

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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ON THE COVER

Dovekie

Few species are more coveted by Connecticut birders than this charismatic little alcid - the Dovekie. Alcids have been increasing in Long Island Sound over the past decade, but Mark Szantyr's subject here remains a real rarity.

THE CONNECTICUT YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

By **Brendan Murtha**

In October 2010, a group of young birders from Connecticut and Westchester County, N.Y., met at Audubon Greenwich for the preliminary meeting of the Connecticut Young Birders Club.

The idea had been in the works for a while, headed by a 14-year-old Alex Burdo. Alex was already a familiar fixture of the Connecticut birding scene, and his drive had garnered the interest of Luke Tiller, then the hawk-counter at Quaker Ridge. Emails had been sent, suggestions traded, and prospective members contacted. I was 11 years old, a relatively new birder, inspired by my father and his colleagues.

At this point I had never met another young birder, although I knew they existed: they were like Spoon-billed Sandpipers in their fantastical rarity. Therefore, arriving to that first meeting was almost surreal, and for the first time I connected with young people who shared my interests. Alongside Alex (now at Brown), Benjamin Van Doren (now a Cornell graduate), Eamon Corbett (now at Harvard) and Zach Smart (now at Princeton), we discussed what we'd like from a young birders club and where we foresaw the club going. This was a gathering of some truly talented and intelligent young people, and I was hooked. To make the occasion even more special, Luke had coordinated this meeting to coincide with the visit of Kenn Kaufman, one of America's foremost bird experts and authors. Mr. Kaufman's enthusiasm for our infant club was a spark, and I found myself in a giddy daze as he pointed out my life Lincoln's Sparrow on our initial bird walk.

Six years later, the Connecticut Young Birders Club returned to Audubon Greenwich. On the morning of Oct. 23, 2016, I found myself with the club back where it all began, watching a stream of American Robins, Eastern Bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings pass overhead at dawn. I'm 17 now, a birder and



From left, Peter Thompson, Alex Burdo and Brendan Murtha on Mount Mansfield, Vermont, on a venture for Bicknell's Thrush.

field naturalist my 11-year-old self would have idolized. I'm the last of the founding members remaining, but am in my final year as college looms in the fall. I'm also the president of the club, a position that has proven to be both a delight and a challenge. As I prepare to pass the torch to the new crop of Connecticut young birders, I reflect back on the journey the club has taken over the past few years.

First and foremost, the organization of the club has changed. After our first year of adult guidance, circumstances shifted and Luke Tiller left the state, leaving us without a designated adult leader. Since that point, the club has been entirely student-run. We have had some adult involvement, for our parents have been immensely supportive as drivers and chaperones, and COA President Kathy Van Der Aue helped orchestrate our hugely successful trip to Vermont's "North-east Kingdom" last year.

However, this pales in comparison to the system most other youth birding clubs across the nation have in place. As part of the New York State Young Birders Club, which has close to 60 members, I have seen firsthand how the constant guidance of NYSOA turns a "club" into a professional entity. Lacking that oversight, the Connecticut Young Birders Club

has retained a somewhat informal feel. Trips run on a monthly basis, and are organized in part by group text message. We sometimes recruit leaders (Nick Bonomo, for example, has graciously led our "Shorebird Day" the past two years) but more often than not trips are student-run. Despite the obvious difficulties of this system, these informal mechanisms have really strengthened bonds between club members. We are all close friends, motivated to bird with one another beyond official club trips. It is not uncommon for several of us to meet up on a typical weekend for casual birding-- most of us do live in Fairfield County after all.

Even with restricted mobility and no real budget, we have run some very successful club trips. We've been all over the state, craning our necks to see Cerulean Warblers in Kent and scoping the marsh from Griswold Point in Old Lyme. We've hopped the border to places like Beavertail State Park in Rhode Island and Jamaica Bay in New York, on the hunt for species hard to find in Connecticut. Last year, we ran a four-day camping trip to northern Vermont, banding Bicknell's Thrush and getting point blank looks at a male Spruce



From front to rear, Jory Teltser, Peter Thompson, Brendan Murtha and Michael Aronson at White Memorial in Litchfield.

Grouse after countless hours of searching. This past spring, the CYBC 'Darth Waders' competed in the World Series of Birding, recording 150 species in Cape May County, N.J., over 24 hours. During this event, we raised funds for the club and Bicknell's Thrush conservation projects, much of which came from supportive members of the state's birding community. The World Series will likely be an annual event for the club from now on, and there are more overnight trips in the works as well.

