



The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association



October 2021

The long and the short of the Dowitchers
A deep dive into early winter bird numbers
The challenge of Buteo identification

CONTENTS

- 89 Identification of Dowitchers in Juvenile and Non-breeding Plumages
Julian Hough
- 96 The 2020-2021 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count
Stephen P. Broker
- 117 Connecticut Field Notes
Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik
- 124 2020 Fall Hawk Watch
Steve Mayo
- 128 Photo Challenge

ON THE COVER

Black-throated Blue Warbler

Warblers feature prominently in the spring field notes, and Julian Hough's portrait does justice to the beauty of an adult male Black-throated Blue Warbler. This species also has an unexpected place in the Christmas Bird Count analysis.

Identification of Dowitchers in Juvenile and Non-breeding Plumages

By Julian Hough

As far as tricky shorebird identifications go, both Long- and Short-billed Dowitchers present identification stumbling blocks for even the most seasoned field birders. There are several detailed US discussions of the identification and separation of both dowitchers (Jaramillo et al. 1991; Lee & Birch 2006), as well as informative reviews in various British journals that provide an invaluable primer even for American birders (Jaramillo & Henshaw 1995; Hough 1999; Chandler 1998).

Long-billed Dowitcher

Long-billeds are monotypic and nest in western and northern Alaska, northwest Canada and northeast Siberia (Pitelka 1950). Although it has a more westerly bias to its US distribution, Long-billeds migrate east to winter along the southern Atlantic coast from Florida south to Mexico and Guatemala.

Short-billed Dowitcher

Three distinct races of Short-billed Dowitchers are recognized:

- a western race, *caurinus* is restricted to the Pacific coast, breeding in Alaska and wintering from California to Peru.
- A "central" race *hendersoni*, breeds from Manitoba west to northern Alberta and winters in the Caribbean and in northern South America.
- an eastern race *griseus* breeds in Quebec and eastern Labrador, wintering in the eastern Caribbean, from Florida south to the coast of Brazil.

Logically, juveniles of the eastern race *griseus* are the one we get in New England, but these are presumably swelled by small numbers of the central race *hendersoni* but sub-specific identification is generally only possible in breeding plumage. Juvenile Long-billeds disperse in September and October and typically arrive in New England later than Short-billed, so any juvenile dowitcher before late September is likely to be a Short-billed.

Identification Problems and Pitfalls

Like many waders, both size and bill length overlaps between the sexes in both dowitchers making identification of some individuals problematic. Long-billeds are larger, longer-legged and shorter-winged than Short-billed. A large, rotund bird, with a long bill roughly 2x the size of the head should prove to be Long-billed (Wilds & Newlon 1983), but it is important to consider a suite of characters to cement any initial hip-shot identification based solely on potentially misleading features such as gestalt or bill length.



Short-billed Dowitcher, Juvenile, New York, September. (Julian Hough)

A very bright individual, it shows the broad orange-buff fringes to upperparts and shows internal markings to the scapulars, inner greater coverts, and the diagnostic “tiger-striped” pattern to the tertials. Unlike Long-billed, the upper breast and flanks are a brighter peachy-buff compared to the duller, more greyish overtones of Long-billed.



Short-billed Dowitcher, Juvenile, Connecticut, September. (Julian Hough)

A typical juvenile griseus, exhibiting the classic, ‘tiger-striped’ tertials and inner greater coverts that allow for an easy separation from Long-billed. The overall shape is quite streamlined, lacking the rotund body and long-legged look often associated with Long-billed. The bill is quite long on this bird, suggesting a female.



Long-billed Dowitcher, Oregon, September. (Dave Irons)

Juveniles are more muted in appearance than Short-billed. The scapulars are solidly dark with a dull chestnut or buffy fringes, and fresh individuals show a subtle, peachy blush restricted to the upper breast. More importantly note the plain tertials, lacking the contrasting internal markings of Short-billed. The overall shape is often more rangy, or “godwit-like” due to the longer bill and legs than Short-billed. The prominent, white lower eye crescent, although not diagnostic, is often exhibited by most Long-billeds and may be useful when combined with a suite of other characters.



Long-billed Dowitcher, First-winter, Connecticut, January. (Julian Hough)

By early winter (Nov-Dec), some individuals have replaced their juvenile head, body and upperpart feathers with grayer, winter-plumaged ones, but retain their diagnostic juvenile tertials. Some individuals, like this one, can retain some juvenile chestnut-fringed scapulars well into January. The two generations of feathers allow the bird to be aged and the patterning of these retained juvenile feathers separate it from similarly-aged Short-billed. The overall length of the bill is quite short (thus overlapping with Short-billed Dowitcher) and suggests this is a male.



Short-billed Dowitcher, First-winter, California. (Ryan Terrill)

Bill length and shape are ambiguous, but the retained juvenile tertials, lower scapulars and inner greater coverts, with broad, buffy internal markings, identify it as Short-billed. The replaced adult-like gray mantle feathers are pale grayish with a narrow white fringe and a thin shaft streak, and lack any noticeable darkening around the feather shaft.



Short-billed Dowitcher, Adult, race hendersoni, Texas. (Kevin T. Karlson)

Aged by the uniformly gray upperpart feathers lacking any contrasting, retained juvenile wing-coverts or tertials. Key features are: more discernible mottling/stippling of the breast band; more defined barring at the carpal area; and a whiter, more extensively pale chin. With comparison and experience, the upperpart feathers are subtly more uniformly grayish with a narrow pale fringe and indistinct shaft streak.



Long-billed Dowitcher, Adult, Texas, date unknown. (Kevin T. Karlson)

Aged by the same features noted for Short-billed. This is a Long-billed with a short bill and presumably a male on bill length and likely to cause the most confusion. Note the overall uniform plumage, with the gray of the neck sides blending into smooth-gray upper flanks and higher onto the throat. The lower breast is often more solid (less stippled/spotted) gray and, more importantly, the carpal area barring is often more diffuse/smooth than in Short-billed. Upperpart feathers show a darker shaft streak and slightly more diffuse darker feather bases that often make Long-billeds a bit more contrasting above.



Short-billed Dowitcher, juvenile, Connecticut, September. (Julian Hough)

Some juvenile birds can be tricky showing a more atypical patterning of the diagnostic tertial and greater coverts. Some bright Long-billeds can show faint internal markings to these feather tracts too, while some Short-billeds can show reduced markings. The crown is dark, lacking any pale streaking; the head and breast are grayish with a minimal buffy/peach wash; the centers to the scapulars appear solidly dark with a paler fringe; and the tertials and inner greater coverts are slightly plainer than expected for a Short-billed. However, the even proportions and short-legs and "medium" bill support Short-billed.

Call is the easiest means of differentiating the two species; a rapid, liquid “*tu-tu-tu*” in Short-billed and a more clipped, higher-pitched “*keek*” in Long-billed.

In early autumn, juvenile Long-billeds are duller grey on the face and breast, show solid dark scapulars fringed with chestnut, and have grayish, plain tertials. Short-billeds show brighter, more prominent buff-orange fringes and internal marking to the scapulars and tertials and are relatively easy to identify. Once Short-billeds molt their juvenile upperpart feathers into an overall grayer first-winter plumage (Oct-Nov), a positive identification is still possible using their retained juvenile tertials.

Adult dowitchers in complete winter plumage are the most difficult to separate and rely on subtle differences in upperpart colors; Short-billeds are more pure grayish with narrow white feather fringes while those of Long-billed are browner, with slight darkening around the feather shaft. In adult Long-billed, the whole head, breast and upperparts look uniform gray leaving just a small pale area under the chin. Short-billeds usually show a more extensive paler chin and a mealier pattern to the lower breast.

There are several features that I find are more variable than some of the literature suggests:

- Tail barring: this feature is no longer regarded by many US birders as being diagnostic and is useful only in tandem with other features. Long-billeds often show wider dark bars than white bars, but some individuals can show barring of equal width. While some *hendersoni* show obvious wider white bars (Jaramillo et al. 1991, Hough 1999), *griseus* can show tail barring that appears ambiguous or shows tail barring similar to Long-billed. An individual with white bars that are obviously wider than black bars is likely to be a Short-billed, but a bird with barring of equal width or with wider dark bars could be either species. Use this feature with caution.
- Facial expression: loral angle and shape of the supercilium (curved in Short-billed and straight in Long-billed) were put forth as useful criteria (Lee & Birch 2006). I personally find this feature difficult to assess in separating the species and defer to the analogy that Long-billed is often more “woodcock-like” and Short-billed is more “snipe-like” (Anthony McGeehan *pers comm*).
- Primary projection: Any adult dowitcher in spring or early fall that shows a small primary projection past the tail is more likely a Short-billed. Long-billeds often show a shorter projection that falls short or level with the tail. However molt can affect the length of the wing feathers that may render this feature unreliable in many individuals.

- Tertial pattern: although many articles stress juvenile Long-billed’s solid dark scapulars and plain tertials, some bright juvenile Long-billed’s can show subtle, but noticeable internal marking to scapulars, tertials and inner greater coverts, similar to juvenile Short-billeds (*pers obs*; Hayman et al 1986). Conversely, in late September, some dull Short-billeds, can show solid scapulars and reduced internal “tiger stripes” to the tertials and inner greater coverts.

Julian Hough, New Haven, jrough1@snet.net

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Michael O’Brien, Alvaro Jaramillo, Peter Pyle and Nick Bonomo for providing valuable comments.

