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ON THE COVER

Mew (Short-billed) Gull

In its 22nd Annual Report in this issue, the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut added two new species to the state list. It also added several subspecies, including the western North American form of Mew Gull, sometimes known as Short-billed Gull. Mark Szantyr's cover illustration complements Nick Bonomo's article on identification of the Mew Gull subspecies

THE MABEL OSGOOD WRIGHT AWARD

2017: To Julie Victoria

Steve Broker presented the following at the 33rd annual meeting of the Connecticut Ornithological Association on March 18, 2017.

It is my great pleasure to present the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, which was established in 1991 by the Connecticut Ornithological Association in memory of one of the most influential conservationists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Past recipients of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, which is given to those who have made a significant impact on our knowledge, study, and conservation of birds, include Roland Clement (COA's first president), Don Hopkins, Fred Sibley, Roger Tory Peterson, Noble Proctor, and last year, Robert Dewire. Our annual meeting registrants and audience today include Mabel Osgood Wright recipients Jay Kaplan, Patrick Comins, Buzz Devine, Flo McBride, Tom Baptist, and David Sibley.

The 2017 Mabel Osgood Wright Award recipient is Julie Victoria. Educated at the University of Connecticut, where she studied natural resources conservation, Julie's entire professional career has been with the State of Connecticut, Department of Environmental Protection, now known as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. From her initial work as a seasonal employee with DEP to her 1985 appointment as a nongame biologist in the Nonharvested Wildlife Program (renamed the Wildlife Diversity Program) to her retirement in 2011, Julie has devoted her professional life to working with other Connecticut state agencies and divisions, federal agencies, state municipalities, private wildlife organizations, public landowners, and volunteers, and she has been a key advocate for the preservation of habitat, communicating with and educating the public, and encouraging an understanding and appreciation for the natural world.

Thirty-two years of work as a biologist in Connecticut cannot be summarized adequately in a few words, but let's consider some of the activities and projects that Julie coor-

minated and conducted. Through her career with DEP, Julie has been based in Hartford and at division offices at Franklin Wildlife Management Area and Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area. She led projects in Connecticut for the monitoring, study, and banding of raptors, including Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and Ospreys. Each of these species has undergone remarkable recoveries as breeding birds in the state. Extirpated as breeders in Connecticut in the 1940s and 1950s as a result of pesticide contamination, Bald Eagles returned as a breeding species in Connecticut in 1992 and Peregrine Falcons in 1998. Julie recalls when Ospreys, her favorite bird species, were rare in this state and spent her career recruiting volunteers, providing technical support information, and streamlining the osprey nest platform registration process to make it easier for volunteers to help.

Julie also coordinated and conducted projects with beach-nesting shorebirds (Piping Plover, Least Tern), as well as the Colonial Waterbirds Survey, a tremendous effort which covers the entire Connecticut coastline from Stonington to Greenwich. Another project has been the Bluebird Working Group, which for a number of years has been setting up artificial nest boxes to bring back the Eastern Bluebird as a more widespread nester in the state.

Julie was instrumental in the development of Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, which was written and accepted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2005. In 2014-2015, DEEP revised and updated that document and renamed it the Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan, with Julie, then in retirement, working with a private contractor and DEEP on the Action Plan's revisions. The Action Plan was accepted by USFWS in 2015. Julie also worked with this same private contractor and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management in 2014 to revise the Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan.

As a Connecticut nongame biologist, Julie also has focused her work on invertebrates and nonavian vertebrates. She developed recovery plans for the state endangered Bog Turtle

and for the state endangered Timber Rattlesnake. Public education has been an important aspect of Julie's work over the years, and has involved collaboration with Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Audubon Society, and the Connecticut Ornithological Association and with numerous other volunteer organizations and individuals from around the state. For more than twenty years, Julie worked with her colleague Jenny Dickson on these and numerous other nongame biological issues.

Now a few years into retirement and living in Andover, Connecticut with her husband, Hank Gruner, Julie continues to make significant contributions to the study of birds, to habitat preservation, and to educational outreach. In the year following her retirement from DEP, she coordinated Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon banding of nestlings in the state. She continued work with the Colonial Waterbirds Survey in 2013. She currently is preparing for a 2019 inventory and productivity status for all Osprey nests in Connecticut, and as she works with Osprey Nation, she encourages everyone in COA to support this effort.

On a personal note, one day in the year 2000 Julie and her Massachusetts colleague Tom French (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program) appeared at cliff top in West Rock Ridge State Park (New Haven, Hamden, Woodbridge, and Bethany) to check up on a reported Peregrine Falcon in residence at this trap rock ridge. They found me at the edge of the cliff making my own observations of the breeding peregrines, the first pair of Peregrine Falcons to attempt breeding on a Connecticut cliff in nearly 60 years. For the next decade, I was pleased to be one of Julie's volunteers in peregrine monitoring, and I had the pleasure of assisting Julie and her colleagues as they banded the peregrine nestlings hatched out at West Rock.

On behalf of the membership of the Connecticut Ornithological Association, it is my privilege to present Julie Victoria with the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.

MEW GULLS IN CONNECTICUT: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

By Nick Bonomo

Introduction

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) is a classic “birder’s bird.” It is one of those species, rare in eastern North America, which could easily be overlooked among flocks of the very similar and abundant Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). One might refer to the species as a “stealth vagrant” to this part of the world. If you’re not looking for one, you are unlikely to find one. Connecticut, as of the end of 2016, has recorded Mew Gull only seven times in its ornithological history, though six of those have occurred during the past eight years.

Mew Gull taxonomy is currently up for debate as scientists work to study each population more thoroughly. The AOU currently classifies the Mew Gull “complex” as one species called Mew Gull (*Larus canus*). Authorities recognize four taxa within this complex: one North American and three Eurasian. They are as follows. Latin names will be used, as the common English nomenclature is variable and confusing.

L. c. brachyrhynchus is the lone North American form; it breeds in northwest Canada and Alaska and winters in the western United States and Canada. *L. c. canus* occurs primarily in Europe, *L. c. heinei* mainly in western and central Asia, and *L. c. kamtschatschensis* in eastern Asia. As widespread as this species is throughout much of the northern hemisphere, the east coast of North America is not a part of its normal range.

Traditionally the default Mew Gull subspecies thought to occur in the northeastern United States has been *canus*, the nominate form from Europe. However, thanks to recent advances in subspecific Mew Gull identification and digital photo

documentation, it has become apparent that while *canus* may indeed be the most regularly occurring form in our region, any form is possible. In fact, Mew Gulls of three subspecies have occurred in Connecticut in recent years. Of the seven state records to date, all six recent sightings (2009-2016) pertained to adults, were photographed, and have been identified to the subspecies level. The state’s first record accepted by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC), a multiple observer sighting in 1973, was not identified to subspecies nor was it photographed. Worth noting, there is a possible 1965 record, mentioned in *Connecticut Birds* by Zeranski & Baptist, for which field notes may exist but have yet to surface as of this writing. If anything comes of the investigation into that report, it may be evaluated by the ARCC at that time. The subspecific breakdown of the six recent records is as follows: four *canus*, one *brachyrhynchus*, one *kamtschatschensis*.



Figure 1. The geographic regions from which CT’s three documented Mew Gull subspecies would have originated. Courtesy of Google Maps.

Here we will provide a chronologic summary of all seven Connecticut records of Mew Gull, with photos when possible. But first we will touch on the basics of Mew Gull identification.

Identification

Mew Gull identification is a two-step process. The first hurdle

one must cross concerns separation from Ring-billed Gull. Then, once a bird has been identified as a Mew Gull, one should determine to which subspecies that individual belongs. Not only does ID down to subspecies level help us understand from where these birds are traveling, but in the event of a taxonomic split of Mew Gull into two or more species it would be most useful to know which ones have occurred here.

The Mew Gull versus Ring-billed Gull identification is treated quite well by our top North American field guides such as *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (2014) and the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (2011). While there is great variation in Mew Gull if you take into account all four worldwide subspecies, there are still several field marks common to most, if not all, Mew Gull forms on which a birder can focus while scanning through a flock of Ring-billed Gulls. Relative to adult Ring-billed, look for a bill that is often thinner (this depends on subspecies) with a narrow or entirely lacking subterminal dark ring, a darker iris (anywhere from amber to blackish), a more rounded head, a broader and higher-contrast white tertial crescent, and darker gray upperparts (from subtly darker to significantly darker). Noticing any one of these field marks during a scan would flag that bird as a candidate Mew Gull requiring further study to see if everything else checks out.