Today, our most important task at hand is increasing membership. Our core group is vivacious and committed, but aging, and the club's continued success will depend on the inclusion of new young birders willing to pick up the mantle of leadership. Because being in the field alongside more experienced birders is the best way to learn, we encourage kids of all experience levels to join. Likewise, it is our hope that we can be role models, showing birding to be an engaging and exciting youth pastime. I challenge any kids on the fence about their interest in birds to tag along on a CYBC trip, because our enthusiasm for birding is infectious.

To the Connecticut birding community, I then extend a request: if you know any young birders, even kids with a vague interest in birds, please turn them our way. We welcome all with open arms, and would be delighted to share our knowledge and passion with anyone willing to listen. I also believe this is in our community's collective interest: encouraging young birders ensures that a next generation of conservationists and passionate outdoorsmen will persist. It is my hope that, when I leave for college in the fall, the club has a new base of young birders excited to get outside and see the natural world. In the meantime, the monthly trips will continue: an outline of our 2017 schedule has been drafted, and it looks very promising. We hope to see you all in the field-- until then, good birding!

Brendan Murtha, who lives in Norwalk, will graduate from the Center for Global Studies at Brien McMahon High School in June. He intends to pursue a degree in Evolutionary Biology.

RECORDING NOCTURNAL MIGRANTS

A Connecticut Young Birder Undertakes A Major Project

By Preston Lust

One of the more interesting aspects of birding is, without a doubt, nocturnal migration – and its accompanying mysteries. Why do some species tend to call at night, and others not? Why do some birds occasionally sing during nocturnal migration?

While these and questions like them are difficult to answer, every bit of data brings closer possible solutions. During the fall of 2016, I looked to make use of recording equipment to supply some of this data – which in addition to presenting potentially useful scientific information, also helped to satiate my personal interests in nocturnal migration.

For my recording setup I purchased an Old Bird 21c microphone from the eponymous website www.oldbird.org. I then secured the microphone to the roof of my house, which thankfully has a relatively flat surface. Others who may not have such a surface often construct a flat wooden fixture on which to fasten the microphone. The details to do this are explained on the oldbird website. After I attached the microphone to the roof, I ran its wire through a window – leading to a computer.

Whenever a night seems fit for migration, all one must do is attach the wire to the computer, and recording will begin. A question remains: what to do with such a long recording? Thankfully, the oldbird website provides a series of free software downloads to analyze the night-long recording and save to your computer snippets of low, mid-, and high frequency calls from throughout the night. This may be done after the fact or in real time.

Sad to say, should your microphone be positioned near trees with singing insects as mine was, many things besides bird



Greg Hanisek photo

An Upland Sandpiper, above, and a Bicknell's Thrush, below, were among the many interesting birds whose calls Preston Lust taped as nocturnal migrants.



Cornell Lab photo

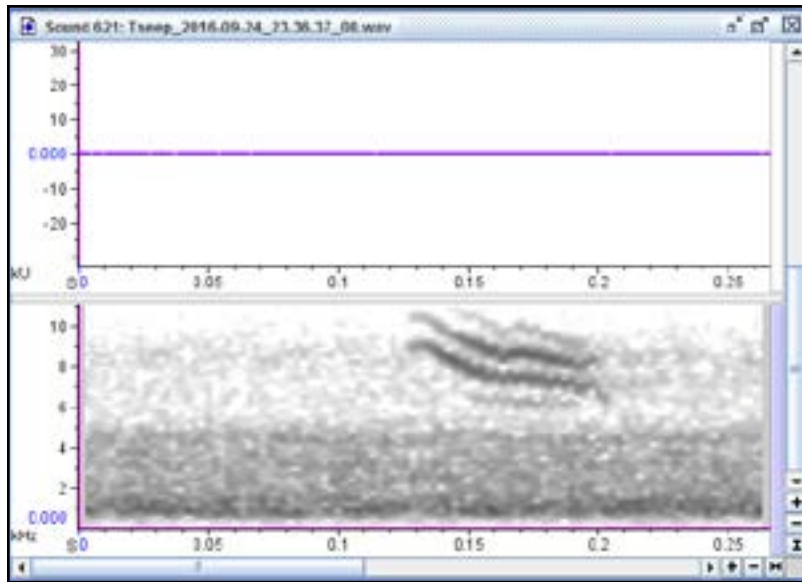
calls will be recorded. On too many mornings I had to sort through thousands of false recordings of insect noise, particularly in the warm months of August and September – wasting hours of valuable time in a pathetic state of self-pity. In October, however, the cold temperatures compelled insects to stop singing, and usually the only recording clips I found were of flight calls.