References

- Jaramillo, A., Pittaway, R., & Burke, P. 1991. The identification and migration of breeding-plumaged dowitchers in southern Ontario. *Birders Journal* 1: 8-25.
- Jaramillo, A., & Henshaw, B. 1995. Identification of breeding-plumaged Long- and Short-billed Dowitchers. *Birding World* & 221-228.
- Chandler, R. J. 1998. Dowitcher identification and ageing: A photographic review *Brit. Birds* 91: 93-106 https://britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/article_files/V91/V91_N03/V91_N03_P093_106_A019.pdf
- Jehl, J.R. Jr. 1963. An investigation of fall-migrating dowitchers in New Jersey. *Wilson Bulletin* 75: 250-261.
- Hough, Julian R. 1999. The Long and Short of It. *Birdwatch Magazine*. April. Pg 28-31
- Lee, C-T and Birch, A. 2006. Advances in the field Identification of North American dowitchers, *Birding* 38:34-43. 12. <https://www.surfbirds.com/ID%20Articles/dowitchers1005/dowitchers.html>
- McNeil, R. & Burton, J. 1977. Southbound migration of shorebirds from the Gulf of t Lawrence. *Wilson Bulletin* 89:167-171
- Hayman, P., Marchant, J., & Prater, T. 1986. *Shorebirds; an identification guide to the waders of the world.*

The 2020-2021 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count

By Stephen P. Broker

Introduction

In last year's review article on the 2019-2020 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count, published in the October 2020 issue, the opening paragraphs addressed the critical issue of biodiversity loss among North American birds with reference to two recently released long-term studies. The article entitled "Decline of the North American avifauna," appeared in the October 4, 2019 issue of the journal *Science* and was written by lead author Kenneth V. Rosenberg and ten other listed authors, including Peter Marra, formerly of Connecticut. Rosenberg is a conservation scientist with Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Also referenced in the 2020 CBC review was an earlier science article written by Candan U. Soykan and including co-author Geoffrey LeBaron, director of the Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. This article, entitled "Population trends for North American winter birds based on hierarchical models," was published in the May 2016 issue of *Ecosphere* (the Ecological Society of America's open access journal).

The *Science* article by Rosenberg, et al. documented "the total loss of 3.2 billion birds across nearly all biomes except wetlands, including 2.5 billion individuals among 419 native resident species." The *Ecosphere* article by Soykan et al. stated, "long-term, large-scale monitoring studies, often carried out by citizen scientists, provide invaluable data on bird and other wildlife populations for conservation and management activities." While the 2016 analysis using Christmas Bird Count data indicated that "68% of the 551 species (found on North American CBCs) had increasing trends within the study area over the interval 1966-2013," it also drew attention to "those species at greatest risk of population decline (including) larger bodied taxa, those occupying higher trophic levels, species with longer life spans, producing fewer eggs per clutch, and later age at sexual maturity." In contrast to the species with increasing continental population trends, the great concern is that many of the remaining 32% of bird species were found to have declining populations across North America.

Long-time Christmas Bird Count participants have seen that a number of bird species in Connecticut and adjacent states have gone through exponential growth in early winter since the 1960s and '70s, while some other species have been in major decline. A few of the most obvious examples of species with expanding winter and breeding ranges include Wild Turkey, Black Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Peregrine Falcon, Fish Crow, Common Raven, and Carolina Wren. Species that have been dropping in numbers or vanishing from our Connecticut CBCs include American Black Duck, Northern



An excellent nine species of warblers were recorded on the 2020-2021 CBCs. Two of the most exciting finds were this Northern Parula, above, in Branford on the New Haven CBC (John Oshlick) and this Prairie Warbler, below, in Norwalk on the Westport CBC (Frank Mantlik)



Bobwhite, Ruffed Grouse, Killdeer, Red Knot, American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed gulls, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, American Kestrel, Loggerhead Shrike, Boreal Chickadee, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Field Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. The factors contributing to these population increases and declines have been discussed in previous CBC review articles. For population increases, they include protective federal legislation, extensive use of bird feeding stations, naturally expanding species ranges, such conservation measures as re-introductions, improved water quality, and climate change. Factors contributing to population declines include degradation and loss of grassland and wetland habitat, loss of early successional habitat, forest fragmentation, capping of landfills, disruption of food webs, direct exploitation, and climate change.

Any analysis of long-term trends in Connecticut's early winter bird populations also should consider recognized regional and global trends. A further example of the current "state of the birds" can be found at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology "Birds of the World" subscription website. Here, one has access to a rich source of information on 10,721 species of birds, including comprehensive species accounts and life history data for all North American birds, as well as the Macaulay Library media assets and all eBird posted observations. Birds of the World (BOW) was launched by Cornell Lab of Ornithology in early 2020 and succeeds the subscription Birds of North America (BNA) website that has been an important reference for previous *Warbler* review articles on the Connecticut Christmas Bird Count. BOW also references the conservation status of birds listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). IUCN identifies itself as "the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species." For Christmas Bird Count participants, it is helpful to learn how the IUCN (2020) Red List rates the global conservation status of bird species that occur on our count.

Nearly all of the 166 species recorded on the 2020-2021 CT CBC are categorized by the IUCN (2020) Red List as "Least Concern", or those species "evaluated with a lower risk of extinction." However, ten species from this year's CT CBC list are rated either as "Near Threatened" or as "Vulnerable." The Red List indicates that "Near Threatened" species are considered "close to the threatened thresholds or that would be threatened without ongoing conservation measures." For our present consideration, they include Common Eider, Black Scoter, Rufous Hummingbird, Razorbill, Eastern Meadowlark, and Common Grackle. Red List (2020) species rated as "Vulnerable" are "considered to be threatened with global extinction." The four "Vulnerable" species found on the 2020-2021 CT CBC are: Long-tailed Duck, Horned Grebe, Snowy Owl, and Rusty Blackbird. Again, these IUCN Red List (2020) assessments concern global populations. The species we record annually in early winter CBC circles, and the population trends that are evidenced by Connecticut CBC data over a period of decades can be considered in the context of the global population trends for each. Brief summaries of each of the ten bird species identified as near

threatened or vulnerable by IUCN and BOW can be found along with the 2020-2021 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count data table and other supplementary materials at the COA website with the link shown in this issue.

Statewide Results of the 2020-2021 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count

All National Audubon Society sponsored Christmas Bird Counts are held during the official period of December 14 through January 5. With the 2020 calendar pushing the first weekend of Christmas Bird Counts back to Saturday, December 19 and Sunday, December 20, the Storrs CBC diverged from tradition and held its count on Tuesday, December 15. Storrs compiler Steve Morytko wrote, "Holding the count on a weekday worked out fairly well this year as almost all of our regular participants were available. Our results benefited from not having any seasonal hard freezes yet, and only partly frozen still water which kept waterfowl around."

Two CBCs were held on Saturday, December 19, and eight on Sunday, December 20, continuing the pattern of stacking many Connecticut CBCs on the first full weekend. Barkhamsted, Napatree, Norwich, and Stratford-Milford CBCs were held on the second and last weekend of the year, December 26 & 27. Pawling/Hidden Valley, NY/CT once again welcomed in the New Year. Bristol, New London, Edwin Way Teale - Trail Wood, and Old Lyme-Saybrook completed the 20 Connecticut counts on the third weekend of count period, January 2 & 3, 2021.

For a number of years, the analysis of the Connecticut Christmas Bird Count has involved downloading the current year's data from the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count website, and entering all count results into spreadsheets for each of the 20 statewide CBCs, including seven count circles located in northern Connecticut, six count circles mid-state, and seven count circles along the coast. In addition, spreadsheets are updated annually for the three regions of the state, the cumulative statewide totals, and the latest count to be held, as with this 2020-21 CBC. The 30-year spreadsheets produced allow for a comparison of the latest Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts with those of the previous 29 years. This three-decade time period gives a useful measure of changing population trends among the nearly 270 species of birds that have been reported on our counts since the early 1990s. The 30-year time span covered this year is from 1991-92 through the 2020-21. Seventeen of our CBCs have been held annually since at least 1991-92. Many of them were introduced to the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count movement in the first half of the twentieth century. The Trail Wood CBC missed only the 2004-05 count in the past 30 years. Napatree now has held 19 consecutive counts, while Bristol enjoyed its fifth count and Norwich its second. The Guilford-Long Island Sound CBC was not held this year.

Statewide, we tallied a total of 167 Count Day and 5 Count Week species, meaning those species missed on count days but recorded within a count circle three days

before or three days after the scheduled count day. All five count week species were found on coastal counts: Laughing Gull at Greenwich-Stamford, Rough-legged Hawk at New Haven, Snowy Owl and Black-throated Blue Warbler at New London, and Indigo Bunting at Westport. Count week species typically are those birds that we would expect to see in the state in early winter but that happened to be missed in the field or at feeders by all count participants. Alternatively, they are seen sporadically from year to year. Laughing Gull has been reported on 14 of the last 30 counts. Rough-legged Hawk is a good example of a species that might elude us on count day. This winter visitor breeds on high Arctic tundra cliffs and is an irruptive species that has been found less often wintering in Connecticut in recent years. Snowy Owl is another irruptive bird of the tundra, observed on Connecticut CBCs 50% of the time. From time to time, a new species is added to the statewide count, either on a count day or a count week. This year, both Black-throated Blue Warbler and Indigo Bunting were new to the 30-year list. Indigo Bunting was reported once before, count week in 1983-84. The Black-throated Blue Warbler count week at New London is the first occurrence of this species in the 121-year history of the Connecticut Christmas Bird Count.

We have achieved 170 or more species statewide in approximately one-third of the years since the early 1990s, with a high count of 177 species in 2007-08. This year, there were 763 field observers and 119 feeder watchers, with a combined total of 882 dedicated participants collecting information on our early winter birds. We logged 2,308 total party hours and covered 9,117 total party miles by foot, car, boat, and other transport. Over the past 30 years, we have sighted a cumulative 261 count day species and an additional 6 count week species, with 21,000 field observers and nearly 3,000 feeder watchers devoting some 50,000 total party hours and 145,000 total party miles. Connecticut birders certainly bring experience, energy, and enthusiasm to the Christmas Bird Count movement.

As noted above, tabular information for the Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts (and Summer Bird Counts), including spreadsheets and graphs, now appears on the COA website (ctbirds.org) in the Publications section. This enables us to separate but link spreadsheets, graphs, and other supplementary materials from the articles and written narratives published in *The Connecticut Warbler*. Among our seven northern counts, Hartford led the way with 87 count day and 1 count week species. Litchfield Hills recorded 79 count day and 2 count week species. The highest species total of the six mid-state counts was achieved at Woodbury-Roxbury, with an eye popping 89 count day and 1 count week species. Norwich followed with 77 count day and 2 count week species, and Pawling/Hidden Valley tallied 76 count day species. Along the coast, New Haven found 127 count day and 4 count week species, and New London recorded 123 count day and 2 count week species.

