

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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ON THE COVER

Ross's Goose

An incredible collection of rare geese during winter 2015-16 at Broad Brook Pond in East Windsor included Connecticut's third record of Ross's Goose. Mark Szantyr enjoyed the "goose-a-palooza" and created our cover illustration of the charismatic little goose from the high arctic.

THE 2015-16 CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Stephen P. Broker

A year ago, the Christmas Bird Count review article summarized the efforts of ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, staff member of the American Museum of Natural History, in promoting and conducting the first “Christmas bird-census” in the United States and Canada. Connecticut was one of 13 U.S. states (along with New Brunswick and Toronto, Canada) answering the call to find, identify, and count birds rather than to shoot and eat them, as had been the widespread practice during the late Victorian ‘side hunt’. Our birding forebears contributed richly to the state’s ornithological history during these early decades of the Audubon Christmas Count.

Of the 19 counts currently being conducted in the state, nine pre-date 1950 in their origins. They are Greenwich-Stamford (formerly Port Chester, NY), Hartford, Lakeville-Sharon, Litchfield Hills, New Haven, New London, Old Lyme-Saybrook, Oxford, and Westport. Because of name changes and small birding parties out in the field during the first several decades of the Christmas Bird Count, well before the standardization of 15-mile diameter count circles, I wisely won’t attempt to give the first years of these counts. In the state-wide list of CBCs that follows, I indicate the inception years of those counts that were introduced in the post-1950 period.

More than 750 field observers and nearly 100 feeder watchers contributed to the 2015-16 Christmas Bird Count in Connecticut, held between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. In the process, they logged more than 2,000 total party hours and some 8,000 miles on foot and by car. This year, Connecticut boasted 19 CBCs, welcoming the addition of the Guilford-Long Island Sound Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by Menunkatuck Audubon Society. Six counts take place in the northern part of the state: Lakeville-Sharon, Litchfield Hills, Barkhamsted (1984), Hartford, Storrs (1956-57), and Edwin Way Teale, Trailwood (1986). The five mid-state counts are Pawling,

NY/Hidden Valley, CT (1967), Woodbury-Roxbury (1964), Oxford, Quinnipiac Valley (1971), and Salmon River (1975). Coastal counts consist of Greenwich-Stamford, Westport, Stratford-Milford (1965), New Haven, Guilford-Long Island Sound (2015), Old Lyme-Saybrook, New London, and Napatree, RI/NY/CT (2002).

As is typically the case, this year's count was characterized by continuing trends of increasing early winter populations of some species of birds, and decreasing early winter populations of others. Also, we had more than our fair share of rarities reported during the three-week window of official bird counts. Most interestingly, the one bird on our all-time statewide list that had not been known to the species level, "Western Flycatcher", was determined through DNA testing of a collected fecal sample to be a Pacific-slope Flycatcher and not the closely related Cordilleran Flycatcher. In addition to Pacific-slope Flycatcher, a *Sterna* tern seen in the Napatree count circle and a Tennessee Warbler seen at Westport's count circle were new to the 30-year statewide list that forms the basis of this CBC analysis. The 30-year statewide list of species observed now stands at a combined 264 count day and 3 count week or count period species. The species seen during count week but not on any scheduled count day over the past 30 years have been Gyrfalcon (at New Haven in 1987-88 and Old Lyme-Saybrook in 1995-96), Purple Gallinule (Greenwich-Stamford, 1998-99), and Piping Plover (Old Lyme-Saybrook, 1993-94).

A total of 18 species were observed in 30-year high totals, and their statewide numbers are listed here. They are Cackling Goose (6), Wood Duck (204), Northern Shoveler (29), Harlequin Duck (7), Double-crested Cormorant (305), Snowy Egret (2), Black Vulture (245), Bald Eagle (180), Laughing Gull (17), Red-bellied Woodpecker (1613), Common Raven (275), White-breasted Nuthatch (3179), Orange-crowned Warbler (4), Western Tanager (2), Eastern Towhee (153), Fox Sparrow (207), Dickcissel (2), and Baltimore Oriole (7). Of these species, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Common Raven continue trends of increasing

early winter populations that extend back a number of years. The 11 species that were recorded this year in 30-year low totals are Mute Swan (686), Common Merganser (1412), Great Cormorant (71), Rough-legged Hawk (none observed this year for the first time in more than 30 years), Killdeer (6), Purple Sandpiper (34), Wilson's Snipe (2), Belted Kingfisher (112), Horned Lark (339), Golden-crowned Kinglet (107), and American Tree Sparrow (892). Most concerning of these species is American Tree Sparrow, which has been in decline on our Christmas Bird Counts for at least the past five years.

This year's Connecticut Christmas Bird Count was most notable for a wealth of western vagrants or cross-continental migrants, including Tundra Swan (rare in winter on the east coast), Pacific Loon, Rufous Hummingbird (increasingly recognized as a late fall and winter vagrant in the northeast), Pacific-slope Flycatcher (now confirmed as to species), Ash-throated Flycatcher ("best treated as late transient" – *Birds of North America*), Cave Swallow, Townsend's Solitaire, and Western Tanager. The specific determination of Pacific-slope Flycatcher by DNA studies is discussed below.

A *Sterna* tern is not without precedent on the Connecticut all-time CBC list as a Common Tern was reported from Stratford-Milford in 1973-74. The tern seen at Napatree's Quonnachontaug was reported appropriately to the genus level. "*Connecticut Birds By The Season*" (Hanisek. 2005, 2008.) indicates that Forster's Tern is the most likely tern to persist in our region into December. The Tennessee Warbler seen at Westport is completely unprecedented for a Connecticut Christmas Bird Count.

The following rarities seen this year also generated considerable excitement: Pacific Loon at the Napatree CBC off Weekapaug Beach, two Black-legged Kittiwakes at New London, Ash-throated Flycatcher at Westport (Sherwood Island State Park), Northern Rough-winged Swallow at Hartford, Cave Swallow CW at New Haven, Townsend's Solitaire at Greenwich-Stamford, Black-and-white Warbler CW at Hartford, and Western Tanagers, one each at Napatree and New

Haven. In Jay Kaplan's summary of the Hartford count, he stated, "Equally surprising (to a count week Tundra Swan at Station 43, South Windsor) was a Black-and-white Warbler that persisted in a rather cold location in front of REI in Blueback Square, West Hartford, right up until the day before the count." Also noteworthy in our statewide count were Snowy Egrets at Greenwich-Stamford and New London, Rufous Hummingbird at Old Lyme-Saybrook, and Nashville Warbler at Westport.

The 171 count day and four count week species (Cave Swallow, Black-and-white Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, Boat-tailed Grackle) seen this year represent a very respectable level of avian species diversity, trailing just four CBC years that recorded greater numbers of count day species: 174 in 1994-95, 173 in 1999-2000, 177 in 2007-08, and 173 in 2012-13. Litchfield Hills led all northern counts with its near record high 90 count day species observed, followed by 86 count day and 7 count week species at Hartford (part of the reason why Jay Kaplan called this a strange count) and 80 count day species at Lakeville-Sharon, a 30-year record high. Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood enjoyed its highest number of field observers and combined field observers and feeder watchers in 12 years. Among mid-state counts, Quinnipiac Valley recorded 90 count day species, down just slightly from last year's exceptional effort. The 40 feeder watchers and 73 combined observers (field + feeders) set new 30-year highs for this count. Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley, CT followed with 82 count day species. New Haven's 120 count day and one count week species were high totals for the coastal CBCs, with Napatree right behind at 117 count day and two count week species. New London set new 30-year high totals for field observers (58) and total field + feeder observers (60), with a near record high number of total party hours. The new Guilford-Long Island Sound count got off to a fine start with 78 count day and 2 count week species identified, keeping in mind that this count circle limits its land coverage and extends well out into the Sound. Statewide, our 763 total field observers were the highest in 17 years of Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts.

Weather conditions during the Christmas Bird Count season were generally mild and favorable. On Saturday, Dec. 19, New Haven, Woodbury-Roxbury, and Storrs all enjoyed temperatures ranging from a low of 27-30 degrees Fahrenheit to a high of 37-40 degrees F. There was no rainfall during the day, and only light snowfall during the morning at Woodbury-Roxbury. At times, all three counts experienced breezy conditions, with highest gusts ranging from 22 to 30 miles per hour. Morning skies were partly cloudy, and the afternoon saw clear to partly cloudy skies. Coastal waters, both still and moving, were open, while inland still waters were partly frozen and moving waters open. New Haven compiler Chris Loscalzo made the interesting observation that "there were several memorable aspects to the count, including the fact that it was run on the coldest day of the warmest December on record."

Eight counts were held on Sunday, Dec. 20: Greenwich-Stamford and Westport along the coast, Oxford, Quinnipiac Valley, and Salmon River mid-state, and Lakeville-Sharon, Litchfield Hills, and Hartford in the northern regions. Mild conditions persisted throughout the day around the state, as most counts ranged from a low of 30 degrees F to a high of 40-42 degrees F. Wind gusts from the west or northwest alleviated somewhat from the day before. Neither rain nor snow interfered with field observations. All counts experienced partly cloudy to clear conditions through morning and afternoon. Oxford, Salmon River, and Hartford counts had partly frozen still water but open moving water. All other counts were free of frozen waters. Hartford compiler Jay Kaplan noted, "The balmy weather conditions of late fall continued through Count Day with temperatures reaching the mid-forties. Yet, in spite of the mild conditions and lack of ice and snow, make no mistake about it – this was a strange count." We'll pick up further on that theme later in this article.

A week after "Big CBC Sunday", two coastal counts (Stratford-Milford and Napatree, RI/NY/CT) and one northern count (Barkhamsted) were held under even warmer conditions, with temperatures of 44-58 degrees F. Light winds

with occasional gusts and cloudy skies characterized much of the day. Stratford-Milford began its count under heavy fog, while Napatree and Barkhamsted had morning light rains. Not surprisingly, still and moving waters were open on the coast and still water was partly frozen in northern Connecticut. The next few days saw a cold front move in, bringing a bit of a chill to the five counts held on the last weekend of the defined count period.