Many flight calls, particularly warbler flight calls, are rather difficult to distinguish by ear – especially with background noise or wind. Recognizing this, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology made Raven – a software used to make spectrograms of bird calls. Spectrograms make call identification much easier, as previously unnoticed subtleties of sound are visually represented, and the nature of calls more definitely determined. The spectrograms can be compared to spectrogram libraries online, such as Paul Driver's blog pjdeye.blogspot.com.

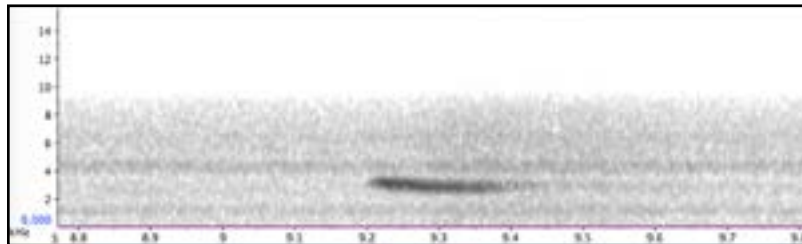
Using this method, I have managed to record the calls of some rare migrants. For instance, Oct. 4, 2016, was possibly my best night, with a tally of 25 species including Upland Sandpiper, Bicknell's Thrush, and Cape May Warbler. Oct. 19 was also a very good night, though possibly the most exhausting to sort through. I tallied some of the highest numbers I had ever seen, with 163 Yellow-rumped Warblers, 167 Chipping Sparrows, and 102 White-throated Sparrows. Other good birds I have recorded include Wilson's Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Dickcissel, American Bittern and Nelson's Sparrow.

I encourage others interested in nocturnal migration to record calls as well, especially in our state of Connecticut. Any data compiled will be a worthy contribution to this developing science.

Preston Lust, 15, a member of the Connecticut Young Birders' Club, is a sophomore at Staples High School in Westport.



This spectrogram graphically illustrates the nocturnal flight call of a common migrant – Wood Thrush.



Not all spectrograms are unambiguous. This one probably illustrates the flight call of a very sparse migrant – Savannah (Ipswich) Sparrow.

NOTES ON BEHAVIOR, STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

Carolina Chickadee: Coming To Connecticut?

But Will We Be Able To Identify One If It Shows Up

Well under the radar for New England birders, the Carolina Chickadee has been staging a northward expansion that has now brought it to latitudes that cross the southwestern corner of Connecticut. Historically the most sedentary of birds, Carolina Chickadees were virtually unknown in the New Jersey and Pennsylvania counties directly north of their rock-solid range limits, let alone New York and Connecticut, which have no verified records. A very narrow hybrid zone, starting around the mouth of the Raritan River at the upper limits of the New Jersey shore, continued across the state to the Princeton area in Mercer County and then into northern Bucks County, PA

This chickadee DMZ was so restricted that hybrids were a matter of little or no concern for the two states' birders. Reports of an occasional chickadee singing the songs of both species were no more than a rare curiosity. Things started to change in the 21st Century, and they've accelerated in the past decade. Tracking their progress through eBird reports shows that they reached the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania by 2006. They were north of Interstate 78 in New Jersey in 2010 and they were north of Interstate 80 in both states in 2016. This brings them to the Delaware Water Gap area, at about the same latitude as Greenwich, with at least one record from Tobyhanna in the Pocono Mountains, at about the same latitude as Bridgeport.

Whether they will reach Connecticut remains problematic, because the northward movement has a marked western component as well. The farthest penetration is up the Delaware River Valley. On the eastern side of their historic range, Carolina Chickadees have only managed to jump north a few miles to Linden and Woodbridge, NJ, across from Staten

Island but still south of Newark, NJ, and Manhattan.

There's also another problem. All of this extended range has resulted in a mobile hybrid zone. Along with Carolina Chickadee records in this area, eBird also shows significant numbers of birds identified as hybrids or Black-capped/Carolina Chickadees. Clearly identification will be an issue with establishing a first record for Connecticut.

This phenomenon has been the subject of a detailed study that points to climate change as the key factor in this range extension. The authors say, "We find strong evidence that winter temperatures limit the northern extent of *P. carolinensis* by demonstrating a current-day association between the range limit of this species and minimum winter temperatures." This was done "using a combination of temporal genomic, distributional, and climatic sampling, making use of the world's largest citizen science database," eBird. (Taylor et al. 2014).

Christmas Bird Count data also offers numerical evidence of the range change. For instance, the Warren County, NJ-Northampton County, PA CBC, an area that historically did not have any Carolina Chickadees, recorded 11 in 2015, compared with 155 Black-capped Chickadees.

