173	1619	
Hooded Merganser	58	12	5	65	117		1	139	16	49		142	351	379	40	101	72	1557	95	1652	
Common Merganser	70	38	115	392	173	87	26	1177	38	22	25	282	38	46	28	37	0	2594	5	2599	
Red-br. Merganser								CW				189	277	659	209	624	127	2085	2232	4317	
Ruddy Duck				CW				5	16	1		20	16	3	67	3	10	141	1	142	
Duck, sp.		16																		16	16
Ring-necked Pheasant		1	2	3	7	1		1	1	1	7	CW	3		0		10	37		37	
Ruffed Grouse	6			6		CW														12	12
Wild Turkey	215	66	58	217	330	66	8	62	113	38	81	69	94	69	56	49	30	1621		1621	
Northern Bobwhite						3													3		3
Red-throated Loon	1											1	17	7	58	9			93	78	171
Pacific Loon														1					1		1
Common Loon	1											4	9	66	14	2	4	100	325	425	
Pied-billed Grebe												2	4	4	2	2	3	17		17	
Horned Grebe	4											CW	182	105			2	333	72	405	
Red-necked Grebe														2				2	2	4	
Northern Gannet														3	5			8	714	722	
D.c. Cormorant			2		1					5		3	13	55	3	1	1	84	10	94	
Great Cormorant			1						2	10		9	23	72	41	18	9	185	65	250	
Cormorant, sp.														3				3		3	
Great Blue Heron	1	1	27	CW		4	4	5	5	4	5	9	32	45	47	14	5	208	31	239	
Great Egret														1				1	CW	1	
Snowy Egret																		0	1	1	
Black-cr Night-Heron												0	5			1	2	8		8	
Black Vulture				CW			2	13		14		23		7			3	41	4	45	
Turkey Vulture			6	CW		67		13	1	22		12	19	111	5	8	30	294	43	337	

BA = Barkhamsted  
 EW = Edwin Way Teale-Trail Wood  
 HA = Hartford  
 LH = Litchfield Hills  
 LS = Lakeville-Sharon  
 ST = Storrs

OX = Oxford  
 PA = Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley  
 QV = Quinnipiac Valley  
 SR = Salmon River  
 WR = Woodbury-Roxbury

GS = Greenwich-Stamford  
 NH = New Haven  
 NL = New London  
 OL = Old Lyme-Saybrook  
 SM = Stratford-Milford  
 WE = Westport  
 NA = Napatree, RI

CW Count Period  
 0 First time not seen in 20 years  
 XX Rare Species  
 XX New 20 Year High Count  
**XX** New 20 Year Low Count (Bold)  
 XX New Species for Count

104TH ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON SOC CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2003-2004

SPECIES	Northern Counts						Mid-state Counts					Coastal Counts						State Total	Coast NA	Grand Total	
	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE				
Osprey										1								1			1
Bald Eagle	7	CW	2	4	6		1	9		7	11	1	5		5		2	60			60
Northern Harrier		CW	5			1		1	6		3		23	7	23	15	1	85	6		91
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	2	18	2		2	1	6	4	4	7	3	25	12	9	7	2	107	10		117
Cooper's Hawk	8	2	17	4	3	2	1	7	2	3	4	5	15	5	10	2	5	95	6		101
Northern Goshawk					1			2							1		1	5			5
Accipiter, sp.		2				1												3			3
Red-shouldered Hawk	CW	4	1			6	2	3	1	5	6		12	8	12	1	2	65	4		69
Red-tailed Hawk	30	19	210	17	20	15	11	100	33	16	109	27	102	19	26	21	19	794	22		816
Rough-legged Hawk			1	CW						1	1		1		1	3	1	9			9
American Kestrel			1	1	1	1			1	0			2		1	0		9	CW		9
Merlin								1					2	2	2		1	10	1		11
Peregrine Falcon			2										2	CW			1	5			5
Clapper Rail													3		1	CW		4			4
Virginia Rail													3	2	2			7	1		8
American Coot				19	1			1					2	26		1	13	63	2		65
Black-bellied Plover												4	8	14	12		2	40	5		45
Killdeer												5	7	2	2	CW	6	22	3		25
American Oystercatcher													1					1			1
Greater Yellowlegs													3			1	1	5			5
Willet															1			1			1
Ruddy Turnstone												33	15	45	13		30	136			136
Sanderling													125		115	69	170	482	28		510
Purple Sandpiper												4	58	30	34		18	144	22		166
Dunlin													10	24	243	0	219	496	81		577
Wilson's Snipe		4						1					3	1		1	2	12			12
American Woodcock										2			1	1	1		1	6			6
Black-headed Gull														1	1			1			1
Bonaparte's Gull													4	53	19	1	26	103	405		508
Ring-billed Gull	1555	254	1142	370	69	115	171	1175	342	118	1344	1112	3903	788	4	2196	480	15138	418		15556
Herring Gull	28	62	1454	29	52	67	41	69	14	25	749	566	1230	5900	1125	2673	1158	15242	3024		18266
Iceland Gull			2			1					1		2	3	3	CW	13	13	1		14

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SPECIES	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE	Total	NA	Total
Lesser Bl.-backed Gull				1								1		1				3		3
Glaucous Gull			1	CW	1													2		2
Great Bl.-backed Gull	6	4	408	5	CW	4	1	7	1	10	49	55	130	478	62	328	81	1629	655	2284
Black-legged Kittiwake																		0	2	2
Gull, sp.		3				6	15											24		24
Razorbill														1	8			9	1	10
Rock Pigeon	200	107	1543	298	513	142	134	263	55	156	152	251	2243	676	262	922	232	8149	184	8333
Mourning Dove	268	343	947	308	111	209	88	353	237	136	573	344	559	605	360	250	141	5832	235	6067
Monk Parakeet												48	625		8	388	5	1074		1074
Barn Owl													1			1		2		2
Eastern Screech-Owl	6		17	17	3	5	7	24	38	7	28	31	20	1	10	0	13	227		227
Great Horned Owl	6	3	10	8	10	8	3	3	9	10	24	8	11	1	14		8	136	4	140
Barred Owl	7	1	3	4	1	1	5	2	3	2	3	2	1	3	2		6	46	3	49
Long-eared Owl		CW		1					1		CW	3	1		1	1		8	1	9
Short-eared Owl													1					1		1
North. Saw-whet Owl	5		3	9		2	1	5		1	10	1		8	2			47	7	54
Belted Kingfisher	3	5	25	2	2	3	1	5	6	6	8	5	19	28	20	5	5	148	8	156
Red-hdd. Woodpecker					1						1							2		2
Red-bld. Woodpecker	50	52	117	40	21	44	24	94	45	57	131	91	76	44	71	12	25	994	10	1004
Yellow-bld. Sapsucker	4		5	5	CW	1	2	6	4	6	7	3	9	2	4		2	60	2	62
Downy Woodpecker	137	63	257	154	35	124	42	180	63	102	210	127	166	85	104	28	52	1929	30	1959
Hairy Woodpecker	38	17	52	31	11	16	9	24	7	5	33	34	16	5	12	4	9	323	2	325
Northern Flicker	11	51	95	5	4	19	16	25	35	42	49	14	69	51	21	13	7	527	35	562
Pileated Woodpecker	17		4	3	6	2		10	2	6	8	2	3		3		2	68		68
Eastern Phoebe													1	1				2		2
Northern Shrike	1				1		1						1					4		4
Blue-headed Vireo																		0	1	1

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NA = Napatree, RI

CW = Count Period

0 = First time not seen in 20 years

XX = Rare Species

XX = New 20 Year High Count

XX = New 20 Year Low Count (Bold)

XX = New Species for Count

104TH ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON SOC CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2003-2004

SPECIES	Northern Counts						Mid-state Counts					Coastal Counts						State Total	Coast NA	Grand Total
	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE			
Blue Jay	474	423	785	326	168	467	204	422	176	398	871	213	354	336	290	32	71	6010	52	6062
American Crow	518	170	####	1332	801	244	406	1114	229	249	4410	221	2642	247	373	195	645	33796	38	33834
Fish Crow			12				2	1				5	5	76	CW	30	6	137	2	139
Common Raven	31	1		32	2		1	29						1				162		102
Horned Lark		100	176	35	396	54				20	626	CW	129	41	13	137	124	1845	82	1927
Black-cpd. Chickadee	906	395	748	902	239	497	120	964	218	432	923	215	338	571	524	89	105	8186	209	8395
Tufted Titmouse	325	174	476	357	148	231	97	630	143	291	557	294	229	235	767	86	108	5148	59	5207
Red-br. Nuthatch	57	22	53	44	7		4	10	12	8	1	23	85	1	8	7	8	350	8	358
White-br. Nuthatch	155	125	185	195	50	157	27	231	47	117	257	118	69	68	70	18	35	1924	23	1947
Brown Creeper	14	10	24	17	1	6	6	6	4	5	7	10	17	6	2	2	2	139	3	142
Carolina Wren	15	23	82	8	2	12	13	36	26	38	43	39	84	150	128	18	20	737	78	815
House Wren														2				2		2
Winter Wren	1	1	5	1		3	1	3	1	3	7	5	7	5	6	4		53	3	56
Marsh Wren													2		2			4	4	8
Golden-crown' Kinglet	125	88	53	87	49	49	11	75	21	68	68	44	45	86	24	15	22	927	26	953
Ruby-crowned Kinglet			12	1	1	6		1	1	2	1	CW	2	8			1	36	3	39
Eastern Bluebird	68	76	63	48	44	133	29	208	27	79	290	24	26	88	178	2	18	1401	29	1430
Hermit Thrush	3	1	9	6	5	9	8	9	4	13	30	10	21	44	18	4	2	196	15	211
American Robin	259	121	285	89	429	76	59	171	525	225	771	94	450	328	379	42	24	4327	274	4601
Gray Catbird			5	2		3		1	4	2	6	9	23	60	11	2	2	130	28	158
Northern Mockingbird	18	27	202	5	1	28	23	49	32	13	62	38	150	178	71	44	14	955	91	1046
Brown Thrasher			1							1			1	9	2		2	16	3	19
European Starling	892	1260	####	1692	1088	1530	177	823	1256	505	2731	848	6918	3319	249	1993	417	65698	1368	67066
American Pipit			6					12	5	2	1	9	29		3		8	75	7	82
Cedar Waxwing	589	28	26	160	295	39	154	183	29	25	285	86	38	154	113	1	30	2235	53	2288
Yellow-rmpd. Warbler			7				1	3	13	2	21	9	16	84	40	2	5	203	184	387
Pine Warbler																	1	1		1
Palm Warbler																		0	1	1
Common Yellowthroat														1			CW	1		1
Yellow-breasted Chat														3				3	1	4
Summer Tanager															1			1		1
Eastern Towhee	2		3					CW	2	4	1	6	7	26	6	2	3	62	19	81

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SPECIES	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE	Total	NA	Total	
Amer. Tree Sparrow	134	63	405	548	169	114	40	154	287	112	399	20	498	213	309	139	61	3665	246	3911	
Chipping Sparrow				1							1		7		3			12	1	13	
Field Sparrow		1	18			8	6	3	16	41	12	4	27	55	12	1	0	204	25	229	
Vesper Sparrow													1					1		1	
Savannah Sparrow			23		1	2			3		8		41	3	27	7	6	121	4	125	
'Ipswich' Sparrow																2		2	1	3	
Saltm. Shp-tailed Sparrow															2			2		2	
Sharp-tailed Sparrow, sp.																		0		1	
Fox Sparrow	2	CW	7	7	1	2	1		2	17	6	27	16	28	16	1	9	142	21	163	
Song Sparrow	48	28	295	46	14	56	94	63	150	93	193	136	452	401	208	78	102	2457	210	2667	
Lincoln's Sparrow								2										2		2	
Swamp Sparrow	2	2	13	2		3	1	1	4	4	19	2	31	11	5	2	34	136	8	144	
White-thr. Sparrow	133	193	712	272	111	303	300	410	428	416	704	532	734	750	518	121	154	6791	491	7282	
White-crn. Sparrow			4		1				8		10		5		1		5	34		34	
Dark-eyed Junco	1605	677	1564	1578	375	920	515	787	393	777	1315	919	491	396	363		90	439	13204	353	13557
'Oregon' Junco													1					1		1	
Lapland Longspur			2		2					8			2	2		CW	2	18		18	
Snow Bunting			2								61		3	6		13	163	248	65	313	
Northern Cardinal	197	118	377	261	44	209	96	197	103	178	318	231	277	369	253	76	122	3426	176	3602	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak												1						1		1	
Red-winged Blackbird			3050	40	448	7	2		181	11	231	5	1213	270	161	7	6	5632	15	5647	
Eastern Meadowlark						1			0			1	2	8	6			18	3	21	
Rusty Blackbird			1			8				1	3	3	16	4				36		36	
Common Grackle		8	702	41	20	65	1		10	29	1555	5	423	33	10	23	1	2926	1	2927	
Brown-hdd. Cowbird	1	80	41	233	474	12			84	72	80	1	780	11	1		2	1872		1872	
Baltimore Oriole											2		1	1				4		4	
Purple Finch	15		3	20	7	6		35	36	14	60	17	14	1	31	2	9	270	16	286	

BA = Barkhamsted  
 EW = Edwin Way Teale-Trail Wood  
 HA = Hartford  
 LH = Litchfield Hills  
 LS = Lakeville-Sharon  
 ST = Storrs

OX = Oxford  
 PA = Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley  
 QV = Quinnipiac Valley  
 SR = Salmon River  
 WR = Woodbury-Roxbury  
 GS = Greenwich-Stamford  
 NH = New Haven  
 NL = New London  
 OL = Old Lyme-Saybrook  
 SM = Stratford-Milford  
 WE = Westport  
 NA = Napatree, RI

CW Count Period  
 0 First time not seen in 20 years  
 XX Rare Species  
 XX New 20 Year High Count  
 XX New 20 Year Low Count (Bold)  
 XX New Species for Count

104TH ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON SOC CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2003-2004

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BROKER

SPECIES	Northern Counts						Mid-state Counts					Coastal Counts						State	Coast	Grand
	BA	EW	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	QV	SR	WR	GS	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE	Total	NA	Total
House Finch	63	98	662	179	54	145	45	381	124	146	464	202	334	457	115	119	63	3651	107	3758
Common Redpoll	24		14	CW	17	4				1	34	3			2	1		100		100
Pine Siskin	71	1	3	9	12	8	6	23	3	4	11	2	20	8	4		7	192		192
American Goldfinch	798	172	1025	476	187	243	241	618	177	345	604	195	499	198	130	134	108	6150	125	6275
Evening Grosbeak				3							1							4		4
House Sparrow	490	269	1504	361	68	302	109	549	165	337	611	338	1249	1746	566	528	166	9358	335	9693

TOTALS

Individuals	11483	6996	89993	13947	15771	8595	4070	13923	11721	7173	26283	12313	39446	26073	11765	16336	10330	326198	17823	344023
CD Species	68	61	94	77	71	72	51	80	76	81	89	99	135	121	122	100	109	166	110	170
CW Species	1	5	0	9	2	2	0	2	2	0	1	4	0	2	2	3	4	0	2	0
Field Observers	35	9	121	44	21	23	15	28	12	40	36	61	63	34	52	24	37	655	18	673
Feeder Watchers	10	0	0	17	5	3	3	14	0	6	3	20	0	0	0	1	17	99	1	100
Total Observers	45	9	121	61	26	26	18	42	12	46	39	81	63	34	52	25	54	754	19	773
Party Hours	95.5	55.3	259	95.8	51	57.3	89.8	135	41.5	81	149	199	160	122	58	74	52	1775	75.3	1850
Party Miles	594	359	819	468	288	496	554	759	227	391	714	529	583	503	?	329	200	7811	341	8152

Northern Counts

- BA = Barkhamsted
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- HA = Hartford
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- ST = Storrs

Mid-State Counts

- OX = Oxford
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- QV = Quinnipiac Valley
- SR = Salmon River
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- GS = Greenwich-Stamford
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- SM = Stratford-Milford
- WE = Westport
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Legend

- CW Count Period
- 0 First time not seen in 20 years
- XX Rare Species
- XX New 20 Year High Count
- XX New 20 Year Low Count (Bold)
- XX New Species for Count



## BUTEO PREYS UPON ACCIPITER OR HAWK EATS HAWK

Jay Kaplan

In the first days of the New Year (2004), Betty Hudson, a Simsbury resident who maintains a backyard bird feeding station, walked into my office holding a plastic bag. The bag held the remains of a Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) that she had retrieved from the wooden deck that serves as a screened in porch in summer and as a bird-feeding station in winter. Miss Hudson reported that the small hawk had flown into the yard, presumably after the songbirds that frequent her feeders. Almost immediately, the "Sharpie" was attacked, killed, and partially consumed by a larger hawk. Miss Hudson initially reported that the larger bird looked much like the Sharp-shin, and I assumed that the predator was a Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*). Both hawks prey on smaller birds, and while instances of a Cooper's Hawk preying upon a Sharp-shin are not well documented, A. C. Bent does list "smaller hawks" as one of many avian prey items for this larger accipiter. The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds mentions that the Cooper's Hawk "does not tolerate the smaller, similar and competitive Sharp-shinned Hawk within the same woodland." Prior to leaving, Miss Hudson told me that she had photographed this event and that she would send me some photos after she had them developed.

I have not had personal experience with this type of predatory behavior in hawks. In fact, I have put hawks of varying sizes together in the same flight cage. I have placed Cooper's and Broad-winged Hawks with Red-tailed Hawks for extended periods of time in a large, outdoor flight cage without observing overt signs of interspecific aggression. I have even placed American Kestrels with Red-tails without problems. Of course, these were captive situations where food was provided daily, but even in the wild, I have never observed large hawks preying upon smaller species.

The same cannot be said for owls. Large owls are known to prey on smaller owls in the wild. I have personally observed a Barred Owl attempt to take a Northern Saw-whet Owl that was released into the wild after recovering from an injury. The Saw-whet immediately dropped to the ground as the larger owl soared over it. I suspect that if not for people in the area, the Barred Owl would not have given up so quickly and flown off. I am also familiar with at

least one instance of a Great Horned Owl feeding on a Barred Owl that it presumably caught in Bloomfield's Penwood State Park.

On 20 January 2004, I received a letter containing two photographs of a headless and partially eaten Sharp-shinned Hawk and three photos of a larger raptor. Although the photos were taken through a window and were not sharp, it was quite evident that the predator was not a Cooper's Hawk. Rather, the bird appeared to be a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)! This species is not known as a predator of other birds. In fact, Bent described this species as "one of our most beneficial and least harmful hawks." Bent provided numerous references on the diet of this species, including one study that included 65% small rodents and only 2% poultry. Nevertheless, Bent also provided an extensive list of birds taken by Red-shouldered Hawks including "Sora, pheasant, bobwhite, chickens, mourning dove, woodcock, screech owl, sparrow hawk, flicker, crow," and numerous smaller songbirds.

I suspect that if American Kestrel made the list, Sharp-shinned Hawk is not out of the question.



Photo taken in January, 2004 in Simsbury, Conn. by Betty Hudson



How common is this behavior in Red-shouldered Hawks? A neighbor told me of a Red-shouldered Hawk that spent almost three hours in his backyard on 9 February 2004 (P. Dal Negro, pers. Comm.). Smaller birds were aware of the hawk's presence, but continued to make brief, albeit nervous forays to the bird feeder nearby. The hawk ignored the songbirds, focusing its attention on meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) of which it caught and consumed several during the time observed.

The winter of 2003-2004 was a harsh one. Multiple snowstorms and a brutally cold January undoubtedly made it difficult for certain raptor species like Red-shouldered Hawks to find the small rodents that, in most years, provide the bulk of their winter diet. Faced with a waning food supply as winter progresses, these hawks are faced with a choice of migrating to more productive locales or altering their prey choices. How an individual bird makes this "decision" provides opportunity for a most interesting research study and beyond the scope of this brief article.

The encounters discussed here offer several points worthy of comment. Perhaps first and foremost is that "backyard birders" can and do make unusual and interesting observations from the comfort of their homes. More seasoned birders and educators should encourage backyard birders to provide detailed information when they witness interactions of this nature. Also, it is always helpful to have a camera within reach. It should be noted that numerous backyard birders become upset when predatory hawks "invade" their yards in search of food during the winter months. It can be difficult to convince some bird feeding enthusiasts that these predators hold an important place in the web of life and should not be chased off or otherwise harassed. As always, a little knowledge can be a valuable tool when attempting to explain the interactions that take place within the world of nature.

The event described here took place in Simsbury near the Farmington River on 27 December 2003. The photographs as well as the remains of the Sharp-shinned Hawk are available for inspection at Roaring Brook Nature Center, Canton, Connecticut.

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 Terres, John K. (editor) The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American Birds. 1982.

JAY KAPLAN, 71 Gracey Rd., Canton, CT 06019



## CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

FALL, AUGUST 1 THROUGH NOVEMBER 30, 2003

*Greg Hamisek*

The passage of Hurricane Isabel in mid-September proved largely uneventful, but the season produced plenty of other highlights. The volume of observer reports helped bring into focus an especially good season for shorebirds and sparrows. In both cases, no stunning rarities were found, but a number of the less-common species were seen in good numbers and overall variety was high. Swainson's Hawks appeared in unprecedented numbers, and another significant flight of Cave Swallows established the Connecticut coast as a prime (and predictable) spot to see this species as a vagrant. Toss in several wandering White Pelicans, signs of a winter finch flight and the state's second-ever report of Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and you get the picture. It was an enjoyable fall for birders.

### GEESE THROUGH GREBES

Five Greater White-fronted Geese for the season continued an upward trend. The reports came from Salisbury October 19 (NH), East Windsor October 21 (MO), Morris October 28 (EAd), Storrs November 12 (KD), and Batterson Pond in New Britain November 13 (PCi). Migrant Snow Geese were widely reported on October 4, with 150+ over Lighthouse Point in New Haven (DSo et al.) and 96 over Bantam Lake in Litchfield (DRo); a report of 160 came from Peak Mountain in East Granby November 8 (JWo). A Ross's Goose was present Sept. 22-27 in Milford (NH et al.). This adult occurred with Canada Geese at a date before the first heavy

movements of migrant geese had begun. Origin questions probably will be considered by ARCC. Connecticut so far lacks an accepted record for the species. Single Brant were inland October 8 in Bloomfield (JMe) and October 26-31 in East Windsor (TW, JWo); 13 passed over the Peak Mountain October 10 (JWo), but all these were topped by 20 on a small pond in Torrington on November 5 (PCa). A flock of 40 Tundra Swans was seen and heard over Meriden November 8 while the observers were watching a lunar eclipse through a telescope (PCo, TL).

Two Eurasian Wigeon were at Konold's Pond in Woodbridge October 27 (CWe).



A containment pond on the Naugatuck River in Harwinton held five Blue-winged Teal, presumably early season migrants, on August 6 (DRo). A group of 10 on August 25 at Little Pond in Litchfield were at a potential breeding site (DRo et al.), as were two at the Access Road marsh in Stratford the same day (FM). The latter site also held a single Green-winged Teal, a species that has bred there in the recent past (FM). A duck that appeared to be a Mallard x Green-winged Teal hybrid was at Bantam Lake October 26 (FM). In a slow season for Northern Shovelers, singles were in Litchfield October 11-18 (DRo et al.) and Westport October 24 (FM), and up to three were at a pond in Goshen on November 19-28 (DRo, BDe). Two Northern Pintails making a brief stop August 24 at Little Pond were probably indicative of the typically early arrival of the fall's first dabbling ducks (BDe). An unseasonable Lesser Scaup appeared August 8 on the Housatonic River in Milford and remained for at least a week (NH); Bantam Lake held a good flock of 36 on November 7 (DRo et al.). A female Redhead was at Bantam Lake November 22 (DRo et al.).

The season's only Common Eider was a first-year male November 2 at Long Beach, Stratford (PDu). A female King Eider set up winter quarters at

Hammonasset Beach State Park (hereafter HBSP) in Madison for the third straight year, beginning Nov. 23 (GN, BN). Seaducks were widely reported inland. Bantam Lake held up to six Surf Scoters October 14-24 (DRo et al.), joined by one White-winged Scoter October 21 (DPe). A drake White-winged Scoter proved unexpected August 6-11 at Short Beach in Stratford (FM), and four were on Cemetery Pond in Litchfield November 5 (CWe, PA). Three Black Scoters were inland on both October 24 and November 6 at Batterson Pond in New Britain (PCi), and three were on Barkhamsted Reservoir November 2 (DRo). Up to five Long-tailed Ducks made an inland appearance October 27-31 at Bantam Lake and nearby Cemetery Pond in Litchfield (DRo, BDe); one was on a reservoir in Middlefield October 31 (ML, FL); five were present at Bantam Lake again on November 7 (DRo et al.); and one was on Roseland Lake in Putnam November 15 (MO). The season's only Barrow's Goldeneye was a drake Nov. 28 in Stratford (RH). Up to two Red-breasted Mergansers were inland October 23-25 at Bantam Lake (DRo, JE), with one present November 9 (DRo et al.). Ruddy Duck numbers peaked at c. 100 November 22 at Bantam Lake (DRo et al.).

The only inland report of Red-throated Loon came from

Bantam Lake on November 15 (PCa et al.). The first migrant Common Loon appeared September 9 at Bantam Lake (EY). An observer who had been watching a pair of Pied-billed Grebes since July at a wetland in Northfield finally confirmed the presence of two young on August 30 (BDe). A staging group of Pied-billed Grebes at Bantam Lake peaked at 21 on October 23 (DRo, JE). Single Red-necked Grebes were at Batterson Pond in Farmington October 15 (PCi) and on Bantam Lake November 7-21 (BDe), with two at Bantam November 22 (fide DRo).

