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ON THE COVER

Brewer's Sparrow

Connecticut's most recent new species, Brewer's Sparrow, isn't much to look at, but Mark Szantyr's artful illustration imparts the sense of significance implicit in such an important record.

TWENTY-FIFTH REPORT OF THE AVIAN
RECORDS COMMITTEE OF
CONNECTICUT

This is the 25th report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC). In the last report (see the 24th Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut, Vol. 38 No. 2), four species were added to the state list. These are Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Little Egret, Roseate Spoonbill and Black-backed Oriole. All but the oriole were photographed and seen by multiple observers. In 2019, a single species was added to Connecticut's state list. A Brewer's Sparrow was located at Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, in early December and remained for several days, when it was seen by many Connecticut and out-of-state birders. The sparrow is 445 on our state list.

This year, the committee voted on 32 records, after considering 29 in the previous year. Digital photography has made the committee's work much easier than in the past. Many of the records included excellent photographs, and a majority of records were accepted unanimously. Updated information



Frank Mantlik photo
The bird of the year was this Brewer's Sparrow, a first for Connecticut, which was present at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison from Nov. 23 to Nov. 25, 2019. It was believed to be only the third record for New England.

on how to develop a report may be found on the committee's web page on the COA web site.

STATE LIST AND REVIEW LIST

As previously noted, the addition of Brewer's Sparrow brings the state list to 445 species. The committee depends on observers to submit their reports of species on the Review List (species marked with an asterisk on the COA checklist plus any species new to the state). The most recent State List and Review List may be viewed on the COA Website at www.ctbirding.org. Submit written reports along with documentary material to Jay Kaplan, ARCC chair, and Greg Hanisek, ARCC secretary (addresses below).

In other action, the committee, in conjunction with input from Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, has determined that Ring-necked Pheasant is now extirpated as a breeding species in Connecticut. It is anticipated that pheasant will be removed from the state list in 2021, following its expected official removal.

Each year, the committee evaluates the review species list. Last year, White-faced Ibis was removed from the Review List as the species now occurs annually in the state. The committee continued its discussion of potential additions and deletions to the Review List. In 2019, the committee discussed the potential addition of Pine Grosbeak to the Review List as this species has been reported in only three years in this century. Prior to making a decision, the committee will be reviewing its current criteria as to what constitutes a review species and will look at what other state committees are now doing. The committee also documents the occurrence of rare species' breeding records. Currently, all such breeding records are being submitted to the ongoing Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas Project.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Members, in addition to the authors, who voted on records in this report are Nick Bonomo, Frank Gallo, Tina Green, Julian

Hough, Frank Mantlik, Dave Provencher, Phil Rusch, Dave Tripp and Glenn Williams.

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. Photos are acknowledged with ‡. Hyphenated numbers 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 Ornithological Society (AOS) Checklist. Multiple records of a particular species are listed chronologically. Months of the year are shortened to their first three letters.

OLD RECORDS

The committee has undertaken a long-term project to document the rare birds of Connecticut. This will include reports and records from the four editions of books on birds of Connecticut (Zeranski & Baptist 1990; Sage & Bishop 1913; Merriam 1877; and Linsley 1843). It will also include Connecticut specimens found in the major ornithological collections in North America. Committee member Phil Rusch is heading this effort with the assistance of committee member Frank Gallo. The following two records, accepted at this year's meeting, are a result of that effort.

SOOTY TERN (*Onychoprion fuscatus*) One was found alive on 7 Sep 1979 on a beach at Stonington Point and taken to Pequotsepos Nature Center in Mystic for rehabilitation (2019-02 Philip Rusch*). The bird was successfully rehabilitated and released in Florida in November 1979. The appearance coincided with the passage of Hurricane David, with six Sooty Terns salvaged in Connecticut. Only this one survived. Rusch examined the other five specimens from Yale and UCONN in 2019 and filed photos with ARCC.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) One was identified on 14 Mar 1978 at a feeder in Gales Ferry,

where it had been present for a few days (2019-03 Robert Dewire, Phil Rusch). Four days later the homeowner reported that it had been found dead. It was salvaged and delivered to UConn, where it was prepared as a specimen entered into the university's collection. It is the only state specimen. Rusch examined the specimen in 2019 and filed photos with ARCC.

CURRENT ACCEPTED RECORDS

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) One was found 5 Dec 2019 at Amos Lake in Preston (2019-25 Dave Provencher*, Russ Smiley‡). It was last seen on 3 Jan 2020. One was seen 9-10 Dec 2019 in western New Haven, then disappeared until it was re-discovered 13 Jan 2020 in nearby Orange (2019-26 Christine Howe*, John Oshlick‡, Greg Hanisek). During December the goose was seen in and near Edgewood Park, New Haven. In January it was seen in Orange at Crosby Pond, Treat Farm and Wepawaug Reservoir, traveling with a large flock of Canada Geese. It was last seen 18 Jan at the latter two locations.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*) A female was found on 7 Dec 2019 at Captain's Cove in Bridgeport (2019 -17 Frank Gallo*‡, Frank Mantlik‡). It was present at least through the end of February 2020, and at times could be found in a scaup flock at nearby Jennings Beach in Fairfield. Presumably the same individual has now been present for three consecutive winters and four of the past five. The possibility that two different individuals were present in 2019-20, based on the size and appearance of the tuft, was considered. Research revealed that the appearance during the course of the bird's stay, from a full to an almost nonexistent tuft, was the result of molt.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) One was found 13 Oct 2019 in the Charles Wheeler Salt Marsh at the Milford Point Coastal Center, Milford (2019-13 Frank Gallo*‡, Frank Mantlik‡). It was a first record for this heavily birded location and was present just that day. One was found 25 Jan 2020 at Stonington harbor (2020-05 Russ Smiley*‡, Dave Provench-

er‡). It was seen through at least late Feb 2020. One was present at the same location in winter 2018-19, which could indicate a returning individual.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) One was found on 24 Nov 2019 off Cove Island Park in Stamford (2019-18 Stefan Martin*‡, David Winston‡, Frank Mantlik). It was seen through 27 Nov. The last record was in 2016.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaidura asiatica*) One was seen on 17 Nov 2019 flying by the Lighthouse Point Park hawkwatch in New Haven and was sketched by the observer (2019-14 Julian Hough*). This species was seen flying by the same location on 24 Oct 2016.