Literature Cited

Taylor, Scott A., Thomas A. White, Wesley M. Hochachka, Valentina Ferretti, Robert L. Curry and Irby Lovette. Climate-Mediated Movement of an Avian Hybrid Zone. *Current Biology* 24, 671-76. March 2014.

Greg Hanisek
Waterbury

Another Egret With Noteworthy Head Plumes

On the afternoon of 3 July 2016 Dan Field and I observed a (presumed) Snowy Egret that had Little Egret-like head plumes in the marsh at Shell Beach in Guilford. Though distant, we were able to study this bird through our scopes for

some time. I am confident that this bird is NOT a Little Egret, as the bird otherwise looked pretty typical for Snowy Egret in size, structure, and plumage. Notably, the bird showed bright yellow lores, a rounded crown and smallish bill giving it a gentle expression. It also had a bushy rear crown/nape and recurved back plumes the same size as those on a nearby Snowy Egret. However, the bird had two obviously very long and sturdy white plumes that would have looked perfectly normal on the head of a standard Little Egret, a species with



Mark Szantyr photo
This is an example of the plumage displayed by the presumed Snowy Egret seen in July 2016 by Bonomo. Note the long straight plumes reminiscent of a Little Egret but other plumes typical of Snowy Egret. This bird was photographed at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison more than a decade ago.

which I am familiar. The two long plumes waved in the breeze as the bird fed in the marsh.

Editor's Note – Birds fitting this description have been seen on more than one occasion in Connecticut as well as in surrounding states. To date there has been no evidence to suggest they are anything other than aberrant Snowy Egrets. As noted by Bonomo, to date none have shown other intermediate characters that would suggest a hybrid origin.

Nick Bonomo
Wallingford

American Oystercatchers and Piping Plovers in 2016

Here is an update on Piping Plover and American Oystercatcher numbers for 2016. Audubon Connecticut and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History are proud to be partners for the upcoming Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds' (AAfCW) sixth season in 2017, and over the past few years we have had a number of tremendous success stories thanks to you. Our incredible 2014 season included an all-time record high number of fledged Piping Plovers for Connecticut with 116 birds. Results from the phenomenal 2015 season indicated we had the second highest number of fledged chicks ever at 112, right behind our own 2014 record. We also set the all-time record number of breeding pairs of Piping Plovers for the state in 2015 at 62, but this was broken in 2016 with 63 pairs!

These birds produced 87 fledged chicks for a productivity rate of 1.38 chicks per pair, well above the federal recovery goal of 1.2 chicks per pair. High tide events, storms, predators and unfortunate human incidents all led to a decline in fledged chicks from the previous two seasons, but it was nevertheless the fourth highest total ever for our state.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is still finalizing the official numbers for Least Terns nesting in 2016. However, we have completed our report for the American Oystercatcher, and it is yet more great news as a record high number of 63 pairs nested in Connecticut in 2016. These birds produced 53 fledglings for a productivity rate of 0.84 chicks per pair, the second highest total of chicks fledged and the second highest productivity rate ever recorded in the state. Our daily work to protect breeding areas, from the beaches to remote offshore islands, is undoubtedly behind this increase in nesting attempts and success.

We would like to thank our hundreds of volunteers for putting in approximately 4,000 volunteer hours as tallied through only the first three quarters of 2016. None of this work could be done without you dedicated citizen scientists.



Bruce Finnan photo

A Piping Plover

Remember that our efforts extend through the end of the year as we survey for birds such as the Black-bellied Plover, Sanderling, Dunlin, Killdeer, Ruddy Turnstone, lingering egrets, herons and more that spend the winter with us.

Audubon Connecticut and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History are looking forward to what will be a very busy and extremely important 2017 field season – starting in less than three months – after Hurricane Matthew tore through the Bahamas and the wintering grounds of many Piping Plovers: <http://www.audubon.org/news/hundreds-atlantic-piping-plovers-are-missing-after-hurricane-matthew>

Hundreds or more may have perished, and we may have fewer pairs returning to us, making our stewardship and outreach efforts all the more important for those that have survived and will depend on Connecticut to recover from these losses. As always, if you have questions about the Audubon

Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds or wish to volunteer, please email us.

Scott Kruitbosch



An American Oystercatcher with chick

Julian Hough photo

CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Summer, June 1 to July 31, 2016

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

Because of the complexity of the summer season, we divide it into four segments: northbound migration, southbound migration, the breeding season and lingerers, wanderers and strays. The breeding season represents the heart of summer, and the Summer Bird Count, featured in the October issue of *The Connecticut Warbler*, offers the most comprehensive review of the state's nesting species. Worth mentioning here are several species that aren't breeding, to the best of our knowledge, but continue to tease us with possibilities, including Sandhill Crane, Red-headed Woodpecker and Yellow-breasted Chat. The migratory and wild-card elements of this productive two-month period as usual produced an interesting array of rare species.