#### STORM-PETRELS THROUGH AVOCET

**Wilson's Storm-Petrels** continued their recent incursions into Long Island Sound, a rare occurrence as recently as the mid-1990s. On August 4 a New London-Orient Point, N.Y. ferry crossing produced at least 120, significantly more than the observer had seen on any of his frequent crossings since 1996 (SMi). Most were in New York waters, but they were present in Connecticut waters as well. **American White Pelicans** offered both excitement and intrigue. First, three were seen on November 1 from several vantage points around Milford Point (SSp et al.), with two reported the next day circling over Westbrook (AN, BN). On November 3, two turned up in

Guilford (RS), and then a short time later what were presumably the same two birds flew west past Lighthouse Point in New Haven, crossing the harbor to West Haven and out of sight (GH, SSa). It was unclear whether the November 2-3 sightings involve two or four birds; it is also unclear whether any of the November 1 birds were involved in the later sightings. The earliest report of Great Cormorant was two immatures September 28 at Lake Watrouse in Woodbridge (FM, LM).

In keeping with recent positive trends, observers reported at least 15 American Bitterns spanning all four months of the season (m.ob.). The best count of Little Blue Herons was six on August 19 at Plum Bank Marsh in Old Saybrook (AO, JO). A staging group of 30 Black-crowned Night Herons provided a good late count October 1 at Stratford Great Meadows (FM); singles were inland August 11 in Southbury (RN) and August 23 in Woodbury (RN). A late Plegadis ibis, presumably a Glossy Ibis, flew by November 8 at HBSP (RH).

A Broad-winged Hawk made a late appearance November 17 at Lighthouse Point (GH). **Swainson's Hawks** occurred in numbers never before approached in the state: Lighthouse Point reported singles September 30, Oct 11 (BB et al.)



and Oct. 13 (SMY et al.), with two there November 18 (LJ et al.). Elsewhere singles were reported October 7 in Milford (NH) and November 8 in Southbury (MSz).

Clapper Rails had a late brood of two downy chicks August 31 in Stratford (RN). An American Coot of the large-shielded variant was at Bantam Lake in Litchfield Nov. 22 (RP). The season's only **Common Moorhen** lingered October 11-22 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (RBe, DTr et al.). **Sandhill Crane**, another increasing species, produced three reports: one August 13 in Clinton (CEI et al.), one flying over HBSP September 3 (CR, SR) and two in a corn field in Windham November 4 (BP).

An excellent flight of American Golden Plovers produced nearly 50 reports ranging from August 19 at Sandy Point in West Haven (JHo) to November 7 at Sikorsky Airport in Stratford (CWe); none of the reports involved more than five individuals and birds were scattered both inland and along the coast (m.ob.). American Oystercatchers have been on the increase, but 10 on September 14 at Griswold Point still represented a good concentration (SK). An **American Avocet**, increasing as a vagrant in recent years, was present September 7-20 in Old Lyme (CN, JN et al.).

## SANDPIPERS THROUGH PHALAROPES

Two Willets, among the least likely of the shorebirds to show up inland, were a good find at West Hartford Reservoir No. 6 on September 16 (DM). Another, showing characteristics of the western race, appeared on the late date of November 16 at Griswold Point in Old Lyme, remaining through the end of the season and beyond (TH et al.). The only reports of migrant Upland Sandpipers were a single August 10 at HBSP (PCi) and two on August 25 at Audubon Center in Greenwich (TBa). The best count of Whimbrel was three on August 1 at Sandy Point in West Haven (JHo). Of special interest was a **Whimbrel of the white-rumped Eurasian race** September 21 at Griswold Point (DPr, DSo et al.). A good season for Hudsonian Godwits brought the following reports: two on September 8 at Sandy Point (JHo); singles September 20 at both Sandy Point (JHo) and Griswold Point (JO); and up to two November 4-5 at Sikorsky Airport in Stratford (CB, TA, JMh). The only Marbled Godwits were singles September 13 at East River WMA in Guilford (PF) and September 20 from Milford Point (CB). The highest count of Red Knot was an alarmingly low four on August 30 at Milford Point (CB).

Sandy Point held 1,600

Semipalmated Sandpipers August 4-5 (JHo). A good flight of Western Sandpipers, always scarce in the state, produced an excellent high count of 12 on August 2-8 at pools on Access Road in Stratford (CB), as well as seven on August 31 at Milford Point (HG, TH) and many reports of singles. The best inland count of Least Sandpipers was 20 on August 12 at a drained pond at Hubbard Park in Meriden (PCo). White-rumped Sandpipers staged an excellent movement: highlights included two inland on August 31 at Bloomfield (SF) and high counts of 34 on at HBSP (HG, TH) and 24 at Sandy Point (JHo), both on September 2. Baird's Sandpiper reports included two on August 23 at the coastal grasslands site in Stratford (CB, TK et al.), and two each on August 24 at Sandy Point (DSo et al.) and Milford Point (DSo et al.); a single was still at the grasslands site August 28 (CB), another was at Greenwich Point August 27 (MSa) and one remained at Sandy Point August 31 (RN). The highest of numerous inland Pectoral Sandpiper reports was eight on September 21 at Great Pond in Simsbury (PCi).

Two Dunlin were inland November 16 in a rainpool on Wethersfield Meadows (SK). The high count of Stilt Sandpipers was three on September 19 at Sandy Point (JHo); two were at

Sandy Point August 3 (JHo); the Access Road pools held two on August 6 (CB); and two were at Stratford Great Meadows August 13 (FM). A Buff-breasted Sandpiper was at Sandy Point on August 30 (PCi), up to two were at HBSP September 2-4 (CR, SR et al.), one was in Old Lyme September 3 (TH) and two were at Sandy Point September 8 (JHo). A basic-plumaged male Ruff was an excellent find September 6 at Milford Point (JBa). A Short-billed Dowitcher of the midwestern *hendersonii* race appeared August 4 at Sandy Point (JHo). Two Wilson's Phalaropes for the season were found August 31 in Guilford (EO) and October 3 at HBSP (BK, GN). Most recent reports of Red-necked Phalarope have come from small ponds well inland, but this fall two juveniles were in Long Island Sound off Westport August 26 (NB), and a single juvenile was at Milford Point August 31 (NB et al.).

## JAEGERS THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

Following the passage of Hurricane Isabel, a Parasitic Jaeger flew by Stratford Point September 19 (NB et al.). The first migrant Bonaparte's Gull appeared August 24 at Stratford Point (FM, LM). The season's first report of Lesser Black-backed Gull came from Holly



Pond in Stamford on September 16 (PDU). Large terns were scarce, with the only reports apparently tied to Isabel. A Caspian Tern was seen September 20 from Cockenoe Island off Westport (NB), and the only Royal Tern report involved a single September 19 off Shippan Point, Stamford (PDU). Roseate Terns were widely reported in August and September, with a high count of 10+ on September 4 at Sandy Point (JHo, SHa). A very late Common Tern occurred November 15-16 in Westport (FM). The high count of Forster's Terns was c. 50 on October 11-12 in at Harvey's Beach in Old Saybrook (JO, JMe). It was an excellent season for Black Terns with about 15 reports. Of special note was an inland bird August 6 at Woodridge Lake in Goshen (KF); the high count was three August 30-September 4 at Sandy Point (JBa, JHo, SHa), with a few other counts of three there later in September. Three also were noted in New Haven harbor on September 21 (DB). The Black Skimmer colony at Sandy Point held 15 birds, including two juveniles, on August 27 (FM); on August 28 an observer detected six young — two fledglings and four chicks in the nesting area (DSO). Two newly hatched chicks were present on the late date of September 26 (JHo) and were still being fed by adults on October

13 (PDe).

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was on the late side October 9 in Southbury (PCo). There were two Barn Owl reports: an apparent migrant October 6 in Woodbridge (RBe) and one throughout season in Milford (fide DSO). A typical flight of Northern Saw-whet Owls brought five to HBSP on November 9 (SK). Common Nighthawks staged a major movement, with almost daily double-figure counts reported across the state beginning in mid-August; the volume picked up with counts of 100 on August 30 at Cornwall Bridge (DSm) and August 31 in Unionville (JK); 110 on September 5 in Broad Brook (JWo); c. 400 on September 7 in Windsor (JWo, TW); c. 115 in the same location September 14 (JWo, TW); and c. 160 September 16 at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich (MSa). A heavy movement of Chimney Swifts September 2 deposited 1,000+ along the Naugatuck River from Waterbury to Seymour (BDe). An adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** visited a feeder in North Branford in November and was banded (fide JZ, MSz), continuing a recent string of fall appearances.

The first of six Olive-sided Flycatchers for the season was reported August 24 at Bluff Point in Groton (GW et al.); two were at Lighthouse Point September 10 (LJ, RM). The only re-

ports of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, an easily overlooked species, came from Woodbury on August 23 (fide RN), Lighthouse Point on August 31 (PDe) and Bluff Point in Groton on September 17 (FN). A big October 1 flight at Bluff produced 50+ Eastern Phoebes (DPr et al.). An unusually long-staying **Western Kingbird** was in Westport from Nov. 10 to the end of the period and beyond (JMH, et al.). A major flight of Eastern Kingbirds produced a tally of 260 on August 24 at Lighthouse Point (SMY). The bird of the season was the state's second record for **Fork-tailed Flycatcher**, an adult seen August 12 only in Stonington (GW et al.).

The two Northern Shrikes for the season were in Simsbury November 24 (FZ) and in East Granby November 27 (PDe). The season's array of observers detected 20+ Philadelphia Vireos. A Red-eyed Vireo was late October 20 at White Memorial in Litchfield (DRo). Few take the time to estimate any of the state's impressive staging flocks of Tree Swallows, so it was good to get a tally of 300,000 from Goose Island in the lower Connecticut River (FM). An extraordinarily late Northern Rough-winged Swallow was carefully studied November 2 in East Haven (PDe et al.). **Cave Swallows** staged another November flight that was easily detected by observers along the

coast. The first reports occurred November 8 with at least eight at Lighthouse Point (DSO et al.), four in East Haven (NP) and one at HBSP (JC). The movement continued the next day with c. 12 at Lighthouse (DSO et al.), five at HBSP (GH et al.), and two in Westport (JHu). Stragglers included singles at Lighthouse November 15 (DSO) and November 25 (GH), plus two in Bridgeport November 26 (DV). The latest Barn Swallow report was October 23 at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford (TH).

A moderate flight of Red-breasted Nuthatches began with one reported August 24 at Maltby Lakes in West Haven (NB). A major passerine flight October 1 at Bluff Point produced counts of 250+ Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 100+ Golden-crowned Kinglets, 50+ Swainson's Thrushes and two Gray-cheeked (type) Thrushes (DPr et al.). The season's "gray-cheeks" were tightly spaced with reports of singles on September 29 at HBSP (JC) and October 1 at Sheffield Island off Norwalk (FM et al.), followed by two on October 7 at Bluff Point (DPr). Additional flights of 50+ Swainson's Thrushes were at Bluff Point October 6 and 7 (DPr, DSO et al.).

## WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Significant warbler flights at



Bluff Point included 1,000 of 24 species September 21; 1,000+ of 17 species September 24, when 17 species also were recorded in West Hartford; 1,500 of 21 species September 30; the big October 1 flight of 8,000+ warblers of 13 species (90% Yellow-rumped Warblers); and 2,000 of 17 species on October 6 (DPr, DSo et al.). A Brewster's Warbler visited a yard in Harwinton August 17 (PCa). At least 10 Orange-crowned Warblers were reported for the season, beginning with a very early one September 6 at White Memorial in Litchfield (KF). A very sparse flight of Cape May Warblers included one September 4 in Suffield (PDe). A Black-throated Blue Warbler was late November 2 in Storrs (AB). A late Prairie Warbler showed itself nicely November 9 at HBSP (GH et al.). Bay-breasted Warblers were noted September 4 in Suffield (PDe) and September 5 at Bluff Point (DPr). The earliest of a half-dozen Mourning Warblers appeared August 16 at West Hartford Reservoir (PCi); two were in Suffield September 9 (PDe). Connecticut Warblers were reported September 7 from Westport Nature Center (TD) and September 21 & 30 from Bluff Point (DPr, DSo et al.). A Common Yellowthroat was still at Milford Point November 8 (CWs). An excellent season for Yellow-breasted Chats produced 10 reports, including the

first of the season in a Hamden yard August 28 (CZ, JZ) and three in the period September 24-26 (MSa, FN, BZ); the latest was November 1 at HBSP (CA, LG).

The October 1 flight at Bluff Point included 40+ Scarlet Tanagers (DPr et al.) and a late individual appeared November 13 in Storrs (SMo). A good season for Clay-colored Sparrows produced reports September 5 at Northwest Park in Windsor (PDe), October 6 in Bloomfield (SF), October 11 at Glastonbury meadows (ADa), October 19 in Old Greenwich (MSa) and October 29 in Manchester (TA). An excellent flight of Vesper Sparrows generated more than 20 reports, including three on October 24-30 at Silver Sands State Park in Milford (ES, SSp). The first reports of the late-migrating Nelson's (Acadian) Sharp-tailed Sparrows were two on October 14 at Long Beach in Stratford (CB). The first of many Lincoln's Sparrow reports was right on time September 18 in New Canaan (FG). The October 1 flight at Bluff Point included 5,000+ sparrows, mostly White-throated Sparrows (DPr).

The season's only Blue Grosbeak was in Bloomfield September 16 (SF). It was a good season for Dickcissels with c. 15 reported from all parts of the state, not counting the regular fly-overs noted at the Lighthouse Point hawk watch in New

Haven. The earliest were September 9 at Lighthouse (GH) and September 12 in Rocky Hill meadows (PCi). A very late Bobolink visited Sandy Point on November 16 (PDe). A nice flock of 16 Eastern Meadowlarks turned up near Griswold Point on October 19 (TH); 13 were at Lighthouse Point October 17 (RA et al.). A state record of 17 Boat-tailed Grackles was on lawns at the entrance to Sikorsky Airport in Stratford September 15 (FM). This likely represents family groups from New England's only breeding location, in the adjacent Lordship marshes. A late Baltimore Oriole was at Westport November 6 (FM).

Purple Finches staged a major flight as evidence by counts such as 500 on October 18 (JHo) and 250 on October 19 (SMY et al.) at Lighthouse Point. The season's only crossbill report was of a Red Crossbill November 10 at HBSP (PA, CWe). The first Common Redpolls of a light fall movement were reported from Lighthouse Point October 22 (MMo), signaling a good winter arrival. Pine Siskins also were present in moderate numbers in anticipation things to come. A sparse movement of Evening Grosbeaks produced singles August 30 and September 1 in Simsbury (LK, JK), two November 17 in Litchfield (DRo) and two November 22 in West Hartland (SSl).

### Exotics:

A Black-hooded Parakeet was in Stratford November 16 (JMh).

[Editor's Note: Reports of rare or unusual bird species in Connecticut (species with an asterisk on the most recent COA checklist) require that documentation be submitted to the Secretary of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (Mark Szantyr, 145 Farmington Ave., Waterbury, CT 06710) if they are to be included in the field notes].

### OBSERVERS,

### CONTRIBUTORS (boldface):

Eric Adam (EAD), Claudia Ahrens, Jayne Amico, Ralph Amodei, Tim Antanaitis, Elliott Ashe (EAs), Phil Asprelli, **Rene Baade** (RBA), **Jim Bair** (JBa), Bill Banks, Tom Baptist (TBA), Leon Barkman, **Charles Barnard**, Scott Baron (SBA), John Barriger (JBr), Mark Barriger, Dan Barvir, Fred Baumgarten, Larry Bauscher, **Joe Bear** (JBe), Ray Belding (RBe), Peter Bono, **Nick Bonomo**, Walter Bosse, Andy Brand, Tom Bravo (TBr), Steve Broker (SBr), Mark Carabetta, **Paul Carrier** (PCa), **Paul Cianfaglione** (PCi), Al Collins, **Patrick Comins** (PCo), Jerry Connolly, Neil Currie, Andrew Dasinger (ADa), Kathy Demers, **Paul Desjardins** (PDe), **Buzz Devine** (BDe), Bob Dewire (BDw), Townsend Dickinson, **Angela Dimmitt** (ADi), **Robert Dixon** (RDi), Randy Domina (RDo), **Patrick Dugan** (PDu), Ken Elkins, **Chris Elphick** (CEl), **Carl Ekroth** (CEk), John Eykelhoff, Bruce Finnan, Kevin Finnan, Jim Ford,



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(SOr), Dave Pelletier (DPe), Ron Pelletier, Bob Pieniadz, Noble Proctor, **Dave Provencher** (DPPr), Charlie Rafford, Shirley Rafford, Mike Resch, Arne Rosengren, **Dave Rosgen** (DRo), Dean Rupp (DRu), Ed Sadowski, **Meredith Sampson** (MSa), Rick Sandella, Sol Satin (SSa), Mark Scott (MSc), Anita Shaffer, Tom Sharp, Sam Slater (SSI), Donna Rose Smith (DSm), Penny Solum, **Dori Sosensky** (DSo), Steve Spector (SSp), Jerry Stage, Maria Stockmal (MSt), Will Storz, **Mark Szantyr** (MSz), Luke Tiller, John Triana, Dave Tripp (DTr), Diane Tucker (DTu), Linda Vegilante, Dennis Varza, Jack Wells (JWe), Charley West (CWe), **Charlotte Weston** (CWs), **Glenn Williams**, John Wojtanowski (JWo), Terry Wojtanowski, Alice Ann Wormald, Olive Wysocki, Ed Yescott, Roy Zartarian, **Carol Zipp**, **Jim Zipp**, Betty Zurow, Fran Zygmunt.

GREG HANISEK, 175 Circuit Ave., Waterbury, CT 06078



## PHOTO CHALLENGE

Julian Hough

### ANSWER TO PHOTO CHALLENGE 45

High above us in the bare branches of a tree, a small passerine perches silent and still. Looking up, the broad pale supercilium catches our attention. Initially we can't put a name to it, but the slender body and thin bill suggest a warbler. The pale supercilium is reminiscent of both species of waterthrush. The bill is not quite

heavy enough, and the long tail (proportionately short in water-thrushes) and lack of heavy streaking on the underparts, suggests we need to consider other species.



Black-throated Green, Blackburnian and Palm Warbler all show a pale supercilium, but in the latter two species the head pattern is rather more contrasting. The dark moustachial stripe and dark eyestripe contrast with the pale supercilium in our mystery bird, and looking closer, we see a weak malar stripe framing a pale throat. Combined with the long tail, and dark looking crown (note the dark

upper border to the supercilium) all fit Palm Warbler, and this is what our bird is. The slim body, longish, broad tail also fit this species, though in color, the dark, rust crown and yellow vent would be instant pointers to a positive identification. Palms show narrow, dark streaking on the underparts, unusually inconspicuous here, though the slightly overexposed breast may be rendering them impossible to discern clearly in this shot.

The Palm Warbler was photographed by Jay Kaplan Florida in 1991.

JULIAN HOUGH, 22 Hallock Ave., New Haven, CT 06519



Photo Challenge 46 Identify the species. Answer next issue,



# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Betty S. Kleiner - 5 Flintlock Ridge, Simsbury, CT 06070  
(860) 658-5670 - CTWarbler@cs.com

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Send manuscripts to the Editor. Please type double spaced with ample margins, on one side of a sheet. Submit a copy on a computer disk, if possible. Style should follow usage in recent issues. All manuscripts receive peer review.

Illustrations and photographs are needed and welcome. Line art of Connecticut and regional birds should be submitted as good quality prints or in original form. All submitted materials will be returned. We can use good quality photographs of birds unaccompanied by an article but with caption including species, date, locality, and other pertinent information.

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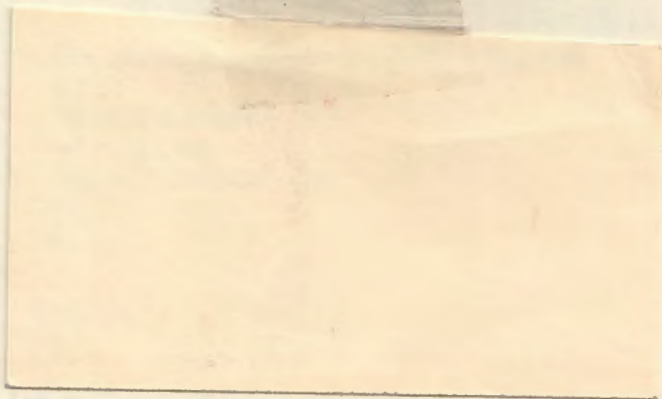
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# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*



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# The Connecticut Warbler

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*

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## ABOUT OUR COVER

### **Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*)**

**by Paul Carrier**

Paul is a well-known artist who has illustrated several children and nature books, and is an avid hawk watcher and nature writer and photographer. Paul owns an advertising studio in his home in Harwinton. He is a member of the Hartford Audubon Society and illustrates their newsletter and leads a number of field trips each year.



## FROM THE EDITOR

This, the July issue of *The Connecticut Warbler*, is my last issue as Editor of this publication. I have held this position for more than 18 years and feel it is now time to step down and let someone else take the reins.

When I began as Editor, "The Warbler" was only 12 pages long. It has since grown to 40 pages and there have been issues with as many as 56 pages. We now include photographs in the text and original artwork on the front cover. We even had an issue with color photographs. Our journal is well received and has subscribers in England and Germany as well as many parts of the United States. I want to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have been involved in the production of this journal.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the many authors who have submitted articles over the years. They are the people who make "The Warbler" what it is—a Journal of Connecticut Ornithology! My thanks to the artists who so graciously submitted drawings for our front covers. There are staff people who write and also edit many of the articles, such as Associate Editor Jay Kaplan, Dwight Smith and Buzz Devine who are ever-ready with an article or Site Guide; Greg Hanisek who does a great job writing the Field Notes and getting them to me on time; Julian Hough with his detailed description of the 'Photo Challenge' bird each month; Mark Szantyr who has given us wonderful insights on numerous bird species with his identification articles; George Clark, who has been a great Associate Editor with his final detailed editing of every article that goes into "The Warbler", and who is also retiring from that job at the end of this year. A special thanks to Louis Bevier, who helped to set up the format of "The Warbler" and helped me learn the intricacies of editing. And last but by no means least, a special thanks goes to my husband Gil, who has done the layout work on the computer all of these years—I couldn't have done it without him.

When the new Editor of *The Connecticut Warbler*, Greg Hanisek, takes over with the October issue, I hope that you will all give him your full support as you have given me over the years.

Betty Kleiner

# EASTERN SCREECH-OWL: COLOR MORPHS AND VEHICLE-RELATED MORTALITY IN CONNECTICUT

Arnold Devine and Dwight G. Smith

## Introduction

The Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*) is a fairly common resident of rural, suburban, and urban open space habitats in Connecticut, although their numbers decline in more rural and remote areas in the northern part of the state (Smith and Devine, 1994). Due to their nocturnal activity pattern, various aspects of screech owl ecology are not well known. In particular, limited information is available regarding mortality of this species within Connecticut and elsewhere in North America.

In a previous paper we described incidence of vehicle-killed screech owls in Connecticut. Herein we summarize information on color morph ratios and incidence of road-killed screech owl mortality documented over a 17-year period. Vehicle-related mortality of the Eastern Screech-Owl has been described in other areas of the species range (Sutton 1927, Stupka 1953, and Schorger 1954).

## Methods

From 1986 through 2003, we investigated the remains of screech owls found along Connecticut roadways. Data collected on all individuals included date, location, and color morph of the vehicle-killed individuals.

## Results and Discussion

We recorded information on 57 screech owls found between 1986-2003 along Connecticut roadways. Dates of collections by month and incidence of color morph is presented in Table 1.

### Seasonal Patterns of Mortality

In general, Eastern Screech-Owl mortality was lowest during the breeding season (April-August), increased through late-fall and with the exception of January, remained elevated throughout the winter months. Peak mortality occurred in November and December. A similar cycle of seasonal road mortality was observed during this investigation as was previously recorded in our earlier 1975-1985 study.



Several factors may contribute to the apparent seasonal incidence of vehicle-killed screech owl mortality. During the nesting season, normally April into August in Connecticut, breeding screech owls restrict their activities to the nesting area and attending to the young (Smith and Gilbert, 1984; Smith and Devine, 2003). Seasonal prey populations are more plentiful and adults travel less distance to procure food for the young. From August into September, however, screech owl family units begin to disband and the young of the year disperse and begin foraging for themselves. Some may remain within their natal territories for several weeks or even months, but generally leave prior to the next nesting season. Therefore, the increased number of vehicle-killed screech owls that we recorded in fall is consistent with post-breeding dispersal of young of the year owls and increased movement of adults.

Stupka (1953) observed a similar pattern of screech owl mortality in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park on the basis of 41 road-killed screech owls collected over a 15-year period. Stupka also noted the lack of road kills from May through July despite the fact that 42% of the annual traffic volume in the park occurred during that three-month period.

### Color Morph Ratios

Of 57 Connecticut road-killed screech owls recorded, 26 (46.4%) were red-morph, 22 (40.7%) were gray-morph, eight (14.8%) were an intermediate brown-morph or chocolate and one was in natal plumage and the color morph could not be determined.

The incidence of brown-morph screech owls that we have noted consistently in Connecticut are unreported or underreported in other areas, judging from the literature on this subject. The 1.2:1.0 incidence of red-morph to gray-morph birds that we observed based on vehicle-killed birds is also substantiated by our field observations of screech owl color morphs over the past decade in which there were slightly more red-morph birds.

This ratio suggests that the ratio of gray to red morph screech owls may be changing. Previously, we found a ratio of gray-morph to red-morph vehicle-killed owls was approximately 2.4:1 (Devine and Smith, 1985) based on 84 owls. This previously determined ratio was also substantiated by field observations of screech owls made from 1976-1985 (N=215) which revealed a ratio of approximately 3.2:1 gray to red-morph birds (Smith, et al., 1987). Screech owl studies by Schorger (1954), Sutton (1927), and VanCamp and Henny (1975) found similar predominance of gray-morph screech owls in northern states: Sutton (1927) reported mostly gray screech

owl in a sample of 98 owls along Pennsylvania roadways, while Schorger (1954) recorded a 1.6:1 ratio of gray to red-morph owls on road trips between Illinois and Wisconsin. The predominance of gray-morph birds in northern states probably reflects the thermal disadvantages of red-morph owls documented by Mosher and Henny (1976). Their results are partly substantiated by Stupka's (1953) findings of a 4:1 ratio of red-morph to gray-morph screech owls in southern states.