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) One was heard and subsequently recorded at 3:45 a.m. on 9 May 2019 at Ragged Rock Creek Marsh in Old Saybrook (2019-05 Nick Bonomo*). It was heard nightly, generally between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., by many observers through at least 25 May.

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) One was found at Stonington Point on 25 Jan 2020 (2020-03 Phil Rusch*, Nick Bonomo‡). It was on the water but then flew toward the harbor. Subsequent searches led to nearby Lambert Cove, where the bird was seen splashing and diving. It was re-found 2 hours later dead on slush ice. The specimen could not be recovered. One was found on 26 Jan 2020 at Shippan Point, Stamford, and moved quickly to nearby Greenwich Point, Greenwich (2020-04 Al Collins*, Will Schenck‡, Cynthia Ehlinger‡). In addition to these two birds, one was seen on 26 Jan in nearby Bronx, N.Y.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) An adult was found on 19 Oct 2019 at Sherwood Mill Pond Preserve in Westport (2019-15 Tina Green*‡). It was relocated the next day at Southport Beach and was seen by many observers through 21 Oct. A first-winter bird was seen on 28 Oct 2019 at Milford Point (2019-29 Steve Spector*‡). The two records were unusual because they involved birds close to shore. Most state records involve birds on the open Long Island

Sound, usually during winter months.

MEW (KAMCHATKA) GULL (*Larus canus kamtschatschensis*)

One was found on 2 Mar 2019 among a flock of about 2000 plankton-feeding gulls at Lighthouse Point in New Haven (2019-27 Nick Bonomo*†). An individual of this large Asiatic subspecies was present and well-documented in January 2019 at Cove Island Park in Stamford. (See 24th Report of ARCC in Vol. 39 No. 2). The observer noted specific features that suggested the Lighthouse Point bird was the same individual. This is a fourth state record for the form but may only involve two returning individuals.

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) A adult was found on 18 April 2019 at Bradley Point in West Haven (2019-20 Nick Bonomo*†, Julian Hough†, Frank Mantlik†). The bird was seen through 28 Apr. It was a second state record.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) One was found on 25 Sep 2019 at Sherwood Island State Park, where it was joined by a second individual the next day at the Sherwood



Shannon Skalos photo

A visiting couple from California were no doubt stunned to look up and see this adult female Magnificent Frigatebird soaring over Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison on Aug. 17, 2019.

Mill Pond Preserve (2019-16 Tina Green*†, Frank Mantlik†). They were seen by many observers through 28 Sep there and at nearby Old Mill Beach.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) One in basic plumage was seen on 1 Dec 2019 at Enders Island in Mystic (2019-04 Nick Bonomo*). This is a seventh state record and the second from this location. All but one have been at coastal locations.

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) An adult female was seen over Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison on 17 Aug 2019 (2019-06 Shannon Skalos*†, Daniel Skalos). Frigatebirds present identification challenges because of similarity among species. The observers, who have experience with both Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds, provided excellent photos and descriptive detail eliminating both Great and Lesser Frigatebird.



Avery Cotton photo

This Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on June 3 at Trout Brook Valley Preserve in Easton was in the typical seasonal window for this species in Connecticut.



Frank Mantlik photo

This LeConte's Sparrow was found at Savin Lake in Lebanon on Nov. 23 and was continued to be seen through at least Nov. 26, 2019

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) An immature intermediate morph was seen both perched and in the air on 28 Sep 2019 at Windham Airport Grassland in North Windham (2019-10 Phil Rusch*). An immature intermediate morph was seen flying by Lighthouse Point hawk watch in New Haven on 4 Oct 2019 (2019-09 Julian Hough*‡, Abby Sesselberg‡). Based on photos of the New Haven bird, Rusch believes it is likely the same bird he saw in North Windham.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) One was seen on 3 June 2019 at the orchard at Trout Brook Valley Preserve in Easton (2019-07 Avery Cotton*‡, N.J. Cotton). This is the second record for this location. One was seen on 27 July 2019 at recreation fields in West Simsbury (2019-08 Jay Kaplan*, David Leff). Neither was re-found, and records of this species are typically of short duration.

BREWER'S SPARROW (*Spizella breweri*) The first state record, a bird of the nominate subspecies, *breweri*, was found

23 Nov 2019 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (2019-19 Jerry Connolly, Frank Mantlik‡, Greg Hanisek). The bird was first correctly identified by Jory Teltser from photos posted on eBird. It was seen by many through 25 Nov. This was only the third record for New England.

LeCONTE'S SPARROW (*Ammospiza leconteii*) One was found on 23 Nov 2019 during a survey of a Connecticut Bird Atlas block at Savin Lake in Lebanon (2019-21 Chris Loscalzo*, Marianne Vahey*, Frank Mantlik‡). This unusually cooperative individual was seen and photographed by many observers through 26 Nov. There are ten previous records.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) One was seen, and later identified through photographs posted on Facebook, on 27 June 2019 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (2019-11 Michael DiGiorgio‡, Julian Hough, Micky Komara, Dan Rottino). One was found on 23 Oct 2019 at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport (2019-12 Tina Green*‡, Frank Mantlik‡, John Oshlick‡) and was seen through 25 Oct. These were the second and third state records, the first also being at Sherwood Island and found by the same observer.