Immature Mew Gulls can be even trickier to separate from Ring-billed, and they also vary greatly in structure and plumage between subspecies, so it would be best to look for the same structural features noted for adults in addition to the presence of second generation scapulars that are darker gray as compared to Ring-billed Gull. Both at rest and in flight, first-cycle Ring-billed Gull averages a higher-contrast upper wing pattern than Mew. Beware the occasional “runt” Ring-billed Gull, whose smaller size and more delicate structure can closely mimic some forms of Mew Gull. Immature Ring-billed Gulls can have bills that are not fully developed

and may incorrectly lead one down the Mew Gull path. Once you have a candidate for Mew Gull in your sights, keep these pitfalls in mind. Document any potential Mew Gull with photographs whenever possible.

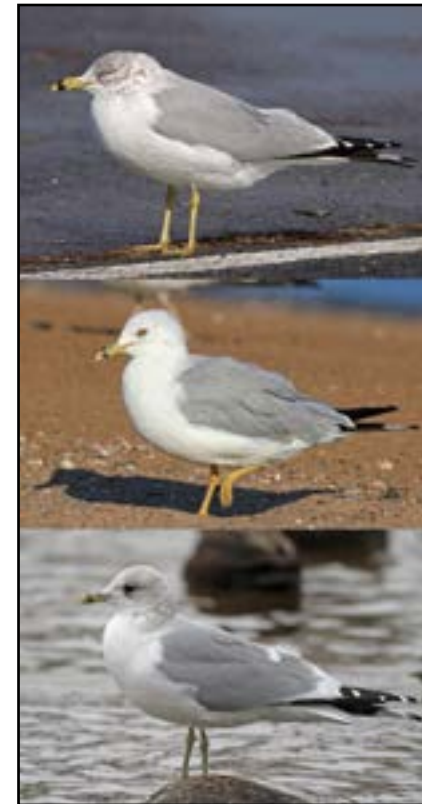


Figure 2. Two Ring-billed Gulls above, one nominate *canus* Mew Gull below (our most regularly occurring form of Mew Gull). On the *canus* Mew Gull, note especially the dull thin bill with narrow ring, dull legs, dark eye, more evenly rounded head, subtly darker gray saddle, and the obvious white tertial crescent. This *canus* Mew Gull shows average head spotting for mid-February when this image was taken; in addition to the features listed above, it also shows an obvious white scapular crescent, which can sometimes help identify a candidate among a flock of Ring-billeds when more obvious parts of the bird are not visible. Note the variation in structure and head streaking between the two Ring-billed Gulls pictured. Top photo by Mark Szantyr; middle and bottom photos by Nick Bonomo.

Separating the subspecies of Mew Gull from one another is the more difficult endeavor. For this task I would highly recommend reading the special issue of Dutch Birding (February 2016) in which a lengthy paper by Adriaens & Gibbins addresses this problem. This special issue can be purchased without subscription; visit <https://www.dutchbirding.nl/> for details. Much of the following information on Mew Gull subspecies identification has been drawn from their impressive work. At the risk of oversimplifying the ID, we will summarize the features that characterize each form in the two plumages most likely to be observed in Connecticut: adult nonbreeding and first-cycle. Most of these field marks are variable and should be considered *average* for each form. Many individuals will need to be identified by a suite of characters rather than just one feature, though sometimes an adult bird's primary pattern alone is distinctive enough, as described by Adriaens & Gibbins in their paper. Keep in mind that intermediate or unidentifiable individuals may occur, particularly between the three Eurasian taxa. The North American *L. c. brachyrhynchus* is the most distinct form and should be readily identifiable with sufficient views and photos. As a rule, male gulls average larger and bulkier than females. Adults molting into breeding plumage lose their dark head/neck/breast markings, and their bare parts generally become brighter, sometimes significantly so. Now let's talk some basics about each subspecies.

L. c. canus

Size and structure – Slightly smaller and slimmer than Ring-billed Gull. Round head and thin bill.

Adult nonbreeding plumage – Averages palest gray above, often only subtly darker than in Ring-billed Gull. The iris is very dark. The bill color is dull greenish in winter and brightens to yellow in spring; there is often a thin dark ring in winter that fades as spring approaches. There is crisp streaking and spotting on the head, face, and neck. The inner primaries are narrowly tipped in white, resulting in a much thinner trail-

ing edge as compared to the adjacent secondaries. This form averages the least amount of black on p4-p5.

First-cycle plumage – Averages the most advanced mantle and scapular molt during first winter, with most birds showing an evenly gray saddle. The head is white with variable streaking to head, neck and flanks. The underparts are variably dark, but the lower belly and vent are white. The uppertail is generally white with a distinct distal black band. The underwing is variable from rather white to heavily marked, including the axillaries. The base of the bill is usually a dull fleshy color with gray tones.

L. c. heinei

Size and structure – Slightly larger than *canus* and averaging longer wings. The crown is flat and forehead is sloping. Stronger bill than in *canus*.

Adult nonbreeding plumage – Darker upperparts than in *canus*, on average. Iris color is variable from pale to dark. The bill is bright yellow throughout winter and is often with a thin ring. The head is very white, in contrast to other forms, but the hindneck is marked by thin streaks. The inner primaries are narrowly tipped in white, resulting in a much thinner trailing edge as compared to the adjacent secondaries. This form shows the greatest amount of black in the primaries.

First-cycle plumage – This is the palest-looking form at this age. The saddle is often a mixture of retained juvenile feathers and fresh pale-edged gray feathers. The head is largely white with thin streaking on the hindneck, similar to adult nonbreeding. The body and underwing are mostly white, and the axillary feathers are entirely white or tipped with dark. The mostly white uppertail with distal black band is like *canus* but averages even whiter. The base of the bill is brighter than in *canus*, often with yellow tones.

L. c. kamtschatschensis

Size and structure – The largest form; can exceed RBGU in size. Body often has a round “inflated” shape that contributes to a heavier look than the other subspecies. The forehead is long and sloping and leads into a thick bill.

Adult nonbreeding plumage – The darkest gray upperparts of any form, on average. Iris color is variable but usually pale. The bill is most often yellow and unmarked, even in midwinter. There are coarse, blotchy markings on the head, neck, and all the way across the breast. As with the other Eurasian forms, the inner primaries are narrowly tipped in white, resulting in a much thinner trailing edge as compared to the adjacent secondaries. The primary pattern in *kamtschatschensis* is more variable than in any other subspecies.

First-cycle plumage – This is the most coarsely-marked subspecies at this age. Many retained juvenile mantle and scapular feathers result in a mix of gray and brown on the saddle. Below, coarse markings are variable in extent and may include the entire belly through the vent into the undertail coverts. Uppertail pattern is intermediate, averaging more heavily marked than *canus/heinei* and less extensively dark than *brachyrhynchus*. The juvenile wing coverts have broad pale fringes that give this form a faded look to the folded wing, even on fresh birds. The underwing is rather dark, sometimes as much as in *brachyrhynchus*, but the pattern is less uniform and the axillaries are barred. The base of bill can be bright, sometimes with pink tones.

L. c. brachyrhynchus

Size and structure – The smallest form, with a small rounded head, steep forehead, long neck and small, thin bill.

Adult nonbreeding plumage – The gray upperparts lie in the middle of the Mew Gull spectrum, never as pale as the palest *canus* and never as dark as the darkest *kamtschatschensis* or *heinei*. Iris color averages paler than in *canus*, usually some shade of brown or amber. The bill is a dull greenish-yellow

in color, thinly ringed or not at all. There is a smooth, smoky brown wash on the head, neck and breast. The quality of these markings is as important to note as their extent; this is smudgy and much less coarse than what one would see on *kamtschatschensis*. Unlike the three Eurasian forms, the inner primaries are broadly tipped in white, resulting in a broad trailing edge throughout. While outer primary pattern is of course variable, many show extensive gray tongues with large white tongue tips; this is particularly notable on p8 because the base of p8 is often mostly black in the Eurasian subspecies.

