

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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ON THE COVER

Pacific Golden-Plover

Julian Hough's passion for the intricacies of shorebird identification comes through in his rendering of the Pacific Golden-Plover, an addition in-waiting for the state list.

CONNECTICUT'S NEXT BIRDS

By Jory Teltser and Aidan Kiley

With an introduction by Nick Bonomo, author of the last Next Birds project

Back in the summer of 2007 several active Connecticut birders attempted to predict (AKA "guess") those species we thought most likely to be added to the state's official list of avifauna, as kept by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut. Thirteen years later, and with the next version of this article ready to go, let's have a look back and see how we fared!

Since the time of that publication (Connecticut Warbler April 2008 Volume 28 No. 2), an impressive 24 species were added to the state list, plus three additional that are currently under review by ARCC. Sixteen of those received votes in the 2007 poll, which goes to show that several of those first records were a bit off the radar, including Graylag Goose, White-tailed Tropicbird, Mexican Violetear, Broad-billed Hummingbird and Black-backed Oriole!

Considering that this exercise seems like a crapshoot, the group did quite well with its top-polling species. Six of the top 12 vote-getters have already been found. They are No. 1 Townsend's Warbler (records of two individuals await ARCC review), No. 3 Black-chinned Hummingbird, No. 4 Little Egret, No. 5 California Gull (two records), No. 9 Slaty-backed Gull (two records), No. 11 Northern Lapwing, and No. 12 Common Murre (incredibly recorded every year between 2011 and 2019!). Bird status and distribution is always changing, even over short periods of time, which is why making these lists can be so fun and challenging.

Nick Bonomo

The project was undertaken by recruiting a panel of 12 active state birders with an interest in status and distribution. Each

was asked to produce a ranked list of their candidates for the next 10 birds to be added to the state list. Their combined lists contained a total of 31 species. Our list of most likely additions was assembled by assigning points to each participant's list, 10 for the top choice through one for their 10th choice.

Participants were ARCC members Nick Bonomo, Frank Gallo, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, Julian Hough, Jay Kaplan, Frank Mantlik, Dave Provencher, Phil Rusch, Glenn Williams and the authors, young birders Aidan Kiley and Jory Teltser.

1

Swainson's Warbler

(11 lists, 97 points)

This southern species' population remains fairly constant, in contrast to many declining passerines. It is most likely to occur in spring, particularly following periods of strong south winds. Swainson's Warblers have been located in surrounding states in both spring in fall, but primarily in April through June. One is most likely to appear in known migrant



Sam Fried photo

Swainson's Warbler

spots or other areas containing appropriate habitat. As with other "spring overshoots" such as Kentucky and Prothonotary Warblers, males end up farther north than their typical nesting range and may stay in an attempt to hold territory for breeding. Possible locations we predict for this species are Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton, East Rock Park in New Haven and Hamden, Mondo Ponds in Milford and Birdcraft Sanctuary in Fairfield. More generally, areas inland with dense under story cover, especially in the northwest or northeast corners of the state, could produce. This is a highly secretive species, which is most often detected by its loud, robust song that is similar to Louisiana Waterthrush. It ranked second on the previous list

2

Common Ringed Plover

(11 lists 86 points)

This species' breeding range is expanding. It is breeding in far northern Quebec and Nunavut. It is hard to detect in shorebird flocks due to very close similarity to Semipalmated Plover. Reports of this species in the Northeast are on the rise



Frank Mantlik photo

Common Ringed Plover

due to population increases in Canada and improved effort - birders are becoming more aware of them as a possibility and are taking on the tough task of identification, including voice. This species could show up in any areas with high concentrations of shorebirds, such as Milford Point, Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, the Stratford beaches and Old Saybrook.

3

Neotropic Cormorant

(11 lists 62 points)

Connecticut has a number of unconfirmed records of this species from the 1990s and 2000s. It has very likely occurred in recent years but has been overlooked due to the abun-



Neotropic Cormorant

Frank Gallo photo

dance of Double-crested Cormorants in spring and summer. This bird could easily show up as a flyover in a Double-crested flock in April, May, August or September in particular. Their population is increasing, and they have become annual in the Great Lakes Region. Coastal locations provide an opportunity to find a flyover, but inland on a pond or lake is another possibility. Mainly found in South and Central American north through Texas and other portions of the Southwest, this cormorant can be identified by its equally proportioned neck and tail, small size, head shape and shape of the gape.

