

# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*



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# The Connecticut Warbler

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## ON THE COVER

### Harris's Sparrow

**Julian Hough has applied his estimable artistic talents to the winter season's most sought-after bird, the Harris's Sparrow that took up long-term residence at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.**

## THE MABEL OSGOOD WRIGHT AWARD

2020: To George W. Zepko

*Steve Broker prepared the following for the 36th annual meeting of the Connecticut Ornithological Association, scheduled for March 21, 2020 but canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.*

Mabel Osgood Wright was born on January 26, 1859 in New York City, and she died at age 75 on July 16, 1934 in Fairfield, Connecticut. Through a lifetime of dedication to the study of birds and bird conservation, Ms. Wright contributed immeasurably to the advancement of our knowledge of, and the general public's knowledge of ornithology in Connecticut. Her accomplishments included a keen understanding of bird biology and behavior, a unique talent for writing about the natural world, significant contributions to the early years of the Audubon movement, a founding member of the National Association of Audubon Societies, editorial responsibilities for the Audubon journal *Bird-Lore*, election to the American Ornithologists Union, founding membership of and first



*George W. Zepko holding one of many Barn Owl nestlings he banded at Dodd's Barn in Middlefield, Connecticut. Photo by Marcia M. Klattenberg.*

president of the Connecticut Audubon Society, creation of Birdcraft Sanctuary in Fairfield, active participation in conservation programs, support of legislation for the protection of birds, and authorship of 27 books on birds and nature, including a highly popular field guide to the birds. "The History of Connecticut Audubon Society's Birdcraft Sanctuary and Museum," written by Kathy Van Der Aue and published in *The Connecticut Warbler*, Volume 36, Number 1 (January 2016), provides a wonderful discussion of Mabel Osgood Wright's impact on American ornithology. Mabel Osgood Wright was born five years after Henry David Thoreau published *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, his experiment of immersion in nature, and five years before George Perkins Marsh published *Man and Nature*, a study of human impacts on the physical world. She died the same year that Roger Tory Peterson produced the first edition of his groundbreaking *A Field Guide to the Birds*.

The Connecticut Ornithological Association annually bestows its highest honor, the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, on an individual who has made significant contributions to the study and conservation of birds in Connecticut. This year's recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award is George W. Zepko, a founding life member of the Connecticut Ornithological Association and a former board member of COA. George's lasting contributions to bird study and conservation in Connecticut fall into three broad, complementary categories: (1) essential work with the first Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas (1982-86); (2) multi-year field studies and banding of nestlings of the state-endangered Barn Owl; (3) financial support of ornithology education for the youth of our state.

In October 1981, a group of 20 interested Connecticut citizens, birdwatchers, and ornithologists met at Wesleyan University to consider launching a scientific breeding bird study. This was one of the first such comprehensive surveys of breeding birds conducted in the United States. Field work for the atlas project commenced in 1982. Through the five years of statewide atlasing, more than 500 field volunteers gathered 42,629 records in Connecticut and submitted them on

field cards. All this breeding bird information was directed to George Zepko, the Manager of User Services at Wesleyan University's Computing Center. George was the logical person to be in charge of computer programming for the Breeding Bird Atlas. He coordinated all the data processing of atlas breeding records and moved this monumental state ornithological project from field cards to data entry, printing, and proofreading of the final summaries of species numbers, then on to the two-dozen contributing authors who wrote the individual species accounts. This handling of the field data was repeated for each of the five atlasing years, with annual updates of the breeding evidence for 189 bird species, including 173 species confirmed as breeders in Connecticut. The atlas results were published in 1994 in *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Connecticut*, edited by Louis R. Bevier (State Geological and Natural History Survey of Connecticut). The species account for Barn Owl was written by raptor specialists Buzz Devine and Dwight Smith, each a previous recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, Buzz in 2011 and Dwight in 2003. While Barn Owl was listed previously as a threatened species in the state, the more recently published lists of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species in Connecticut have recognized Barn Owl as an endangered species.

The Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas Project produced only four confirmed nesting records of Barn Owls in its first three years of field work. Three of those four nest sites had been monitored by George Zepko over the previous five-year period as he observed and banded Barn Owl nestlings in two Middlesex County towns. Working under the banding permit assigned to Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's Fred Sibley (Mabel Osgood Wright Award recipient in 1996), George's banding records in Middletown at Wesleyan University's Memorial Chapel and a nearby water tank, as well as two barns in Middlefield, were submitted to the Federal Bird Banding Laboratory in Maryland. These Barn Owl banding records, ultimately numbering more than 150 owl nestlings, constituted a significant percentage of all Barn Owl banding records made in the state. However, these were not solitary trips to Barn Owl nesting locations. Rather, George

was assisted by a small team of loyal volunteers, and the banding operations always attracted a number of energetic neighborhood children who took delight in the special experience of observing young Barn Owls in the hand as George took measurements and attached the federal banding rings. Here is a fine example of George's strong interest in teaching young birders about bird study and the critical importance of wise conservation practices.

George currently is submitting his many years of Barn Owl records to the eBird database, along with his reports from several dozen wetland call-back surveys for the Connecticut DEP-Wildlife Division. These surveys were conducted by canoe in the Coginchaug River marshland in Durham Meadows Wildlife Management Area. George's wetland surveys collected valuable breeding season data on such endangered, threatened, and elusive marsh birds as Pied-billed Grebe, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Bittern, and Least Bittern. His unpublished writing about Barn Owls includes descriptions of known Barn Owl nesting habitat, nesting and banding results, interviews with a dozen of the state's most active owl field observers, guidelines for installation of Barn Owl nest boxes, and recommendations for further study. Yet another of George's projects currently in the works is to submit an article summarizing his years of Barn Owl research to *The Connecticut Warbler*.

George Zepko's most lasting contribution to the study of birds is the direct result of the life changing experiences he had as a young man at the National Audubon Society Nature Study Camp for teachers and adult students in mid-coastal Maine. Founded in 1936, this world-famous camp is now known as the Hog Island Audubon Camp and is administered by the Science Division of the National Audubon Society through Project Puffin. In 1955, the Westport Audubon Society awarded a scholarship to then nineteen-year-old George Zepko to attend the well known and highly respected Nature Study Camp. This was a new and exciting experience for a young adult beginning to develop a deeper understanding of the natural world. George's Audubon Camp experi-

ences that year were formative in leading him to more than six decades of diverse contributions to ornithology in Connecticut.

For the past three years, George Zepko has made it possible for the Connecticut Ornithological Association to establish a permanent endowment for future recipients of the George W. Zepko Audubon Camp Scholarship. Just as he benefited from his Hog Island experiences, George is pleased to pass on this opportunity to today's young birders. In his generosity and in all respects, George Zepko exemplifies the qualities and accomplishments expressed a century earlier by Mabel Osgood Wright.

For these and many other contributions that he has made during a lifetime of dedication to Connecticut birds and conservation, the Connecticut Ornithological Association takes great pride in recognizing George W. Zepko as the recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.



*This framed photograph of a Barn Owl in flight by Jim Zipp was presented by the Connecticut Ornithological Association to George W. Zepko along with the 2020 Mabel Osgood Wright Award.*

## THE 2019 SUMMER BIRD COUNT

By Joe Zeranski, Patrick Comins, Tom Robben and Chris Wood

**Note:** *Any evidence of nesting by state-endangered (E), threatened (T) or special concern (SC) species should be reported to the COA Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) Project. This will ensure that the best available information can be taken into account in land-use decisions.*

### Introduction

The Summer Bird Count (SBC) is our oldest and largest inventory of breeding birds in Connecticut. This effort is now in its 28th year and helps us to sample the changing status of breeding birds in the state and provide insight into the dynamic nature of the distribution and status of our breeding birds. As was the case last year, this year's effort was especially important as it coincided with the Connecticut Bird Atlas project. Many observers collected data for the atlas project alongside their SBC data. As the results emerge from the atlas effort it will be interesting to see how well our SBC data captured the range expansions and contractions that the new atlas will undoubtedly show. The preliminary results indicate that we already had a good idea of which species were expanding their ranges and which were contracting thanks to the data you have collected over the years. Thank you for all of your efforts to track the breeding birds of Connecticut!

### Results

A total of 181 count-day species were recorded on the 2019 counts. This is about average (98%) [Note: averages in this article refer to the average of the previous ten years' data, respectively] and 17 more than the last year's count. One additional count period species was observed, a **Greater Scaup** in Greenwich/Stamford. Litchfield Hills again had the most species with 132 and Storrs the fewest with 108. There were 245 observers, in 125 parties. The number of parties was at a ten-year low (the least since 2008) and down by 45 rela-



*Mark Szantyr photo  
Cedar Waxwings made the list of the 10 most numerous birds reported on the 2019 Summer Bird Counts.*

tive to last year. Volunteers tallied 1403.55 party hours, with 1325.8 being daylight hours and 77.75 night hours; just about average for party hours and day party hours, but well above average night hours and an all-time high for that category, due primarily to the 30 nighttime hours logged on the Woodbury/Roxbury count.

There were 95,001 individual birds recorded, which is 5,593 below last year's total and about 96% of average. The ten

most abundant species were, in descending order: **American Robin**, **Gray Catbird**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **European Starling**, **Common Grackle**, **Red-eyed Vireo**, **House Sparrow**, **Cedar Waxwing**, **Canada Goose**, and **Song Sparrow**. This is a very similar list to last year, with **Cedar Waxwing** replacing **American Goldfinch** (12th this year). Last year **Cedar Waxwing** had replaced **American Goldfinch** on the list.

Eleven species were represented by a single individual: **Northern Shoveler**, **Pied-billed Grebe** (E), **Common Nighthawk** (E), **Eastern Whip-poor-will** (SC), **Red Knot** (T), **Dunlin**, **Black Skimmer**, **American Bittern** (E), **Glossy Ibis** (SC), **Merlin**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Mourning Warbler**, and **Kentucky Warbler**.

### Non-nesting Species

There were 19 species recorded on the count days that do not regularly breed in Connecticut and can be considered either late migrants or non-nesting visitors. Underlined species could potentially nest in Connecticut, but are assumed to be non-breeders unless specific evidence of breeding was submitted: **Brant**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Sandhill Crane**, **Black-bellied Plover**, **Semipalmated Plover**, **Red Knot** (T), **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Dunlin**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Laughing Gull**, **Ring-billed Gull**, **Merlin**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Mourning Warbler**, and **Blackpoll Warbler**.

The underlined species are potential nesters that nest in nearby states, but in the absence of additional supporting evidence they will be considered non-nesting visitors. The two **Sandhill Cranes** for Hartford are the first ever recorded on the count, and could represent a nesting attempt near or in Connecticut.

Noteworthy among these: New Haven's **Northern Shoveler** hasn't been recorded statewide since 2013. Two **Long-tailed Ducks** for Greenwich/Stamford were a good find. A **Red Knot** (T) in New Haven represents the seventh SBC record



*Bruce Finnan photo*  
The counts usually record non-breeding waterbirds summering in Long Island Sound. In 2019 these included some Long-tailed Ducks.

since 1999. New Haven's two **Ruddy Turnstones** were also a good find. Hartford had four **Least Sandpipers**, especially impressive for an inland count. Barkhamsted had a **Merlin**, the fourth ever for the statewide count.

### Notable Nesting Species

New Haven had its annual **Common Nighthawk** (E), which may represent a remnant breeding population and Litchfield Hills found an **Eastern Whip-poor Will** (SC). Two **Soras** were found in New Milford/Pawling along with one each for Hartford and Litchfield Hills. Greenwich/Stamford had a **Black Skimmer**, which may have been attempting to nest in the area. Greenwich/Stamford's **Common Loon** (SC) was a lingering non-nester, but Barkhamsted's two **Common Loons** (SC) represented breeding birds. Litchfield Hills had an **American Bittern** (E) and Hartford (3) and New Milford Pawling (2) had **Least Bitterns** (T). A **Glossy Ibis** (SC) was a nice find for Greenwich/Stamford. Litchfield Hills and Barkhamsted each recorded a single **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, a species that is easily overlooked. **Pine Siskins** were

found in Greenwich/Stamford (2) and Woodbury/Roxbury (4); any record of this species could represent a nesting attempt. Two **Seaside Sparrows** (T) and three **Saltmarsh Sparrows** (SC) were great finds by team New Haven, as was their **Kentucky Warbler**.

### Species Recorded in Above Average Numbers

Aside from the two aforementioned **Sandhill Cranes**, very few species came in with new high counts. **Black Vulture** (84), **Bald Eagle** (T) (60), **Red-shouldered Hawk** (154), and **Peregrine Falcon** (T) (12) once again put in all-time high counts and **Field Sparrow** (176) had the highest total since 2002.

### Species Recorded in Below Average Numbers

Twenty-nine species came in at new low counts, including 14 new all-time lows.

### Species recorded at ten-year or all-time (\*) low numbers

Mallard*	Mourning Dove*	Killdeer*	Spotted Sandpiper
Willet	Great Black-backed Gull*	Double-crested Cormorant*	Great Egret (T)
Snowy Egret* (T)	Green Heron*	Black-cr Night-Heron*	Northern Flicker*
Monk Parakeet	Blue-headed Vireo	Bank Swallow*	Black-capped Chickadee
Veery	Hermit Thrush	American Robin	Northern Mockingbird*
European Starling*	Grasshopper Sparrow* (E) (0)	Song Sparrow	Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird*	Magnolia Warbler	Yellow Warbler	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler			



*Bruce Finnan photo*  
Soras were recorded on three of the counts. Although secretive and hard to confirm, they are likely nesters.

We will be keeping an eye on future counts of these species to see if any of these results are indicative of a trend of concern. Worth special mention again are the wading birds with record low counts for **Great Egret** (T), **Snowy Egret** (T), **Green Heron** and **Black-crowned Night Heron**, all of which been found in fewer numbers in recent years and may indicate trends of concern. Also there seems to be a good representation of northern species on this list, such as **Blue-headed Vireo**, **Magnolia Warbler**, **Black-throated Blue Warbler** and **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. **Gadwall**, **Northern Goshawk** (T) and **Grasshopper Sparrow** (E) were all missed on the count.

