



The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association



January 2022

The saga of the high-flying Kites

The changing face of our avian scavengers

Tackling the challenge of Empid phobia

The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of the Connecticut Ornithological Association

Volume 42, Number 1

January 2022

CONTENTS

- 1 **Flying Kites: The Mississippi Kite in Connecticut**
Chris Loscalzo
- 12 **Scavengers in Connecticut**
Joseph Belanger
- 18 **Connecticut Field Notes**
Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik
- 23 **Photo Challenge**
Aidan Kiley

ON THE COVER

Mississippi Kite

Abby Sesselberg captured the passage of this juvenile Mississippi Kite, the first for the venerable Lighthouse Point Park hawk watch in New Haven. In this issue Chris Loscalzo takes a broad look at this species' presence in Connecticut, with an emphasis on its status as a rare breeder.

Flying Kites: The Mississippi Kite in Connecticut

By Chris Loscalzo



Adult Mississippi Kite

The Mississippi Kite has been expanding its range northward in the past few decades, both in the Northeast and central United States. The first sighting of this species in Connecticut was in June 1995, and the first confirmed nesting was in 2008. Since then, the species has been observed in numerous locations throughout the state and additional nesting has been confirmed. The first nesting was well-described by John Weeks in the January 2009 issue of this journal. Now that the Mississippi Kite is a regular visitor and breeder in our state, it is important that we increase our understanding of this remarkable raptor.

Kites are members of the family of raptors that includes hawks, eagles and vultures. They can be found throughout the world. The Black Kite is particularly abundant throughout the Eastern Hemisphere, including in urban areas. There are four regularly occurring species of kites in North America, with the Mississippi Kite being the most numerous and widespread. The total population is estimated at



Mississippi Kite with an American Crow for size comparison

300,000 birds. The Mississippi Kite is monotypic, meaning that it does not have any recognized subspecies, but it is closely related to the Plumbeous Kite of Central America. Mississippi Kites have an average lifespan of 8 years.

Identification

Kites are often first seen in flight. Mississippi Kites resemble falcons on the wing, but are more buoyant. They glide and soar on long, flat wings. Their wingbeats are deep, loose and moderately fast. Their wings may be held straight or bent. Their tails are usually fanned and occasionally tilted in flight. Kites are evocative of nighthawks when they pursue prey in flight. The similarity is logical (and likely an example of convergent evolution) as both are aerial hunters that feed on large flying insects. Kites will dive when going after prey or flying to their nests.

Mississippi Kites are 12-15 inches long with wingspans of 29-33 inches. They are roughly intermediate in size between an American Kestrel and a Peregrine Falcon. Their length and wingspan are similar to that of a Bonaparte's Gull. Females are usually slightly larger than males. The adults have pale gray to white heads and underparts and medium to dark gray upperparts. The outer wings and tails are black to dark gray. The primary wing feathers can be tinged with rufous. The eyes are red

and bounded by dark lores. The bill is dark gray with a hooked upper mandible. Males tend to have paler heads and underparts and blacker tails than females. In flight, the outermost primary (P10) is noticeably shorter than the adjacent primaries. The wings are pointed at the tips. The secondaries are white, often seen as broad bands in flight and narrow stripes when perched. Juveniles have dense brown streaks on their underparts and brown and white banded tails. They retain this distinctive plumage for the first one and a half years of life.

