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CONTENTS

- 1 **Wood Warbler Population and Habitat Trends**
Chris S. Wood
- 13 **Of Geese and Ghosts**
Mark Szantyr
- 15 **Barnacle Goose**
Greg Hanisek
- 19 **Connecticut Field Notes**
Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik
- 24 **Photo Challenge**
Julian Hough

ON THE COVER

Graylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose and Barnacle Goose

In this issue Mark Szantyr paints a word picture spread over 35 years that illustrates the changes that have transpired in our understanding of waterfowl origins. His work on the Avian Records Committee has played a key role in acceptance of the natural occurrence of several species, including (from left in his cover illustration) Graylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose and Barnacle Goose.

**WOOD WARBLER POPULATION AND
HABITAT TRENDS**

By Chris S. Wood

Observations From a Connecticut Summer Bird Count

Introduction

The Woodbury/Roxbury Summer Bird Count (WR-SBC) dates to 1978, when Ed Hagen recruited members of the Western Connecticut Bird Club to initiate a citizen research project emulating the Christmas Bird Count, sponsored and coordinated by the National Audubon Society. Since 1992 the WR-SBC has been organized and compiled by Russ Naylor and is one of eight such projects now conducted in Connecticut, as tabulated and analyzed by the late Joe Zeranski, Tom Baptist, the late Fred Purnell, Tom Robben, Patrick Comins, and others yearly in the Connecticut Warbler.

The results of the WR-SBC have been tabulated and data for five groups of species of wood warblers (*Parulidae*), based on primary breeding habitat preferences, and have been analyzed to identify possible breeding population trends in the study area over the past 35 years. This report also demonstrates the long-term benefit of gathering and, as important, retaining and protecting data on bird populations, especially that collected outside of more rigorous professional ornithological research programs. The compilation of 40 years of WR-SBC data (in Excel format) has been provided to the Connecticut Ornithological Association Research Committee for archiving.

Joe Zeranski and Patrick Comins made this point in their 2003 SBC report: "Ornithology is perhaps unique among the sciences in the degree to which professional scientists and conservationists rely upon the data collected by volunteer observers. Were it not for the avian data collected by volunteers, we would have little clue as to population trends of concern until it was too late to correct those trends without expensive and controversial remedial action. Additionally,

our knowledge of the distribution of key species would not be sufficient to allow for effective prioritization of limited conservation resources.”

Study Description

This study uses wood warblers as something of a proxy for the status of breeding bird populations in the study area. Wood warblers (hereafter also “parulids” or “warblers”) are considered the most abundant breeding passerines of eastern North America and occupy a wide variety of habitats throughout their breeding range. Data on their occurrence provides valuable insight not only into population trends of the various species but also on the condition of those habitats within the study area.

Thirty species of wood warblers have been recorded on the WR-SBC and while some are rarely found in recent years (e.g. Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*), most are tallied in numbers sufficient to allow year to year comparisons. This analysis isolated data from five habitat categories for 15 species of parulids: Succession/Edge; Evergreen Forest; Dense Undergrowth Deciduous Forest; Mature and Second Growth Woodlands; and Wetlands.

Because the data, and recollections of the originators and early participants, show an obvious increase in numbers of species and individuals beginning in 1983 likely due to significant increase in numbers and skill level of participants, this study did not include data from 1978-1982.

For each group of warblers selected, annual totals for each species were compared to the average annual total for that species over the 35-year time frame. These results were plotted and a linear trend line was added to more clearly illustrate trends. A general discussion is provided of the results with reference to land cover changes and other accounts of population trends and influences, including the accounts presented in *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Connecticut* (1994) (hereafter “1994 Atlas”) and accounts in *Birds of North America Online* from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (“BNA Online”).

Study Area

The WR-SBC encompasses the same 15-mile diameter circle used for the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) conducted also by the Western Connecticut Bird Club. The area is mostly developed as suburban/residential with pockets of open space and agricultural land, some of significant size and habitat diversity. One area of denser urban development, portions of the Town of New Milford, is included in the circle.



Approximate Count Circle Location

Land cover and land cover changes between 1985 and 2015 within the six towns that compose this study area, according to data from the Center for Land Use Education and Research (“CLEAR”) at the University of Connecticut are shown in the table below.

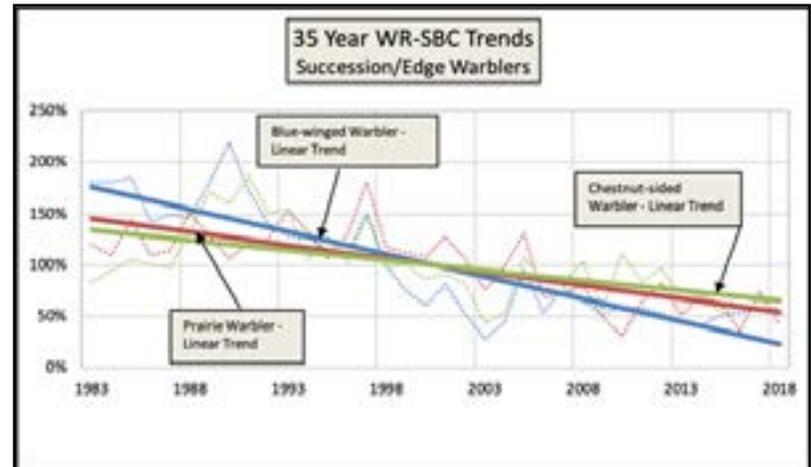
Study Area Land Cover			
	Forest	Agricultural Field	Turf and Grass
Proportions			
Six-Town Study Area	68%	13%	7%
Change 1985 - 2015			
Six-Town Study Area	-3.83%	-14.05%	42.33%

Note: Totals do not include “other” categories.