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*) An adult male



Frank Mantlik photo

The state's third Western Meadowlark, shown here at right with a more brightly marked Eastern Meadowlark, was at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport from Oct. 23 to at least Oct. 25, 2019.

visited feeders at a Torrington home from 18 Nov to 8 Dec 2019 and was seen by many (2019-22 Phil Kozlak*†, Lia Brignano, Greg Hanisek). An adult male visited feeders at a Coventry home on 17 Jan 2020 (2020-01 Nancy Thurnauer*†).

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) One was reported from Greenwich on 16 Jan 2015 (2019-28). A number of reports of this species far north and east of its normal range have been documented this century. This report was from an observer familiar with the species, but it was a naked eye sighting of very short duration from a car driven on Interstate 95. The committee considered it too brief to document a first state record.

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SHIFTS IN POPULATION TRENDS OF CONNECTICUT'S SPIZELLA AND SPIZELLOIDES SPARROWS

Alexander Lin-Moore

Introduction

Connecticut's first state record of Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) last fall made waves among rarity chasers and natural historians across the Northeast. One of only a handful of records in New England going back to the 19th century, this largely Great Basin species has been appearing with steadily increasing frequency in the eastern half of North America over the past few decades. Indeed several changes in the distributions of the *Spizella* sparrows have been noted across the continent, including in Connecticut. This article summarizes changes in distribution and seasonal movements of the state's three regularly occurring *Spizella* sparrows: Field, Chipping and Clay-colored, as well as American Tree Sparrow, a former member of the *Spizella* genus. Several species show relatively recent changes in arrival and departure times from the state, as well as some subtle changes in their distribution within the state over time. Taken together, these shifts in seasonal distribution, as well as overall abundance, indicate that *Spizella* sparrows may be undergoing major changes in their ecology and behavior, both in Connecticut and across the continent.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*)

A regular migrant and an abundant summer breeding species, Chipping Sparrow has been historically scarce in winter in Connecticut, usually disappearing from the state in early November and not reappearing in numbers until early April. Overwintering Chipping Sparrows have been reported sporadically throughout the state, though without any clear trends regarding numbers of overwintering birds, or their regional preferences within the state. The past 20 years, however, have seen a general increase in the number and distribution of overwintering Chipping Sparrows, and dramatic

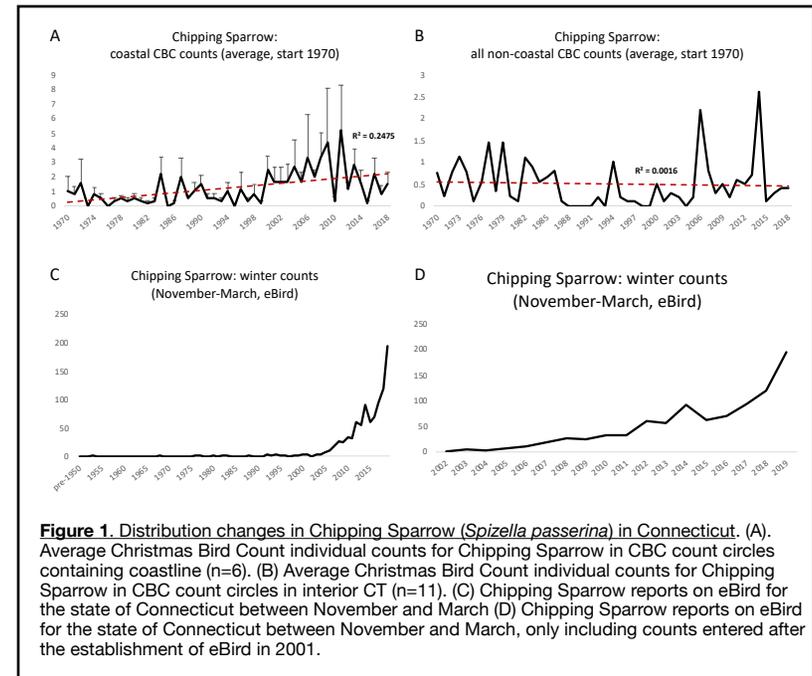


Jeri Duefrene photo

Chipping Sparrows, abundant breeders, have shown significant increases in winter. This one visited a feeder in East Lyme in January 2015.

increases in sightings of Chipping Sparrows across the state in the second half of November and first half of March. CBC results show a slow but steady increase of Chipping Sparrow counts in coastal regions in the state since 1970, though their numbers remain more-or-less consistent in Connecticut's central and northern regions (Fig. 1A,B). Reports of overwintering Chipping Sparrows state-wide are even more remarkable: reports on eBird have increased tenfold in the past fifteen years, from less than twenty state-wide between November and April to nearly two hundred in 2019's winter months (Fig. 1C,D). Even in the past five years, in which eBird usage can be more consistently compared, December Chipping Sparrow counts have tripled between 2016 and 2019.

Though their populations have decreased since record highs at the turn of the 20th century (Middleton 2020), Chipping Sparrow remains one of North America's most abundant native species, and is not considered a conservation concern in any significant portion of its range, including Connecticut. Recent changes in seasonal abundance and migratory behavior, particularly the changes in migration timing and



increases in overwintering population seen in our state, are more likely to represent behavioral responses to increased resource availability, as well as a milder winter climate. Many late-migration and overwintering reports of Chipping Sparrows pertain to feeder sightings, particularly for reports in the state's interior. Milder winters with later and less persistent snows, both of which the state has experienced consistently in the past several years, may also help explain Chipping Sparrow's increased recent abundance in Connecticut winters. Whether these migratory changes represent rapid sensitivity to seasonal resource availability, or (more likely) a general trend towards more northerly wintering sites as climate shifts become ever more tangible remains to be seen for this and other species.