Our results suggest a slight predominance of red-morphed Eastern Screech-Owls in Connecticut. These results are further supported by our field observations as well as other researchers (e.g., Mark Szantyr, pers. com.). The slight predominance of red-morph to gray-morph birds may be the result of the series of milder winters that southern New England has experienced over the past decade. It will be interesting to see if the long periods of cold and snow that characterized Connecticut's two most recent winters (2002-2003 and 2003-2004) will be reflected in a decline in incidence of red-morph screech owls in the state.

### Conclusions and Summary

The number of screech owls located during this study (57 owls in 17 years) was considerably less than the previous study (84 owls in 10 years) yet the study period was seven years longer. Undoubtedly, several reasons contribute to this difference, but one possibility is that local screech owl populations are declining in our area. Factors that may contribute to this perceived decline include spread of residential and commercial development into pristine habitats in many areas of the state where screech owls were formally common. The rate of reforestation in the more rural parts of the state may further reduce screech owl populations, which primarily select open woodland and woodland-meadow habitat. As with other species of nocturnal raptors, additional research is needed on this and other aspects of their ecology.

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BUZZ DEVINE, 18 South Street, Plymouth, CT 06782

DWIGHT G. SMITH, Biology Dept., Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT. 06515

**Table 1. Color morphs of vehicle-killed Eastern Screech-Owls (1986-2003) in Connecticut**

Color Morph	Month												Totals
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	
Gray	1	5	4				1	1	3	1	4	2	22
Red	2	3	2						2	4	7	6	26
Brown		1	2	1	1						1	2	8
Juvenile							1						1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>57</b>

# COMMON RAVEN BREEDING AT WEST ROCK RIDGE DURING 2003

Stephen P. Broker

I report here on the successful 2003 breeding of Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) at West Rock Ridge State Park, Woodbridge, Connecticut, from discovery of a raven nest containing five eggs through hatching and fledging of young and subsequent autumn dispersal of the young from the parental breeding territory. In a subsequent report, I will describe the 2004 second year of breeding of the West Rock ravens at the same nest site as in 2003, including observations of courtship, territorial defense, nest building, egg laying, hatching, feeding, and nest occupancy. In these two reports, I compare various aspects of the breeding of the West Rock ravens with previously published breeding data from the literature on this holarctic corvid.

## Historical Status of Common Raven in Connecticut.

Tom Baptist published a thorough review of the occurrence of "Common Raven in Connecticut" in *The Connecticut Warbler* in 1991, describing the transition of ravens from rare winter visitors to year-round residents and nesters as "one of the most interesting ornithological events in the state" in recent years. He referred to the apparent presence of breeding ravens in Connecticut during the early period of colonial settlement, based on seventeenth century published reports of ravens in adjacent southern New England colonies. Numerous twentieth century authors have attributed the loss of the raven from the New England avifauna to near-complete destruction of forest cover, loss of top predators and large herbivores through intense hunting pressure, and deliberate persecution of ravens, viewed then as serious threats to domesticated livestock. Baptist (1991) also summarized the status of ravens in Connecticut in the state's published checklists, and he tracked the reappearance of the raven through northern New England, Massachusetts, and ultimately, Connecticut. He discussed the reasons for the return of ravens as breeding birds, and he chronicled the Connecticut breeding records for ravens from 1987 reports of fledged young at Canaan Mountain (Housatonic State Forest, Canaan, Connecticut), Ashford (1987 and '88), Sharon (1988, '89, and '90), Barkhamsted (1989, '90), and Hartland (1989, '90). The first photographic confir-



mation of raven breeding in Connecticut was made in 1988 at Ashford. Baptist wrote, "it will be interesting to see whether ravens will extend their range in the coming years to include lower elevations in the major river valleys and along the coast."

The American Ornithologists' Union Check-List (Fifth Edition, 1957) lists Common Raven as "casual throughout . . . New England, New York, [and] New Jersey." The Sixth Edition of the AOU Check-List (1983) updated the distributional status of ravens by stating that the species "wanders sporadically or casually south . . . to southern New York, New Jersey, and southern New England, also to lower elevations in the Appalachians . . ." Most recently, the Seventh Edition of the AOU Check-List (1998) lists the breeding distribution of Common Raven as including northern Connecticut.

### **West Rock Ridge State Park.**

West Rock Ridge is a six-mile long ridge located in the towns of New Haven, Hamden, Woodbridge, and Bethany, Connecticut. It is, along with Pine Rock, Mill Rock, and East Rock, the southernmost in a series of north-south trending trap rock ridges found in the Central Valley Lowlands of Connecticut and Massachusetts. West Rock was designated as a state park, formally known as West Rock Ridge State Park, twenty-five years ago. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Natural Diversity Database recognizes West Rock as possessing the second highest diversity of rare and endangered plant species in the state. West Rock plants include a combination of species at their southernmost or northernmost range distributions. The rich biodiversity of West Rock extends to invertebrate and vertebrate life. Concerning the avifauna of West Rock, I have recorded more than 230 species of birds in twenty years of field work here. The Breeding Bird Atlas Survey of 1982-1986 and subsequent field work indicate that West Rock ranks among the top half-dozen hotspots for breeding birds in Connecticut, with more than 100 confirmed or probable breeding species – a sizeable percentage of the total state breeding avifauna. The diversity of upland forest, talus slope, and lowland/wetland habitats found at West Rock attracts a broad diversity of resident, migratory, and casual or accidental bird species.

### **Observations of Territorial and Breeding Common Ravens at West Rock.**

My previous field work at West Rock during the 2002 breeding season confirmed the breeding of Common Raven on this near-coastal trap rock ridge, when I observed a pair of raven adults at-

tending three recently fledged young. I do not know where the ravens nested on West Rock in 2002. This confirmation of raven nesting followed by approximately five years the discovery by Jim Zipp of a Common Raven nest at Sleeping Giant State Park (the trap rock ridge also known as Mount Carmel) in Hamden, Connecticut. Sleeping Giant is located two miles northeast of the northernmost portion of West Rock and six miles northeast of the West Rock raven nest site. In turn, the West Rock raven nest site is located within five miles of New Haven Harbor and six miles of Long Island Sound. The current 2004 breeding season also has seen a raven pair breeding on a cliff face in East Rock Park, New Haven, continuing a remarkable 20 year expansion of the breeding range of Common Raven from extreme northwestern and northeastern Connecticut to appropriate coastal habitat in south-central Connecticut.

The main part of this report is drawn directly from my field notes made through the 2003 calendar year at West Rock, as I believe they best present the specific data on the timing of breeding by ravens in Connecticut. Unless otherwise noted, observations were made from the ridge top in the vicinity of the old quarry site due east of Konold's Pond, Woodbridge, Connecticut. The notes are drawn from a combination of written field notes and microcassette tape recordings using a hand-held audio recorder. Observations were made using Swarovski 10 x 40 binoculars and Swarovski Habicht ST80 HD spotting scope with 20x to 60x zoom lens. On certain days, two or more separate visits were made to West Rock Ridge for observations on the ravens. These multiple visits are reflected in large time jumps within the notes for a given day.

A fairly extensive portion of the west-facing cliff at West Rock was quarried for trap rock in the early 1900s, with abandonment of quarry operations before mid-century. The hiker is afforded spectacular views of the West River valley three hundred feet below the shear quarry cliff and lower slopes. Visible are the artificially impounded Konold's Pond, the western fault zone separating the Connecticut Valley lowlands from the eastern uplands and associated coastal plain, the suburban Amity region of Woodbridge, and Long Island Sound. One can see ridgelines extending some distance to the north. Clear days afford distant views of Long Island, New York to the south.

Observations of the West Rock ravens were made from a ledge on the south end of the quarry, which I call the "south promontory" or the "south prom." This ledge is separated from the raven nest site by the full length of the quarry, spanning approximately two hundred yards. The raven nest is located outside the quarry and some-



what further north, in a shallow cliff recess not visible from the main observation site. However, the ravens could be seen entering and leaving the nest recess. Both adults, but particularly the male, would frequently do surveillance flights into the quarry space for food searching or territorial defense, occasionally banking right out in front of the observation ledge. Their movements could be tracked to a series of perch sites on the cliffs and trees to the north of the quarry, in a broad indent of the ridge referred to in the notes as the "raven nest territory." They had a tendency to fly north-south along the ridge line, remaining in sight to an area two hundred yards north of the nest recess, referred to as the "north point," where West Rock Ridge takes a bend to the east. In addition, the ravens could be followed with binoculars in their flights west across Konold's Pond and south to Amity Shopping Center and its convenient food sources. Some observations were made from the "center column" of the quarry space, closer to the nest site but offering a more obscured view of the cliffs north of the quarry. Here, the male raven could be seen perched in his "sentinel tree," just north of the quarry, from which he could see the female on the nest. I have also left in references to specific landmarks on the West Rock cliff face, including the "cave upper left snag," the "rock overhang," and the two "emergent pines."

The raven nest itself is visible from above in just two locations. The first observation point is immediately above the rock shelf that supports the nest, where one can lean out into space and look down the recess chute approximately forty feet to the stick nest. The north face of the cliff recess tilts its top portions southward, providing some protective rock overhang to the nest itself, but not fully shielding the nest from rainfall. This viewpoint becomes progressively obscured as cliff-hanging trees and shrubs leaf out in late April and May. The second observation point is ten feet further south, where one can balance on a narrow rock shelf and view the nest while leaning outward. Those who have danced along trap rock cliff faces are well aware of the difficulty of locating anything over the edge and down slope. This nest is nearly impossible to locate, even when you know where it is. The ravens select the site to afford maximum protection from mammalian predators. I will describe the nest and nesting habitat in greater detail in the subsequent report.

Although ravens are known to have a close relationship and shared history with humans spanning some thousands of years, they also have a tendency to disappear shortly after humans come into view. This is especially true in the weeks prior to egg-laying. They are particularly sensitive to nest disturbance. With this well in

mind, I established a protocol for viewing the nest. From my southern observation point, if I felt confident that the female had just left the nest, I would relocate to the nest site and make observations on the contents of the nest in as short a time as possible, typically no more than a minute. I would then leave the area directly. If the female were on the nest, I would try to remain undetected during brief observations. If the female were pushed from the nest, I would make my observations and depart quickly. Finally, I would take into consideration the vocal responses of male and female ravens when I approached the nest site. On some visits, the female would produce only occasional soft kronk calls as she flew to a nearby perch. On others, the male would raise alarm calls, sometimes loud ones, and that would hasten my departure. Throughout the period of observations of the nest, I became convinced that the female invariably would return to the nest shortly after my departure. Offsetting the desire to limit my intrusiveness on the nesting process was my desire to obtain the data that would provide a deeper understanding of the timing of raven breeding in Connecticut.

#### **Field Notes on Common Ravens at West Rock.**

**Friday, January 31, 2003:** Observations made during the period 1547 to 1600 hours (3:47-4:00 P.M.): Possible Common Raven call, east side of ridge, midway along straightaway north of Lake Dawson Hawk Watch site. No bird seen.

**Friday, March 7:** 1620-1647: No sighting of ravens.

**Sunday, March 9:** 1205-1235: No sighting of ravens.

**Wednesday, March 12:** 1521: Two Common Ravens seen circling in and above the quarry. Observed for a period of 5-7 minutes. 1631: Common Raven seen briefly gliding beyond far north point, from quarry observation site (top of ridge).

**Sunday, March 16:** 1301: A pair of Common Ravens appears, both perching briefly above the north ledge of the quarry, then jumping out. Brief agonistic behavior with a Turkey Vulture north of the quarry. 1309: A raven circles and disappears into a recessed area behind the north ledge. The other flies to a tree immediately behind the rock overhang. 1315: A perfect view of a raven perched on cedar tree north of nest recess; preening; bill opens a series of times as adult leans forward. Possible gag motion or regurgitation of pellet.



1325: Both ravens glide beyond the north point and out of sight. A possible size differential noticed. 1334: A raven comes out low from the recess and circles. Both ravens then seen in aerial displays, gliding side by side. A Red-tailed Hawk pursues one of the ravens, temporarily driving it away.

**Wednesday, March 19:** 0750: A pair of Common Ravens seen in recess north of quarry, flying and perched. Audibilizing. They depart north at 0759. 1222-1227: One raven circling in the quarry. Seen again to the north at 1231.

**Friday, March 21:** 1222: 43° Fahrenheit. Arrival at quarry site, top of ridge. One Common Raven is circling in the quarry and flies right in front of me (south prom, outer ledge), then banks back to north of quarry. Drops down to west and disappears from view. Now 1227. 1231: Common Raven appears briefly in air to north of quarry. 1232: The raven loops around into view again. Disappears east over top center of ridge. 1530: Arrival at center column. Immediately, a Common Raven jumps off the south edge (inside) of the quarry and flies north beyond the north ledge and out of sight. 1545: I walk to north of area between north cave upper left snag and north edge of quarry. 1549: As I came off the Blue Trail by two logs that are placed facing toward the cliff and approached the rocky shelf that faces north toward the cave upper left snag, one raven flew out low, below me and flew straight north past the north point and out of sight. [Sketch made of rocky cliff.]

**Saturday, March 22:** 1810-1825: No ravens observed.

**Sunday, March 23:** 1420-1510: 58° Fahrenheit. One Common Raven is seen at 1425 from the south prom, coming out of the recess, north of the north ledge, and again at 1440, from the north point and emergent pines.

**Thursday, March 27:** 1315-1400: No raven sightings.

**Friday, March 28:** 1559 and 1606: Common Raven heard calling at ridge top vernal pool no. one, just north of the north end of Lake Dawson. 1625: Returning to the quarry, a Common Raven seen emerging from the recess north of the quarry and flying out of sight beyond the north point.

**Saturday, March 29:** 1527: One Common Raven seen from the center column, dropping down into a recess just north of the north ledge, in strong winds. Not seen thereafter.

**Thursday, April 3:** 1315-1410: No raven sightings.

**Sunday, April 6:** 1730-1800: Exploration of the talus slope on the west side of West Rock Ridge, immediately north of the quarry. After a series of views upward at base of steep cliff, I spotted a collection of whitewash on a rocky outcrop, some 30-35 feet above me. As I commented to myself aloud about the whitewash, I glanced a few feet to the north, and at that moment an adult Common Raven jumped off an obvious, large stick nest that I had not previously focused on. The nest appeared to be balanced on a flat rock outcrop, and it was supported in part by a Black Birch growing up out of a rock crevice. The nest site found was in a rock recess approximately five to seven feet wide (north-south dimension) and five to six feet deep (east-west dimension). The nest was midway between the top of the near-vertical [70°] cliff and the top of the talus slope, where I stood. Working my way off the talus slope and arriving twenty minutes later at the ridge top via the Baldwin Drive access at the east side of the ridge, I relocated the nest from above. The female raven jumped off the nest at my appearance, and she revealed five eggs in the nest. The eggs matched published descriptions of raven eggs, being blue-green to green in color, with superimposed light to dark brown mottling. Four of the eggs were fairly close matches, and the fifth was slightly smaller and of differing color mix.

**Thursday, April 10:** 1720: 49° Fahrenheit. The nest was reexamined, with the incubating female being dislodged from the nest as I came into view above her. Five eggs were centered in the nest depression.

**Monday, April 14:** 1800: Examination of the raven nest. The eggs have hatched out. At least three very pink, featherless nestlings are observed, in a highly altricial condition. Strong yellow coloration rings the inside of each mouth. Based on the tiny, helpless condition of the nestlings, hatching is believed to have occurred in the previous 12 to 24 hours and no earlier than Sunday, April 13.



**Thursday, April 17:** 1445 and following: 44° Fahrenheit. **Photographs** of Common Raven nest taken by Jim Zipp. Four nestlings are present. (A Peregrine Falcon observed flying due south, then a second peregrine observed up in air. Both circle the area in front of the raven nest. First observations of peregrines at West Rock Ridge in 2003).



**Figure 1.** West Rock Common Raven nestlings at age 4-5 days.  
Photographed April 17, 2003 by Jim Zipp.

[Friday, April 18 through Monday, April 21 in Maine; Wednesday, April 23 through Sunday, April 27 in Virginia.]

**Monday, April 28:** 1835-1905: SPB and Jim Zipp visit the Common Raven nest site. Three raven nestlings are seen in the nest, all oriented due west, side by side. Both raven adults are in the air, one of them clearly coming out from the nest upon hearing our voices above. This adult circled. Photographs of raven nest taken by Jim Zipp. (A pair of peregrines is observed in the air, the male doing two or more power dives. Chittering calls when male passed female in air. No alarm calls, but agonistic behavior by the peregrines directed toward five Turkey Vultures circling just above the western edge of the ridge.)

**Tuesday, April 29:** 1830-1930: Observations initially of Common Raven defending nest site from Turkey Vultures. After conversation with two hikers, I went solo to the raven nest site, examining the three nestlings. They are significantly larger. While looking at the raven parent in the air (the female had come off the nest while the male previously was circling), a female peregrine falcon came into view, flying in from the south and below me, giving alarm calls. She circled several times, rising and then diving at the raven. Then she departed from view, to the south. She relocated to the south prom ledge, then jumped off when I came into view, circled for a few minutes, and flew to and landed on the tall radio tower. (The raven nestlings were audibilizing on Tuesday, April 29!)

**Wednesday, April 30:** 1630: One raven circling in nest recess area. 1640: The raven flies out from north of quarry, across Konold's Pond to Amity Bowling Center apparently in search of food. Some time later, it returns from the west and goes into the nest recess. Nothing seen in bill. 1655: Raven banks right in front of me; strong black sheen noticed. 1718: A raven kronks and is up in the air. 1745: Both ravens circling, and one drops into nest recess. Then, the pair flies out over Konold's Pond. 1804: I check the nest. Three nestlings are observed, all gray now. They've really feathered in with downy feathers. The nestlings are being left unattended by the parent birds for somewhat extended time periods. 1818: Departure from quarry site.





Figure 2. West Rock raven nestlings at age 15-16 days. Photographed April 28, 2003 by Jim Zipp.

**Thursday, May 1:** 1952-1954: At nest site, I heard young nestlings audibilizing before I looked over the edge. The adult male jumps off nest recess whitewash area. The female jumps off the nest. Both go out and circle. Three nestlings observed, definitely getting bigger. I depart immediately. 1852-1935: Female peregrine observed in quarry, with full crop.

**Friday, May 2:** 0840: One or both raven adults seen flying out of nest area. One perched high on north edge of quarry, below iron post. One parent flies east over the ridge centerline, giving some kronking calls. 0859: One raven flies to Center Column, then heads back north and disappears, heading east over centerline of ridge. 1800: The raven nest checked. The adult male was on his regular perch ledge in the nest crevice. There is extensive build up of whitewash below this perch site. He jumped off and circled. The adult female was on the nest, and she jumped off to join the male in flight. Three nestlings were easily visible. They are getting bigger, and they are all gray. They were audibilizing.

**Thursday, May 8:** 1620-1632: I observed Common Raven twice to the north of the quarry.

**Friday, May 9:** 1013-1042: Common Raven nestlings were observed, attended by both parents (trying to bring food into the nest). The food was unrecognizable. The nestlings were black and feathering out, but they were nonvocal. The parent birds were vocalizing as they circled overhead. Leaves are largely obscuring the nest now.

**Monday, May 12:** 1744: The three nestlings are observed to be large, very black, and very feathered in. All are sitting quietly in the nest, with one parent overhead objecting softly to my presence. The best view now is from the south side of the crevice, a somewhat precarious spot from which to view. The view is unobstructed except for the inside (east) portion of the nest. 1800-1818: Spectacular views of the male Common Raven flying in and fighting strong winds, then heading to Amity Shopping Center. Then, the presumed female is seen flying, chasing and attacking Turkey Vultures. She then pursues an Osprey carrying a small fish. All observations are from the center column, with the birds in the quarry space and just to the north and south. The Common Raven legs are dangling down, and the feet are curled under. Both ravens "dance" on the gusts of wind, parachuting down. Winds are up to 20-25 mph.

**Wednesday, May 14:** 0705-0730: Two Common Raven parents in the air just above the nest site. 1545: The raven nest is checked. No adults are present. Three nestlings are large, with black feathers covering the body. No audibilizations. The largest nestling is observed to tilt its head upward and view me. 1553: Departure. 65° Fahrenheit at the bottom gate.

**Thursday, May 15:** 1520-1525: 72-73° Fahrenheit on the ridgetop. Observations of the three nestlings in the raven nest. One nestling observed to back up to edge of nest (west) and defecate. The nestlings have their mouths open, panting/thermoregulating. One parent comes off the cliff just to the south, where it had been perched. It flew to below the nest and perched briefly. Then, it took to the air, giving low kronk calls. The young are much more actively walking in the nest.

**Friday, May 16:** 1740-1750: The three nestlings are observed at the



raven nest. They are large, with one – the largest – moving around and possibly feeding. The probable adult female is perched on a tree or rock at the north ledge. She flew out when I came into view.

**Saturday, May 17:** No visit to WRR.

**Sunday, May 18:** 1125: A check of the raven nest. Three nestlings observed, oriented NW, NW, and NE (the third one positioned below the other two).

**Monday, May 19:** 1650: Three raven nestlings huddled on right side of nest in shade, all facing northwest. The largest, in the center, turns its head up and eyes me. A parent is circling overhead as I descend to view the nest.

**Tuesday, May 20:** 1850: Three nestlings observed, one looking much more mature than the other two. It is black and glossy. My talking did not dislodge it. One parent is up in the air, chasing a Turkey Vulture.

**Wednesday, May 21:** 1615-1620: Raven nest observed. Three nest-



Figure 3. Common Raven adult in flight opposite West Rock nest site. Photographed by Jim Zipp during 2003 breeding season.

lings in the nest, the most mature oriented to the west, the second to the northwest, and the third to the northeast. The most mature looks very black and glossy. It is preening. Both adult ravens are in the air and vocalizing softly as they circle low. 1629: Returning to center column, I observe one raven adult to jump off the north ledge or rock overhang and fly north, kronking.

**Thursday, May 22:** 1700: 50° Fahrenheit. Light rain, total overcast with heavy air. Three nestlings in raven nest. A parent flies in low and lands immediately in front of the nest. The three nestlings all give loud cries – one syllable, harsh, crowlike. All three nestlings face the parent. The parent jumps off the nest, with no apparent delivery of food. She flies south. The center nestling looks up at me and gives one loud cry.

**Friday, May 23:** 1530: 56° Fahrenheit. Three nestlings in the raven nest, with a parent perched on a tree branch just north of the north ledge rock. She comes out and circles, giving fast, low kronks. The nestlings are oriented WSW, NW, and SSW, from right (north) to left (south). This is Day 41 for the nestlings. (Yellow-billed Cuckoo nuptial gift/copulatory position observed. Light rain during observations).

### **Memorial Weekend spent in Wellfleet, Massachusetts.**

**Monday, May 26:** 1900-1920: Approaching the raven nest and just above it, I observed the presumed adult female to jump off the cliff in the vicinity of the cave-upper left-sag and fly south past me, this time with rapid, strongly objecting calls. She was not in any way emitting soft kronks as in my earlier visits to the nest site. Genuine agitation noted. She flew north again and landed on the rock ledge just north of the snag. This is where she probably was on my arrival. The three nestlings are still in the nest, looking very wet on this rainy weekend. They are large. No vocalizations heard. This is Day 43, assuming hatching on April 13.

**Tuesday, May 27:** 1515-1543: Three raven nestlings are still in the nest, all standing up, walking around, stretching their wings, and flapping their wings. They are looking very active. I hear vocalizations from them as I approach the area immediately above the nest. A few minutes into the observations, a parent flies in. Just then, a pair of peregrines flew in from the south at eye level. For the next five minutes, I watched them overhead, flying at eye level and be-



low me. The raven adult attacked one peregrine once, just in front of the nest. The peregrine male dive-bombed the adult female raven twice. The male also did several power dives. Both peregrines moved north and south along the ridgeline during these observations. This is a year old male and an adult [two year old] female. 1830-1902: Three nestlings observed in the raven nest. They were mostly silent until the two falcons came into view, then one kronked strongly and repeatedly. There was much walking around and changing of position on the nest, including quick spurts across the nest and head rubbing against another raven nestling. Also, head rubbing against a nest branch, picking up of some vegetation with the bill, picking at the deer hair nest lining, and active wing flapping. My ultimate departure from quarry site at 1944.

**Wednesday, May 28:** 0722-0724: Three raven nestlings still in the nest. No adults detected in the vicinity of the nest. 1535-1555: All three raven nestlings are still in the nest. One stretches its wings up toward the centerline above the body. One adult is out in front of me, kronking in half-loud fashion. She perches on rocks to the north. When she returns to the air space opposite the nest, one of the nestlings responds with cries every four to five seconds. This is Day 45 for the hatched ravens. 1555: The adult female is perched to the north, out of sight, and the nestlings are quiet, except for an occasional kronk or caw. Eight caws are heard in a row, followed by another 6 caws. 2009-2014: Observations from the lowlands below the quarry site – the light industrial area. A pair of peregrines is seen flying and perching in the quarry.

**Thursday, May 29:** 0935: The three raven nestlings are still in the nest, moving actively, the adult female circling to the north, giving low kronk calls. 1615-1630: The three raven nestlings are still in the nest.