The most abundant species, listed in descending order, are: (1-10) European Starling, Canada Goose, American Crow, Herring Gull, Dark-eyed Junco, Ring-billed



Some Connecticut CBCs cross state lines, such as the Napatree count where this female Painted Bunting was a stellar find in Westerly, RI. (Tim Metcalf)

Gull, Mallard, Black-capped Chickadee, House Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and; (11-20) Common Grackle, White-throated Sparrow, Blue Jay, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Tufted Titmouse, American Robin, Song Sparrow, Common Merganser, Northern Cardinal. Once again, 18 of these 20 species appeared on the previous year's top-20 list. Red-winged Blackbird (10th this year) and Northern Cardinal (20th) bumped American Black Duck (19th last year) and American Goldfinch (20th last year). The exotic, introduced, or feral species included Mute Swan, Mallard (domestic type), Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Pigeon (feral pigeon), Monk Parakeet, European Starling, House Sparrow, and House Finch. (We'll give Mallard a pass, even though captive bred members of this species were released into the eastern United States for hunting purposes in the early 1900s.) Four of the introduced species (pigeon, starling, house sparrow, and house finch) account for 18% of the statewide individual total. In comparison, European Starling accounted for 43% of all individuals counted on the 1976-77 CT CBC. It is the case that starling numbers have crashed over a 40-year period.

Twenty-four bird species were found on a single CBC. They are, with abbreviated count names: Snow Goose (HA), Greater White-fronted Goose (NA), Tufted Duck

(SM), Harlequin Duck (NL), Barrow's Goldeneye (NL), Ruffed Grouse (LH), Rufous Hummingbird (QV), Wilson's Snipe (NL), Spotted Sandpiper (WE), Black Guillemot (NL), Laughing Gull CW (GS), American Bittern (SM), Osprey (NL), Northern Goshawk (WR), Rough-legged Hawk CW (WE), Snowy Owl CW (NL), Lincoln's Sparrow (NH), Ovenbird (NH), Common Yellowthroat (GS), Northern Parula (NH), Black-throated Blue Warbler CW (NL), Prairie Warbler (WE), Indigo Bunting CW (WE), and Painted Bunting (NA). Many of these species are good finds for any CBC year. New London excelled with seven of the above mentioned single count circle finds, with Westport locating an additional four and New Haven three.

Each year, our field observers and feeder watchers report a number of rare and significant bird species, and the 2020-2021 CT CBC was no exception. Here is a list of the most interesting finds, some of which have been referred to above. A hen Tufted Duck was at Bridgeport's Captain's Cove Marina on the Stratford-Milford CBC, making this the third consecutive year for this species on a Connecticut CBC. Westport recorded Tufted Duck in 2018-19 and 2019-20. A cluster of eBird winter reports exists for hen Tufted Duck along Connecticut's Long Island coast from Seaside Park in Bridgeport west to Penfield Reef in Fairfield every year since 2015. Harlequin Duck has become a near annual occurrence along the southeastern coast, at Napatree and now on the New London count. Alcids attract heightened interest throughout the state's birding community. A winter plumaged Black Guillemot at Bluff Point State Park in Groton (New London CBC) marks the third time this species has occurred on our "statewide" count, which ranges into neighboring New York and Rhode Island. Napatree reported Black Guillemot in 2013-14 and 2014-15. A non-irruption year count week Snowy Owl at New London was a welcome find. New Haven located a late lingering Ovenbird and an additional wood-warbler species of particular note. New Haven compiler Chris Loscalzo wrote in his count summary, "The most remarkable (find) was a Northern Parula, a first-time ever observation for our 121-year-old census, observed at the water treatment plant in Branford. The bird was there for over a month and demonstrates how productive these water/sewage treatment sites are for finding out-of-season insectivores." The Northern Parula continued to be seen at the Branford water treatment plant through January 17.

The Black-throated Blue Warbler found count week at New London was the star of this year's CBC season and adds a new species to the all-time Connecticut CBC list. Prairie Warbler at Westport was the second occurrence of this species on a Connecticut CBC, occurring previously in 2007-08 at New London. Indigo Bunting count week at Westport is another ultra rare species occurrence for the all-time Connecticut CBC list. Finally, the Painted Bunting at Napatree was a very rare winter species for our region.

The Connecticut 30-year statewide list now stands at 261 count day species and six count week species (Purple Gallinule, Piping Plover, Gyrfalcon, Western Kingbird,

Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Indigo Bunting). This year, 12 species attained 30-year high totals, and 12 species were at 30-year lows. Most of the new high counts are of diurnal raptors, a very large, kronk-calling corvid, Marsh Wren, and two sparrow species, Vesper and Savannah. Record low counts included four anatids including the notable absence of Eurasian Wigeon, two secretive sandpipers (American Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe), Black-crowned Night-Heron, Monk Parakeet, and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Check the supplementary materials for this article, linked here to the Connecticut Ornithological Association website, which detail high counts, low counts, new species, and rarities for each count circle and for the three regional count areas and statewide cumulative results. COA members also can access the most recent eight issues of *The Connecticut Warbler*.

Weather Conditions

The 2020-2021 count got underway with the Storrs CBC, held on Tuesday, December 15. Field observers and feeder watchers experienced fairly typical early winter conditions, with temperatures ranging from 25 to 37 degrees Fahrenheit and occasional gusts of wind from the north presenting some discomfort. Compiler Steve Morytko wrote that it was "a rather windy day in our area.... Wind was a factor owing too, but we detected all expected species." Morning and afternoon skies were clear, and there was no new precipitation throughout the day. New Haven and Woodbury-Roxbury held their counts on the traditional first Saturday of count period. A recent winter storm dumped from four to twelve inches of snow through the region, complicating birding somewhat and causing some remote birding spots to be overlooked. New Haven compiler Chris Loscalzo wrote, "The participants in this year's New Haven Christmas Bird Count faced many challenges. The most serious one was conducting the annual survey during a global pandemic. COVID-19 prompted us to modify the way in which we conducted our surveys: we eschewed carpooling and maintained safe social distancing while birding. Additional challenges included dealing with a foot of freshly fallen snow and subfreezing temperatures on the day of the count." Morning temperatures dipped to 12 degrees F. in the New Haven circle and a chilly -2 degrees F. at Woodbury-Roxbury. Winds were more manageable, however. Still waters were frozen at both count circles, and rivers and streams were open near the coast and were partly frozen mid-state. Partly cloudy skies were the order of the day. Most subsequent counts were held under cloudy or partly cloudy skies.

The eight counts held on Sunday, December 20 had early morning temperatures ranging from the high teens to the low twenties, while Greenwich-Stamford reached the high twenties. Highest temperatures experienced by mid afternoon were consistently in the mid to high thirties. Winds were negligible. Snow depths to 15 inches carried over from the previous day, as did those of still and open waters. Several of these counts had light snow in the afternoon. Long-time Hartford CBC compiler Jay Kaplan stated, "I can't remember the last time we conducted a Christmas Bird Count with up to a foot of snow on the ground. Three days prior to the count, we endured

a significant snowfall, the first of 2020! Five days following the count, a torrential rainstorm would wash all that snow away, but on count day our 112 field observers, the most since 2012, walked through substantial snow for the first time in well over a decade. It can be tough walking through almost 12 inches of snow - for birders and for birds!”

Salmon River co-compilers Sharon Dellinger and Doreen Jezek said “in spite of the pandemic we had a great turn out and a lot of interest this year.” Greenwich-Stamford compiler Cynthia Ehlinger also gave a huge thank you to the participants “who trekked in the snow and mist and managed the COVID limitations to make for another fun but safe birding adventure.” She noted that “weather was a factor that may have allowed some species to be seen and others kept hidden. Recent snow of a few inches covered most of the ground, but roads were clear. Count Day included snow flurries for a couple hours, and a short drizzle followed by clouds, but winds were light.”

The second full weekend of counts offered somewhat cooler temperatures, as is expected in southern New England in late December. The Barkhamsted count was the only one conducted on Saturday the 26th, followed by Napatree, Norwich, and Stratford-Milford on Sunday the 27th. At Barkhamsted, Dave Tripp, Jr. wrote of “high raging rivers and a thaw after a significant freeze, limiting some waterfowl and other riverside birds. Tough birding for sure.” Still waters thus retained some ice on northern counts. Norwich was the only count to report clear skies through the day. Norwich CBC field observer Nick Bonomo wrote, “I highly recommend getting in touch with compiler Allison Black for next year’s count. This is a new count and has some rather good habitat in an under-birded part of the state.” Stratford-Milford compiler Steve Mayo felt that the ongoing pandemic actually increased participation, while eBird helped with an increase in submitted reports. As an aside, he offered that “a freezing trip on the Port Jeff Ferry was loony, but failed to turn up any rarities on quiet seas and light northwest winds.” Maybe the Bridgeport to Port Jefferson round trip ferry trip was not so looney. With several pelagic species showing recent increased presence in Long Island Sound, LIS ferry rides by hearty birders may well become routine. The New London CBC has had great success finding alcids on its traditional round trip birding on the New London, CT to Orient Point, NY ferry.

The New Year was greeted by birders on the Pawling, New York/Hidden Valley, Connecticut CBC. This is one of several count circles that straddles two states. Carena Pooth and Angela Dimmitt compile separate lists for New York and Connecticut regions, but the data are combined for the final submission to National Audubon. The count had temperatures ranging from 20 to 39F, generally light easterly winds, an absence of snow cover, partly frozen waters and mostly cloudy skies. A day later, Bristol and New London birders enjoyed unseasonably warmer weather but strong winds through the day. Field observers dealt with light morning rain at Bristol. The



It was a tough year for dabbling ducks. Gadwalls, for example, were recorded overall at a 10-year low total. (Bruce Finnan)

last two counts were the Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood CBC and the Old Lyme-Saybrook CBC. Somewhat cooler temperatures prevailed at each count, although the winds lessened considerably. Still waters remained partly frozen, and moving waters allowed better conditions for finding waterfowl. A light snow changed to light rain in the afternoon along the coast.

Checklist Summary of Bird Species Observed

We move now from weather conditions to the species results. The taxonomic order followed differs from that used on previous CT CBC reviews and is consistent with the American Ornithological Society Checklist of the Birds of North America, 7th edition 1998 and supplements to the 62nd, June 29, 2021. The latest Connecticut Ornithological Association Checklist of the Birds of Connecticut follows this order and “includes the 450 species of birds recorded in Connecticut and accepted by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC).”