Northbound Migration

Two Least Sandpipers, two Semipalmated Sandpipers and 14 Ruddy Turnstones were either northbound or stalled June 16 at Cockenoe Island in Westport (TG). Up to two White-rumped Sandpipers, typically late migrants, were present to at least June 6 at Sandy Point in West Haven (MK et al.). A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was at Little Pond in Litchfield on June 1 (SB). An Alder Flycatcher singing June 10-11 in South Windsor was outside of known breeding areas (PDe, PCi, PFa). Given

the species' late migration schedule, this was likely a northbound bird. The latest report for Blackpoll Warbler came on June 4 at River Road in Kent (SMr, MWa). The same date produced a tardy Wilson's Warbler at Branford Supply Ponds (SMa, MSt).

Southbound Migration

Shorebird movements were well under way on July 7, when the following species were noted on Cockenoe Island in Westport – Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher and

Mississippi Kites Nest Again



Jay Kaplan photo

Arguably Connecticut's rarest breeding bird, Mississippi Kite, nested again in 2016. A pair fledged one young at an undisclosed site in Simsbury, the town that has hosted all the known and presumed nestings dating from 2008. This site is some distance from the vicinity of Great Pond, where other breeding activity occurred. The chronology: Birds first observed by homeowner 6/21/16. Nest first discovered 7/28/16. Kite bringing food to nest 8/7/16. Young first heard vocalizing about 8/10/16. Fledgling first seen 8/17/16. Last observation 9/20/16.

Greater Yellowlegs (TG). A Whimbrel was a good inland find July 8 at Horse Barn Hill in Storrs (CE). Reports of multiple birds included two on July 17 in Norwalk (BM, SMu), and three on July 27 at Milford Point (PFu). The typical build up of Semipalmated Sandpipers around the mouth of the Housatonic River included

a total of 4000 on July 28 at Milford Point and Stratford Greenway (NB). The only reports of Western Sandpiper (maximum two) came from the Stratford Greenway area July 21-31 (FM, MWa et al.) Three Pectoral Sandpipers were inland July 26 at Cemetery Pond in Litchfield (MDo). In a good season for Stilt Sandpipers a high count

of four was noted July 19 at Shell Beach in Guilford (SSa et al.). The season's shorebird highlight was a **Ruff** that was present July 1-13 at the small but highly productive marsh along the Stratford Greenway (SMr et al.). The mid-summer appearance of Bonaparte's Gulls included a first arrival July 20 at Milford Point (JT), followed by a good count of four the next day at Burying Hill Beach in Westport (TG). Burying Hill also produced a Black Tern the same day (TG).

A Black-billed Cuckoo July 14 at Stratford Point was away from likely breeding areas (PCo). Staging by large numbers of Northern Rough-winged Swallows in the upper Connecticut River Valley is a fairly recent phenomenon. An example this year was "several hundred" at Windsor Locks State Park on July 21 (PDe). A Red-breasted Nuthatch on June 26 in Stamford was out of place and likely a harbinger of what turned out to be a good fall irruption (BI). Offering additional evidence were singles June 28 in Bethlehem (RW), July 3 in Voluntown (MSc) and July 4 in Mystic (EW). A Mourning Warbler

on July 7 in Granby could have been an early migrant or a bird dispersing from breeding areas not too far away in Massachusetts (JW). The mid-summer movement of Red-winged Blackbirds produced a passage flight of c. 4000 on July 19 at Lighthouse Point in New Haven (GH, BB).

The Breeding Season

Which waterfowl, or any species of bird for that matter, is doing better than the Wood Duck? Consider that sightings such as the following have become commonplace around the state: 52 on June 29 at Little Pond in Litchfield, which included 36 young birds (JSw). A Great Blue Heron colony in Simsbury held 26 chicks on June 22 (PCi). Virginia Rails are common, but secretive and limited to specific wetland habitats, so observation of downy young is difficult. An observer was thrilled on June 29 when two showed themselves along the weedy shore of Little Pond, one accompanied by two downy young and the other by at least three (JSw). Seven young American Oystercatchers were present with



Frank Mantlik photo
 This Ruff at a small marsh near the Stratford Greenway, shown here on July 1, was a seasonal shorebird highlight.

four adult pairs on June 16 at Cockenoe Island in Westport (TG). A Roseate Tern was well west of the Falkner Island breeding colony on June 14 at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport, and two were on the tern spit at nearby Cockenoe Island on June 16 (TG). Thirty Roseate Terns were reported from the Falkner colony on June 1 (BS).