On Friday, Jan. 1, Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley, CT continued its tradition of a New Year's Day count, this first day of the new year marked with temperatures in the 30s, cloudy skies, and an afternoon dusting of snow. On Saturday, Jan. 2, it chilled down further as the inaugural Guilford-Long Island Sound CBC and the veteran New London count dealt with morning temperatures of 29 degrees and 25 degrees, respectively, and afternoon peaks of 43 degrees and 38 degrees, respectively. The day was unmarred by rain or snow. Completing the Christmas Count season on Sunday, Jan. 3, Old Lyme-Saybrook and Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood had similar cold morning starts but warmed through the day to the mid-40s. Skies remained largely clear, and still waters continued to be partly frozen.

As has been noted in previous Connecticut Christmas Bird Count articles, Excel spreadsheets are maintained and updated annually for each of the 19 CBCs now being held in the state. The results of this year's count are compared with those of the previous 29 years (shorter periods for the younger counts), and new high and low totals are determined for each species on the list. Species new to the count and species rare to the count (defined as occurring six or fewer times in 30 years) are indicated in the table that accompanies this narrative. Also, 30-year highs and lows, new species, and rarities are shown for the combined statewide results. Let's review the 2015-16 findings following the current American Ornithologists' Union Check-List order (which has undergone a number of revisions in recent years).

Waterfowl. Hartford located the only Greater White-fronted



Mark Szantyr photo

Northern Pintails made a good showing on the 2015-16 Christmas Bird Count.

Goose on the statewide count. The 247 Snow Geese seen at Greenwich-Stamford were by far the biggest contributors to the second highest statewide total in 30 years. Brant were concentrated along the western coastline, with New Haven, Westport, and Greenwich-Stamford accounting for more than 80% of the coastal total. Hartford recorded a new high of three Cackling Geese. The 37,427 Canada Geese distributed around the state were the lowest number in 10 years. Once numbering more than 2,000 statewide, Mute Swans were at a 30-year low total, some 33% of their peak CBC year of 2002-03. Jay Kaplan wrote, "a Tundra Swan showed up at Station 43, South Windsor on Monday, on the day following the count. Where was it on Sunday?" Always generating interest in the state, Tundra Swan has made an appearance on 10 of the last 30 CBC years.

How about dabbling and diving ducks? Wood Ducks surged to a new 30-year high total, 8% higher than the previous record of 2001-02. The only Eurasian Wigeons reported were at Westport (2) and Stratford-Milford (1). Three coastal counts reported record low numbers of Mallards, leading to the

second lowest Mallard count in 30 years. Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail were well represented this year, with 11 shovelers at Stratford-Milford, 10 at Hartford, and 37 pintails at Old Lyme-Saybrook. Last year, only one Canvasback made an appearance on a Connecticut CBC. This year, Stratford-Milford reported 10 canvasbacks, and the northern count at Barkhamsted had 1, a strong sign of continuing very low numbers for this prairie pothole-breeding species in early winter Connecticut. The only Redheads reported this year were at Napatree (10 total). Napatree's rocky coastline also boasted seven Harlequin Ducks. Buffleheads continue in high numbers throughout the state, while Common Goldeneyes plunged to half last year's total. On the other hand, Hooded Merganser enjoyed its continued high numbers of the last 18 years. Due largely to the extensive open water throughout the state, Common Mergansers were widely dispersed and difficult to find, hence a new 30-year low total. Ruddy Duck is another diving duck species on the increase in recent years, and its numbers were representative of the higher counts in early winter especially mid-state and along the coast.

Phasianids to Bitterns and Herons. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, 100 or more Ring-necked Pheasants were counted statewide. Their numbers are highly dependent on restocking efforts by hunt clubs, and with the apparent continued decline of pheasant hunting, pheasants have become difficult to record on a Christmas Bird Count. This year, Lakeville-Sharon had the greatest number at five. Our populations of the native Ruffed Grouse have plummeted even further, with Litchfield Hills (1), Lakeville-Sharon (1), and Trail Wood considering themselves fortunate to find any grouse. *Birds of North America* states, "Ruffed Grouse mainly occupy early-successional deciduous forests created by fire, logging, or other large-scale disturbance. Fire control, opposition to clear-cut logging practices, and conifer management have resulted in maturation and conversion of eastern deciduous forests and in general degradation of habitats for Ruffed Grouse and other early-successional forest birds, with assumed concurrent reduction in numbers of Ruffed Grouse."

Since being reintroduced to the state, Wild Turkeys have fared well, although they can be somewhat elusive on counts. This year's total is below average for the past 20 years.

Red-throated and Common loons were well represented along the coast, with one Red-throated found in land at Lakeville-Sharon and one Common at Litchfield Hills. Napatree's Pacific Loon off Weekapaug Beach was the third occurrence of this western rarity in the 14-year history of the Napatree count. Field observers along the coast had a difficult time finding Horned Grebes this year. Three coastal counts spotted single Red-necked Grebes. The occurrence since the early 1990s of Northern Gannets in Long Island Sound during March-April flights and again in October through December has made this species an annual find on our coastal CBCs. The Atlantic waters off Napatree funnel these birds to the Sound, and this year's was the second highest total ever. The previous pattern was that Double-crested Cormorants would be well outnumbered in early winter by Great Cormorants. Not so this year, with a record high 305 Double-crested Cormorants reported (including one inland at Quinnipiac Valley) and a record low 71 Great Cormorants.

American Bitterns certainly can be described as rare and elusive marsh birds. Three bitterns at Napatree and one count week at Stratford-Milford were excellent finds. Great Blue Herons were in average numbers, while 11 Great Egrets at New London were significantly high. Greenwich-Stamford and New London had single Snowy Egrets, far more scarce in early winter than are Great Egrets. Stratford-Milford counted 12 Black-crowned Night-Herons, but once again no Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were located this year. Yellow-crowned has been reported only five times in 30 CBC years, either as an individual bird or as a count week occurrence.

New World Vultures to Rallids. A few years after their first appearance on a Connecticut CBC in 1989, Black Vultures became an annual occurrence. By 1997-98, they topped 25 total individuals, mostly in the northern part of the state. By

the 2001-02 CBC, Black Vulture numbers exceeded 50 individuals statewide, and the number reached 100 individuals by 2005-06 and 150 two years later. In 2010-11, a record high count of 244 Black Vultures was reached, exceeded this year by the 245 counted, with 59 seen on northern counts, 60 on mid-state counts, and 126 along the coast. Turkey Vulture numbers have increased in early winter during the same time period but remain variable from year to year. This species of New World Vulture still outnumbers Black Vultures in early winter by 2:1. Osprey has been reported on 21 of the last 30 Connecticut CBCs but was not seen this year. The steady expansion of nesting Bald Eagles in Connecticut since the 1990s has led to a record high 180 counted on this year's CBC. Sharp-shinned Hawks were well represented, and Cooper's Hawks continued their higher numbers of the past 15 years. Northern Goshawk always is a challenge to find, and this year Lakeville-Sharon and Litchfield Hills reported the only ones on the count.

Among buteos, Red-shouldered Hawk was widespread, especially mid-state, and Red-tailed Hawk also enjoyed high numbers. Rough-legged Hawk was missed for the first time in 30 years. Consider the 37 Rough-legs counted in 1989-90, a major incursion year from the north that also included White-winged Crossbill and Common Redpoll but not Northern Shrike. Golden Eagle, seen on three of the four previous counts, did not show itself this year. Clapper Rails were detected at New Haven, Old Lyme-Saybrook, and Westport, while Virginia Rails were harder to find at Old Lyme-Saybrook and Napatree. Old Lyme-Saybrook reported the only Sora. American Coot is quite variable from year to year, this year being at 40% of the previous year's total.

Shorebirds to Gulls and Terns. Stratford-Milford and Napatree reported the only American Oystercatchers. Among charadriids, Black-bellied Plover and Killdeer were at new low numbers. Of the seven sandpiper species seen, Ruddy Turnstone, Purple Sandpiper, and Wilson's Snipe were in short supply. Greater Yellowlegs (19), Sanderling (401), Dunlin (558), and American Woodcock (5) continued their

fluctuating patterns of recent years. Among alcids, Razorbill has been reported in each of the last 14 years, due in part to the birds seen at Napatree's Atlantic coastline. Greenwich-Stamford (CW), New Haven (2), and New London (3) also contributed to the Razorbill total. New London reported five large alcids, as well. The larids were well represented, with two Black-legged Kittiwakes at New London, a Black-headed Gull at Napatree, a comparatively high number of Laughing Gulls (11 at Greenwich-Stamford!), several Iceland Gulls (one at Hartford), single Lesser Black-backed Gulls at New Haven and Westport, and a slight smattering of Bonaparte's Gulls along the coast. Ring-billed Gulls (13,025), Herring Gulls (9,599), and Great Black-backed Gulls (982) all have experienced reduced numbers with the closing of landfills statewide. Napatree's *Sterna* tern seen at Quonnochohtaug was a record first tern for its count.

Columbids to Falcons and Parrots. Rock Pigeons and Mourning Doves always seem to weigh in with similar numbers annually, the feral pigeons suggesting a steady decline in numbers over the years. Barn Owl was last reported at New Haven in 2010-11. Alas, no Barn Owls again this year. Eastern Screech-Owls (141) and Northern Saw-whet Owls (19) were in low supply. Great Horned Owls (106) fluctuate in their counted numbers, while Barred Owls (58) answered the call in good numbers. Long-eared Owls at Quinnipiac Valley (3), Litchfield Hills (2), and Woodbury-Roxbury (1) were a bonus, as was a Short-eared Owl at New London. No counts reported Snowy Owl. Old Lyme-Saybrook had the only Rufous Hummingbird this year, a species reported in seven out of the last 14 years. The extensive open water statewide scattered Belted Kingfishers, producing a new low total. Six Red-headed Woodpeckers statewide (with three at Hartford) were impressive. Red-bellied Woodpeckers continue their impressive march northward. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers continue their impressive march southward. High counts of Pileated Woodpecker at Barkhamsted, Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood, and Quinnipiac Valley bolstered this woodpecker species statewide.