### Note about Warbler Populations

2019 results show generally continuing declines of many warbler species, with numbers of nearly all of the more common species in 2019 below the average of the previous 10 years. A recent Warbler article (Vol 40 #1, January 2020) detailed wood warbler population trends from the Woodbury-Roxbury Summer Bird Count database. Of the 15 species detailed

in that report, in the 2019 statewide results only three had numbers above the prior 10-year average, one of which (Worm-eating Warbler) has historically low and fluctuating numbers; another (Hooded Warbler) is highly concentrated in the lower western Litchfield County area; and the third (LOWA) indicating continued population stability statewide. The Summer Birds Counts will continue to be important for monitoring these and other species' trends that provide insight to ecological and environmental conditions in our State.

	2019 Result as % of Prior 10-Year Average
Ovenbird	93%
Worm-eating Warbler	110%
Louisiana Waterthrush	126%
Blue-winged Warbler	95%
Black-&-White Warbler	95%
Common Yellowthroat	86%
Hooded Warbler	172%
American Redstart	95%
Blackburnian Warbler	89%
Yellow Warbler	87%
Chestnut-sided Warbler	92%
Black-throated Blue Warbler	72%
Pine Warbler	89%
Prairie Warbler	91%
Black-throated Green Warbler	66%

### Thank you

On behalf of the Connecticut Ornithological Association, we would like to thank all of the volunteer observers, captains and compilers for all of your hard work. The data that you provide is critical for understanding our summer bird abundance and distribution! A special thank you goes out to Joe Zeranski, the father of Connecticut's Summer Bird Count for



*Mark Szantyr photo*  
Warblers in general have shown downward trends. In 2019 Black-throated Green Warbler was found at 66% of its 10-year SBC average.,



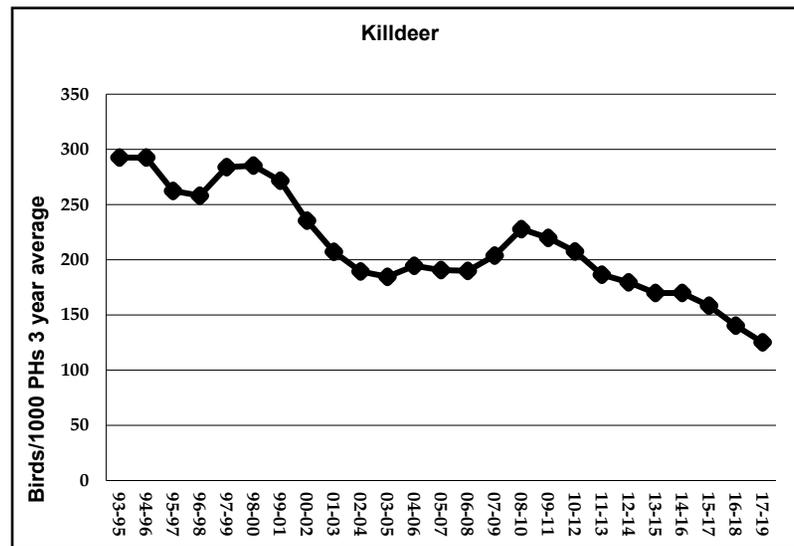
*Mark Santyr photo*  
Herons in general, including Great Egrets, continued to show declines in the results from the 2019 Summer Bird Count.

his leadership and all he has done over the years to coordinate, promote and report about the Count. This article is dedicated to Joe's memory. Thank you for all you have done for the birds and birding in Connecticut!

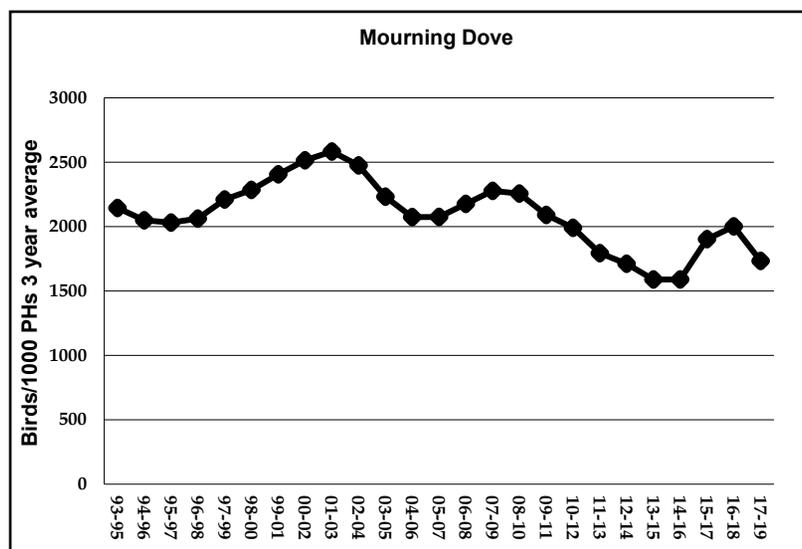
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*This year we are focusing on species with high or low counts to dig deeper on whether the counts may be indicative of a longer term trend. The data are presented as a three-year running average to smooth out year-to-year variability and corrected for effort by showing birds per 1,000 party hours. Selecting 1,000 party hours results in a similar scale as would raw birds recorded. Note, no statistical analysis was performed to determine if any trends are statistically significant.*

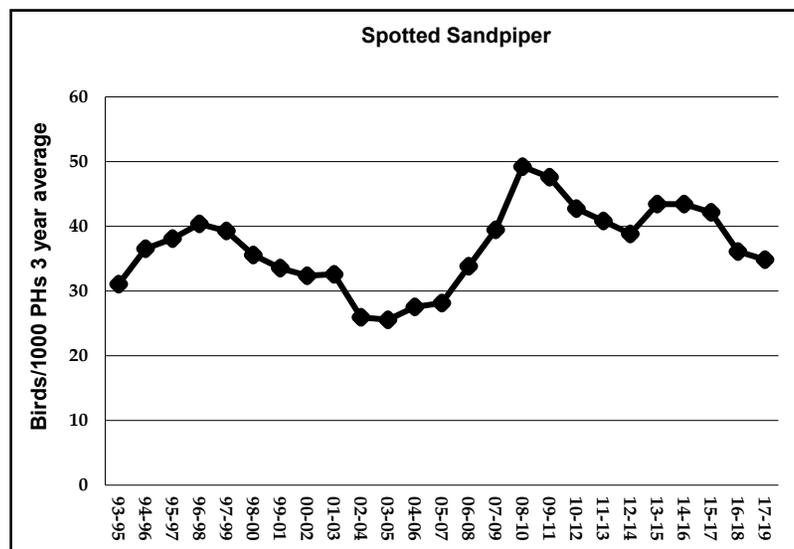
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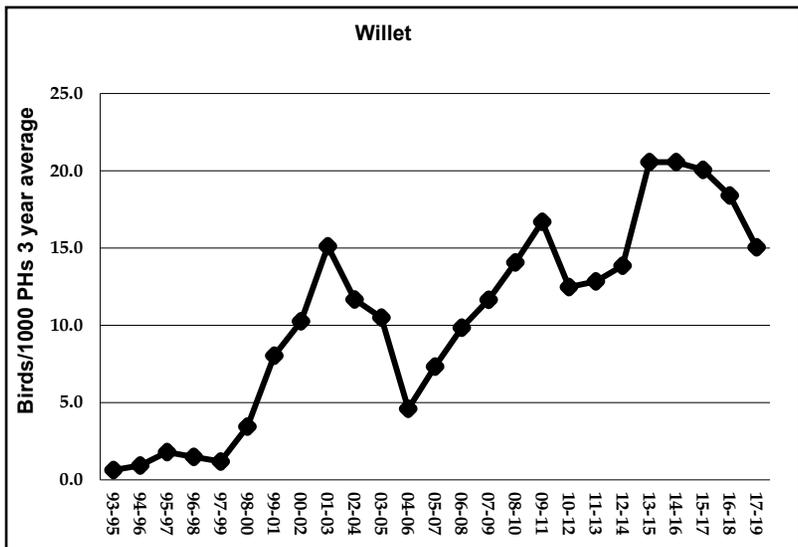
*Killdeer appears to have a legitimate declining trend, which is consistent with other indicators of their population, e.g. Breeding Bird Surveys.*



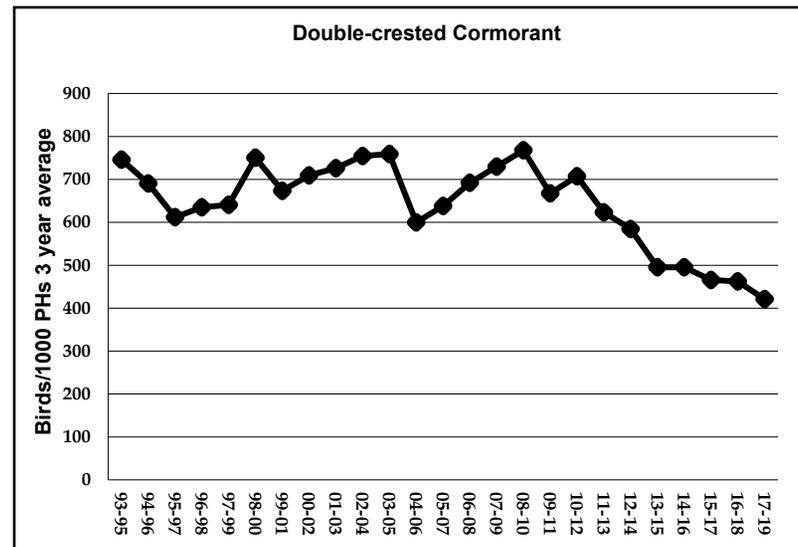
*The numbers for Mourning Dove show a less decisive trend, with some peaks and valleys, but perhaps overall fewer birds than recorded in the '90s and early '00s.*



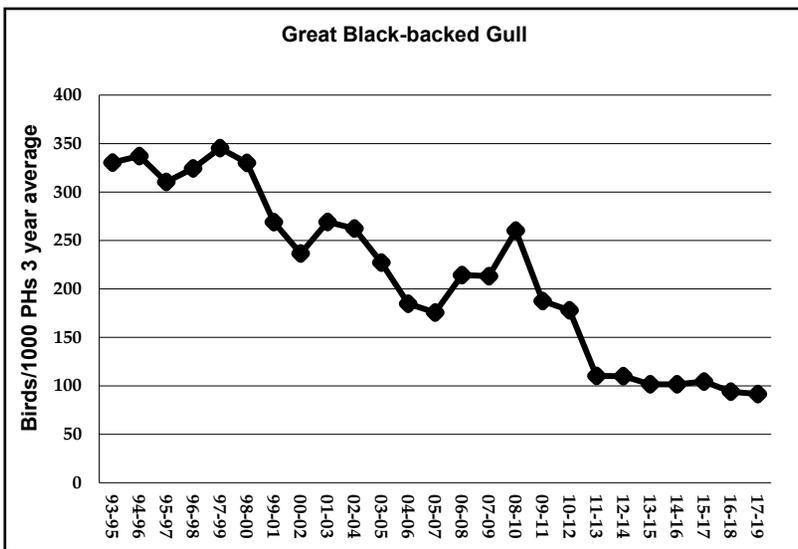
*Spotted Sandpipers have several peaks and valley and no real clear trend.*



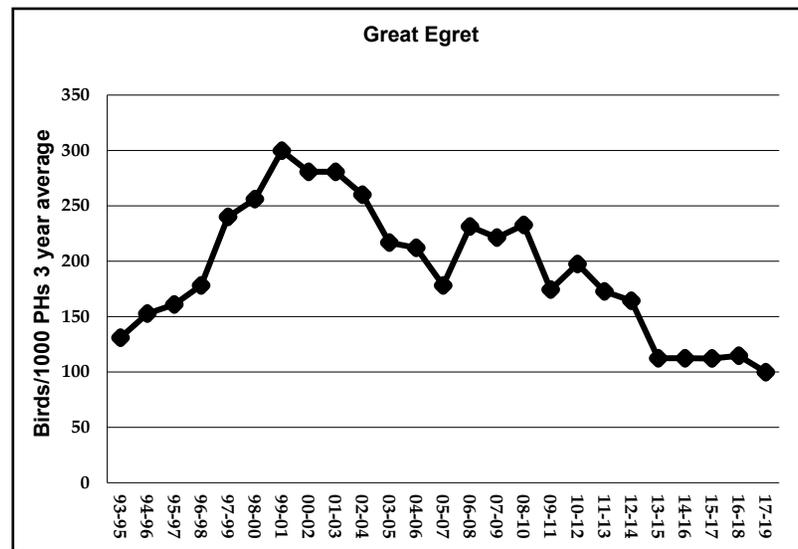
Willetts appear to have just had a down year in 2019 and relative to the '90s current counts are higher.



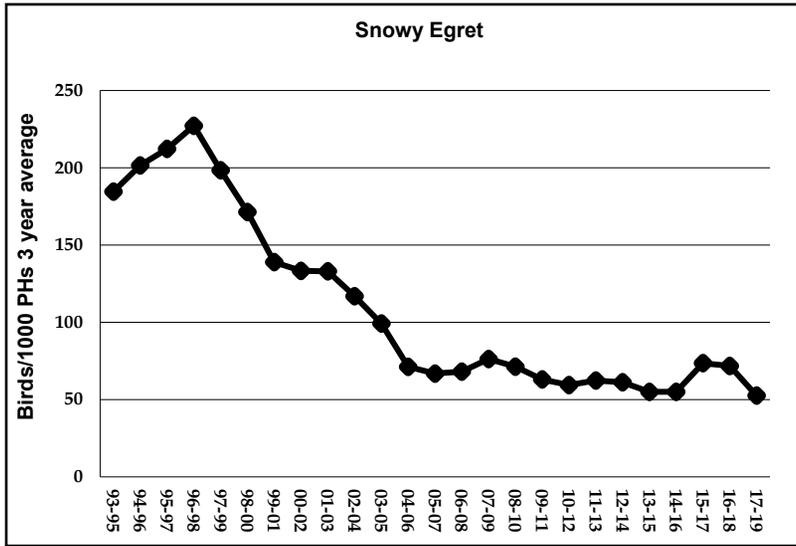
There appear to be fewer Double-crested Cormorants relative to their peak in the late '00s.