Waterfowl

One Snow Goose in the Hartford CBC circle represents the lowest total for this species in at least 30 years. Greater White-fronted Goose has appeared near annually

since the mid-1990s. The ultra rare Ross's Goose and Pink-footed Goose were not found. Brant have been increasing their numbers steadily for the past two decades. Canada Goose numbers fluctuate annually from 35,000 to 55,000 individuals statewide, and this year was the second lowest total in the last 30 years. Seventy per cent of Mute Swans spend winter along Connecticut and Rhode Island shorelines, and this swan population gives some indication of a shift eastward and away from the former strongholds at New Haven and New London. Dabbling ducks had a lackluster CBC season, with Gadwall counted at a ten-year low, American Wigeon at its second lowest 30-year total, Eurasian Wigeon missed entirely, Mallard at a new 30-year low, American Black Duck in a steady three-decade decline, and Green-winged Teal at a new low.

Diving ducks tend to be on an upward trajectory, with the exception of Canvasback, whose numbers have plummeted over the past 20 years. Tufted Duck made its third appearance in the last three years. This is the first year that all coastal counts have recorded Common Eider, including six eider at Greenwich-Stamford and one at Westport. This handsome duck either is expanding its winter range westward, the eiders now are finding good food supplies in better quality Long Island Sound waters, or both. Three Harlequin Ducks were found in the New London count circle. All three scoter species were well represented this year, with Old Lyme-Saybrook counting 235 Surf Scoters, Napatree recording 141 White-winged Scoters, and New London tallying 106 Black Scoters. These three benthic feeding, mollusk-eating divers have dissimilar distributions along the coast. Surf Scoters are found in greatest abundance from Stratford-Milford to Napatree, with New London usually boasting highest numbers. White-winged Scoter is most abundant from Westport to New Haven. Black Scoter is a species of Rhode Island's Atlantic coastal waters, occurring in rapidly decreasing numbers as one moves west. Long-tailed Duck and Common Goldeneye numbers are variable from year to year. Bufflehead and Hooded Merganser continue population growth surges in early winter. Common Merganser numbers vary widely year to year, depending in part on inland open waters. Red-breasted Merganser is almost exclusively a coastal species. Ruddy Duck is another species with high or low early winter populations.

Gallinaceous Birds to Rails

The 628 Wild Turkeys counted this year represent the lowest count in 28 years. Two years ago, we had one of the highest counts of the last three decades. Ruffed Grouse is an early successional species of the deciduous or mixed deciduous/coniferous forest. Grouse have been counted in single digits for the past 16 CBC years, as compared with the 100 to 275 counted annually from the 1960s through the 1980s. During those earlier decades, a single count circle could report 20 or more Ruffed Grouse. Over the past 30 years, a total of 547 grouse have been reported on Connecticut counts, most of them prior to the year 2000. Nearly two-thirds of these occurrences have been on northern counts. Ruffed Grouse now is close to reaching the vanishing

point on our Christmas counts. Birds of the World states, "Ruffed Grouse populations will probably decline in the future as eastern deciduous forests mature and are fragmented by rural and suburban development."

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) website has a section on Ring-necked Pheasant and pheasant hunting in Connecticut, "Each year pheasants are purchased and distributed throughout the state on state-owned, state-managed, and Permit-Required Areas. The Pheasant Program is funded by the sale of Resident Game Bird Conservation Stamps and hunting licenses and a Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration grant." Each year, DEEP releases approximately 20,000 pheasants in 20 Wildlife Management Areas, three State Forests, and a number of town properties. "All pheasant hunters must purchase a Resident Game Bird Conservation Stamp, along with a hunting license. The Resident Game Bird Conservation Stamp is also required for those who wish to hunt wild turkey, ruffed grouse, bobwhite quail, and chukar and Hungarian partridge." The Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC) has determined that Ring-necked Pheasant populations are totally dependent on restocking efforts by DEEP and sportsmen's clubs, and ARCC has determined that breeding populations are extirpated in Connecticut. Thirty-six pheasant survivors were counted on the 2020-2021 CT CBC. I recall driving on the Wilbur Cross Parkway many years ago when a gravid female pheasant flew into the open back window of my car and met an untimely death. Fortunately, no non-avian passengers were riding in the back seat. The hen pheasant jettisoned several eggs upon impact with the car interior, and the eggs splattered on the rear window sill. There at least was a bit of evidence that Ring-necked Pheasant once maintained a breeding population in the state. Native populations of Northern Bobwhite also are listed as extirpated in Connecticut. Whether as released birds or last remnants of native ones, Northern Bobwhite has occurred on Connecticut CBCs in single or low double digit numbers through the 2020-11 CBC year.

Pied-billed Grebe numbers were low, while those of Horned Grebes and Red-necked Grebes were representative of average and good years, respectively. Our resident feral Rock Pigeons have seen a decline in numbers over the past two decades. Curiously, Mourning Dove numbers often track closely with Rock Pigeon numbers both on individual counts and statewide. Mourning Doves were in below average numbers this year. A Rufous Hummingbird at Quinnipiac Valley was a great find, new to that count. Clapper Rails were found on four coastal counts. Two Virginia Rail were located in appropriate habitat at Norwich, and eighteen Virginia Rails were reported from three coastal counts. American Coots were restricted to the coast, with a high of 66 coots at Old Lyme-Saybrook.

Shorebirds to Alcids

American Oystercatcher is reported approximately two out of three years, with Napatree and New Haven scoring this year. This was a rough CBC year for documenting

most species of plover and sandpiper. Black-bellied Plovers have been in noticeable decline for a dozen years, with the most recent five-year average less than 20% of the five-year average from the time span 1991-92 through 1995-96. Killdeer numbers have dropped to 10% of former levels during these same time intervals, and Ruddy Turnstone numbers also have fallen significantly over the last decade. Red Knot is close to disappearing from our statewide counts. The one sandpiper in relative abundance along the coast this year was Dunlin. American Woodcock was seen count week at New Haven and on count day at Old Lyme-Saybrook, while a single Wilson's Snipe was found in Westport. Greater Yellowlegs is variable annually, and this year four were reported along the coast. Four coastal counts reported Razorbill, with 43 at Napatree and 36 at New London. Black Guillemot entertained birders at Bluff Point, Groton from its January 3 discovery through January 18 and was a highlight of the New London CBC and the statewide count.

Gulls to Cormorants

Last year's review article noted the downward trend in early winter populations of Bonaparte's Gull. This year, Greenwich reported a single individual, while Napatree had a bountiful 44 of these delicate larids. Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls were the fifth and seventh most abundant species on this year's count, but their numbers pale in comparison with those of 30 years ago. Ring-billed Gulls have fallen by 50%, and Herring Gulls are down by 67% during this time span. Great Black-backed Gull has dropped to 58% of former levels. These greatly reduced numbers correlate with the closing of state landfills, but there may be other factors at play. The far less common Iceland Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Glaucous Gull were well-represented this year, with eight, six, and six individuals, respectively. Red-throated Loons and Common Loons were fairly abundant along the coast, with good inland finds of a Red-throated Loon at Barkhamsted, a Common Loon at Litchfield Hills, and 6 Commons at Pawling. It was an off year for seeing Northern Gannets plunging into our offshore waters, at least from mid-December to early January. Double-crested Cormorant and Great Cormorant numbers easily exceeded their totals of a year ago.

Hérons

Stratford-Milford reported the count's only American Bittern, a species that is considered endangered in Connecticut. The majority of Great Blue Herons are found on coastal CBCs, but this year's highest numbers occurred in the Hartford count circle. Fewer Great Egrets lingered into early winter this year than last. Great Egrets are colonial nesters that disperse northward following their breeding season in order to exploit readily available food sources, then begin their southern migration beginning in late September and extending through much of November. They rarely overwinter here successfully. Black-crowned Night-Heron numbers vary from year to year. In 2019-20, only four individuals were counted. This year, Greenwich-Stamford had a count week Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Stratford-Milford had a single count day bird. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron has localized populations and is found occasionally at Milford Point on the Stratford-Milford CBC, but not this year.



Black Vultures, a species on long-term increase, again reached a statewide high on the 2020-2021 CBCs. (Steve Broker)

New World Vultures to Owls

Black Vulture continued its dramatic early winter population increase in Connecticut, with 558 individuals counted this year, 34% seen on northern counts, 44% on mid-state counts, and 22% along the coast. Turkey Vultures have been more variable, and there were half as many counted as was the case with Black Vultures. New London found the only Osprey. Northern Harrier, an extremely rare breeder in Connecticut and a species listed as state endangered, was fairly well represented this year. Cooper's Hawks outnumbered Sharp-shinned Hawks three to one and set new high totals mid-state, coastally, and statewide. A Northern Goshawk at Woodbury-Roxbury was an excellent find. Wintering Bald Eagles have been increasing for the past decade, with a new high of 283, a majority of them along the coast. Red-shouldered Hawk was counted in record high numbers on nine of our CBCs, reflecting growing early winter populations throughout the state. Three out of every four soaring buteos sighted now are Red-tailed Hawks, but in the early 1990s the ratio of the two species was closer to 20 Red-tails for every one Red-shoulder. Rough-legged Hawk, an irruptive winter visitor to our region, ranges from uncommon to rare along the East Coast. One was found count week at New Haven.