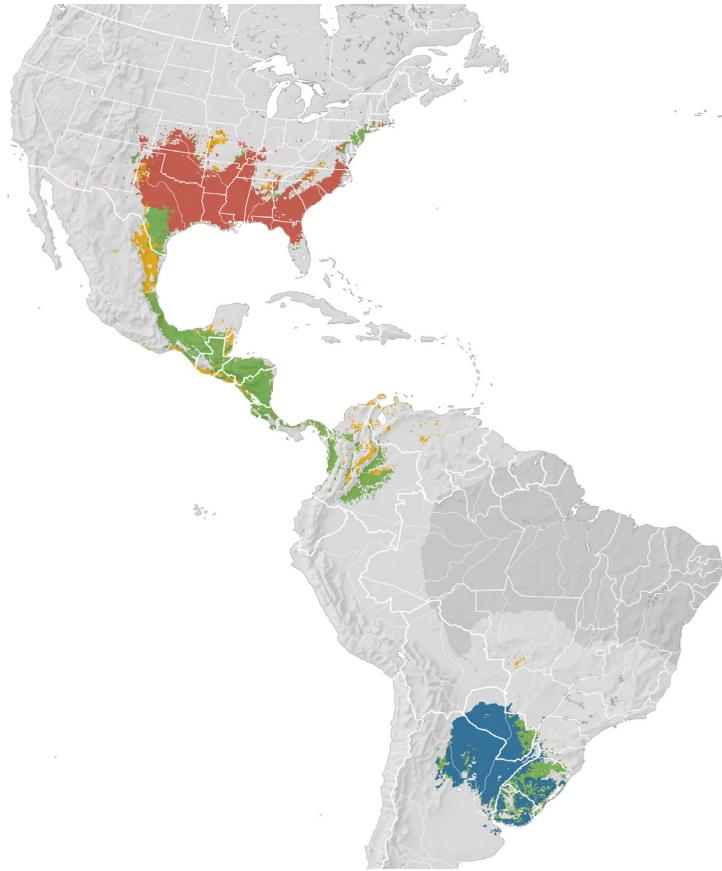
The voice of the Mississippi Kite is a loud, high-pitched “phee-toooooo” or “pee-teer” with the second sound descending. The call resembles that of a Broad-winged Hawk. They have other vocalizations as well, including a softer “pee-tititi” used during courtship and nest building, and a single “pbeer” sound often used by fledglings. Kites are often quite vocal and the young call incessantly as fledglings when begging for food.

Habitat

Mississippi Kites are found in riparian habitats, or near lakes and freshwater swamps, typically at low elevations. The open wet areas are often bounded by stands of mature deciduous trees. The adjacent woods may be deciduous or mixed coniferous/deciduous. The open areas above water, marshes and fields serve as feeding grounds, while the tall trees are used for nesting. They prefer a hot and humid climate. In recent years, they have adapted to breeding in areas with abundant human activity, including urban and suburban locales. They nest along golf courses and in cemeteries



Mississippi Kite soaring. Note short P10 feather.



Mississippi Kite Range Map. Image provided by eBird (www.ebird.org).

and parks. On occasion, during the peak of nest activity, they have been known to fly aggressively at, and occasionally strike, human intruders.

Feeding Habits and Diet

Mississippi Kites are predominantly aerial hunters, catching flying insects on the wing. They capture their prey in their talons and then bring the food forward in one foot and reach down with their heads to pull apart and eat the prey while in flight. Occasionally, they will fly to a perch and devour their prey there. Kites are also known to hunt from perches, especially in the early morning or late afternoon, capturing prey close to or on the ground. They do not hover. They eat all kinds of large flying insects, but are especially fond of cicadas. They also prey upon small birds, usually nestlings or fledglings, as well as bats, amphibians and small reptiles. They carry their prey in their beaks when taking the food to their nests.

Nesting Habits

Although the preferred location of a kite nest varies greatly throughout its breeding range, it can often be found in the densely foliated secondary branches of a large deciduous tree, usually high up in the tree. Both the male and female Mississippi Kite are involved in building the nest. They often procure twigs from live trees, trim off the leaves and then add the twig to the nest. Nests are typically about one foot in diameter and five inches deep. The nest cup is lined with greenery, the true purpose of which is unknown. Often, nests are reused from one year to the next. Nest building is done in the month of May at a relatively leisurely pace, often taking a week or more to complete. The eggs are usually laid in early June. Almost always, two eggs are laid, but on rare occasions, nests with one or three eggs are found. Incubation is done by both parents and lasts about 30 days. The chicks hatch sequentially, usually several days apart. Thus, one chick will be larger than the other. On most occasions, only one chick survives to fledging. In years with abundant food sources, two chicks might fledge. Overall, about 50% of nests yield young that reach fledgling age. Predators of kite nests include Great Horned Owls, raptors, crows, ravens and raccoons. Many kite pairs nest at a good distance from other kites, but in areas where the species is abundant, colonial nesting is observed.

Raising Young

Newly hatched chicks are helpless little balls of white feathers with a mouth, eyes and legs. For the first ten days of their lives, they are fed morsels of food regurgitated by their parents. As they mature, feeding evolves such that the young will pick at regurgitated food on their own and eventually take non-regurgitated food directly from a parent. Males and females share in the feeding duties, but males often do the bulk of the feeding. The young fledge at about 30-35 days of age, and then will spend the next few weeks staying close to the nest and begging for and accepting food from their parents. Interestingly, Mississippi Kites often display nest helping behavior wherein an immature bird (a yearling, still in immature plumage) will be observed at and around the nest site for a significant portion of the nesting period. These young birds participate in the nesting process in a variety of ways, including defending the nest from potential predators, incubating the eggs, building the nest and (rarely) feeding the young chicks. It is presumed, but not certain, that these immature birds are the offspring of the parental pair from the previous year.