Julian Hough photo
The Christmas Bird Counts continue to confirm the steep decline in American Kestrel numbers.



Julian Hough photo
Hooded Merganser numbers continue to increase on the Christmas Bird Counts, especially in protected coastal waters.

American Kestrel continues in reduced numbers (compare this year's 10 with 116 seen in 1986-87), and Merlin outnumbered kestrels for the ninth straight year, now at a 2:1 ratio. To illustrate the resurgence of nesting Peregrine Falcons in the state, West Rock Ridge (Woodbridge), East Rock (New Haven), and Sleeping Giant State Park (Hamden) combined to produce five fledged young in 2015, a first ever trifecta for these trap rock ridges in the south-central Connecticut lowlands. This year's CBC total throughout the state is second highest ever. Monk Parakeets continue their stronghold at Stratford-Milford. Budgerigar (not to ignore escapees), last reported as a count week bird in 1985-86 at Woodbury-Roxbury, drops off the 30-year list.

New World Flycatchers to Corvids. The occurrence of a species "new" to the Connecticut state list of birds deserves special treatment and undoubtedly will receive such in an upcoming issue of *The Connecticut Warbler*. Here is some background. On Dec. 1, 2007, Roy Harvey found an *Empidonax* flycatcher at Osbornedale State Park in Derby. This bird subsequently was identified as either a Pacific-slope Flycatcher or a Cordilleran Flycatcher, closely related species of the western United States, and it joined the Connecticut state list of birds as "Western" Flycatcher, the name that formerly recognized these birds as one and the same species. *Birds of North America* currently describes Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers in the same hard copy and on-line article, but they now are considered to be distinct species. "Recognition that 2 species existed under the guise of the Western Flycatcher followed a comprehensive systematic study of geographic variation characterizing differences in size and color, vocalizations, genetics, and ecology between coastal and interior populations. The 2 species divide roughly along the Cascades and n. Sierra Nevada into the Pacific-slope Flycatcher west of the divide, retaining the name *Empidonax difficilis*, and the Cordilleran Flycatcher, taking the name *Empidonax occidentalis*, found to the east to the Rocky Mountains and south in mountains throughout most of Mexico" (*Birds of North America*). The species name of *Empidonax difficilis* thus was aptly chosen when applied previously to Western Fly-

catcher.

On this year's Dec. 19 New Haven Christmas Bird Count, Steve Mayo, Jim Cortina, and Howie Sternberg were birding a section of Area K behind the closed Branford Hills School. Cortina first spotted and then with Mayo and Sternberg studied what was ultimately recognized as a "Western" Flycatcher, the second occurrence in the state. Word spread fast, and a number of birders arrived at the scene. The flycatcher was observed to forage along a 50-yard stretch of woodland edge from the western portion of the Branford Hills School parking lot to the adjacent rise and athletic field. It remained out of sight for extended periods of time as it foraged low in weedy growth. When it was relocated, it alternated periods of time on low perch sites (weeds, vines, branches, tree roots) giving searching head movements, with quick forays to secure small invertebrates on the ground. A very frisky and active bird, eating well and processing food at a steady pace, its behavior (most activity within 5-8 feet of and down to ground level) was consistent with that of the "Western" Flycatcher found by Roy Harvey in 2007. The Branford Hills flycatcher was generally oblivious to the presence of the adoring masses. Numerous excellent photographs were taken by a number of observers. Steve Broker focused binoculars on the foraging bird, then crawled into a thicket to collect a fecal sample freshly deposited on a sycamore leaf. Later, Julian Hough collected a second fecal sample. The two samples were parked in freezers.

With guidance from Rick Prum (Yale) and Chris Elphick (University of Connecticut) as well as using his own contacts, Julian Hough wrote to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in the hope that DNA testing could be done to resolve the matter of identification to the species level. At Cornell, Nick Mason, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, responded to Julian's request. Nick wrote, "A Cornell undergrad, Nathan Goldberg, observed one of the recent vagrant *Empidonax* in NYC and was able to collect a fecal sample. We've gone ahead and secured a fecal extraction kit as well as 4 primer pairs to amplify ND2 from



Mark Szantyr photo

Horned Lark numbers fluctuate widely from year to year. They were on the downside for the 2015-16 Christmas Bird Count.

the presumably degraded DNA. This gene region served Andrew well in largely distinguishing the two species, save for individuals from the hybrid zone, and should allow us to figure out whether it's a Cordilleran/PacSlope/hybrid individual." (Nick was referring here to Andrew Rush of University of California Berkeley, previously described by Rick Prum as having completed his PhD on Pacific Slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher systematics and song, and thus being the most recent person to be working on this question of "Western" Flycatcher identification). Nick continued, "Our goal is that Nathan can use this as an opportunity to learn some basic phylogenetic methods and write the analysis up as a short manuscript for *Northeastern Naturalist*."

Broker and Hough mailed off the fecal samples separately to Cornell, and the first to be put through DNA testing, sent by Hough, came back with a positive identification of Pacific-slope Flycatcher. Thus, the identification to species level of "Western" Flycatcher in Connecticut was resolved for the

2015 sighting. The Avian Records Committee of Connecticut will consider the accumulated evidence in an upcoming committee meeting.

Eastern Phoebe sightings on four CBCs were par for the course. This is the third time an Ash-throated Flycatcher has been reported on a CT CBC, the bird at Sherwood Island State Park, Westport being seen by many observers. In most years, this would have to be considered the find of the state-wide count. Northern Shrikes were found at Lakeville-Sharon and Woodbury-Roxbury. Among corvids, 42 Fish Crows at Hartford were notable, while Common Raven continues its dramatic spread through Connecticut as a breeding and wintering species, the 275 individuals this year showing a 40% increase over last year's record high count of 197.

Horned Lark to Kinglets. Horned Larks are unpredictable on the Christmas Bird Count. Comparatively few were seen this year, a new 30-year low total. Hartford reported a Northern Rough-winged Swallow (now seen five times in the last nine years), and New Haven reported a count week Cave Swallow as Greenwich-Stamford listed 3 swallows of undetermined species. Chickadees and titmice were in average supply, while White-breasted Nuthatches were comparatively abundant, particularly on northern counts. Red-breasted Nuthatches (29) were few and far between and far more evident on coastal counts. Brown Creepers were hard to locate. Westport recorded the only two House Wrens this year. A year ago, three times as many Winter Wrens were seen as in 2015-16. Hartford's one Marsh Wren is added to nine seen along the coast. Knocked back by last year's heavy snow cover, Carolina Wrens slumped to their lowest total in 15 years. This is a rebound species following more favorable winters. Golden-crowned Kinglets are nearly 10 times more likely to be seen as Ruby-crowned Kinglets, but this year they were comparatively scarce in the state (107 total) and Ruby-crowned were well represented, at 54 total.

Thrushes to Parulid Warblers. Conservation efforts involving setting out starling-proof bluebird boxes continue to



*Mark Szantyr photo
American Tree Sparrows, once abundant
wintering birds, have been in a decline that
was apparent on the 2015-16 Christmas Bird
Count.*

benefit the Eastern Bluebird statewide population. Greenwich-Stamford had the fifth report of Townsend's Solitaire on the 30-year Connecticut CBC list, a bird first found on Dec. 5 and subsequently seen and photographed by many observers throughout the month and into the new year. American Robin had another explosive early winter. Jay Kaplan wrote of Hartford's count, "imagine the surprise of one birder when over one thousand robins flew over a Bloomfield wetland early in the morning. No doubt there was a massive robin roost somewhere in the area. The abundant fruit crop this year obviously plays a role here as almost 2,600 robins, another 10-year high (for Hartford) were tallied. At this late date, one wonders how these birds will fare as we move through the winter season." Jay continued, "In spite of the big fruit and berry crop, we did not see any significant increase for other fruit-eating species like bluebirds or waxwings, and the hope of finding an oriole or some other exotic species in the fruit trees did not materialize." Northern Mockingbirds these past five CBCs have been counted at a mere 37% of their average numbers of the late 1980s

and earliest 1990s. European Starlings were up 28% from their numbers of 2014-15. Nomadic Cedar Waxwings set no record highs or lows anywhere in the state, yet a thousand more were counted this year than last.

This was a banner year for wood warblers with nine species seen statewide. A Black-and-white Warbler was reported count week at Hartford. Westport reported the first Tennessee Warbler in 116 years of Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts. Orange-crowned Warblers were seen at Greenwich-Stamford (CW), Napatree (1), and Westport (3!), and Westport also found a lingering Nashville Warbler, seen for just the eighth time in 30 years of Connecticut CBCs. Common Yellowthroat, Palm, and Pine warblers and Yellow-breasted Chat were among the parulids reported. Yellow-rumped Warblers also were seen in good numbers.