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*)

The only *Spizella* species reliably found throughout most of the state year-round, Field Sparrow typically peaks in abundance in Connecticut during spring and fall migration,

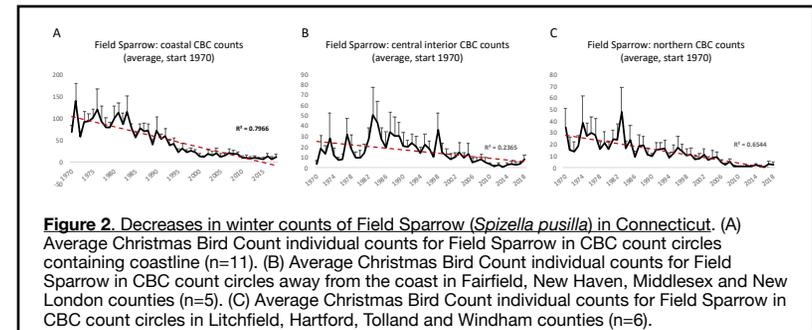
when northerly-breeding populations overlap with locally breeding or overwintering birds. In winter, Field Sparrows are most commonly found in the southern third of the state, though they are typically recorded throughout the state during winter counts. Unlike Chipping Sparrow, wintering Field Sparrow numbers have shown a dramatic decline in coastal Connecticut (Fig. 2A), a trend reflected to a lesser degree in the northern parts of the state (Fig. 2B,C).

Whether these local declines are caused by shifts in migratory and overwintering habits, as is likely for Chipping Sparrow, or reflect population declines observed in many American bird species in the second half of the 20th century is unclear. Since its period of highest abundance in the early 1900s, Field Sparrow has declined consistently across its range in eastern North America. Continent-wide breeding bird surveys estimate that between 1966 and 2003, Field Sparrows have consistently declined approximately 3% per year (Carey et al. 2020). Currently Field Sparrow is not treated as a species of concern by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and is not listed as threatened or endangered by any



Bruce Finnan photo

Field Sparrows, which occur year-round, have been declining as breeders continent-wide and in Connecticut for decades.



state or federal agencies, but its declining trend over the last half-century certainly warrants attention in Connecticut and elsewhere.

American Tree Sparrow (*Spizelloides arborea*)

A hardy breeding resident of tundras and stunted forests as far north as the North Slope of Alaska, American Tree Sparrow is a common overwintering species in overgrown fields and open, shrubby woodlands throughout Connecticut. Historically, American Tree Sparrows have arrived in the state after the beginning of November, and typically depart by the end of April, a pattern seen throughout the end of the 20th century and in to the early 2000s. However, beginning in the early 2010s, American Tree Sparrows have been recorded in Connecticut in ever-larger numbers, including in coastal and other down-state habitats, as early as October and as late as May. Delayed departure by American Tree Sparrows seems to have changed particularly dramatically in the past decades: more sightings were reported on eBird in 2015 alone than in the entirety of the preceding decade (Fig. 3A), and the trend of American Tree Sparrows staying in the state through April seems to be persistent, if fluctuating. Though far less dramatic, a similar trend can be seen in October reports, which have increased steadily over the past two decades, though this may be attributable to ever-increasing eBird engagement by Connecticut birders.

This increase in American Tree Sparrow sightings and counts both in late autumn and well into spring contrasts surpris-

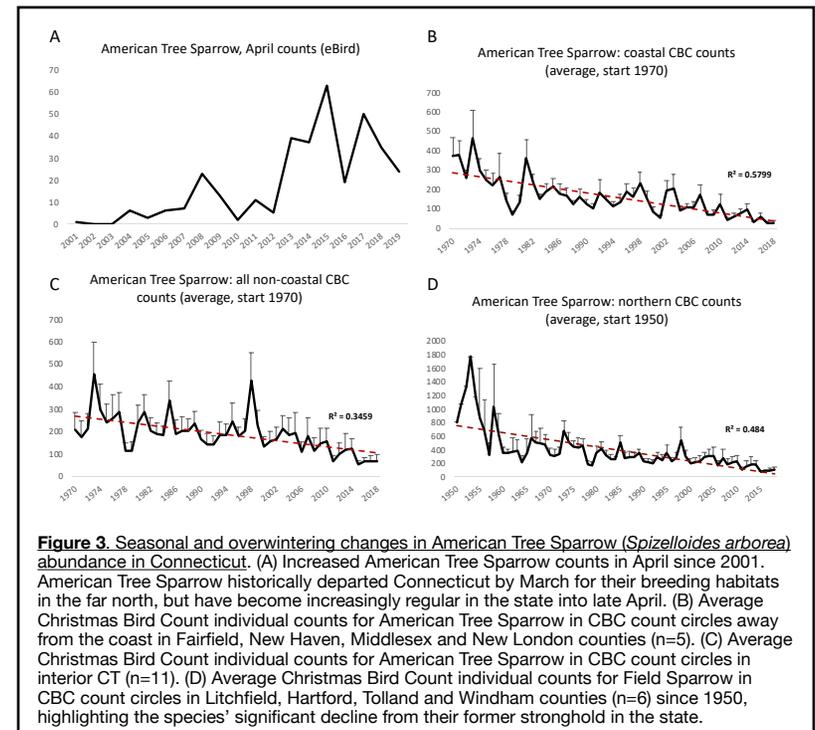
ingly with their overwintering status in the state. Winter bird counts show a persistent and dramatic decrease in abundance across Connecticut (Fig. 3B,C). Counts at coastal CBC sites, which averaged counts in the high hundreds in the mid-twentieth century, have rarely reported averages above 80 individual birds in the past ten years, a continuation of a gradual decrease in number beginning in the late 1960s. In more northern count areas a less severe but similar trend is seen, with consistent decreases in count circle abundance from highs in the 1950s (Fig. 3D).