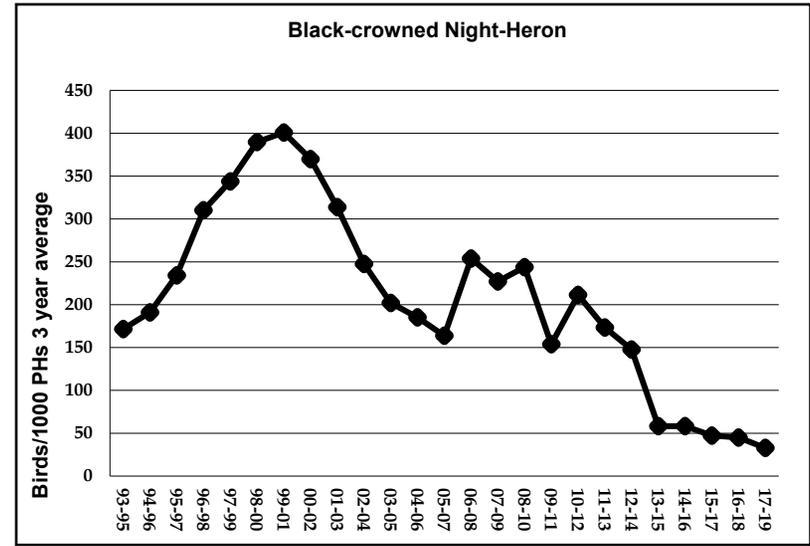
It seems pretty clear that there are fewer Great Black-backed Gulls being recorded on recent counts relative to the '90s and '00s.



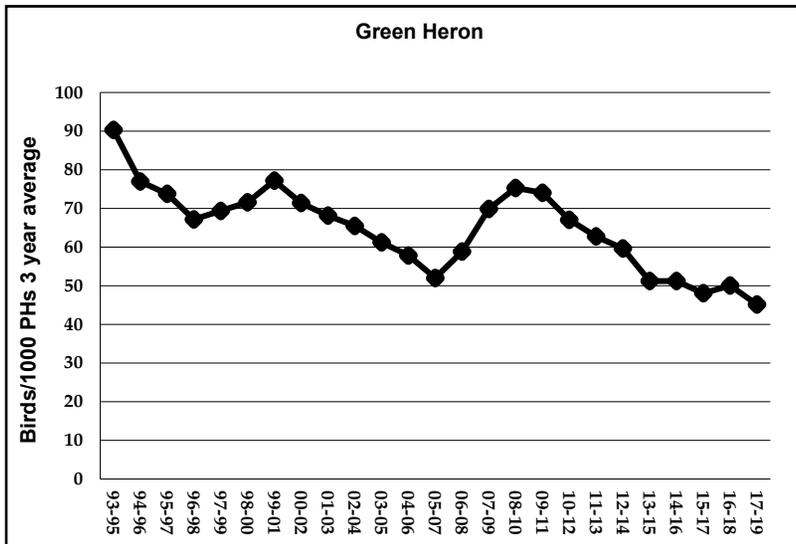
Clearly fewer Great Egrets have been recorded in recent counts relative to peaks in the early '00s.



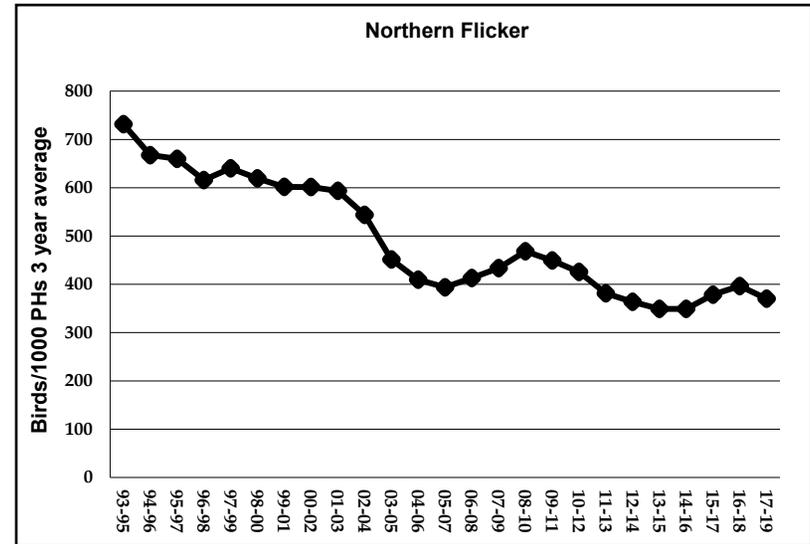
The bulk of the apparent declines in Snowy Egrets were from the late '90s to the late '00s, but they continue at reduced abundance relative to the early years of the count.



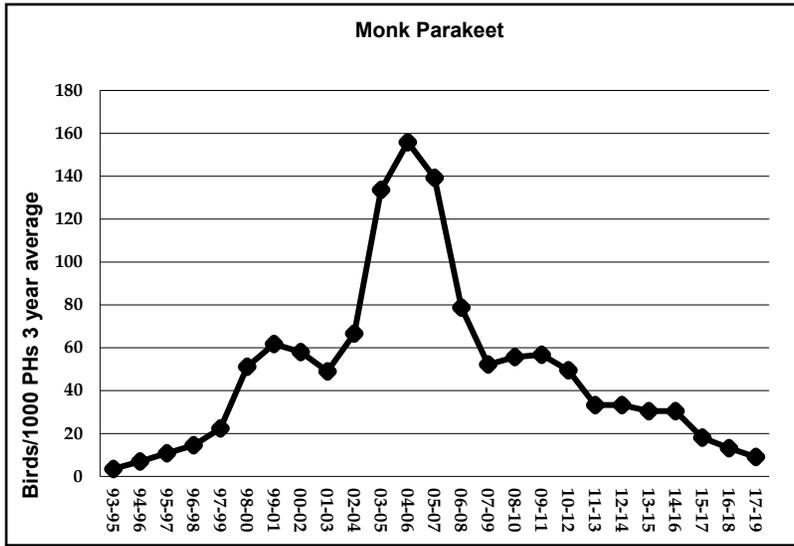
There are a lot of peaks and valleys in the numbers of Black-crowned Night Herons, but overall there are fewer recorded in recent years.



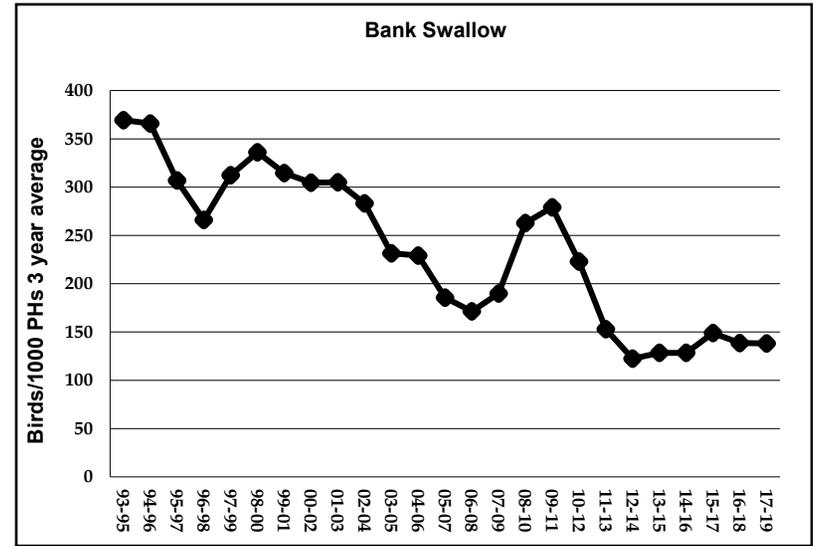
A declining trend appears to be indicated in the numbers of Green Herons recorded.



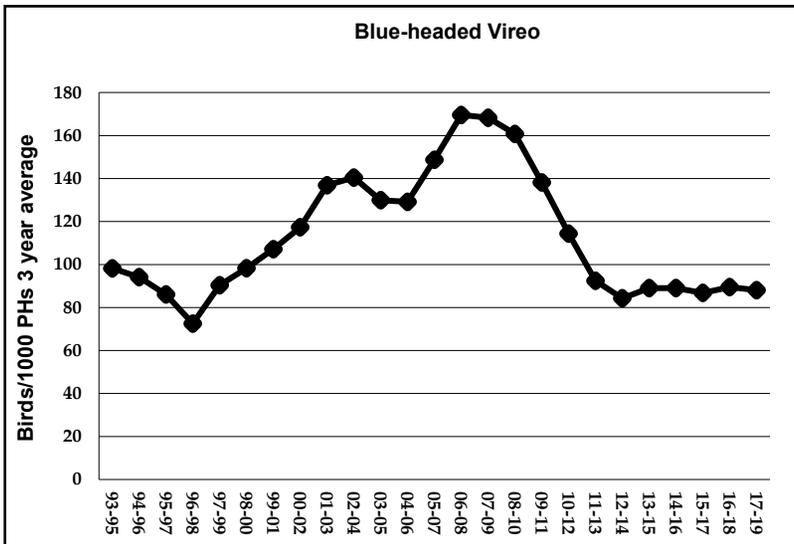
Northern Flickers appear to be in decline.



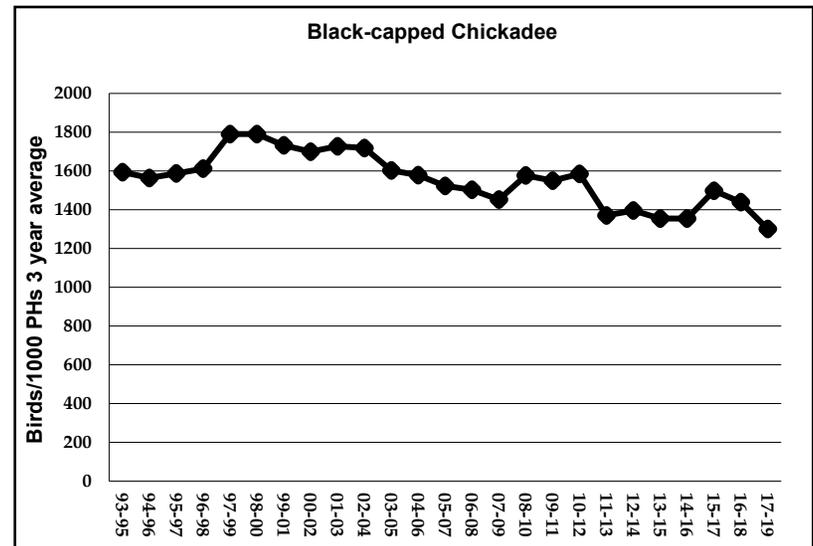
Monk Parakeets show the most interesting graph, with increasing numbers in the early counts and declining numbers for the recent counts in a typical “bell curve” shape. By most accounts it is harder to find Monk Parakeets than it was 10 years ago.



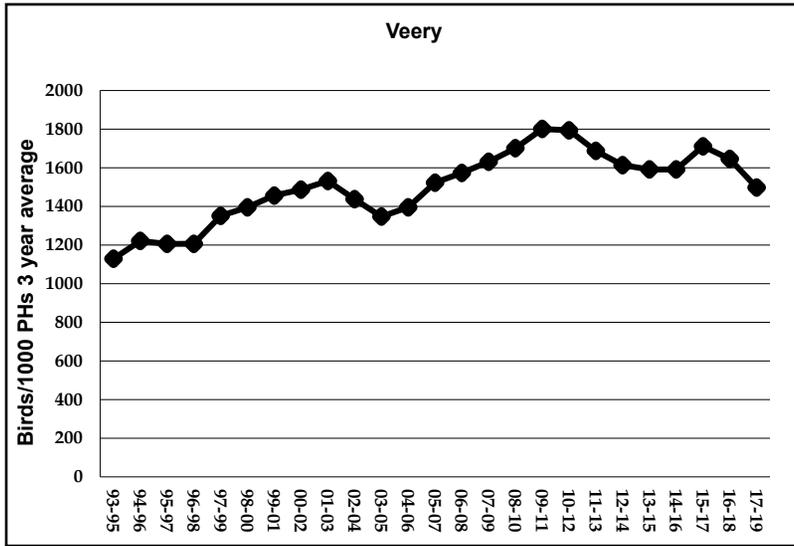
Though there are some peaks and valleys, Bank Swallows clearly appear to be less common than they were in the '90s.



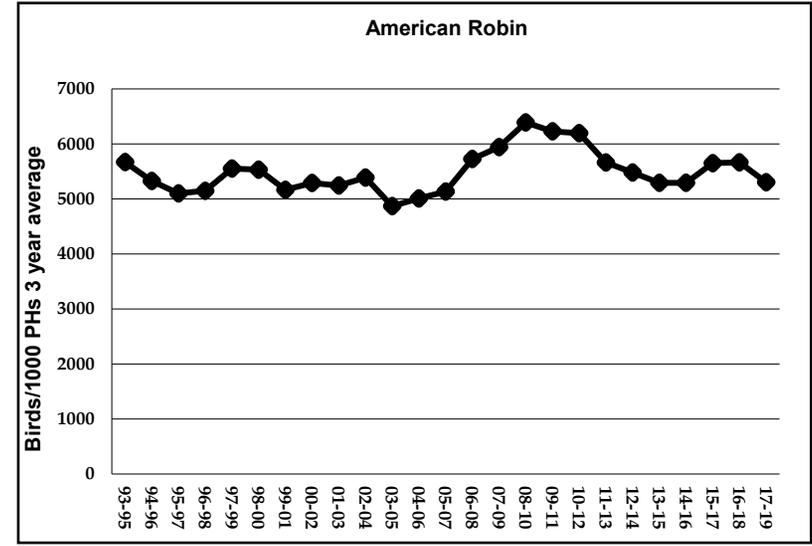
The numbers of Blue-headed Vireos have had many ups and downs, but are fairly stable for recent counts, despite this year's ten-year low.