First-cycle plumage – This is the darkest first-cycle Mew Gull. It is a smooth brown color overall. Even the incoming second generation gray scapulars often have a subtle brown tone to them. Again, note the quality of the body coloration, smooth versus coarse; the darkest *kamtschatschensis* can be very brown overall but are characterized by coarse markings. The underparts are brown all the way through the lower belly, vent, and undertail coverts. Those undertail coverts are more heavily marked in *brachyrhynchus* than in the Eurasian forms. The tail is evenly brown and unbanded, and the uppertail coverts are heavily marked with brown. Both on the ground and in flight, this is the most uniformly brown, lowest contrast Mew Gull at this age. The greater coverts can be subtly paler with a gray tone relative to the rest of the upperwing. The underwing is rather uniformly brown, and the axillaries are plain brown and unbarred. The base of the bill is usually a dull fleshy color.

Summary of 7 ARCC Reviewed Records

1/ Subspecies: unknown

Age: adult

Date: November 4-7, 1973

Location: Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (New Haven County)

Details: A multiple observer sight record of an adult, subspecies not determined. This bird is noted in *American Birds* (1974), in which it was described to have greenish legs and an unmarked bill. It was accepted by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut as referenced in their third published report (1989). This is the only autumn record of Mew Gull in Connecticut.

2/ Subspecies: *L. c. canus*

Age: adult

Date: March 20, 2009

Location: Bradley Point, West Haven (New Haven County)

Details: The first Mew Gull to be identified to subspecies in the state, this adult was a classic example of the nominate *canus* from Europe. Upperparts were subtly darker than surrounding RBGU. It showed slightly smaller size and more delicate structure, a thin greenish-yellow bill with weak dusky subterminal ring, and a very dark iris.



Figures 3 & 4. This bird was nearly molted into breeding plumage thus retained only a hint of dark spotting on the head. Its bill was becoming yellower and showed only a subtle dark ring. Note the mostly black p8 and how the trailing edge narrows at the inner primaries. Photos by Mark Szantyr.

3/ Subspecies: *L. c. canus*

Age: adult

Date: January 30-February 2, 2014 (and returning the following winter from January 3-21, 2015)

Location: Housatonic River, Southbury (New Haven County)

Details: The state's only inland record, this individual represented another fairly typical *canus*. It was associating with a large RBGU flock that was often seen bathing on the river and roosting in farm fields adjacent to the riverbank. This is the only Mew Gull to have remained at one location for more than a few days and the only to have shown site fidelity.



Figure 5. Note the dull greenish bill color on this midwinter individual. That thin, lightly marked bill in combination with the round head and striking tertial crescent are rather distinctive even from a distance. Eye color is best assessed when up close; this bird was noted in the field to have a blackish iris. Photo by Frank Mantlik.

4/ Subspecies: *L. c. kamtschatschensis*

Age: adult

Date: April 10-17, 2015

Locations: Southport Beach, Fairfield (Fairfield County) and Oyster River mouth, Milford/West Haven (New Haven County)

Details: Initially discovered at Southport Beach on April 10, relocated at Oyster River April 15-17. This marked the state's first record of the East Asian form *kamtschatschensis*. A large, dark-mantled bird the size and bulk of a Ring-billed

Gull or larger. Its bright yellow bare parts, the lack of a ring on the bill, coarse horizontal markings on the breast in addition to size and structure all helped identify this bird to *kamtschatschensis*. This individual's unique primary pattern, showing a tiny pinhole mirror on its left p9 only, allowed us to discover via photo analysis after the fact that the same bird had been seen earlier that winter on Nantucket, Massachusetts, and was apparently also present there during the winter prior.



Figures 6 & 7. This bird looks nothing like the *canus* Mew Gulls pictured above. It would be difficult to confuse this bird with those, or with Ring-billed Gull for that matter. For starters, its mantle shade was much closer to adult *graellsii* Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus graellsii*) than to Ring-billed Gull. Its length was comparable to adjacent Ring-billed Gulls, but it was even larger in bulk. The forehead is long and sloping, giving it a "snouty" look. It showed a dark shawl of coarse markings onto and across the breast, and its bright yellow bill was unmarked. The iris was rather dark, which does occur in *kamtschatschensis* but is in the minority for this form. Photos by Nick Bonomo.

5/ Subspecies: *L. c. canus*

Age: adult

Date: April 15, 2015

Location: Oyster River mouth, Milford/West Haven (New Haven County)

Details: This adult bird was seen and photographed on the same day the *kamtschatschensis* Mew Gull was relocated at this location, only a couple hours earlier; the two were not seen simultaneously. The photos are just good enough to piece together details of plumage and bare parts, particularly the wing pattern, to determine that this bird comfortably fits into *canus*. This location is a prime low tide roost for gulls that feed on surface plankton in Long Island Sound at this time of year, and this bird was presumably part of that party, as there was significant plankton feeding happening offshore on this day.

6/ Subspecies: *L. c. canus*

Age: adult

Date: March 20-23, 2016

Location: Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (New Haven County)

Details: Found minutes before the next Mew Gull on this list and present simultaneously in the same flock. It was found surface feeding on plankton off Meigs Point in a mixed flock of a few thousand gulls. A straightforward example of an adult *canus* (ARCC review in this issue), showing, among other things a thin greenish-yellow bill with subtle hint of a subterminal ring, a blackish iris, upperparts barely darker than surrounding RBGU, and a typical primary pattern for this form.



Figure 8. Another early spring *canus* that had lost most of its winter head markings and was sporting a brighter bill color than you often see during early-mid winter. The major differences from Ring-billed Gull can be seen by directly comparing the two birds in the image. This bird's beady black eye was especially obvious. As is typical for *canus*, its gray upperparts were only subtly darker than the surrounding Ring-billed Gulls and were not very useful in locating this bird in the field. Photo by John Oshlick.

7/ Subspecies: *L. c. brachyrhynchus*

Age: adult

Date: March 20-21, 2016

Location: Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (New Haven County)

Details: Found just minutes after the previous Mew Gull on this list; surface feeding on plankton with the masses. This constitutes the state's first record of *brachyrhynchus* (ARCC review in this issue). It did not associate at all with the *canus* that was also present, only crossing paths with one another once or twice by chance while drifting and feeding. The combination of features key to its separation from the Eurasian forms includes obviously darker upperparts than RBGU, amber-brown iris, smooth blotchy brown markings on neck and breast, broad white tips to inner primaries, and strong

“string of pearls” outer primary pattern including p8 with long gray tongue and large white tongue-tip.



Figures 9 & 10. On the water this bird had a distinctive small-headed and long-necked look. Its upperpart shade of gray, obviously darker than Herring and Ring-billed yet certainly lighter than Lesser Black-backed, is unmatched by any of our local gull species. The quality of the breast markings were key to note – smooth and smoky instead of coarse. While the bird’s iris was a pale amber-brown, this was surprisingly difficult to ascertain from a distance; the eye looked deceptively dark when it was not close. Lucky for those birders present, the bird was at close range for most of the day and was studied in detail for hours. As if there was any doubt regarding this individual’s identification on the water, its striking primary pattern in flight sealed the deal as *brachyrhynchus*. Photos by Nick Bonomo.

Searching for Mew Gulls

If the rash of recent records is any indication, Mew Gull is perhaps more regular in Connecticut than previously thought, and any subspecies is fair game. If you are interested in finding a Mew Gull, a clear pattern of occurrence has emerged over these past eight years. Five of the six recent records have occurred along the coast during early spring among flocks that were noted to be actively feeding on plankton in Long Island Sound. All of these were adults. To increase your likelihood of seeing a Mew Gull based on current patterns, search through coastal Ring-billed Gull concentrations between Westport and Madison, where plankton feeding seems to occur most often, from March through mid-April. Amazingly, three of the six recent birds were found on the date of March 20th along that stretch of coast. That being said, I would recommend searching through Ring-billed Gull flocks at *any* time of year, coastal or inland, as Mew Gull has proven that it may appear anytime from fall through spring in our region.