The combination of increased encounters of American Tree Sparrow during migration against decreased winter counts raises an interesting conundrum for this familiar Connecticut species: are they increasing or decreasing? American Tree



Mark Szantyr photo

American Tree Sparrows, high-latitude nesters that winter in Connecticut, exhibit a complex array of seasonal changes.



Sparrow is listed as “Least Concern” by the IUCN, and is not considered threatened or endangered by any local or federal governments within its range. Their remote breeding range in the high Arctic also means that human disturbance is unlikely to acutely affect their populations the way it has for other birds, including the native Connecticut Spizella sparrows. In spite of this, however, American Tree Sparrows are estimated to have decreased in population by over 50% in the last 50 years (Rosenberg et al. 2016). Furthermore, their preferred breeding habitat in high Arctic tundra is highly vulnerable to some the more immediate effects of global climate change, including loss of permafrost and subsequent changes to floral composition (Natali et al. 2014), indicating that further population declines could occur in the near future. Presently American Tree Sparrow remains a staple of Connecticut’s winter avifauna, but changes in this charismatic species’ abundance and migratory patterns should be watched closely.

Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*)

Now an expected, if scarce fall migrant, Clay-colored Sparrow was virtually unknown in Connecticut until the 1970s, and remained on the state's review list until at least 1998. Although its core nesting and wintering ranges, and migration routes mostly fall in the Great Plains and associated habitats in the center of the continent, Clay-colored has become a reliable fall migrant in the northeastern states, and a scarce but regular overwintering species in the southeast coast. In Connecticut, Clay-colored Sparrow has in the past fifteen years become annual in small numbers (Fig. 4A), and can be reasonably expected to appear in sparrow-rich migration stopover spots between September and November: over three-quarters of all of the state's Clay-colored Sparrow records come from fall migration (Fig. 4B).

The Great Plains is North America's most endangered major ecosystem, and many of the losses that account for the now-recognized 29% decrease in American avifauna are attribut-



Bruce Finnan photo

This singing Clay-colored Sparrow, seen here in Nauagtuck State Forest on May 30 2008, appeared to be on territory but never attracted a mate.

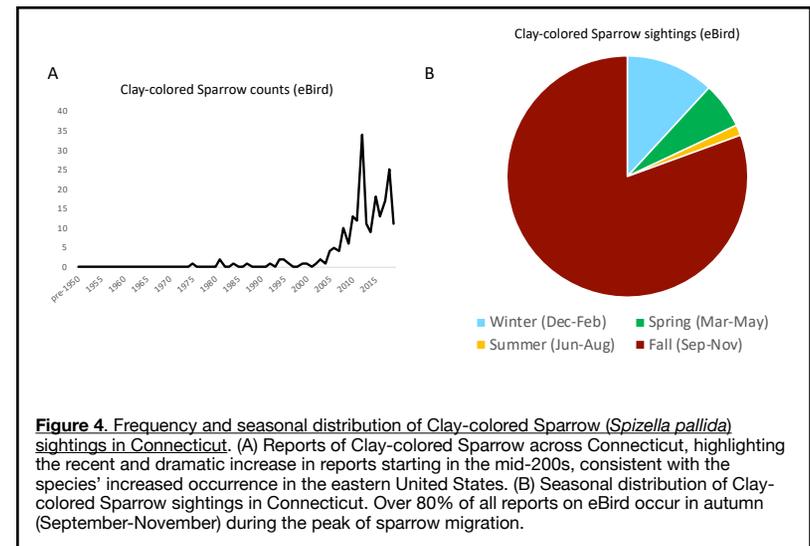


Figure 4. Frequency and seasonal distribution of Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) sightings in Connecticut. (A) Reports of Clay-colored Sparrow across Connecticut, highlighting the recent and dramatic increase in reports starting in the mid-2000s, consistent with the species' increased occurrence in the eastern United States. (B) Seasonal distribution of Clay-colored Sparrow sightings in Connecticut. Over 80% of all reports on eBird occur in autumn (September–November) during the peak of sparrow migration.

able to grassland species: more than half of all grassland specialists have disappeared since 1970, a greater loss than in any other ecosystem (Fitzpatrick & Marra 2019). Clay-colored Sparrow is no exception, and though its eastward expansion and ability to nest in disturbed habitats has buffered the effects of major losses to its core habitats, steady population declines have been recorded in the central United States since 1966, mainly attributable to conversion of grassland and shrubland habitats into human and agricultural developments (Grant & Knapton 2020). Encouragingly, Clay-colored Sparrow does appear to be shifting its breeding and wintering ranges east into semi-open habitats generated by human activity, suggesting not only that the species may be resilient to continued degradation of Great Plains habitats, but also that they may in the future become a year-round feature of eastern North America's avifauna. However, as one of the most abundant, mobile, and disturbance-tolerant Great Plains specialist species, it remains to be seen which other species, if any, may replicate this eastward expansion in the face of increased habitat loss.

Conclusions

The past decades have seen unprecedented changes in bird

populations, distributions, and behaviors across North America and the world, and the status and distribution of Connecticut's Spizella and Spizelloides sparrows are no exceptions. Regional and seasonal increases in population, as exemplified in Connecticut's Chipping and Clay-colored sightings, may give the impression that populations continent-wide are on the rise, and in some cases this is true: Clay-colored Sparrow in particular has responded well to concerted conservation efforts in the Great Plains (Faanes 1981). However, it is important to recognize that changes in migration pattern, overwintering habits, and total abundance in our state may be indicative of population-wide responses to severe, continent-wide pressures. Climate change is known to delay timing and shorten distance of bird migration (Hedenström et al. 2007, Horton et al. 2020), and although in the short-term that may suggest less strenuous seasonal movements for many species, dramatic and rapid disruption of migration cycles that have evolved over millions of years may lead to a complete breakdown of phenology with dire consequences. Whether the changes we have observed in migratory sparrows in Connecticut demonstrates a vulnerability or a resilience to human pressures on wild species is yet to be seen, but no matter what, represents a tangible and intimate way to relate our local avifauna to global ecology.