The Warbler Groups

Succession/Edge Warblers

Chestnut-sided Warblers (*Setophaga pensylvanica*; "CSWA"), Blue-winged Warblers (*Vermivora cyanoptera*; "BWWA"), and Prairie Warblers (*Setophaga discolor*; "PRAW") are parulids that rely on successional and edge habitats for breeding areas. Loss of such habitats – overgrown fields, recently cleared forests, hedgerows, field/forest edges, and other early succession expanses – has been widely discussed as affecting populations of certain bird species (see, e.g., BNA Online accounts for these species). Although the CLEAR land cover data do not specifically tabulate such habitats, WR-SBC data show that all three species are declining in the study area, implying that their preferred habitat is also in decline. Increased development throughout the study area has almost certainly reduced the amount of successional habitat, as has the normal ecological process of cleared land reverting to forest.



Evergreen Forest Warblers

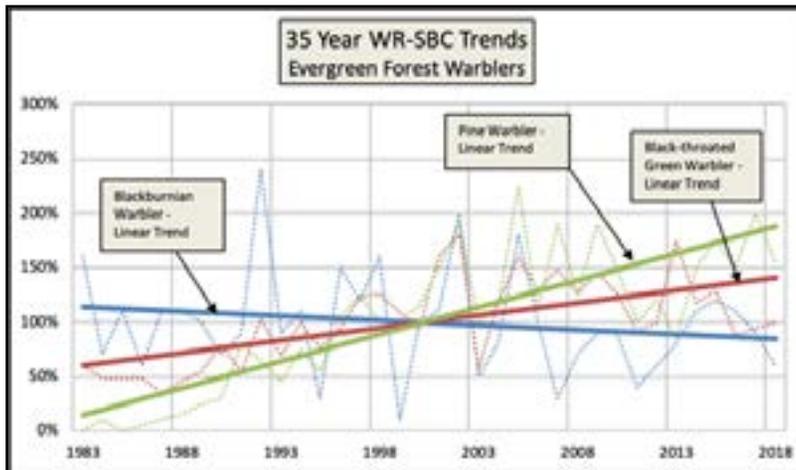
Blackburnian Warblers (*Setophaga fusca*; "BLBW"), Pine Warblers (*Setophaga pinus*; "PIWA"), and Black-throated Green Warblers (*Setophaga virens*; "BTNW") breed in evergreen forest habitats including pines and hemlocks. Although many



Chestnut-sided Warbler



Black-throated Green Warbler



Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) stands have been heavily damaged by the woolly adelgid infestation of the past 30 or so years, the pioneering succession by Eastern White Pines (*Strobus pinus*) has resulted in some increase in evergreen coverage in portions of the study area, based on personal observation. The significant increase in Pine Warbler numbers on the WR-SBC is consistent with this trend, although at least part of this observed increase may be attributable to improved observer ability to distinguish Pine Warbler songs. According to BNA Online, "Breeding Bird Survey data (1980-2006) continue to show stable/increasing populations for most regions where this species [Pine Warbler] breeds." However, fragmentation of pine forests due to development may eventually alter this trend.

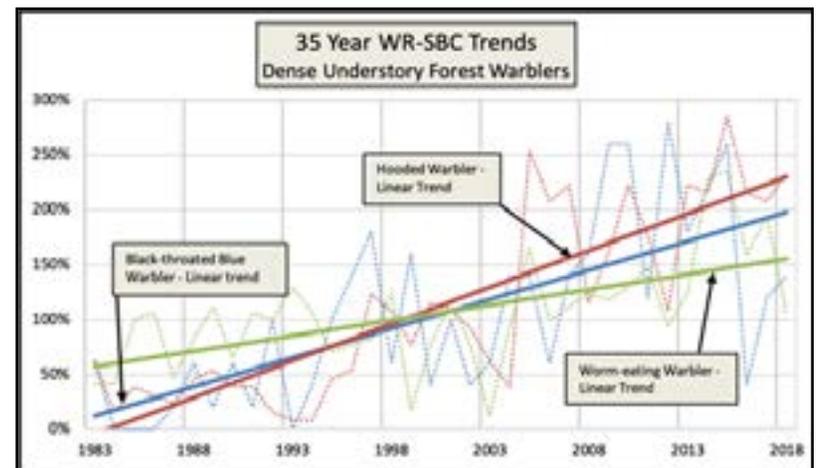
Blackburnian and Black-throated Green prefer hemlock and spruce stands; BLBW populations appear to be stable or slightly decreasing while the BTNW looks to be slightly increasing in the study area. The 1994 Atlas account for Black-throated Green Warbler by Walter G. Ellison notes the potential impact that the loss of Eastern Hemlock stands, due to pest invasions, may have on the breeding population of this bird in Connecticut. Continued monitoring of this species through SBC and Connecticut Bird Atlas research may help determine the extent of this threat.