4

Allen's Hummingbird

(9 lists 61 points)

This species is a rare vagrant to the Northeast, but there is a steady pattern of records. After about Oct. 15, it is likely that a hummingbird in Connecticut is not a Ruby-throated. Rufous Hummingbird is by far the most common, but its *Selasphorous* cousin is important to keep in mind. Clear photos of the spread tail, or in-hand study after banding are the



Allen's Hummingbird

Dave Provencher photo

only ways to confirm this bird. Adult male Rufous is the only age/sex combination of the two species that is identifiable without tail photos or banding. As with almost all rare hummingbirds, this species will be found at a feeder. There are a number of records in nearby states. Pennsylvania has six, and Cape May County, N.J. alone has four records.

5

Crested Caracara

(8 lists, 60 points)

This species could show up at any time of year. There is no strong pattern to the vagrancy, unlike most species on this list. There are records in NY, NJ, VT, ME, and MA. One could be found any time from spring into winter, associating with vultures. Farmland in northern Connecticut would be a good place to check. Unlike many raptors, this species is not likely to show up at a hawk watch. It is migratory, however, and could appear as a flyover or feeding on carrion. Caracaras avoid water, so inland may be the way to go for this one. With fairly few records with little in common in terms of date, it is unclear what weather patterns may drive this species to appear in our region.



Crested Caracara

Kent McFarland photo

6

Hammond's Flycatcher

(8 lists 46 points)

This is a difficult Empidonax flycatcher to identify. Most records in our region have occurred in late fall to early winter, at least partially because of attention paid to any Empid at that time of year. Any found after about the first week of Oc-



Hammond's Flycatcher

Dave Provencher photo

tober should get a really close look! This species could show up anywhere. A coastal migrant trap, river valleys, or coastal shrub habitat are options. But Connecticut's first confirmed Pacific-slope Flycatcher was found in December behind an abandoned middle school in Branford. Anything is possible!

7

Pacific Golden-Plover

(8 lists 44 points)

This species has little record of historical vagrancy, because it has only been recognized as a species since 1993. It was formerly lumped with American Golden-Plover as Lesser Golden-Plover. Later migration timing in fall and earlier in

*Bruce Finnan photo**Pacific Golden-Plover*

summer/early fall than American (with exceptions) is a good clue. Much earlier molt timing than American, larger bill, under wing pattern, and short primary projection are basic identification features. June adult Golden-Plovers should be checked carefully, as well as any late fall adult. Options for this species include Milford Point, Hammonasset and flooded fields after storm systems. This intercontinental migrant, as other shorebirds, is grounded by rain. As with Common Ringed Plover, call is very useful and should be noted.

8

Vermilion Flycatcher

(9 lists 38 points)

This species is another solid choice to show up in Connecticut. Abundant in the western US, this attractive flycatcher is

*Dave Provencher photo**Vermilion Flycatcher*

likely to be found in open areas, especially fields or meadows. Coastal brushy areas provide habitat as well. Non-adult males are similar in plumage and habits to Say's Phoebe. Good locations to search for this species after periods of west or southwest winds include Trout Brook Valley, Hammonasset, Long Beach in Statford and any open meadows or farms inland or coastal.

9

White-winged Tern

(4 lists 19 points)

This Eurasian tern is a wetland and lake specialist with a pattern of vagrancy to the East. Most records have occurred in spring and summer, with few in the fall. Check large inland lakes after storms, or any time there is a regional incursion

*Nick Bonomo photo**White-winged Tern*

of European birds. It is most similar to Black Tern, but easily distinguishable with close views or photos. Coastal records have occurred, such as one recently on Cape Cod, but we are predicting one to show up inland. Bodies of water such as Bantam Lake in Litchfield/Morris, Candlewood Lake in northwest Fairfield County, Hemlock or Aspetuck Reservoirs in central Fairfield County, Barkhamsted Reservoir in Litchfield County, or wetlands along the Connecticut River are all spots to keep an eye on.

10 (3- way tie at 18 points)

Sage Thrasher

(5 lists)

All records of this species have occurred in fall through winter. Massachusetts has four records, two of which were at the same location. This shows that habitat is the key to finding this bird. Heavily birded locations with good scrub habitat such as Sherwood Island State Park in Westport, Hammonasset, Long Beach, or farmland inland are solid possibilities. This species is unlike other thrashers in that it is highly migratory. They are western scrub land birds with a pattern of vagrancy to the East. Look for this species in late fall after extended periods of southwest winds and drought in the West.

