



BULLETIN

The Newsletter of Connecticut Ornithological Association

VOLUME 2

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SUMMER 1988

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

FIRST BREEDING RECORD

A pair of Common Ravens successfully fledged two young this May in Union, Ct. This represents the first known breeding in the state. (Complete details in The Connecticut Warbler.)

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED - FALL HAWK BANDING

Clay Taylor is looking for help at the Hammonasset Hawk Bonding Station this fall. He needs someone to count and identify migrating hawks and to assist in the banding operation. The Station will be in operation during the months of September and October. At a minimum you will be provided with housing, but possibly more remuneration can be arranged. Call Clay or write him at: Clay Taylor, Old Leedsville Road, Moodus, CT 06469.

HAWK WATCH DATES

The New England Hawk Watch encourages all hawk watchers (birders) to be in the field throughout the fall, but the following weekend dates are for coordinated (as many sites as possible) watching:

September 10-11*

September 17-18* (Everyone out for Broadwings!)

*It's difficult to select the best of these weekends any given year, as the peak of migration generally falls between these dates, but we'll hope '17-18 is the best!

September 24-25. The Broadwings are probably gone by now, but flights of Sharpies along the shore are at a peak.

October 1-2 and October 8-9

There are many established hawk watching lookouts in the state. For help on date and lookout selection, contact your local bird club or call Neil Currie at 426-9861.

DID YOU DO A BIG DAY IN MAY?

Many groups of individuals did Big Days in May. Total counts for 24-hour periods ranged all the way up to 167 species (a new state record)! What birds were in Connecticut at that time? Send your lists to:

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

I'll compile, summarize, etc. and have the information ready for the fall (September) BULLETIN.

Neil Currie

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

If you've moved recently, please send us your new address. This will ensure that you will receive The Connecticut Warbler and the BULLETIN, plus any other announcements we send.

Our mailings are done under a second class, bulk mail permit, and as such are not forwardable, nor does the Post Office return the material with your forwarding address. So we have no way of knowing if your address has changed.

It will also help reduce our mailing costs for back issues, which have to be sent first class postage.

MOST-WANTED LIST

To date, 67 Members have mailed in the "most-wanted" card from the spring issue. Added to the forms mailed in from December, the total now is 96.

It was interesting to note that the majority of cards returned did not have state totals on them, nor were they signed.

So here, if you are wondering how your most-wanted list compares with other birders in the state, is the complete list compiled from cards mailed in: (The number following the species is how many of the 96 respondents listed that species.)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) Black Rail 52 | 17) Black Vulture 7 |
| 2) Prothonotary Warbler 31 | 18) Northern Bobwhite 7 |
| 3) Barrow's Goldeneye 30 | 19) American Bittern 7 |
| 4) Yellow Rail 29 | 20) Boreal Chickadee 7 |
| 5) Sedge Wren 27 | 21) Northern Shrike 7 |
| 6) Connecticut Warbler 25 | 22) Harlequin Duck 7 |
| 7) Wild Turkey 18 | 23) Ruff 6 |
| 8) Blue Grosbeak 15 | 24) Yellow-throated Warbler 6 |
| 9) Bohemian Waxwing 14 | 25) Black-headed Grosbeak 6 |
| 10) Gray-cheeked Thrush 13 | 26) Red Crossbill 5 |
| 11) Yellow-headed Blackbird 11 | 27) Northern Gannet 5 |
| 12) Snowy Owl 11 | 28) Summer Tanager 5 |
| 13) Great Gray Owl 11 | 29) Golden Eagle 4 |
| 14) N. Hawk Owl 11 | 30) Morning Warbler 4 |
| 15) Marbled Godwit 8 | 31) White-winged Crossbill 4 |
| 16) Pine Grosbeak 8 | 32) Yellow-breasted Chat |

(Three or Fewer)

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Tundra Swan | Lesser Black-Backed Gull | Western Kingbird |
| Tufted Duck | Ross' Gull | Cerulean Warbler |
| C. Eider | Little Gull | Dickcissel |
| Buff-breasted Sandpiper | Royal Tern | Clay-colored Sparrow |
| Baird's Sandpiper | Caspean Tern | |
| Curlew Sandpiper | Black Tern | |

Further issues of the BULLETIN will offer specific suggestions as to where and when to look for your most-wanted Connecticut birds.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR YOUR MOST-WANTED SHOREBIRDS

Even though it's the middle of summer and we've had record-breaking heat, now is the time to be thinking about the fall shorebird migration.

In fact, it's already begun with Yellowlegs showing up in early July. Soon these far northern breeders will be filling mud flats and damp fields along the Connecticut coast.

To help you enjoy this annual birding event to the fullest, Dennis Varza has kindly consented to share his many years of birding experience with readers through the following detailed article.

SHOREBIRDING IN CONNECTICUT

By Dennis Varza

The key to finding shorebirds is knowing the right time and the right habitat. Because shorebirds are long distance migrants, they are able to pick and choose the most suitable habitats. Being long distance travelers, shorebirds can also get lost and turn up in unusual places, making the probability of finding a rarity relatively high.

Being sensitive to habitat differences then, is the key to finding the different species of shorebirds. And they do have different habitats. Despite their name, shorebirds can be found away from the shore, including upland fields and wooded ponds. Besides time of the year, tide is important. Some sites are used for feeding only at low tide, while others are used for roosting at high tide.

On the shore, differences as subtle as beach substrate are important. There are rocky beaches, sandy beaches, mud flats and marshes. Purple Sandpipers prefer rocks and boulders that are covered with algae. The best place to see them are the rocks at Merwin Point, Milford at high tide. Other places to look are rock jetties and breakwaters in harbors.