Deciduous Forest with Dense Undercover Warblers

Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Setophaga caeruleascens*; "BTBW"), Hooded Warbler (*Setophaga citrina*; "HOWA"), and Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*; "WEWA") choose mature deciduous or mixed forests with heavy shrub



Black-throated Blue Warbler



undergrowth for breeding habitat. The impact of defoliation by Gypsy Moth infestations of the 1980's, which resulted in more open forests allowing heavier development of under-

growth such as mountain laurel and rhododendron, may be a factor in the apparent increase in numbers of warblers reliant on forests with thick ground cover, as pointed out by Mark Szantyr in his Hooded Warbler account for the 1994 Atlas publication. On the other hand, all of these species may be exposed to loss of suitable habitat due to forest fragmentation.

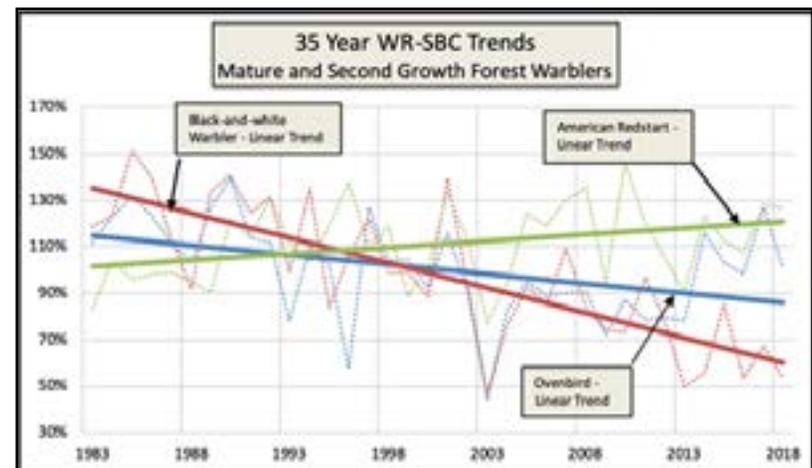
Mature and Second Growth Forest Warblers

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*; "AMRE"), Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*; "OVEN"), and Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*; "BAWW") are typically found in mature and second-growth forests with varying amounts of shrub understory. Trends from the WR-SBC show these species as stable or slightly decreasing over the 35-year study period. This would seem counter-intuitive, as Connecticut's forests continue to recover from heavy clear-cutting in the early to mid-20th century as well as benefitting from forest management by owners of large open space properties. However, these species may be affected by continuing fragmentation of forest blocks. According to data from CLEAR, only 46% of Connecticut's forest land is considered "core" forest, defined as forest blocks at least 300 feet from non-forested areas.



Black-and-white Warbler

The 1994 Atlas account for Ovenbird by George A. Clark, Jr. noted a significant decrease in this species on Breeding Bird Survey routes from 1978 – 1987. WR-SBC results seem to indicate only a slight decline of this species' breeding population, at least within this study area, although as pointed out in the BNA Online account this species "is sensitive to the combined effects of decreased habitat area and increased habitat edge that exists in fragmented forest." This writer has noted that Ovenbirds are one of if not the most abundant breeding season birds recorded in a 680 +/- acre contiguous forest within a current Connecticut Bird Atlas research block.



Wetlands Habitat Warblers

Some species of wood warblers occupy diverse wetlands habitats, including open marshes, wet woodlands, and stream and river riparian areas. This review looked at data for three: Louisiana Waterthrush (*Parkesia motacilla*; "LOWA"), Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*; "YEWA"), and Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*; "COYE"); the former is found in forested riparian zones while the latter two occupy a variety of open and riparian wet areas.

Data from the WR-SBC present a mixed picture, with Louisiana Waterthrush showing notable increases in the annual counts, while Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats show declining numbers. In the 1994 Atlas account for Loui-

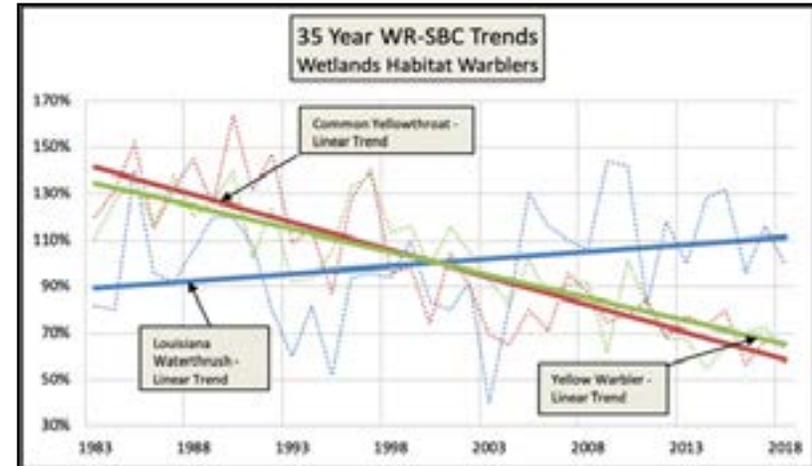


Yellow Warbler

siana Waterthrush, George A. Clark, Jr. observed that “Maturation of forests along streams...has presumably favored an increase in this [Louisiana Waterthrush] species.” WR-SBC data appears to indicate a continuation of that trend.

Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler are seemingly ubiquitous around open marshes and wet meadows, although WR-SBC data indicate declines in both species in the study area. CLEAR does not provide statistics on loss of wetlands habitats, but after significant losses prior to the establishment of wetlands regulatory protection by the 1972 Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act (Connecticut General Statutes Chapter 440), wetlands habitat availability over the 1983 – 2018 study period should be assumed to have stabilized. Speculation about potential declines in wetlands-preferring warblers may include normal succession, such as beaver ponds reverting to dryer meadows, as well as continuing development that may not directly impact wetlands, but create some degree of fragmentation.

George A. Clark notes in his 1994 Atlas account for Yellow Warbler that beaver activity was a major factor in creating wetlands habitat suitable for YEWA. Given the readily ob-



served increase in beaver activity within the study area, the decline in this species over the study period is puzzling. It may be that the factors affecting wetlands, noted above, are out-weighting any beaver-caused increases in wetlands, at least within the study area.

Discussion

Obvious trends in habitat changes in the study area are clearly illustrated by the simple analysis of wood warbler populations presented here. Edge and succession habitat (Chestnut-sided, Blue-winged, Prairie) is decreasing; evergreen forests (Pine, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green) are stable or increasing; dense undercover in deciduous forests (Hooded, Black-throated Blue, Worm-eating) is increasing; unfragmented mature and second growth forest areas are decreasing; and wetlands habitats (Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow) are decreasing or compromised. These trends are all consistent with personal observations throughout the study area and with land cover data from CLEAR.

Of course, there are circumstances affecting these data that are independent of the local habitat conditions, such as range-wide population trends, winter habitat availability, climate change, and variations of observation effort; this review makes no attempt to incorporate or adjust for those

impacts. However, the data do appear to show some correlations between breeding season bird populations (in this case wood warblers) and habitat trends. Continued collection of data, and more sophisticated analyses, will eventually help determine the relationship of breeding bird populations and habitat conditions in Connecticut. This will of course include comparison of SBC data to the results of the latest Connecticut Bird Atlas project. Such efforts will also more clearly identify areas of concern with these and other species.

Thanks are due to Ed Hagen and Russ Naylor for their organization and compilation of the WR-SBC, and of course to the volunteer researchers that participated. Thanks also to Joe Zeranski and Tom Robben for reviewing a draft of this report and for their helpful comments.

Resources

Summer Bird Count Reports, Connecticut Warbler (Joeseph Zeranski, et.al.)

The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Connecticut (Louis R. Bevier, Ed.; Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Bulletin # 113, 1994)

Connecticut's Changing Landscape (web page), Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) <http://clear.uconn.edu/projects/landscape/stats/change19852015.htm#top>

American Warblers – An Ecological and Behavioral Perspective (Douglass H. Morse; Harvard University Press, 1989)

Life Histories of North American Wood Warblers (Arthur Cleveland Bent; Smithsonian Institution Bulletin # 203, 1953)

Warblers of the Americas (Jon Curson, David Quinn, David Beadle; Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994)

The Birds of North America (P. Rodewald, Ed.); Ithaca: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology; Retrieved from The Birds of North America: <https://birdsna.org>; AUG 2015.

All photos © C.S. Wood

OF GEESE AND GHOSTS

By Mark Szantyr

People ask how I got into birds. My grandmother had two ceramic Mallards on a shelf in her kitchen. They were planters. She put all sorts of treasures in them and, if I was good, she let me sort through the buttons and pins and ephemera that had collected inside. Since then, waterfowl have held a special place in my heart.

Chasing rare birds began for me in the 70's after seeing a lecture that noted naturalist, Noble Proctor gave to the Western Connecticut Bird Club. Dr. Proctor suggested that rarities can be anticipated, and even looked for, if you had enough knowledge. And off I went.

Perhaps the first bit of bird forensics I ever undertook involved geese. In November 1984, Russ Naylor found a Barnacle Goose on a small pond at the Southbury Training School in Southbury, Connecticut. He also noted it was accompanied by a very small form of Canada Goose (there was no such thing as Cackling Geese in those days) and two birds



Mark Szantyr photo
This Barnacle Goose with five hybrid geese - judged to be Barnacle Goose X Cackling Goose - remained together in an apparent family group in late December 2019 in Shelton and Stratford. This photograph was taken in Shelton on 22 December

that appeared to be hybrid young of this pair.

I remember standing on the shore of this pond with Ray Schwartz, a well-known bird photographer and hawk-bander, and Dennis Varza, a prematurely curmudgeonly but tireless field biologist and naturalist, studying these birds. The common knowledge of the day was that ALL Barnacle Geese were escapes from aviaries. But we wondered about this, an apparent family group. Did this not seem beyond coincidental?

I began an in-depth study of Barnacle Geese and their occurrences in North America. The results of this study were published in *The Connecticut Warbler*, volume 5, number 2, and reprinted later in *Birding*, the journal of the American Birding Association. This study and the development of interpreting observational characteristics of each vagrant goose sighting allowed for our state records committee, as well as a few other state rarity committees, to accept Barnacle Geese and several other waterfowl species as naturally occurring vagrants.