**Friday, May 30:** 0720-0735: The three raven nestlings are still in the nest. There is much vocalization among them, as they walk around, biting at each other. Some preening possibly is taking place. No adult raven is observed in the area. Some white feather tracts are still visible on the nestlings. One nestling is backed up to the front (west) edge of the nest. After I spoke aloud, all vocalizations from the nestlings ceased. 0743: As I reviewed notes while sitting out of sight above the nest, I heard two low kronks given by one raven nestling. Departure at 0744 with no adult raven seen. This is Day 47 for the nestlings. 1400-1415: Foliage is obscuring the raven nest,

but I hear nestling vocalizations and observe at least two nestlings in the nest. I can only confirm seeing two nestlings. The adult female is in flight to the north. 1608: Arrival at the nest site. 1617: While above the raven nest, I determine that a fledged raven is calling from the talus slope below the nest. 1619-1623: The adult female raven flies in twice from the north, kronking, and she then lands below the nest and out of sight. 1626: I can confirm only two nestlings in the nest. One or both see me looking down from above. One syllable nestling calls are made - "rawww!" 1629: Two ravens glide north beyond the north point. Thus, the first nestling fledged between 0735 and 1400. 1636: An adult raven circles in to the nest area, carrying food. 1638: I confirm that an adult has brought in food to the fledged raven, in the trees or on the ground below the nest. 1641: I see the fledgling jumping between tree limbs below the nest, and I hear it vocalizing. Then, an adult raven flies out from these trees, low and to the north, where it perches on the cliff face. 1644: I confirm that two nestlings are still in the nest. 1645: An adult flies out again from below and lands on a rocky outcrop just south of the cave-upper left snag." 1650: I hear five calls from below the nest ledge. 1654: I confirm that the adult female was in a tree just below the nest. She flew off to the north, kronking, and flew past the north point and out of sight. Between 1707 and 1709, the adult female reappears and circles north of me, giving low kronk calls. The two remaining nestlings responded briefly to her calls. A light rain begins at 1720. 1724: Two adult ravens fly by me, north to south, each giving kronk calls. Departure at 1751. 72° Fahrenheit.

**Saturday, May 31:** 0853: Arrival at the raven nest site. Three ravens are observed flying below the nest. The nest is checked, and only one nestling is observed in it. Feather tracts (secondaries) are visible on its wings. Two of the birds in flight are seen well. One, an adult, is all black. The other, a fledged juvenile, has feather shafts visible near the base of each wing (secondaries). The one remaining nestling is vocalizing occasionally. It has visible secondary feather shafts, particularly on the left wing. Departure at 0909. 64° Fahrenheit. 1450: One nestling is heard "crying" from the nest. One fledgling flies out from the forest below and heads north. It then flies south to the quarry cliffs, and then locates north to a tree perch north of the nest. It begins to rain at 1455. 1457: I confirm that one bird is still in the nest. It is identifiable by its feather shafts still visible on the left side of the neck and back. 1521: I can confirm the location of the second fledged raven. The first fledgling has not been confirmed in the vicinity of the nest since its departure from



the nest. 1538: A fledged raven flies in from beyond the north point following a Turkey Vulture, and it circles below the nest, giving soft cacks, then disappears into the trees on the cliff north of the nest. 1546-1548: The remaining nestling is walking around on the nest, picking at the deer hair lining. It spreads its wings out fully to the sides, then resumes walking on the nest. 64° Fahrenheit. 1653: I recheck the raven nest in a harder rain, and see one bird remaining in the nest. The exposed feather tracts are on the left side of the neck and not on the base of the left wing. Departure at 1653. 63° Fahrenheit.

**Sunday, June 1:** 0840: An immature-sounding kronk is heard in the vicinity of the raven nest as I approach from above. A fledgling flies out and north, giving stronger kronk calls. During 0845-0847 check of the nest, no nestling is seen or heard. However, during the period 1102-1107, and in a fairly heavy rain, one nestling is seen to be in the nest. It is very wet, and it moves its head about. It is nestling #3, seated in the nest and facing inward toward the cliff. 1954: One nestling is still present in the nest, as one fledged bird and one adult fly and circle to the north. The nestling does not leave the nest upon hearing me, but it does look up at me. No audibilizations are given. The rain has now stopped, although it is windy.

**Monday, June 2:** 0730-0735: No birds remain in the nest. The nest is largely destroyed and is now down to exposed bedrock outcrop. A few branches remain along the front (west) edge of the nest. Most of the deer hair is now removed. One adult raven and one fledgling are observed flying to the north, both vocalizing. I cannot confirm the location of the first raven to fledge or the adult male during the past several days. During the period 1126-1137, a pair of peregrines is observed in the air to the north of the nest recess, then disappearing. 1152: I hear a fledgling raven calling repeatedly and insistently from the vicinity of the nest site, and five minutes later an adult and a fledgling fly out from the trees to the north of the nest site. 1203 departure from the area. 1700 and following: I check the raven nest and find that it has been stripped down to bare rock. Fledgling #3 is somewhere down below, crying, while fledgling #2 flies out from the trees and heads north.

**Thursday, June 5:** 1600: A fledged raven is perched on the top of the quarry cliff.

**Friday, June 6:** 1830-1945: No ravens are observed at the nest site or the quarry.

**Saturday, June 7:** New Haven Summer Bird Count. During the morning hours, two adult ravens and three large, fledged ravens are observed in trees on east side of Baldwin Drive, West Rock ridge top. They progressively move northward from tree perch to tree perch as they are observed and counted.

**Monday, June 16:** 1450-1625: No ravens observed at West Rock.

**Thursday, June 19:** 1455-1525: No ravens observed.

**Saturday, June 21:** 1117: Observations from the center column. A raven is heard calling from the recess just south of the north point, and it is seen briefly in the air.

**Monday, June 23:** 1717-1719: One fledgling raven seen perched in the black birch tree at the south promontory of the quarry site, giving insistent, monosyllable cries. It then flies off to the south. 1756: The same fledgling flies low, north through the quarry, and it settles into the recess below the north point. A second raven, with deeper cry (adult?) is heard with it.

**Thursday, September 25:** Three Common Ravens observed from a canoe on Konold's Pond, seen to fly together high above the light industrial buildings and south to the West Rock Tunnels. They then turned right (west) toward Amity Shopping Center.

**Saturday, September 27:** 1310: One raven seen at West Rock Ridge, from ridge top.

**Saturday, October 4:** 1229: Two ravens fly in to the quarry area from the south, and they disappear to the north. One is observed to fly briefly upside down. Some audibilizations heard. 58° Fahrenheit.

**Sunday, October 5:** 1304-1306: Observations from the quarry site. One Common Raven observed flying high overhead and to the south, joined by a second raven.

**Wednesday, October 15:** 1019-1025: A pair of Common Ravens observed in the quarry space, flying in strong winds.



**Thursday, October 16:** From the quarry site, two Common Ravens observed circling high to the south. Thirty seconds later, they pass through the quarry just above eye level and then rise to circle high, along with two Turkey Vultures.

**Sunday, October 19:** 1039: One Common Raven is perched on the center bar of the high tension pole, east side of power line cut that crosses West Rock Ridge, from north of Lake Dawson, Woodbridge (Route 69) to south of Main Street, Hamden.

**Monday, October 20:** 1748-1749: Observations from along the edge of Konold's Pond. First one and then two adult Common Ravens are being dive-bombed by a Red-tailed Hawk. 1757: A second view of one Common Raven in flight north of the quarry site.

**Wednesday, October 22:** Checking the raven nest site at 1612 under cold, overcast conditions. 43° Fahrenheit. I found one adult raven on the nest crag and the other perched just below in a tree. Neither bird noticed my presence.

**Monday, October 27:** No Common Ravens observed at the nest site crevice.

**Tuesday, November 18:** I deposit a road-kill deer carcass at the West Rock ridge top, near the raven nest crevice.

**Wednesday, November 19:** Two ravens were flushed from feeding on the deer carcass. The carcass shows initial signs of having been worked on by the raven pair, with one eye gone and a hole established on the exposed thigh of the deer.

**Thursday, November 20:** A pair of ravens flushed from the deer carcass upon arrival at the nest site. They circled in the air briefly, then disappeared to the north.

**Friday, November 21:** Below the west-facing cliff face at East Rock Park, New Haven at 1557, I heard a raven kronk coming from the direction of East Rock. I then observed two raven adults flying and gliding along the cliff face in front of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, cruising east and disappearing into trees at the east end of the cliff. Dan Barvir has seen a raven pair at East Rock in the previous weeks of fall. At present, I suspect that they are the West Rock

ravens in search of food at East Rock. [In 2004, it becomes clear that East Rock has its own distinct raven pair.]

**Wednesday, December 10:** A second deer carcass (a dissected doe) is put out on the West Rock ridge top.

**Thursday, December 11:** A third deer carcass is put out at West Rock in the morning. 0715: Two ravens are seen to be feeding at the deer carcasses. 1557: Both raven adults are pushed off their roost site at the raven nest crevice. They both fly north, one of them kronking.

**Tuesday, December 16:** 1540: In a crusted snow cover, I flush two ravens from the deer carcasses at West Rock. They circle overhead for a minute, then depart north beyond the north point.

**Wednesday, December 17:** One Common Raven is observed to fly out from the deer carcasses. This sighting constitutes the first record of Common Raven on the New Haven Christmas Bird Count (a count period sighting).

**Saturday, December 20, 2003, New Haven Christmas Bird Count Day:** One Common Raven is seen gliding out from the southern terminus of West Rock Ridge toward Westville Village at approximately 0900. The sighting is made while driving along Fitch Street toward the entrance to West Rock Ridge State Park. This constitutes a count day observation of raven for the New Haven CBC. No raven is present on the deer carcasses when the ridge top is reached.

**Sunday, December 21:** 1507: 35° Fahrenheit. One raven is sighted overhead while I was standing at the deer carcasses. One faint kronk call is heard. The raven glided to the center of the ridge and out of sight to the north.

**Winter 2004:** Continued observations of the raven pair are made at West Rock Ridge through January and February 2004, primarily seen feeding on the deer carcasses.

### **Summary.**

There was some limited evidence of Common Raven present at West Rock Ridge in late January 2003. Regular field observations began at West Rock after the first week in March. A raven pair, presumed to be the same pair that successfully bred at west Rock in



2002, was first observed in the 2003 breeding season on March 12. The first observation of a raven adult dropping out of sight into the cliff nest recess occurred on March 16. During the period March 21 to April 6, only one raven, the adult male, was observed at the nest site or quarry site.

On April 6, the West Rock raven nest was discovered, with the female raven quietly incubating five eggs. The five eggs are known to have persisted in the nest through April 10. On April 14, I confirmed hatching of three of the eggs. The three very small nestlings very likely hatched out during the two days of April 13 and April 14. I have no data on any sequence of hatching. The newly hatched young initially were not distinguishable by size. It is possible that the nestlings were lying over a fourth, unhatched egg. Ratcliffe (1997) reported that only the female incubates the eggs, while the male brings food in to the female and maintains a sentinel watch on the nest. Incubation of eggs by ravens usually begins with the last or second last egg laid and it lasts for 17 to 21 days. He stated that raven eggs are laid one per day or over an interval of between one and two days. Using these data as a guide, the egg-laying of the breeding West Rock female most likely began between March 19 and March 23. March 19 is the last day that the male and female were seen flying together in the vicinity of the nest crevice.

Jim Zipp photographed the four raven nestlings on April 14. No observations of the nest were made between April 18 and April 27, but one of the nestlings was lost during this period. On April 28, Jim Zipp photographed the three remaining nestlings, now noticeably larger and more feathered out. They were not observed to vocalize in any way during the photographic work, but the following day, April 29, they were audibilizing, in their 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> day. From the 28<sup>th</sup> of April through latest May and early June, size differentials were apparent in the nestlings. The three birds were distinguishable by their overall size, the extent of feather development and visibility of feather shafts and tracts, and their behavior in the nest. The oldest of the three nestlings was considerably more active than the other two. I was able to obtain fairly specific times for fledging of the three young birds. The oldest nestling fledged on Friday, May 30 between 0735 and 1400, in its 47<sup>th</sup> day. The second bird fledged between 1736 on Sunday, June 1 and 0853 on Monday, June 2 in its 47<sup>th</sup> or 48<sup>th</sup> day. The third bird fledged between 1954 on Sunday, June 1 and 0730 on Monday, June 2 in its 49<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> day. Ratcliffe (1997) stated that young ravens "do not leave the nest until 45 days old on average," citing several other authors. My observations indicate that the West Rock ravens required 47 to 50 days in the nest.

During the breeding period, the adult ravens were observed to engage in agonistic behavior with Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawk, Osprey, and Peregrine Falcons. Their disturbance by Turkey Vultures was fairly regular, particularly in the warmer weather when vultures spend a great deal of time soaring up and down the ridge. The ravens were especially irritated with the occasional appearance of Red-tailed Hawk, which they would pursue aggressively until the hawk left the nest site. Peregrine Falcons clearly held dominance over the ravens, dive-bombing them very aggressively for as long as they cared to. In these instances, the ravens would retreat into the tree canopy.

I never observed feeding of the raven nestlings, due to the impossibility of viewing the nest when the parents were attending the young. The adult male gave evidence of seeking food at Amity Shopping Center, close by to the south and west of West Rock Ridge. Food searches also probably took place in the quarry space, north and south along the ridge, and off to the east of the ridge. On the few instances that food was seen brought back into the nest area, it was unrecognizable. My observations of ravens breeding at West Rock in 2004, to be described later, include more complete information on food preferences and other aspects of raven breeding, particularly nest construction and egg laying.

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Stephen P. Broker, 50 Hidden Place, Cheshire, CT 06410-3723

## COOPER'S HAWK WITHIN-FOLIAGE-FORAGING

Dwight G. Smith and Arnold Devine

Three basic Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) foraging patterns are described in the literature. One method consists of extended back and forth searching flights adjacent to woodland edges or just above open terrain such as grasslands, fields, and meadows to flush birds into flight. Birds that take flight are then pursued and captured, if possible. A second pattern consists of attacking a flock of flying, feeding, or roosting birds to scatter the group and isolate an individual, which is then pursued. A third foraging behavior consists of short surprise attacks, often via a circuitous route to the prey which may be taken in midair, on the ground, or from branches of a tree or shrub (Bent 1937, Johnsgard 1990, Palmer 1988). In this paper we describe our observations of a fourth hunting technique which we tentatively label "within-foliage-foraging," during which wintering Cooper's Hawks foraged within densely branched conifer trees or in shrub thickets.

In the first series of observations the Cooper's Hawk initially adopted a sit-and-wait foraging format, watching birds enter and roost within the lower branches of a Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens*). The hawk used several different perches on a nearby tree, all from 25 to 32 meters distant. When a small group of birds or sometimes a single bird entered the spruce the hawk flew directly to the spruce, landed on the ground just beneath the lowest branches, hesitated briefly as it looked up into the interior branches, then flew and hopped from branch to branch within the conifer interior toward where the potential prey species were perched.

Target species included House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*), and Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*). The four attacks on House Sparrows were successful, but the White-throated Sparrow managed to "wiggle free" and escape. The Common Grackle was grappled in the branches and again on the ground, but struggled continuously, pushing the hawk away with its feet and striking it with its bill. It ultimately wriggled free and escaped.

The observed prey capture rate of four of six attempts is 67%, which is considerably higher than the 21% success rate that Toland (1985) reported. Possibly, the dense spray-like branching of certain types of conifers limits escape routes, thereby increasing the vulner-



ability of potential prey.

In another encounter in a different habitat, a Cooper's Hawk was observed chasing an unidentified sparrow into a shrub thicket. Instead of veering off, the Cooper's Hawk followed the sparrow into the thicket and perched within the densely branched shrubs. The hawk hopped methodically from branch to branch towards the sparrow. As the hawk neared striking distance the sparrow burst from the thicket with the hawk in pursuit. We were unable to determine the outcome of this foraging episode.

The nature and persistence of the pursuits and attacks that we observed suggests that Cooper's Hawks may, under some circumstances at least, continue to pursue prey for some time after one to several failures. We suggest that caution should be used in determining prey capture rates for this species when based on observing the results of a single strike. We also pose the question as to how hunting success rate should be tallied. Should it be tallied on the basis of the success or failure of each strike, or of each hunting episode?

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DWIGHT G. SMITH, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT 06515

ARNOLD DEVINE, 18 South Street, Plymouth, CT 06782

## RED-SHOULDERED HAWK EATING CARRION IN WINTER

Paul Carrier

We all perceive hawks as active hunters, taking their prey live while leaving carrion for the vultures and their kind.

The winter of January 2003 was a cold and snowy one in north-west Connecticut. We had snow a week before Thanksgiving, and snow pack remained on the ground well into April. January was unusually cold with six days of lows below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, and several daytime highs that failed to reach 20 degrees.

This winter a number of Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) over-wintered in northwest Connecticut and that is not typical for this area. Red-tailed Hawks predominate here in winter, as do Coopers, Sharp-shinned and the occasional Northern Goshawk. Red-shouldered Hawks nest in this area almost every year, and this winter one apparently chose to over winter in the Harwinton area

This adult female Red-shouldered Hawk was in my neighborhood all winter, and often came into my yard. Once I saw her fly into a clump of goldenrod and catch a dark rodent from beneath the snow, and several times I watched her make passes at the many red squirrels under and about my bird feeders. I assumed this was her primary prey, for there were many red squirrels around this winter. On another occasion I saw her perched 30 feet up in a dead tree overlooking my garden, while below many Dark-eyed Juncos were actively feeding under this tree. The juncos appeared to ignore her altogether, unlike when an accipiter is present, so I assume she posed little threat to them.

In the back yard I maintain an organic compost pile to which I also add table scraps, and from it local crows glean anything edible, especially meat scraps. This compost pile has been a favorite feeding place of the crows for many years, and it is my belief that it has helped many survive the winter.

This Red-shouldered Hawk roosted within the thick, dark old hemlock forest in the back yard. When the crows found her, they made her life miserable, although she had learned through patience that the crows quickly lost interest and just flew away to take their business elsewhere.

On January 26th I put out my daily deposit of table scraps containing some chicken leftovers and trimmings. I always bang the container on the side wood, and like clockwork several crows ap-



peared. Before I reached the door, they were gleaning the offerings.

A short time later, while looking out the window, I saw a large adult Red-shouldered Hawk perched on my grape arbor just above the compost pile being harassed by three crows. I noticed her tearing food from her talons! Had she caught a mouse nearby and landed on the arbor to eat it? With the aid of binoculars I saw that she was actually eating from a scrap chicken wing! I assumed she probably usurped it from a crow; but did she?

After gleaning all she could from the chicken wing, she flew down into the compost pile and began exploring for more. Soon she found another cooked chicken scrap, and putting a talon on it began pulling off bits of cooked meat! This hawk was undoubtedly eating cooked table scraps from the compost pile! After that day, I again observed her several times gleaning table scraps from my compost pile.

Throughout the winter, I noticed this hawk had a seemingly symbiotic relationship with the crows. Through tolerating their harassment and keeping the local crow clan in view, she gathered information as to where available food might be, and when they found it, she swiped food from the crows. I would often see this hawk follow a crow from the compost pile into the woods, and there steal its morsel.

"Almost all raptors will probably take fresh carrion on occasion, Even species with specialized diets like Osprey, which have been seen to eat dead fish. In North America, Bald and Golden Eagles feed regularly on carrion, as do Crested Caracaras. Rough-legged Hawks scavenge, especially in winter, and carrion can be an important food for Red-tailed Hawks - as evidenced by one study that showed remains of cows, horses, sheep and bobcats in redtail pellets." (Weidensaul, 1996).

Also mentioned in a list of "Raptors that eat carrion" is the Red-shouldered Hawk, noted as rarely a carrion user (Weidensaul 1996):

Within food taken by Red-shouldered Hawk, (Ferguson-Lee & Christie (2001) list. "Wide variety of, mainly, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, and insects, with fewer birds, crayfish and fish; carrion rarely taken."

Under Food for Red-shouldered Hawk, Edward Forbush wrote: "In Fairfield Connecticut, at Birdcraft sanctuary, on January 1, 1920 - A Red-shouldered Hawk was seen daily for two months - entered a hen yard where a deer's neck and dead Opossum were, and fed on this carrion daily for two weeks". It was also seen catching rats and mice.

In Summary: Raptors are not always predatory. When the weather is cold and harsh, and live prey become depleted or difficult to find, becoming opportunistic and eating carrion may become a necessary survival option. I, believe the word "carrion" should be used only for the description of putrid, decaying meat. Freshly killed, dead and/or frozen meat should be described under a different term. For cooked meat, however, I do not know what term to use.

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PAUL CARRIER - 80 High view Drive, Harwinton, CT 06790



Red-shouldered Hawk eating in compost pile. Drawing by Paul Carrier





## CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

WINTER, DECEMBER 1, 2003 THROUGH

FEBRUARY 29, 2004

*Greg Hanisek*

Conditions here were the same as elsewhere in New England - very cold with extensive snow cover. Open water was limited away from Long Island Sound, and half-hardy species were reduced in number with most reports from the immediate coast.

### GEESE THROUGH RAPTORS

Five **Greater White-fronted Geese** for the season included singles at Fisher Meadows, Avon, December 25-January 1 (PCi et al.), at Twin Brooks Park in Trumbull December 27-January 11 (SMy et al.), in Bloomfield December 27 (JMe), in Somers January 1 (CE) and in Lebanon February 14 (JMe). A **Barnacle Goose** of unknown provenance was at Smith Cove on the Thames River in Waterford February 14 (BA). The season's only **Tundra Swan** was at North Cove, Old Saybrook, December 1 (CWs, PA). Late **Blue-winged Teal** included one at Bantam Lake in Litchfield December 12 (DRo) and two at Pine Creek saltmarsh in Fairfield December 12-14 (CB). Konold's Pond in Woodbridge held two **Northern Shovelers** December 8-10 (KH, SBr), and one was at the

Quinnipiac River ponds in Hamden December 13 (NR). In a winter inhospitable to dabbling ducks, six **Northern Pintails** were still at Konold's Pond on January 1 (JMo); three were at Millwoods Park, Wethersfield, on January 2 (SK); and two were at Fisher Meadows in Avon on January 1 (JMe et al.). The season's only **Redheads** were singles on December 20 in East Haven (fide DSo) and December 27 to early January at Seaside Park in Bridgeport (DV, SMY et al.).

A female **King Eider** wintered at HBSP for the third straight year (m.ob.), and two female **Common Eiders** at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford January 14-15 (NS, JR) were the only ones reported. This species seemed poised a few years ago for a major surge in numbers in the state, but it

hasn't happened yet despite nesting close by. A female **Harlequin Duck** was a good find December 12 at Greenwich Point (MSa). A leucistic Common Goldeneye wintered off Bridgeport. It was described as "mostly white with a cream-colored head and back" (DV). Three **Barrow's Goldeneyes** (two males, one female) wintered on the Bantam River in Litchfield at its entry into Bantam Lake. They fed in the open waters of this small river by day then moved into open waters of a lake cove at the river mouth by night (DRo et al.). Icy conditions pushed freshwater-loving Common Mergansers right down to the mouth of the Connecticut River, with 119 in North Cove, Old Saybrook, February 29 (SK).

Of 10 reports of Red-necked Grebe, the earliest was January 24-27 at Quinebaug Fish Hatchery in Plainfield (RDi et al.), with the rest in February in a small echo of last year's big "spring" flight." American Bittern sightings on December 3, 19, 28, and January 1 at Hammonasset Beach State Park (hereafter HBSP) in Madison, were typical of small numbers that winter there annually (SK, DL, LGa et al.). The high counts for **Black Vulture** were 13 on January 29 in Wilton (LT) and 11 on December 7 in Bridgeport (JHo); there were numerous reports of smaller groups scattered around the state. Up to 50

**Bald Eagles** wintered on the lower Connecticut River (m.ob.) and birds were scattered at the few other open water locations around the state. For instance the Naugatuck River, which has not traditionally had wintering eagles, held about five (m.ob.). Wintering numbers are on an upward trend statewide. Nearly 30 reports of Rough-legged Hawks (with attempts to avoid duplication) amounted to a good winter season. As expected, most were seen near the coast with a high count of four December 29 at Milford Point (CB). Ten reports of Northern Goshawk were a little more than average, but probably reflective of increased observer reporting rather than an incursion. Golden Eagle sightings from seven locations were more than double the normal winter number. Reports from the Northwest Corner usually come from Canaan Mountain, but this year one was in Sharon December 14 (DSm). The only other report away from Canaan Mountain or the regular Connecticut River valley spots was a single January 6-10 at Lake Galliard in North Branford (SW et al.).

#### SHOREBIRDS THROUGH THRUSHES

A Willet showing characteristics of the western race lingered to at least January 6 at Griswold Point in Old Lyme (TH, HG et al.); there is only one



later record, a bird that overwintered in West Haven in 1996-97. An American Woodcock was an unexpected visitor to a New Haven yard December 11 (MSc). The only **Black-headed Gull** for the season was at Eastern Point, Groton, on January 4 (BD). The recent closing of most of the state's larger landfills, especially the gull magnet in Manchester, led to speculation about how numbers of some of the less common species would fare. Early returns suggest the bottom may be dropping out of the Lesser Black-backed Gull market in this state. When the landfills were open, Iceland Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull occurred in roughly equal numbers. Things tilted toward Iceland last winter, and this winter the disparity was striking: 25+ reports of Iceland Gull (with an effort to eliminate duplication) compared to two Lesser Black-backeds. The high count of Iceland Gulls was three each December 14 at Griswold Point (TH) and December 23 at West Hartford Reservoir No. 6 (PCi). The only two reports of **Glaucous Gull** were singles December 12 at Bantam Lake, a rare occurrence for Litchfield County (DRo, JE), and December 27 from Wethersfield Cove (SK), but this species occurred in limited numbers even when the landfills were open. The season's only alcid report was a

**Razorbill** from Ender's Island, Mystic, on January 4 (BD).

**Snowy Owl** produced two reports of short-staying birds in December but none thereafter. One was at Long Beach in Stratford December 5 (fide DV) and the other at HBSP the same day (SA fide JCo). Coastal marshes produced about 15 reports of Short-eared Owls (m.ob.), including a high count of three on December 9 at Long Beach in Stratford (CB). Three **Red-headed Woodpeckers** for the season, all immatures, were in Roxbury December 20 (RB), in a North Stonington yard January 18-20 (BFe) and at Worthington Pond Farm in Somers February 26-29 (WS, JS et al.). A partially leucistic Downy Woodpecker wintered at a feeder in Brookfield (fide ADi). Unlike most half-hardy species, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers occurred in good numbers, with about a dozen reported. This may be a reflection of the species' increase via southward range extension in the state. An Eastern Phoebe, probably an early migrant, was in Guilford February 26 (LGu). A long-staying **Western Kingbird** in Westport, which was first reported in fall, remained until at least December 8 (JHu et al.). Five **Northern Shrikes** for the season were at Naugatuck State Forest December 14 (MSz), Lake Chamberlin in Bethany December 20 (fide DSo), Bantam Lake

in Litchfield January 21 (GH), Goshen January 26 (JMh) and Harwinton February 26 (PCa). Red-breasted Nuthatches were widespread and numerous; examples include 19 at reservoir property in Manchester on December 14 (TA), 26 in one section of White Memorial Foundation in Litchfield on January 13 (DRo) and 85 in the New Haven area Dec. 20 (fide DSo). A leucistic **Eastern Bluebird** was an interesting find January 2 in Litchfield (KF).