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TWENTY-SECOND REPORT OF THE AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE OF CONNECTICUT

By Jay Kaplan and Greg Hanisek

This is the Twenty-second Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC). The Connecticut Ornithological Association (COA) checklist for Connecticut Birds has been updated and is now in print form as well as available on the COA web site. The Connecticut review list has also been updated and Swainson's Hawk has been returned to the list as this species is no longer appearing in the state on an annual basis. There is a COA archive on eBird and we continue to update the Connecticut State List on this popular site. Should COA members find errors on eBird, please bring them to the committee's attention by contacting either the chairman or the ARCC secretary, whose addresses are at the end of this article.

In the last report (see the Twenty-first Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut, Vol. 35 No. 2), Zone-tailed Hawk was added to the state list. This year, California Gull was added after one was found at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, and Sprague's Pipit was added after an individual was discovered at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport. The Connecticut State List now stands at 439 with these additions. The committee also reviews unusual subspecies and forms. In 2016, the Short-billed subspecies of Mew Gull was accepted from the report of an individual found at Hammonasset Beach State Park. This is Connecticut's first record for this North American form. The committee also accepted older reports of Vega (Herring) Gull and Eurasian Whimbrel, also first subspecies records.

The committee also deliberated on other subspecies including Black Brant and a western form of White-crowned Sparrow, the latter unresolved. The improvements in digital photography allow for the documentation of characteristics that were previously more difficult to assess. Going forward,

the committee will consider which subspecies and forms are reviewable.

This year, the committee voted on 41 records, exceeding 40 records for a second consecutive year. Technological advances as well as the growing popularity of field birding have contributed many important additions to Connecticut's ornithological record. ARCC appreciates the willingness of the birding community to share their unusual sightings. In addition to the previously mentioned state firsts, other records of note included the state's second record for Bell's Vireo, third records for Black Guillemot and Say's Phoebe, and a fourth for Western Grebe.

The Connecticut review list has also been updated, and Swainson's Hawk has been returned to the list as this species is no longer appearing in the state on an annual basis. There was significant discussion concerning Bicknell's Thrush. Identification is very difficult and there is scant documentation for this species, but how should it be reviewed? The committee would welcome audiograms and/or recordings, and photographs are needed. The committee agreed to add Bicknell's Thrush to the review list, with the addendum that we are specifically looking for photos and recordings, not sight records. Banding reports are also encouraged.

One of the difficulties in assessing records is the potential for hybrid individuals. One of the Ross's Goose reports included photographs of a bird that showed features of both Ross's and Snow Goose. The committee has not accepted the bird as a Ross's Goose at this time. The photos will be sent out to goose experts for their opinions.

The committee continues to evaluate review species. Just this year, four reports were received for Ross's Goose, three of which were accepted. Previously, there were but three accepted records for this small goose. Four accepted records for Pink-footed Goose nearly doubled the previous record total (5) for this increasing species. If these trends continue, it may be that these geese, and perhaps other species, will be

removed from the review list.

The committee continues to study early records such as a 1965 accepted record for Mew Gull. Questions have arisen as to the identity of the original reporter of this bird. These questions require more careful study to determine if the record can stand. It should be noted that committee actions are never final. New information can always be brought forth in order to reopen previous records, whether they have been accepted or not.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Members, in addition to the authors, who voted on records in this report were Nick Bonomo, Robert Dixon, Frank Gallo, Tina Green, Julian Hough, Frank Mantlik, Jacob Musser, Dave Provencher, Phil Rusch, Dave Tripp and Glenn Williams.

STATE LIST AND REVIEW LIST

The state list now stands at 439 species with the addition of California Gull and Sprague's Pipit. The committee depends on observers to submit their reports of species on the Review List (they are species marked with an asterisk on the COA Checklist plus any species new to the state). The most recent State List and Review List can be viewed on the COA Website at www.ctbirding.org. Submit written reports along with documentary material to Jay Kaplan, ARCC chairman (address below).

FORMAT

This report continues the format of previous reports. In the case of accepted records, only observers who submitted reports are listed, with the original finder listed first followed by an asterisk. Photo are acknowledged with †. Hyphenated numbers (e.g. 02-01) preceding the observers are the ARCC file numbers. For reopened files, an "R" follows the numbers. The species are listed in order according to the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Checklist. Multiple records of

a particular species are listed chronologically. Months of the year are shortened to their first three letters.

ACCEPTED RECORDS

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) Single birds were present 11-16 Dec 2016 at Grass Island Nature Area in Greenwich (16-18 Stefan Martin*† Sean Murtha, Ryan Maclean et al.); at Fairfield County Hunt Club in Westport 5 Jan 2017 (17-03 Jory Teltser*† et al.); at Barnes Boat Launch and nearby areas in Enfield and Suffield 15 Jan-15 Mar 2017 (17-02 Bill Asteriades*† m.ob.); at Southport Beach in Fairfield 11-13 Mar 2017 (17-13 Aidan Kiley*†, Jory Teltser* Frank Gallo† et al.). There are five previous records.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) An adult remained at Seaside Park in Bridgeport from 19 Mar to 10 Apr 2016 (16-24 Stefan Martin*, Greg Hanisek†, m.ob.); an immature was present 13-15 Dec 2016 at Squantz Pond in New Fairfield (16-24 Bill Gemmell*, Angela Dimmitt*†); an adult found at the Hunt Club of Fairfield County, Westport, was present 15-28 Jan 2017, often seen on a small pond near the original location where it usually spent the night (Jory Teltser*†, m.ob.). There are three previous records.

BLACK BRANT (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) This well-marked subspecies of western distribution was found on 5 Feb 2017 at Eastern Point, Groton. (17-06 Nick Bonomo*† et al.). This is the third state record (and first immature), all found by the same observer.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*) A female settled in at Captain's Cove Marina in Bridgeport 18 Jan-11 Feb 2017 (17-08 Dylan Jackson*, Greg Hanisek, Frank Mantlik, Mike Warner†, m.ob.). A female was at the same location 22 Feb-19 Mar 2015.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) One was found on 28 Dec 2016 at Ender's Island in Mystic. It remained until 2 Jan 2017 (16-31 Russ Smiley*†, Frank Mantlik*†, Robert Dixon, m.ob.). This is the sixth state record.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) A bird found 16 Jan 2017 at Stratford Point in Stratford was last seen there on 21 Jan. What was believed to be the same individual, based on photo comparison and lack of date overlap, was found at Fort Nathan Hale in New Haven on 25 Jan 2017 and remained to at least 11 Apr 2017 (17-05 Patrick Comins*‡, Nick Bonomo‡, m.ob.); one was found on 21 Feb 2017 in Stonington Harbor, where it was present to at least 29 Mar 2017 (17-10 Robert Dewire*, Glenn Williams*‡ et al.). Photos showed a head pattern different from the Stratford/New Haven bird.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) One was found 27 Mar 2016 at Cornfield Point in Old Saybrook and then was relocated on 2 Apr 2016 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (16-12 Russ Smiley*‡, Tina Green, Dan Rottino‡, m.ob.).

FRIGATEBIRD SP. (*Fregata sp.*) An adult soaring over the Connecticut River in Middletown on 29 Sep 2016 no doubt startled the observer, who nonetheless took field notes that included a sketch of the bird and a map of the area where it was seen (16-20 B. Lynn Hollinger*). Of interest were reports of a Magnificent Frigatebird on 11 Oct 2016 on the Maine and New Hampshire birding listservs. Magnificent Frigatebird is the only species breeding in North America, but because the



Dan Rottino photo
This Western Grebe, first found off Old Saybrook, was relocated 2 April 2016 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

sighting was brief, the committee took a conservative approach on the species involved. Other species of frigatebirds have shown long distance vagrancy into the North Atlantic; Ascension Island Frigatebird has reached Scotland twice (moribund 1953 and 2013). In the US, Lesser Frigatebird has been recorded in Maine (1960), Wyoming (2003), Michigan (2005) and California (2007). Great Frigatebird has been recorded in California (1979 and 1992) and adult males are essentially identical to male Magnificents.

WHITE IBIS (*Eudicimus albus*) A single adult offered a brief but diagnostic look to two observers on 23 Jul 2016 at Ash Creek, Fairfield (16-32 Dave Zawisha*, Joel Hintz*).