Forestry work that has created openings in the West Block of Naugatuck State Forest has quickly attracted territorial Whip-poor-wills. A visit to the Hunters Mountain section on June 22 re-

vealed at least three singing birds (GH, BF). What appears to be the last hope for breeding Common Nighthawks centers on a very sparse presence in downtown New Haven. Reports starting on June 3 never confirmed more than one bird (LB). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker on June 11 in West Hartford was a veteran observer's first summer record for the Connecticut River valley. (PDe).

A White-eyed Vireo, a sparse bird in Fairfield County, appeared to be on territory June 22 at a Bethel quarry (GH). A three-year attempt to establish a Purple Martin colony



Paul Fusco photo
 This Whimbrel offered a nice photo opportunity when it flew by Milford Point on July 26, 2016.



Russ Smiley photo
 Connecticut birders don't get many opportunities to see a Royal Tern (left) and a Caspian Tern side by side, like these two June 6, 2016, at Sandy Point in West Haven. The Royal's full black cap is a feature that is molted quickly and is seldom seen here.

at Lake Waramaug State Park drew in two pairs investigating the house on June 2, with a single nest confirmed on June 25 (CM). A significant colony of Cliff Swallows at a shopping center in Canton was largely destroyed by American and Fish Crows. On one large store building alone only seven of 41 mud nests were still intact on June 13 (PCi).

The only report of a single Golden-winged Warbler came from near the Massachusetts line June 15 on Bear Mountain in Salisbury (KP). This is within a potential breeding area, but currently no known breeding sites exist. A Lawrence's Warbler was in Mansfield on June 11 (PR), and single Brewster's Warblers were at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby on June 14 (SSp) and in Gaylordsville June 22 (GH, BB). Northern Parulas reported June 16 in Naugatuck State Forest in Beacon Falls (GH) and at Bent of the River Audubon in Southbury (JSw) were potential breeders. A bird was present at the latter site to at least June 25 (CF). A Grasshopper Sparrow July 12 in Suffield offered hope that land acquired by

the state will attract nesting grassland species (PDe). Nine Eastern Meadowlarks on July 23 at Windham Airport comprised two adults with three and four juveniles respectively (PR). Boat-tailed Grackles bred again at their Great Meadows Stratford stronghold (FM), and a pair was seen again June 4-5 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (MDa), a site where the species has bred in recent years. Two Evening Grosbeaks in Colebrook on June 6 offered potential for breeding (DRo). Another two were reported from Cheshire on June 12 (CP).

Lingers, Wanderers and Strays

A Greater Scaup was present in mid-July in Old Saybrook (JOg). A Black Scoter lingered to at least June 5 at Sandy Point, where it was joined by a Surf Scoter and two Long-tailed Ducks (GH et al.). The Long-tailed Duck count hit four at Sandy Point during early June, but the overall high count of nine occurred in Westport on June 18 (TG). Red-breasted Mergansers were widespread in small numbers, mostly

singles, but with a high count of three on July 3 in Groton (SG). An unidentified **shearwater** was off Norwalk on July 5 (ID).

Inland concentrations of Great Egrets included 15 on July 22 at Riverside Park in Hartford (PCi), and nine at Filley Park in Bloomfield on July 26 (SKo). A Little Blue Heron was a good inland find July 20-26 at Quinebaug Fish Hatchery in Central Village, with a second bird present on the latter date (MWe, JD, RD). An immature was at Station 43 in South Windsor on July 30 (SW). A Black-crowned Night-Heron on July 12 in East Hartford was probably a post-breeding wanderer (DC). An adult **White Ibis** was a quick and unexpected visitor when it flew by two fishermen July 23 near Ash Creek in Fairfield (JHi, DZ), not to be seen again. Reports of a single **White-faced Ibis** came from two Old Saybrook locations, Ingham Hill Pond on June 26 (LN) and Plum Bank Marsh on June 27 (JOg). Presumably the same bird was at HBSP on July 3 (TA). Two **Sandhill Cranes** were noted wandering around the Benedict Pond area in Norfolk in

late July and continued into the fall season (MB, PP et al.). Although breeding is likely somewhere near the northwestern Connecticut boundary with Massachusetts, no nest site has been found to date. There is confirmation from across the state line.