*Julian Hough photo**Sage Thrasher*

Reddish Egret

(4 lists)

This strictly coastal heron would likely occur as a result of post-breeding dispersal from the Gulf Coast, especially Texas. They follow river systems north to the Northeast, similar to Little Blue Herons, which are occasionally found inland. One is most likely to show up from July to September. Possible locations include Milford Point, Hammonasset or Sherwood Island. The white morph could make for a more challenging identification, but with photos or observer experience either morph can be easily identified.



Reddish Egret

Nick Bonomo photo

Violet-green Swallow

(4 lists)

This swallow is undoubtedly missed due to its similarity to Tree Swallow, which is abundant. This bird is likely to occur during migratory staging, which takes place in April,



Nick Bonomo photo

Violet-green Swallow

September and October. One is likely to show up as a result of post-breeding dispersal in the fall in a flock of Tree Swallows. A flyby at a location with clear visibility, such as a hawk watch or a river system, is a good possibility. Roosting has been documented in Cape May. Good views of structure, white rump, face pattern and short tail can result in a first state record. This is a highly migratory bird that is abundant in the West. Periods of west winds will likely precede a discovery. Our first record is likely to be a fall immature that is quite similar to Tree Swallows, so good viewing conditions, observer experience and photographs will be important.

The Next Five

Included on three lists were Yellow-billed Loon and Common Shelduck. Chosen on two lists were Garganey, Anna's Hummingbird and Cassin's Kingbird. In the 2008 article Garganey was No. 10. Anna's Hummingbird was an also-ran at No. 34, and Common Shelduck, Yellow-billed Loon and Cassin's Kingbird were not listed.

The remainder of this year's candidates, appearing on one list, are: Velvet Scoter, Common Scoter, Lesser Nighthawk, Lesser Sand-plover, Black-tailed Gull (No. 15 previously), Yellow-legged Gull, Elegant Tern, Lewis's Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, Redwing (No. 14 previously), Black-throated Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, Virginia's Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler.

Of this year's Top 10, neither Neotropic Cormorant nor Crested Caracara appeared on any of the previous lists. Common Ringed Plover and Violet-green Swallow appeared on but one list each previously. Reddish Egret and Vermilion Flycatcher appeared on two each. Continuing to garner support after more than a decade were, with previous rank in parentheses, White-winged Tern (No. 6), Allen's Hummingbird and Hammond's Flycatcher (tied for No. 7) and Pacific Golden-Plover (No. 13).

Species getting votes last time, but not this time, were Shiny Cowbird, Rock Wren and Great-tailed Grackle (2 lists each) and on single lists Inca Dove, Long-billed Murrelet, Western Wood-pewee, Gray Jay, Western Reef-Heron, Eurasian Kestrel, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Clark's Grebe, Common Chaffinch and Mountain Plover.

Two species, reported after this year's lists were compiled - Common Ringed Plover and Pacific Golden-Plover - await action by ARCC,

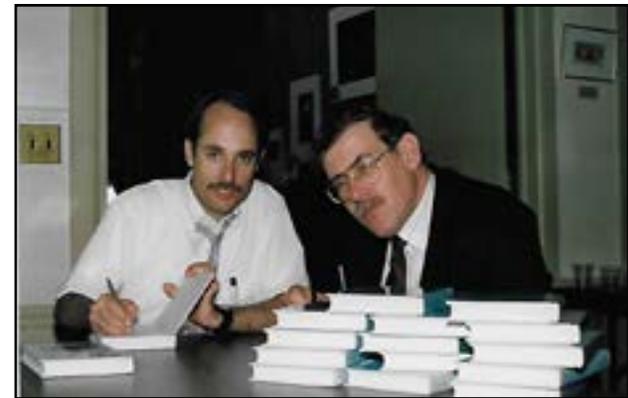
A REFLECTION ON JOE ZERANSKI AND THE WRITING OF *CONNECTICUT BIRDS*

By Thomas R. Baptist

Joseph D. Zeranski, an important figure in Connecticut field ornithology for more than 50 years, died in Greenwich on December 8, 2019. He was 78 years old. One of Joe's most important accomplishments was the publication of *Connecticut Birds* in 1990. *Connecticut Birds*, co-authored by this writer and published by University Press of New England, was the first compendium of the abundance and distribution of birds in the state since 1913.

This article describes some of the planning and preparation of *Connecticut Birds*. The book established an important benchmark describing the status of bird populations at that time, to which future compilations may provide useful comparative measurements. Like all state bird books, this one was "out-of-date" the moment it was published, thus making important the need for future assessments.