Adding secretive Long-eared Owls to any CBC's totals requires diligent scouting for daytime roosts. (Steve Broker)

Connecticut CBC data and the current Connecticut Bird Atlas data suggest that Eastern Screech-Owls are losing ground, with the last three CBC years representing a 60% drop in numbers from a comparable period in the early 1990s. In contrast, Great Horned Owls had their highest statewide count in 16 years. New London's count week Snowy Owl was the only one reported. Barred Owls approached their all-time high count set three years previously. No Short-eared Owls were found, but Long-eared Owls were found on one northern and four coastal counts. Lakeville-Sharon led the way with an impressive 16 Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Kingfishers to Woodpeckers

Wintering Belted Kingfishers decrease in numbers as one moves from the coast to mid-state and northern habitats, in part because of their dependence on open water. Red-headed Woodpecker is a species of southern and western distribution east of the Rocky Mountains which breeds casually in Connecticut and is listed as state endangered. The species' life history characteristics and relationships within its preferred habitats are poorly known. Woodbury-Roxbury, Norwich, and Napatree found this showy, sexually monomorphic woodpecker on their counts. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has expanded its early winter numbers and its breeding range in Connecticut over the past dozen years. Prior to around 2007, their numbers on the statewide CBC ranged

from a low of 21 individuals to a high of 88. In more recent years, sapsuckers have been counted in triple digits, with 340 individuals in 2017-18 and a second highest count of 299 this year. Mid-State counts reported record high numbers of this beautiful sap-licking and fruit-eating woodpecker. Downy and Hairy woodpeckers were well represented, and Pileated Woodpecker was counted at a new state high total. Northern Flickers were in reduced numbers.

Falcons to Corvids

From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, counts tallied 100 to 150 American Kestrels annually, with a high count of 203 kestrels in 1977-78. Over the past 25 years, this Connecticut special concern species has crashed to low double and single digits, and sad to say, this year's total of 10 individuals is representative of their present early winter status. Merlin is on the opposite population trend, with a new record high total of 40 "pigeon hawks" statewide, 75% of them on coastal counts. Peregrine Falcons have been brought back from DDT era extirpation east of the Rocky Mountains and continue their slow but steady expansion as breeding and wintering birds in southern New England. The Eastern Duck Hawk, believe by experts to have been a distinct subspecies of Peregrine Falcon, is extinct, but years of conservation work and re-introductions have brought the peregrine back into its formerly occupied range. Peregrines occupying breeding territory on cliffs and human-made structures tend to be non-migratory and are found both on Summer and Christmas Bird Counts.

Speaking of persecution, what is happening with the state's Monk Parakeet population? This is an introduced species from South America, popular in the pet industry. A small parakeet that builds a bulky stick condominium that is occupied year-round, Monk Parakeet nevertheless dazzles the eye with hues of pale green, pale blue, and yellow. At their peak presence in Connecticut in the early 2000s, they topped out at 900-1,200 individuals on coastal counts. This year, 23 were counted from Westport to Old Lyme-Saybrook. Greenwich-Stamford compiler Cynthia Ehlinger wrote, "the surprise miss was Monk Parakeet, which has been declining in its stronghold in Stamford." Birds of the World states, "Use of lethal methods to control Monk Parakeet populations and reduce damage, fires, and interruption in electrical service has been met with considerable resistance from the general public, and has even led to a lawsuit against a utility provider in Connecticut, though the suit was ultimately dismissed. Although some non-lethal methods have been explored (such as chemical contraception, nest removal, and trapping), thus far, no practical, long-term solution has been developed." Or has it?

A dozen Eastern Phoebes statewide were welcome lingering flycatchers. Shrikes went unreported this year. Among corvid species, Blue Jays were in average numbers, known roosts of American Crows have been less populated for some eight years, Fish Crows continue to expand their early winter ranges northward along major river valleys, and Common Ravens continue their steadily expanding breeding and

wintering populations. Ravens increased by 25% over last year's record high CBC total. Northern, mid-state, and coastal counts also had record high or second highest reports of Common Raven.

Chickadees and Titmice to Wrens

Year-round resident Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmice were more abundant this year than last by 50% and 40%, respectively. Birders had expressed concern about declining chickadee numbers a year ago. Hartford led all counts of Horned Lark with 208 individuals, which this year were well distributed around the state in northern and coastal grassland habitat. No swallow species were observed. Golden-crowned Kinglets dropped sharply this year, while Ruby-crowned Kinglets continued their erratic annual swings. Cedar Waxwings are nomadic flocking birds that in winter feed primarily on the berries of Redcedars, Japanese honeysuckle, and other richly caloric fruits. Comparatively few waxwings were reported on our CBCs. This was a good winter in Connecticut both for Red-breasted and White-breasted nuthatches. Thirty-five per cent more Brown Creepers were sighted, while no House Wren reports were submitted. Winter Wrens seemingly occurred everywhere in their appropriate habitats of hardwood forests, swamps, and stream sides containing scattered snags and fallen logs. Marsh Wrens were at record high numbers, with two at Norwich and 27 on coastal counts, including a dozen at Napatree.

Thrashers and Mockingbirds to Pipits

Gray Catbirds are a semi-hardy species that feeds primarily on winter fruits. Thirty per cent fewer catbirds were counted this year than last. The average number of Brown Thrashers recorded on our Christmas counts is around ten. This year, there were seven thrashers found on coastal counts. Northern Mockingbirds are year-round residents whose populations have been declining in Connecticut for at least 20 years. Their downward slide is a possible consequence of reductions in favored open and early successional habitats. Nearly 34,000 European Starlings may sound like a lot, until one compares that number with the 151,000 recorded in 1992-93 or the 248,000 counted in 1983-84. Starlings have been coming back to earth in recent years.

Eastern Bluebirds are doing well, in part due to widespread use of bluebird boxes. The semi-hardy Hermit Thrush increased in numbers over last year's count. American Robin flocks show as great a fluctuation in appearances from year to year as any species. This was an off year for seeing the big robin flocks during the day and toward twilight. House Sparrows bounced back from record low numbers of a year ago. Fifty-five American Pipits at Hartford accounted for more than half of pipits seen throughout the state.

Winter Finches and Allies to Sparrows

A small number of Evening Grosbeaks were found on one northern and three mid-



North American research shows that the northern-nesting American Tree Sparrow has declined by 50% since 1970, with steepest drops on Connecticut CBCs during the past 13 years. (Mark Szantyr)

state counts, continuing their major decline begun in our region some 25 years ago. The species entry for House Finch in *Birds of the World* states, "the House Finch is a bird of remarkable records. From a few California individuals released from a pet store in New York City in 1939, and through natural expansion of its western range, in just a few decades this species came to occupy one of the widest ecological ranges of any extant bird." The BOW species description continues, "in 1994, the explosive growth of House Finch populations across North America was interrupted by one of the worst epizootics in history – an outbreak of mycoplasmosis that killed millions of individuals across the continent and drove many small populations to near extinction." Connecticut CBC data show that House Finches in our region were knocked back by 66% in a matter of one year. The House Finch population on our counts shows a continuing decline over the last 26 years. Winter irruptions of Purple Finch into our region are variable but have produced fewer individuals over the past dozen years. This past winter saw the best irruption of Redpolls and Crossbills into Connecticut in eight years, even though Red and White-winged crossbills were not

particularly abundant. A fair number of Pine Siskins were around, but American Goldfinch was in very short supply. Three Lapland Longspurs were found along the coast, as were most of the 75 Snow Buntings reported.

The taxonomy of sparrows has undergone major changes in recent times, so the species order shown here will raise some eyebrows for those into avian relatedness. Among other changes, American Tree Sparrow has been placed in its own genus and now is considered more closely related to Fox Sparrow than to Chipping, Clay-colored, Field, and other *Spizella* sparrows. Regardless, let's see how the sparrows fared this CBC year. Fifty per cent fewer Chipping Sparrows were counted in 2020-21 than last year. Field Sparrows have become far less common than they were 30 years ago, due to loss of suitable open habitats that are generally free of human interference. Fox Sparrows, stunningly beautiful and behaviorally intriguing sparrows of a retiring nature, were quite prevalent on the statewide CBC, with a majority found near the coast. Connecticut CBC data for American Tree Sparrow are supportive of research that indicates populations of this breeding bird of the far north have declined by more than 50% since 1970. Our state data show greatest reduction in numbers over the past 13 years.

Dark-eyed Juncos, White-crowned Sparrows, and White-throated Sparrows were counted in representative numbers. Vesper Sparrows were seen at Hartford (1), Quinnipiac Valley (2), Woodbury-Roxbury (1), and New Haven (6!). It was an incredible CBC for Savannah Sparrows, with 200 counted at New Haven, 47 at Hartford, and 377 statewide. Napatree and Stratford-Milford located a few Savannah 'Ipswich' Sparrows. Song Sparrows were at near record high numbers. The only Lincoln's Sparrow reported was found feeding on bird seed scattered that morning on snow drifts at an always productive East Haven site in the New Haven count circle. Swamp Sparrows were in average supply, and Eastern Towhee, now moved taxonomically from the front of the sparrow column to the back of the pack, was far less frequently found than a year ago.

Chats to Cardinals and Buntings

There Yellow-breasted Chats were found at Napatree, with two more at New London. Eastern Meadowlarks dropped out of our region nearly three decades ago. Since at least the 1950s, 100 to 400 meadowlarks graced grasslands annually on Connecticut CBCs. The highest count we've had in the last two decades is 34. This year, there were 28 during count week near the coast and one count week at Lakeville-Sharon. Baltimore Orioles were found at Greenwich-Stamford (1), New Haven (1), and New London (4). Coastal field observers always anticipate counting the scores of Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Common Grackles that sweep in flocks across the landscape, heading at twilight for roosting spots. All three of these generally abundant icterids are highly variable in their annual early winter appearances and were present this year in above average numbers. While studies show that

Rusty Blackbirds have declined 85-95% since 1970, Connecticut CBC data going back to 1950 show only their high variability from year to year. The highest count we've had of Rusty Blackbird is 300 individuals in 1975-76. This year's count of 166 Rusty Blackbirds was above average for a Connecticut CBC.

This was a good year for lingering wood-warblers, with three stunning finds and a total of nine species reported. New Haven located an Ovenbird on a snow-covered walk in the downtown area. Stratford-Milford and Westport each had Orange-crowned Warblers. Greenwich-Stamford found the only reported Common Yellowthroat. New Haven's Northern Parula, photographed at the Branford water treatment plant, marks the second occurrence of this species on our statewide count. One was found at Napatree in 2012-13. A count week Black-throated Blue Warbler at New London, new to the statewide list, deserves consideration as best bird of the CBC year. Palm Warblers are expected each year in small numbers and did not disappoint. Three were on the coast, and one was at Storrs. Four count day and two count week Pine Warblers were excellent finds. There is no clear 30-year trend in the early winter statewide occurrence of Yellow-rumped Warblers, yet this year's total of 139 butter-butts was 50% lower than last year. A Prairie Warbler at Westport marks the second time that this species has been documented. The first occurrence was in 2007-08 at New London.