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) One was found on 22 Apr 2016 at Plum Bank Marsh in Old Saybrook. Subsequent reports came from Clinton on 23 Apr to 2 May; from Ingham Hill Pond in Old Saybrook on 26-27 Jun; and from Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison on Jul 3 (16-14 Chris Elphick*, Frank Mantlik‡, Tim Antanaitis‡ m.ob.).

EURASIAN WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus sp.*) An individual of this white-rumped Old World form was seen briefly but well on 21 Sep 2003 at Griswold Point in Old Lyme (17-12 Dave Provencher*, Roy Harvey, Dori Sosensky). North American authorities consider the North American form (*N. p. hudsonicus*) to be conspecific with the well-marked and distinctive Eurasian birds, which comprise three subspecies. Because of its white rump, the Griswold Point bird easily falls into the Eurasian grouping, but subtle subspecific differences among the Eurasian birds could not be ascertained. It is the first state record for this form.

RUFF (*Calidris pugnax*) A black-and-gray adult male was at Wheeler Marsh, Milford, on 2-7 May 2016 (16-15 Tina Green*‡, Frank Mantlik‡ et al.). A black-and-white adult male was at Sandy Point, West Haven, on 14 May 2016 (16-16 Anthony Amato*, Julian Hough‡, Steve Broker et al.). A bird in basic plumage was at the Greenway in Stratford 1-8 Jul 2016 (16-17 Stefan Martin*, Frank Mantlik‡ et al.). Determining the sex of the latter bird is complicated by the relatively



Jory Teltser photo

These three Common Murres were logged on a ferry trip that was part of the New London Christmas Bird Count on 31 December 2016.

recent discovery that some males, known as faeders, mimic the size and plumage of females. Three Ruffs within a two-month period were unprecedented for Connecticut.

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) A group of three was observed from a New London, CT-Orient, NY, ferry on 31 Dec 2016 as part of the New London Christmas Bird Count (16-33 Frank Mantlik*†, Jory Teltser† et al.). Two were observed from a New London, CT-Orient, NY, ferry on 16 Jan 2017 (17-07 Frank Mantlik*† et al.). In both cases the birds' presence in CT waters was verified by GPS on cell phones.

BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus grylle*) The state's third was found on 26 Jan 2017 at Stonington Point, Stonington (17-01 John Oshlick *). It was noted that while Connecticut has few records, it is fairly regular in winter in nearby Rhode Island waters.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) A first-winter bird was seen from a boat about two miles off Shippan Point, Stamford, on 18 Dec 2016 on the Greenwich-Stamford Christmas Bird Count (16-30 Al Collins*† Patrick Dugan*†). It represented a first record for that CBC.

MEW (COMMON) GULL (*Larus canus canus*) An adult of the European subspecies was found in a surface-feeding flock on 20-23 Mar 2016 off Meigs Point at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (16-09 Nick Bonomo*† m.ob.). This is the

fourth state record for this subspecies.

MEW (SHORT-BILLED) GULL (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) An adult of the North American subspecies was found on 20-21 Mar 2016 shortly after discovery of the "Common Gull" in the same flock at Hammonasset (16-10 Nick Bonomo*† et al.). This is a first state record for this subspecies of the Pacific Northwest. A recent paper (Adriaens and Gibbins 2016) suggests that this West Coast form may be a potential future split and thus will become the first state species record. (See an article elsewhere in this issue on identification of Mew Gull subspecies and their status in the state).

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) This much-anticipated first state record, a first-cycle bird, was found on 21-23 Mar 2016 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison during a search for the two forms of Mew Gull found there the day before (16-11 Stefan Martin*†, Phil Rusch, Nick Bonomo†, Robert Dixon† m.ob.). It was relocated on 24 Mar 2016 about 20 miles west at a boat launch in West Haven, where it remained to at least 16 April 2016. Apparently the same bird was re-discovered in the same West Haven area on 29 Sep 2016, staying to at least 4 Oct. Its advance into second-cycle plumage corresponded with the expected molt of the bird found in March. (See additional information about the initial discovery in the Photo Challenge in this issue).

VEGA GULL (*Larus argentatus vegae*) This Asiatic subspecies of Herring Gull was observed and photographed in North Haven in November 1995, when distribution and identification of gulls from this part of the world was poorly understood. In the last decade, the ability of gulls from this region, such as Slaty-backed (*Larus schistisagus*) and Kamchatka Gulls (*Larus canus kamtschatschensis* - the Siberian race of Mew Gull), to reach the eastern U.S. has been well established. As a result, efforts to identify Vega Gulls have gained traction. In the east, there have been documented reports of this subspecies in Florida (2009) and Pennsylvania (2012) as well as Europe's potential first record in Ireland (2016). Although they show some distinctive plumage traits, some authors regard Vega Gull as a separate species, while others

treat them as a subspecies of Herring Gull. Relying on recent literature and expert opinions, the observer used his photos and sketches to illustrate a suite of features (wing tip and underwing patterns, eye and mantle color, head and bill shape and head and body markings) consistent with this subspecies (16-05 Julian Hough*†). It is a first Connecticut record for the subspecies and likely represents the first documented record for eastern North America.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) One was found on 18 Sep 2016 at Forth Nathan Hale in New Haven (16-23 Greg Hanisek*, Jannie Shapiro†, Maggie Peretto†, et al.). It was not relocated immediately, but one that made a brief appearance at nearby Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven on 24 Oct 2016 may have been the same individual (Sol Satin et al.).

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW (*Caprimulgis carolinensis*) One was heard singing repeatedly just before dawn on 23 May 1995 in the backyard of a house in Norwalk (17-09 Frank Mantlik*, Connie Wood). It was not heard or seen after that.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) One was found on 18 Sep 2016 at Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton, where it was seen and photographed by many through at least 21 Sep 2016 (16-22 Jeremy Nance*, Brenda Inskeep*, Mike Carpenter†, m.ob.). This is a third state record but the first one available for many to see. The other two are a specimen from Gaylordsville in 1916 and one seen by a single observer on private property in Shelton in 2012.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) One found at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison fit the classic timing pattern for this western rarity, offering many observers opportunities to see and photograph it 4-10 Dec 2016 (16-27 Tim Antanaitis†, Julian Hough†, m.ob.).

BELL'S VIREO (*Vireo belli*) This nondescript species, Connecticut's second, was described in meticulous detail by a lone observer who found it on 13 Nov 2016 at Glastonbury Meadows (16-13 Andrew Dasinger*).



Mark Danforth photo
This first-spring male Black-headed Grosbeak, shown here on 30 April 2016, paid a two-day visit to a Berlin feeder.



Frank Mantlik photo
Connecticut's third Say's Phoebe shows off on 18 September 2016 at Trout Brook Valley in Easton.



Julian Hough photo
Connecticut's first Sprague's Pipit turned 23 October 2016 into an exciting day at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport.



Mark Szantyr photo
Western Tanagers, like this one at an Eastford feeder on 20 December 2016, always cut an impressive figure.



Julian Hough photo
This Ash-throated Flycatcher provided ample viewing opportunities 4-10 December 2016 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) Two young brothers added a species to the state list when they found this cryptic and secretive pipit of the prairies on 23 Oct 2016 at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport, where it was seen and photographed by numerous observers during its one-day stay (16-26 Preston Lust*‡, Terry Lust*, Frank Gallo‡, Greg Hanisek, Frank Mantlik‡ m.ob.).

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*) An adult male visited a feeder in Eastford 17-27 Dec 2016 (16-28 Joe Beau-doin*‡, Mark Szantyr‡, Chris Elphick).

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) A first-spring male was a distinguished feeder visitor 29-30 April in Berlin (16-19 Brett Myskowski*‡, Mark Danforth‡ et al.). This is a fourth state record.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) A dark raptor identified as this species was reported on 10 Jan 2015 over Long Island

Sound off of Stamford (15-04). The observer presented as much detail as possible given about a three-minute view. The committee considered the short duration of the observation and less than ideal lighting conditions as factors in its decision. This species has proven difficult to document without extended viewing opportunities or quality photos.