The book was, in many respects, a collective effort. "Hundreds of people have, over the years, contributed greatly to the body of knowledge pertaining to the avifauna of Connecticut" we wrote. Our task was to look closely at that



Cathy Dellacarpini Kruse photo
Thomas R. Baptist, left, and Joseph D. Zeranski signing books
in April 1990

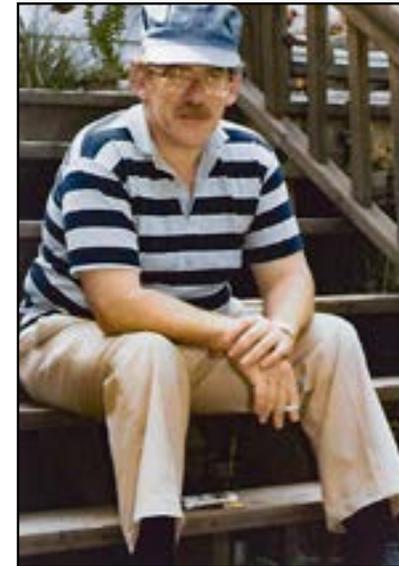
collective knowledge to describe then-current bird distribution and numbers and also present a discussion of changes in Connecticut's environment and the effects of those changes on birds.

As co-compilers of the Greenwich-Stamford Christmas Bird Count, started in 1911, Joe and I had access to decades of historical avifaunal data. We were amazed at the changes in bird populations revealed in CBC data. Moreover, during our many years as "birding buddies", Joe and I observed that Connecticut's nesting and migrant bird populations had changed dramatically since described by Sage, Bishop and Bliss in 1913. A current compendium was sorely needed. Thus, Joe and I embarked in 1983 on a seven-year effort to review thousands of records and articles, published and unpublished, as well as interviewing dozens of persons active in field ornithology.

The many conversations Joe and I had with members of the ornithological community were immensely helpful. The authors' acknowledgments contained in the book name many of those individuals. In reflection, the input we received from State Ornithologist George A. Clark, Jr., Louis Bevier and Paul Lehman were the most critical, and the most important, to us. Our personal "therapist" throughout the project was the late Frederick Purnell Jr., who offered endless encouragement and perspective as well as thoughtful comment on the draft manuscript.

A major challenge we faced was in defining terms of abundance. Typical measures of "common", "uncommon", "rare" needed greater precision than is often used in common parlance, especially since count data from numerous sources (e.g., Christmas and Summer Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys) were available to increase objectivity. After a review of a dozen or more options, we ultimately decided on measurement terms modified from those used by John Bull in his *Birds of the New York Area*.

Another important challenge was determining accurate and



Grace Baptist photo
Joe Zeranski in June 1984.

timely ranges and numbers of breeding birds in Connecticut. Field work for Connecticut's first breeding bird atlas had been conducted from 1982 to 1986, but the final results were unavailable until after *Connecticut Birds* was published. We were therefore left with time-consuming interviews of the major participants of the atlas, comparing their notes with our own. To that end, the input of Louis Bevier, Paul Desjardins, Frank Mantlik, the late Dennis Varza, and Paul Merola, Dale May and Ken Metzler of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, was essential.

One chapter of the book of importance, which is as relevant today as when written, is the Summary of Natural and Cultural History of Connecticut. Changes in the state's environment were described from the prehistoric and historic periods, focusing on the effects of European settlement, farming, manufacturing, urbanization, the return of forest, and modern conservation efforts. Joe researched dozens of works on the subjects and aptly condensed a large amount of information into a single, informative chapter.

From the outset of the project, Joe and I agreed to a division

of the work in which Joe focused on researching and drafting the “Historical Notes” section of each species account, and I researched and wrote the “status” sections. Both elements of the work were laborious. Despite our best editing and checking efforts, some citations containing erroneous volume or page numbers nonetheless found their way into the book!

Joe and I were delighted to work with editors at University Press of New England, a consortium of university presses including Wesleyan University, Dartmouth College, Tufts University and Northeastern University. University Press published notable nature and environmental authors over the years, including Cynthia Huntington and David Gessner. University Press, unfortunately, was shut down in April 2018, thus depleting the number of possible publication options for future works in ornithology and natural history.