A **Wilson's Phalarope**, known for June appearances in the Northeast, visited the Stratford Greenway marsh June 16-17 (SMr et al.). A Bonaparte's Gull lingered to June 2 at Stratford Point (CL et al.). Two Laughing Gulls and a Forster's Tern were at Compo Beach in Westport June 7 (TG). Both a Caspian Tern and a Royal Tern visited Sandy Point in West Haven June 5-6, offering opportunities to photograph both sitting together (GH, FG). The two species were also together July 8 at Milford Point (NB). Other Royal Terns included three at Shippan Point, Stamford (PDU), and two at Milford Point (NB), both on June 28. Singles of both species were noted periodically through July at various coastal sites. While we waited hopefully for Black Skimmers to resume their former short presence as breeders, the few



Tim Antanaitis photo

This White-faced Ibis, an increasingly regular visitor in spring and early summer, was at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison on July 3.

reports this season provided no positive evidence. They included one at Cockenoe Island, Westport, on June 3 (TG), one at Milford Point on June 8 (FM) and two in Westport on June 30-July 5 (PL, TG).

A Red-headed Woodpecker July 26 at a feeder in Canaan continued to make visits into at least December (TS). The always scarce Kentucky Warbler turned up on June 4 in Kent (SMa), and one was present June 17-20 in

Portland, but with no sign of a mate (TA). A singing male Yellow-breasted Chat found in late May at Silver Sands State Park in Milford was present through June 17 without any evidence of a mate (JOs et al.). There were two other reports of singles: June 2 in Barkhamsted (JHe) and June 11 in Salem (KT). With no confirmed breeding reports for many years, they'll remain in this category for now. A **Blue Grosbeak**, a species primed to join the breeding list, was at

Stratford Point June 30-July 2 (PCo et al.). Another was at Sherwood Island on July 17 (TG).

Exotics – A European Goldfinch was in Madison on June 12 (CI). This species is being tracked nationally by eBird to assess the possibility of breeding populations becoming established. Connecticut has a number of reports over the past decade, mainly in the Hartford area.

Observers – Tim Antanaitas, Bill Banks, Larry Bausher, Nick Bonomo, Steve Broker, Matt Burke, Dana Campbell, Paul Cianfaglione (PCi), Patrick Comins (PCo), Mark Danforth (MDa), Paul Desjardins (PDe), Ian Devlin, Mike Doyle (MDo), Robert Dixon, Jeri Duefrene, Patrick Dugan (PDU), Chris Elphick, Patrice Favreau (PFa), Bruce Finnan, Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe, Paul Fusco (PFu), Frank Gallo, Sheryl Gracewski, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, James

Heuschkel (JHe), Joel Hintz (JHi), Julian Hough (JHo), Chuck Imbergamo, Brenda Inskip, Micky Komara, Steve Kotchko (SKo), Scott Kruitbosch (SKr), Donna Lollo, Chris Loscalzo, Preston Lust, Charles Makarewich, John Marshall, Frank Mantlik, Stefan Martin (SMr), Steve Mayo (SMa), Brendan Murtha, Sean Murtha (SMu), Larry Nichols, Anders Ogren, John Ogren (JOg), John Oshlick (JOs), Cathy Parent, Karen Prager, Paul Provost, Dave Rosgen (DRo), Dan Rottino (DRt), Phil Rusch, Sol Satin (SSa), Tom Schaefer, Matthew Schenck (MSc), James Sherwonit (JSh), Steve Spector (SSp). Bethany Spiegel, Maria Stockmal (MSt) Jack Swatt (JSw), Mark Szantyr, (MSz) Jory Teltser, Kristen Trower, Marianne Vahey, Ed Wallace, Mike Warner (MWa), John Weeks, Mike Wehking (MWe), Stuart Winquist, Ryan Wirtes, Sara Zagorski, Dave Zawisha

20 YEARS AGO IN THE WARBLER

Editor's Note: This article appeared in Vol. 17 No. 1 of the Connecticut Warbler (January 1997).

A Great Gray Owl in Connecticut

By Tom Harrington

On 14 January 1996, Sue Craig and I were birding at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, Connecticut. At approximately 9:15 a.m., as we entered the Willard's Island Nature Trail at the east end of the park, we heard an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) cawing at something in a dense stand of Eastern Red-Cedar (*Juniperus virginianus*) near the trail. After searching for a minute or so we located the object of the crow's attention... a Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*).

The owl was about two to three feet over my head in the cedars. From that distance, the identification was simple even without binoculars. We spent the remainder of our initial time of observation studying the bird from a distance of about 25 feet, so as not to disturb the bird.

We left to get a disposable camera at a local convenience store so that we could document this rare occurrence. We returned after about an hour or so to find the bird in the same area and managed to get some photographs.

The owl stayed on its original perch in the cedar for approximately two hours. It did not move until a Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) flew over the adjacent saltmarsh within a quarter mile of the perched bird. At this the Great Gray flew to a nearby perch in a crabapple tree (*Malus sp.*) at the edge of the marsh, where it remained for the duration of the observation.