THAYER'S GULL (*Larus thayeri*) A first-cycle gull photographed on 1 Feb 2016 at Holly Pond in Stamford exhibited a series of characters consistent with this species (16-08). However, the status of the bird's molt, appearing to be out of synch with the Thayer's molt cycle, prompted consultation with outside experts. One from the West Coast and another from the Great Lakes Region independently responded that the bird was not in their opinions a Thayer's Gull. There was no consensus on what the gull was.

SLATY-BACKED GULL (*Larus schistisagus*) A bird at the Windsor-Bloomfield landfill on 23 Feb 2013 was photographed after birders considered that it might be a first-cycle Slaty-backed Gull, an age class for which solid consensus on identification criteria was lacking. The issue was essentially tabled until an identification article in *Birding, November/December 2014*, used these photos as an example of a legitimate first-cycle Slaty-backed. ARCC then undertook a review of this bird that included a study of the photos, search of literature, correspondence with the article's authors and consultation with outside experts. After more than two years of study that covered every aspect of the bird's appearance, committee members concluded that uncertainty remained. Most believed that the bird could be a Slaty-backed or possessed Slaty-backed genes, but that a positive identification remained elusive. As is the case with all unaccepted records, this one can be reopened at any time that new information becomes available.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee thanks Alvaro Jaramillo and Amar Ayash for comments on the Thayer's Gull photos and on some of

the other gulls. Osao and Michiaki Ujihara of Japan, internationally acknowledged experts on Slaty-backed Gull, led the outside commentary on that species. Commenting on the Vega Gull were Chris Gibbins, Peter Adriaens and Jon King. Jory Teltser created a photo array that allowed easy comparison of the individual Pink-footed Geese based mainly on bill patterns.

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CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

Fall season, Aug. 1 through Nov 30, 2016

In a season with no extraordinary weather events, highlights included the state's first Sprague's Pipit, the first cooperative Say's Phoebe, an unusually early and very localized appearance by Red Crossbills and the makings of a legitimate Evening Grosbeak flight. In the otherworldly category was a report of a frigatebird over the Connecticut River.

Rarer geese began to appear at the beginning of October, including a **Cackling Goose** Oct. 3 at Mackenzie Reservoir in Wallingford (NB) and a **Greater White-fronted Goose** Oct. 4 at Broad Brook Pond in East Windsor (PDe). Of special interest was an apparent **Barnacle Goose X Canada Goose** hybrid Oct. 7-13 at Mackenzie (NB). The first **Eurasian Wigeon** of the season was found on Oct. 10 at Mondo Ponds in Milford (LB). Typical early-fall appearances by dabbling ducks included a Green-winged Teal on Aug. 14 at Burying Hill Beach in Westport (TG). A female **King Eider**, photographed Nov. 14 at Hammonasset Beach Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP), appears to have wandered westward (MK). An identical

bird turned up at Long Beach in Stratford on Nov. 18 and was seen until at least Nov. 26 (NB et al.). The season's only **Harlequin Duck**, an adult male, was in the Mystic River Nov. 12-13 (RN, AH et al.). A lingering Bufflehead was found on the Farm River in East Haven on Aug. 21 (CL). An outstanding Oct. 29 aggregation of 350 Ruddy Ducks at Andover L. in Andover grew to 500 by Nov. 6 (RD, MC).

A Pied-billed Grebe made an early appearance Aug. 10 at Scovill Reservoir in Wolcott, a place where breeding would not be expected (APl). The season's most startling event was a report of a **Magnificent Frigatebird** soaring over Middletown on Sept. 29 (LH). A Northern Gan-

net was first noted Oct. 17 at Stratford Point (FM), and the first Great Cormorant was photographed Sept. 15 in Niantic (KW). An unusually large inland roost of Double-crested Cormorants formed in pines at Aspetuck Reservoir in Easton, where 59 were counted on Aug. 23 (FM). An **American White Pelican**, which flew over the Connecticut River in Hartford on Oct. 7 (AS et al.), apparently stayed in the area based on another sighting Oct. 10 at Riverside Park in Hartford (PCi et al.).

Migrant American Bitterns were noted Sept. 11 at Broad Brook Pond in East Windsor (PDe) and as pre-dawn flyovers Sept. 15 in Sterling (RD) and Westport (PL). A major flight of 50 Great Blue Herons passed Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven Sept. 24 on moderate north winds (SMa et al.). Barn Island Wildlife Management Area in Stonington held an impressive 62 Great Egrets on Oct. 10 (RN). Three Cattle Egrets made a brief appearance Aug. 29 in Madison (MSz). More typical of this species' sparse appearances in recent years were singles Nov. 6 at Lighthouse Point

(FG et al.) and Nov. 18 at Savin Lake in Lebanon (APe, MPr et al.). Two immature Black-crowned Night-Herons were far up the Connecticut River Sept. 4 at Windsor Locks State Park in Suffield (PDe). A Glossy Ibis was a good inland find on Aug. 2 at Windham Airport in North Windham (PR). Another inland ibis was at the opposite end of the state Aug. 28 at Tyler Lake in Goshen (DK), and one found at Cemetery Pond in Litchfield on Sept. 27 remained through at least Oct. 12 (MDo, JMa et al.), an unprecedented length of stay for an inland location.

The pair of **Mississippi Kites** that nested at an undisclosed location in Simsbury were last seen on Sept. 20 (fide JK). A count of 36 Bald Eagles on Sept. 25 was a record day's total at Lighthouse Point (SMa et al.). Although a few juvenile Broad-winged Hawks appear annually in early November at coastal hawk watches, one on Nov. 25 at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich was unusually late (RM). One of the state's best places for **Common Gallinule**, Little Pond in Litchfield, held one Oct. 2-4 (MDo et al.). An-



Mark Szantyr photo

This is one of two Sandhill Cranes, shown here on Aug. 16 in Norfolk, that wandered around Norfolk and Colebrook through most of the fall season.

other turned up at Branford Supply Ponds on Oct. 31 and remained through at least Nov. 18 (DCi m. ob.). Two **Sandhill Cranes** were conspicuous from Aug. 3 to Oct. 8 in the Benedict Pond/ Aton Forest area of Norfolk and neighboring Colebrook (GH, m.ob). Nesting has been suspected but not proven in that general area for several years. The species' remarkable increase remained evident this season, with at least 12 different sightings involving a total of 47 individuals. The high was a flock of 14 over the Lighthouse Point hawk watch on Nov. 23 (HS

et al.).

The drawn down pond at Fisher Meadow in Avon held the following array of shorebirds on Aug. 1: one Semipalmated Plover, one Pectoral Sandpiper, four Semipalmated Sandpipers, 31 Least Sandpipers and one Lesser Yellowlegs (PCi). A small marsh near the Stratford Greenway held 100 Semipalmated Plovers and 1500 Semipalmated Sandpipers on Aug. 6 (SB). On the same day Stratford Marina held 70 Short-billed Dowitchers and 75 Greater/Lesser Yellowlegs (SB). Few shorebird opportunities present them-

selves in Meriden, but with Hanover Pond drawn down, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Sept. 16 and eight Pectoral Sandpipers on Sept. 19 zeroed in on the temporary habitat (CFo). A good late migration total of nine shorebird species were at Milford Point on Oct. 19, including an American Golden-Plover, a Red Knot and three White-rumped Sandpipers (FM).

The first two American Golden-Plovers were at Milford Point on Sept. 1 (FM et al); the latest was Oct. 29 at HBSP (RS). Two Semipalmated Plovers found on the late date of Nov. 23 at Greenwich Point gave new meaning to the word tardiness when they stayed all winter (ND, m.ob.) A startling flock of 17 Hudsonian Godwits flew by a Big Sit team on rainy Oct. 9 at Milford Point (FG et al.). Although this is a scarce species, there are two other records of flocks of this magnitude during fall migration. Single Marbled Godwits, possibly one individual, were at Sandy Point Aug. 7 (MSt) and Aug. 14 (MC). An Upland Sandpiper made a quick stop at Windham Airport in North Windham on Aug. 2 (PR), and another migrant

visited Rocky Hill Meadows on Aug. 28 (PW). A mere five Red Knots on Sept. 16 at Milford Point represented the season's high count (FM). A major fallout of Stilt Sandpipers on Aug 10 brought 15 to the Stratford Greenway (FM) and three to Shell Beach marsh in Guilford (SSa). The only inland report came from Fisher Meadow on Aug. 25 (JMe). First reports of the always scarce Western Sandpiper came from HBSP (TA) and Stratford Point (PCo), both on Aug. 26. The first Baird's Sandpiper appeared Aug. 16 at Sherwood Island mill pond in Westport (TG). The high count was three Aug. 19-20 at Rocky Hill Meadows (JR et al.), and the last two were seen Sept. 15 at Sandy Point (MA) and Milford Point (SSp).