Range in the United States

Mississippi Kites have been observed in nearly every one of the 48 states in the continental United States. They are regular breeders in states in the south, central and eastern states, including Kansas, Oklahoma, northern and eastern Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, North and South Carolina, Georgia, northern Florida, Alabama and, of course, Mississippi. In recent decades the species has expanded its range westward all the way to the California coast and northward up the Mississippi River Valley and along the East Coast into New England. They can be found in many



Kite nest with chick

states in the spring as migratory “overshoots” and in the late summer during post-breeding dispersal.

Migration and Winter Range

Mississippi Kites arrive along the southern US coast from late March to late April and reach their breeding grounds in early May where they will typically stay until late summer. Beginning in mid-August and through September, they will migrate south. They tend to migrate over land, eschewing a more direct route over the Gulf of Mexico. They gather in great numbers as they travel south along the eastern coast of Mexico. Nearly all pass by Vera Cruz, Mexico. Monitors at a hawk watch site there have recorded a remarkable number of kites each fall. In 2020, thousands of birds were seen on good migration days between Aug. 20 and Sept. 20, with a peak number of nearly 67,000 birds recorded on Sept. 12. From Mexico, they travel south over Central America into Colombia and then continue on to their wintering grounds in central South America, predominantly in Paraguay, Bolivia, northern Argentina and western Brazil.

STATEWIDE OBSERVATIONS

Early Sightings

The first accepted state record for this species was an adult reported by Patrick Dugan in Stamford on June 13, 1995. What was likely the same bird was seen again on June 16 in Stamford and on June 17 in Darien. And this same bird might have

been observed on June 3 of that year, as an adult was reported to have been seen briefly by an experienced birder in Sandy Hook on that day. Subsequent sightings of Mississippi Kites occurred in Connecticut in 1997 (in South Windsor), 1999 (in Redding) and 2002 (in Middlebury). All of these early observations were in the months of May and June. They fit the pattern of observations in those years throughout the northeast United States: individual kites, usually first-year birds, were seen briefly in various locations in May or June. These birds were presumably spring migration overshoots or unmated wanderers. A great number of these sightings took place in southern New Jersey and southeastern Massachusetts. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the pattern changed. Mississippi Kites were observed in the summer and early fall, and occasionally as pairs.

First Confirmed Nesting

A single sighting in August 2005 and a few sightings in June and July 2006 foretold what was to come in the summer of 2008: repeated sightings of a pair of kites foraging over Great Pond State Forest and other nearby locations in Simsbury. An active nest was found in a local residential neighborhood in early August, thus confirming the first known breeding of Mississippi Kite in Connecticut. Remarkably, two nests were found in New Hampshire that same year, with all three serving as the first known nests of this species in New England. The Simsbury pair successfully fledged one young bird that year and a pair of adults returned to the site each year until 2014.



Mississippi Kite adult and recently fledged juvenile



Adult feeding fledgling at the nest

Many Connecticut birders were fortunate to observe these birds either foraging over the pond or near their nest site. A pair of kites was found nesting at a new site in Simsbury in 2016, a few miles south of the original nesting location. It is unknown, of course, if either of these birds were part of the pair that nested at the original site. The Mississippi Kite is one of only four species to be added to the list of birds nesting in CT since the last breeding bird atlas in the mid-1980s. The other three species are Black Vulture, Monk Parakeet and Mourning Warbler.

Second Confirmed Nesting

Two Mississippi Kites were observed in eastern Fairfield County in the summer of 2018. Eventually, a nest was located and breeding was confirmed. As with the original Simsbury nest (as well as one of those in New Hampshire), the nest was found high up in the secondary branches of a tall oak tree at the end of a private driveway in a quiet residential neighborhood. The selection of a tree at such a location might not be a coincidence; there could be advantages for the nesting birds, including easier access to the nest by the parents for bringing food to the nestling and perhaps a greater ability to defend the nest from predators.