Alex Lin-Moore, a resident of New Haven, is a PhD student in Genetics at Yale University.

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CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Fall Season: Aug.1 through Nov. 30, 2019

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

Highlights included a first state record of a western sparrow, a big warbler day at Bluff Point State Park in Groton and an array of late records. As usual in the always productive four-month autumn season, rare species are scattered throughout this report, from grebes through tanagers.

Major flights of Snow Geese at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich included 1364 on Nov. 13 (KM) and 3400 on Nov. 30 (SB, CEh). The first report of **Greater White-fronted Goose**, now regular in small numbers, came from Wallingford on Oct. 8 (TB). An excellent count of 14 Blue-winged Teal was made at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) on Aug. 30 (RS). The season's first **Eurasian Wigeon** was reported on Nov. 5 at 14-Acre Pond in Norwalk (JF et al.). There were additional reports in late November from the Compo Beach area of Westport (TG) and from Mondo Ponds in Milford (FG). Early dabbling ducks included two American Wigeon and a Gadwall on Sept. 5 at Research Parkway in Meriden (PDe). Single

Redheads were present in November at Andover Lake in Andover (DW et al.) and at Wononskopomuc Lake in Lakeville (DJe, BD). A good fall flock of 160 Ring-necked Ducks was at Sharon Audubon on Oct. 13 (SMc). A female King Eider was in Waterford on Sept. 16 (NB), and it was joined by a male on Oct. 13 (NB, PR). The male continued to be seen through at least Nov. 17 (MB et al.). Andover Lake held 220 Ruddy Ducks on Nov. 9 (DM). An **Eared Grebe** was found during the annual Big Sit competition Oct. 13 at Milford Point (FG, et al). A **Western Grebe** was a great find Nov. 24-27 off Cove Island Park in Stamford (SMr, m.ob.).

A **White-winged Dove** flew by the Lighthouse Point Park

hawk watch in New Haven on Nov. 17 (JHo). The latest Yellow-billed Cuckoo was Nov. 1 at Greenwich Point Park (CEh). The season's first south-bound Common Nighthawk was reported on Aug. 11 in Woodbridge (CL). A migratory movement of c 430 was noted at Woodbury Middle School, which also hosted a Chimney Swift roost of c. 1350, both on Aug. 30 (RN). A **Selasphorus hummingbird** was at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport on Sept. 6 (TG). An adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** visited a Simsbury feeder Sept. 14-Dec15 (fide JK). A female/immature visited a feeder in Naugatuck Sept. 5 (MSz), an immature male was present at a Coventry feeder Oct. 7-Nov. 6 (SL), and one visited a private feeder in Columbia to Nov 12 (fide DP).

A **Sandhill Crane** was easy to see Oct. 26-28 at Salt Meadow Park in Madison (MA, m.ob.). Two were seen on Nov. 4 in Southbury (JD), and various flyovers included a flock of five on Nov. 29 at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven (NB). An unusual flurry of **Common Gallinule** sightings, all

immatures, involved singles Sept. 13-16 at Branford Supply Ponds (FG, m.ob.) and Oct. 4 at Little Pond in Litchfield (MD). Two were at Bishop's Pond in Meriden on Oct. 11-13 (NB et al.).

Three **American Avocets** appeared at Milford Point on Aug. 30 and were seen by many through Sept. 9 (HW, FM et al.). One, thought to be a separate individual, continued primarily at Stratford Marina through Oct. 4 (FM, FG et al.). The breakwater off Milford Point held a high count of 80 American Oystercatchers on Sept. 16 (FM). The first report of an American Golden-Plover was Aug. 28 at Milford Point (SSp). The high count was four on Oct. 28 at Sandy Point in West Haven (PS et al.), and the last report came from Durham Meadows on Nov. 17 (CI et al.). An Upland Sandpiper was a surprising late find Nov. 1 when it flew across Lordship Blvd. in Stratford and landed long enough to be well-photographed (LO).

Two reports of a single Hudsonian Godwit came within about a half hour of each other Sept. 5 from Sandy Point as a fly by (NB) and



Tina Green photo

This adult Black-legged Kittiwake, shown here on Oct. 20, 2019 in Southport, was an unexpected visitor away from the open waters of Long Island Sound.

Short Beach Park in Stratford on the ground (SSp). A Marbled Godwit was at Milford Point on Aug. 8 (SSp), with two at Sandy Point in West Haven the next day (GS). Two were then seen Aug. 13 at Milford Point (FM et al.). The first Stilt Sandpiper was at Milford Point on Aug. 3 (JN), and the only report of multiple birds was of two on Aug. 21 at the Guilford shorebird pools (FM). The season's first Baird's Sandpipers were singles Aug. 22 at Sandy Point (SU) and Aug. 23 at Windham Airport, North Windham, (PR). A rare adult Baird's was

at Sandy Point on Aug. 30 (JR). The last report came on Sept. 28 at Sandy Point (DRt, FG). The first Buff-breasted Sandpipers were found Aug. 24 at Sandy Point (JLn, BM et al.) and Milford Point (NM). The high count was two in late August at HBSP (GH et al.). During the Semipalmated Sandpiper's peak migration period, 3500 were massed at Milford Point on Aug. 7 (FM). A Spotted Sandpiper lingered to Nov. 29 at Greenwich Point (MH). A **Wilson's Phalarope** was photographed at Silver Sands State Park, Milford, on Aug. 30 (fide MB).