#### WAXWINGS THROUGH WINTER FINCHES

**Bohemian Waxwings** created a flurry of February reports. The first, one bird on February 3 in Torrington (PCa), was the only one west of the Connecticut River. All others reports were east of the river in the general area of Storrs: up to two on February 5, 8 and 11 in Tolland (LGa, SR et al.); two on February 11 in Westford (NP); 20 on February 12 in Chaplin (MSz); 11 on February 14 at the same Chaplin location (PR); two on February 14 in Eastford (PR); c. five on the UConn campus at Storrs on February 17 (PR); and one on February 27 in Danielson (MSz). Wintering Yellow-rumped Warblers were greatly reduced in numbers, reflective of harsh conditions. The only other warbler species reported were a Palm Warbler December 4 at Sherwood Island State Park in

Westport (EJ) and a Yellow-breasted Chat December 21 in Pawcatuck (BD). One the season's most interesting birds was a **Summer Tanager** present from December 8 to at least Jan. 6 in a neighborhood in Old Lyme, where it spent part of the time eating bees at a hive (HG).

A Chipping Sparrow wintered at a feeder in Harwinton (PCa). A flurry of December Vesper Sparrows included one December 20 in North Haven (fide DSo), one December 24-January 8 at Sherwood Island (FG et al.) and one December 22 in South Windsor (TA). The best count of White-crowned Sparrows, which were widespread, was 10 on January 10 in South Windsor (LK). **Dickcissels** were nice feeder visitors in a Waterbury yard in early December (DC) and in Mansfield Center December 31-January 2 (GK). The best of a handful of Eastern Meadowlark reports was four on January 17 at a horse pasture in Ledyard (SG). A group of eight **Boat-tailed Grackles** wintered at the Stratford Great Meadows, which is also a breeding area (CB). The only **Baltimore Oriole** for the season was in Groton January 4 (BD).

Common Redpoll staged a widespread flight, with most in the northwest but scattered birds in all parts of the state. A total of c. 35 reports included many single-digit counts at feeders, but also about 10



groups ranging from 20 to 50 birds. Dwarfing them all was a group of c. 300 feeding on black birch catkins on the Mattabesett Trail above Black Pond in Meriden February 29 (DB). Reports were spread throughout the season. No Hoary Redpolls were confirmed, but two possibles were mentioned by cautious observers who didn't get sufficient looks to be positive about this critical and difficult identification. Pine Siskins were present in numbers similar to the redpolls; the high counts were feeder reports of 120+ birds January 6 in Barkhamsted (FZ) and 70+ January 2 in West Hartland (SSl). Both species of Crossbills and Pine Grosbeak were absent. While hardly a major flight, six reports of Evening Grosbeaks were more than in recent winters. Reports ranged from one to 10 birds, with two in January and the rest in December. The earliest was a small group of flyovers December 9 in New Hartford (PCa); the high count of 10 was at feeders in West Hartland December 13 (SSl).

[Editor's Note: Reports of rare or unusual bird species in Connecticut (species with an asterisk on the most recent COA checklist) require that documentation be submitted to the Secretary of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (Mark Szantyr, 145 Farmington Ave.,

Waterbury, CT 06710) if they are to be included in the field notes].

## OBSERVERS,

CONTRIBUTORS (**boldface**)

Sylvia Alexander, Jayne Amico, Ralph Amodei, Ken Andresen, Tim Antanaitis, Bob Askins, Phil Asprelli, **Renee Baade**, Jim Bair (JBa), **Charles Barnard**, Scott Baron (SBA), Dan Barvir, Fred Baumgarten, Joe Bear (JBe), Nick Bonomo, Steve Broker (SBr), **Paul Carrier** (PCa), Paul Cianfaglione (PCi), John Clancy (JCl), Linda Clancy, Al Collins, **Patrick Comins** (PCo), Jerry Connolly (JCo), Dave Coutu, Neil Currie, ML Dahl, Chris Dalton, Andrew Dasinger (ADa), **Paul Desjardins** (PDe), Bob Dewire, **Angela Dimmit** (ADi), Robert Dixon (RDi), Randy Domina (RDo), Patrick Dugan (PDu), **Carl Ekroth**, John Eykelhoff, Bruce Fellman (BFfe), Bruce Finnan (BFi), Kevin Finnan, Sam Fried, Paul Fusco, Lisa Gagnon (LGa), Frank Gallo, Ted Gilman, **Hank Golet**, Steve Gordon, Lorraine Gunderson (LGu), Ed Hagen, Nita Hamilton, AJ Hand, **Greg Hanisek**, Stacy Hanks (SHa), Mark Hansen, **Roy Harvey**, Simon Harvey (SHr), Ted Hendrickson, John Himmelman (JHi), Julian Hough (JHo), Katy Hubbard, Jim Hunter (JHu), Lynn James, Elsbeth Johnson, Rich Kania, Jay Kaplan, Len Kendall, Betty Kleiner (BKl), Brian Kleinman

(BKm), George Knocklein, Cindi Kobak, **Steve Kotchko**, Tricia LaPolla, Roger Lawson, David Lawton, Carol Lemmon, Steven Living, **Frank Mantlik** (FMA), Steve Mayo (SMY), Flo McBride (FMc), Janet Mehmel (JMh), **Jamie Meyers** (JMe), Judy Moore (JMo), Marty Moore, Bob Muller, **Russ Naylor**, Gina Nichol, Adrian Nichols, Beth Nichols, Fred Norton, Anders Ogren, John Ogren, Scott Olmstead, Dave Pelletier (DPe), Ron Pelletier, Noble Proctor, **Dave Provencher** (DPr), James Restivo, Steve Rogers, Nancy Rosenbaum, **Dave Rosgen** (DRo), Arne Rosengren, Dean Rupp (DRu), Phil Rusch, **Meredith Sampson** (MSa),

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GREG HANISEK, 175 Circuit Ave.,  
Waterbury, CT 06078





## PHOTO CHALLENGE

*Julian Hough*

### ANSWER TO PHOTO CHALLENGE 46

Obviously a passerine, we are immediately drawn to the long, robust bill and short tail. The overall plumage is rather nondescript, with no wingbars or other striking features. The head pattern is the most eye-catching, showing a distinct whitish supercilium and dark eyestripe.

The robust feel to the bird, combined with a domed crown, long bill and pale supercilium all suggest Swainson's Warbler, a bird we have seen skulking around mosquito-infested woodlots in southern Texas. A nice bird to see in Texas, but a mega for Connecticut!

Unfortunately, before we get too excited and reach for our cell phone, we rule this out as quickly as we considered it, because we notice on second glance, distinct dark streaks on the breast. Swainson's Warblers don't have underpart streaking.

Only two species fit the mystery bird; Northern and Louisiana Waterthrushes. Usually, these two species are not too difficult to identify. Northern's are typically smaller and show more of a pale lemon yellow suffusion to the supercilium and underparts.



Louisiana tends to be more contrasting, showing a more contrasting white supercilium and underparts. This is typically hard to judge from a black and white photograph, so let's look at other features. If you ignore overall plumage colors in the field and look at the overall shape of both waterthrushes, you will notice that Northern's tend to be shorter-billed and longer-tailed. In the field, the shorter tail and longer bill of Louisiana Waterthrush give them a more front-heavy appearance. From this picture, the bill does indeed look long and the tail appears to project only a small distance from the primaries suggesting Louisiana Waterthrush. To clinch the identification we need to look at a few more features: Northern Waterthrushes typically show more densely streaked underparts, with some small spots/streaks intruding into the lower throat areas.

In Louisiana, the throat is whitish and unmarked and the breast markings seem bold, but sparse, both features, which fit our mystery bird and support the identification as Louisiana. In life, Louisiana's show a more contrasting head pattern with a wide whitish (not lemony) supercilium which (unlike Northern) flares noticeably behind the eye. The underparts are usually more whitish (often buff-washed on flanks), but never lemon yellow and have fewer breast streaks. Lastly, the stout legs often appear more 'bubblegum' pink than the flesh pink legs of Northern.

Although the prominent supercilium does not appear to flare behind the eye, the combination of long bill, unmarked throat and short tail identify this bird as a Louisiana Waterthrush. It was photographed by Jay Kaplan in Canton, Conn. in 1983.

Julian Hough, 22 Hallock Ave., New Haven, CT 06519



Photo Challenge 47 Identify the species. Answer next issue,



# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Betty S. Kleiner - 5 Flintlock Ridge, Simsbury, CT 06070  
(860) 658-5670 - CTWarbler@cs.com

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*The Connecticut Warbler* (ISSN 1077-0283) is devoted to the study of birds and their conservation in Connecticut and is published quarterly (January, April, July, and October) by the Connecticut Ornithological Association.

Send manuscripts to the Editor. Please type double spaced with ample margins, on one side of a sheet. Submit a copy on a computer disk, if possible. Style should follow usage in recent issues. All manuscripts receive peer review.

Illustrations and photographs are needed and welcome. Line art of Connecticut and regional birds should be submitted as good quality prints or in original form. All submitted materials will be returned. We can use good quality photographs of birds unaccompanied by an article but with caption including species, date, locality, and other pertinent information.

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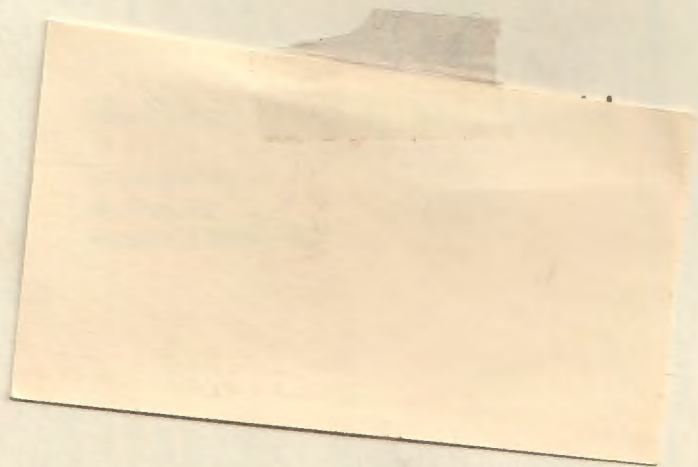
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# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*



Volume 24 No. 4    **October 2004**    Pages 109-156

# The Connecticut Warbler

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*

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Volume 24, Number 4

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## ABOUT OUR COVER

### Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*) By Mark Szantyr

Ask Connecticut birders what species they'd most like to see in the state, and our cover subject would get a lot of votes. Mark used his well-honed artistic skills to create a birding fantasy that could come true. A native of Waterbury, he is fine arts program coordinator at Quinebaug Valley Community College and serves as secretary of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut.



## Note from the Editor

The Connecticut Warbler is, quite simply, the face of the Connecticut Ornithological Association. With that in mind, I approach my assignment as the latest editor of this well-respected journal with a great sense of excitement and responsibility. I hope to use my experience as an ardent birder and naturalist to continue the tradition of excellence established by my predecessors.

I'd like to apply a time period to my birding experience but I'm never sure where to begin. One of my earliest memories dates to the age of 3 or 4, when my dad called me to the kitchen window to point out a shrike on a wire fence bordering our backyard. If I start there I've been birding more than five decades. Or should it begin at age 12, when on a trip to Florida with the family I ticked off Swallow-tailed Kite, Brown Pelican and White Ibis in the Life List pages of a well-worn Peterson Field Guide. Maybe I should wait a couple of years, to age 14, when I started keeping a year list in a small notebook, after reading about this practice in "Footnotes on Nature" by John Kieran. I've been an obsessive note-keeper, and a student of local avifauna, ever since.

This interest has made it pure joy to compile the Field Notes section of *The Warbler* since 1995, a task that I'll continue and one that I gladly shouldered for about a decade for Records of New Jersey Birds before moving to Waterbury 12 years ago.

Since then I've come to appreciate the beauty and the birding in my adopted home state. I've traveled extensively here, compiling lists, leading field trips, conducting counts and studies and learning constantly. I've also spent a lot of time at my two favorite places, Lighthouse Point in New Haven during fall migration and my oak-filled neighborhood during warbler time in May.

All of you have your favorite birding spots, and one of the greatest pleasures has been learning about them from the many new friends I've made here. I confess, however, that when I first arrived I noticed a slight inferiority complex among the state's able contingent of birders. This was directly attributable to Connecticut's location between two of the most historically significant birding states, Massachusetts and New York. Borrowing a phrase I once heard used about another state in another context, I found myself in "a vale of humility surrounded by two mountains of conceit."

I've also seen that begin to change. As the ranks of the state's birders have grown, and dissemination of information has

improved, so has the appreciation for our rich and beautiful backyard. The breeding diversity of the Northwest Corner, the sweep of autumn migration along the coast, the magnets for birds moving north in spring - they capture new admirers every year.

Betty Kleiner, the retiring editor, has done a wonderful job of addressing the interests of the state's birders, and I'll do my best to maintain her high standards. I'd also like to draw attention to the behind the scenes work of her husband, Gil Kleiner, who handled all the pagination and production of the magazine. I'm also very fortunate that Manny Merisotis has agreed to take on this portion of the job. Manny and his wife Teri have been handling the production work of the *Bulletin* for the past three years and have now decided to help out with the *Warbler*. I expect we're going to have fun.

*Greg Hanisek*

### **Coming in January**

In recognition of the importance of seasonal status in the understanding and appreciation of an area's avifauna, the January issue will be devoted to the status and distribution of Connecticut's birds. The centerpiece will be a full series of bar graphs charting the seasonal distribution of all of the more than 400 currently extant species recorded in the state.

In order to make this issue a useful instrument that can be carried in the field and kept as a reference, all of the articles will be related to general status and distribution, with an emphasis on the period since the publication of Zeranski and Baptist's "Connecticut Birds" in 1990. To this end, both the spring and summer Field Notes appear in this issue.

### **What have you observed?**

This edition includes a section of short notes on bird behavior and distribution. We would like to make this a regular feature and encourage submissions from the state's contingent of field observers.



## Questions and Answers: Identifying Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii*, the Newest Addition to the Connecticut Checklist.

Mark S. Szantyr

My first experience with small Canada Geese came when Russ Naylor, our local area "Anser-man" discovered a Barnacle Goose at the Southbury, Connecticut, Training School pond that was accompanied by, in Russ's excited words "a family group of Hutchin's Geese". Hutchin's Geese, or more correctly, "Richardson's" Canada Geese, *Branta canadensis hutchinsii*, was considered a subspecies of Canada Goose at that time. To be honest, I was largely unaware of what this form was or what it looked like. I had no experience with it and, after finally seeing this group in Southbury, was amazed at how strikingly small this Canada Goose appeared compared to the larger, locally nesting form of Canada Goose so often encountered in Connecticut.

Subsequently, I spent many years living in northeastern Connecticut. This area abounds in open agricultural fields and seems to be on a major flyway of migrant waterfowl passing through Connecticut from their Arctic origins on their way south. Many of these ducks and geese use the corn fields of the "Quiet Corner" as staging and feeding areas, staying till freeze up or snow cover drives them further south. Since that time in Southbury, I have encountered this small form of Canada Goose in several field seasons. Occasionally, while sorting through the thousands of migrant Canadas for the "twitch-able" uncommon geese that pass through the state, Snow, Greater White-fronted, or even the rarer Barnacle or Pink-footed Geese, I might encounter this diminutive form of Canada Goose and, maybe because I am a bird geek, or maybe because I was incredibly prescient (the former is closer to the truth), I started keeping track of them. After all, while not a countable species in Connecticut (at that time), it was a bona fide migrant from quite a distance and was no less interesting than other Arctic nesting species one might encounter in Connecticut. Likewise, the challenge of finding this uncommon form of Canada Goose in a flock of geese that might approach 2,000 individuals was great sport.

Challenge? You might be asking yourself why this is so challeng-

ing if in fact this form of goose is so strikingly small when compared to our local denizens of the putting green. When this bird occurs in Connecticut, it is rarely with very many of the larger local race of Canada Geese but with the much trimmer and compact "wild" northern nesting forms that pass through in late autumn. This migration usually peaks in late November, with Thanksgiving being a good average time of occurrence. These Arctic nesting Canadas are markedly different from our local geese and in fact, can appear so different as to be mistakenly considered the aforementioned *hutchinsii* when compared to our local form.

Before I go any deeper into this identification problem, let's discuss the confusing world of Canada Goose subspecies.

Prior to the most recent supplement to the American Ornithologists Union Checklist of Birds in North America, Canada Goose was considered to be a single species, *Branta canadensis*. This species comprised (varyingly) 11 subspecific forms:

#### Larger Forms:

Eastern or Atlantic, *canadensis*; Interior, *interior*; Giant, *maxima*; Western, *moffitti*; Dusky, *occidentalis*; Vancouver or Queen Charlotte, *fulva*; and Lesser, *parvipes*.

#### Smaller Forms:

Richardson's, *hutchinsii*; Taverner's, *taverneri*; Aleutian, *leucopareia*; and Cackling, *minima*.

These forms were split largely based on the distinct and separate location where each type nested or wintered as well as by markedly different physical characters in some forms. (I have greatly over-simplified this picture and for a fuller understanding please see Angus Wilson's incredible Web site, Ocean Wanderers, [www.oceanwanderers.com](http://www.oceanwanderers.com), for a cogent and comprehensive breakdown of the group as well as an extensive list of references.)

Subsequent genetic studies show that there are probably two species comprising the Canada Goose complex, and the 45<sup>th</sup> Supplement to the AOU Checklist, released this year, now shows the Canada Goose split into two species, the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), and the Cackling Goose (*B. hutchinsii*). The Canada Goose includes all of the larger forms and the Cackling Goose includes the small ones.





Photo by Mark Szantyr

**Figure A.** *Branta hutchinsii*, Cackling Goose, 21 December 1990, Mirror Lake, Storrs, Tolland County. Here shown with a Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*, for a size comparison. Note the extensive appearance of the white cheek patch on this small goose. This individual is typical of a textbook "Richardson's" Cackling Goose.

### Identification of Cackling Goose.

The subspecies of Cackling Goose most likely to be encountered in Connecticut is Richardson's form or *B. c. hutchinsii*. Other small forms are either very hard to differentiate or possibly more likely to be from a captive origin (remember, these are waterfowl and all caveats as to origin status apply here too!). This identification can be a daunting challenge for several reasons:

- We don't know where any one unbanded goose originated from in the Arctic and many of the forms are not readily separated by field characteristics. Making assumptions as to the identity of some individuals can only lead to further confusion.
- These various forms hybridize amongst themselves.
- Many previously "confidently" identified birds and photos are not really conclusive and may add to confusion when sorting through field marks.

I intend to concentrate on the most likely and perhaps, for us in the East, the most identifiable wild form, "Richardson's" Cackling Goose, and give you a set of field characters that seem to hold consistently across many field encounters. Many of the darker, more western forms of Cackling Goose are quite distinct in the field, but it is unclear as to whether or how frequently wild vagrancy of these forms occurs. Any encounters with these forms should be fully and conclusively documented. Again, please know that not all "small" geese will be attributable to a subspecies and it is conceivable that some geese that appear small may not be confidently assigned to either of the two new sibling species.

Cackling Goose is small. Very small. It can appear very nearly Mallard-sized, especially at a distance when compared to some larger Canada Geese. It is smaller than most of the Snow Geese that stop over in Connecticut and about the same size as Brant and Barnacle Goose. As well as being smaller overall, this species is short-legged, short-necked, square-headed, and stubby-billed. All of these characters are subject to interpretation. Even an Arctic nesting Canada Goose can show tendencies toward these characters when compared to our local-nesting Canadas.

"Richardson's" Cackling Geese, however, also tend to be very pale breasted. They are perhaps the palest breasted of all the small forms, and perhaps the palest breasted in either species. Other forms of Cackling Goose, generally the more western forms, are darker, often much darker, and some forms tend to show a white halo separating the black neck from the dark grayish brown of the breast. This white ring is rarely evident in Richardson's form. Cackling Goose also tends to have a silvery or frosted appearance dorsally. The feathers of the upper parts are grayer and more broadly pale edged, and this contrasts with the darker bases of the feathers to create a striking appearance. This is probably seasonally variable depending on feather wear and age of the bird.

Cackling Goose shows essentially the same white band on the neck and face as Canada Goose. Close inspection, however, shows that on "Richardson's" Cackling Goose, this white patch is proportionally more extensive. It is broader and seems to reach to the rear of the eye. The shape of the patch tends to be squarer and appears to take up more of the face than that of the larger Canada Goose. Some Cackling Geese show this white patch separated



across the ventral midline by a black stripe but I have not seen this in Richardson's Cackling Goose.

In the field the pale, silvery coloration, the very short neck (which also can appear relatively quite thick in relation to other Canada forms) and the square head and very stubby bill are quite distinctive. While some Canada Geese can approach "Richardson's" Cackling Goose in some aspects, it is likely that none will possess all of these field marks.



*Photo by Mark Szantyr*  
**Figure B** Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii*, Mansfield,  
Tolland Co., 20 November 2002.

Cackling Goose is a regular visitor to Connecticut. It is found in most field seasons and probably overlooked on many more occasions than it is seen. Searching through the large flocks of Canada Geese that occur in November and December and again in

March and April, especially those flocks in the eastern and central portions of the state, has proved rewarding. This search takes patience and the willingness to not identify some smaller birds lacking ALL of the conclusive field marks. As always, detailed notes and field sketches can be invaluable to double check your sighting at a later time.



Photo by Mark Szantyr

**Figure C** Cackling Goose, same as Figure B. This individual showed all the characters consistent with this form in the field but the photos do not show the more overall frosted look typical of "Richardson's" Cackling Goose so evident in Figure A.

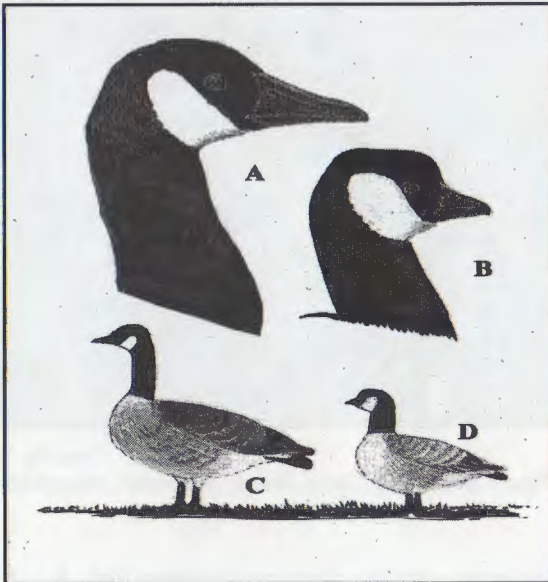


Illustration by Mark Szantyr

**Figure D** Comparison of typical Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*, (A, C) and "Richardson's" Cackling Goose (B, D)



## Notes On Behavior, Status and Distribution

### Winterer from the West

A probable "Oregon" Junco (*Junco hyemalis oregonus* in part) spent the entire winter at the Finnan residence in the Bunker Hill section of Waterbury. It was present 3 December 2003 through 4 April 2004. It appears to have been a first winter female and was never captured. As such, the bird cannot be safely identified as a pure Oregon, and the possibility of some hybrid ancestry cannot be ruled out. However, experts familiar with this form of *J. hyemalis* concur with its identification as an Oregon-type junco.

The accompanying photograph was taken in April shortly before the bird departed. The brown was really burning in on the wings and the bird looked very "Oregon-like" by this point.

When it first arrived in early December, the bird seemed only to



Photo by Bruce Finnan

*This junco wintered in Waterbury in 2003-04. Features suggesting "Oregon" Junco include the sharply defined convex hood, broad rufous flanks, brown back and brown scapulars.*

loosely associate with the main Junco flock. It was slightly smaller and not well tolerated by the others, who frequently chased it off. However, it wasn't long before they seemed to accept this individual as one of their own. It was almost always among them when they came in to feed throughout the rest of the winter.

Bruce Finnan

### **The Last Thrush Song**

The waning days of summer are perhaps the most mysterious of the year in regard to locally breeding passerines, especially the highly migratory species. Under most circumstances it's virtually impossible to sort out migratory departures, migratory arrivals and post-breeding dispersal.

The Cornwall Birding Group approached this topic from an interesting perspective in summer 2004. Members recorded the last singing dates for the three breeding thrush species. Here are the latest serenades they logged:

Veery - 29 July in Cornwall Bridge (Ron Hummel)

Hermit Thrush - 12 August in south Cornwall (Jean Bouteiller)

Wood Thrush - 6 August in West Cornwall (Don Henry)

data from Art Gingert

### **Delusions of Grandeur**

While I conducted a point count survey for the Mclean Wildlife Refuge in Granby, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers was causing a god awful commotion on a dead snag over my head. At the same time I heard what sounded like a third Pileated drumming 25 yards away. Whenever this interloper would drum, one or both of the pair overhead would fly to the area of the drumming and act very agitated. Upon investigating, I found a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker drumming on a metal Mclean Wildlife Refuge boundary marker sign attached to a small oak. The cadence and volume of the rapping, amplified by being done on the metal sign, was very similar to the slow and irregular drumming of a Pileated. The pair of "real" Pileateds were very disturbed by this and harassed the sapsucker until it stopped the drumming. This continued for the fifteen or twenty minutes I was in the area.