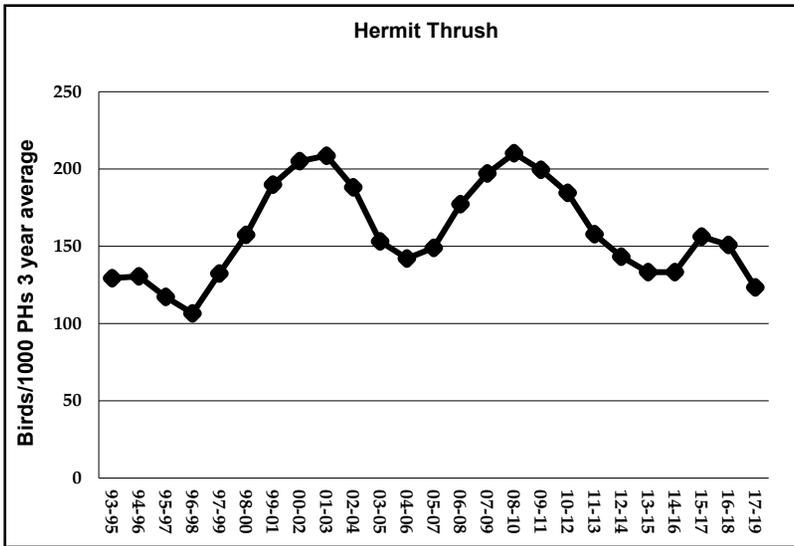
There might be a slight downward trend for Black-capped Chickadee, but differences are fairly slight.



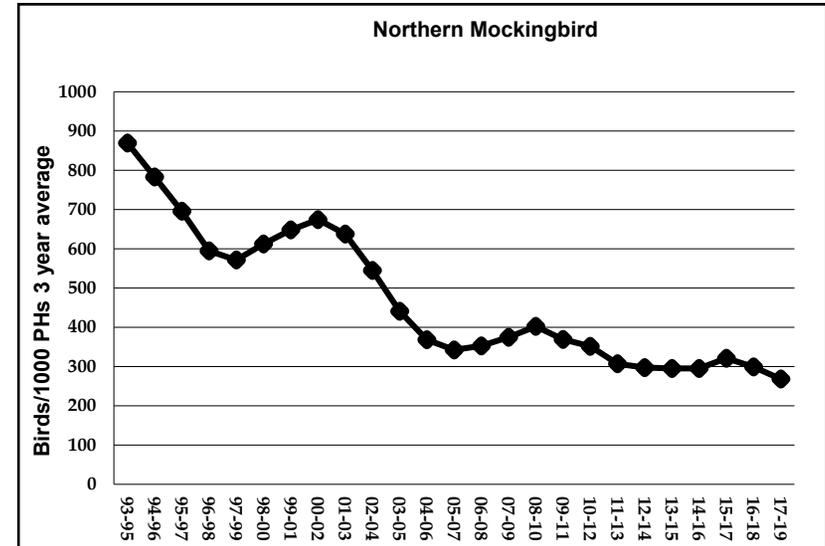
No clear trend is indicated by the numbers of Veery, despite this year's 10-year low.



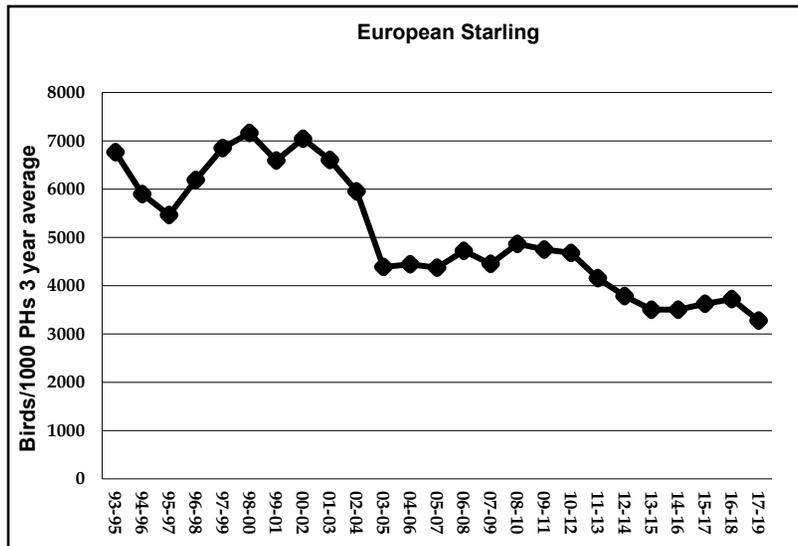
Numbers of American Robins appear to be fairly stable despite this year's low count.



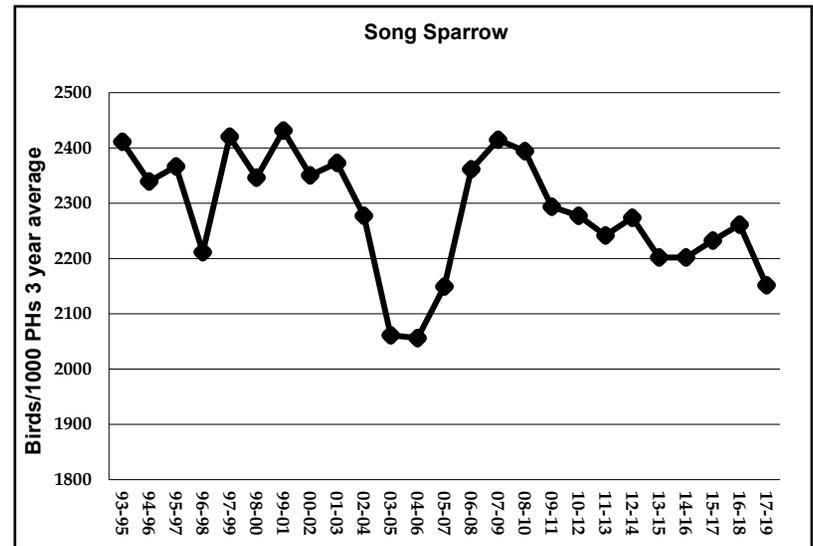
Lots of peaks and valleys and little clear trend for the numbers of Hermit Thrush.



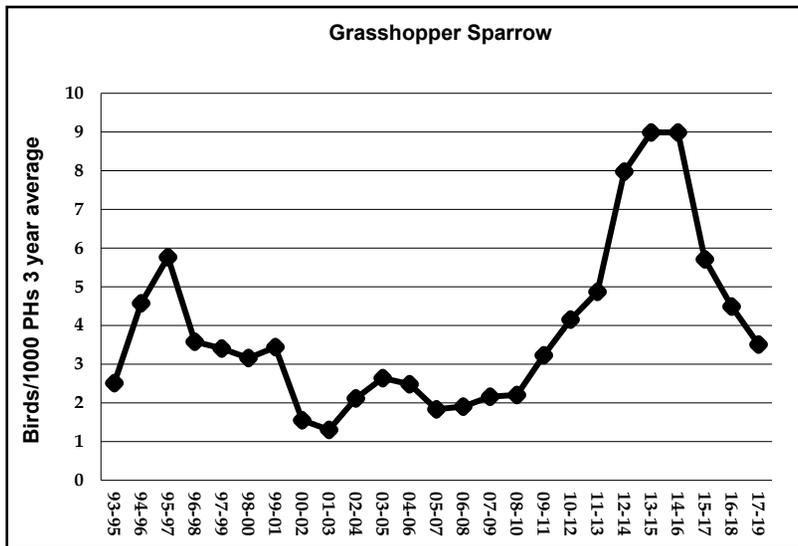
There is a clear downward trend in the numbers of Northern Mockingbirds.



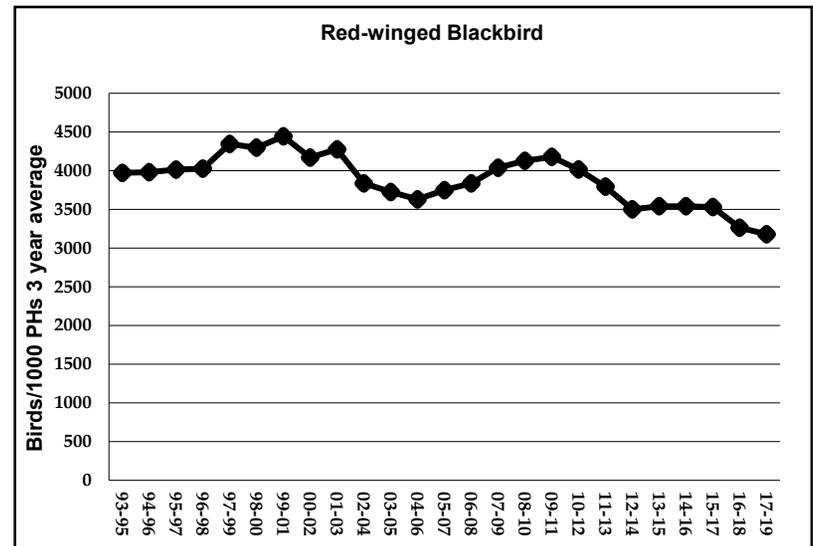
Fewer European Starlings are being recorded, although there are some peaks and valleys in the graph.



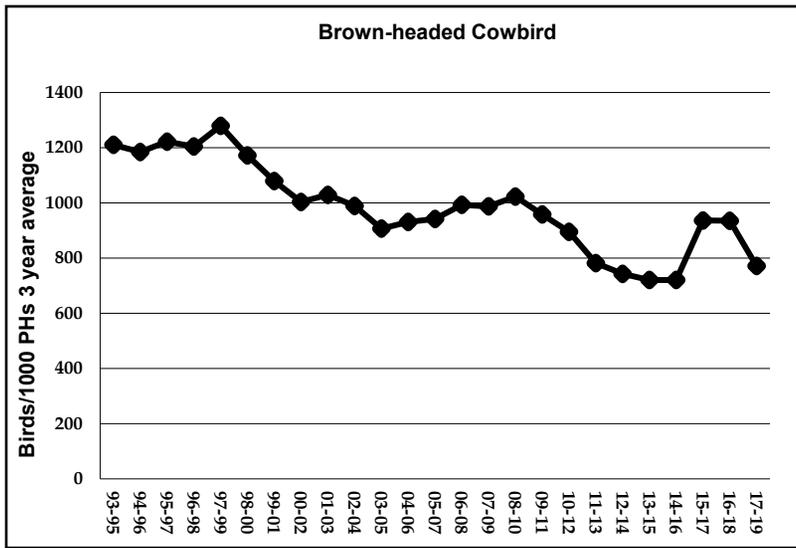
There are many ups and downs for Song Sparrows over the years.



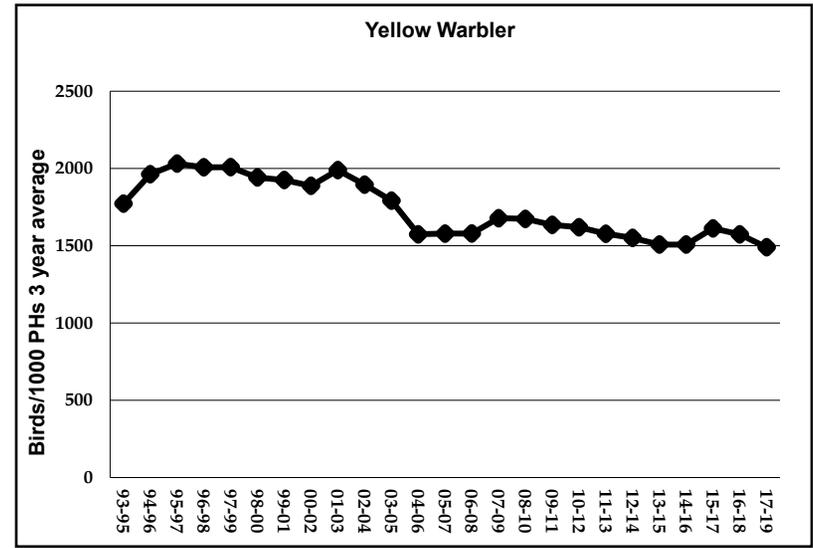
For Grasshopper Sparrow we chose year by year data rather than a three-year average. They have been uncommon from the early years of the count, were missed entirely in 2019.



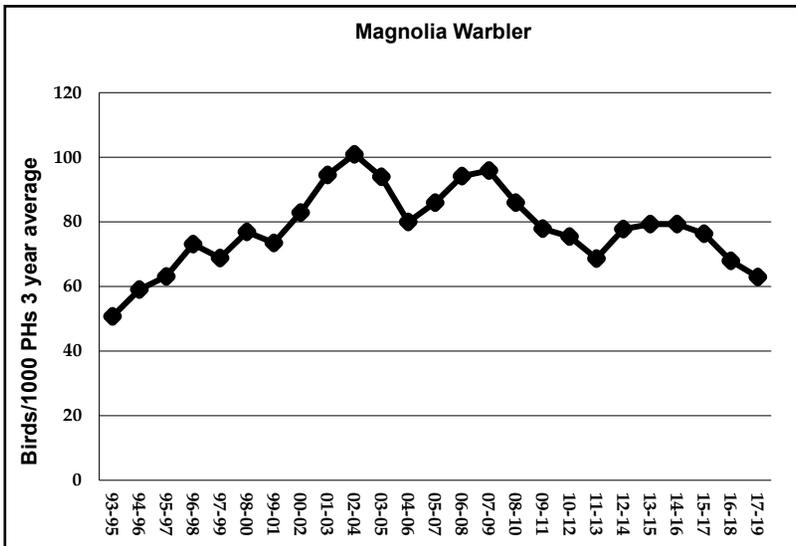
Though still abundant, there does appear to be a slight declining trend for Red-winged Blackbirds.



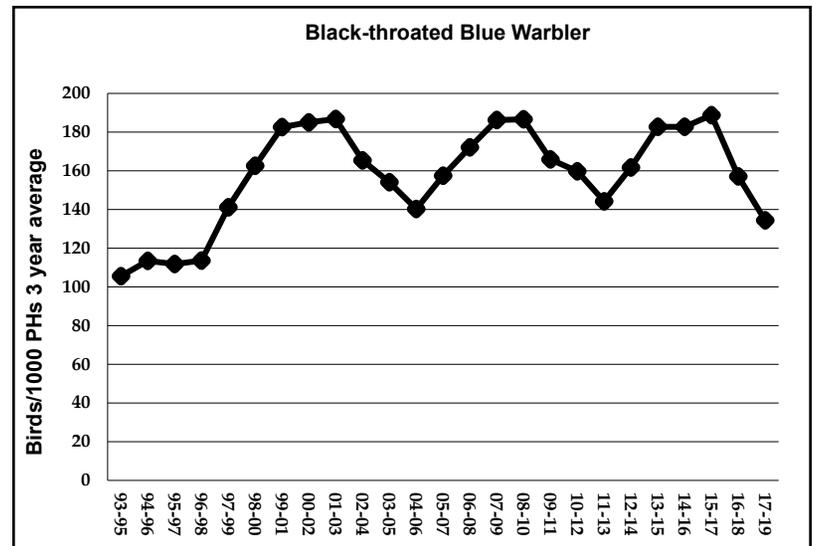
There are fewer Brown-headed Cowbirds being recorded in recent years compared to the early years of the count.