The precise location of the Fairfield County nest has been undisclosed for the sake of the birds and the local residents. However, detailed observations have been made as the pair has returned each of the past four years and has successfully fledged a chick

each time. The observations shed more light on the behavior of these remarkable birds. The adult kites are often observed perched on the bare branches of dead trees within 100 yards of the nest tree. From there, they forage for food, defend the nest and bring food to the nestling. The timing of the nesting milestones has been consistent each year: hatching has taken place in early July and fledging of the young bird has occurred around Aug. 10. The adults have been observed to defend the nest from a variety of potential predators, including American Crows, Red-shouldered Hawks and even a Bald Eagle.

In 2020, several remarkable observations were made. An immature bird was seen on several occasions during the nesting period and was observed to defend the nest from aerial predators. The yearling was seen frequently with the adults until the nestling hatched and then was not observed thereafter. Also of note, the nest was destroyed during the passage of Hurricane Isaias on Aug. 4. The nestling survived the storm and stayed hidden in the deeper recesses of the tree, nearer the trunk, until fledging. The adults were seen to have difficulty delivering food to the nestling at that location, but the nestling fledged successfully.

The observations this past summer (2021) have been enlightening and intriguing. A new nest was built in the same tree as the old nest. Notably, the adult pair and the nestling were much quieter than in previous years, rarely vocalizing. In the previous three years, the adults called often and the nestling was quite vocal as well. The reason for this change in behavior is unknown. It will be interesting to see if the birds are more vocal next year, should they return to nest again. The success of this nest over the past four years has been remarkable and exceeds the success rate for this species in general.

Additional Recent Sightings

Numerous sightings of pairs of kites in the past few years suggest that nesting could have taken place in additional locations within Connecticut. From 2013 through 2018, there were multiple sightings of Mississippi Kite in Glastonbury. This is an excellent location for nesting for this species as it lies along the Connecticut River floodplain. A kite pair was observed in Danielson in the northeast corner of the state on July 2, 2020. There is extensive habitat in that area that is suitable for nesting (and is relatively inaccessible). This past year, a pair was observed in the Lebanon area, often flying over the Exeter Marsh, beginning in mid-May. At least one bird was observed in this area through the month of July, but no nest was found. There have been many sightings of individual birds all over the state in spring and summer, suggesting that the population of this species is expanding here. Almost certainly, additional nests of this species will be found in the years to come. And, in a clear sign that the species is becoming more numerous in New England, an immature bird was observed at the Lighthouse Point Hawk Watch site this past September, adding this species to the list of migrating raptors seen at this location.



Mississippi Kite with small nestling as prey

Final Comments

The expansion of the range of the Mississippi Kite into the state of Connecticut and the rest of New England over the past few decades has been a remarkable phenomenon. We can add Mississippi Kite to the list of southern species that have expanded their ranges into the Northeast in the past century. As exciting as the advancement of this species into our area might be, the realization that climate change is the driver of this observation is sobering if not terrifying. The warming of the planet has led to changes in climate all over the world. In the Northeast, that has meant warmer and wetter summers, conditions conducive to the influx of Mississippi Kites. Unfortunately, the further warming of the planet will certainly lead to the loss of many more species of birds and other wildlife. And those species that benefit from the altered environment might do so only transiently. In time, the conditions could change such that not even they will survive. It is incumbent upon all of us who enjoy the varied and ever-changing avifauna of our local area to do what we can to slow the pace of climate change and reduce its devastating impact on our world. The future of the birds and people who will be here after us depend on it.

References

- Alderfor, J. National Geographic Complete Birds of North America, 2014, National Geographic Society.
- Birder, Anonymous. Personal comments.
- Bolen, EG and D Flores, 1993, The Mississippi Kite, University of Texas Press.
- Gallo, F, 2018, Birding in Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press.
- Grinley, S, September 1, 2018, Words on Birds: Kites Expanding in New Hampshire, The Daily News.
- Hanisek, G and F Mantlik, Connecticut Field Notes, The Connecticut Warbler, 37: 16, 2017.
- Hernandez, AM, 2020, eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S73856950>. eBird, Ithaca, New York.
- Mantlik, F, D Provencher and M Szantyr, Seventh ARCC Report, Connecticut Warbler, 17: 97-122, 1997.
- Meyers, J, 2016, eBird Checklist: <https://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S75869259>. eBird, Ithaca, New York.
- Sibley, DA, The Sibley Guide to Birds, 2014, Alfred A. Knopf, New York.
- Vanner, M, The Complete Encyclopedia of North America Birds, 2005, Parragon Publishing.
- Weeks, J, Personal comments.
- Weeks, J, First Confirmed Nesting by Mississippi Kites in Connecticut, The Connecticut Warbler, 29:1, 1-8, 2009.
- Wheeler, BK, Raptors of Eastern North America, 2003, Princeton University Press.