Interestingly, there was some new home construction going on adjacent to this section of the refuge and whenever a workman hammered on the roofing of one of the new homes, the Pileateds also became very agitated and would fly in large circles to investigate.

In addition, Greg Hanisek investigated an extremely loud drum on 6 May 2002 in the Milton section of Litchfield. He found a sapsucker using a small metal roadside sign as a drumming site

Mark Szantyr



## The 2004 Connecticut Summer Bird Count

### Joseph Zeranski and Patrick Comins

The Summer Bird Count (SBC) is the largest annual effort to track the status of nesting birds in Connecticut. Other efforts attempt to sample the state's breeding birds through standardized methods along fixed routes or sites and extrapolate those results to determine overall state trends. Additional ongoing or periodic studies focus on selected sites or track specific species. While all of these efforts provide valuable insight into the populations and trends of Connecticut's birdlife, the SBC provides the broadest picture of the overall health of Connecticut's breeding birds. Because the SBC covers so much of the state's area and attempts to address all groups of birds, it is an important tool to detect population changes at an early stage. Early detection of population declines is important to allow for remedial action when warranted.

Bird populations and habitats are dynamic and as more and more of our state becomes suburbanized, populations of some species or groups of species may be effected more than others. By painting a broad picture of Connecticut's bird life the SBC provides clues to help conservation planners decide which species and habitats need special attention in order to maintain the state's avian diversity or keep our common birds common.

This year 183 count day species were recorded, a ten-year low and slightly down from last year's 190 species. Three additional species were recorded within the count period. There were 229 observers in 116 parties, nearly perfectly on average compared with the last ten years of counts. A new ten-year high of 1231.8 party hours means that more time was spent in the field by the observers as compared with the last ten years. We heartily welcome back the participants from the Hartford circle; the Salmon River circle did not participate this year, but we added the Pauling NY-Hidden Valley Count area.

There were 99,908 individual birds recorded this year, very close to (99%) the ten-year average. The ten most abundant species recorded were: **American Robin, Common Grackle, European Starling, Gray Catbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Canada Goose, House Sparrow, Mourning Dove, Song Sparrow, and American Goldfinch.** Eleven species were represented by a single bird:

**Snow Goose, Green-winged Teal American Bittern, Least Bittern, Little Blue Heron, Glossy Ibis, Swainson's Thrush, Northern Parula, Yellow-breasted Chat, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and Pine Siskin**, as were both forms of hybrid between Blue and Golden-winged Warblers—"Brewster's" and "Lawrence's" Warbler. The three species recorded within the "count period" but not on the count days themselves were: **Least Sandpiper, Forster's Tern and Seaside Sparrow.**

Fourteen species were recorded that do not nest in Connecticut and can be considered either late migrants or non-nesting visitors. Especially noteworthy from this group are the first circle records for: **Snow Goose** in Greenwich Stamford (recorded only in two previous counts in the last ten years statewide); **Semipalmated Plover** (also recorded only in two previous counts in the last ten years statewide) and **Greater Yellowlegs**, both especially noteworthy inland in Hartford; and **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** in Litchfield Hills. Also noteworthy were the two **Common Goldeneye** from Stamford and the two **Red Knots**, which was a new species last year and was recorded for the second year in a row on the New Haven circle. **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows** are always a nice pick up in spring migration and it would be especially noteworthy if it was of one of the inland subspecies rather than the more likely *subvirgatus* race, which nests in coastal marshes south to Maine. The complete list of non-nesting species recorded on the SBC is: **Snow Goose, Brant, Greater Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Least Sandpiper (count period), Laughing Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Forster's Tern, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.**

**Red-breasted Merganser and Laughing Gulls** could potentially nest in Connecticut, but neither has been confirmed as breeding in the state and non-breeding lingerers of both species are regular in the breeding season in Connecticut. While it has yet to be confirmed as a nesting species in Connecticut, **Forster's Tern** was recorded for the second year in a row on the Greenwich Stamford Count and the sighting is again notable in light of increasing reports of this species in the spring and the northwards expansion of this southern species' nesting range. While the *Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas* lists **Olive-sided Flycatcher** as an accidental



breeder in the state, both records may just be of late migrants since this species occurs regularly as a migrant well into June. The Hartford record is undoubtedly a migrant, but the Litchfield Hills bird would be interesting if it was recorded in suitable habitat or remained in the same place for any period of time. Similarly, **Swainson's Thrush** is listed as a potential nester in the *Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas*, but we would be more curious about the possibility of a nesting attempt if it had occurred in the Litchfield Hills or Barkhamsted count areas where there is more suitable habitat.

### Notable Nesting Species

The **Green-winged Teal** in Greenwich/Stamford is noteworthy since this species recently joined the list of breeding species in Connecticut. The single **Common Nighthawk** recorded in the New Haven and Woodbury Roxbury circles may just be migrants, but the New Haven record is especially interesting since there were nighthawks recorded on this circle last year as well, and this species tends to be an urban nester in Connecticut. Any records of this species in the nesting season are noteworthy as it is one of Connecticut's most endangered species. The **Northern Parula** in Barkhamsted is notable in light of last year's confirmed nesting in this area. While **Yellow-breasted Chat** does nest in the state (at one known location), the bird recorded in the Greenwich-Stamford circle was likely a migrant. Two **Grasshopper Sparrows** were a new addition to the Storrs count, and if they nested it would mark a new breeding location for this species, another of the most endangered in the state. The **Pine Siskin** recorded on Litchfield Hills is a really good find, and this was a good year for them to nest in the state as there were good numbers of siskins around last winter. Since this species is a nomadic breeder it can decide to nest almost anywhere if there is a sufficient food supply. Siskins are so nomadic that it is possible that a pair could nest in western Canada one year, come here for the winter and stay to nest here in the spring. New possible nesting species for count circles include: **Bald Eagle**, **Black Vulture**, and **Golden-crowned Kinglet** in New Haven; **Black Vulture** and **Hooded Merganser** in Greenwich/Stamford; **Least Bittern** in Barkhamsted; and **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in Hartford. That Pawling Hidden Valley had several new species is no surprise since it is such a new count. (Only the CT portion of the area was censused these last two years, NY section will be covered next year)

### Increasing Species

**Wood Ducks** turned in a new ten-year high with 418 recorded, as did **Hooded Mergansers** with 72, 60 of which were on the Litchfield Hills circle, which alone would have been enough to be a ten-year high for the state. The reintroduction of **Wild Turkeys** continues to be a success, with 547 recorded, 131% of the ten-year average; we are sure many of you remember a time not so long ago when turkeys were worth a mention on the Rare Bird Alert (RBA). Another success story is that of **Great Blue Heron**, with 225 recorded, 170% of the ten-year average; they were on the state list as a species of special concern as recently as 10 years ago. **Black Vultures** continue to expand their range and increase in numbers in the state with a new high of 22 recorded; it is not hard to envision a day soon when they are no longer mentioned on the RBA. **Osprey** and **Bald Eagle** both turned in new ten-year high numbers with 87 and 22 respectively. These two species are recovering due to the 1972 United States ban on DDT. It is a shame that there are efforts by some to bring this pesticide back into use in the US. **Cooper's** and **Red-tailed Hawks** both turned in new highs with 40 and 341 respectively, perhaps due to increasing adaptability to suburban and, in the case of red-tails, even urban habitats. The comeback of the **Cooper's Hawk** has brought about its removal from the list of Connecticut's Special Concern Species. The reestablishment of the **American Oystercatcher** was exemplified by another ten-year high, this one of 57. The introduced **Monk Parakeet's** population continues to grow, with a ten-year high of 121, 347% of the average, proving that they are hardy enough to survive even the harshest of Connecticut winters. The ten-year high of 131 **Barred Owls** is somewhat of a pleasant surprise, but the vast majority of those were recorded in Barkhamsted and Litchfield Hills where they put in a tremendous effort and really have the art of owling down to a science. **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** turned in a good performance with numbers being 147% of average. We may see more and more hummingbirds as more Connecticut residents turn to naturalistic landscaping as at least a partial alternative to lawns. **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** continue to increase in number and range as indicated by the high count of 412 and the aforementioned debut on the Hartford circle. **Downy** and **Hairy Woodpeckers** had a good year as well, with record numbers and increasing trends for each, possibly owing to the increasing popularity of offering suet



among ever growing numbers of bird feeding stations.

**Yellow-throated Vireos** also had a new high count of 248. A northern species that used to be worthy of a trip to the northwest hills but has now spread to nearly every corner of the state is **Common Raven**, which provided a new high count of 73 and was recorded on every count except Greenwich/Stamford and Storrs. So adapted to suburban life is this once shy species, that one of the authors regularly sees them foraging in the dumpsters of a coffee shop on the Meriden/Southington town line. Three species of **swallows**, **Northern Rough-winged**, **Tree** and **Barn** recorded new high numbers, but aside from the case of Tree Swallows and artificial nest boxes we are at a loss to propose a hypothesis as to the cause. Above average numbers of **Carolina Wren** indicate that, contrary to popular belief, this species can survive the roughest winters that New England can throw at them. **Gray Catbird** turned in a new ten-year high of 4219, which was also indicated in casual observations, with several people noting that catbirds were everywhere this year. Above average numbers of **Black-throated Green** and **Blackburnian Warblers** at 146% and 161% respectively are a bit of a pleasant surprise in light of the decline of hemlocks in the state, although many people noted that the hemlocks looked healthier this year than they had in many years. Apparently very low temperatures, such as those experienced here last winter, prove quite detrimental to the wooly adelgid, the hemlocks' attacker. Both of these species do occur in purely deciduous woodlands in other parts of their range, so they may also be adapting to the loss of hemlocks. Trills abounded as **Pine Warblers** and **Chipping Sparrows** turned in new ten-year highs. **Orchard Orioles** round out our discussion of increasing species with above average numbers for a total 146% of the ten-year average.

### Declining Species

We start out this group with a bit of a surprise. **Mute Swans** turned in a new 10-year low (low) of 184, 51% of the 10-year average (average) and down over 100 from last year's total. This decline is a recent phenomenon for this introduced species, as we had a record high of over 450 just 2 years ago in 2002. This sudden, unexplained decline may also be the result of West Nile disease. A number of other ground oriented or water dependent species' declines may be due to this disease too. Only three **Gad-**

wall were recorded, but this is such an uncommon and difficult to detect nesting species in the state that little can be read into this low number. Numbers of **American Black Ducks** were also down, 70% of average. Looking over the last few years of data shows that this species indicates a slight overall downward trend, but with erratic fluctuations from year to year, perhaps due to successful early broods resulting in young birds, which swell its numbers. We will keep an eye on future counts since this is a species of conservation concern. **Ring-necked Pheasant** had a new low of six birds, 39% of average; a marked downward trend is apparent compared to past year's data, which could be due to the loss of open country habitat and perhaps a decline in the number of birds stocked by hunting clubs, as this is an introduced and stocked species. **Common Loon** was missed for the first time in 10 count years. This likely had more to do with how the last breeding season was to our north than any factors in Connecticut, as most June birds are immatures from the previous season's brood.

Several species of wading birds turned in poor performances in 2004. Only single **American** and **Least Bitterns** were recorded, 64% and 37% of their averages respectively. Both species represent overall small sample sizes and can be difficult to detect, but since they are state threatened (Least) and endangered (American) we will keep an eye out for their totals in future years. **Snowy Egrets** and **Black-crowned Night-Herons** are both colonial species that generally nest in shrubby vegetation on offshore islands. Their diminished numbers this year at: 52% and 79% of average, and with a new low for **Snowy Egrets**, may be cause for concern. For **Snowy Egrets** this is especially troubling, since this has been a continuing trend since 1996. This may represent a problem on island heronries, especially with undestory nesters, as the numbers of the canopy-nesting **Great Egret** appear normal. There have been problems with human disturbance in many of the colonies in the last few years and further study may be warranted to determine the factors behind this apparent decline. Also these trends should be verified through additional studies since it is difficult to extrapolate population changes from observing birds away from nesting colonies. While the overall sample size for **Little Blue Herons** and **Glossy Ibis** is small to begin with, they nest in the same situations as the more common Snowys and B-c Night-Herons and also had below normal years, coming in at 39%, and 50% of average respectively. **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons**



generally nest in mainland colonies and had been increasing for several years before this year's result of 33 % of its average, which may represent an anomaly or a short-term factors at work.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk** numbers were down this year, but normal last year. We will need to keep an eye on this state-endangered species, as the recovery of **Cooper's Hawks** may impact their numbers in the state, since the larger Cooper's both out compete their smaller cousins for nesting territories and prey on the smaller "sharpies." Only three **Northern Goshawks** were recorded, 44% of average, but it is hard to read much into the overall small sample size of this uncommon nesting species. **American Kestrels** improved significantly from last year's record low, with 12 as compared with three, but the overall longer-term trend is still downwards, perhaps due to the loss of open farmland habitat to development and succession and competition from and predation by increasing numbers of **Cooper's Hawks**. The loss of open country habitat is also likely a factor in low numbers of three of our nesting shorebirds this year, **Killdeer**, **Spotted Sandpiper** and **American Woodcock** at 61%, 78% and 62% of average respectively. **Killdeer** is a bit of a surprise since they appear to be adaptable to nesting in habitats such as rooftops and parking lots; numbers of this species do tend to fluctuate from year to year, but it will be worth watching for future counts.

Lower numbers of **Laughing Gulls** and **Ring-billed Gulls** at 31% and 58% of their averages, with a new low of 311 Ring-bills, are likely due to factors outside of Connecticut since neither species nests in the state. **Great Black-backed Gulls** on the other hand do nest here and posted a new low of 225, a sudden decline for a species that had apparently been increasing or at least holding its own. The numbers of Great Black-backs tend to fluctuate from year to year and it is somewhat tricky to imply trends for colonial-nesting species by numbers recorded away from colonies. **Least Tern** numbers for this year were at only 77% of the average. They did apparently have a good year at Sandy Point, but we do not yet know how the other colonies fared.

**Rock Pigeon** numbers appear to be way down for the second year in a row, but this would be more of a concern if it were a native

species. **Whip-poor-wills** were recorded in below average (63%) numbers. As Connecticut's woodlands continue to mature we are likely to hear less and less of these vociferous nocturnal birds. Some think that pesticide contamination and declining populations of their prey insects may also be affecting their populations. **Northern Flickers** seem to be bucking the increasing or steady trends of most of the other woodpeckers in the state with an overall slow declining trend over the last decade. One hypothesis behind this may be the popularity of lawncare pesticides, as flickers tend to forage for insects in well-manicured lawns. Only circumstantial evidence exists to tie this declining trend to pesticides, but some studies have found that more dead birds of many suburban species are found with high levels of pesticides but do not test positive for West Nile virus.

A record low of 12 **White-eyed Vireos** was recorded; lower numbers seem to be the rule for shrubland-nesting birds. **Blue Jays** and **American Crows** both had record low counts this year, which is quite interesting since corvids are known to be highly susceptible to West Nile virus. Certainly, other factors could be at play for one or both of the species, but it is something to consider in light of this newly introduced disease. Another factor that may be at work for crows is the closing of the landfills throughout the state, which may affect their winter survivorship. A quick look at historical results notes that the initial declining trend began in 2000, around the same time as the last landfills stopped receiving "edible" waste and when West Nile virus was first detected in North America. **Purple Martins** appear to have had their second bad year in a row with only 46% of the average recorded this year. Three 'northern' species seem to have had a down year. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** improved slightly from last year's 14, with 38 this year, but still only 58% of average, **Brown Creepers** were at 66% of average and **Winter Wrens** were also up slightly from last year, but still way off of the average. The decline of Eastern Hemlocks in the state is a likely factor in at least the decrease of **Winter Wrens**.

Several other shrubland nesting species, aside from the aforementioned **White-eyed Vireos**, continue to show clear downward trends over the last decade and below average numbers this year: **Northern Mockingbird** (new low and 69% of average), **Brown**



**Thrasher** (66%), **Blue-winged Warbler**, (58%), **Prairie Warbler** (56%), **Common Yellowthroat** (new low and 85%), **Eastern Towhee** (new low and 79%) and **Field Sparrow** (79%). As our woodlands continue to mature, we can expect these trends to continue unless there are greatly expanded efforts to manage certain areas continuously in shrubs. Three understory forest nesters also turned in below average performances with **Black-&-White Warbler** at 88% of average and a clear declining trend, **Worm-eating Warbler** at 75% and **Canada Warbler** at a new low and at 68%. Two more of our most northerly nesters produced very poor totals for this year with **White-throated Sparrow** at a new low of two birds (14% of average) and **Dark-eyed Junco** with a new low of 29 (61%). **Eastern Meadowlark**, with 25 recorded, is way up from last year's eight but continues to show a clear declining trend over the last decade, with only 66% of its average. **Boat-tailed Grackle** was not recorded this year for the first time since 1999. (Understandably so without the Trumbull-Bridgeport Count this year).

### Thank you

In conclusion, on behalf of everyone who cares about Connecticut's bird life, we would like to thank all of the observers, captains and compilers who took part in the Summer Bird Count. It is the data that you provide that allows everyone to better understand our changing nesting bird populations.

*Editor's Note: This summary complements the Field Notes in this issue. Note especially the Field Notes references to Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Common Raven and Pine Siskin.*

## 2004 Connecticut Summer Bird Count Totals

Species known to nest recently within Connecticut are shown in *italics*. The high/low/rare stats (below) are given for local SBCs at least ten years old. For counts held for fewer than 10 years (PHV) only new Count Day species are noted. Under the statewide totals all stats pertain to the prior ten years.

- XX = Rare, noted on fewer than five years during previously censused 10 years [outlined box]
- XX = new Count Day species; not recorded on previously censused 10 years [darkened outlined box]
- XX = more birds tallied than recorded on any of the previously censused 10 years [underlined number]
- XX** = fewer birds tallied than recorded on any of the previously censused 10 year [boldfaced number]
- 0** = not recorded on CD, but recorded on each of the previously censused 10 years [boldfaced zero]

<u>SPECIES</u>	Coastal		CT Valley	<i>Upland Counts</i>					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	1994-2003 yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Hfd	Mid-state		Northern							
			WR		PHV	Ba	LH	St	Ave	Low	High			
Snow Goose				1					1	100%	2	1.0	1	1
<i>Canada Goose</i>	1436	533	463	356	494	263	459	67	4071	89%	10	4560	3783	5197
Brant	20								6	56%	8	10.8	2	29
<i>Mute Swan</i>	67	57	3	19	30		7	1	184	51%	10	361	297	462
<i>Wood Duck</i>	90	37	29	<u>108</u>	30	32	73	<u>19</u>	<u>418</u>	130%	10	322	280	398
<i>Gadwall</i>		3							3	29%	8	10.3	1	15
American Wigeon										0%	5	1.0	1	1



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern		St				Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH								
<i>American Black Duck</i>	32	22						2	56	70%	10	80	50	120
<i>Mallard</i>	781	248	716	195	78	128	153	26	2325	93%	10	2497	1460	3022
MallardxAm Black Duck		2		1		3	3		9					
<i>Blue-winged Teal</i>										0%	4	3.3	1	8
<i>Northern Shoveler</i>										0%	3	1.5	1	2
<i>Northern Pintail</i>										0%	3	1.0	1	1
<i>Green-winged Teal</i>	1								1	50%	3	2.0	1	4
<i>Canvasback Duck</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Ring-necked Duck</i>										0%	5	1.2	1	2
<i>Greater Scaup</i>	2								2	125%	10	1.6	0	4
<i>Lesser Scaup</i>										0%	3	1.0	1	1
<i>Common Eider</i>										0%	1	2.0	2	2
<i>White-winged Scoter</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Long-tailed Duck</i>	3								3	136%	8	2.2	1	4
<i>Bufflehead</i>										0%	7	2.0	1	4
<i>Common Goldeneye</i>		2							2	75%	3	2.7	1	6
<i>Hooded Merganser</i>	1					11	60		72	377%	10	19.1	2	50
<i>Common Merganser</i>				27		74	23		124	108%	10	115	72	196
<i>Red-breasted Merganser</i>	2	2							4	165%	8	2.4	1	7
<i>Ruddy Duck</i>										0%	5	3.6	1	10
<i>Ring-necked Pheasant</i>	3			3					6	19%	10	32	9	93

SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Ruffed Grouse</i>				1		9	3		13	39%	10	34	16	77
<i>Wild Turkey</i>	<u>115</u>	40	<u>39</u>	24	32	158	115	24	547	131%	10	419	135	645
<i>Northern Bobwhite</i>			<u>5</u>						5	129%	9	3.9	1	11
<i>Red-throated Loon</i>										0%	5	3.2	1	8
<i>Common Loon</i>									0	0%	10	4.7	2	8
<i>Pied-billed Grebe</i>										0%	9	3.0	0	7
<i>Horned Grebe</i>										0%	3	1.5	1	2
<i>Red-necked Grebe</i>										0%	2	1.0	1	1
<i>Double-crested Cormorant</i>	401	235	8	10	32	3	18	8	715	96%	10	745	574	964
<i>Great Cormorant</i>										0%	2	1.0	1	1
<i>American Bittern</i>							<u>1</u>		1	64%	7	1.6	1	3
<i>Least Bittern</i>						<u>1</u>			1	37%	10	2.7	1	7
<i>Great Blue Heron</i>	15	1	<u>21</u>	14	15	<u>100</u>	42	<u>17</u>	225	170%	10	132	75	248
<i>Great Egret</i>	295	36							331	140%	10	237	153	376
<i>Snowy Egret</i>	67	30							97	52%	10	185	134	261
<i>Little Blue Heron</i>	1								1	39%	9	2.6	1	5
<i>Tricolored Heron</i>										0%	2	1.0	1	1
<i>Cattle Egret</i>										0%	1	4.0	4	4
<i>Green Heron</i>	24	4	15	9	10	4	<u>15</u>	2	83	109%	10	76	62	87
<i>Black-cr Night-Heron</i>	207	43					CP		250	79%	10	316	161	458



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Yellow-cr Night-Heron</i>	0 CP	2							2	33%	10	6.0	2	21
<i>Glossy Ibis</i>		1							1	50%	4	2.0	1	4
<i>Black Vulture</i>	6	1			5		10		22	293%	8	7.5	1	17
<i>Turkey Vulture</i>	52	20	16	65	60	58	82	12	365	129%	10	284	186	382
<i>Osprey</i>	35	45	4	1			2		87	216%	10	40	9	75
<i>Mississippi Kite</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Bald Eagle</i>		2		2	1	11	6		22	239%	10	9.2	2	20
<i>Northern Harrier</i>										0%	6	2.7	1	5
<i>Sharp-shinned Hawk</i>	1	2	1	1	1		1		7	71%	10	9.8	5	14
<i>Cooper's Hawk</i>	7			6	2	7	18		40	144%	10	28	15	38
<i>Northern Goshawk</i>		2		1					3	44%	10	6.8	2	18
<i>Red-shouldered Hawk</i>	2	8		4	1	17	5	3	40	117%	10	34	25	47
<i>Broad-winged Hawk</i>	5		1	4	9	25	12	6	62	114%	10	55	46	66
<i>Red-tailed Hawk</i>	116	16	31	22	38	40	66	12	341	157%	10	217	140	266
<i>American Kestrel</i>			1		5		4	2	12	83%	10	14.5	3	30
<i>Peregrine Falcon</i>	1	2							3	120%	10	2.5	1	6
<i>Clapper Rail</i>	3	3							6	53%	10	11.3	5	21
<i>King Rail</i>										0%	4	1.3	1	2
<i>Virginia Rail</i>	CP	1		10			27		38	131%	10	29	15	51
<i>Sora</i>										0%	8	1.8	1	3

SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern		St				Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH								
<i>Common Moorhen</i>									0%	5	1.4	1	2	
<i>American Coot</i>									0%	5	1.4	1	3	
<i>Black-bellied Plover</i>		7						7	183%	6	3.8	1	7	
<i>American Golden Plover</i>									0%	1	1.0	1	1	
<i>Semipalmated Plover</i>			2					2	17%	8	12.0	3	35	
<i>Piping Plover</i>		11						11	87%	10	12.6	6	24	
<i>Killdeer</i>	46	17	50	11	18	33	21	16	212	77%	10	276	158	351
<i>American Oystercatcher</i>	51	6							57	204%	10	28	11	47
<i>Greater Yellowlegs</i>	3	1	1						5	208%	10	2.4	1	5
<i>Lesser Yellowlegs</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Solitary Sandpiper</i>										0%	8	1.3	1	2
<i>Willet</i>		4							4	50%	8	8.0	1	24
<i>Spotted Sandpiper</i>	1	3	7	3	3	4	3	2	26	70%	10	37	26	49
<i>Upland Sandpiper</i>											1	0	0	0
<i>Ruddy Turnstone</i>	8	1							9	137%	9	6.6	2	16
<i>Red Knot</i>		2							2	250%	1	0.8	8	8
<i>Sanderling</i>										0%	5	5.2	2	9
<i>Semipalmated Sandpiper</i>										0%	9	73	2	349
<i>Western Sandpiper</i>										0%	2	26	1	51
<i>Least Sandpiper</i>	CP								CP		4	1.8	1	3