Northern Cardinals began an expansion of their historically southern distributions into New England by the early 1940s, when Connecticut birders were thrilled to find these unexpected arrivals from the South. The widespread post-WWII, year-round use of bird feeders in the East enabled cardinals to survive and thrive in our northern temperate climate. By 1960, as many as 300-400 cardinals were counted on Connecticut CBCs. Over the past 30 years, Northern Cardinal numbers have been remarkably consistent, with more than 3,500 this year. Rounding out the taxonomic order of species, Westport reported a count week Indigo Bunting. This species was found for the second time in the 121 year history of the Connecticut CBC. Indigo Bunting is another rightful claimant for being called best bird of the year. A Painted Bunting at Napatree also deserves special notice.

Concluding Remarks

The 882 field observers and feeder watchers who participated in the 2020-2021 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count included those who ventured into forest or field, wetland or shore line, parkland or backyard, for the first time or for the fiftieth. Each participant has contributed to the longest running wildlife census in the world, and each has expanded awareness of, appreciation for, and knowledge about our early winter avifauna. Salmon River co-compilers Sharon Dellinger and Doreen Jezek describe well what it means on a personal level to take part in a Christmas Bird Count. Here's what they had to say about their day on the Salmon River count:

“We want to share a most magical experience our group had at our last stop at Ber-ryhill Farm in Moodus. The snow was falling fairly heavily, and the skies were gray. The farm had let thousands of plants go to seed. Everywhere we looked there were small songbirds (juncos, goldfinch, sparrows) feasting on the seeds. We even had one Savannah Sparrow that was literally at our feet eating seeds that had been revealed by our footsteps. A hungry Cooper’s Hawk took two passes for a meal, once nearly flying into our group as we waited with bated breath to see what might happen. Two misses. It was awesome!”

Acknowledgements

Julian Hough’s recent redesigning of Connecticut Ornithological Association publications is a welcome advance for the appearance and quality of *The Connecticut Warbler* and the *COA Bulletin*. Steve Morytko very recently walked me through the move away from Excel spreadsheets to Google Sheets, and Cynthia Ehlinger has brought what I believe is a greatly improved table of CBC results to the COA website. Greg Hanisek is our highly valued editor of *The Connecticut Warbler*, and Manny Merisotis assembles all authors’ contributions into final print form before *The Warbler* goes to Yale Printing Service. As always, our two dozen highly dedicated CBC compilers and our legions of field observers and feeder watchers continue to make the Christmas Bird Count season one of the high points of the birding year.

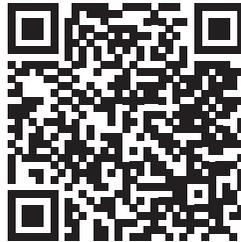
Steve Broker, Cheshire, CT, stephenpaulbroker@gmail.com

FOR CHARTS AND MORE DATA ON:

HAWK WATCH
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
SUMMER BIRD COUNT

Click on the link below or use the
QR Code on right

<https://www.ctbirding.org/publications/ct-bird-count-data/>



Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik



This long-staying adult male Painted Bunting is seen here on March 15 at a feeder in Stonington. (Frank Mantlik)

Spring Season March 1 through May 31, 2021

First records of regularly occurring species included Yellow-billed Cuckoo – April 30 in New Haven (AL); Common Nighthawk – April 20 in Westport (TG); Eastern Whip-poor-will – April 10 in East Lyme (LV); Chimney Swift – April 17 in New Haven (KL); Ruby-throated Hummingbird – April 18 in Brookfield (MH); Virginia Rail – March 22 in Old Lyme (RMa); Sora – April 19 in Litchfield (GH); American Oystercatcher – March 12 in Milford (PC); Semipalmated Plover – April 10 in Madison (TK); Piping Plover – March 9 in Milford (WB) and Waterford (APr); Spotted Sandpiper – April 24 at two locations; Solitary Sandpiper – April 9 in Simsbury (DBi); Willet - April 15 in Westport (TG); Least Tern – April 30 in Westport (TG); Common Tern – April 20 in Westport (TG); Snowy Egret - March 26 in Westport (AWi); Little Blue Heron – March 29 in Madison (APr); Green Heron – April 10 in Norfolk (TG); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – March 27 in Stratford (SZ); Glossy Ibis - March 27 in Madison (JHe); Great Crested Flycatcher – April 27 in Granby (CH); Eastern Kingbird – April 21 in Avon (JMe); White-eyed Vireo – April 23 in

New Haven (CLi); Yellow-throated Vireo – April 21 in New Canaan (FG); Blue-headed Vireo – April 7 in Hartford (JKo); Warbling Vireo – April 21 in Fairfield (AK).

Also Bank Swallow – April 18 in Canaan (FZ); Northern Rough-winged Swallow – March 24 in Vernon (MB); Purple Martin – April 5 in Storrs (SMo); Barn Swallow – March 27 in Norwalk (JHa); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – April 4 in Shelton (SS) and New Haven (PS); Veery – April 18 in Sharon (SB); Gray-cheeked Thrush – May 13 in New Haven (ES); Swainson's Thrush – May 1 in Woodbridge (CLo, MV); Wood Thrush – April 19 in Madison (SMa); Grasshopper Sparrow – May 5 in Storrs (PR); Seaside Sparrow – April 11 in Madison (JMe); Bobolink – May 2 in Glastonbury (ADa), Orchard Oriole – April 20 in New Haven (PDe); Baltimore Oriole – April 20 in Sharon (BSu); Louisiana Waterthrush – April 5 in Hamden (JZ, CZ) and Bolton (SMi); Northern Waterthrush – April 9 in Ashford (PR); Blue-winged Warbler – April 25 in Pomfret (AR); Nashville Warbler – April 27 in Fairfield (AK) and Sharon (BSu); Black-and-White Warbler – April 13 in East Lyme (JA); Cape May Warbler – April 29 in Fairfield (JJ); Magnolia Warbler – April 28 in Fairfield (AK); Bay-breasted Warbler – April 29 in Westport (JT); Chestnut-sided Warbler – April 24 in Franklin (JL); Palm Warbler – March 26 in Woodbury (RN); Prairie Warbler – April 23 in West Hartford (DG); Canada Warbler – April 30 in Shelton (DBo); Scarlet Tanager – April 29 in Darien (BI) and Greenwich (CE); Indigo Bunting – April 23 in Vernon (JG).

The big day for arrivals, either first or widespread, was April 28: Ovenbird – more than 30 locations; Worm-eating Warbler – first at five locations; Common Yellowthroat – more than 20 locations; Hooded Warbler – first in New Haven (JO) and Fairfield (AK, JP); American Redstart – first at six locations; Blackburnian Warbler – first at Darien (KW) and Litchfield (JKa); Blackpoll Warbler – first in New Haven (NA); Black-throated Blue Warbler – first in West Hartford (LL) and Litchfield (BMr); Black-throated Green Warbler – at 12 locations.

A Greater White-fronted Goose found March 11 at Talcottville Pond in Vernon had a pink bill, suggesting it was a western form (JF). Two Tundra Swans visited Leander Pond in Ashford from March 15-23 (SMo et al.). Two that wintered on the Farmington River in Farmington were present through March 3 (JGr et al.) The Newberry Road section of Station 43 in South Windsor hosted eight species of waterfowl on March 20, including 200 Wood Ducks, three Northern Shovelers, a Northern Pintail and two Lesser Scaup (PDe). A female Eurasian Wigeon was on the Norwalk River in Norwalk on March 10 (FM). A **Green-winged (Eurasian) Teal** was at Milford Point on March 22 (SS, GA). A wintering **King Eider** was present through March 25 at Stratford Point, (FM, JO et al.). Another was at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford on May 17 (DP). A late high count of 25 Ruddy Ducks was in the Fenwick section of Old Saybrook on May 16 (WW).



The state's first Crested Caracara performed for one observer, and no one else, on March 7 in West Haven. (Amy Peck)

A Ruffed Grouse on April 9 in Boston Hollow, Eastford, was noteworthy outside of Litchfield County (PR). A rare visit by a calling **Chuck-will's-widow** was a treat for a homeowner in Stamford on May 19 (AC). A concerted nocturnal search for elusive King Rails on May 15-16 produced a total of four in Lyme and Essex (GW, PR). At one of the most reliable spots for the species, a **Common Gallinule** was at Little Pond in Litchfield on May 4-5 (BDv et al.). The bird of the season, seen and photographed by a single observer, was the state's first record of **Crested Caracara** on March 7 in West Haven (APe). Records in the Northeast have been on the increase, and in a recent Connecticut Warbler article predicting the next additions to the state list, it was ranked Number 5. A flock of five Sandhill Cranes, the season's highest count, was in Ashford on March 11 (TZ).

Barely hanging on as a presence in the state, an Upland Sandpiper was found on April 27 at Suffield WMA (JW). A Whimbrel was early April 19 in Westbrook (BB). The season's shorebird highlight was a **Black-necked Stilt** on May 31-June 1 at Barn Island WMA in Stonington (BDe, GW, m.ob.). A Pectoral Sandpiper was late April 28 at Sandy Point in West Haven (JO et al.). It was a great season for **Wilson's Phalaropes**, with the following reports: two on May 17 at Barn Island (LBo, SMe) and singles on May 21 at Harkness (KCy), on May 25 at Sandy Point (PS), and on May 30 in Storrs (DM).

The first report of a Black-headed Gull came from Bridgeport on March 13 (AK, JN et al.). The season's only Little Gull was a good find on March 12 at Burying Hill Beach in Westport (TG). A **Common (Kamchatka) Gull** was a great find April 1 at Seaside Park in Bridgeport (JN), which was later re-found and seen by many April 5-8 in West Haven (JO, m.ob.). The Bradley Point area of West Haven was "gull central" with a **California Gull** preceding the Kamchatka with a two-month winter stay that extended to at least March 30 (JHo, mob.) A Caspian Tern visited Bantam Lake in Litchfield on April 11 (MD). On May 10 singles were seen at Long Beach

in Stratford (FM) and Barn Island in Stonington (LBo et al.). About 800 Common Terns arrived at the eastern end of Long Island Sound on April 28. They foraged in the area of Bartlett's Reef on New London Ledge in Connecticut waters (MM). A small group of four Roseate Terns also flew through the feeding Commons (MM).