Scavengers in Connecticut

By Joseph Belanger



These Ring-billed Gulls, Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls gather on the ice at a roosting site (WGB).

Introduction

There has been an interesting change in the composition of avian scavengers across the Northeast in recent decades, one that has been borne out by the results of the Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts. The numbers of European Starling, American Crow and several gull species have fallen while the Turkey Vulture, Black Vulture, Common Raven and Fish Crow have become firmly established and often shown steady increases. The following is a review of this data and an examination of the underlying reasons.

Background

Landfills were common in the United States during the twentieth century and typically featured enormous clouds of squabbling gulls and other scavengers. In accordance with newly introduced provisions of the Clean Air Act, the country began a widespread curtailing or outright closure of landfill operations in the early 1990s, including the half dozen facilities that were situated within Connecticut. In a completely unrelated event, the first case of West Nile Virus to strike the nation occurred within New York City in 1999. This disease was believed to be particularly virulent with regard to certain avian species such as American Crow and assorted

gulls. While exact numbers remain unknown, West Nile Virus is believed to have substantially reduced the regional populations of these species within only a few years.

The landfill closures and the outbreak of West Nile Virus combined to send several scavengers into steep decline, including the American Crow, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. Interestingly, the European Starling had already been in sharp decline for some time. In contrast, at approximately the start of the new millennium, a number of other scavengers began to rise steadily across Connecticut. Turkey Vulture became commonplace while Common Raven expanded from the north. Fish Crow and Black Vulture aggressively advanced from the south. It appears likely that these increases were accelerated by the sudden drop in the established scavengers.

This review utilized raw count numbers, uncorrected for the number of observer or party hours, because the results of the raw data tend to be dramatic enough to speak for themselves. Christmas Count data was used because the length and consistency of that database is extensive, but it should be noted that these population trends were also evident in the Connecticut Summer Count results. Four data points were used at ten-year intervals, with the 2019 interval substituting for 2020 because the latter count had not yet been conducted at the time of this writing.

European Starling

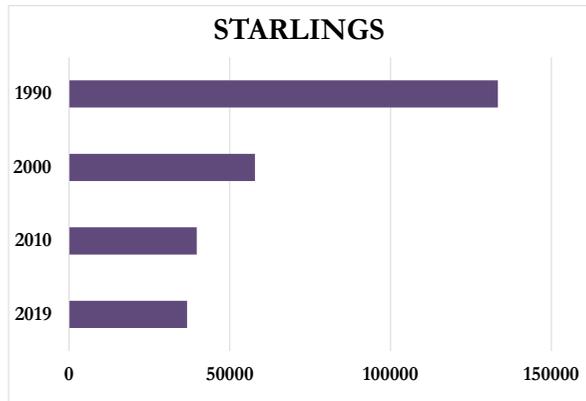
The European Starling remains an abundant scavenger, currently rivaled in numbers only by the American Crow. However, it has clearly gone through a steady decline that has spanned several decades and apparently began as early as the 1970s. While part of this decline is related to the landfill closures of the 1990s and may also be attributable to West Nile Virus, its descent began prior to either event. All of the factors involved in this decline are not readily apparent, but it is helpful to remember that this bird's population had become so disproportionate that some sort of correction was almost inevitable.

The European Starling is an exotic species that remains a nuisance from city centers to remote farmlands. It is a relatively small bird with an unspecialized bill,



The European Starling has a small and pointed generalist's bill that makes it more suited to refuse than carrion (JB).

making it more inclined toward refuse than carrion. In recent years it has faced direct competition from the Fish Crow, particularly at dumpsters behind fast food restaurants. In addition, the Common Raven, Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture have all become increasingly bold at refuse sources, further increasing the competition faced by the European Starling.