Emberizids. A Nelson's/Saltmarsh Sparrow (Sharp-tailed Sparrow) was reported at New Haven. This species (take your pick, either one) is increasingly difficult to locate on a Christmas Bird Count, reflecting a bleak future in Connecticut's salt marshes as they are under threat from expected, continuing sea level rise. Six count circles submitted new record low numbers of American Tree Sparrow, which has fallen from a high of 6,193 individuals in 1998-99 to a new low of 892 birds this year. *Birds of North America* lists American Tree Sparrow as "an abundant species, breeding in remote, undisturbed areas (breeding to the tree line, northwest Alaska across the northern continent to coastal Labrador); populations are thus in no immediate danger." Connecticut Christmas Bird Count data paint a far less optimistic picture for our wintering populations. Ten Chipping Sparrows at Napatree were noteworthy. Field Sparrow is a scrubland species in apparent steep decline in Connecticut's early winter, with combined numbers reported from the last five CBCs running just 15% of the combined numbers of the period 1986-87 through 1990-91. On a positive note, handsome Fox Sparrows were in abundance this year. Dark-eyed Junco made its usual widespread appearances, while White-crowned Sparrows were seen sparsely on eight CBCs and White-throated

Sparrows showed a 10% increase over last year. Savannah Sparrows were in short supply. Song and Swamp Sparrows were well represented. The only Lincoln's Sparrow reported was a count week bird at Hartford. Eastern Towhees spiked to a new high total, good news for all tea aficionados.

Northern Cardinal to Baltimore Oriole. Hartford and New Haven reported low numbers of Northern Cardinals, while Napatree enjoyed record high numbers. There is no readily apparent explanation for this. Dickcissels at Quinnipiac Valley and Westport were outstanding finds. Flocking species such as blackbirds and grackles have the greatest variability in their appearances from year to year. The patterns hold, with average numbers of Red-wings, Rusty Blackbirds down 30% from last year, and higher numbers of Common Grackles and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Stratford-Milford recorded its Boat-tailed Grackles during count week but could not find any on count day. The Baltimore Orioles missed by Hartford were located at Barkhamsted, Quinnipiac Valley, Greenwich-Stamford, New Haven, Old Lyme-Saybrook (2), and Stratford-Milford for a total of seven statewide.

Winter Finches to House Sparrow. Southward irruptions of our winter finches, including Pine Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill, Common Redpoll, Hoary Redpoll (wishful thinking), and Pine Siskin, seldom are synchronized. For Pine Grosbeak, 2007-08 was the most recent (and only) big year in the last 30. For Purple Finch, 1986-87 stands out. Crossbills had big years in Connecticut in 1989-90, 1997-98, and 2012-13, Common Redpoll particularly so in 1986-87, 1997-98, and 2007-08, Pine Siskin in 1986-87 and 2008-09. In case there was any doubt, this was not a winter finch year, with no Pine Grosbeak, no crossbills, Common Redpoll only at Barkhamsted, and 37 Pine Siskins statewide, way down from the 503 reported last year. The state checklist ends with House Sparrow, an Old World weaver finch. House Sparrows experienced their highest total in 16 years and third highest in the last 30. Thus ends the march through AOU Check-List order.

SPECIES	NORTHERN COUNTS					MIDSTATE COUNTS					COASTAL COUNTS					STATE TOTAL				
	EA 12/27/15	EW 01/03/16	HA 12/20/15	LH 12/20/15	LS 12/20/15	ST 12/19/15	OX 12/20/15	PA 01/01/16	OV 12/20/15	SR 12/20/15	WR 12/19/15	GL 01/02/16	GS 12/20/15	NA 12/27/15	NH 12/19/15	NL 01/03/16	OL 01/03/16	SM 12/27/15	WE 12/20/15	STATE TOTAL
Double-crested Cormorant												14	61	26	3	181	12	6		305
Great Cormorant												14	14	9	8	23	10	5	2	71
American Bittern												7	41	22	10	32	7	15	33	221
Great Blue Heron												1	1	CW					12	12
Great Egret																				2
Showy Egret																				2
Black-crowned Night-Heron																				15
Black Vulture	6	4	7	7	23	16	13	15	8	9	15	CW	5	20	19	64	11	12	1	245
Turkey Vulture	3	27	1	1	1	95	7	2	9	32	8	11	50	33	41	105	37	CW	26	488
Northern Harrier																				57
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	2	0	4	3	6	13	3	2	4	6	4	7	25	12	5	8	1	128	
Cooper's Hawk	4	2	8	6	2	5	6	5	7	4	6	3	5	9	6	6	9	9	10	110
Acadictes sp.																				2
Bald Eagle	1																			2
Red-shouldered Hawk	12	4	5	13	8	3	1	20	6	20	13	3	6	14	13	29	5	4	180	
Red-tailed Hawk	2	2	5	9	1	10	22	14	20	10	10	3	5	3	14	9	1	7	165	
Rough-legged Hawk	35	32	120	56	46	24	45	71	61	43	62	11	76	15	73	47	36	23	904	
hawk, sp.																			0	0
Clapper Rail																				2
Virginia Rail																				2
Sora																				7
American Coot																				5
American Oystercatcher																				1
Black-bellied Plover																				5
Killdeer																				287
Greater Yellowlegs																				3
Reddy Turnstone																				3
Sanderling																				10
Dunlin																				6
Purple Sandpiper																				1
Wilson's Snipe																				1
American Woodcock																				6
Razorbill																				3
large alcid, sp.																				10
Black-legged Kittiwake																				3
Bonaparte's Gull																				3
Black-headed Gull																				10
Laughing Gull																				6
Ring-billed Gull																				3
	49	84	952	149	296	417	244	1671	311	138	1729	129	771	298	1379	436	3404	370	13025	

Northern Counts
 BA = Barkhamsted
 EW = Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood
 HA = Hartford
 LH = Litchfield Hills
 LS = Lakeville-Sharon
 ST = Stens

Mid-State Counts
 OX = Oxford
 PA = Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley, CT
 QV = Quimptic Valley
 SR = Saimon River
 WR = Woodbury-Roxbury

Coastal Counts
 GL = Guilford/Long Island Sound
 GS = Greenwich-Stamford
 NA = Napatree, RI/NY/CT
 NH = New Haven
 OL = Old Saybrook
 SM = Stamford/Milford
 WE = Westport

Legend
 CW = Count
 XX = New Species for Count
 XX = Rare Species for Count
 0 = First Time Not Seen, 30 Year

Count Week/Count Period
 New 30-Year High Count
 New 30-Year Low Count

SPECIES	NORTHERN COUNTS					MIDSTATE COUNTS					COASTAL COUNTS					STATE TOTAL			
	EA 12/27/15	EW 01/03/16	HA 12/20/15	LH 12/20/15	LS 12/20/15	ST 12/19/15	OX 12/20/15	PA 01/01/16	OV 12/20/15	SR 12/20/15	WR 12/19/15	GL 01/02/16	GS 12/20/15	NA 12/27/15	NH 12/19/15		NL 01/03/16	OL 01/03/16	SM 12/27/15
Golden-crowned Kinglet	26	3	6	7	4	14	1	3	5	1	0	0	0	2	3	1	1	2	107
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	128	85	51	278	74	180	134	231	175	171	309	11	83	60	45	57	6	23	2204
Blue Jay	1649	172	2592	2057	696	225	345	902	707	158	2033	168	2108	772	981	312	568	137	19251
Townsend's Solitaire	7	4	2	16	2	8	6	7	9	4	7	1	13	13	5	19	10	3	138
American Robin	14	13	96	7	10	18	32	32	50	1	22	13	89	41	64	63	31	52	709
Brown Thrasher	595	2094	3744	2497	1109	1737	976	1594	2153	580	1348	622	2843	6729	7105	1094	3098	2555	44954
European Starling	689	80	51	250	22	92	174	261	56	16	294	26	73	201	28	80	125	22	2542
American Pipit																			170
Cedar Waxwing																			1
Snow Bunting																			1
Black-and-White Warbler																			4
Tennessee Warbler																			1
Orange-crowned Warbler																			4
Black-throated Green Warbler																			1
Common Yellowthroat																			4
Palm Warbler																			4
Pine Warbler																			3
Yellow-rumped Warbler																			4
Yellow-breasted Chat																			1
Nelson's/Saltmarsh Sparrow	1	9					41	1	33	5	4	17	13	321	2	85	41	10	563
American Tree Sparrow	17	10	74	120	84	39	44	73	93	40	70	1	16	38	30	28	36	63	892
Chipping Sparrow																			12
Field Sparrow																			1
Dark-eyed Junco	1	8	3	1	1	1	6	1	10	0	5	5	3	15	25	6	2	6	83
Fox Sparrow	940	517	1305	1527	611	721	11	11	5	14	4	221	32	41	12	30	12	11	207
White-crowned Sparrow	192	92	424	353	82	207	459	397	370	315	436	5	1334	506	681	417	357	198	14194
White-throated Sparrow																			16
Lincoln Sparrow																			1
Spang Sparrow																			6
Song Sparrow	56	26	274	91	52	88	205	93	131	98	137	39	403	297	251	355	84	226	3039
Lincoln's Sparrow																			1
Swamp Sparrow	3	2	12	20	3	4	9	17	15	1	2	5	5	10	9	10	48	12	185
Eastern Towhee																			1
Western Tanager																			1
Northern Cardinal	208	92	303	236	86	133	198	248	166	191	201	45	315	370	185	325	126	109	3659
Dickcissel																			2
Red-winged Blackbird	2	14	1867	353	64	393	2	145	14	15	27	6	33	32	78	51	110	26	3289

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 GS = Greenwich-Stamford
 NA = Naugatuck
 NH = New Haven
 NL = New London
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 SM = Stamford/Milford
 WE = Westport

Legend
 CW = CW
 XX = XX
 XX = XX
 0 = 0

Count Week/Count Period
 New 30-Year High Count
 New 30-Year Low Count
 New Species for Count
 First Time Not Seen, 30 Year