An **American White Pelican** was a nice find March 30 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, hereafter HBSP (JS). Another was in Southport on April 28 (JT, AB). An American Bittern was seen and enjoyed by many at the DEEP Marine HQ in Old Lyme March 14-26 (JGa), and one was unexpected at Nod Brook WMA in Avon on May 19 (DL). Least Bitterns were reported from seven locations. The state's second **Little Egret** caused a lot of excitement May 12-15 along the Saugatuck River in Westport (FM, m.ob.). It was much more accessible than the first record, in 2018 in Stonington, which could only be observed by boat. Tricolored Herons were reported from four coastal locations. The now rare Cattle Egret put in appearances on April 25 in Redding (KCu), April 28-29 at HBSP (CI), April 29 in Old Lyme (BMa), and May 12 at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven (NB). A high count of 30 Yellow-crowned Night-Herons on May 29 at Mac's Harbor in Stratford underlines their increase as Black-crowned Night-Herons decline (FM).



The state's second Little Egret enjoys a fish dinner on the Saugatuck River in Westport on May 12. (Frank Mantlik)

Three Glossy Ibises were a good inland find April 12-15 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (NM). A huge flock in Madison held c. 300 on April 17 (MK). **White-faced Ibis**, now annual in multiple numbers, made its first appearance March 30 at HBSP (SZ, RS). Single **Swallow-tailed Kites** made typically quick appearances, both in Greenwich, on May 2 (PDn) and May 25 (RMa, SMr). More unusual was a cooperative one that performed for many observers May 12-13 in Preston/Norwich (LV, PR et al.). In addition to the May 13 return of breeding **Mississippi Kites** to northern Fairfield County (JHI), two were seen on May 20-28 in Lebanon, but with no evidence nesting (LBr).

At least three Red-headed Woodpeckers were at Shingle Mill Pond in Salem through March (BMa et al.). An Olive-sided Flycatcher was early on May 5 in Hamden (JZ, JO). The first Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was reported on May 12 at Del Reeves Marsh in East Hampton (RS). Alder Flycatcher, typically the latest arriving passerine migrant, was first reported May 14 in Barkhamsted (JHk). The first Philadelphia Vireo, always a nice spring find, was at East Rock Park in New Haven on May 11 (ES). A Red-eyed Vireo was extremely early on April 8 in Fairfield (JJ). Northern Shrikes were reported on March 6 on Canaan Mountain (NP) and on March 19 in Ashford (SMo). A **Sedge Wren** found May 31 in Pomfret was present deep into summer (AR).

A two-day flurry of Purple Finches included 20 at a feeder in New Milford on April 15 (ADi) and 12 at a feeder in Madison the next day (FH). A Pine Siskin was feeding a fledgling on May 8 at Huntington State Park in Redding (JB, KR). A Lapland Longspur was late on May 10 at HBSP (TY). **Clay-colored Sparrows**, less frequent



This adult Common (Kamchatka) Gull is a long way from its Asian homeland on April 7 at Sea Bluff Beach in West Haven. (Frank Mantlik)

in spring than in fall, put in a good showing with singles on May 2 in Cheshire (VQ), on May 17 in Westport (JT, TG) and on May 31 and beyond at Roberts Field in Bristol (JC, m.ob.). Lincoln's Sparrows were widely reported on May 3-4. A **Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco's** long stay at a Chaplin feeder ended on March 22 (PR).

Unusually early warbler records included a Northern Parula on April 9 in Madison (CI); a Yellow Warbler on April 11 in Monroe (EB); and a Wilson's Warbler on April 17 in New Haven (KL). A Golden-winged Warbler was at Meshomasic State Forest in Glastonbury on May 10 (BA). A Brewster's Warbler was in Granby on May 19 (PDe). A Lawrence's Warbler was at Bauer Farm in Madison May 20-27 (CI et al.). **Prothonotary Warblers** were good finds on April 23 in Westport (TG), May 2 in Groton (LR) and May 19 at Lake Mohegan in Fairfield (AK). The first Cerulean Warbler was reported on May 3 in Lyme, at one of the state's handful of breeding sites (EC); of special note was one away from regular locations May 19 in Bantam (RW). It was another good spring for Kentucky Warblers, with reports from Edgewood Park in New Haven on April 20 (KL), from East Rock Park in New Haven on May 12-13 (DBI, JO); from Portland (TA) and Montville (PR) on May 16; from Ellington on May 25 (JF); and from West Hartford on May 26 (BT et al.). **Yellow-throated Warblers**, regular but uncommon as migrants, were in East Rock Park in New Haven on April 26-27 (AL et al.); in Fairfield on April 29 (AK); and at Wooster Square in New Haven on May 20 (SU).

A **Summer Tanager** visited a New London feeder on April 20-21 (DBu); others were in Bloomfield on May 7 (MG), in Easton on May 7-9 (JMa, CW), in Westport on May 12 (TG), and in North Haven on May 19 (DD). A **Western Tanager** visited a feeder in Hamden on March 4 (AS), and one was present in Simsbury on May 4-5 (fide JMe). April 28, a big migration day, produced **Blue Grosbeaks** at East Rock Park in New Haven (JV) and in Stamford (BI); others were in West Haven on May 8 (DD) and in Southbury on May 10 (JD). An Indigo Bunting in Essex on March 11 probably wintered somewhere nearby (KM). A **Painted Bunting** found in February at Lords Point in Stonington was present through April 4 (SD, LD et al.). One was in Manchester on May 11 (fide SMi). A Dickcissel was at Trout Brook Valley in Easton on May 14 (JN), and of special interest was a singing male found May 28 at Suffield WMA, where breeding was confirmed during the summer (RS, m.ob.).

Observers – George Amato, Tim Antanaitis, Bill Asteriades, Joe Attwater, Nicholas Aubin, Ed Bailey, William Batsford, Joe Bear, Scot Beattie, Bianca Beland, Matt Bell, Deb Bishop (DBi), Daniel Blatt (DBI), Lucas Bobay (LBo), Nick Bonomo, Derik Bowen (DBo), Lindsey Bradley (LBr), Alex Burdo, Diane Buhr (DBu), Dana Campbell, Paul Cashman, Elena Coffey, Al Collins, John Correia, Kimberly Cunningham (KCu), Kate Cygler (KCy), Andrew Dasinger (ADa), D. Edward Davis, Alex Delehanty (ADe), Paul Desjardins (PDe), Buzz Devine (BDv), Bob Dewire (BDe), Angela Dimmitt (ADi), Laura Dodd, Steven Dodd, Mike Doyle, Peter Dugan (PDn), Jed Duguid, Cynthia Eh-



This Swallow-tailed Kite was more cooperative than most that pay brief visits. It performs here on May 13 in Norwich. (Frank Mantlik)

linger, Tammy Eustis, Jeff Fengler, Frank Gallo, John Gaskell (JGa), David Gifford, John Graham (JGr), M. Graham, Jonathan Green (JGn), Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, John Hannan (JHa), Jennie-Wren Healy (JHe), James Heuschkel (JHk), Connor Hogan, Fran Holloway, Janet Holt (JHl), Julian Hough (JHo), Matt Hoyt, Chuck Imbergamo, Brenda Inskeep, Jack Jerrild, J. Kanderfer (JKa), Thomas Kelly, Aidan Kiley, Jeff Kohan (JKo), Micky Komara, Jack Landry, Krzysztof Lasocki, Dave Lawton, Cody Limber (CLi), Alex Lin-Moore, Chris Loscalzo (CLo), Larry Lunden, Bob MacDonnell (BMa), Ryan MacLean (RMa), Nic Main, Charles Makarewich, Matthew Male, Frank Mantlik, Jillian Mahar (JMa), Barry Marsh (BMr), Stephen Marsi (SMa), Stefan Martin (SMr), Dave Mathieu, Sam Meigs (SMe), Kathy Messier, Jamie Meyers (JMe), Sean Milnes (SMi); Robert Mirer (RMi), Steve Morytko (SMo), Jeremy Nance, Russ Naylor, Gina Nichol, Larry Nichols, John Oshlick, Nickilas Paulson, Amy Peck (APe), Annie Perko (APr), Dave Provencher, James Purcell, Victor Quintanilla, Larry Reiter, Andy Rzeknikiewicz, Katie Rice, Phil Rusch, Ed Sadowski, Jannie Shapiro, Arthur Shippee, Benjamin Skaught (BSk), Russ Smiley, Paul Smith, Steve Spector, Beverly Sullivan (BSu), Jory Teltser, Brian Toal, Severin Uebbing, Marianne Vahey, Linda Vegliante, Julian Ventres, John Weeks, Alan Welby (AWe), Kim Westcott, Chandler Wiegand, Alec Wiggin (AWi), Glenn Williams, Ryan Wirtes, Wendy Wright, Tom Younkin, Sara Zagorski, Anthony Zemba, Carol Zipp, Jim Zipp, Tracy Zulick, Fran Zygmunt

2020 Fall Hawk Watch

By Steve Mayo



Hawk watchers that brave cold late fall weather can be rewarded with significant flights of Red-tailed Hawks. (Abby Sesselberg)

Birders and photographers gather to watch hawks and other migrants every autumn, and at some sites this migration is enjoyed from late August through early December. The season starts with neotropical migrants moving south with small numbers of Kestrels and Osprey. It ends with the passage of blackbirds and Buteos, when the cold fronts favoring migration are significantly colder. The following is a brief review of the 2020 hawk season.

Inland Hawk Watch Sites

The term “inland hawk watch sites” is used for all organized Connecticut sites except Quaker Ridge (Greenwich) and Lighthouse Park (New Haven). With notable exceptions, these inland hawk watch sites provide coverage only during the September Broad-winged Hawk Flight. The new Apple Hill (Litchfield) watch was one such exception. Hawk watching continued into November and 681 hawks of 13 species were tallied during an impressive 217 hours of coverage. Boothe Memorial Park (Stratford) had just over one thousand raptors in 35 mid-season coverage hours. In

the recent past, this site has reported a large diversity of hawks and impressive seasonal totals. Its location on the Housatonic River makes it ideal for full-season observations.