The Connecticut River swallow cruise boat out of Deep River happened upon a **Parasitic Jaeger** on Sept. 1 (MB). A dark immature was seen off Old Saybrook from Sept. 10 through 16 (NB). Three **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were unusual because of their onshore presence, an adult Oct. 19- 21 in the Sherwood Island area (TG et al.), a juvenile on Oct. 28 at Milford Point (SSp) and another immature at Long Beach, Stratford, Oct. 29 (SMr). Large flocks of 450 Ring-billed Gulls and 270 Laughing Gulls participated in an aerial feeding frenzy on flying insects - apparently winged ants - at Milford Point and Short Beach in Stratford late in the day on Sept. 8 (FM). A Bonaparte's Gull was inland Sept. 6 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (FZ). A seasonally unexpected **Black-headed Gull** was at Milford Point on Aug. 29 (SSp) and continued to be seen primarily at Short Beach Park in Stratford through Oct. 21 (FM et al.). One was at Stonington Point on Nov. 11 (DP).

A **Gull-billed Tern** was found on Sept. 25 at Burying Hill Beach in Westport (TG),

and to the delight of many birders it was relocated the next day at nearby Sherwood Mill Pond along with a second individual (m.ob.). They continued in that area through Sept. 28 (TG et al.). An aggregation of 1200 *Sterna* terns on Aug. 23 at Sandy Point in West Haven included 46 Roseate Terns (NB). A lower Connecticut River swallow boat cruise on Aug. 30 logged a count of 88 Forster's Terns (FG). Up to 30 were at Birdseye boat launch in Stratford on Oct. 17 (SMr), and 31 were in Milford harbor on Nov. 2 (SSp). The high count of Black Skimmers was two at Greenwich Point on Sept. 28 (CEh et al.).

The bird of the season (if it wasn't for a little sparrow) was an adult female **Magnificent Frigatebird** observed on Aug. 17 soaring over HBSP (SSk, DSk). A roost of 1410 Double-crested Cormorants was on the Stonington breakwater an hour before sunset on Sept. 2 (FM). Raven Park Pond in Stratford held 22 Great Egrets on Nov. 10, with the number dropping to 11 on Nov. 30 (FM). Plum Bank marsh in Old Saybrook held 19 adult and 22 juvenile Little Blue Herons on Aug. 5 (JOG).



Abby Sesselberg photo
This well-marked juvenile Swainson's Hawk flew by the hawk watch at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven on Oct. 4. The number of occurrences in the state have been on the decline.

An immature was inland in Woodbury on Sept. 4 (GH, FG), An unusual Tricolored Heron sighting, both late and inland, was well-documented Oct. 16 in Killingworth (DRu). A Glossy Ibis was inland at Little Pond, Litchfield, on Sept. 3 (BD).

A **Mississippi Kite** was flying west over Norwalk Community Gardens on Sept. 8 (FM). A major movement of 3000+ Broad-winged Hawks on Sept. 17 at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich was right in the seasonal sweet spot for this species. (RM). An intermediate morph **Swainson's Hawk** was an exciting find Sept. 28 at Windham Airport in North Windham (PR). What may have been the

same bird was photographed Oct. 4 at the Lighthouse Point hawk watch (JHo, AS). The only confirmed Snowy Owl sighting was Nov. 23 on a house roof in Stratford (SC). There were reports of Red-headed Woodpeckers from at least 10 locations, including a cluster of up to four at a location in East Windsor through November, with some continuing through winter and into early spring (PDe et al.). .

A significant flight of c. 350 Eastern Kingbirds was at Sherwood Island on Aug. 30 (TG), along with a high count of three Olive-sided Flycatchers (TG). The season's only Northern Shrikes were one that made a brief visit to



Paul Smith photo
This Lark Sparrow, photographed on Sept. 17 at Quinnipiac River Park in New Haven, was one of at least six for the season, a record number.

Milford Point on Oct. 27 (LB), and one found at Allen's Meadows in Wilton Nov. 17-18 (RDo, TG). A White-eyed Vireo lingered Nov. 29-Dec. 1 at HBSP (JS). **Bell's Vireos** were reported twice by experienced observers, on Sept. 13 at UConn's Lot W in Storrs (MS) and Nov. 13 at Millstone Point in Waterford (DP). There are two previous state records. Red-eyed Vireos were late Nov. 9 in Old Lyme (RS) and Danbury (DSa).

A Horned Lark on Aug. 16 at Sandy Point was suggestive

of local breeding (PL). The swallow cruises on the lower Connecticut River recorded 2000-4000 Purple Martins on Aug. 23 (FG). A light flight of **Cave Swallows** included singles on Nov. 1 and Nov. 6 at Lighthouse Point (SMa, DC, FM et al.) and one on Nov. 1 at HBSP (RS, GN). Two were at Greenwich Point on Nov. 12 (CEh). A **Sedge Wren** made a brief appearance Sept. 13 at Stratford Point (PC). Others were seen Oct. 4 at Silver Sands State Park in Milford (JOs) and Oct. 22 at Colebrook Reservoir (RBe). The first southbound Swain-

son's Thrush, based on nocturnal flight calls, was heard Sept. 8 in Sterling (RDi). A Lapland Longspur was early Sept. 21 in Preston (DP), followed by two on Sept. 25 at Sandy Point (JLe).