Flash ahead to December 2019. Word came over the internet (not something that would happen in 1984), that a Barnacle Goose with five apparent hybrid young (suspected hybrids with Cackling Goose, the same form of "small" Canada Goose from the 1984 sighting) were being seen at Trap Falls Reservoir and a golf course, both in Shelton, Connecticut.

Because I love geese and because of my history with this type pairing, I traveled to Shelton on 22 December with my nephew and budding bird photographer, Adam Coley. I arrived to find Chris Wood, who had also seen the 1984 birds, and Greg Hanisek, a partner in crime for geek level bird forensic study, already on the birds. They had also found a darker Cackling Goose in the flock that did not seem closely bonded to the family group.

The group of birders thinned out as I studied the birds. I gradually drifted back to the 1984 sighting. Ray, Dennis and Noble have all passed on. In my head I heard the ghosts of

Ray and Dennis, arguing over the provenance of these birds as they did with the 1984 birds. I heard the guiding wisdom of Noble warning to look at every bird and don't assume anything. I imagined them huddled together at the Cape May of Eternity, laughing at what a silly game we all play, this trying to know everything about birds.

I gave a nod to their ghosts and turned back to the geese.

Mark Szantyr is a former secretary of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut. His Connecticut Warbler article from 1984 can be viewed by searching Vol. 5 No. 2 online. The cover includes a 25 Nov 1984 photo of that hybrid group by Frank Mantlik.

BARNACLE GOOSE

A brief history in Connecticut

By Greg Hanisek

I've been birding for more than 60 years (thanks to a very early start!).

That means I grew up attempting to master my avocation in the days of the toxic Barnacle Goose. While Eurasian Wigeon and Tufted Ducks usually got a pass, the birding community could not shake the Barnacle's image as an escape artist. You risked being dismissed as an overenthusiastic lister if you even hinted that one found out on its own was a wild bird.

That situation still held when I moved here more than 25 years ago, although I had a change of heart when I still lived in New Jersey. In October 1986 two Barnacle Geese appeared at Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge during a massive arrival of wild Canada Geese and Snow Geese. I went to see them and was impressed by their comfortable association with these flocks and with their nervous demeanor. In my mind, if not in the official realm of Garden State ornithology, these birds seemed wild.

I looked up this event in eBird and found that Mary Gustafson, a well-know birder who now serves on the American Birding Association checklist committee, had seen these birds

and added this comment:

“Appeared with 1500 Snow Geese; brief notes (someone took photos). Debate about origin at the time, those that presumed all were captive origin vs. those that 'liked' that these birds appeared with (Snow Geese).”

Those birds lingered in my mind (still in a kind of limbo) when I moved to Connecticut. Here I met Mark Szantyr, who shared my willingness to question conventional wisdom. This became reality as the increasing appearance of Old World geese demanded better answers. As a result Barnacle Goose was added to the official state list in the 11th Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (July 2002 Connecticut Warbler, Vol. 22 No. 3). Here is the report:

“BARNACLE GOOSE (*Branta leucopsis*) An apparent adult was located on the Stearn's Farm property in Mansfield, Tolland County, 4 December 2001 and stayed through the first part of January 2002 (Mark Szantyr, Curtis Marantz, Chris Elphick, Don Crockett 2002-02). The Avian Records Committee of Connecticut has had the dubious pleasure of evaluating several reports of this species and until now has always judged that the origin of this fairly popular avicultural species is difficult to ascertain. This bird is common in captivity and the “old school” common logic was to be better safe than sorry and reject this easily identified bird, nearly out of hand, simply because the committee could not be sure that any individual was truly wild. Why then are we accepting this individual to the official state list?

“The evidence: The bird appeared wild, was un-banded and had all its toes intact.

The bird occurred at the proper time for its species to be migrating and at a location that has, in the past, held other migrant waterfowl from essentially the same source location as *B. leucopsis*. A Pink-footed Goose, *Anser brachyrhynchus*, was located in this same field with an apparent Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*, of the Greenland race *flavirostris* on 21 March 1998 and several additional *flavirostris* White-fronted Geese have been noted there.



Mark Szantyr photo
This Barnacle Goose at Longshore Club in Westport in January 2011 provided the evidence needed to prove its wild origin. One of its two bands is visible in this photo. They proved it had been banded on wintering grounds in Scotland.

The goose was in the company of several thousand Canada Geese, *Branta canadensis*, including birds that had been neck-banded as migrants or as nesting birds, and the bands indicate that at least part of this migrant flock had origins in or near Greenland. This was in fact similar to evidence that allowed the committee to accept the Pink-footed Goose to the state list, the first for the Lower 48 states (see Ninth Report).

“According to experts in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as well as their counterparts in Canada and Greenland, Barnacle Goose numbers are exploding on their Arctic breeding grounds, as are most other Arctic nesting geese.

“According to experts in the field of aviculture, the numbers of Barnacle Geese in captivity has probably been declining through the past decade, a consequence of economic and legislative factors.

The 2002 Connecticut Barnacle Goose was part of a seemingly small invasion of the species in New England and in the Mid-Atlantic states, with several birds located in New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and even a bit farther south.