Bird distribution and abundance in Connecticut has changed since *Connecticut Birds* was published. The ongoing breeding and winter bird atlas will provide important information about those changes, and many look forward to the publication of those results. Notwithstanding, it may not be too soon to start work on updating *Connecticut Birds*! Sadly, Joe can't join that effort, but his commitment to Connecticut's avifauna is always on my mind.

In the 1970s, Joe helped establish the Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch at the Audubon Center in Greenwich, one of the premier hawk watch sites in southern New England. Joe's analyses of raptor migration numbers from this and other important locations has provided valuable insight into changes of raptor populations. Similarly, his analyses of Summer Bird Count data published in the *Connecticut Warbler*, with co-authors including Patrick Comins, have provided important narrative about breeding population changes.

Joe was a founding director of the Connecticut Ornithological Association in 1984, and he served on its Board for many years. Joe's dedication to the COA was in part due to his desire to establish and grow a statewide birding organization to contribute to the body of knowledge of birds, and

also to engage people in defending bird habitats from degradation or destruction. Joe played a role in COA assuming responsibility for publishing the *Connecticut Warbler* in 1984, which was begun by Connecticut Audubon Society in 1981. The COA also formed in 1985 the Connecticut Rare Records Committee (now called the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut), on which Joe and I have served. The Committee has provided careful evaluations of unusual reports to determine the adequacy of documentation, and it publishes summaries of its work in the *Warbler*. In doing so, the Committee helped to solve the problem that Joe and I faced in evaluating published accounts of rare sightings from years past. Joe strongly believed COA was essential to bird conservation in the state, and for his many efforts, he received the COA Mabel Osgood Wright Award in 2010.

Joe also played a leadership role in shaping the conservation movement in his home town of Greenwich, including serving on its Conservation Commission and the board of the local Audubon chapter, advocating conservation zoning, and publishing numerous natural resource and historical booklets and papers. Joe travelled with his birding friends throughout the country and his trips to Texas, Arizona, California, Washington and Oregon were among his favorites. He was a serious lister and he enjoyed the competition among his friends.

Joe felt that *Connecticut Birds* would sharpen the focus on the importance of protecting birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Considering my career in conservation, Joe was my primary guide and mentor, and co-authoring *Connecticut Birds* helped to fortify my commitment to bird protection. Joe was a constant source of ideas and suggestions, and he influenced and counseled conservation leaders throughout Connecticut. He was an inspiration to many, especially this author.

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CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Summer Season, June 1 through July 31, 2020

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

The short summer season packs a lot of activity into two months. Spring's northbound migration continues into early June; the southbound migration begins with the passage of arctic-nesting shorebirds in early July; and throughout the period birders are on the alert for lingerers, wanderers and strays. The season also represents the heart of the breeding season for Connecticut's diverse avifauna.

Northbound Migration

A Red-necked Grebe was late June 1 at Waterford Beach in Waterford (KG). A Common Nighthawk on June 20 at Windham Airport in North Windham was probably a late migrant (PR). Shorebirds still on the move at Milford Point included two Whimbrel on June 2 (TG, FM et al.) and two Western Sandpipers on June 3 (GH et al.). Even later were a Whimbrel on June 9 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, hereafter HBSP, (MK et al.) and a Western Sandpiper from June 12 (PC) to June 17 (RS) at Milford Point. High counts of Red Knots were six on June 3 at Milford Point (GH et al) and five on June 6 at Barn Island in Stonington (DP).

Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, typically late migrants, were present June 1 in Windsor Locks (PDe) and June 2 in Wolcott (JS). Two Nashville Warblers, very sparse breeders in the Northwest Corner, were probably northbound June 5 in Thompson, but their presence in separate clear cuts may have signaled territorial behavior (AR). Late Mourning Warblers consisted of singing birds June 2-10 in Morris (GH, BF et al.), and June 9-14 in Cornwall (BV). These were potential breeders, but there was no evidence they had found a mate. The good number of over-shooting Kentucky Warblers from the spring season resulted in lingerers June 4 in Portland (TA) and to June 13 at



Pam Johnson photo
Sandhill Cranes have become increasingly regular, but one on June 16 in Branford caused a small sensation when it wandered around a residential neighborhood to the amazement of local residents.

Bent of the River Audubon Sanctuary in Southbury (ES, CW et al.). Four was a good count for the late-moving Blackpoll Warbler on June 7 in Southbury (RN); the latest was June 12 in Marlborough (EH). A Canada Warbler was far from state breeding areas on June 2 at HBSP (MK). Other late warblers included two Wilson's Warblers at Milford Point on June 2 (GA,

DR), and one on June 12 in New Canaan (EM). A northbound Nelson's Sparrow was singing at Ragged Rock Creek marsh, Old Saybrook, on June 6 (NB).