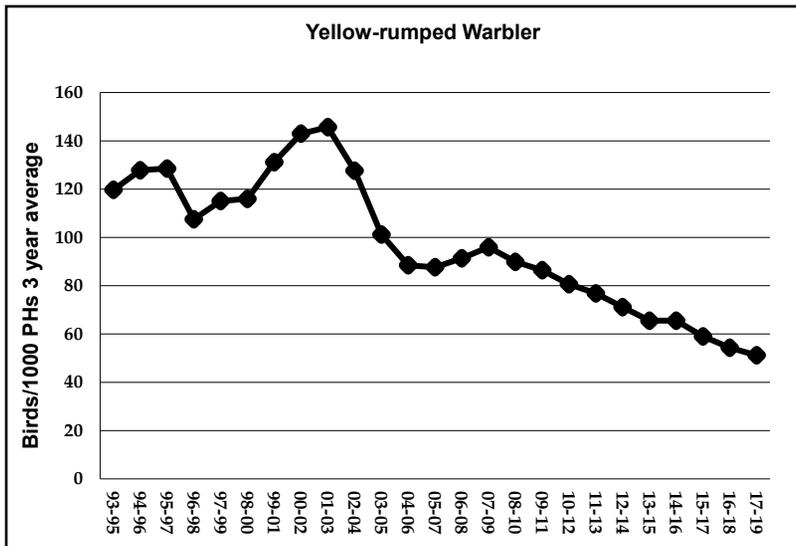
A slight downward trend is indicated by the numbers of Yellow Warblers.



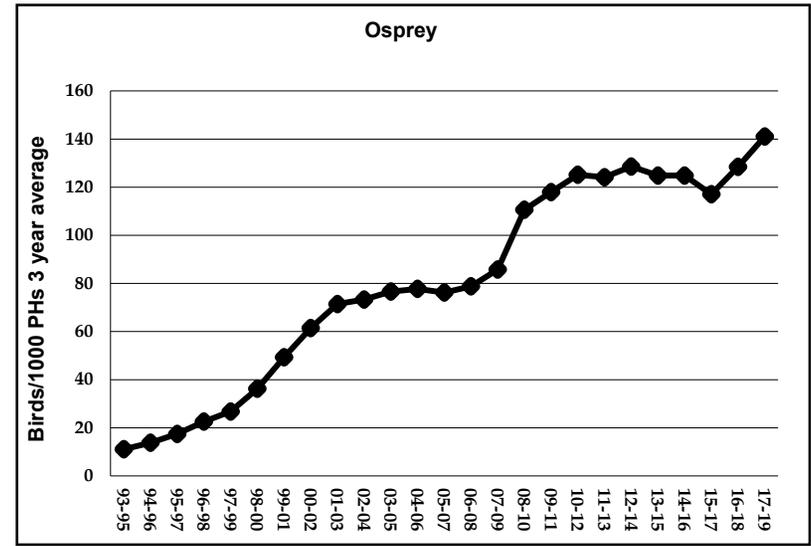
Numbers of Magnolia Warblers have fluctuated up and down.



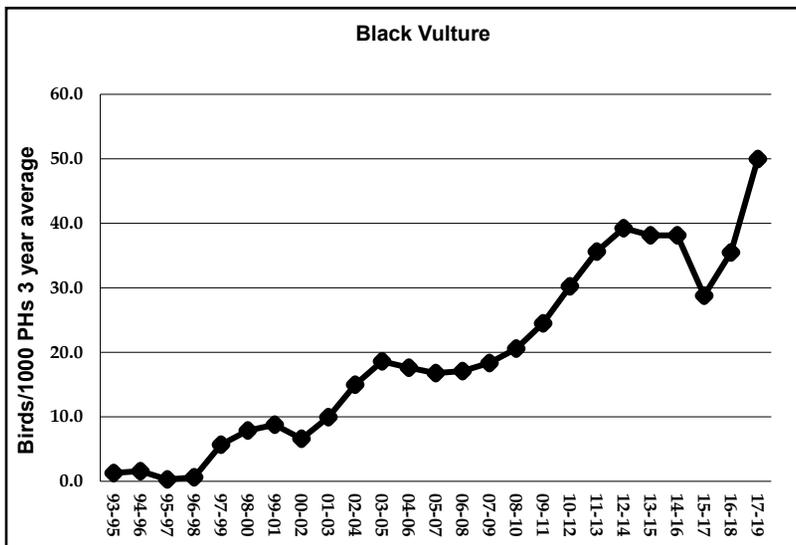
Black-throated Blue numbers have fluctuated over the years.



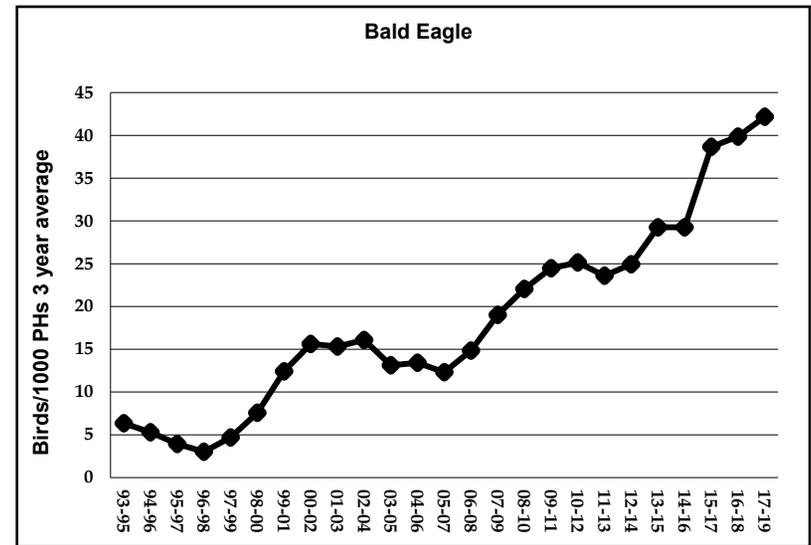
*There appears to be a clear downward trend for the numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers since the early '00s.*



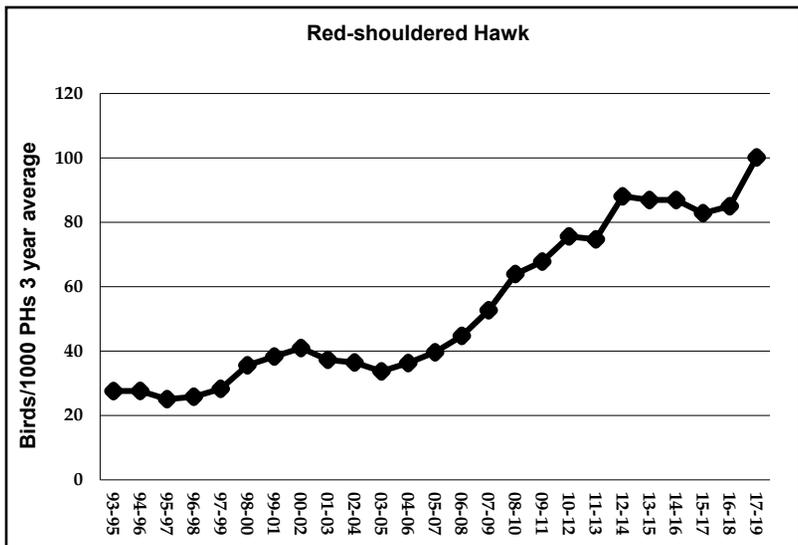
*The well-documented recovery of Osprey populations is tracked well with SBC data.*



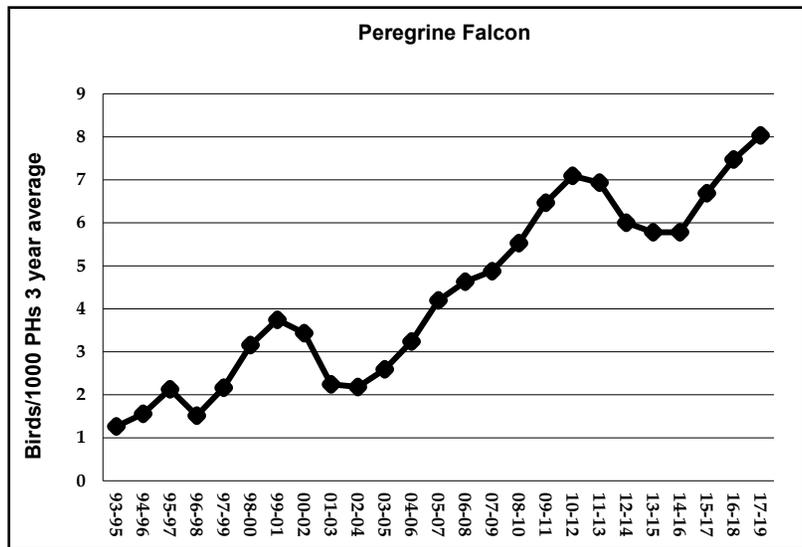
*Black Vultures are clearly more common than they were in the '90s.*



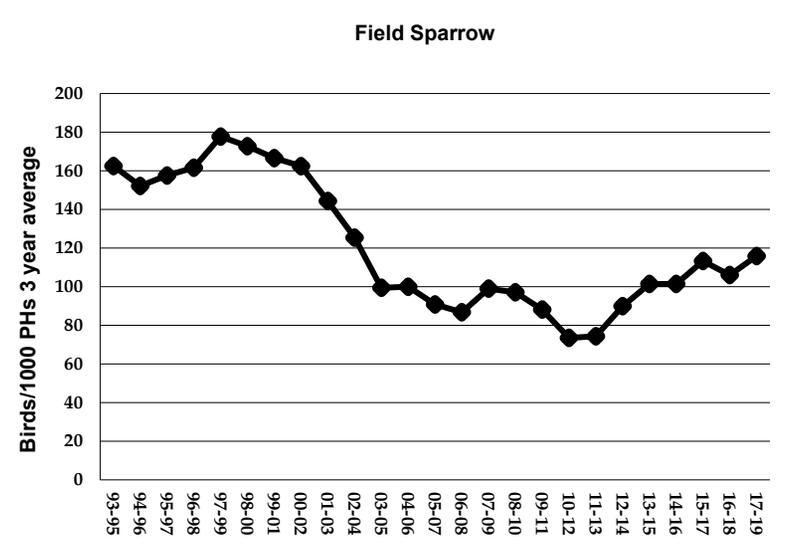
*As has the recovery of Bald Eagles.*



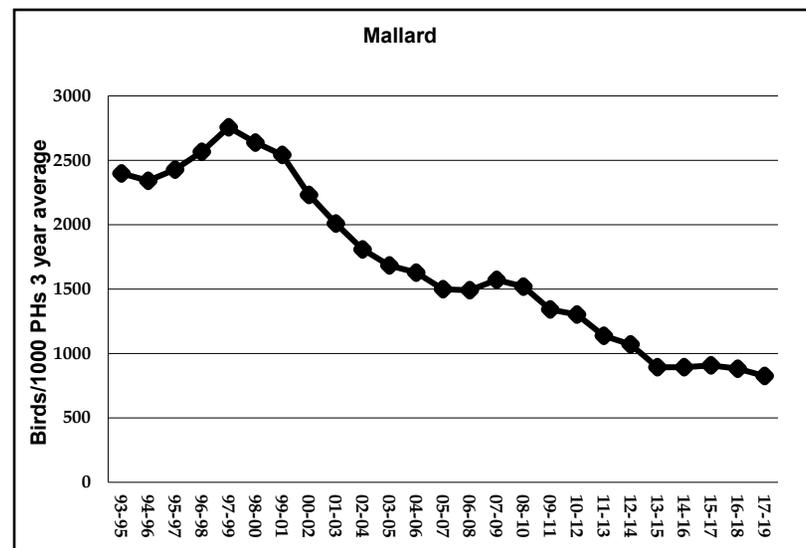
Not surprisingly, we have been finding more Red-shouldered Hawks than we did in the '90s.



The recovery of Peregrine Falcons has also been well-tracked.



Though Field Sparrows came in at a ten-year high, numbers are lower than in the early years of the count.



This year's low count of Mallards does appear to be consistent with an overall declining trend in their population.

## STATEWIDE COUNT TOTALS

Local SBC count areas are detailed in the *Connecticut Warbler* [36:4:140-45].

Count Dates: June 1,2, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, & 23

Totals: 178 count day [CD] species were recorded and totaled 95,001 individual birds. Two hundred and forty-five observers in 125 parties spent 1,403.55 Party Hours [PH] in the field.

Since 1976, 268 SBC species (including 3 new ones in 2019) have been counted across all eight SBCs.

## LOCAL COUNT TOTALS

### **Barkhamsted Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1992*)

Count Dates: June 22-23 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 118 species, 20,709 individual birds. Thirty observers in 16 parties spent 274 PHs in the field. Since 1992 164 CD species have been recorded (including no new ones in 2019).

Participants: Tim Acker, John Anderson, Bianca Belard, Ray Belding, Ayreslea Denny, Buzz Devine, Angela Dimmitt, Elizabeth Faber, Peter Faber, Nicki Hall, Seth Harvey, Vicki Hester, Andy Hubbard, Denise Jernigan, Jim Kandefer, Marie Kennedy, Leona LeJeune, Vima LeJeune, Chris Loscalzo, **John Marshall** (60 Wilson Drive, Watertown, CT., 06795, 203-232-4393, JohnMarshall@gmail.com), Russ Naylor, Carol Parent, Andrea Pelletier, Kitty Placo, Mike Placo, Wally Placo, **David Rosgen** (121 Laurel Way, Winsted, CT 06098-2534; ctbluebird1020@gmail.com), and Sam Slater

Weather: 62° to 82° F.