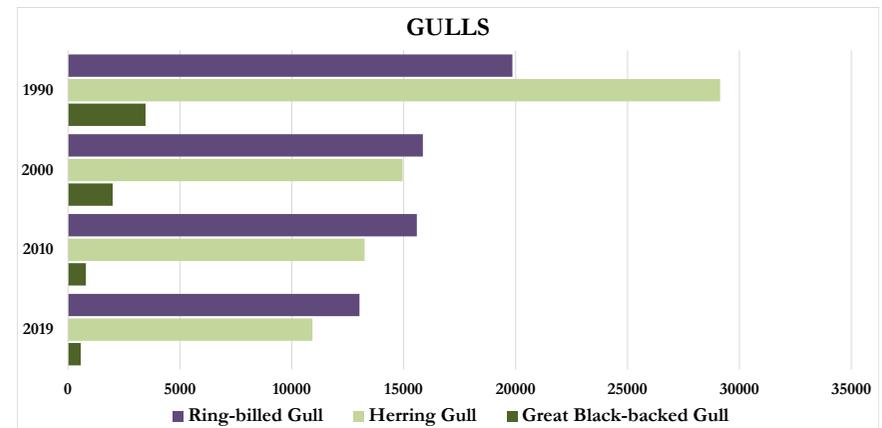
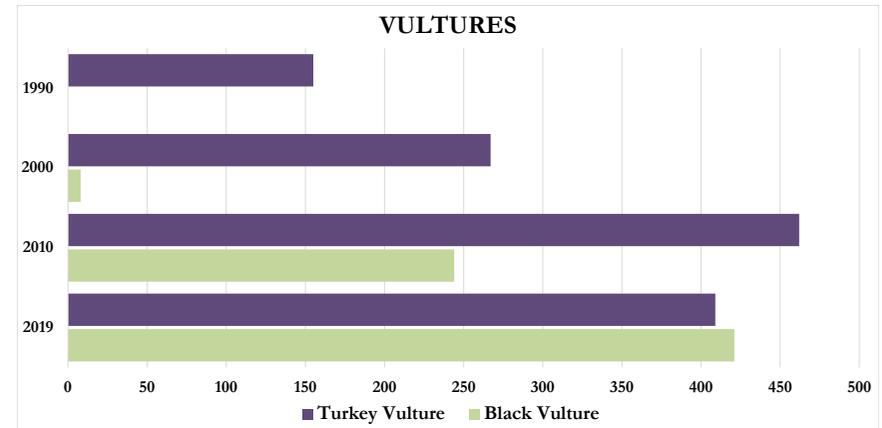


Vultures

The Turkey Vulture has long been present in the Northeast in limited numbers, but these numbers began to climb after 1990 until this species became common across Connecticut. The Black Vulture is a southern species that appeared in the early 1990s and has shown dramatic increases. Both species are carrion specialists that will also consume refuse when it is available.

Gulls

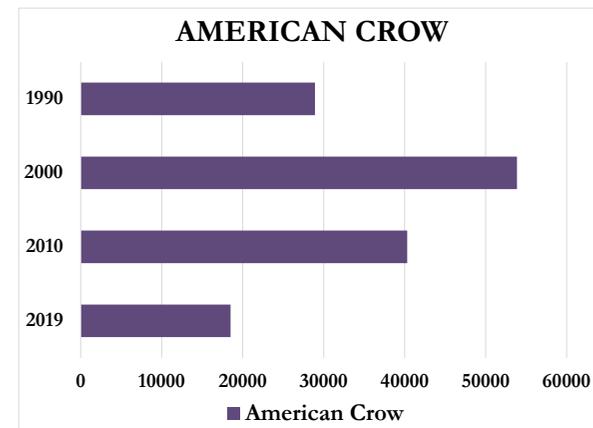
The Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull all suffered population reductions after 1990 due to the landfill closures and possibly the West Nile Virus outbreak. To one degree or another, all three species appear to be stabilizing at much lower levels. They remain relatively common in their preferred habitats.

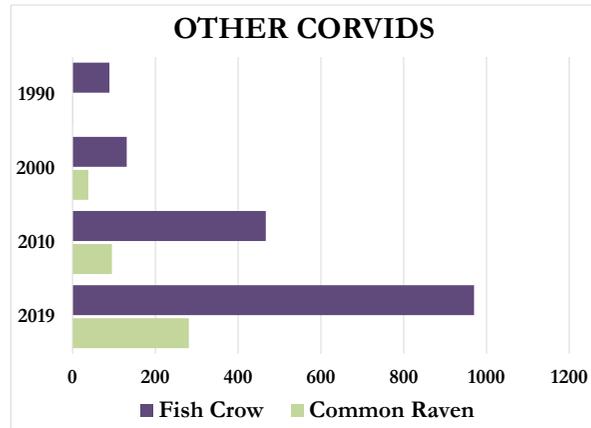


A Turkey Vulture inspects its surroundings (USFWS).



A Black Vulture eyes some dumpsters (WJB).