Southbound Migration

As July progressed the expected array of shorebirds accumulated: July 11 – a Whimbrel at Milford Point

(GN et al.); July 12 – an unusual concentration of up to 10 Western Sandpipers at Sandy Point (NB, SU); July 24 – a Stilt Sandpiper at Milford Point (FM et al.); July 26 – a Red Knot and a **Wilson's Phalarope** at Milford Point (CL, MV); July 28 – a Marbled Godwit at Sandy Point (JO, SU et al.); July 30 – a flyover flock of 22 Short-billed Dowitchers at Windham Airport (PR); and July 31 – five Pectoral Sandpipers at HBSP (GN). There were scattered reports of single Black Terns in the Stratford-Milford area July 11-31 (AK et al.) with two on July 30 at Milford Point (FM).

Lingerers, Wanderers and Strays

Summering waterbirds in Long Island Sound included an unexpected Northern Shoveler on June 8 at Cockenoe Island off Westport (BM) and a high count of six Long-tailed Ducks at Cove Island Park in Stamford on June 11 (PDu), with a male off Milford Point June 30 to July 8 (FM). On June 23 Stratford Point produced an immature male White-winged Scoter and two long-saying female Red-breasted Mergan-

sers (FM). A Horned Grebe in alternate plumage was at Chaffinch Island in Guilford on June 16 (DM, KJ). A calling **Chuck-will's-widow** was a noteworthy pre-dawn surprise June 1 at Hoyden's Hill in Fairfield (CP). A **Sandhill Crane** wandered around a residential neighborhood in Branford on June 16, unconcerned about gawking residents (PJ). One was present July 7-13 at HBSP (AW et al.), and two were in the Colebrook-Norfolk area in mid-July (RS et al.).

Three Bonaparte's Gull were still at Milford Point on June 4 (TG), with five off Westport on June 8 (BM et al.). The high count was six off Westbrook on July 2 (NB et al.). The bird of the season was a **Franklin's Gull** on June 5 at Griswold Point in Old Lyme, where it joined two Caspian Terns (DP). Two Caspians were up the Connecticut River at Deep River Landing on June 14 (MA), and two more were at Sandy Point on July 8 (NB). The first Royal Tern report was from July 31 at Milford Point (RS). Red-throated Loons, casual in the Sound in summer, were off Westport June 1-3 (TG) and at Sandy Point



Julian Hough photo

After years of increasing as visitors, Black Skimmers nested successfully this summer at Sandy Point in West Haven. They last nested in the state, at the same location, in 1998.

in West Haven on July 19 (MS). More unusual was one farther inland in Norwich on June 11 (CR). A flurry of July 11 tubenose reports included two **Great Shearwaters** and two that were either Great or Cory's Shearwaters at Old Saybrook (NB, PR, JR), as well as one Great Shearwater at Stonington Point (GW). A Black-crowned Night-Heron was far from coastal breeding locations June 27 in Morris (NM). A Red-headed Woodpecker was at Gay City State Park in Hebron on June 16 (JL). An adult male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was seasonally unexpected June 2 at HBSP in Madison (MK). A Yellow-breasted Chat was in Suffield on June 6 (TJ).

Breeding Season

A pair of Gadwall on June 23 at Stratford Point were a nice find of a bird that has declined markedly as a breeder (FM). Hooded Mergansers with broods were widely reported in Litchfield County throughout June: two females with three young each at Cemetery Pond in Litchfield (RN); a female with two young at Orton Lane Pond in Woodbury (RN); a female with seven young at Hesseky Meadows in Woodbury (RN); and at least one female with a brood among eight birds at a Christian Road pond in Middlebury (BD). There also were females with ten and five young respectively at Wimisink Sanctuary in Sherman, the northern tip of Fairfield County (AD, RN).



Abby Sesselberg photos
This adult male "Lawrence's" Warbler, a hybrid backcross of Blue-winged Warbler and Golden-winged Warblers, was found on June 28 in Hamden.