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
White-rumped Sandpiper									0%	2	6.0	6	6	
Dunlin									0%	6	2.2	1	4	
Short-billed Dowitcher									0%	2	6.0	4	8	
Common Snipe									0%	1	1.0	1	1	
<i>American Woodcock</i>				3	1	4	5	13	81%	10	16.1	9	24	
Laughing Gull	9	3						12	31%	10	38	1	119	
Bonaparte's Gull									0%	3	3.7	1	9	
Ring-billed Gull	73	176	39	1	3	6	13	311	58%	10	533	326	795	
<i>Herring Gull</i>	429	362	120	2	1			914	96%	10	957	532	1229	
Glaucous Gull									0%	10	1.0	1	1	
<i>Great Black-backed Gull</i>	100	86	33	4	2			225	70%	10	323	216	414	
Gull-billed Tern									0%	2	2.5	2	3	
Royal Tern									0%	1	1.0	1	1	
<i>Roseate Tern</i>									0%	0	0	0	0	
<i>Common Tern</i>	168	88						256	135%	10	190	56	518	
<i>Forster's Tern</i>	CP							CP		2	4.0	1	7	
<i>Least Tern</i>		212						212	77%	10	274	50	560	
Black Tern									0%	2	1.0	1	1	
<i>Black Skimmer</i>		2						2	30%	6	6.7	2	12	
<i>Rock Pigeon</i>	208	276	145	48	21	56	76	68	898	64%	10	1397	974	2543

SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Mourning Dove</i>	548	341	<u>415</u>	313	155	311	240	<u>300</u>	2623	109%	10	2405	2123	2896
<i>Monk Parakeet</i>	<u>33</u>	<u>88</u>							121	347%	10	35	1	105
<i>Black-billed Cuckoo</i>	CP	1	1	3		<u>5</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>2</u>	25	84%	10	30	8	52
<i>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</i>	7	6		3	1	2	<u>10</u>	4	33	122%	10	27	4	50
cuckoo species	1				1				2					
<i>Barn Owl</i>										0%	2	16.0	13	19
<i>Eastern Screech-Owl</i>	16			5	11	2	<u>14</u>		48	112%	10	43	25	61
<i>Great Horned Owl</i>	10	1	1		3	<u>15</u>	3		33	102%	10	32	25	40
<i>Barred Owl</i>	8			8	6	<u>70</u>	<u>37</u>	2	<u>131</u>	209%	10	63	38	85
<i>Long-eared Owl</i>										0%	1	2.0	2	2
<i>Northern Saw-whet Owl</i>						3			3	93%	9	3.2	1	7
<i>Nighthawk, Common</i>		1		1					2	13%	10	15.4	1	77
<i>Chuck-will's-widow</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Whip-poor-will</i>				2		6	3		11	63%	10	17.5	11	25
<i>Chimney Swift</i>	<u>101</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>91</u>	124	79	133	88	44	771	118%	10	655	500	740
<i>Ruby-throated Hummingbird</i>	<u>26</u>	2	2	10	10	48	36	<u>8</u>	142	147%	10	97	47	143
<i>Belted Kingfisher</i>	<u>15</u>	6	16	15	5	39	8	4	108	90%	10	119	75	166
<i>Red-headed Woodpecker</i>										0%	4	1.0	1	1
<i>Red-bellied Woodpecker</i>	<u>237</u>	59	51	60	45	36	52	19	559	137%	10	410	269	573
<i>Yellow-bellied Sapsucker</i>			<u>1</u>	<u>13</u>	7	208	<u>183</u>		<u>412</u>	199%	10	207	87	351



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Downy Woodpecker</i>	244	41	85	75	124	<u>174</u>	126	36	<u>905</u>	151%	10	599	394	764
<i>Hairy Woodpecker</i>	<u>79</u>	9	6	14	20	50	43	7	<u>228</u>	127%	10	180	110	224
<i>Northern Flicker</i>	169	<b>41</b>	82	<b>42</b>	30	77	56	24	521	79%	10	663	512	828
<i>Pileated Woodpecker</i>	17	3	2	8	3	34	34	<u>6</u>	107	112%	10	95	63	123
<i>Olive-sided Flycatcher</i>			1				<u>1</u>		2	171%	6	1.2	1	2
<i>Eastern Wood-Pewee</i>	<u>137</u>	30	26	<b>58</b>	22	<u>123</u>	105	<u>50</u>	551	105%	10	526	423	661
<i>Yellow-bellied Flycatcher</i>				<u>1</u>			<b>1</b>		2	125%	5	1.6	1	3
<i>Acadian Flycatcher</i>	6			6	1	4			17	66%	10	26	7	39
<i>Alder Flycatcher</i>			1	1	2	13	57	<u>1</u>	75	95%	10	79	40	116
<i>Willow Flycatcher</i>	44	31	9	20	11	<u>24</u>	91	2	232	95%	10	245	200	281
<i>Least Flycatcher</i>	1			31	11	52	40	10	145	96%	10	152	98	223
Epidonax species		1							1					
<i>Eastern Phoebe</i>	87	23	27	106	52	<u>193</u>	167	47	702	101%	10	697	496	907
<i>Great Crested Flycatcher</i>	68	39	12	56	21	55	75	<u>34</u>	360	87%	10	414	330	513
<i>Eastern Kingbird</i>	59	28	40	76	55	185	138	31	612	107%	10	574	489	683
<i>White-eyed Vireo</i>	9		1		<b>1</b>			<u>1</u>	12	33%	10	37	21	52
<i>Yellow-throated Vireo</i>	34	2	3	55	34	30	59	31	<u>248</u>	118%	10	211	169	245
<i>Blue-headed Vireo</i>	2		1	<u>15</u>	<b>5</b>	79	34	1	137	123%	10	111	76	159
<i>Warbling Vireo</i>	111	35	44	<b>122</b>	46	31	115	<u>55</u>	559	99%	10	563	460	664
<i>Red-eyed Vireo</i>	248	<b>53</b>	41	257	117	<u>264</u>	594	87	2361	115%	10	2050	1640	2784

SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Hfd	Mid-state		Northern							
			WR		PHV	Ba	LH	St	Ave	Low	High			
<i>Blue Jay</i>	348	100	98	182	93	290	164	53	1328	87%	10	1534	1346	1729
<i>American Crow</i>	287	145	109	421	319	483	470	66	2300	59%	10	3880	3154	4516
<i>Fish Crow</i>	30	16	6	15	5	1	4		77	123%	10	62	39	94
<i>Common Raven</i>		2	4	6	2	39	20		73	218%	10	34	12	58
<i>Horned Lark</i>											0	0	0	0
<i>Purple Martin</i>	13	6	1				2		22	56%	10	40	17	54
<i>Tree Swallow</i>	231	82	280	213	133	573	550	114	2176	134%	10	1622	1422	1867
<i>Northern Rough-w Swallow</i>	130	92	22	66	87	81	47	15	540	156%	10	346	294	420
<i>Bank Swallow</i>		5	18	163	9	71	14	7	287	85%	10	338	202	529
<i>Cliff Swallow</i>	56		10	111	64	22	14		277	103%	10	270	190	420
<i>Barn Swallow</i>	292	179	86	260	218	299	363	146	1843	127%	10	1450	1184	1640
<i>Black-capped Chickadee</i>	279	74	90	239	160	636	329	112	1919	108%	10	1779	1566	2064
<i>Tufted Titmouse</i>	422	87	74	302	200	364	259	129	1837	117%	10	1565	1182	2269
<i>Red-breasted Nuthatch</i>	10		0			13	13	2	38	57%	10	67	14	137
<i>White-breasted Nuthatch</i>	156	12	37	47	58	143	89	41	583	139%	10	419	301	519
<i>Brown Creeper</i>	1		0	1		23	28	2	55	66%	10	83	52	130
<i>Carolina Wren</i>	90	27	32	26	17	6	4	24	226	124%	10	182	49	420
<i>House Wren</i>	184	51	39	121	46	124	136	47	748	93%	10	804	544	938
<i>Winter Wren</i>	1		1	2		12	6	1	23	55%	10	42	14	80
<i>Sedge Wren</i>										0%	0	0	0	0



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Marsh Wren</i>	<u>46</u>	22			4		41		113	117%	10	97	51	167
<i>Golden-crowned Kinglet</i>	2	<b>1</b>				2	1		6	79%	9	7.6	4	16
<i>Blue-gray Gnatcatcher</i>	<u>42</u>	<u>4</u>	4	66	15	<u>72</u>	65	23	291	134%	10	218	169	308
<i>Eastern Bluebird</i>	62	5	16	<b>112</b>	93	126	94	26	534	94%	10	567	319	793
<i>Veery</i>	123	<b>18</b>	9	200	108	559	380	77	1474	103%	10	1437	1247	1710
<i>Swainson's Thrush</i>						<b>1</b>			<b>1</b>	80%	4	1.3	1	2
<i>Hermit Thrush</i>	1		2	2	<b>1</b>	127	54	2	189	113%	10	167	109	243
<i>Wood Thrush</i>	<u>308</u>	58	79	189	56	269	213	63	1235	95%	10	1305	1065	1503
<i>American Robin</i>	1437	<u>771</u>	623	<b>730</b>	455	724	981	<u>337</u>	6058	107%	10	5650	4750	6354
<i>Gray Catbird</i>	1099	277	<u>379</u>	513	391	<u>645</u>	738	<u>177</u>	<u>4219</u>	118%	10	3575	3140	4093
<i>Northern Mockingbird</i>	127	81	<b>82</b>	<b>56</b>	34	42	26	35	<b>483</b>	69%	10	703	522	943
<i>Brown Thrasher</i>	28	6	3	2		3	<b>1</b>	3	46	66%	10	70.2	36	94
<i>European Starling</i>	1067	804	<b>839</b>	514	372	499	455	580	5130	75%	10	6808	4854	8852
<i>Cedar Waxwing</i>	<u>258</u>	71	154	110	101	386	315	46	1441	102%	10	1416	568	2387
<i>Blue-winged Warbler</i>	57	33	6	49	31	<b>29</b>	<u>70</u>	24	299	58%	10	512	271	716
<i>"Brewster's Warbler"</i>		1							1					
<i>"Lawrence's Warbler"</i>	1								1					
<i>Golden-winged Warbler</i>										0%	8	1.3	1	2
<i>Tennessee Warbler</i>										0%	4	1.8	1	2
<i>Nashville Warbler</i>										0%	5	2.4	1	7

SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	1994-2003 yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
Northern Parula						<u>1</u>			1	22%	10	4.6	1	11
Yellow Warbler	475	116	121	273	103	237	478	93	1896	91%	10	2083	1847	2352
Chestnut-sided Warbler	4	2	3	47	29	<u>250</u>	211	7	553	82%	10	671	507	777
Magnolia Warbler		CP			<u>1</u>	89	15		105	132%	10	79	52	117
Cape May Warbler										0%	1	1.0	1	1
Black-throated Blue Warbler				7		114	38	1	160	101%	10	158	105	219
Yellow-rumped Warbler			<u>1</u>			78	39		118	87%	10	136	110	183
Black-thr Green Warbler	7	8		41	1	<u>205</u>	143	<u>19</u>	424	146%	10	290	204	436
Blackburnian Warbler				8		<u>155</u>	79	1	243	161%	10	151	87	233
Yellow-throated Warbler										0%	2	1.0	1	1
Pine Warbler	<u>56</u>	23	16	23	5	<u>209</u>	92	<u>11</u>	<u>435</u>	156%	10	279	190	431
Prairie Warbler	4	5	9	63	8	12	2	8	111	56%	10	197	101	249
Bay-breasted Warbler										0%	2	3.0	1	5
Blackpoll Warbler	<u>1</u>			1			1		3	42%	8	7.1	1	11
Cerulean Warbler						<u>1</u>	4	4	9	108%	10	8.3	2	15
Black-&-White Warbler	38	22	1	65	26	<u>202</u>	122	21	497	88%	10	565	453	639
American Redstart	47	5	42	157	48	<u>395</u>	415	31	1140	112%	10	1014	885	1223
Prothonotary Warbler										0%	1	1.0	1	1
Worm-eating Warbler	59	12	2	16	2	2	4	<u>16</u>	113	75%	10	150	91	201
Ovenbird	141	66	15	173	46	<u>457</u>	321	78	1297	96%	10	1346	1112	1556



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Northern Waterthrush</i>				1		5	16		22	45%	10	49	22	69
<i>Louisiana Waterthrush</i>	44	9	1	41	5	18	15	7	140	105%	10	133	84	160
<i>Kentucky Warbler</i>										0%	5	2.8	1	7
<i>Mourning Warbler</i>										0%	7	1.9	1	3
<i>Common Yellowthroat</i>	171	64	61	164	103	529	379	73	1544	85%	10	1820	1558	2061
<i>Hooded Warbler</i>			1	5	6	1	1		14	53%	10	26	11	37
<i>Wilson's Warbler</i>										0%	3	1.3	1	2
<i>Canada Warbler</i>				4		14	21	2	41	68%	10	60	42	83
<i>Yellow-breasted Chat</i>	1								1	67%	5	1.5	1	2
<i>Summer Tanager</i>											0	0	0	0
<i>Scarlet Tanager</i>	129	32	17	100	37	204	143	28	690	106%	10	651	533	827
<i>Eastern Towhee</i>	94	41	24	89	49	122	104	31	554	79%	10	701	557	887
<i>Chipping Sparrow</i>	399	59	101	335	267	548	366	136	2211	120%	10	1840	1622	2090
<i>Field Sparrow</i>	7	11	30	44	6	14	8	11	131	79%	10	166	82	203
<i>Savannah Sparrow</i>			10	6		1	8	15	40	108%	10	37	12	54
<i>Grasshopper Sparrow</i>			3					2	5	121%	8	4.1	1	8
<i>Nelson's Sh-tailed Sparrow</i>	1								1	100%	3	1.0	1	1
<i>Saltm Sharp-tailed Sparrow</i>	6	3							9	59%	10	15.3	5	26
<i>Seaside Sparrow</i>			CP						CP		7	5.3	1	11
<i>Song Sparrow</i>	409	159	235	384	214	552	457	103	2513	101%	10	2490	2093	2915

SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
<i>Swamp Sparrow</i>	8	5	7	24	18	53	156	3	274	84%	10	326	238	457
<i>White-throated Sparrow</i>	<u>1</u>						1		2	14%	10	14.2	5	23
<i>White-crowned Sparrow</i>										0%	2	4.5	1	8
<i>Dark-eyed Junco</i>						25	4		29	61%	10	48	30	70
<i>Northern Cardinal</i>	436	180	145	254	169	207	199	<u>102</u>	1692	105%	10	1615	1452	1844
<i>Rose-breasted Grosbeak</i>	42	11	21	63	38	113	86	21	395	100%	10	397	334	476
<i>Blue Grosbeak</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Indigo Bunting</i>	56	11	13	80	79	<u>139</u>	71	<u>27</u>	476	128%	10	371	290	493
<i>Dickcissel</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Bobolink</i>		<u>1</u>	22	79	12	35	272	11	432	94%	10	460	335	571
<i>Red-winged Blackbird</i>	689	554	465	586	358	353	808	<u>299</u>	4112	94%	10	4393	3851	5271
<i>Eastern Meadowlark</i>			3	0	5		4	<u>13</u>	25	66%	10	38	8	63
<i>Rusty Blackbird</i>										0%	1	5.0	5	5
<i>Common Grackle</i>	<u>1908</u>	779	631	610	364	348	443	162	5245	111%	10	4721	3871	5582
<i>Boat-tailed Grackle</i>										0%	4	2.5	1	5
<i>Brown-headed Cowbird</i>	<u>257</u>	86	88	171	82	159	137	88	1068	89%	10	1204	922	1450
<i>Orchard Oriole</i>	<u>40</u>	3	1	16	5				65	143%	10	46	21	71
<i>Bullock's Oriole</i>										0%	1	1.0	1	1
<i>Baltimore Oriole</i>	<u>365</u>	99	58	160	79	134	169	<u>50</u>	1114	110%	10	1010	892	1192
<i>Purple Finch</i>				6	8	<u>90</u>	63		167	136%	10	123	80	159



SPECIES	Coastal		CT Valley Hfd	Upland Counts					2004 State Totals	% of 94-03 aver	yrs obs	1994-2003		
	GS	NH		Mid-state		Northern						Ave	Low	High
			WR	PHV	Ba	LH	St							
House Finch	356	121	114	255	180	156	160	95	1437	87%	10	1643	945	3040
Pine Siskin							1		1	57%	4	1.8	1	3
American Goldfinch	407	155	297	385	180	501	412	176	2513	113%	10	2232	1476	3030
Evening Grosbeak										0%	5	2.4	1	5
House Sparrow	1083	422	524	254	203	273	361	259	3379	106%	10	3196	2514	4051
other unidentified/hybrid			3					12	15					
<b>TOTAL INDIVIDUALS</b>	22133	9703	8897	12164	7578	17678	16523	5259	99908	99%		100567	87437	110978
CD Species	130	124	110	124	110	122	133	101	183	96%		190	184	201
CP Species	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3			0.6	0.0	3.0
<b>DEGREE OF EFFORT:</b>														
Party Hours	315.5	117.0	120.0	132.0	66.5	218.0	188.0	74.8	#####	111%		1113.5	1008.5	1191.5
Day Party Hours	303	115	120.0	125.0	63	198	172	74	1170	111%		1058.8	962.5	1130.0
Night Party Hours	12.5	2	0.0	7	3.5	20	16	0.75	61.75	113%		54.7	42.0	69.5
Observers	55	25	30	25	14	25	44	11	229	101%		228	193	257
Parties	31	11	17	16	7	14	14	6	116	100%		116	102	130
Indiv bds per 10 PH	702	829	741	922	1140	811	879	704						
Ind. bds per Observer	402	388	297	487	541	707	376	478						
% Observers	24	11	13	11	6	11	19	5						
% Party Hours	26	9	10	11	5	18	15	6						
% Individual Birds	22	10	9	12	8	18	17	5						

## 2004 Connecticut Summer Bird Count Results

### STATEWIDE COUNT TOTALS

Count Dates: June 5, 6, 12, 13, 19, 20, 26, & 27. Reported on Count Days (CD) were 180 species, with three additional Count Period (CP) species, consisting of 99,908 Individuals. Two hundred & twenty-nine observers in 116 Parties (PtyS) spent 1232 Party Hours (PHs) in the field.

### INDIVIDUAL COUNT TOTALS

#### Barkhamsted Summer Bird Count (founded 1992)

Count Dates: June 26 & 27 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 122 species, 17678 individual birds, plus one hybrid. Twenty-five observers in 14 PtyS spent 218 PHs in the field. Since 1994, 171 CD species have been confirmed. Least Bittern is an addition this year; 120 have been recorded as nesting.

Participants: Jocelyn Baker, Bob Barbieri, Ray Belding, George Boynton, Ayreslea Denny, Duncan Denny, Angela Dimmitt, Nikki Hall, Seth Harvey, Vicki Hester, Jay Kaplan, Marie Kennedy, Jeffrey Krukar, Leona LeJuene, Vima LeJuene, Jerry Marcellino, Russ Naylor, Carol Parent, Paul Parent, David Rosgen (121 Laurel Way, Winsted, CT 06098-2534; drosogen@optonline.net), Sam Slater, J. T. Stokowski, Duane Tabak, David Tripp Jr., and Fran Zygmunt.

Weather: 6/26- AM: Cloudy with showers/drizzle, 0.25" rain, PM: clearing; SW winds 0-10 mph. Night- clear, NW winds 0-10 mph. 6/27- Sunny; W winds 0-7 mph. Night- W winds 0-3 mph.

Count (a rectangle, 12 mile east-west by a 17 mile north-south) Center: 41° 55' N 72° 59' W. Elevation: 285 to 1457 feet. Area covered: Barkhamsted, Burlington (northern 1/4), Canton, Colebrook (south half), Granby (southwest 1/4), Hartland, New Hartford, Harwinton (northern edge), Torrington (northern 1/4), and Winchester.

#### Greenwich-Stamford Summer Bird Count (founded 1976)

Count Dates: June 12 & 13 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 130 species, 22214 individual birds, plus five CP species. Fifty-five observers in 31 PtyS censused during a period of 303 PHs. Since 1994, 199 CD species were confirmed with the additions of Hooded Merganser and Black Vulture this year; 139 of these have been found nesting

Participants: Georgia Abbott, Tom Andersen, John Askildsen, Pat Bailey, Tom Baptist, Trudy Battaly, Joan Becker, Richard Becker, Joe Belanger, Gail Benson, Andrew Block, Michael Bochnik, Thomas W. Burke (235 Highland Road, Rye, NY 10580; tom.burke@rsmi.com), Al Collins, Peter Davenport, Patrick Dugan, Cynthia Ehlinger, Debbie Etheridge, Andrew Farnsworth, Margaret Gargen, Kathy Gellman, Ted Gilman, Andy Guthrie, Carol Hartel, David Havens, Edward Henrey, Jalna Jaeger, Kelli Jewell, Ryan McClean, Janet Mehmel, Frank Novak, Conner O'Brien, Jim O'Brien, Ellen O'Connell, Joe O'Connell, Anneliese



O'Toole, Gary Palmer (34 Field Road, Cos Cob, CT 06807), Drew Panko, Matt Popp, Paul Renken, Steve Ricker, Meredith Sampson, Bob Shriber, Alice Smith, Barbara Smith, Bruce Smith, Anne Swain, Andy Towle, Richard Trepp, Bill Van Loan Jr., Aaron Virgin, Bill Wallace, Steve Walter, Craig Whitcomb, and Lynn Zeltman.

Weather: "Fairly decent weather - clear with some clouds both days, enough wind to get the vultures flying." 6/12- N-NW winds 2-6 mph, 54° to 75°F. 6/13- W-SW winds 0-6 mph, 55° to 75°F.

Count (a square, 15x15 mile east-west) Center: 41° 05' N 73° 37' W. Elevation: sea level to at least 740 feet. Area covered (Connecticut, 65% of area): Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, & Stamford; and (New York, 35% of area) Armonk, Bedford (in part), Port Chester, Rye, and White Plains (in part).

### **Hartford Summer Bird Count (founded 1991)**

Count Dates: June 26 & 27 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 108 species, 8893 individual birds. Thirty observers in 17 Plys censused over 120 PHs. After an unfortunate hiatus of two years this important SBC has returned this year. Since 1992, 152 CD species have been documented with Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker additions this year.

Participants: Bill Altman, Paul Cianfaglione, Pam Cooper, Fran D'Amico, Natasha Domina, Randy Domina, John Gaskell, Marjorie Haley, Jay Kaplan, John Karpinski, Len Kendall, Betty Kleiner (5 Flintlock Ridge, Simsbury, CT 06070; CTWarbler@cs.com), Gil Kleiner, Brian Kleinman, Steve Kotchko, Caroline LeRoux, David Lyons, Nancy Manning, Roger Preston, Mary Rudeck, Ann Shapiro, Mark Shapiro, Shirley Smigel, Frank Vartulli, Bob Wagner, Debbie Wheeler, Judy Whittlesey, Mike Whittlesey, Phyllis Winer, and Alice Anne Wormald.

Weather: 6/26- Showers AM, clearing to partly sunny PM, SW winds 3-5 mph, 68° to 77°F. 6/27- Mostly sunny; winds 3-5 mph, 62° to 74°F.

Count (15-Mile diameter circle) Center: 41° 46' N 72° 40' W. (Old State House), Elevation: 40 to 640 feet. Area covered: Bloomfield, East Hartford, Farmington (in part), Hartford, Manchester (in part), Newington (in part), Rocky Hill (in part), South Windsor, Wethersfield, and Windsor.

### **Litchfield Hills Summer Bird Count (founded 1994)**

Count Dates: June 12 & 13 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 133 species, 16523 individual birds. Forty-four observers in 14 Plys censused over 188 PHs. Since 1994, 171 CD species have been observed, including Yellow-bellied Flycatcher new this year, of which 119 have nested.

Participants: Linda Balkin, Janet Baker, John Baker, Bob Barbieri (Kalmia Sanctuary, 183 Laurel Lane, Harwinton, CT 06791) Ray Belding, Debra Bishop, George Boynton, Angela Dimmitt, Curt Edgat, Frank Errico, John Eykelhoff, Eileen Finnan, Kevin Finnan, John Grabowski, Jeff Greenwood, Kathy Hall, Greg Hanisek, James Harmen, Lukas Hyder, Rich Kania, Bill Kennedy, Gorden Loery, Deborah Martin, Patti

McCurdy, Marsha McGowan, Scott Mills, Russ Naylor, Nancy Nichols, Ann Orsillo, Pat Owen, Linda Potter, Dave Rosgen, Sam Slater, Donna Rose Smith, Nina Stein, Dave Tripp Jr., Pamela Velez, David Wakefield, Lyle Whittlesey, Dave Winters, Paul Woodward, Ed Yescott, and Fran Zygmunt.

Weather: 6/12- Sunny and warm; 75° to 80° F. 6/13- Sunny and warm; 75° to 80° F.

Count (15-Mile diameter circle) Center: 41° 43' N 73° 14' W. Elevation: 450 to 1658 feet. Area covered (in whole or in part): Cornwall, Goshen, Kent, Litchfield, Morris, Sharon, Torrington, Warren, and Washington.

#### **New Haven Summer Bird Count (founded 1991)**

Count Dates: June 5 & 6(Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 124 species, 9703 individual birds, plus two CP species.

Twenty-five observers in 11 Pts spent 117 PHs in the field. Since 1994, 187 CD species were confirmed with Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, and Golden-crowned Kinglet added this year.

Participants: Ralph Amodei, Larry Bausher, Andrew Brand, Steve Broker, Richard English, Douglas Gregory, Stacy Hanks, Mike Horn, Patrick Leahy, Gary Lemon, Christopher Loscalzo, Steve C. Mayo (27 Tuttle Court, Bethany, CT 06524; [SMayo@sikorsky.com](mailto:SMayo@sikorsky.com)), Florence McBride, Bob Mitchell, Linda Rediker, Nancy Rosenbaum, Arne Rosengren, Lee Schlesinger, Art Shipee, Charla Spector, Steve Spector, Maria Stockmal, John Triana, and Mariane Vahey.

Weather: 6/5- day: E winds 0-12 mph, 56° to 65°F.; night: E-NE winds 7-8 mph, 58°F to 59°F. 6/6- 0.05" rain, N-NE winds 10-15 mph, 54° to 59°F.

Count (15-Mile diameter circle) Center: 41° 18' N 72° 56' W. Elevation: Sea level to 700 feet. Area covered: Branford (western), East Haven, Milford, New Haven, North Haven, Orange, West Haven, and Woodbridge (in part).