SPECIES	NORTHERN COUNTS					MIDSTATE COUNTS					COASTAL COUNTS					STATE TOTAL				
	EA	EIV	HA	LH	LS	ST	OX	PA	OV	SR	WR	GL	GS	NA	NH	NL	OL	SM	WE	TOTAL
Eastern Meadowlark	1	1	1952	4	1	9	151	2	1	12	5	7	35	755	11	55	337	4	12	69
Rusty Blackbird						7545														13757
Common Grackle	187	306	671	33	801		55	23					92	23	185	38	43	30	2487	13757
Boat-tailed Grackle																				2487
Brown-headed Cowbird																				7
Baltimore Oriole	133	47	445	206	58	237	177	378	385	199	400	162	261	809	932	302	264	120	5895	
House Finch	34	1	25	13			8	15	1	13	5	11	5	15	3	4		2	162	
Purple Finch																				35
Common Redpoll	7	8				5														35
Pine Siskin	366	82	471	337	53	162	204	251	11	226	314	99	324	304	286	132	170	81	4317	
American Goldfinch	433	331	1345	553	191	476	288	330	274	228	122	71	1376	531	1417	367	1153	509	11247	
House Sparrow																				37
TOTALS	10700	6960	47101	19689	9494	18344	8124	16178	14601	6943	17091	4289	24690	20281	30134	21895	10660	20694	12097	319665
Total Individuals	70	63	86	90	80	73	69	82	90	73	78	78	103	117	120	113	112	104	108	171
Total Count/Day Species	0	1	7	0	0	8	1	0	0	1	4	2	11	2	1	2	4	0	5	5
Total Count/Week Species	22	13	103	56	25	31	19	42	33	43	30	41	65	31	81	58	53	31	29	806
Total Field Observers	3	0	7	8	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	4	5	0	3	1	0	1	91	
Total Feeder Watchers	25	13	110	64	29	35	20	46	73	43	34	45	70	31	84	60	54	31	30	897
Total Observers	95	49	240	139.5	79	97	69.8	115.25	136.75	81	139	55.7	206.5	110	177	143	70	97	54.5	2155
Total Party Hours	465	324	563	679.5	382.55	450.8	373.3	587.5	585.55	649	588	109.1	670.75	297.5	562	285	375	95.7	8556.25	

Northern Counts
 BA = Barkhamsted
 BW = Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood
 EIV = Eastford
 HA = Litchfield Hills
 LH = Lakesville-Sharon
 LS = Storrs

Mid-State Counts
 OX = Oxford
 PA = Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley, CT
 OV = Oxford Valley
 SR = Salmon River
 WR = Woodbury-Roxbury

Coastal Counts
 GL = Guilford/Long Island Sound
 GS = Greenwich-Stamford
 NA = New Britain/CT
 NH = New Haven
 NL = New London
 OL = Old Lyme-Saybrook
 SM = Stratford-Milford
 WE = Westport

Legend
 CW
 XX
 XX
 XX
 XX
 0

Count/Week/Count Period
 New 30-Year High Count
 Rare Species for Count
 Rare Species for Count
 First Time Not Seen, 30 Year:

Acknowledgements. The success of the Connecticut Christmas Bird Count is dependent on the organizational skills and extensive knowledge of the count circles by CBC compilers, many of whom have served in these positions for a number of years. The count compilers are as follows.

Northern Counts – Lakeville-Sharon (Sean Grace, Robert Moeller); Litchfield Hills (Raymond Belding); Barkhamsted (David Tripp, Jr.); Hartford (Jay Kaplan, Stephen Davis); Storrs (Steve Morytko); Edwin Way Teale – Trail Wood (Susan Harrington).

Mid-State Counts – Pawling, NY/Hidden Valley, CT (Carena Pooth, Angela Dimmitt); Wodbury-Roxbury (Ken Elkins, Renee Baade); Oxford (Roy Harvey); Quinnipiac Valley (Corrie Folsom-O’Keefe, Melissa Baston); Salmon River (Joseph Morin).

Coastal Counts – Greenwich-Stamford (Gary Palmer, Matt Fry); Westport (Mardi Dickinson, Townsend Dickenson); Stratford-Milford (Steve Mayo); New Haven (Christopher Loscalzo); Guilford-Long Island Sound (Nina Levenduski); Old Lyme-Saybrook (Barbara Hawes); New London (Robert Dewire); Napatree, RI/NY/CT (Shai Mitra, Glenn Williams).

Compilers, area captains, field observers, and feeder watchers, your efforts are greatly appreciated as we continue to heed Frank Chapman’s most forward thinking call of 1900. And so, “hie us to the fields and woods [and grasslands and coastlines] on the cheerful mission of finding, identifying, counting, and publishing a bird-census, a new kind of Christmas side hunt.”

Stephen P. Broker

50 Hidden Place

Cheshire, CT 06410-3723

2015 FALL HAWK WATCH

By Steve Mayo and Ryan MacLean

The Broad-winged Hawk Flight

For most sites in Massachusetts and western Connecticut, the September Broad-winged Hawk migration is the entire hawk watch season. Watchers hope for blocking weather, followed by a passing cold front preferably over much of southeastern Canada and the Northeastern US. Less significant frontal passages did occur during the peak migration time frame. The passage of rain on Sept 13 set up several days of high pressure and northerly winds. On Sept. 15, Chestnut Hill (Litchfield) and Quaker Ridge (Greenwich) both had more than 400 Broad-winged Hawks. Winds diminished on the 16th, but Chestnut Hill still had 261, Quaker Ridge totaled 1,728 before the wind shift to the southeast, Botsford Hill (Bridge-water) had 1,676, also mostly in the morning, and Johnny-cake Mountain (Burlington) counted 192. Chestnut Hill had another 223 Broad-wings on Sept.17, after the winds shifted back from southeast to light northeast.

On Sept. 20, a weak front had passed, and a second push of Broad-winged Hawks went over the look-outs. There were 2,681 over Quaker Ridge, where strong north winds continued throughout the day. On Sept. 21, 748 continued during the morning on moderate northeasterly winds. To the east, Boothe Memorial (Stratford) had similar wind conditions. Broad-winged Hawk totals were 170 on Sept. 20 and 134 on Sept. 21, before northeasterly winds shifted east and subsided. Middle School (Torrington) had only 57 on Sept. 20, but on Sept. 21 a couple of good hours of strong northerly winds contributed to a daily total of 1,035. Botsford Hill had 592 Broad-winged Hawks on Sept. 20 and 21. And in New Hartford on Sept. 21, the tally of 1,240 Broad-winged Hawks included 850 in just 6 minutes of counting! Johnnycake counted several dozen Broad-winged Hawks almost every day from mid-September. On Sept. 27, when most other sites had closed for the season, 600 Broad-winged Hawks were tal-



*A.J. Hand photo
An immature Golden Eagle, a prize during hawk watch season.*

lied in just 2 hours of observation.

Other raptors pass the western inland sites, but in much lower numbers. Notable season totals include 20 Osprey from Chestnut Hill and 59 from Johnnycake. Bald Eagle sightings at these two sites were 39 and 40, respectively. Botsford Hill also had a season total of 20 Osprey, along with 101 Sharp-shinned Hawks. To the south, Boothe Memorial suffered from the unfavorable weather patterns the entire 2015 season. Season totals included 413 Osprey, 105 Bald Eagle, and 258 Sharp-shinned Hawks. Virtually all of these came

through in September.

Quaker Ridge

Several geographical features make Quaker Ridge a leading Connecticut hawk watch site. The look-out is 510 feet above sea level and 6 miles from the Long Island Sound. It is at the bottom of a chain of ridges that extend north through Connecticut and eventually become the Berkshires. To the west these hills become the Taconic Range and Hudson Highlands. Hawks are often several thousand feet above this relatively low ridge line. Others traveling along the coast cannot be seen as they

move behind the trees to the south and are flying below this diminishing ridge line.

Many of the hawks seen over Quaker Ridge have a long journey and have to seek energy-efficient ways to migrate. Sea breezes from Long Island Sound meet with north winds along this ridge line, creating updrafts for migrating hawks. Additionally, the sun reflecting on pavement and other open spaces in the Greenwich area provide thermals. Hawks will use these columns of rising air to gain altitude. Buteos can travel up to 250-300 miles a day on thermals.

But when hawks see the Sound at the end of this ridge line, they stop. The Sound has no source of updraft or thermal energy for them to use so the only way they could navigate over it is by flapping, which would use excessive energy. The Sound is a formidable diversion line. Hawks will re-orient themselves in order to find another route that provides less energy expenditure.

Weather is the most important factor in hawk migration and, as with all Connecticut look-outs, northwesterly winds are the most important for large hawk movements at Quaker Ridge. This provides a tail wind to propel them southward while the westerly component drives them towards the Southern New England coast. If winds are too strong however; birds will get pushed directly to the coast. For birds that prefer inland routes (eg., accipiters, buteos), they then have to re-orient themselves. Hawks have been observed at Quaker Ridge heading northeast from the coast after strong northwest winds.

Cold fronts play a significant role in that birds will back up behind a passing front, sometimes on the leading edge, and then pass when the front has cleared. Usually northwest winds are behind a cold front. The lack of strong cold fronts made 2015 the lowest season since 2004.

Early in the 2015 season, fronts were very calm and rain was minimal. Without strong fronts, Quaker Ridge had fewer Broad-winged hawks. The total was 5,745 for the season, and

the average and standard deviation for the previous 10 years were 11,773 and 4,315 respectively. The wide fluctuations in Broad-winged Hawks and other Buteos may reflect Quaker Ridge's existence as a "no man's land" between traditional western ridge lines and the coast. In 2015, hawks appeared to have migrated to the west of Quaker Ridge. For example, Mount Peter in Warwick, N.Y., had a record Broad-wing season. On southwest winds on Sept. 17, Mount Peter had 2,365 Broad-winged Hawks while Quaker Ridge had 13. The discrepancy was similar during southwest winds on Sept. 22. Mount Peter had 1,151 while Quaker Ridge had 5.

Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks move much later in the season. Quaker Ridge had 406 red-shouldered, well below the 1,046 of 2014 but still the fourth consecutive year over 400 and the fourth highest season number overall. Their only substantial days occurred on Nov. 8 (moderate west-northwest winds) and Nov. 17 (northeast shifting southeast). Daily totals were 55 and 70, respectively. These observations continue to support the trend that Red-shoulders move under a variety of conditions. Red-tailed Hawks migrate during strong northwest winds and significant drops in temperature. November was unusually mild, and this is reflected in the season total of 228 Red-taileds.