A Chimney Swift roost at Mitchell School in Woodbury was occupied from June 25 through the end of the period (and beyond), with high counts of 274 on July 3 and 202 on July 17 (RN). A **King Rail** was in good habitat June 2 in the Durham Meadows (DP). Two **Sandhill Cranes** June 24-July 7 in Pomfret raised suspicions, but no evidence of breeding was found (AR, SZ et al.). This year Sandy Point was among the most successful nesting locations for Least and Common Terns, according to DEEP (LS). Black Skimmers appeared in good

numbers, starting with 10 on June 3 at Milford Point (TM) and an incredible 24 on June 6 at Short Beach, Stratford (FM). By mid-July fledged young were present at Sandy Point in West Haven, the site of the last state nesting in 1998 (JHo et al). At least one **White-faced Ibis** was present all summer at HBSP, with records from June 11 & 25 (AP, MK) and July 9 (NB), creating the potential for hybridization with the area's nesting Glossy Ibises. A pair of **Mississippi Kites** nested successfully again in northeastern Fairfield County (JHI) and two adults made an

interesting appearance July 2 in Brooklyn (PR).

It appears Purple Martin colonies did well this year. The one at Milford Point fledged 132 young from 37 active nests (FM). A **Sedge Wren** found in Newtown on July 26 was present into late September (PDu). It was seen carrying grasses in the first two weeks but a second bird was never seen. Employing a bit of wishful thinking, we'll include two **Red Crossbills** from July 10 on Canaan Mountain in this category (BV). Windham Airport now ranks as the state's most prolific Grasshopper Sparrow breeding site, with 16 reported there on June 21 (PR). Five female/immature Boat-tailed Grackles were at Sandy Point in West Haven on July 13 (SS, JO). This is away from the state's few known breeding locations. The season's only report of Lawrence's Warbler was on June 28 in Hamden (SM, AS).

Observers – George Amato, Tim Antanaitis, Mark Aron-

son, Nick Bonomo, Patrick Comins, Angela Dimmitt, Buzz Devine, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Patrick Dugan (PDu), Bruce Finnan, Frank Gallo, Karen Gallo, Tina Green, Ed Haesche, Greg Hanisek, Janet Holt (JHI), Julian Hough (JHo), Tenzin Jampa, Pam Johnson, Kim Jones, Aidan Kiley, Jeffrey Kimball, Micky Komara, Jack Landry, Chris Loscalzo, Nic Main, Frank Mantlik, Steve Mayo, Edward McCabe, David McLain, Tom Murray, Brendan Murtha, Russ Naylor, Gina Nichol, John Oshlick, Chris Petherick, Aidan Place, Dave Provencher, Darryl Rathbun, Andy Rzeznikiewicz, Craig Repasz, Jason Rieger, Phil Rusch, Laura Saucier, Abby Sesselberg, Eric Silverman, Russ Smiley, Steve Spector, Andrew Stack, Maria Stockmal, Jack Swatt, Severin Uebbing, Benjamin Van Doren, Marianne Vahney, Anthony Wang, Chris Wood, Glenn Williams, Sara Zagorski

HERMIT THRUSHES AND THE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS IN CONNECTICUT

By Chris Wood

I spend a lot of time in the woods these days, partly seeking solace but mostly to enjoy nature and photography. And participating in the ongoing Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas project. Out of curiosity, after surveying at least 10 territorial male Hermit Thrushes (*Catharus guttatus*) along a 1.4 mile route within the Whittemore Sanctuary Preserve in Woodbury (which is in two of my Atlas blocks), I looked through the preliminary lists for about 100 blocks in northwest Connecticut for HETH reports. I came up with only four con-



Adult Male Hermit Thrush

Chris Wood photo

firmed breeding and fewer than 20 probables.

In Review of the Birds of Connecticut (Merriam, 1877), HETH were described as “Common in migration from mid-April to early May.” By the time of publication of The Birds of Connecticut (Sage, et al, 1943), HETH were “breeding regularly in the northwest part of the state.” The 1982-1986 field work for the first Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas found Hermit