#### **Pawling/Hidden Valley Summer Bird Count (founded 2003)**

Count Dates: June 19 & 20(Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 110 species, 7578 individual birds. Fourteen observers in seven Pts spent 66.5 PHs in the field.

This new SBC began last year but the data was received too late to be included in the 2003 summary. Since 2003, 118 CD species have been noted with Mute Swan, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Woodcock, Great Black-backed Gull, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, and Magnolia Warbler additions this year; 98 have been confirmed nesting.

Participants: Pat Bailey, Jocelyn Baker, Robert Cartoceti, Angela Dimmitt (PO Box 146, Sherman, Ct. 06784; [BaDimmitt@AOL.com](mailto:BaDimmitt@AOL.com)), Carol Hartel, Nancy Liedlich, William Liedlich, Russ Naylor, Nancy Nichols, Pat Owen, Linda Potter, Dave Rosgen, Sally Spence, and Nick Thold.

Weather: 6/19- mostly sunny with light breeze, S wind 5-10 mph, 72°



to 80° F., 0.75" rain. 6/20- mostly sunny with light breeze, SW winds 3-5 mph, 45° to 75°F

Count (15-Mile diameter circle) Center: 41° 32' N 73° 34' W (Intersection of routes 68 & 157). Elevation: 30 to 600 feet. Area covered (Connecticut, 1/3 of area): Sherman, New Fairfield, New Milford (west of route 7), and portions of Brookfield & Danbury; and (New York, 2/3 of area) Patterson, Pawling, Putnam Lake, Carmel, southern Wingdale, and Poughquag. Only the Connecticut portion was canvassed these last two years.

### **Storrs Summer Bird Count (founded 1990)**

Count Dates: June 19 & 20 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 101 species, 5259 individual birds. Eight observers in six P tys spent 74.75 PHs in the field. Since 1994, 127 CD species have been verified, including Grasshopper Sparrow new this year; 66 have nested. Pileated Woodpecker was confirmed as nesting this year.

Participants: Bruce Carver, Carol Charter, Kathleen Demers, Marilyn Higgins, Marcia Hughs, Sarah Hume, Sherry Jones, Steve Morytko, Jane O'Donnell, Jim Rogers, and Steve Rogers (75 Charles Lane, Storrs, CT 06268; sdrogers@snet.net).

Weather: 6/19- AM Foggy, cloudy, then breezy and mix of sun and clouds PM, NW winds 0-20 mph., 61° to 84°F. 6/20- Clear and sunny, breezy, NW winds 0-10 mph., 50° to 75°F

Count (15-Mile diameter circle) Center: 41° 48' N 72° 15' W. (Juncture of Route 195 and North Eagleville Road) Elevation: 200 to 750 feet. Area covered: Andover, Ashford, Chaplin, Coventry, Mansfield, Tolland, Willimantic, West Willington, Willington, and Windham.

### **Woodbury-Roxbury Summer Bird Count (founded 1978)**

Count Date: June 6 (Sun.)

Totals: 123 species, 12164 individual birds. Twenty-five observers in 16 P tys spent 132 PHs in the field. Since 1994, 179 CD species have been recorded with Snow Goose an addition this year, while 122 species have nested.

Participants: Dave Babington, Ray Belding, Polly Brody, Neil Currie, Buzz Devine, Angela Dimmitt, Larry Fisher, Seth Harvey, Bob Hollister, Anne Kehmna, Paul Lang, Carolyn Longstreth, John Longstreth, Christy Melhart, Pat Monahan, Russ Naylor (44 Church Street, Woodbury, CT 06798), Allan Root, Dave Rosgen, Fred Schroeder, Carol Titus, Leigh Wells, Chris Wood, Jon Zaneski, Tom Zissu and Francis Zygmont.

Weather: Cloudy, drizzle, scattered light showers, windy, variable winds 10-15 mph., 50° to 58°F. "Exceptionally high number of low totals. Quite possibly caused by... intensive development in Woodbury/Roxbury area".

Count (15-Mile diameter circle) Center: 41° 32' N 73° 16' W. Elevation: 110 to 1060 feet. Area covered: Bethlehem, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Middlebury, New Milford, Newtown, Roxbury, Southbury, Washington, and Woodbury.

**Connecticut Field Notes**  
**Spring , March 1 through May 31, 2004**  
**Greg Hanisek**

Following are a selection of first arrival dates for some regularly occurring species:

Blue-winged Teal: March 27 in Litchfield (RBe); Little Blue Heron: April 12 in East Haddam (HG); Yellow-crowned Night Heron: March 30 in Stratford (PF); Glossy Ibis: April 3 in Madison (RP); Lesser Yellowlegs: March 7 in Durham (PF); Solitary Sandpiper: April 27 in Waterbury (GH) and Hamden (LB); Pectoral Sandpiper: March 21 in Westport (TB); Ruby-throated Hummingbird: April 26 in Mystic (GW); Chimney Swift: April 16 in Stratford (FM); Common Nighthawk: May 10 in Watertown (EH); Whip-poor-will: April 22 in Southington (JA); Least Flycatcher: April 30 in Litchfield (DRo); Great Crested Flycatcher: April 30 in Litchfield (DRo); Eastern Kingbird: April 22 in Litchfield (DRo); Olive-sided Flycatcher: May 15 in Greenwich (TG); Northern Rough-winged Swallow: April 4 in Woodbury (RN); Tree Swallow: March 6 in Litchfield (RH); Barn Swallow: April 10 in Stratford (GH); Marsh Wren: April 17 in Litchfield (WSw); Veery: April 26 in Greenwich (MSa); Wood Thrush: April 25 in Ellington (CE); House Wren: April 4 in Cheshire (RA); Northern Parula: April 24 in Bloomfield (J&LC); Yellow Warbler: April 19 in Litchfield (LTi); Black-throated Green Warbler: April 20 in New Canaan (FG); Cerulean Warbler: April 30 in Kent (RBa); Black-and-White Warbler: April 17 in Woodbury (TZ); Mourning Warbler: May 18 in Greenwich (TG); Hooded Warbler: April 29 in New Canaan (FG); Eastern Meadowlark: March 31 in Durham (JMa); Vesper Sparrow: April 18 in Ellington (CE) and Hamden (C&JZ); Lincoln's Sparrow: May 7 in Waterford (GW).

**Waterfowl through Herons**

The season's only **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Farmington Meadows April 11 (PCi). A flock of 32 migrant **Snow Geese** March 5 in Ellington included 20 blue morphs, an unusually high number (CE); a flock of 25 on

April 10 in Litchfield included five "blues" (DRo). The largest staging flocks of Brant were 1,400 at Greenwich Point on April 3 (MSa) and 2,500 at Seaside Park, Bridgeport, April 4 (GH); 60 passed over Bantam Lake in Litchfield May 27 (JE). A swan in flight on the unseasonable date of May 21 at



Meriden was probably a **Tundra Swan** but could not be positively identified as to species (MSz). A good inland flock of 25+ **Northern Pintails** stopped at Station 43 in South Windsor March 6 (TA). A **Common Teal** was in the Nell's Island marsh at Milford Point March 21 through early April (DSo et al.). **Green-winged Teal** peaked at 500+ there on April 4 (FM). The best count of **Blue-winged Teal** was 19 on April 17 at Little Pond in Litchfield (DRo et al.).

A male **King Eider** in near alternate plumage was exciting but not really unexpected May 22 at HBSP (MD et al.); this is at least the fifth record for the last 10 days of May. The fact that it lingered to at least June 18 (TA) was more unusual. Scattered inland sightings of **White-winged Scoter** culminated with 18 at Bantam Lake May 27 (DRo et al.). Flocks of 30 on May 8 and 62 on May 24 off Madison were typical of May scoter staging in the Sound (SM, FG et al.). A massive staging flock of c. 600 **Long-tailed Ducks** was off the Woodmont section of Milford March 20 (JHo); one was on the Connecticut River at Station 43 on April 24 (RM) and Bantam Lake pulled in 10 on April 26 (MD). A drake **Barrow's Goldeneye** appeared March 14-15 off **Shippan Point, Stamford**, which seems to have supplanted various Connecticut

River locations as the most reliable spot to find this species (PDu, MMc). A female was there March 21 (FG et al.). The three **Barrow's** that wintered at Bantam River/Lake were last seen April 3 (DRo et al.). The best count of **Hooded Mergansers** was an excellent 115 March 22 at Bantam Lake (DRo). An impressive staging flock of 2,000+ **Common Mergansers** was on Candlewood Lake in Brookfield April 2 (AD).

A smattering of **Red-necked Grebes** included two significant inland flocks: 14 on April 14 at Bantam Lake (SSI), and nine on May 7 at Snipsic Lake in Ellington (CE). Amid a flurry of **Northern Gannet** sightings March 31-April 4, the most interesting was one seen from the window of a New Haven office building as it penetrated deep into New Haven harbor (DSo). **Anhinga** appearances in the state remain fleeting; two were reported high over Canton and heading south May 23 (JK). The usual scattered **American Bittern** reports included three on April 17 at Little Pond in Litchfield (DRo et al.). Stratford Great Meadows held two **Tricolored Herons** May 6 (JO). The season's only **Cattle Egret**, lately a rare visitor to the state, was at Lighthouse Point, New Haven, May 7 (CL, DB). Five **Black-crowned Night Herons** made an unexpected inland appearance May 11 at

Woodridge Lake in Goshen, flying in at sunset, landing briefly in trees and then departing (KF).

### Hawks through Terns

The first **Broad-winged Hawk** report was early, as has been the recent trend, March 26 in Watertown (RN). A late **Northern Harrier** was at HBSP May 30 (PDe), followed by an even later one there June 13 flying up the Sound as if migrating (PDe). After an absence over the winter, two **Peregrine Falcons** appeared March 1 on the Gold Star Bridge over the Thames River in New London (RDi).

The season's only **American Golden Plover** was in a mixed flock of shorebirds May 17 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, hereafter HBSP (GH). The shorebird of the season was a **Black-necked Stilt** May 30 at Sandy Point in West Haven (MSt). The Little Pond area in Litchfield held 29 **Solitary Sandpipers** May 17 (DRo). A migrant **Upland Sandpiper** flew by Sandy Point on April 18 (JHo); another paid a brief visit to Little Pond April 22 (EA). What was by far a state-record count of 80+ **Whimbrels** roosted on Sand Island, Greenwich Point, at high tide May 21 (JWe); what normally would be a good count of five was at Sandy Point the same day (JMa). The

season's outstanding early arrival was a **Spotted Sandpiper** March 7 at Mondo Pond in Milford, a full five weeks ahead of the previous date (FM). A **Dunlin** was a good inland find May 22 at Little Pond (DRo). Station 43 in South Windsor again hosted an impressive number of **Wilson's Snipe**, with up to 120 on April 9 (TA). The only **Wilson's Phalarope** report came May 24 at Sherwood Island State Park, Westport (RS).

Three adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were off Meigs Point at HBSP on March 8 (GH, EH). A **Glaucous Gull** was off Long Beach, Stratford, April 4-5 (CB et al.), with additional sightings April 17-18 (CB et al.). Another was late May 19 in Waterford (DP). A heavy movement of **Bonaparte's Gulls** April 10 included 2,000+ at Long Beach, Stratford (JHo). A **Black-headed Gull** was at Southport Beach, Fairfield, March 30 (PS). Single **Little Gulls** were at Burwell's Beach, Milford, on March 12+ (DV) and Southport Beach on March 20 (JHu); two were at Shippan Point, Stamford, on April 3 (PDU). A **Black-legged Kittiwake**, rare inside Long Island Sound at any season, livened up a boat foray May 4 off Stamford (PDU, FG). The season's only **Caspian Tern** was at Sandy Point, West Haven, May 13-16 (JHo et al.). A



**Forster's Tern** April 27 at Bantam Lake was unusual for both place and season (DRo); most are seen in late summer-fall on the coast.

### Doves through Thrushes

A **Eurasian Collared Dove**, an expanding species previously unrecorded in the state, appeared at a feeder in Waterbury May 2 and was photographed May 4 (DC, MSz, GH). It was an excellent season for cuckoos. With attempts to avoid duplication, we received c. 30 reports of **Black-billed Cuckoos** and 40+ reports of **Yellow-billed Cuckoos**. A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was calling March 18 in Ridgefield (EJ). The largest flocks of **Common Nighthawks** were 32 in Ellington on May 12 (CE); 50+ in Bloomfield May 13 (J&LC); and c. 90 May 17 and c 70 May 25, both in Litchfield (DRo). Up to 12 **Whip-poor-wills** at Barn Island, Stonington, on May 1 represented an excellent count for a species in perceived decline that nonetheless occurs at locations scattered throughout the state (GW). For instance, one was calling in North Granby, a previously unreported location, the same day (JWk). A **Red-headed Woodpecker** was found March 3 in Somers (LTu); it was present to at least March 11 (JSt). Another visited a Canton yard April 24

(JMe).

An **Acadian Flycatcher** set an early arrival record May 1 in New Haven (JHo); one visited a Canton yard May 27 (PCi). The only reports of **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, a late-arriving and easily overlooked species, were May 21 in Southbury (PCo) and May 22 in Preston (DP) and Lyme (LV). The amazing expansion of **Common Raven** continues. On May 13 in Wethersfield one was within a half-mile of Hartford and carrying food toward a cliff as if nesting (PDE). Reports of one to three **Swainson's Thrushes** came from multiple locations May 16-19 (m.ob). These were accompanied by a few **Gray-cheeked type Thrushes**, including two on May 16 in East Rock Park, New Haven (GW).

### Warblers through Finches

A **Blue-winged Warbler** arrived in Wilton on the record early date of April 6 (LTi). The season's only **Brewster's Warbler** visited a Mystic yard May 7 (GW). The only **Lawrence's Warbler** was at the Walden Preserve, Salem, May 17 (HG). A **Nashville Warbler** arrived April 22 in Sharon, a day ahead of the previous record (FB). The season's only **Orange-crowned Warbler** was in New London April 17 (GM). **Single Yellow-throated Warblers** appeared April 20 at New

Canaan Nature Center (FG), May 7 at Chatfield Hollow State Park in Killingworth (DRu, MR) and May 8 at Greenwich Point (MSa), with another report there May 18 possibly referring to the same bird (JWe). What appeared to be a massive flight of **Blackpoll Warblers** swarmed across the state May 16-20, with singers conspicuous in suburban and even urban areas with mature trees (JMe, GH et al). The season's only **Prothonotary Warbler** was in Manchester May 5 (DL). East Rock Park in New Haven hosted a **Kentucky Warbler** May 4 (JL); one was present May 1-8 in Manchester (TA); and on May 11 singles visited a Hamden yard (C&JZ) and a Wilton yard (JBe). Another was in West Hartford May 18 (BT), and the Hamden yard produced another sighting May 20 (JZ), marking an excellent season for this species.

A male **Summer Tanager** was found on private property in Salem on May 15 (PB, DBi). A **Chipping Sparrow** March 27-28 in Litchfield was well ahead of normal arrival dates (DRo). A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was banded May 29 at Milford Point (CW). An **Oregon-type Dark-eyed Junco** that wintered in Waterbury was last seen April 4 (BF). An **Indigo Bunting** April 14 in Westport was three days ahead of the previous early arrival date (FM). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** that ap-

peared March 3 at feeders in Killingworth was so far ahead of schedule that it probably wintered well north of its usual range (DRu & MR). The season's only **Dickcissel** was in a Mystic yard April 30 (GW).

A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** provided a seasonal surprise May 14 in Deep River (ES&DSa). Good flocks of 100+ **Rusty Blackbirds** were in a swamp in Harwinton April 7 (PCa) and at a golf course in Bloomfield April 9 (SF). The eight **Boat-tailed Grackles** that wintered at Stratford Great Meadows were engaged in territorial courtship and display there March 15 (EH et al.). A first-year male **Orchard Oriole** at a feeder April 15 in Bloomfield beat the previous early arrival date by eight days (SF).

A good winter for some of the northern finch species spilled over into March, including 200+ **Common Redpolls** March 7 at Lake Saltonstall in Branford (AGd); the last report was of two at a Goshen feeder on April 2 (KF). **Pine Siskins** persisted deeper into the season with 60+ at feeders in West Hartland on April 14 (SSI) and one of a pair seen carrying nest material May 14 in Harwinton (PCa). A lingering flock of up to 10 **Evening Grosbeaks** visited feeders in Union until at least April 28 (KE et al.).





*Julian Hough photo*  
*This Upland Sandpiper made a fly-by appearance at Sandy Point, West Haven, on April 18, 2004.*



*David Sadowsky photo*  
*This adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird visited a feeder in Deep River on May 14, 2004.*

## SUMMER, June 1 through July 31, 2004

Two **Ring-necked Ducks** were unseasonable July 15 at Aspetuck Reservoir in Easton (DV). **Hooded Mergansers** nested successfully in three boxes placed for **American Kestrels** in Cornwall (AGi). A pair of **Pied-billed Grebes** that nested at Stratford Great Meadows fledged six young (CB et al). A pair at Hesskey Meadows in Woodbury had at least one young by May 8 (TZ). Basic plumaged **Common Loons**, regular in Long Island Sound in summer, were off Greenwich Point June 26 (KE) and off Niantic July 17 (ER). A late **Horned Grebe** visited Nepaug Reservoir in New Hartford June 9-12 (DRo et al.).

A **Sooty Shearwater** was observed in Long Island Sound, about 1.25 miles south of HBSP, on July 8 (PCo). There is no accepted state record to date. In keeping with recent trends, small groups of **Wilson's Storm-Petrels** were reported on several occasions in July from Long Island Sound (m.ob.). Two **American White Pelicans** were seen at two locations in Westbrook on July 8 (PCo). Two pairs of **Yellow-crowned Night Herons** were nest-building May 1 in Stonington, apparently the first confirmed nesting east of the Connecticut River and a significant range extension in

the state (BDw).

**Northern Harrier** nested again at Stratford Great Meadows (CB). **American Kestrels** were confirmed nesting at three locations in Cornwall and three or four locations in Sharon (AGi). A single **King Rail** was calling during June at Stratford Great Meadows (FM). A **Common Moorhen** was found June 20 at Stratford Great Meadows; it stayed through the season but there were no signs of breeding (FM et al.) The increasing reports of **Sandhill Crane** included one at Barn Island, Stonington, June 9-12 (BDw et al.).

The first southbound **Whimbrels** were at Sandy Point July 14 (JHo), with one at Stratford Great Meadows the next day (CB). Other notable shorebird arrivals included two **Red Knots** at Sandy Point July 18 (PDe), two **Western Sandpipers** July 17 at Milford Point (NB); three **Pectoral Sandpipers** July 25 at Sandy Point (GN); and **Upland Sandpipers** at Lake Chamberlain, Bethany, July 25 (JT) and Simsbury Airport July 29 (BKI). A significant flock of 109 **Short-billed Dowitchers** dropped in at Lord's Cove in Old Lyme July 28 (HG). A **Red-necked Phalarope** was a good find July 29 at Shell Beach, Guilford (LGu). Single **Caspian Terns** were at Lord's Cove in Lyme July 8 (HG) and Caswell Cove in Milford July 9 (NH),



plus a large **Sterna tern**, probably **Caspian**, July 10 at Stratford Great Meadows (LTi). Unusual away from the immediate coast was a **Least Tern** that fished in upper Lake Whitney in Hamden for a week in mid-July (AS). Single **Black Terns** lingered into the season June 6 & 13 at Sandy Point (JHo, PF).

At least one pair of **Monk Parakeets** was nesting in July in New Britain (AW), far from the established breeding range in the state, which is on the immediate coast in Fairfield and New Haven counties. Nesting also was established in Old Saybrook, well east of the breeding stronghold (m.ob.). A pair of **Long-eared Owls**, a very elusive breeder, nested in Southbury (LF fide RN). Single **Whip-poor-wills** were singing in Wolcott June 30 (JSw) and Tolland July 12 (TS).

The southward breeding explosion of **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** continued with reports of territorial birds at four locations in Woodbury and at least 10 drumming in Southbury (RN). One also was seen in June in Middlebury (GH), and two on May 31 near the Wolcott/Southington line were potential breeders (JSw). A wandering **Red-headed Woodpecker**, a species that can appear any month of the year, turned up at the Stratford Coastal Grasslands site July 16-

21 (LTi, PS et al.)

A juvenile **Horned Lark**, a very scarce breeder, was observed July 27-28 at Stratford Coastal Grasslands (CB). Two singing **Sedge Wrens** were in a hay field in Ledyard June 19-23. They were seen carrying nesting material June 22; but there were no sightings after the field was cut June 23 (SG, LV et al.). **Magnolia Warbler**, another species undergoing a southward expansion, held at least two territories in Woodbury (TZ). A singing male **Prothonotary Warbler** was discovered June 13 in Nehantic State Forest in Lyme, and seen through at least June 17 (TA et al.). A female was at a different spot in Nehantic July 1 (DP) A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was away from known breeding sites but in good habitat June 14 at Meriden Airport (MMo).

An observer in Harwinton, who saw a pair of **Pine Siskins** carrying nesting material in May, saw five individuals June 18 in the same location and believed that the group comprised two adults and three flighted young (PCa); a nesting attempt also was reported from Winsted (DRo).

OBSERVERS - Eric Adam, Jayne Amico; Ralph Amodei, Tim Antanaitis, Renee Baade (RBa), Jim Bair (JBa), Bill Banks, Charles Barnard, Dan Barvir (DBa), Fred Baumgarten, Larry

Bauscher, Joe Bear (JBe), Ray Belding (RBe), David Bingham (DBi), Peter Bono, Nick Bonomo, Andy Brand, Tom Bravo, Paul Carrier (PCa), Paul Cianfaglione (PCi), John Clancy, Linda Clancy, Patrick Comins (PCo), Dave Coutu, Neil Currie, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Buzz Devine (BDe), Bob Dewire (BDw), Mike DiGiorgio, Angela Dimmitt, Robert Dixon (RDi), Randy Domina (RDo), Mike Doyle, Jim Dugan, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Carl Ekroth, Ken Elkins, John Eykelhoff, Larry Fischer, Bruce Finnan, Kevin Finnan, Sam Fried, Paul Fusco, Lisa Gagnon (LGa), Frank Gallo, Anthony Giardiello (AGd), Ted Gilman, Art Gingert (AGi), Sheila Gleason, Tim Goldsmith, Hank Golet, Andy Griswold (AGr), Lorraine Gunderson (LGu), Ed Hagen, Nita Hamilton, Greg Hanisek, Roy Harvey Simon Harvey, Julian Hough (JHo), Katy Hubbard, Jim Hunter (JHu), Jalna Jaeger, Elsbeth Johnson, Rich Kania, Jay Kaplan, Len Kendall, Betty Kleiner (BKr), Brian Kleinman (BKl), Jonas Lai, Stephen Living, Carol Lemmon, Dave Lyons, Glenn Mahler, Frank Mantlik, Linda Mantlik, John Maynard (JMa), Steve Mayo, Jamie Meyers (JMe), Ron Mirer, Mike Moccio (MMc), Marty Moore (MMo), Russ Naylor, Gina Nichol, John Ogren, Scott Olmstead, Ron Pelletier, Dave Provencher,

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## Photo Challenge:

Julian Hough

### ANSWER TO PHOTO CHALLENGE 47

The photograph is not one of the clearest and it is difficult to make out many plumage features.

The bird in question is clearly a shorebird and the most obvious feature is the long, straight bill. The bird's markings seem well-delineated with an obvious oval white cheek patch and dark "braces" extending over the back. The crown is pale, but aside from that there is little to go on in the photo.

Thumbing through the field guide in a process of elimination we can find only one species that shows such a bold dark stripe through the eye, pale crown and prominent white "cheeks" and throat – breeding Wilson's Phalarope!

Of the three phalaropes, Wilson's are much more suited to feeding on land, and as we can see in the photo the legs are much longer than we would find on either Red-necked or Red Phalarope. In summer plumage, Wilson's really are unmistakable. As with all phalaropes the sexual roles are reversed with the female being the most brightly colored. The males are more nondescript so as not to attract attention of predators during incubating.

The bold markings of our bird, despite the photo, are that of a female.

Wilson's also differ in that they are larger and show a white-rump in flight, a feature not shared by the other two species.

This photo was taken by Gil Kleiner at Brigantine, New Jersey in May 1987.

Julian Hough, 22 Hallock Ave., New Haven, CT 06450



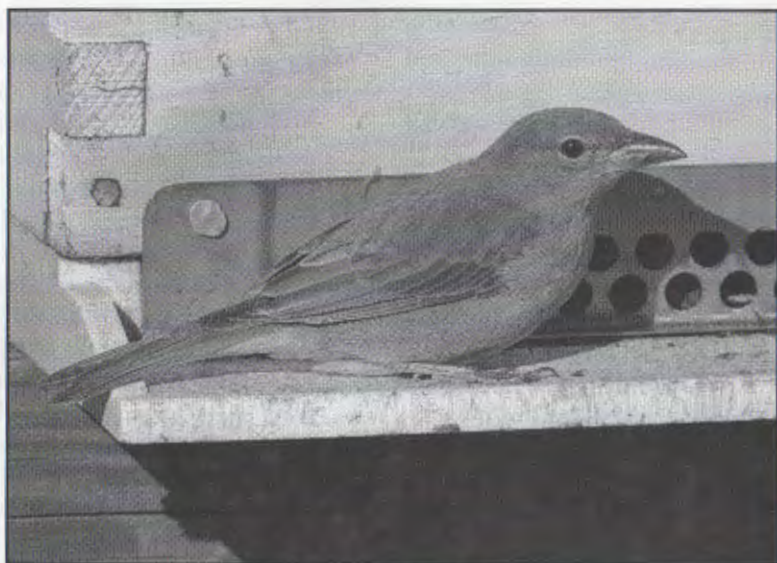


Photo Challenge 48 Identify the species. Answer next issue.

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# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Greg Hanisek - 175 Circuit Ave., Waterbury, CT 06708

(203) 754-4401 email: ghanisek@rep-am.com

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