The total for Sharp-shinned Hawks at Greenwich was 2,160. This was higher than the 2013 total (2,147) but lower than the average of the previous ten years (3,385; standard deviation of 719). The two highest days occurred during northeasterly winds and were nearly 2 weeks apart: Sept. 21 (203) and Oct. 4 (128). Coopers Hawk season totals (403) were comparable to the average of the previous ten years. Quaker Ridge tallied 17 Golden Eagles, the third highest total ever. These birds typically migrate to the west, over upstate New York and Pennsylvania. American Kestrels continue to decline; 374 was the lowest season total in eleven years. Merlin and Peregrine numbers remained comparable to those of previous seasons. Osprey numbers (594) were slightly higher than those of the previous four seasons. Peak days included 44 birds on Sept. 16 (light northwest winds shifting to south-

Connecticut - All Lookouts - Fall 2015

Lookout	Town	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW
INLAND GROUP												
Booth Hill	West Hartland	15	0	5	4	9	1	20	2	0	1	1454
Botsford Hill	Bridgewater	66	0	0	20	16	5	101	1	0	0	2778
Chestnut Hill	Litchfield	89	0	2	20	39	5	39	8	0	0	4011
Johnycake Mt.	Burlington	58	2	4	59	40	2	58	9	0	5	1430
MiddleSchool	Torrington	50	2	7	9	7	0	4	2	0	1	1409
White Memorial	Litchfield	22	0	51	4	16	0	5	7	2	23	33
INLAND TOTAL		300	4	69	116	127	13	227	29	2	30	11115

Connecticut - All Lookouts - Fall 2015

Lookout	Town	Hours	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	uR	TOTAL
INLAND GROUP										
Booth Hill	W. Hartland	15	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	1502
Botsford Hill	Bridgewater	66	0	0	0	4	5	1	7	2938
Chestnut Hill	Litchfield	89	6	0	1	9	1	0	15	4156
Johannycake Mt.	Burlington	58	0	0	2	49	1	3	2	1666
MiddleSchool	Torrington	50	1	0	0	2	0	0	7	1451
White Memorial	Litchfield	22	4	0	0	2	0	1	6	154
INLAND TOTAL		300	11	0	3	69	9	6	37	11867

BV-Black Vulture	SS-Sharp-shinned Hawk	BW-Broad-winged Hawk	AK-American Kestrel
TV-Turkey Vulture	CH-Cooper's Hawk	RT-Red-tailed Hawk	ML-Merlin
OS-Osprey	NG-Northern Goshawk	RL-Rough-legged Hawk	PG-Peregrine Falcon
BE-Bald Eagle	RS-Red-shouldered Hawk	GE-Golden Eagle	uR- Unidentified Raptor
NH-Northern Harrier			

Connecticut - All Lookouts - Fall 2015

Lookout	Town	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW
"COASTAL" GROUP												
Boothe Memorial	Stratford	82	2	37	413	105	8	278	28	0	0	351
Lighthouse Point	New Haven	632	6	696	1027	164	291	2325	849	0	62	133
Quaker Ridge	Greenwich	821	47	1469	594	191	156	2160	403	4	406	5745
"COASTAL" TOTAL		1535	55	2202	2034	460	455	4763	1280	4	468	6229

Connecticut - All Lookouts - Fall 2015

"COASTAL" GROUP																
Lookout	Town	Hours	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	uR	TOTAL						
Boothe Memorial	Stratford	82	7	0	0	57	17	5	14	1322						
Lighthouse Point	New Haven	632	186	0	4	428	250	61	179	6780						
Quaker Ridge	Greenwich	821	228	0	17	374	101	40	141	12076						
"COASTAL" TOTAL		1535	421	0	21	859	368	106	334	20178						

BV-Black Vulture	SS-Sharp-shinned Hawk	BW-Broad-winged Hawk	AK-American Kestrel
TV-Turkey Vulture	CH-Cooper's Hawk	RT-Red-tailed Hawk	ML-Merlin
OS-Osprey	NG-Northern Goshawk	RL-Rough-legged Hawk	PG-Peregrine Falcon
BE-Bald Eagle	RS-Red-shouldered Hawk	GE-Golden Eagle	uR-Unidentified Raptor
NH-Northern Harrier			

Broadwing Flight - Connecticut - Fall 2015

	Aug	Sept	Sept	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22-24	25-30	Oct	Nov	Total
Lookout		thru 14													
INLAND GROUP															
Booth Hill		106			108					1240					1454
Botsford Hill		94	67	1676	57	15	13	592	259	5					2778
Chestnut Hill		23	414	261	223		11	859	50	1449	721				4011
Johnnycake Mt.		79	42	192	34	136	55	94	86	112	600				1430
Middle School		1	7	293	14			57	1035	2					1409
White Memorial		3		28			1				1				33
"COASTAL" GROUP															
Boothe Memorial		19	19	3					170	134			6		351
Lighthouse Point		13				2	17		24	3		15	59		133
Quaker Ridge	15	62	411	1728	13	5		2681	748	25	34	23			5745
Total	15		960	4289	343	173	80	4477	3555	1593	1371	88	0		17344

Lighthouse Point, New Haven - Fall 2015

	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PF	uR	Total
August	16	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
September	208	0	7	660	50	62	746	90	0	2	74	4	0	0	239	97	24	37	2125
October	237	6	641	364	101	136	1423	680	0	15	59	76	0	2	184	139	29	97	4038
November	167	0	48	1	13	93	156	79	0	45	0	106	0	2	5	14	8	45	615
December	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	632	6	696	1027	164	291	2325	849	0	62	133	186	0	4	428	250	61	179	6780

Quaker Ridge, Greenwich - Fall 2015

	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PF	uR	Total
August	89	1	0	61	7	6	1	1	0	0	15	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	96
September	264	2	0	441	99	50	992	65	0	4	5707	3	0	0	247	49	13	58	7730
October	252	30	1012	90	50	67	1017	282	3	95	23	46	0	11	122	42	21	61	2971
November	217	14	457	2	35	33	150	55	1	307	0	179	0	6	1	10	6	22	1279
Total	821	47	1469	594	191	156	2160	403	4	406	5745	228	0	17	374	101	40	141	12076

east). There were also 39 on Oct. 3. This was during the remnants of the Noreaster that hit around the time Tropical Storm Joaquin was offshore. These were likely birds migrating along the coast that wound up inland. Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers and vultures were comparable to averages from the past previous years.

Lighthouse Point Park

Unlike Quaker Ridge and Boothe Memorial Park, Lighthouse Point Park, New Haven (Lighthouse) is literally on the Long Island Sound. Birds pushed southward on north or west winds will end up to the east of Lighthouse and be seen heading westward overhead. The presence of the Sound and New Haven Harbor cause hawks to build up over Lighthouse. Peak days occur on very strong northwest winds.

Again, these strong northwest winds rarely occurred in 2015, and the Lighthouse season was marked by many record lows. The total hawks average and standard deviation for the previous 10 seasons are 12,960 and 1,574, respectively. Yet only 6,780 raptors were tallied for all of 2015. One must refer back to 1979 (a season where published Lighthouse count data is incomplete) or more likely, 1974 (the beginning of full time coverage), to see similar low numbers. Sharp-shinned Hawk (a historical Lighthouse specialty), Broad-winged Hawk and American Kestrel numbers were all at these low circa 1979 season total levels. Red-tailed Hawk numbers hadn't been this low since 1988. These are diverse species that migrate at different times in the season. The low numbers of almost every species resulted in low totals for every month. August yielded the lowest totals since the beginning of coverage in 1984. September and October were lowest since that 1979 year of incomplete data. November hadn't realized a lower count in 15 years.

Still, there were many days of plenty of low flying hawks to be enjoyed by watchers and photographers alike. Moderate daily numbers, including average numbers of Osprey, were tallied beginning in mid-September. The highlight of Sep-

tember occurred almost as if on schedule, during the New Haven Parks Department's very popular Migration Festival. On Sept. 20, 408 hawks were counted. Half of these were Sharp-shinned Hawks. But a vagrant Zone-tailed Hawk, well studied and photographed, stole the show and became the highlight of the 2015 Lighthouse season.

Peak migration typically occurs in mid-October. At this time in the season, a passing cold front and strong northerly winds will blow hawks down to the coast. These weather patterns historically will bring over 500 raptors in a day, representing about a dozen different species. In 2015, blocking strong cold fronts continued to be almost non-existent. On Oct. 3, after that rainy Nor'easter, 281 hawks were counted, including good numbers of Osprey and swirling, in-the-park Merlins. Steady northeasterly winds on Oct. 4 resulted in a good accipiter push and 511 hawks. Accipiters continued to move on the 5th, when 238 hawks were observed. Remarkably, for the next ten days of the peak of the season, only 429 total hawks were tallied. Good flights from Oct. 16-19 and again on October 23 were often bolstered by migrating Turkey Vultures. For example on Oct. 23, there were 735 hawks of 14 species, moving on strong northwest winds throughout the day. This daily total included 330 Turkey Vultures.

November was unusually warm and this may have reduced the numbers of migrating buteos. Light northwest winds on Nov. 8, resulted in a good morning flight of passerines (and also a Red-headed Woodpecker and a Sandhill Crane), and a few hawks. A small movement of buteos boosted the daily total to 159. There were another 155 hawks on Nov. 14. This included 63 Northern Harriers, 33 of which were adult males. Among the many non-raptors reported were Cave Swallows, a Sandhill Crane and a hummingbird, sp. An impressive morning flight was again reported on Nov. 16, but the light west winds only brought 20 hawks. Light winds prevailed through the end of the month and into the first week of December.