Even in the face of this voluminous circumstantial evidence, the committee acted carefully and worked diligently to not

act in haste. The ARCC has at its disposal a voting category that allows us to accept a species even though we cannot definitely prove that the individual in question is wild. When the bird has been properly identified and the preponderance of the evidence seems to indicate a wild origin and there is little or no evidence to the contrary, we believe it is responsible to accept the record under our voting category, Accept – Origin Uncertain. Species accepted under this category are fully accepted onto the state list and enjoy the same status as any other bona fide vagrant. We believe that the disclaimer simply reflects the truth in a situation that is essentially unknowable.” (End of ARCC report).

The uncertainty ended in 2010-11, when Barnacle Geese were found at four locations in Connecticut, and one of them answered the question of whether the species arrives here on its own. The following is from the 16th ARCC report (April 2011 Connecticut Warbler Vol. 31 No. 2).

“One was found in Wooster Park, Stratford, on 2 Dec 2010. It eventually was relocated on 10 Dec at the Longshore Club in Westport, where it remained through 7 Jan 2011 (10-22 Frank Mantlik, Bruce Finnan, Frank Gallo, Scott Kruitbosch, Mark Szantyr). Record 10-22 was of special significance because observers were able to read a leg band that proved it to be the same bird seen in The Bronx, N.Y., a few days before its arrival in Stratford. New York observers had also read the band and discovered the goose had originated from a prime wintering area of this species on the island of Islay in the western isles of Scotland, U.K., where it was banded as a juvenile on 13 Nov 2002. It had a plastic leg band, VUB, and a metal band, “British Museum # 1291347.” The Barnacle Geese wintering on Islay breed in northeastern Greenland, known to be the point of origin for some neck-collared Canada Geese seen annually in Connecticut. This is also the presumptive point of origin for other Barnacle Geese, Greenland White-fronted Geese and Pink-footed Geese seen in Connecticut, often in the company of neck-collared Greenland Canada Geese.”

The arrival of Barnacle Geese has continued and it is no longer a Review Species.

CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Summer Season, June 1 to July 31, 2019

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

Northbound Migration

The tail end of the Black Scoter migration found one off Westport on June 3 (TG). Two Whimbrels were reported as late as June 28 at Milford Point (JG, SSt). The latest Red Knot was June 4 at Sandy Point in West Haven (SSp). Four **Red-necked Phalaropes**, on the water c. 2 mile south of Stamford, were a nice find June 1 (ACI). Two Black Terns were seen on the same trip (ACI), and one was present the next day off

Westport (TG). One getting into between-seasons territory was at Milford Point on June 27 (SSp).

In typical seasonal fashion, multiple Mourning Warblers were reported to at least June 8, when northbound movement abruptly dropped off (JOs et al.). A Nashville Warbler was in Woodbury June 8 (RN). After a spring season that produced an unusual five reports, additional Kentucky Warblers were found June 6 at Lake Saltonstall in



Frank Mantlik photo
This handsome American Avocet, one of two found during Summer 2019, posed for many observers on July 9 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

Branford (GN) and on June 10 in Hamden (SMa). A Cape May Warbler, not noted for late appearances, was singing June 2 in Winsted (DR). Three Blackpoll Warblers, noted for late passage, were at White Memorial in Litchfield on June 8, with one still present June 10 (RN). One was unusually late June 23 at Nepaug State Forest in Canton (BR).

Southbound Migration

Two different discoveries of **American Avocets** motivated birders to get out for looks at this charismatic species. A one-day appearance July 9 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) was enjoyed by dozens of people (JL, m.ob.). Off the beaten path, one that found its way to Moosup Pond in Plainfield attracted about a half-dozen admirers on July 30 (AB et al.). Limited access has sharply reduced shorebird reports from Rocky Hill Meadows, a premier inland location, but seven Semipalmated Plovers were there July 23 (PDe). The first Whimbrel was reported July 20 at Great Island, Old Lyme (JS). Although the July shorebird migration was on

the slow side, five Western Sandpipers July 16 at Milford Point was an exceptional number for that early date (NB). The first Red Knot was seen July 13 at Milford Point (JJ), with a high count of four there on July 25 (KV et al.). A birding trip throughout the Southbury area on July 24 detected 10 to 12 Louisiana Waterthrushes during their typically early migratory window (RN).

Lingerers, Wanderers and Strays

A Northern Shoveler lingered to June 8 at Quinnipiac Marsh in North Haven (FMc). Other summering waterfowl included a Bufflehead at Johnson's Creek in Bridgeport (FMa), two Long-tailed Ducks in Norwalk harbor (ID); two Common Goldeneyes off Tuxis Island in Madison (HS), a Red-breasted Merganser June 27 in Old Saybrook (JOg) and a Ruddy Duck June 23 in West Haven (AKo).

A **Common Gallinule**, a former breeder that more recently has been an occasional visitor, was at Lake Whiney in Hamden on June 8-10 (FMc). The now-

regular roster of Sandhill Crane sightings includes two on June 15 at Glastonbury Meadows (BA); one on June 30 in New Milford (SMi); and one in Colchester July 3 (EH). Two Bonaparte's Gulls were between seasons June 21 at Penfield Reef in Fairfield (JP). The first report of a Royal Tern came from Milford Point on June 1 (AL). The high count of Black Skimmers was five June 20 at Milford Point (SSp). The only report of **Wilson's Storm-Petrels**, wanderers from the southern hemisphere, was of two from a Long Island Sound ferry on July 7 (NB, PR). A Great Cormorant lingered to June 9 in West Haven (SSp).