### **Greenwich-Stamford Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1976*)

Count Dates: June 8-9 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 123 count species and 15,498 individual birds. Three additional count period species were recorded. Forty-seven observers in 31 Parties spent 287 party hours [PHs] in the field. Since 1976, 239 CD species have been recorded (including one new one in 2019).

Participants: Tom Andersen, Kyle Bardwell, Marty Barris, Trudy Battaly, Joe Belanger, Gail Benson, **Thomas W. Burke** (235 Highland Road, Rye, NY 10580; 914 967-4922, thomaswardburke@gmail.com), Sean Camillieri, Al Collins, Annette Cunniffe, David Cunniffe, Lisa Curtis, Peter Davenport, Neil Dittrich, Brian Donovan, Rich Donovan, Patrick Dugan, Cynthia Ehlinger, Kathy Gellman, Ted Gilman, Barbara Hancock, Dave Havens, Jalna Jaeger, Wendy Knothe, Paul Lewis, Ryan MacLean, Stefan Martin, Kevin McGrath, Chris Mignone, James Muchmore, Gary Palmer (34 Field Road. Cob Cob, Ct., 06830; 203 661-4897, gejlpalmer@yahoo.com), Drew Panko, Ellen Plotnik, Paul Plotnik, Matt Popp, Anne Ribolow, Phil Ribolow, Steve Ricker, David Salmon, Meredith Sampson, Kate Scully, Bob Shriber, Marvin Turner, Mike Usai, Bill VanLoan, Mike Warner, and Dale Worsley.

Weather: 56° to 82°F.

### **Hartford Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1991*)

Count Dates: June 8-9 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 112 CD species, 8,650 individual birds. Thirty-eight observers in 28 Parties covered 128 PHs. 175 CD species have been documented since 1992 (including 2 new ones in 2019).

Participants: Dorina Ademi, Elizabeth Ademi, Bill Asteriades, Doug Beach, Shirley Beach, Debbie Bishop, Carol Bradovchak, Pamm Cooper, Andrew Dasinger, Paul Desjardins,

Peter Egan, Sarah Faulkner, Patrice Favreau, Norman Fieravanti, David Funke, Roberta Gowing, Dee Hansen, Eric Hansen, Denise Jernigan, , **Jay Kaplan** (71 Gracey Road, Canton, CT. 06019; 860 693-0157, jaybrd49@aol.com), Gil Kleiner, Acadia Kocher, David Leff, Alex Lin-Moore, Jan Olsen, Polly Parker, Annette Pasek, Zellene Sandler, Brian Toal, Jon Trouern-trend, Mike Trouern-trend, Jon Trouern-trend, Jon Ward, Jim Watso, John Weeks, Judy Whittlesey, Mike Whittlesey, Blair Wlochowski

Weather: 50° to 84°F.

### **Litchfield Hills Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1994*)

Count Dates: June 8-9 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 132 species, 14,163 individual birds. 31 observers in 14 Parties accumulated 164 PHs. Since 1994, 177 CD species have been recorded (including no new ones in 2019).

Participants: Judi Armstrong, Janet Baker, John Baker, Bob Barbieri, Ray Belding, Deb Bishop, Jay Coles, Eileen Cooper, Robin Denny, Angela Dimmitt, Eileen Finnan, Cathy Glasner, Nicki Hall, Dennis Hannon, Keith Johnson, Bill Kennedy, Marie Kennedy, Patricia Kennedy, Nic Main, Bill Martha, Denise Martha, Debbie Martin, Scott Mills, Russ Naylor, Ann Orsillo, Susanna Shirlock, Sam Slater, Donna Rose Smith, **David Tripp Jr.** (345 Colebrook Road, Winsted, Ct. 06098; [dtrippjr@gmail.com](mailto:dtrippjr@gmail.com)), John Wagenblatt, and Fran Zygmunt

Weather: 48° to 80°F.

### **New Haven Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1991*)

Count Dates: June 8-9 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 131 species, 8,139 individual birds. Thirty-eight observers in 18 Parties spent 180 PHs in the field. Since 1991, 204 CD species have been confirmed (including 2 new ones

in 2019).

Participants: Marion Aimesbury, Dewitt Allen, Ralph Amodei, Mark Aronson, Bill Batsford, Larry Bausher, Thera Bowen, Steve Broker, Mike Carpenter, Nancy Clark, Louisa Cunningham, Lori Datlo, Roy Dellinger, Sharon Dellinger, Frank Gallo, Mike Horn, Doreen Jezek, Emmerline Kaiser, Chris Loscalzo, **Steve Mayo** (27 Tuttle Court, Bethany, CT 06524; 203 551-1707, [rsdmayo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rsdmayo@sbcglobal.net)), Ann Meacham, Flo McBride, Pat McCreless, Gina Nichol, John Oshlick, Bev Propen, Frank Ragusa, Nancy Ragusa, Lesley Roy, Lee Schlesinger, Arthur Shippee, Nancy Specht, Charla Spector, Steve Spector, Marianne Vahey, Lisa Wahle, Maureen Wolter, and Paul Wolter

Weather: 55° to 80°F.

### **New Milford/Pawling Summer Bird Count** (*founded 2003*)

Count Dates: June 15-16 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 123 species, 9,037 individual birds. Twenty-six observers in 15 parties spent 113 PHs in the field. Since 2003, 155 CD species have been recorded (including 1 new one in 2019).

Participants: Pat Bailey, Ray Belding, Don Breeger, Ioa Burne, Barbara Butler, Binnie Chase, **Angela Dimmitt** (PO Box 146, Sherman, Ct. 06784; 860 355- 3429, [angeladimmitt@aol.com](mailto:angeladimmitt@aol.com)), Larry Fischer, Dot Fleury, Carol Fredericks, Ken Fredericks, Linton Hamilton, Ken Harris, Sue Iannucci, Marge Josephson, Marie Kennedy, Paul Koker, Dennis Larkin, Stefan Martin, Sariena Masiero, Russ Naylor, Marianne Pitts, Adrienne Popko, Nick Thold, Sally Spence, Bill Wallace

Weather: 50° to 75°F.

**Storrs Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1990*)

Count Dates: June 22-23 (Sat. & Sun.)

Totals: 109 species, 6,573 individual birds. Eleven observers in seven parties accumulated 105.05 PHs in the field. Since 1990 138 CD species have been counted (including no new ones in 2019).

Participants: Mike Curtis, Chris Elphick, Sue Harrington, Tom Harrington, Erin King, **Steve Morytko** (288 Varga Road, Ashford, CT 06278- 1828; 860 680-5729, [smorytko@yahoo.com](mailto:smorytko@yahoo.com)), Jason Reiger, Steve Rogers, Phil Rusch, Kevin Thompson, and Peter Thompson

Weather: 46° to 75°F.

**Woodbury-Roxbury Summer Bird Count** (*founded 1978*)

Count Date: June 1-2 (Saturday, Sunday)

Totals: 127 species, 12,297 individual birds. Twenty-four observers in 14 Parties spent 152.5 PHs in the field. Since 1978, 183 CD species have been recorded (including no new ones in 2019).

Participants: Grace Aarons, David Babington, Polly Brody, Bob Cartoceti, Jay Coles, Buzz Devine, Angela Dimmitt, Ken Elkins, Morgan Evans, Ian Fernandes, Larry Fischer, Cathy Hagadorn, Seth Harvey, Nick Main, Stefan Martin, **Russ Naylor** (44 Church Street, Woodbury, CT 06798, 203 841-7779), Donna Rose Smith, Darcy Thurrott, Dave Tripp, Jr., Deirdre Wallin, Leigh Wells, Chris Wood, Tom Zisso, and Fran Zygmunt.

Weather: 65° to 82°F.

**2019 FALL HAWK WATCH**

**By Steve Mayo and Ryan MacLean**

Every fall, large numbers of migrating hawks move through the western part of Connecticut. For the purpose of summarizing hawk count totals, sites have been categorized as either inland or coastal. Quaker Ridge (Greenwich) and Lighthouse Point Park (New Haven) have been categorized as coastal sites and they provide coverage throughout the season. Boothe Memorial (Stratford) is closer to the coast than is Quaker Ridge and with additional coverage, it has proven to be a very productive full season hawk watch. Poquonock (Windsor) an inland site, contributed coverage all season and shares this similarity with Quaker Ridge and Lighthouse. The categories are purely arbitrary.

**INLAND HAWK WATCH SITES**

Botsford Hill (Bridgewater) had 49 hours of coverage and 2,364 hawks, well within 10-year averages. The highlight was 1,142 Broad-wings on September 16 and an additional 642 the next day. Chestnut Hill (Litchfield) provided a solid 66 hours of coverage and also benefited from September 15 and 16 winds, with 346 and 935 Broad-winged Hawks, respectively. Middle School (Torrington) had 241 Broad-winged Hawks on September 16 and otherwise missed the hawk flight. Coverage and season totals (265) were the worse since its inception almost two decades prior. Poquonock had impressive full-season coverage hours (183) and managed 238 total hawks. Again, the Broad-winged Hawks flew elsewhere, perhaps further west. Boothe Memorial counted 524 Hawks (293 Broad-winged Hawks) on the passing front September 16 and 17. Back east, traditional Massachusetts sites had average or below average Broad-winged Hawk flights. These included Blueberry Hill (Granville), Wachusett (Princeton), Wataitac (Ashburnham), and Shatterack (Russell). There was no 2019 coverage at historical Fall Connecticut sites such as White Memorial (Litchfield) and Johnnycake (Burlington).

## QUAKER RIDGE

After a promising fall season in 2018, Greenwich Audubon's Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch experienced extremely unpredictable weather and lackluster migration for fall 2019. Due to the site's location several miles inland from the coast, lighter northerly winds with a westerly component are crucial in keeping migrant raptors off of the coast, particularly Broad-winged Hawks. The site logged 93 hours in August and was rewarded with a sub-adult Mississippi Kite heading southwest, on August 24. September 2019 saw the offshore passage of Hurricane Dorian and as a result there were periods of prolonged easterly winds for the majority of the month. By September 15 the numbers of Broad-winged Hawks began to accelerate, peaking with one day of 3,270 birds on September 17. The weather conditions on this day held light NW winds but unfortunately no cloud cover, which brought many birds to high altitudes. As this day was not preceded by a major cold-front, conditions changed quickly afterwards and winds shifted back to the east. After this day no further large flights materialized and numbers at hawk watches to the west in New York such as Mount Peter, indicated that easterly winds likely pushed birds further inland and west.

Sharp-Shinned Hawks put in their third-lowest showing in the watch's history with 1,535 birds counted for the season. Their peak day proved to be one day after the Broad-winged Hawk peak, with 193 counted on September 18. Cooper's Hawks also put in a below average showing of 306 for the season, and this was the first year in 35 years of full-time coverage at Quaker Ridge that not a single Northern Goshawk was recorded. As hawk watches across the Northeast proved to have low numbers for this season it appears many birds chose not to move further south. Two species of biggest concern also had alarmingly low numbers. American Kestrels had a record-low 268 and Northern Harriers had their second-lowest total of 75. With reduced grassland and coastal marsh habitat throughout Connecticut, these numbers will be crucial in understanding future conservation efforts.



*Abby Sesselberg photos*

*Northern Harriers have been in steady decline at the state's hawk watches. This female (above) was photographed on Oct. 4, 2019 at Lighthouse Point hawk watch in New Haven. Bald Eagles have been steadily increasing as breeders and migrants. This one (below) passed Lighthouse Point on Nov. 3 2019.*



By November there were several periods of significantly cooler weather including a substantial cold front on November 12 and 13. These brought temperatures down to the 20s. Despite this, numbers of late-season migrants proved lower than average as well. In the past decade there was a dramatic increase in Red-shouldered Hawks with both 2014 and 2017 seasons tallying over 1,000 birds. This year yielded a significantly lower 370 birds indicating that either many birds chose to stay in the area or a less-eruptive breeding season for the species. While these high-total years would bring days of over 200 Red-shoulders, this season's highest day was only 41 birds on November 3. Other late-season migrants such as Golden Eagles also did not materialize in large numbers with only 3 counted, but the stable populations of Bald Eagles yielded 215 counted for the season. One final late-season highlight was a Short-eared Owl that passed at close range on November 26.

With a total of 9,557 raptors counted for the season, it appears that the general trend of the past decade of fewer cold fronts and unpredictable winds has led to unpredictable seasons at Quaker Ridge. When conditions are right however, such as on September 17, they still can produce the most remarkable Broad-winged Hawk Flights in the state of Connecticut.

## LIGHTHOUSE PARK

There were plenty of migrating birds at Lighthouse Point Park (Lighthouse) in August, including Eastern Kingbirds and other neotropical migrants, terns building over the New Haven Harbor, and the first waves of blackbirds. Few hawks were moving, however. On August 24, for example, 30-60 Osprey were observed, often returning to the northeast over the Park, carrying fish. Three were considered passage migrants for the day. The migration floodgates opened at the beginning of September. A daily average of 25 Osprey was roughly consistent with previous September counts. Sharp-shinned Hawks are also a September staple, but the 517 total was the lowest in the history of full-season coverage. For

the sixth consecutive year, there was no significant Broad-winged Hawk flight. On September 29, there were steady northerly winds with few clouds and 301 hawks of eleven species were counted. Still, the month's hawk total of 2,125 tied the record low for September.

October 4 brought ideal conditions: A strong northwest wind and increasing clouds following the passage of a cold front. The flight lasted until 5 pm, and highlights included Turkey Vulture (76), Osprey (94), Sharp-shinned Hawk (232), Cooper's Hawk (147) and American Kestrel 147. Fifty-eight late Broad-winged Hawks boosted the day's total to 825 comprising 13 species. A low flying juvenile Swainson's Hawk was the highlight of the day. North winds at 6-10 mph continued the next day, bringing another 454 hawks. Strong winds returned on October 10, bringing 721 hawks including the season's first of four Northern Goshawks, low over the hawk watch lawn. The stationary tropical storm continued to churn northwest and then northeast winds, bringing another 616 hawks of 11 species over cloudy skies. The total included a season-record 284 Cooper's Hawks. Northerly winds on October 18 (304 raptors of 13 species) and October 21 (202 hawks) brought the only other noteworthy totals for the remainder of the month.