Exposed sand bars and mud flats are the favorites of Sanderling, Dunlin with occasional Dowitchers, Yellowlegs and Semipalmated Sandpipers. Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstone also prefer feeding in this habitat, especially on beds of Blue Muscles. At Milford Point, the muscle bed beyond the sand bar in late May almost always has Knots. The exposed mud flats inside the marshes at low tide are a bonanza for probing shorebirds, including the Peeps (Least, Semipalm, Western and White-rumped Sandpipers), Dowitchers, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Plovers, Willets and Marbled Godwits. At high tide isolated beaches and sand bars become roosting sites, concentrating the birds and making the search more efficient. Roosting beaches include Long Beach in Stratford, Milford Point and Griswold Point, Old Lyme.

Inside the marshes on the marsh grass islands, Least Sandpipers and Whimbrels feed. At high tide the dryer spots become roost sites for Black-bellied Plovers, Knots and Dunlin and Ruddy Turnstones in the spring. In early spring, when the grass is still short, Yellowlegs can be found with a chance of finding a Ruff. A good example is the Guilford Sluce. An important habitat to look for is

"shorebird pools." These pools are generally shallow collections of water that the birds roost in at high tide. The pools get large numbers of Yellowlegs, Dowitchers, and Peeps and are the places to look for Stilt Sandpipers, Godwits, Whimbrels, Ruffs, Avocets, and Wilson's Phalaropes, not to mention chances of Rails and Gallinules.

Lordship had several pools, but as of last year only two were left. One is a restored marsh on the east of Lordship Boulevard and north of the airport. Park by the entrance to the airport and walk north along the boulevard until you see the pools on your right. The other pool is the "Warehouse Pool" at the end of Long Beach Boulevard. Park before you cross the railroad tracks, then walk through a steel storage yard until you come up to the pond. Assorted shorebirds roost there as well as nesting Least Bittern and Pied-billed Grebe. This winter plans have been made to start building around the pond, so it may be gone soon. Another pool of potential is one in Westbrook at Pilot's Point Marina North. The dredge spoils on the marsh form impoundments that collect water and shorebirds. I'm sure there are others to be found. All it takes is someone to look.

Sherwood Island State Park, Sikorsky Airport in Stratford, Veterans Park in Norwalk. The location of these fields is also important. The closer they are to marshes or lakes, the greater variety there will be. When filled with water, they become roost sites for Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plovers and assorted Peeps. The fields themselves become feeding areas for the likes of Golden Plover, Killdeer, Baird's Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and Hudsonian Godwit. The only problem with this habitat is that it is very dependent upon rain. A dry spell during migration could make the field useless.

Wet fields and pastures where the grass forms tussocks instead of lawns is the place to look for Common Snipe in early spring, before the grass gets too high, and for Upland Sandpipers in the fall. A good example is the Stouffer Chemical property in Westport. There is a field on the north side with a brook through it where one can see up to ten Snipe without getting out of the car. Otherwise, one has to put on boots and stomp through the fields to flush one up. For the Woodcock, look for old weedy fields no more than ten years old, or better yet, freshly plowed ones, and visit them in the spring at sunset to watch their courtship flight.

An inland habitat that has been under-birded is reservoir drawdowns. In August reservoirs are at their lowest level, exposing vast areas of mud flats and short grass. Expected birds should include Golden Plover, Stilt, Buff-breasted, and Baird's Sandpipers. Other inland habitats include lakes and rivers for the resident Spotted Sandpiper and migrant shorebirds such as Yellowlegs, Least and Pectoral Sandpipers. Wooded streams and ponds are the favorite haunts of the Solitary Sandpiper in spring.

The following are suggestions for where to look now and in the month or two ahead for specific species:

FINDING FALL SHOREBIRDS

Lesser Golden Plover	Late Aug.-Early Oct.	Hammonasset St. Pk., Milford Pt. Sikorsky Airport, Stratford
American Avocet	Early Sept.	Shorebird Pools
Upland Sandpiper	Late July-Early Sept.	Sikorsky Airport, Stratford, and surrounding fields, Guilford Sluice, Hammonasset St. Pk.
Whimbrel	Mid July-Early Sept.	Milford Pt., Lordship Marshes
Marbled Godwit	Late Aug.	Milford Pt., Lordship Marshes, Shorebird Pools and Mud Flats
Hudsonian Godwit	Late Aug-Early Nov.	Sikorsky Airport, Lordship, Hammonasset St. Pk., Wet Fields
Baird's Sandpiper	Late Aug.-Early Oct.	Sikorsky Airport, Lordship, Hammonasset St. Pk., Wet Fields
Curlew Sandpiper	Late July-Aug.	Long Beach, Stratford, in the company of Sanderlings and Dunlin
Stilt Sandpiper	Late July-Sept.	Shorebird Pools Stratford
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Late Aug.-Sept.	Sikorsky Airport, Lordship, Hammonasset St. Pk., Fields
Long-billed Dowitcher	Sept.-Oct.	Milford Pt. at high tide, Shorebird Pools in Stratford, Hammonasset St. Pk.
Wilson's Phalarope	Aug.-Early Sept.	Milford Pt. at high tide, Shorebird Pools in Stratford

EDITOR'S NOTE: Our thanks to Dennis Varza for his efforts, which were rushed to us during "exams" only to appear in this "slightly tardy" issue of the BULLETIN. Thanks again Dennis!

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