Identification and Description

The bird had a hooked bill and talons, round facial disk and

forward facing eyes typical of the Family Strigidae. Its large size eliminated all of the smaller members of the family and the overall dark grayish brown coloration, lack of ear tufts and yellow eyes eliminated all but the Great Gray Owl.

As stated, this spectacular bird showed an overall dark grayish coloration. It appeared larger than a Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*). Its head was large and rounded with no ear tufts. The facial disk was well developed and patterned with light and dark concentric rings. The yellow eyes seemed relatively small for an owl of this size. The bill was a pale yellowish color, much duller than the eyes. The chin directly beneath the bill was dark and this dark area was bordered on each side by white feathers, giving the appearance of a white bow tie or mustache. The underparts of the owl were barred pale gray and grayish brown. This patterning was densest on the upper breast. The upper parts were more uniformly patterned and appeared overall darker than the underparts, with occasional pale spots on the folded wing. The wings were long, extending more than half way down the tail. The tail appeared long for an owl and was banded with brown and pale grayish. The legs were fully feathered.

Distribution and Status

The Great Gray Owl is known for its irruptive movements during winter. Although its range is largely confined to middle and western Canada, as well as northern Minnesota to Washington and south in the mountains to Yosemite National Park in California, this bird moves farther south and east during winter dispersals. It is believed that these movements correspond to failure of the food base in the normal wintering areas. However, this may not be true in all cases.

A major irruption into New England occurred in winter 1978-79. During that winter 94 Great Gray Owls were reported in New England, as well as one in New Brunswick. Sixty-seven were found in Maine, while 15 were located in Massachusetts. Other reports included one from Rhode Island, seven from New Hampshire, two from Vermont and two undocu-

mented, uncorroborated reports from Connecticut (Vickery and Yunick, 1979).

The winter of 1995-96 saw an estimated 11 Great Gray Owls enter the New England region. I observed one in Connecticut and one in Rowley, Mass. A single bird also was reported from Rhode Island (D.L. Saint, pers. comm.). At least two were found in Vermont (Terry Hall, pers. comm.); three or four reported from New Hampshire were accepted by the New Hampshire Rare Bird Committee (Alan Delorey pers. comm.), and at least three were reported in Maine, with six others possible (Despres 1996).

The winter of 1995-96 may not have provided the largest invasion of this spectacular owl into our area, but the winter was certainly more exciting for what did show up. An irruption of northern owls into our region can be a wonderful event. The long hours often necessary to locate these birds in the bitter cold of winter are well worth the effort. However, when we do find these owls, we must all ensure their safety by exercising proper birding behavior and ethics while observing them and we must encourage such behavior in those who share this experience with us.

Literature Cited

Despres J. 1996. *Maine Bird Notes* 8 (2):45.

Vickery, P.D., and R.P. Yunick. 1979, *Am. Birds* 33(3):242-244.

PHOTO CHALLENGE

By Mark Szantyr

Rats. The truth is I was photographing a group of Norway Rats that were making a living eating the dropped seeds around a local eastern Connecticut bird feeder set up. I had no rat pictures in my collection and this opportunity seemed too good to pass up.

As the rodents ran in and out of the tree line near the feeders, the group assembled to witness this episode of Willard noticed a medium-small, streaky brown bird scratching about below the feeders. The bird was larger than the Song Sparrows that were present and perhaps a bit larger than the Brown-headed Cowbirds that were also there.

It was suggested that maybe this unfamiliar bird was a very young, juvenal female Red-winged Blackbird. That made some sense as it was very brown and streaked dark and light both dorsally and ventrally. The bird appeared more richly colored, almost a bit of rufous, on the inner primaries, mantle, and on the rump. There was also an intriguing bit of white at the base of the outer primaries and secondaries that was paired with a blackish alula and dark greater coverts. The birds also showed white edging along the outer tail



feathers. Working against the identification as a Red-winged Blackbird was the heavy finch or sparrow-like bill rather than the longer, more pointed icterid bill.

Noteworthy, and what finally led the group of observers down the path to a correct identification, was the distinctive, simultaneous, two-footed scratching in the leaf litter. This seemed so familiar....Could it be a juvenal Eastern Towhee? Just about then, the bird turned showing its other side and there, in the flanks were the beginnings of the "rufous-side" that was responsible for its old name.

Eastern Towhee is a decreasingly common bird in the summer in our area. When this large sparrow is in its earliest plumage, the heart of the summer, it is usually in thick, overgrown scrub and brush. We rarely get to see a towhee so young.

So....back to photographing rats! This Eastern Towhee was photographed on 7 August 2016 in Windham County, Connecticut.



Photo Challenge No. 96

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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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