Crows

The American Crow remains a common scavenger in Connecticut that is exceeded only by the European Starling. However, the American Crow's numbers have trended steadily downward since the appearance of West Nile Virus in 1999. Conversely, the Fish Crow and the Common Raven have exhibited a steadily increasing presence since roughly the same time.

Conclusion

As the old adage goes, nature abhors a vacuum. With the demise of so many of the established scavengers within Connecticut, we see the sudden appearance and rapid growth of entirely new scavenger species. This new pattern continues to evolve, with the Bald Eagle emerging not only as a competitor but also as a potential predator of the other scavengers.

Connecticut is part of a larger ecosystem that is clearly rebalancing itself, driven by a myriad of factors that include changes in land use, the reforestation of former farmland, changes in pesticide use, suburban sprawl, species reintroductions and climate change. These changes have resulted in compositional shifts to the local avifauna that are not restricted to the scavengers.

Many raptors have shown marked increases, including the Bald Eagle, Osprey, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk and Peregrine Falcon. Reforestation appears



American Crow (Pixnio)



Fish Crow (Pixnio)



Common Raven (DM)

to have benefited the Wild Turkey, Barred Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Yellow-breasted Sapsucker. Conversely, the decline of early successional species has been stark, including the Ruffed Grouse, Northern Bobwhite, American Woodcock, Eastern Whip-poor-will, White-eyed Vireo and Eastern Meadowlark.

However, despite this considerable level of change to species composition, within Connecticut the bird count numbers and Shannon-Wiener biodiversity analyses reflect no dramatic change to the local avifauna. Incremental declines to one suite of species are typically offset by incremental increases in another, trends that take decades before they become fully recognizable. The key element here is that Connecticut has arguably the best statewide avian monitoring in America, and while it is not alone in these environmental changes, it can see them better than most.

References

- Belanger, Joseph
2014 Short-Range Migratory Strategies. *The Connecticut Warbler: A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*, Volume 34, Number 1, pp 1 - 9.
- Bevier, Louis R. (Ed.)
1994 *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Connecticut*. Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Hartford, Connecticut
- Broker, Steven P.
2020. The 2019-2020 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count. *The Connecticut Warbler: A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*, Volume 40, Number 4, pp 121 - 171.
- 2011, The 2010-2011 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count. *The Connecticut Warbler: A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*, Volume 31, Number 3, pp 91 - 94.
- 2001, The 2000-2001 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count. *The Connecticut Warbler: A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*, Volume 21, Number 2, pp 76 - 83.
- 1991, The 1990-91 Christmas Bird Count. *The Connecticut Warbler: A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*, Volume 11, Number 2, pp 58 - 63.
- McGowan, Kevin J., and Kimberley Corwin (Eds.)
2008 *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York

Photographs

The author wishes to thank family members and associates for graciously providing photographs for this article. The photo credits follow below:

JB Joseph Belanger (author)
WGB William G. Belanger
WJB William J. Belanger
LK Lee Karney, USFWS
DM Dave Menke, USFWS
Pixnio Photographic Image Service
USFWS United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik



This wide-ranging Roseate Spoonbill, Connecticut's second, showed off its flashy wings on July 31 near the Sound School in New Haven. (Frank Mantlik)

Summer Season, June 1 through July 31

This season marked the final year for the breeding portion of the Connecticut Bird Atlas. While this report includes some noteworthy breeding season records, the final compilation of Atlas data will provide a comprehensive look at how our state nesting species have fared since the last Atlas effort in the 1980s.

Northbound migration

An adult Western Sandpiper, a typically late migrant, was at Milford Point on June 6 (PC). The intentions of one still there on June 23 were less clear (TM). Two Bonaparte's Gulls were late on June 13 at Bradley Point in West Haven (SS). There were five reports of Olive-sided Flycatchers in the first week of June. The latest Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was June 1 at Cove Island Park in Stamford (PDu). A Yellow-throated Warbler was an unexpected find June 3 in a yard in Westport (TG). The latest Mourning Warbler was on June 12 at the Racebrook tract in Woodbridge (CL, MV).

Southbound migration

A series of shorebird arrival dates included chronologically: a Marbled Godwit on July 16 at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford (JA); an Upland Sandpiper on July 18 in North Windhan (PR), with another July 28 at Rocky Hill meadows (PDe); a Stilt Sandpiper on July 18 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, hereafter HBSP (GHo); and a Whimbrel on July 27 at Long Beach in Stratford (FM). A few Bonaparte's Gulls appeared along the coast, starting with one on July 9 at Stratford Point (FM).