The first Buff-breasted Sandpiper was found Aug. 17 at Sandy Point (JR), with a high of two at HBSP on several dates in early September (JCa et al.). The latest two Pectoral Sandpipers lingered to Nov. 14 at HBSP (MK). The first report of the typically scarce Long-billed Dowitcher came from Sandy Point on Aug. 23 (JHo). Others involved a single Oct. 27- Nov. 4 at



Paul Fusco photo
Never an easy bird to find in Connecticut, this Western Sandpiper proved very cooperative on Oct. 26 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

Johnson's Creek, Bridgeport (FM, TG et al.) and two Nov. 23-Dec. 11 at Shell Beach in Guilford (PW et al.). A **Wilson's Phalarope**, the most regular of the three species, appeared at Shell Beach in Guilford on Aug. 25-29 (SSa et al.). A **Red-necked Phalarope** was a nice find Aug. 23 at Fisher Meadow in Avon (IS, BN). A **Red Phalarope** was reported from Batterson Pond in Farmington on Oct. 18 (DL). Solitary Sandpipers stretched their seasonal limits with three on Oct. 17 at Aspetuck Reservoir in Easton (JN), one on Oct. 25 at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby (GH) and a very late one on Nov. 1 at a small pond in Winchester, a report

accompanied by excellent details in eBird (DRo).

A **Parasitic Jaeger**, rare but seasonally expected, passed Shippan Point, Stamford, on Sept. 27 (PDu). Another was off Stratford Point Oct. 21 (FM), perhaps a bit late but our knowledge of jaeger movements in Long Island Sound is rudimentary. That made a third one off HBSP on Nov. 13 even more unexpected (TG, GH et al.). The season's only **Black-headed Gull** was found in Mystic on Nov. 13 (TC). A second-cycle **California Gull**, apparently the first-state record bird found in spring 2016, made a return appearance at Sandy Point in West Haven Sept.

29-Oct. 4 (NB, ST, PP). This is the area where it was last seen in mid-April. An early Glaucous Gull, seen on Nov. 17 at Lighthouse Point, signaled what turned out to be a good winter arrival of this sought-after species (SMA, AK). The season's tern highlight was a **Gull-billed Tern** on Sept. 4 at Stratford Point (TG). A good August movement of Black Terns included a high of nine on Aug. 22 at Shippan Point in Stamford (PDu). Dispersing juvenile Forster's Terns began appearing in early August, with three at Sandy Point (JOs) and one at Stratford Point

(GH et al.) on Aug. 8 and one at Short Beach, Stratford, on Aug. 9 (FM). Fifty were off Meigs Point at HBSP on Sept. 5 (JCo), and Lord's Cove in Lyme, a traditional staging spot, held 27 on Sept. 20 (HG). A few Royal Tern reports were dwarfed by 12 off Sachus Head, Guilford, on Oct. 29 (SSa). Among scattered reports of single Black Skimmers on the western shoreline from Aug. 31 to Sept. 17 (TP et al) were an unexpected six at Shippan Point in Stamford on Sept. 9 (PDu).

A **White-winged Dove** co-



Maggie Peretto photo
The White-winged Dove was a surprise find on Sept. 18 at Fort Nathan Hale in New Haven.

operated for a birding group Sept. 18 at Fort Nathan Hale in New Haven (GH et al.). It was not immediately relocated, but one that appeared briefly at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven on Oct. 24 might have been the same individual (SSa et al.). The latest report of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo was Nov. 1 at Ocean Beach Park in New London (CC). The latest of about six October Black-billed Cuckoos was found Oct. 20 in Mystic (GW). A late Ruby-throated Hummingbird visited a feeder in Shelton at least through Oct. 28 (CFa, FM). A **Selasphorus hummingbird** appeared at Roaring Brook Nature Center in Guilford on Oct. 18 and remained deep into winter (KK et al.). It was believed to be an adult female Rufous Hummingbird (fide MSz). A Whip-poor-will on Sept. 7 at Sherwood Island, a non-breeding location, offered a window on this species' southbound migration schedule (TG). The first southbound Common Nighthawk was reported Aug. 14 in Bloomfield (JHa). There were five triple-digit reports, with a high of 310 on Aug. 29 at Quaker Ridge in Green-

wich (BI). There were numerous double-digit reports Aug. 17-Sept. 6, with the latest a single bird on Oct. 17 at Silver Sands State Park in Milford (SSp).

The first of about a dozen Olive-sided Flycatcher reports was in Litchfield on Aug. 15 (RB). The first Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were reported Aug. 27 at Bluff Point (GW) and Stratford Point (SK), with a final report Sept. 18 from Trout Brook Valley in Easton (AB, MDa et al.). A four-day stay by a **Say's Phoebe** brought many observers to Trout Brook Valley Sept. 18-21 with a chance to add to their state lists (JN, BI, m.ob.). The only other modern record proved inaccessible on private property (October 2012). The only Northern Shrike report came from Canaan on Nov. 6 (NB). A late White-eyed Vireo found Oct. 29 in Southbury (NB) was eclipsed by one on the record late date of Nov. 24 at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby (TM). A Blue-headed Vireo, typically the latest staying of the genus, was still overdue on Nov. 27 at HBSP (T&FH). A late Red-eyed Vireo was at Mondo Ponds, Milford,

on Oct. 29 (TD). A single Horned Lark, if a migrant, was early Sept. 29 at Sandy Point (NB).

The start of a weak flight of **Cave Swallows** included one at HBSP on Oct. 26 (TM) and two in Clinton Westbrook on Oct. 31 (MK). The high count was up to four on Nov. 12 at Lighthouse Point (SMa et al.). The only other location, Sherwood Island, had one on Nov. 13 (TG). The final report was of one Nov. 20 at Lighthouse Point (MDa). After a flurry of summer records in non-breeding areas signaled a movement, single Red-breasted Nuthatches were noted on Aug. 3 in Westport (TG) and Windsor Locks (PDe) and Aug. 7 at Bluff Point State Park in Groton (PR, GW). The pace picked up thereafter, illustrated by 16 at Sherwood Island on Sept. 6 (TG) and 17 at Bluff Point on Sept. 12 (CE). The latest House Wren report was Nov. 11 at Kellogg (BB). Bluff Point's flight of Aug. 23 produced 38 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (GW). An early-rising observer who usually starts monitoring nocturnal flight calls from his Sterling yard on Aug. 20 heard his first thrushes

this fall, three Veerys and a Wood Thrush, on Aug. 9 (RD). The first Gray-cheeked Thrush was detected there Sept. 15 (RD). At least one Bicknell's Thrush was recorded Oct. 5 in Westport using automated flight call monitoring (PL). Perhaps the top find of the season was a **Sprague's Pipit** discovered Oct. 23 at Sherwood Island, Westport (PL, TL). It was seen and well-photographed by many that day. If accepted it would be a first confirmed state record.

A first visit of the season to Bluff Point following an Aug 6-7 front produced more than 100 warblers of seven species with the best being an adult Hooded Warbler. Two Worm-eating Warblers were noteworthy, and the most common migrant was American Redstart (c. 50) as expected (PR, GW). On Aug. 23 the flight produced c. 300 warblers of 10 species, 200 of them American Redstarts, but also two Hooded Warblers (GW). A nocturnal flight call recording project in Westport logged 10 species of warblers, included 34 American Redstarts and 21 Common Yellowthroats, on Aug. 29 (PL). On Sept. 2,

Bluff Point logged c. 500 warblers, including 115 American Redstarts and multiple Magnolia and Black-throated Blue Warblers (CE, NB et al.). Bluff reported c. 450 warblers of 11 species on Sept. 12 (CE), 300 warblers of 13 species on Sept. 15 (CE), and 500 warblers of 11 species on Sept. 25, when American Redstarts were still the most numerous, but Blackpoll Warblers moved into second place and Yellow-rumped Warblers were beginning to show (GW).