A good count of post-breeding Great Egrets inland was six on July 29 at Mansfield Hollow Dam (DW). Three were in East Hartford on July 23 (PDe). A Little Blue Heron was unexpected well to the northwest on June 1 at Wimisink Preserve in Sherman (AD). Even more surprising was an inland Tricolored Heron June 9 at Station 43 in South Windsor (AL et al.). Could it have been the same one that flew through Wallingford on June

13? (SMi). A Cattle Egret visited Sherwood Island State Park in Westport on July 3 (JB). Wandering **Mississippi Kites**, absent any suggestion of breeding, were reported from Sherman on July 20 (CL) and from Lebanon on July 31 (LO).

Red-headed Woodpecker reports from Madison feeders, July 14 (SP) and July 26 (MF), may have involved the same bird. The birds of the season were two **Scissor-tailed Flycatchers**. One was seen June 1 only at Trout Brook Valley Preserve in Easton (ACo), where one was also seen in June 2009. The second was found during a butterfly survey July 27 at town open space in West Simsbury (JK, DL) but not seen thereafter. An American Pipit was an anomaly, but a bonus of good coverage by tern monitors, July 1 at Falkner Island, Guilford (AE). Up to three **Red Crossbills** at Benedict Pond in Norfolk were seen from July 13 through the end of the period and into early August (JMa et al.). This is a species known for widespread wandering, but also for breeding at unusual times of year. A female **Summer Tanager** was seasonally



Chris Wood photo
This was one of at least three Red Crossbills, shown here on July 15, that were present from July 13 into August at Benedict Pond in Norfolk. The species is noted for unpredictable wandering and breeding attempts.

unexpected in a Tolland yard July 2-4 (CS).

The Breeding Season

American Black Ducks have seldom been confirmed breeding inland in recent years, so noteworthy was a female with three fledged young through June at Hes-

seky Meadows in Woodbury (RN). Two were also present in June at Lake Zoar in Southbury (RN). Hooded Mergansers had at least five ducklings June 1 at Wimisink Preserve in Sherman (AD). A hatch-year Pied-billed Grebe was at Benedict Pond in Norfolk on June 16 (JMa).

Away from traditional breeding areas in the Connecticut River Valley, Least Bitterns were resident at Wimisink Preserve in Sherman, where a pair was seen courting on June 15 (AD, RN), and one was present June 4 in North Granby (CC). Two Black-crowned Night-Herons present through the period at Lake Zoar raised the possibility of a rare inland nesting (RN).

Single Tricolored Herons, potential breeders, were at Barn Island in Stonington June 15-16 (FMr), July 11 at HBSP (NV) and July 28 in Old Saybrook (JOG). A pair of **Mississippi Kites** nested again in northeastern Fairfield County, fledging one young (JH). A single adult seen July 30 in Seymour was in range of being a bird from this nesting (DJ).

Pine Siskins were present at two Woodbury locations in June, most notably a pair with three fledglings June 7 on Orton Lane (RN). Four were present in early June on Paper Mill Road, with up to two lingering at feeders June 20-21 (TZ, GA). Two Eastern Meadowlarks were at Suf-field Wildlife Management

Area on July 14 (PDe). Northern Parulas appeared to be on territory in early June at Bent of the River Audubon in Southbury (KE) and at White Memorial (RN). One was in Old Lyme on June 23 (MB).

Observers: Grace Aarons, Bill Asteriades, Matt Bell, Jay Boll, Nick Bonomo, Aaron Bourque, Chris Chinni, Al Collins (ACI), Avery Cotton (ACo), Peter DeGennaro (PDn), Paul Desjardins (PDe), Ian Devlin, Angela Dimmitt, Andy Eckerson, Ken Elkins, Matias Fernandez-Duque, Frank Gallo, Jonathan Green, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, Ernie Harris, Janet Holt, Jim Jacques, David Jaffin, Jay Kaplan, Aidan Kiley (AKi), Acadia Kocher (AKo), David Leff, Jim Link, Alex Lin-Moore, Chris Loscalzo, Preston Lust, Frank Mantlik (FMA), Frank Marengi (FMr), John Marshall (JMa), Stefan Martin (SMt), Steve Mayo (SMA), Flo McBride (FMc), Jamie Meyers (JMe), Sean Milnes (SMi), Russ Naylor, Gina Nichol, John Ogren (JOg), Linda Olsen, John Oshlick (JOs), James Purcell, Steve Pynn, Bill Root, Dave Rosgen, Phil Rusch, Chris Shapter, James Sherwonit, Steve Spector (SSp), Howie Sternberg, Stephanie Stewart (SSt), Kathy Van Der Aue, Nick Varvel, Doug Warner, Mike Warner, Glenn Williams, Sara Zagorski, Tom Zissu

PHOTO CHALLENGE

By Julian Hough

It's late September and a confiding plover is found roosting in the tide wrack. The neat, fresh look to the feathers (which all appear to be of the same generation and pattern) indicates it is a juvenile. But which species? The yellow hue to the crown and mantle feathers suggests it is likely an American Golden Plover, but the open face and relatively short-looking wings - not extending past the tail - seem to suggest the bird could be a fresh juvenile Black-bellied Plover. The somewhat large head and eye, compact body and less attenuated shape seem a little "off" for American.