Historically, early November could provide good numbers of migrating hawks, especially buteos. In early November hawks continued to occupy the Park as they had all season, but there were few migrants. Even after a windy frontal passage on November 8 and again on November 13, only 99 and 122 hawks were tallied, respectively. Tens of thousands of migrating passerines moved through, especially in the early morning hours. But few hawks were migrating. The highlight of the month was November 16, when a frontal passage occurred and Turkey Vultures, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed hawks contributed to a daily total of 265 in just 5 hours of coverage. November finished with 834 hawks with only slightly lower coverage hours. The prior ten-year average and standard deviation was 1,192 and 467 respectively. The season total of 6,899 was second only to the 2015 total

## Connecticut - All Lookouts - Fall 2019

Lookout	Town	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW
Boothe Memorial	Stratford	11	0	7	53	43	4	96	20	0	0	293
Botsford Hill	Bridgewater	49	0	0	13	29	0	55	2	0	0	2240
Chestnut Hill	Litchfield	66	0	0	14	9	1	38	7	0	0	1792
Middle School	Torrington	37	0	0	1	2	0	4	3	0	0	247
Poquonock	Windsor	183	7	51	14	13	2	13	3	0	9	90
INLAND TOTAL		346	7	58	95	96	7	206	35	0	9	4662

BV-Black Vulture	SS-Sharp-shinned Hawk	BW-Broad-winged Hawk	AK-American Kestrel
TV-Turkey Vulture	CH-Cooper's Hawk	RT-Red-tailed Hawk	ML-Merlin
OS-Osprey	NG-Northern Goshawk	RL-Rough-legged Hawk	PG-Peregrine Falcon
BE-Bald Eagle	RS-Red-shouldered Hawk	GE-Golden Eagle	uR-Unidentified Raptor
NH-Northern Harrier			

## Connecticut - All Lookouts - Fall 2019

Lookout	Town	Hours	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	uR	TOTAL
Boothe Memorial	Stratford	11	0	0	0	26	1	1	3	547
Botsford Hill	Bridgewater	49	1	0	1	8	1	0	14	2364
Chestnut Hill	Litchfield	66	0	0	0	7	1	0	3	1872
Middle School	Torrington	37	1	0	0	3	0	1	3	265
Poquonock	Windsor	183	12	0	1	8	7	1	7	238
INLAND TOTAL		346	14	0	2	52	10	3	30	5286

BV-Black Vulture	SS-Sharp-shinned Hawk	BW-Broad-winged Hawk	AK-American Kestrel
TV-Turkey Vulture	CH-Cooper's Hawk	RT-Red-tailed Hawk	ML-Merlin
OS-Osprey	NG-Northern Goshawk	RL-Rough-legged Hawk	PG-Peregrine Falcon
BE-Bald Eagle	RS-Red-shouldered Hawk	GE-Golden Eagle	uR-Unidentified Raptor
NH-Northern Harrier			

**Broad-winged Hawk Flight - Connecticut - Fall 2019**

	Aug	Sept thru 14	15	16	17	18	19-21	22- 24	25- 30	Oct	Nov	Total
Lookout												
<b>INLAND GROUP</b>												
Boothe Memorial	0	0	0	95	198	0	0	0	0	0	0	293
Botsford Hill	0	0	270	1142	642	35	11	0	0	0	0	2100
Chestnut Hill	0	78	346	935	59	107	257	8	2	0	0	1792
Middle School	0	3	0	241	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	247
Poquonnock	9	32	0	0	24	2	3	3	9	8	0	90
<b>COASTAL GROUP</b>												
Quaker Ridge	27	137	258	588	3270	52	96	27	130	14	0	4599
Lighthouse Point	12	2	1	0	46	0	1	0	14	127	5	208
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>3001</b>	<b>4242</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9329</b>

**Lighthouse Point, New Haven - Fall 2019**

	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	uR	Total
August	44	0	0	16	2	1	0	3	0	0	12	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	39
September	215	0	12	761	103	64	517	166	0	2	64	15	0	0	263	80	34	44	2125
October	207	0	195	253	96	86	1051	1248	2	39	127	57	0	0	386	129	48	184	3901
November	148	0	130	5	31	32	90	92	2	118	5	219	0	2	6	17	17	68	834
<b>Total</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>1035</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>1658</b>	<b>1509</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>657</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>6899</b>

**Quaker Ridge, Greenwich - Fall 2019**

	Hours	BV	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	RS	BW	RT	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	uR	Total
August	93	0	0	61	33	2	2	2	0	0	27	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	133
September	233	5	65	355	108	34	1034	86	0	4	4558	3	0	0	193	41	9	22	6497
October	183	26	832	32	41	29	413	181	0	85	14	46	0	0	70	18	11	17	1815
November	187	22	435	3	33	10	86	37	0	281	0	179	0	3	4	7	5	7	1112
<b>Total</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1332</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1535</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>4599</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>9557</b>

of 6,780. Most of this decline can be attributed to rapidly dropping numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawks and American Kestrel.

Additional data including daily, monthly and seasonal summary reports, may be obtained from the Hawk Migration of North America website, hawkcount.org. Summaries for Connecticut and the rest of New England, can also be obtained from The Northeast Hawkwatch, <http://www.battaly.com/nehw/>.

## WATCHERS

Renee Baade, David Babington, Bill Banks, Marty Barris, Dan Barvir, Steve Beal, Raymond Belding, John Berman, Gail Benson, Steve Bird, Nick Bonomo, Tom Bravo, Polly Brody, Tracy Brown, Christina Buccieri, Tom Burke, Dana Campbell, Al Collins, Jim Cortina, Annette Cuniffe, Louisa Cunningham, Kathy Davies, Rita Dempsey, Amy Dworetzky, Cynthia Ehlinger, Chris Finlay, James Fischer, Bobbie Fisher, Frank Gallo, Ted Gilman, Nancy Glynn, Tina Green, Carole Griffiths, Frank Guida, Ed Haesche, Greg Hanisek, Carol Harrington, Richard Harrington, Rosz Harris, Roy Harvey, Julian Hough, Lynn James, Steve Kovari, Scott Kruitbosch, Merriam Levin, Ryan MacLean, Jim MacLean, Matt Male, Frank Mantlik, Mike Marsano, John Marshall, Jeff Martin, Shaun Martin, Stefan Martin, Louise Massey, Kathleen Mathews, Steve Mayo, Robin McAllister, Kevin McGrath, Ken Merrifield, Chris Mignone, Judy Moore, Jim Muchmore, Tom Murray, Gina Nichol, John Oshlick, Gary Palmer, Andrea Pelletier, Jim Phillips, Matt Popp, Tim Reed, Anne Ribolow, Phil Ribolow, Paul Roberts, Johnny Rodriguez, David Salmon, Sol Satin, Abby Sesselberg, Scott Slora, Dori Sosensky, Howie Sternberg, Bill Tischler, Carol Titus, Tony Tortora, Mike Turok, Bill Wallace, Mike Warner, Chris Weintraub, Al Welby, Joseph Wojtanowski, Steve Wolter, Sara Zagorski

## CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Winter Season Dec 1, 2019 through Feb. 29, 2020

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

The season brought a nice array of waterbirds, including rare geese. Northern finches were essentially absent, and there were few irruptive raptors such as Rough-legged Hawks, Snowy Owls or Northern Shrikes. However, some formerly rare to uncommon wintering birds, including sparrows and warblers, continued to appear in elevated numbers. A nice mix of rarities included a Pacific Loon, a Harris's Sparrow and a Painted Bunting.

A **Greater White-fronted Goose X Canada Goose hybrid** was in Stratford on Dec. 26 and was seen there and in Fairfield through Feb. 28 (FM et al.). A **Pink-footed Goose** at Amos Lake in Preston on Dec. 5 remained through at least Jan. 4 (DP et al.). A different Pink-footed was present Dec. 9-10 in New Haven (CH), and what was most likely the same bird was found Jan. 13 at Crosby Pond in a little-birded area of Orange (GH, BBa). It was seen through at least Jan. 18, mostly at nearby Wepawaug Reservoir and Robert Treat (Pond-delete) Farm (m.ob.). Birders coming to see this bird as it settled in at those two locations during subse-

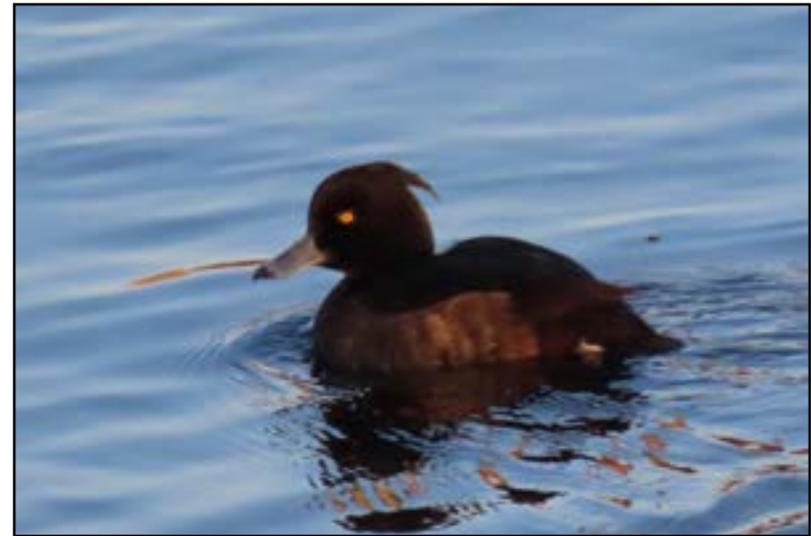
quent days also found Snow, Greater White-fronted and Cackling Geese, as well as a possible **Snow Goose X Ross's Goose hybrid** (FM, m.ob.). A Brant was unusual Dec. 7 at Broad Brook Mill Pond in East Windsor (PDe). A **Barnacle Goose** found Dec. 21 at Trap Falls Reservoir in Shelton was seen there and at a nearby Brownson golf course through Dec. 27, usually accompanied by five hybrid **Barnacle X Cackling Geese** offspring (MF et al.). This group was still present Dec. 26-27 in Stratford (TM, FM). An always-scarce Tundra Swan was at South Cove in Old Saybrook on Dec. 8 (SSa).

A find of regional importance involved the discovery of 34 Greater White-fronted Geese on Feb. 16-17 at Little Pond in Litchfield (RW, JKn et al.) and then relocating to a pond in Goshen, Connecticut gets small numbers of the Greenland race of this species annually, but this extraordinary number suggested they might be birds from the North American West, which had never been documented in the state. The high count ended up being 35 in Goshen on Feb. 28 (GH, NM et al.). Examination of photos, along with observers' field notes, indicated these were essentially all western birds based on bill color and other features.

A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was at Mondo Ponds and Law High School pond in Milford Dec. 1-3 (SSp et al.), carrying over from late November. Singles were at Shell Beach in Guilford on Dec. 8 (NB), at 14-Acre Pond in Norwalk on Dec. 10 (JF), and from Dec. 30-Feb. 29 in the Compo Beach/ Longshore Park/Grays Creek area of Westport (TG, PL et al.). A **Green-winged (Eurasian) Teal** was found at Beaver Ponds Park in New Haven from Jan. 26 to Feb. 1 (BBt et al.). A Ring-necked Duck X scaup sp. hybrid was found Dec 25 at Long Wharf in New Haven, presumably the same individual seen there last winter (NB). The high count of up to six Redheads wintered at Grass Island

Natural Area in Greenwich, present Dec. 8 through at least Feb. 22 (LC, JB et al.). A female **Tufted Duck** found among scaup sp. flocks Dec. 7 at Captain's Cove in Bridgeport remained through the end of the period, appearing at times at nearby Jennings Beach in Fairfield (FG, m.ob.).

A male King Eider found Jan. 1 in Waterford (DP) was seen through Jan. 12 primarily at Harkness Memorial State Park (RD et al.). A **Harlequin Duck** was at Gulf Beach, Milford, on Dec. 21 (AL et al.). Female **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were found Jan. 1 at Milford Point (GHo) and Jan. 5 at Shippan Point, Stamford (FG). Another female was found Dec. 22 at Windsor Locks Canal State Park



Paul Smith photo

*This female Tufted Duck wintered with scaup flocks in Bridgeport and a neighboring area in Fairfield.*

(PDe), and it was joined by a male on Jan. 6 (PDe). They were seen on and off through at least Feb. 9. An **Eared Grebe** was in Stonington Jan. 25-Feb. 15 (RS et al.).

A dead Ruffed Grouse on the Merritt Parkway in Stratford on Feb. 28 was a major surprise given the drastic contraction of this species' range in the state over the past 20 years (PR, MS). A very late juvenile male Ruby-throated Hummingbird was still at a Milford feeder on Dec. 1 (LM, SMr, FM). An adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** that had been frequenting a Simsbury feeder since early

fall finally disappeared on Dec. 15. The bird was seen feeding almost continuously all morning on a warm, breezy day (temperatures reached into the low 50s). It was last seen about 1 p.m. (fide JKa).

A **Sandhill Crane** was foraging in a farm field in Griswold on Dec. 6 (DP et al.). A flock of 13 flew over Charter Oak Landing in Hartford on Dec. 26 (SC). An American Oystercatcher was early Feb. 23 at Eastern Point in Groton (LF). A Semipalmated Plover lingered to Jan. 8 in East Lyme (GN). Three Long-billed Dowitchers were

a good find Dec 21 on the Stratford-Milford Christmas Bird Count (SMr). Presumably the same three birds were at Johnson's Creek in Bridgeport Dec. 31-Jan. 8, during which time the number dropped to two (FM, et al.). A **Thick-billed Murre** found Jan. 25 at Stonington Point was near-dead when relocated later in the day at nearby Lambert Cove (PR, NB et al.). It eventually expired but the carcass could not be retrieved. The next day one was off Shippan Point, Stamford (LC, FG et al.) but quickly moved west to Greenwich Point (WS, JL

et al.). A noteworthy movement of Razorbills included 11 off Stamford on Dec. 20 (PDU).

An **Iceland (Thayer's) Gull** was at Long Beach in Stratford on Feb. 28-29 (FM). A **Black-headed Gull** was at Barn Island in Stonington on Dec. 26 (CL), and one found at Czekik Marina in Stamford on Feb. 5 stayed in the vicinity through the month (PDU et al.). A Glaucous Gull was at a recycling plant in Hartford on Jan. 17 (PCi, SZ). Others were at Long Beach in Stratford on Jan. 18-Feb. 4 (AL et al.), in Waterford Jan.