26



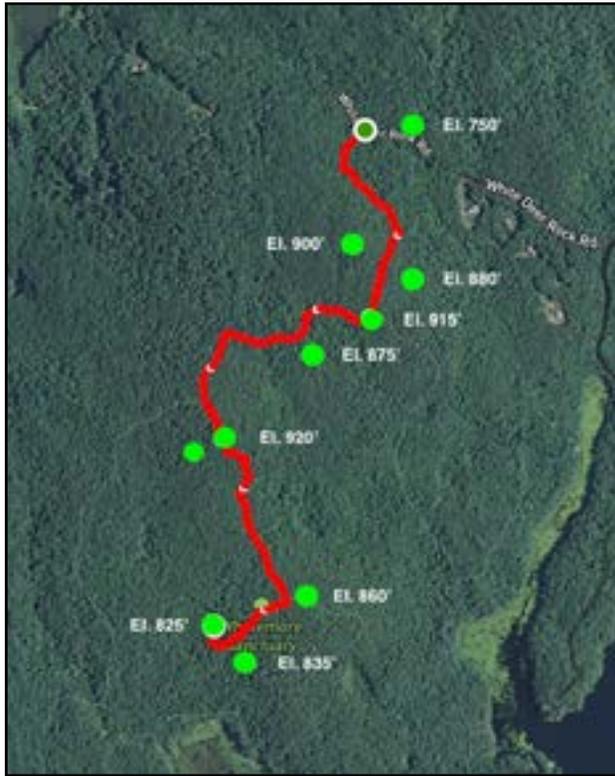
Chris Wood photo

Likely Nesting Habitat

Thrush breeding evidence in 30% of the 600 study blocks, but only confirmed nesting in 36 blocks, most of which were in the northwest and northeast corners of the state.

According to Cornell’s Birds of The World (BOW) the Hermit Thrush is “one of the most widely distributed forest-nesting migratory birds in North America and the only forest thrush whose population has increased or remained stable over the past 20 years.” Hermit Thrush breeding habitat overlaps some with Wood Thrush and Veery here in Connecticut and according to BOW, those species may limit HETH nesting by “interspecific tension.”

Whittemore Sanctuary encompasses almost 700 acres of mixed forest, large enough to create interior forest habitat that many bird species (including HETH) prefer or require. At one location, where I found three singing males all audible from one spot, the habitat was as described in BOW: small openings in a large forest area with fern thicket and grasses (in this case where selective forest management 25 or so years



 Locations of territorial male Hermit Thrushes along 1.4 mile route

ago created canopy openings), at higher elevations related to surrounding area (in this case 860' ASL).

One study from Ontario calculated an average HETH territory size of almost 2 acres, about the size of a soccer field or one half of a Costco store. Although males will attack other males trespassing on established territories, HETH "may have a tendency to choose territories near those of conspecifics." (BOW) The distribution of 10 apparent territories on my 1.4 mile route in Whittemore looks like an example of this tendency. This route traverses the highest elevations in this forest and I have not located HETH anywhere else on the 700 acre site.

Nests of the subspecies that breeds in the Northeast (C.g.

faxoni) are most commonly on the ground, underneath an overhanging tree or shrub branch, or underneath fern fronds or grass clumps (BOW). Prime nesting habitat includes small openings in a large forest area with fern thicket and grasses at higher elevations relative to surrounding area. Nests are apparently very difficult to find (I can attest), so observing nest building, food or fecal sac carrying, or adults attending fledglings are the best bets for breeding confirmation, but even "probable" classifications such as a singing bird present seven days would be valuable information for the Atlas database.

HETH are at the southern edge of their breeding range here in Connecticut and extending along higher elevations of the Appalachians to Virginia, so it seems that the data collected on this species by Atlas work would prove valuable in assessing impacts of climate and habitat change on bird populations and distribution (range expansion and range contraction applies to several species here in Connecticut). I don't



Source: eBird



Juvenile Hermit Thrush (early September)

Chris Wood photo

think eBird or the Atlas has requested, but it may be worth noting elevations for any HETH records during the current Atlas research.

Any chance to just listen to the ethereal fluting of a Hermit Thrush is worth the mosquito bites and humidity of the Connecticut woods.

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Adult Male Hermit Thrush

Chris Wood photo

PHOTO CHALLENGE



When this warbler pops up from scrubby cover in a community garden in early fall, you may already have to overcome a psychological hurdle. If you were raised as a birder on a classic field guide, the first thing that pops into your mind may be the phrase “confusing fall warblers.” In order to make the identification you need to clear your head and assess the details in front of you. The first thing you notice are the yellow under parts, which narrows things down somewhat. Combine that with some streaking and things narrow even more. A species that comes to mind, Magnolia Warbler, in even its drabest plumage has a complete neck band, which this bird lacks. Then the bird wags its tail and you think, “Oh, Palm Warbler.!” But Palm has a strong supercilium, and you’re not seeing one of those. There must be another tail-wagger in play, and by taking a close look at the streaking, you see it forms a small horizontal bar at the base of the throat. Put it all together and confusion is gone. It’s a Prairie Warbler, photographed by Karen Gallo on Sept. 25, 2020 at Bauer Park in Madison.



Photo Challenge No. 112

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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