In late fall, larger and stockier juvenile Black-bellied Plovers are often monotone gray, but warmer, yellow-toned individuals do occur and can cause confusion with American Golden Plovers. In flight, the black armpits and pale rump of Black-bellied would be evident, but this is of little help with our standing bird.

Luckily, the bird raises its leg, revealing a lack of the vestigial hind toe that is present on Black-bellied Plover. This confirms our initial suspicions that the bird is an American Golden Plover. The pale supercilium, longer legs, slimmer bill and



Juvenile Black-belled (left) and American Golden Plovers, Sandy Point, August



Julian R Hough photo
The feather patterning is very similar due to the warm light at sunset. When seen together, note more robust structural features on the Black-bellied such as larger bill, head and eye. Subtle plumage differences are the finely streaked breast and supercilium and face, the latter reducing the contrast often noticeable on American Golden Plovers.

slight contrast between the yellow-edged mantle feathers and grayer, colder wing coverts now fall into place and are all pro-American Golden Plover features.

But what about the overall shape, which seems more compact and shorter-winged than our recollections of previously seen American Golden Plovers? Individual variation and sexual differences in size also affect bill size. Wing length, defined here as the amount of wingtip projecting beyond the tail, is usually substantial in American Golden Plover. However variation can make this unhelpful with some individuals, as is the case with this month's challenge, which shows a shorter primary projection than is typical on American Golden and might cause an observer to head down the wrong path.

Phew, that was easy, wasn't it? American Golden Plover!

But wait, are there any other species we may be forgetting to

consider? In our myopic state, have we perhaps not cast a wide enough net? What about Pacific Golden Plover, an Alaskan breeder that has occurred as a rare vagrant to the eastern seaboard? Or what about Eurasian Golden Plover? Both would be first state records and should be on our radar since both species have occurred in neighboring New England and mid-Atlantic states.

Identification and separation of these stealth species is more difficult in some ways than the solution presented above, and is perhaps beyond the scope of this article. But let's deal with some general and basic clues to help rule out these two species in juvenile plumage. First, Eurasian Golden is a stocky, compact bird with a short neck, pigeon-like keel and very short legs. Structure alone should be a good clue, but they are also quite uniformly yellow above with a whiter, contrasting belly, more so than American and superficially may re-

Juvenile Pacific Golden Plover, British Columbia, Canada, Oct 2019 (Melissa Hafting)



Photo used courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Superficially this plover is very similar to our quiz bird in overall jizz. The photo was taken in October, at a time when an American Golden Plovers' golden bloom has usually worn to gray-white. This individual shows strong yellow-buff tones to part of the supercilium, ear-coverts and upper breast. The combination of very short primary projection, battleship gray legs and obvious yellowish tones to the head should set alarm bells ringing in Connecticut!

semble a Pacific in this respect. The feather edges are heavily notched giving the bird a very "busy," spangled appearance. The white underwings of Eurasian Golden are also diagnostic – the two other species having smoky-gray axillaries.

Pacific Golden Plover, for all intents and purposes, is the sister species to American Golden Plover. The stocky body, larger bill, very short wing projection (with 1-2 primary tips extending beyond the tail tip) and bright, buffy-yellow tones to the face are main features to key in on. It may superficially recall Black-bellied Plover in overall gestalt.

Could our bird be a Pacific? It seems to show hints of these features and we panic a little, hoping we've not messed up. Subtle yellow tones can wear off and be quite variable; bill size is somewhat subjective; and wing projection is variable enough between the species to make us feel a bit confused. Why isn't this a juvenile Pacific Golden Plover? We've no real experience, so how do we advance our position and rule it in or out?

First, compared with the more expected American Golden Plover, juvenile Pacifics, when fresh, have strong yellow-buff tones throughout the crown, supercilium and cheeks. The upper part feathers are more strongly edged with yellow too, and the overall result is a plover with a more saturated and brighter yellow look than the individual in our challenge. The other key feature to note is that Pacific Golden Plovers have blue-gray or battleship-gray legs. These are blackish in American.

Thankfully, our bird has dark, blackish legs and combined with the other features, we can rest easy that it is just an American Golden Plover. Probability suggests this is likely the scenario you will encounter in the state. So, my public service announcement is that chance favors the prepared mind and we have to always consider both Eurasian and Pacific Golden Plovers when faced with either an adult or juvenile bird that perhaps seems a bit off. You have been forewarned and forearmed! Any rather yellow-faced, juve-

nile plover with blue-gray legs should be flagged and critically studied to ensure we don't overlook our first Pacific.

This instructive bird was photographed by myself at Sandy Point, West Haven, in September 2019.

Julian R Hough, 80 Sea Street, New Haven, CT 06519



Photo Challenge No. 108

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Volume 40, No 1, 2020

Wood Warbler Population and Habitat Trends

Chris S. Wood 1

Of Geese and Ghosts

Mark Szantyr 13

Barnacle Goose

Greg Hanisek 15

Connecticut Field Notes

Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik 19

Photo Challenge

Julian Hough 24

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