Additional data including daily, monthly and seasonal sum-

mary reports, may be obtained from the Hawk Migration of North America website, hawkcount.org. Summaries for Connecticut and the rest of New England, can also be obtained from The Northeast Hawkwatch, <http://www.battaly.com/nehw/>.

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NOTES ON BEHAVIOR, STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

First Specimen of a Male Cerulean Warbler from Connecticut

On Tuesday May 10, 2016, I got a call from Dan Rottino that he had run into Greg Dysart from Massachusetts on Pumpkin Hill Road in Chaplin. Greg had found a dead male full alternate-plumaged Cerulean Warbler and wanted to donate it to a collection. Of course I said I'd take it for UConn.

Sue Hochgraf, collections manager at the University of Connecticut Vertebrate Collections, prepared the specimen in the traditional round skin method with the added twist of a spread wing preparation. An internet search of collection databases from around the country resulted in finding only two previous specimen records of Cerulean Warbler from Connecticut. They are listed below:



*Photo courtesy of Sue Hochgraf
Connecticut's first specimen of an adult male Cerulean Warbler, shown in a traditional round skin and a spread wing preparation at the University of Connecticut.*

A female specimen from Suffield on 10 May 1888 at Yale Peabody.

An unsexed specimen from Seymour, on 12 June 1875 at Ohio State.

So this bird is the third specimen, the first male, and the first alternate-plumaged male from Connecticut. This is almost as good as a life bird for a collection geek like me. It isn't often that you get to be part of a first record in a collection the size of UConn's.

Phil Rusch
Chaplin, CT

Discovery Of A Banded Piping Plover

I found a banded Piping Plover at Short Beach in Stratford on May 25, 2016, which I thought might be of interest. Scott Kruitbosch relayed that it was a "bird that had been at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison since at least March 31 through at least May 22. Bird "09C" was banded on June 4, 2015 at Sandy Point, R.I., as part of a nanotag project by Pam Loring. Last year's nest was predated around June 10, and the bird was last detected in R.I. in mid-July 2015. This bird was also detected in migration at Cape Hatteras, N.C., mid-July-mid-Aug; then detected in Abaco, Bahamas on Oct. 30 2015 - Jan. 30, 2016."

Frank Mantlik
Stratford

CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Winter season, December 1, 2015 to February 29, 2016

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

A **Pink-footed Goose** found in November in Avon remained to Jan. 21 (m.ob.). Another was found on Dec. 26 at Broad Brook Mill Pond in East Windsor (JCl et al.) and remained to Jan. 31. At times this latter goose was found feeding in fields in Ellington. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** found Dec. 5 at Broad Brook (PDe) was followed by up to four there throughout the season (m.ob.). Others were at Goodwin Park in Hartford on Jan. 5 (PCi); Hartford Reservoir No. 6 in Bloomfield on Jan. 27 (MP); Nod Road in Simsbury on Feb. 13 (TD et al.); and Hockanum River Trail in East Hartford on Feb. 20 (DM). Dec. 16 was a big flight day for Snow Geese with c. 1000 in two flocks over Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison – hereafter HBSP - (BKu) and 60 over Milford (EH). The state's third **Ross's Goose** was found Jan. 15 at Broad Brook and later moved to nearby Vernon and Ellington in a stay that ended Feb. 29 (PDe et al.). Rounding out the incredible goose run at the small East Windsor pond were three **Barnacle Geese**, the least cooperative of the rare geese, which stayed



*Mark Szantyr photo
Connecticut's third Ross's Goose is shown here on Jan. 15 2016 at Broad Brook Pond in East Windsor.*

only on Jan. 2-3 (JB et al.). One or two Cackling Geese were found at nine different locations (m.ob.). A Tundra Swan joined a large Mute Swan aggregation Dec. 11-29 on the Connecticut River at Haddam Meadow State Park in Haddam (HG et al.). It then moved down river to Salmon River Cove Dec. 31-Jan. 4 (DRt et al.). One was seen on Dec. 21 only in South Windsor (MP).

A flock of seven Northern Shovelers were unexpected flying by Merwin Point in Milford on Jan. 12 (FM). In a good season for the regionally scarce Redhead, two females were inland on Aspetuck Reservoir in Easton on Dec. 21 (TG); four were on Lake Waramaug in New Preston on Jan. 11 (BD); and one was at Pistapaug Pond in Wallingford on Jan. 31 (NM). The high count was also inland, when eight turned up on a small pond in North Guilford in mid-January (NM). There were a total of 15 reported in January from six locations along the coast, from Mystic to Greenwich (GW, FM et al.). The high count of Common Eider was 250 on Jan. 30 from the New London-Orient, N.Y., ferry

(SMi, PL). Two Long-tailed Ducks on Dec. 7 at Hanover Pond in Meriden were unusual on a small inland body of water (PCo). Six were at Highland Lake in Winsted on Jan. 4 (PCa). Two **Harlequin Ducks** were off Fairfield on Dec. 6 (BM), and again on Feb. 10 (TG). An adult male flew by Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford on Jan. 9 (DRt). The season's two **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were an adult male present Jan. 24 through period's end in Madison (HS et al.) and another Jan. 26 on the Connecticut River in Windsor Locks (PDe).

A two-hour sea watch on Dec. 1 in Stratford noted the passage of 77 Red-throated Loons on steady northeast winds (FM). Three Pied-billed Grebes comprised an unusual mid-winter concentration on Jan. 3 at Moosup Pond (CEI) in Plainfield. Two were at Amos Lake in Preston on Jan. 9 (RD). A Horned Grebe was unusual on the Connecticut River in Hartford on Jan. 18 (PCi). Single Red-necked Grebe were reported from 11 locations, with two at Greenwich Point on Dec. 22 (SMu). A significant flight of

39 Northern Gannets was off Westport on Dec. 21 (TG). A Great Cormorant was inland on the Connecticut River at Enfield on Jan. 2 (PDe). An unexpected Christmas season find, three **American White Pelicans** turned up on Dec. 26 in Old Saybrook (JSh et al.) and remained through Dec. 28.

A total of five Rough-legged Hawks were widely distributed with three on the coast and two inland (PCa, MW et al.). An unusual number of winter Great Egrets centered on Rocky Neck State Park in East Lyme, where 12 were present Dec. 26 (RS) and seven were still there Jan. 10 (TT). There were singles at a few locations through January, with the latest Feb. 13 in Stratford (JR). The flock at Rocky Neck was joined by a Snowy Egret through Jan. 10 (TT). An unusually large winter flock of 20 Killdeer flew over Long Beach in Stratford on Jan. 4 (GH). Two American Oystercatchers found on Dec. 21 at Stratford Point stayed through the winter (SK et al.). Rare in winter, five Long-billed Dowitchers were at HBSP on Jan. 1 (TA).

Two **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were a good find Jan. 2 on a ferry trip from New London to Orient, N.Y. (FM, FG et al.). A **Black-headed Gull** found Dec. 27 at Stonington Point was there sporadically through the season (NW et al.). Despite closure of the state's landfills, Iceland Gulls continue to appear in good numbers. For the season one to two were reported from at least 12 locations (m.ob.). Single Glaucous Gulls were at Fort Trumbull in New London on Jan. 3 (AP); at Long Beach, Stratford, on Feb. 26 (KM); and at Seaside Park, Bridgeport, on Feb. 27 (TG). An apparent Herring X Glaucous Gull hybrid, known as "Nelson's" Gull, was in Hartford starting on Dec. 9 (PCi). Two Razorbills were at Merwin Point, Milford, on Dec. 19 (FM, SS), three were off New London Jan. 2 (FM), and two were at Stratford Point on Jan. 21 (PCo). Singles were seen from Shippan Point in Stamford on Dec. 22 (PDU), Sherwood Island on Dec. 25 (TG), Madison on Feb. 11 (KM) and Stonington on Feb. 13 (MB). The season's best alcid was a **Common Murre** seen from shore on Dec. 26 in

Old Saybrook (JM et al.).

A Snowy Owl found on Jan. 3 at Milford Point was subsequently seen at locations in Milford and Stratford (SD et al.), with two at Stratford on Feb. 21 (DRt). One was at HBSP on Jan. 12 (DC).

Up to two Long-eared Owls hunted at dusk from Jan. 31 through the end of the period at Silver Sands State Park in Milford (SZ et al.). A female **Rufous Hummingbird** spent late December-early January at a feeder in Old Lyme (SL fide PR). It was an unusually good winter for Red-headed Woodpeckers, with several long-stayers scattered around the state. These included two in Lyme and singles in Canton, South Windsor, New Milford, Avon and North Stonington (m.ob.).

The state's first **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** was a great find Dec. 19-20 in Branford on the New Haven Christmas Bird Count (JCr, SMa, HS et al.). It was originally accepted by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut as Cordilleran/Pacific-slope aka "Western" Flycatcher (the state's second), because no species-specific call notes were heard. However, a fecal sample was obtained, and later analysis by researchers from Cornell University showed it to be Pacific-slope. Final action on this report will be taken by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut at its next meeting. The latest Eastern Phoebe made it to at least Feb. 4 in Southbury (RN). The state's fifth **Ash-throated Flycatcher**



Russ Smiley photo

This Common Murre off Old Saybrook on Dec. 26 2015 is only the second recorded from shore in the state.



Lois Martin photo

This remarkably late and hardy Wood Thrush was found in mid-February at Lighthouse Point in New Haven.

er, found in November at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport, stayed to at least Jan. 8 (AH, TG m.ob.). It was included on eBird checklists by c 170 different observers. The dates fall within the very consistent window for this Southwestern species to occur in the Northeast.