Botsford Hill (Bridgewater) has been active for most years since 1985. The site had 46 hours of coverage and 929 hawks, well below previous years averages. A highlight was Sept. 19 with 490 Broad-winged hawks on cloudless skies and northerly winds. Chestnut Hill had 1364 Broad-winged hawks on Sept. 18, comprising half of their September season total. Coverage hours were similar to those of Botsford Hill. Johnnycake Mountain (Burlington) logged 63 hours but missed any significant Broad-winged Hawk flight. Its seasonal total of 478 hawks was the lowest since 2003. A frontal passage brought north winds and clouds to Middle School (Torrington) on Sept. 14. The daily total of 588 Broad-winged Hawks was similar to that of nearby Chestnut Hill. Once again Poquonock (Windsor) logged very impressive full-season coverage (203 hours). It tallied 604 Broad-winged Hawks, almost all from Sept. 18-20. Season totals were 817 hawks representing 12 species.

Quaker Ridge

Quaker Ridge continued to be the premier spot in the state to view Broad-winged Hawks. Sept. 14 brought NNW winds and kettles began to form in the afternoon and 1253 were recorded that day. 583 were counted on 9/15 before winds shifted easterly and then to the south. Southerly winds continued until a frontal passage brought 15 mph winds from the NNW on 9/18. There were 2704 Broad-winged Hawks that day, including 1673 at the 3 pm hour. On 9/19, there were another 1801 Broad-winged Hawks as well as 161 Sharp-shinned Hawks. Almost half of September's Sharp-shinned Hawks (675) flew over during these several days of excellent migration weather. Another 422 Sharp-shinned Hawks were counted while moderate northerly winds predominated 10/8 through 10/11. The season total was 1771, below the average of 2524 for the previous ten years. The season total for Cooper's hawks (312) was essentially the same as that of 2019. This was also lower than the previous ten year average (423).

A season tally of 238 represented a record low for Osprey, but Quaker Ridge posted a new record for Turkey Vulture (2167). Dozens of migrating vultures were observed almost every day throughout October and November. The daily high count was 188 on light west winds, Oct. 9. Bald Eagle totals for 2019 and 2020 were identical (215). The Northern Harrier count (95) bounced back from last year's record low (75) but was still below the average for the previous ten years (145). It was the same story for American Kestrels. The season total (447) was much better than the poor showing in 2019 (268). Merlin (69) and Peregrine Falcon (21) totals were similar to year-end totals for the previous year. Red-shouldered Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk migrate later in the season and totals (602 and 255 respectively) were within seasonal averages.



Sometimes raptors rest and hunt at hawk watch sights, as Peregrine Falcons often do on the lighthouse railing at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven. (Abby Sesselberg)

Lighthouse Point Park

Osprey feed in large numbers in areas around the New Haven harbor throughout the late summer. On Aug. 30, there were many Osprey soaring and catching fish but 27 were deemed to be passage migrants. Another 73 were identified as migrating on 9/3 and 68 more Osprey left on 9/11. The daily average in September was 18, and total Osprey counts were within recent September and year-end averages. Late season adult male Northern Harriers helped boost the season total to 255, slightly better than the record low tally in 2019. Bald Eagle numbers (229) were similar to those of the previous year.

Gusting Northwest winds starting 9/18 brought almost 500 Sharp-shinned Hawks over the next three days. As with the Quaker Ridge flight, these comprised a large portion of the September total (796). The season total of 2321 was an uptick from the 2019 record low of 1658. Sharp-shinned numbers at Lighthouse continue to exhibit a steeper rate decline than comparable coastal watch sites such as Cape May, New Jersey or Kiptopeke, Virginia. The Cooper's Hawk migration peaks in mid-October. Northwest winds on 10/11 brought 187 with another 164 Cooper's Hawks recorded on 10/17. Season totals (1127) were below the previous ten years average (1368).

Moderate northwest winds on 9/14 forced 124 American Kestrels over Lighthouse Park. This boosted the September and year-end totals to 484 and 963 respectively. This was a welcome increase over 2019 totals (657). Oct. 8 was also the date of a significant falcon flight. American Kestrels totaled 178 and there were 71 Merlin for the day. The Merlin season total was 275, below the ten year average of 319. Red-shouldered Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks totals for 2020 were 209 and 321 respectively. Both were slightly higher than 2019 totals.

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

Mark Aronson, Blake Auchincloss, Renee Baade, Christina Baal, David Babington, Bill Banks, Marty Barris, Dan Barvir, Steve Beal, Raymond Belding, John Berman, Gail Benson, Nick Bonomo, Tom Bravo, Polly Brody, Tracy Brown, Christina Buccieri, Sylvio Buccieri, Tom Burke, Dana Campbell, Al Collins, Jim Cortina, Peter Davenport, Rita Dempsey, Ayreslea Denny, Paul Desjardins, Angela Dimmitt, Amy Dworetzky, David D'Ostilio, Mike Doyle, Cynthia Ehlinger, Chris Finlay, James Fischer, Bobbie Fisher, Anne Fiske, David Fiske, Frank Gallo, Nancy Glynn, Carole Griffiths, Olivia Giuntini, Frank Guida, Pete Gustas, Ed Haesche, Greg Hanisek, Carol Harrington, Richard Harrington, Roy Harvey, Dayton Hedges, Julian Hough, Lynn James, Lynn Jones, Steve Kovari, Scott Kruitbosch, Meriam Levin, Ryan MacLean, Jim MacLean, Frank Mantlik, Mike Marsano, John Marshall, Jeff Martin, Gail Martino, Stefan Martin, Steve Mayo, Robin McAllister, Kevin McGrath, Ken Merrifield, Ken Mirman, Judy Moore, Jim Muchmore, Tom Murray, John Oshlick, Gary Palmer, Matt Popp, Tim Reed, Brendan Reilly, Phil Ribolow, Rick Roach, Paul Roberts, David Salmon, Sol Satin, Will Schenck, Abby Sesselberg, Jim Sherwonit, Nadir Shir-Zelniker, Scott Slora, Ryan Sperzel, Anastasia Stefano, Howie Sternberg, Bill Tischler, Tony Tortora, Mike Turok, Jean Waful, Mike Warner, Christine Weintraub, Al Welby, Joseph Wojtanowski, Steve Wolter, Sara Zagorski, Dave Zawisha

FOR CHARTS AND MORE DATA ON:

HAWK WATCH
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
SUMMER BIRD COUNT



Click on the link below or use the
QR Code on right

<https://www.ctbirding.org/publications/ct-bird-count-data/>

Photo Challenge



This bird, clearly a *Buteo*, looked familiar, but certain details caused observers to raise their eyebrows. Let's get right to the finish line and confirm that it is a Red-tailed Hawk. This is a wide-ranging and highly variable species which presents across the continent in several subspecific forms. But this individual, an adult, shows how much variation can occur within Connecticut's breeding subspecies, the Eastern Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis borealis*). Brian Wheeler, a Connecticut native and author of authoritative books on raptor identification, provides this analysis. (1) Throat is dark with whitish edges, a somewhat common variation on this race; throat can be all-dark, too. (2) Tawny breast is a very common variant on *borealis* in all of its range, especially late summer through fall. Breast typically fades to white by winter. (3) Finely barred flanks are typical of all races of this species. There are faint cross-bars on some mid-belly feathers, which occurs on a few adults of *borealis*; more distinct barring on most Western adults (*B. j. calurus*). (4) Undertail coverts lack rufous cross-bars that are prevalent on *calurus*. This individual was photographed in Connecticut on Oct 31 2020 by Jeff Fengler.



Next Challenge Photo

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

Editor

Greg Hanisek - 175 Circuit Ave., Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 754-4401 email: ctgregh@gmail.com

Departments

Field Notes

Greg Hanisek
Frank Mantlik

Bird Counts

Steve Broker
Steve Mayo
Patrick Comins

Site Guides

Arnold Devine
Dwight Smith

Layout/Production

Manny Merisotis

Editorial Advisory Board

Louis Bevier
John Kricher
Wayne Petersen

The Connecticut Warbler (ISSN 1077-0283) is devoted to the study of birds and their conservation in Connecticut and is published quarterly (January, April, July, and October) by the Connecticut Ornithological Association.

Send manuscripts to the Editor. Please type double spaced with ample margins, on one side of a sheet. Submit a copy on a computer disk, if possible. Style should follow usage in recent issues. All manuscripts receive peer review.

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.

CONNECTICUT ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

President: Tom Robben, 172 Grandview Drive, Glastonbury, CT 06033

Vice-President: Chris S. Wood, Woodbury, CT 06798

Secretary: Denise Jernigan, 618 Hopewell Road, South Glastonbury, CT 06073

Treasurer: Paul Wolter, Branford, CT 06405

Chairman, ARCC: Jay Kaplan, 71 Gracey Road, Canton, CT 06019

Board of Directors (terms ending)

2022	2023	2024
Nick Bonomo	Allison Black	Melissa Baston
Steve Broker	Andrew Dasinger	Milan Bull
Sharon Dellinger	Frank Gallo	Ryan MacLean
Angela Dimmitt	Craig Repasz	David Provencher
Cynthia Ehlinger	Larry Reiter	Laurie Reynolds
Maureen Wolter	Kathy Van Der Aue	Abby Sesselberg

Membership, including subscription to The Connecticut Warbler and COA Bulletin, is based on a calendar year and is renewable in January: Student, \$15.00; Individual, \$25.00; Family, \$35.00; Contributing, \$50.00; Donor, \$75.00, Benefactor, \$100. Life is \$1000.00, payable in three annual installments. Send membership application, dues, change of address, and checks payable to: Connecticut Ornithological Association, 314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06430.



**Connecticut
Ornithological
Association**

314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06824

www.ctbirding.org

– Address Service Requested –

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
New Haven CT
Permit No. 526

Contents

Volume 41, No 4, 2021

- 89 **Identification of Dowitchers in Juvenile and Non-breeding Plumages**
Julian Hough
- 96 **The 2020-2021 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count**
Stephen P. Broker
- 117 **Connecticut Field Notes**
Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik
- 124 **2020 Fall Hawk Watch**
Steve Mayo
- 128 **Photo Challenge**