A Brewster's Warbler was found at Trout Brook Valley in Easton on Aug. 29 (CP). The first Orange-crowned Warbler was a bit early on Sept. 24 in Woodbridge (CL, MV). Historically this species was not reliably reported before October, but arrival dates have become somewhat earlier recently. There were three other September reports this fall (NB, PDU, AC). Four Cape May Warblers on Sept. 22 in Barkhamsted and Hartland proved a good haul for this often-scarce species (DRo). Even a single Connecticut Warbler can be difficult to locate during a full fall season, so three fairly cooperative ones on

Sept. 22 at Wangunk Meadows in Portland were a real treat for the observer (LN). In a good season overall for the species, two were at Woodbridge Community Garden on Sept. 26 (ES et al.). Yellow-breasted Chats were reported from 10 locations, a very good showing (m.ob.).

A series of late warbler records included a Magnolia Warbler (a veteran observer's latest by five days) on Oct. 17 at East Shore Park in New Haven (PDe); a Prairie Warbler on Oct. 18 at Stratford Point (FM); on Oct. 31, both an American Redstart at Cove Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Stamford (SMr) and a Blackburnian Warbler at Silver Sands (JOs); a Blackpoll Warbler Nov. 19 at Quinebaug Fish Hatchery in Plainfield (RS); two Nashville Warblers Nov. 19 at Silver Sands (JOs) and singles Nov. 12-27 at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford (RS et al.) and Nov. 17 East Shore Park (JOs); a Tennessee Warbler Nov. 19 in Cheshire (CU); and Black-throated Green Warblers Nov. 25 at Kellogg (PDn) and Nov. 27-28 at Sherwood Island (JJ).

Grasshopper Sparrow, a



Brian Kulvete photo
The season's only Lark Sparrow, shown here on Nov. 9, was at times surprisingly easy to find in a big assemblage of sparrows at Community Farm in Simsbury.

sparse fall migrant, produced just three records of singles – Sept. 27-28 at Stratford Point (MW, TM); Oct. 8 at Lot W in Storrs (CE); and Oct. 12-15 at Silver Sands (TM et al.). The first report of the increasing **Clay-colored Sparrow** was Sept. 18 at Trout Brook Valley (SK). The species was reported from at least 11 different locations, including one found Nov. 14 at Quinebaug Fish Hatchery in Plainfield that stayed deep into winter (RD, LD). A **Lark Sparrow** found on Nov. 5 at Community Farm in Simsbury was seen through at least Nov. 19 (LS m.ob.). The first "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow

was at Milford Point on Oct. 19 (FM). A Lincoln's Sparrow was a bit early Sept. 3 on the Norwalk Islands (BM). A white-lored White-crowned Sparrow, of western origin, was at Storrs Oct. 1-2 (CE). Another was at Silver Sands on Oct. 18 (JOs). A late Rose-breasted Grosbeak appeared in Lyme on Nov. 28 (JG).

Single **Blue Grosbeaks** were at Cove Island Park in Stamford on Aug. 15 (PDU); the Connecticut Audubon tree farm in Westport on Aug. 19 (TG); at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby on Sept. 22 (JOs); and at Portland Fairgrounds Oct. 5

(DCm). A first-year **Painted Bunting** turned up Sept. 13 at Sherwood Island, and what was certainly the same bird was found there Oct. 12 (TG). The first Dickcissel was heard calling overhead (as many are) on Sept. 12 at Bluff Point (CE); they were widely reported throughout the season. A long-staying bird arrived at a feeder in Salem on Nov. 17 and stayed deep into winter. It was joined by a second bird Nov. 29-30 (P&CT). A Bobolink was late Nov. 6 at Station 43 in South Windsor (PDe). An adult **Yellow-headed Blackbird** appeared on Oct. 20 in a large flock of grackles in a Seymour yard (BB). The first two Rusty Blackbirds were in Ashford on Sept. 22 (SMo), with almost daily reports statewide thereafter; the high count was 150 on Oct. 30 at George Dudley Seymour State Park in Haddam (SW). There were at least eight reports of Baltimore Orioles in November (SP et al.).

An unusual irruption of **Red Crossbills**, joined by a few **White-winged Crossbills**, centered almost exclusively on the Benedict Pond and Doolittle Pond area of Norfolk and Colebrook. The

area supported an abundant crop of Eastern White Pine cones. After a first report on Sept. 10 at Benedict Pond (RS), larger numbers of Red Crossbills were encountered in subsequent days including a high of 12 the next day (TG, FN et al). Birds continued to be seen in the area through the fall season and deep into winter (m.ob.). A Red Crossbill heard singing at Doolittle Pond on Jan. 29, 2017 (GH, SZ), along with reports of three birds in September 2015 (MPe) and one in July 2013 (RS) suggest breeding may be occurring in the area. Elsewhere single Red Crossbills were in New Hartford on Sept. 13 (DRo); at Shippan Point, Stamford, on Sept. 26 (PDu); and in Westport on Oct. 23 (PL). Pine Siskins were first noted Aug. 10, when two were seen in Southington (SG). Ahead of one of the best flights in more than a decade, **Evening Grosbeaks** appeared at three locations Oct. 24-29, including four on Oct. 27 in Canton (JMe et al.). There were at least nine additional sightings in November, including four on Nov. 12 in Portland (TA) and five on Nov. 18 at Lighthouse Point (DCa).

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PHOTO CHALLENGE

By Stefan Martin

This time of year (mid-March) is always exciting! That is, of course, if your idea of excitement is spending the better part of your day thumbing through a sun-bleached and decrepit copy of 'Where's Waldo' a few hundred feet away through heat shimmer...

Following the previous day's excitement, Mike Warner and I decided to try our luck at relocating either one of, or better yet, both of Nick Bonomo's Mew Gulls (*brachyrhynchus* and *canus*).

We arrived at Meig's Point at Hammonasset Beach State Park late-morning as I recall, joining the existing handful of people already picking through the flock. Within a few minutes, Keith Mueller had spotted the "Common" Mew Gull and managed to get the group fixed on the focus. After observing the bird for a few minutes, I turned my attention to the remainder of the flock in hopes of finding the "Short-billed"



Julian Hough Photo

Mew, the first state record for this subspecies. While scanning the flock, someone shouted out that the canus was up and flying right at us. Missing my opportunity for a decent flight shot, I decided to follow the flock and found myself on the beach just west of the jetty. At this point, gull numbers were continuing to grow and groups of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls were joining the drift from well offshore and to our east.

We spent the next few hours scanning the evolving flock, chatting and passing the time with the also ever-changing cast of birders. By this time, the majority of the flock was well offshore and continuing to drift west, making it painful to pick through. While passing the time in conversation and taking a break from our scopes, I noticed an unusual-looking gull along the water's edge. I first noticed the size and structure of the bird, comparing it to the perfectly placed Herring Gull on one side, and the Ring-billed Gull on the other. You couldn't have asked for a better side by side really. I noticed the bill structure and color. The bill was long and relatively thin, showing a dramatic cutoff between the 'ink dipped' tip and the clean, pale base. The bird's overall structure and long-winged profile were apparent. The bird was also more



Stefan Martin Photo

robust and taller than the nearby Ring-billed Gull but more petite and streamlined than the Herring. I also noticed some dark gray scapulars coming in but dismissed that for poor lighting at the time.

Knowing the strong potential that this bird was a California Gull, I interrupted the conversation and directed the group's attention toward the subject. Although brief, we were able to communicate our general impression and key field marks to one another while observing the bird. In this time, I was able to take a few pictures for documentation. About a minute later, the handful of birds along the beach picked up and returned to the feeding group well offshore. Alas, the bird was gone...

Editor's Note: But it wasn't gone for long! Stefan Martin's March 21, 2016, discovery of the state's first documented California Gull allowed many birders to enjoy its presence for an extensive period from March to October 2016 and at locations in both Madison and West Haven.



Photo Challenge No. 97

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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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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