The only Northern Shrike was an immature on Dec. 16-19 at the Southbury Training School in Southbury (RN, RBa). After a strong autumn flight of **Cave Swallows**, late ones included two at Milford Point on Dec. 15 (SS), two on Dec. 18 in Fairfield (JP) and singles that day at Lighthouse Point (WB) and Stratford Point (PCo). A late Northern Rough-winged

Swallow, following recent trends, was in East Hartford on Dec. 20 (BW). A **Townsend's Solitaire**, found on Dec 5 in a residential neighborhood in Greenwich (SMr, m.ob.), was seen and heard by many as it stayed through the winter period. Perhaps the season's most remarkable record was a **Wood Thrush** found and photographed on Feb. 11 at Lighthouse Point (LM). There are a couple of recent December records, but none this deep into the winter. A flock of 12 American Pipits bounced around Hard Hill in Bethlehem on Jan. 13 (GH). The high count of Snow Buntings was 60 on Jan. 11 at Sikorsky Airport in Stratford (LB).



*Julian Hough photo
The state's first Pacific-slope Flycatcher was separated
from the almost identical Cordilleran Flycatcher through
DNA analysis.*



*Mark Szantyr photo
This long-staying Dickcissel was seen by many observers at Sherwood Island State
park in Westport over the course of the winter.*



Russ Smiley photo
These three American White Pelicans were surprise winter visitors off Old Saybrook.



Frank Mantlik photo
This adult male Western Tanager was great find on the New Haven Christmas Bird Count.

A nice collection of late warblers included single Nashville Warblers (with two Orange-crowned Warblers) in Norwalk Dec. 20-Jan. 1 (FM et al.) and another Jan. 9 in Madison (JCo); a Tennessee Warbler Dec. 20 in Fairfield (JT, AK); an American Redstart Dec. 16 in Enfield (PDe); a Black-and-White Warbler Dec. 16-19 in Enfield (PDe) and another Black-and-White Warbler Jan. 22 in Greenwich (AC); and a Wilson's Warbler Dec. 14 at East Shore Park in New Haven (JO). A Common Yellowthroat, a species more inclined to winter, was at Station 43 in South Windsor on Dec. 13 (PDe). The latest Palm Warbler was Jan. 3 at HBSP (GH), and a Pine Warbler was still in Easton on Jan. 19 (CP). Outshining them all was the state's second **Hermit Warbler**. The immature male, found Jan. 31 along the Farmington River in Barkhamsted (DRo), was refound in the same area Feb. 7 (FZ, m.ob.) and was feeding along a popular trout fishing stretch that produces insect hatches all winter. It stayed to Feb. 13, when it apparently succumbed to sub-zero temperatures. A Yellow-breasted Chat was

seen at Greenwich Point Jan. 17-30 (AC et al.), and one was at Haley Farm in Groton on Jan. 2 (TS).

A Clay-colored Sparrow proved elusive after being found Jan. 2 at HBSP (CI). One visited a Naugatuck yard Jan. 23 (PDn). A Dickcissel was found associating with House Sparrows on Dec. 5 in Enfield (PDe), and one wintered at Sherwood Island (TG et al.). An adult male **Western Tanager** at a small park in New Haven attracted many admirers from Dec. 19 to Jan. 3 (JO et al.). An Indigo Bunting was a surprising winter survivor Jan. 3-24 at Greenwich Point (CEh et al.). After wintering at a Stamford feeder in 2014-15, an adult male **Painted Bunting** reappeared there Jan. 21 and stayed through the end of the period (DW et al.). Four Eastern Meadowlarks settled in on Jan. 25 at Sikorsky Airport (FG et al.), and one was in Storrs on Jan. 11 (CM).

A flock 120 Rusty Blackbirds appeared during a Feb. 5 snow storm in East Hartford (FZ), and 40 were on the Hockanum River Trail in the same town on Jan.

11 (PDe). An adult male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at Station 43 in South Windsor on Jan. 31-Feb. 3 (SF et al), with a female/immature male also present Feb. 2 (MP et al.). Other adult males were found Feb. 21 in Old Lyme, staying through the end of the period (JSa et al.), and in the Highland section of Middletown on April 18 (AS). A flock of up to 29 Boat-tailed Grackles wintered somewhere in the Stratford area and were seen landing several nights in Phragmites at Stratford Great Meadows (PW, MW et al.). There were at least 10 wintering Baltimore Orioles, including two at HBSP (TA et al.) and two at Ferry Landing Park in Old Lyme (JSh et al.). Pine Siskin was the only northern finch that appeared in any numbers, such as 30 in Harwinton on Dec. 8 (PCa). Another paltry showing by Evening Grosbeaks was limited to two in Barkhamsted on Dec. 6 (FZ).

Exotics – A European Goldfinch was at a feeder in Goshen for several days in mid-January (fide RBe). Two were at a feeder in Middlefield Feb. 28 (KP).

Observers –Tim Antanaitis, Renee Baade (RBA), Dan Barvir, Melissa Baston, William Batsford, John Barriger, Larry Bausher, Ray Belding (RBe), Nick Bonomo, Steve Broker, Dave Carey, Paul Carrier (PCa), Paul Cianfagione (PCi), Jan Collins (JCl), Patrick Comins (PCo), Jerry Connolly (JCo), Jim Cortina (JCr), Annette Cunniffe, Mark Danforth, Peter DeGennaro (PDn), Buzz Devine, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Ian Devlin, Robert Dixon, Susan Doherty, Turk Duddy, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Cynthia Ehlinger (CEH), Chris Elphick (CEl) Sarah Faulkner, David Funke, Frank Gallo, Hank Golet, Tina Green, Ed Haesche, A.J. Hand, Greg Hanisek, Chuck Imbergamo, Jay Kaplan, Aidan Kiley, Brian Kleinman (BKl), Scott Kruitbosch, Brian Kulvete (BKu), Sue Latourette, Patrice Lindsay, John Marshall, Frank Mantlik, Lois Martin, Stefan Martin (SMr), Steve Mayo (SMA), Deborah McTigue, Shai Mitra (SMi), Nancy Morand, Clark Moseley, Keith Mueller, Brendan Murtha, Sean Murtha (SMu), Russ Naylor, John Oshlick, Karen Pattist, Maggie Peretto, Charlie Plimpton, Anthony Popiel, James Purcell, Jason Rieger, Dave Rosgen (DRo), Dan Rottino (DRt), Phil Rusch, Jeffrey Sabia (JSa), Tommy Self, James Sherwonit (JSh), Alan Siniscalchi, Russ Smiley, Steve Spector, Howie Sternberg, Mark Szantyr, Jory Teltser, Timothy Thompson, Doug Warner, Mike Warner, Glenn Williams, Nathan Williams, Dave Winston, Blair Wlochowski, Maureen Wolter, Paul Wolter, Chris Wood, Sara Zagorski, Fran Zygmunt.

PHOTO CHALLENGE

By Julian Hough

The annual, late-spring plankton bloom in Long Island Sound attracts thousands of gulls, leading to concentrated flocks along the Connecticut coastline. Searching through these flocks at this time of year can yield hidden treasure in the form of vagrant species such as Little and Black-headed Gull as well as the rarer, and harder to identify, Mew Gull, *Larus canus*.



As we are sifting through the throng of Ring-billed Gulls, a close flying bird attracts attention – it shows more white in the wingtip and a narrower, cleaner bill – at last - surely a Mew Gull!! We fire off a few record shots as the bird continues past us and away into the distance. Reviewing the images on the back of the camera confirm it is a Mew Gull. But, here's where it becomes tricky – which Mew Gull is it?

Mew Gull has several different races/subspecies across its range from Europe to Asia. The only New World form occurs in western North America. Based on previous accepted

records, the default race to be expected in Connecticut is the European nominate form *L. c. canus* (Common Gull). However, the Siberian form, *kamtschatschensis* (Kamchatka Gull), has been documented several times in neighboring states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Therefore, it wasn't totally unexpected when this relatively distinct race was found in Connecticut in 2015. The West Coast form, *brachyrhynchus* (Short-billed Gull), seems to be the rarest form in the Northeast, although Long Island, N.Y., has hosted several of these in the past decade.

So, with all three forms possible, which one just flew by us? A careful examination of the open wing is perhaps the best clue to identify any Common/Mew-type gull. Since many features can be subjective, capturing a photo of the open wing pattern is the key feature for securing an identification on a sub-specific level.

Kamtschatschensis, typical of Siberian/Asian forms of gulls, is a larger bird with a much darker mantle (similar in tone to a *graellsii* Lesser Black-backed Gull) and a strong, thicker bill. Our bird looks closer to Ring-billed in size and proportions and has a relatively pale back, which dispels any thoughts of *kamtschatschensis*. Thus we can feel comfortable that we have seen either a *canus* or *brachyrhynchus*.

Nominate *canus* has a trailing edge that becomes narrower on the inner primaries and shows less "white in the primaries" due to more extensively dark outer primaries. The head is usually white with a dark iris that looks overly large when seen at a distance.

On our bird, the dusky look to the head and the primary pattern do not fit *canus*, and given the pro-*brachyrhynchus* wing pattern – a broad trailing edge continuing across the inner primaries, and obvious white subterminal "moons" to the outer primaries, we are excited that this may actually be a West Coast Mew Gull! Other features supportive of this identification include: narrow bill with indistinct dusky markings; nicotine-stained blotchiness extending from crown around

in a shawl onto the upper breast; extensive gray tongues on primaries P8-7; and, broad white subterminal “spots” on the outer primaries.

The recent treatise on the Common/Mew Gull forms by Peter Adriaens and Chris Gibbons proposes that *brachyrhyncus* warrants full species status, while elevating *kamtschatschensis* to a distinct species warrants further investigation at this point.

I photographed this *brachyrhyncus* Mew Gull at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison in April 2016. Pending acceptance by the Avian Records Committee, this would be the first state record of this form. Initially discovered by Nick Bonomo, he also found a nominate *canus* in the same flock, allowing many birders the unique experience to compare these two forms.

Julian Hough New Haven, CT 06519 www.naturescapeimages.wordpress.com



Photo Challenge No. 94

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

Editor

Greg Hanisek - 175 Circuit Ave., Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 754-4401 email: ghanisek@rep-am.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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