The first report of a **Clay-colored Sparrow** was Sept. 19 at Allen's Meadows in Wilton (SMi et al.). There were at least ten for the season statewide. The state's first **Brewer's Sparrow** was found Nov. 23 at HBSP (JC et al.). Word spread quickly and more than 500 birders were able to see and photograph it through Nov. 25 (m.ob.). An especially good high count of six Vesper's Sparrows was at Allen's Meadows on Sept. 21 (JBe). A **Lark Sparrow** on Sept. 8 at Bluff Point, Groton, (DP) touched off an unusual number of reports. Others were seen on Sept. 9-10 at the Lighthouse Point Park hawk watch (TG et al.); Sept. 17 at Quinnipiac River Park in New Haven (PS); Sept. 22 and Oct. 23 at Silver Sands (JOs, TM); Oct. 26 at Sikorsky Airport in Stratford (ER) and Nov. 2 at Sherwood Island (DJa). The first report of a migrant Grasshopper Sparrow was Sept. 8 at HBSP (JC). Others were at Stratford

Point Sept. 29 (SMr) and at Allen's Meadows on Oct. 21 (CC). A **LeConte's Sparrow** was a nice find Nov. 23 at Savin Lake in Lebanon (CL, MV). It remained remarkably cooperative for such a skulking species through Nov. 26 (m.ob.). The first migrant White-crowned Sparrows were found Sept. 22 in Barkhamsted (DRo) and Milford (JOs et al.).

Yellow-breasted Chats were in Cornwall on Aug. 8 (RBe), in Woodbridge on Oct. 12 (RS), in Portland on Oct. 22 (TA) and at Walnut Beach in Milford on Nov. 9 (JOs). **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were at Silver Sands State Park, Milford, on Sept. 2 (BH) and at a Coventry feeder on Nov. 19 (PG). A late Bobolink was at Sherwood Island on Nov. 16 (TG). The state's third **Western Meadowlark**, and the second for Sherwood Island State Park, was present Oct. 23-26 (TG et al.). The latest report of Boat-tailed Grackles this year were 16 at Long Beach, Stratford Aug. 22 (FM). Early visits to Bluff Point State Park in Groton produced some good Baltimore Oriole numbers, including 17 on Aug. 10, 18 on Aug. 11 and 16 on Aug.



Bruce Finnan photo
One of the Thanksgiving guests at the Kozlak home in Torrington was this handsome male Western Tanager, present from Nov. 18 to Dec. 8.

23 (GW, PR). The typical early push of Red-winged Blackbirds produced a tally of 1650 on Aug. 10 at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven (GH).

A Golden-winged Warbler, now rare in the state, was banded at Bent of the River Audubon in Southbury on Aug. 27 (CF). The season's only Lawrence's Warbler was in New Milford on Aug. 19 (AD). A **Prothonotary Warbler**, most often seen in spring, was found Aug. 15 in Danbury (NS). An Aug. 31 warbler movement in Wilton produced 13 species in a backyard in about 20 minutes (JBe). The big morning

flight day at Bluff Point was Sept. 25, when clear skies with moderate northwest winds produced about 5000 warblers of 21 species (DP, PR). Another big day on Oct. 19 produced 4000 warblers in proportions expected for the later date, 12 species consisting almost entirely of Yellow-rumped Warblers (DP). Late reports included a Tennessee Warbler on Nov. 6 in Middle Haddam (LW), a Magnolia Warbler on Nov. 2 in Stratford (LO), Black-and-white Warblers Nov. 14 at HBSP (PH) and Waterbury (GH), a Northern Parula Nov. 18 at Avery Pond in Preston (PT), a Yellow Warbler Nov. 26 at Sherwood Island (TG) and a

Wilson's Warbler Nov. 29 in Milford (FM).

An adult male **Western Tanager** visited a feeder in Torrington from Nov. 18 to Dec. 8 (PK et al.). **Blue Grosbeaks** were at Bauer Park in Madison on Aug. 21 (FM, HW et al.), at Smith Richardson Preserve in Fairfield on Oct. 4-21 (EG, JF et al.) and at Silver Sands State Park Nov. 6-7 (SSp et al.). Lighthouse Point Park's first passage Dickcissels were two on Aug. 23 (SMa, DC).

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PHOTO CHALLENGE

By Frank Mantlik

Here we have a photograph of an obvious duck. Given the bird's body shape and bill shape, we get the sense that it is one of the "puddle" or "dabbling" ducks. In other words those species that tip up and feed by submerging just their heads under water, versus "diving" ducks that completely dive underwater for food. As such, we can rule out the scoters, mergansers, eiders, and other diving ducks.

One prominent field mark of this duck is the blue bill. Only a few North American species have this feature: Northern Pintail, Wigeons, Redhead, and Greater and Lesser Scaup. Another feature of this duck is the fairly uniform reddish-brown color. The combination of bill and body color points to a Wigeon. Since there is no colored crown stripe that males of both species exhibit, we know that this is a female.

Most U.S. birders know well how to distinguish male American Wigeons from male Eurasian Wigeons. The former has a gray head and reddish sides; the latter has a reddish head and gray sides. The difference between females is quite a bit more subtle. As such, it seems few CT birders study female



Wigeons in the field. Like the males, female American Wigeons have rusty brown sides and a contrasting grayish head. But wait a minute! Our subject bird has a reddish brown head color similar to the color of its sides. Might this be a female Eurasian Wigeon?

Upon closer inspection, and comparing this bird to adjacent male and female American Wigeons at the time, this female definitely had a uniformly warm reddish brown head and body color. Also, the upperparts are grayer and less patterned than the nearby female Americans. Further, looking closely at the head, this female has virtually no black near the gape of the bill. Female American Wigeons have a small but distinct black area at the gape. If seen in flight, another good field mark to look for is the gray "armpits" (axillaries) of Eurasian Wigeon versus the white armpits of American Wigeon.

This female Eurasian Wigeon was photographed by me on November 29, 2019 at Mondo Ponds in Milford, Connecticut. Upon reporting this duck, several other birders were able to relocate this individual, and appreciated the opportunity to study a female Eurasian Wigeon.

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Photo Challenge No. 109

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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