25-Feb. 17 (JMn et al.) and in Old Lyme on Feb. 20 (RS). A seasonal highlight was a **Pacific Loon** on Dec. 1 off Enders Island in Mystic (NB).

A pair of Northern Goshawks was acting territorial in North Stonington on Feb. 29 (DP). A dark-morph Rough-legged Hawk was at McKinney NWR in Stratford on Dec. 26 (FM). The only report of a Snowy Owl came from HBSP on Dec. 17 (SR). At least four Long-eared Owls wintered in the Stratford-Milford area (FM, m.ob.). Reports of singles came from Old Lyme (MA), Fairfield (JT), Preston (DP) and Groton (PR). A Short-eared Owl was in Milford Feb. 22 (FM). A Red-headed Woodpecker was in Avon on Jan. 31 (GS), but attracting many observers were up to three all winter at Hilltop Farm in Suffield (SU et al.). An unusual concentration of 25 Northern Flickers was at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport on Jan. 14 (TG). A very late Blue-headed Vireo was in uncharted territory on Jan. 27 in a Westport yard (PL). Two in December were in Derby on Dec. 15 (FG et al.) and in Branford on Dec. 16 (JOs). A Tree

Swallow was very late Dec. 29-Jan. 18 at Old Mill Beach in Westport (TG). A late Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was in Stratford on Dec. 3 (FM). In a winter devoid of northern finches, three Pine Siskins were in West Hartland on Dec. 22 (PCa).

An unprecedented number of Chipping Sparrows, once a winter rarity, included 19 in Guilford on Dec. 15 (PW), and 17 in Moodus (DRT) and 12 in Wallingford (JR), both on Dec. 21. There were 12 the next day in Stratford (FM). An extraordinary 18 Field Sparrows were at Smith-Richardson Preserve in Fairfield on Feb. 5 (SMr). A Seaside Sparrow was late Dec 14 at Ash Creek in Fairfield (MP). A Nelson's/Saltmarsh Sparrow was at Milford Point Jan. 24 (PCo). A Lincoln's Sparrow was a good mid-winter find Jan. 7 at Silver Sands State Park in Milford (JOs). Another turned up Jan. 15 at Vibert Road in South Windsor (JMe). A seasonal highlight was a **Harris's Sparrow** found Feb. 23 in the campground at HBSP (MK). It remained reliable and faithful to a small bit of habitat throughout the season and



*Paul Fusco photo*

*Despite closing of the state's landfills, Iceland Gulls have remained regular winter visitors. These two were at the West Haven boat launch on Feb. 9.*



*Bob MacDonnell photo*  
This Harris's Sparrow, seen here on Feb. 25, seldom disappointed birders looking for it at Hammonasset Beach State Park during its long stay that extended into May.

deep into spring (m.ob.).

A **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was a great find Jan. 15 in Storrs (DM). An Eastern Meadowlark was unusual on Dec. 8 in New Preston (DA), but of special interest were 10 wintering at Griswold Point in Old Lyme (BM et al.). Two were at Sunny Valley in New Milford on Feb. 5 (AD). The latest of about a dozen Baltimore Orioles was seen on Feb. 17 in Greenwich (PS). One at a feeder at Mondo Ponds in Milford was seen by many observers from Dec. 19 through at least Jan. 17 (SSp, m.ob.). A nice flock

of 45 Rusty Blackbirds was at Rocky Neck State Park in East Lyme on Jan. 3 (DP), with 40 still there on Feb. 20 (RS). In a winter devoid of northern finches, three Pine Siskins were in West Hartland on Dec. 22 (PCa) and three were in Colchester on Dec. 5 (AP).

An Ovenbird found in Norwalk in mid-December remained through much of the winter (EM). Unseasonable warblers included a Wilson's Warbler on Dec. 5 at Great Hollow Lake in Monroe (JH) and a Nashville Warbler on Dec. 6-8 at Smith-Richardson



*Tina Green photo*  
This adult male Painted Bunting visited a feeder in New Canaan from Jan. 26 through at least Feb. 8.

Preserve in Westport (TG). Others were found Dec. 15 at Saugatuck Shores in Westport (FM) and Dec. 24 in Fairfield (JMh). Two Com-

mon Yellowthroats, a hardier species, were at Silver Sands State Park in Milford on Dec. 13 (JOs); much hardier was one on Feb. 1 at Edgewood

Park in New Haven (AL). Feb. 1 was an extreme date for a Yellow Warbler at East Shore Park in New Haven (JT, JL). About 10 reports of Palm Warblers included up to three that wintered at McKinney National Wildlife Refuge in Stratford (PDn et al.). A male **Western Tanager** visited a feeder in Coventry Jan. 17 (eBird, NT). An adult male **Painted Bunting** was present Jan. 26 into spring at a home in New Canaan (CA). A **Dickcissel** was in Brookfield on Dec. 21 (DD).

OBSERVERS – Cleo Abrams-Horsburgh, DeWitt Allen, Mark Aronson, Bill Banks (BBa), Bill Batsford (BBt), Jay Boll, Nick Bonomo, Paul Carrier (PCa), Silus Caswell, Paul Cianfaglione (PCi), Lynnette Clemens, Al Collins, Patrick Comins (PCo), Peter DeGennaro (PDn), Dianna Delohery, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Angela Dimmitt, Robert Dixon, Jim Dugan, Patrick Dugan (PDU), Cynthia Ehlinger, Mike Ferrari, Larry Flynn, Jo Fasciolo, Paul Fusco, Frank Gallo,

Tina Green, Greg Hanisek (GHa), William Hobbie, Gary Hodge (GHO), Janet Holt, Christine Howe, J. Kanderfer (JKn), Jay Kaplan (JKa), Micky Komara, James Leone, Alex Lin-Moore, Chris Loscalzo, Preston Lust, Bob MacDonnell, Jillian Mahar (JMh), Frank Mantlik, John Marshall (JMa), Laura Mastrianni-Abbotts, Ed McCabe, Nicolas Main, Stefan Martin (SMr), Dave Mathieu, Steve Mayo (SMA), Jamie Meyers (JMe), Jonathan Monderer (JMn), Tom Murray, Brendan Murtha, Sean Murtha (SMu), Genevieve Nuttall, John Ogren (JOg), John Oshlick (JOs), Mark Passmann, Andrea Perko, Dave Provencher, Jason Rieger, Dave Rosgen (DRo), Dan Rottino (DRt), Scott Roxbrough, Phil Rusch, Scott Sarratt (SSa), Will Schenck, Russ Smiley, Gillian Smits, Steve Spector (SSp), Paul Swigert, Mark Szantyr, Jory Teltser, Nancy Thurnauer, Severin Uebing, Glenn Williams, Ryan Wirtes, Paul Wolter, Sara Zagorski

## PHOTO CHALLENGE

Identifying a bird based on a single photograph can be a challenge. Unless it's an Ostrich. Often with just one photograph to consider, we can't see all the relevant features or dimensions of a bird. There are always clues to be harvested never-the-less, so let us investigate the clues we are presented with here.

Where a bird is seen is one of the first clues to its identity. In this instance it is a perching bird, so that limits the field of



choices right there. Another clue that can be garnered from the habitat in the photo is the size of the leaves near the subject bird. Judging from those leaves, it isn't a very large bird, indeed it seems rather a small one. What else can the leaves tell us? Well, they are turning, so the bird was photographed in the Fall. So before even considering the actual features of the bird, we have limited the possibilities.

So what are some of the bird's features? Let's start with the bill. A look reveals a relatively thin and pointed bill. This suggests an insectivore or perhaps a frugivore, a bird that eats fruit. Given what we've gathered so far, and considering that this going to be a bird possibly found in Connecticut, we must consider Flycatchers, Vireos, Warblers, or even perhaps Orioles among a few other less likely groups.

What about an Oriole? If we look at the colors of the plumage we can see it lacks the orange tones of any Baltimore Oriole plumage except an extraordinarily pale first-year female. What about a female Orchard Oriole? An examination of the bill reveals it appears too short and the wrong color for an Oriole bill. Also the obvious white arcs above and below the eye are wrong for any of our Orioles. So we can move on.

What about a Flycatcher? We can eliminate the larger Flycatchers right off. Great Crested and Eastern Kingbird would appear considerable larger relative to those leaves, and the plumages would be very different than the subject bird. Eastern Kingbird would be dark-headed and -backed, and Great Crested would be brilliantly yellow below with a gray throat and a working bill.

Let's consider the smaller flycatchers. An Eastern Phoebe would have a dark face without white eye arcs, so no. An Eastern Pewee would be eliminated for pretty much the same reasons. The Empidonax group including Alder/Willow, Acadian, Least and Yellow-bellied, all show varying eye-rings. So could it be one of those? Well it isn't the most obvious at this angle, but the bill doesn't look wide enough at the face for any Empidonax species and it definitely looks too

deep at the face (top to bottom) relative to the length for an Empidonax. Looking at the tail it seems way too long for any Empidonax as well. Indeed, the bird looks just a bit too lanky overall for an Empidonax, which as a group appear just a bit chunky and compact. So let us move on from Flycatchers.

Could it be a Vireo? We have five species to consider in Connecticut. We can eliminate all of them based on one feature alone, the bill. All our Vireos have shorter and more stout bills than the subject bird, and they all have slight hooks at the tip. This bird has a thin tapering bill that clearly ends in a distinct hook-less point. So without even discussing plumage, we can say it isn't a Vireo.

That leaves us with a Warbler. Indeed, the dreaded Fall plumage Warbler! Okay if you haven't tossed this article aside at this point, just let me say it isn't all as bad as that! The bill shape is perfect for Warbler, so let's start eliminating species. Looking at the photo we see distinct white eye arcs above and below and a clearly obvious darkish line from eye to bill. This results in a sort of "spectacled" look. We also see a dull yellowish-brown overall tone to the plumage, faint (quite faint) streaks along the sides of the breast, and a long thin tail. It also seems to show a wingbar in the photo. This brings up a pitfall of single photo identifications. Sometimes a character seems to be evident in a photo but only just barely so. Photographic artifacts (characters that are a result of the optical process of photography that are not present on the actual bird) have often led birders astray, and it is often best to work off what is clearly observable in a photograph. For that reason I will ignore the possible wingbar.

This eliminates many of our Fall Warblers for various reasons. The face pattern eliminates species which do have streaking underneath such as Orange-crowned, Magnolia, Cape May, Palm, or an immature Black-throated Green. The streaking along the sides eliminates species that show white eye arcs or eye-rings such as American Redstart, and the dull brownish color eliminates such bright species as immature Canada. But which species remain in contention given the

details we can observe? Focusing on the face pattern, the streaks on the sides of the breast, the overall dullish yellow-brown plumage pattern, and the longish looking tail, we are left with Fall plumage Blackpoll Warbler, Fall plumage Bay-breasted Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Pine Warbler.

Prairie Warbler: Long looking tail, so that's good for Prairie. The bird in the photo seems quite dullish yellow-brown though, and the streaks are oh so faint. Prairie Warblers, even the dullest ones, look more yellow than this bird and the streaks along the flanks are more noticeable. There should also be a more distinct pale eyebrow and a pale patch below the eye, not these distinct whitish eye arcs. It's just not a good fit for Prairie Warbler.

Bay-breasted Warbler (Fall plumage): Longish looking tail, generally that's not good for Bay-breasted. Bay-breasted shows a much cleaner look to the breast, lacking the faint streaks of the subject bird. Fall Bay-breasted sometimes still shows a noticeable rufous wash to the flanks as well. Looking at the face pattern we can see it isn't quite right either. Bay-breasted shows a noticeable darkish line through the eye and the result is not the "spectacled" look this bird is exhibiting. But really, that tail just looks too long and the bird looks too streaked! So not a Bay-breasted.

Blackpoll Warbler: Again the tail is just too long, but let's consider other features anyway. The overall dullish yellow-brown isn't bad, but Blackpoll usually shows a hint of yellowish green to its Fall plumage. The streaks on the side are okay but they should be more obvious and on the breast as well. The face pattern is definitely not right though. Blackpoll shows a quite distinct dark line through the eye and in no way looks "spectacled." The killer detail in this photo however may be the feet. Blackpoll Warblers have pinkish yellow legs and feet. This is very obvious in the field, remarkably so when seen well. This bird's feet are way too dull and dark for Blackpoll. And did I say it before? The tail looks too long!

Yellow-rumped Warbler: This is an interesting candidate. A Fall immature Yellow-rumped Warbler is brownish overall, shows streaking underneath, has white eye arcs, and looks longer-tailed than many other Warbler species. Fall Yellow-rumped Warblers however generally show heavier streaking underneath than our subject bird and that streaking is more broadly across the breast. This usually results in a darker more boldly patterned appearance underneath than this bird. The face pattern of Yellow-rumped does not suggest "spectacles," being more just white eye arcs above and below looking more like a thin eye ring. Finally, a Yellow-rumped should show patches of yellow on the flanks that even in a young bird should be discernible in a photo such as this. So Yellow-rumped Warbler just doesn't fit.

Last choice, Pine Warbler: This bird ticks all the boxes for Fall Pine Warbler. Long-tailed look, tick. Spectacled face pattern, tick. Dull streaks on sides of breast, tick. Overall dull brownish plumage, tick. When this bird was photographed it was fairly early in the morning. This low angle of light (as photographers will know) gives a yellow cast and makes objects look "warmer." So this bird is even more dullish brown than the photo makes it appear, which is perfect for Pine Warbler. Also notice the contrast of the dark auriculars (region around the ears) against the pale throat and the faint pale area below the auriculars, all good for Pine Warbler. Immature Pine Warbler can be even duller and more brownish than this individual, truly the LBJ (little brown job) of eastern Fall Warblers. So if you see a dull brown Warbler in the Fall with an obviously long looking tail and a hint of "spectacles," ask yourself why wouldn't it be a Pine Warbler. It's a good place to start.

This likely first-Fall female Pine Warbler was photographed by myself at the "Hot Corner" at Bluff Point State Coastal Reserve in Groton on October 19, 2019.

Dave Provencher

11 Ortega Drive, Preston, CT 06365



Photo Challenge No. 110

## 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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