Lingerers, Wanderers and Strays

A flock of six Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, a species that has greatly increased in eastern North America, dropped into ponds at the Watertown Fire District well fields in Woodbury on June 1 (NM, m.ob.). These were only the second occurrence of this species in CT. Two Northern Shovelers were at Little Pond in Litchfield on June 17 (MD). A male Long-tailed Duck lingered at Stratford Point, Stratford June 21-July 28 (FM), and several others were scattered along the western coast in June. An American Coot continued at Beaver Pond Park in New Haven to at least June 17 (WB). A Black-necked Stilt, found at the end of the spring season, was still present June 1 at Barn Island WMA in Stonington (CE, SZ et al.). Connecticut's first Gull-



This Gull-billed Tern gulps down a small crab during a visit to Milford Point on June 4. (Frank Mantlik)



This adult male Dickcissel was one of a group of this species involved in breeding activity in Suffield throughout the season. (Mark Szantyr)

billed Tern since 2019 appeared on June 4 at Milford Point (GA, FM). Two Caspian Terns were at Sandy Point in West Haven on June 22 (MA), and two were at Long Beach in Stratford two days later (FM). A Cattle Egret was found on June 4 at an athletic field in Danbury (EB).

Two Wilson's Storm-Petrels made it into the east end of Long Island Sound by July 24 (NB, PR, JR). A group of six were reported off Mystic on July 26 (MT, LT). The state's second Roseate Spoonbill was found on July 29 at Wheeler Marsh in Milford (JM); part of a noteworthy movement into the Northeast, at least one individual was seen well into August at various locations. A lone Mississippi Kite was away from known breeding areas on June 30 in Fairfield (CP). Single Red-headed Woodpeckers were reported from at least seven scattered locations throughout the season, without any of the elusive evidence of breeding. Two Red Crossbills were picking gravel on a road in Norfolk on June 27 (SH). A Yellow-headed Blackbird made one of its occasional appearances on June 13 in Fairfield (KB). A single Dickcissel was at Flirt Hill in Redding on July 2 (JN). The first Blue Grosbeak of the fall wandered north to Burying Hill Beach in Westport on July 20 (TG).

Breeding Season

A hen Blue-winged Teal with four small ducklings was an exciting find on June 20 in one of the wet potholes on top of the old dump at Windham Airport in North Windham (PR). One was present July 9-19 at McKinney NWR in Stratford (FM, et al.). Green-winged Teal in potential breeding habitat included two on June 22 at Milford Point (FM); an adult male on June 10 in West Simsbury (DB, SG); and one on June 13 at Wimisink Preserve in Sherman (GM). A King Rail was a great find on June 17 in Woodstock (PR). After years with no nesting evidence in the state, three Common Gallinules, including one or two juveniles, were found on July 7 at Hart WMA in Goshen (BD). Several pairs of Black Skimmers attempted nesting at Sandy Point, West Haven, but eventually failed (KG).

A Northern Saw-whet Owl was tooting in Chaplin on June 15 (PR). Two Common Nighthawks, virtually extirpated as breeders, offered a glimmer of hope June 21 over the Quinnipiac River in New Haven (VR). The well-established Mississippi Kite pair in Fairfield County were consistently on the nest by June 4. They were bringing in food by July 4. Another pair continued from late May through June 4 at Exeter Marsh in Lebanon (DR), but breeding was not confirmed.



This flock of six Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks rests at a pond in Woodbury on June 1. (Chris Wood)

A Sedge Wren was territorial at Wyndham Land Trust in Pomfret from June 1 to at least July 3 (AB et al.). Two Pine Siskins were at a feeder in Harwinton on June 24 (DL). An Eastern Meadowlark was a nice mid-state find on June 23 in Wallingford (MB). Three were at the capped Hartford landfill on June 13 (JW). A singing Yellow-breasted Chat was in good habitat in mid-June at Roberts Field in Bristol (JC et al.); another was reported on one day only on June 7 in Kent (Laurie Doss). Although breeding confirmation for Northern Parulas remains scarce, there were about 15 reports during the season. Dickcissels were confirmed as breeders during the season at Suffield WMA, with up to four present June 1 to July 22 (KS, m.ob.).

Exotics

An African Collared-Dove frequented an Orange yard June 16 through the summer (BP).

Observers – George Amato, Mark Aronson, Joe Attwater, Ed Bailey, Kieran Barlow, Melissa Baston, William Batsford, Debbie Bishop, Nick Bonomo, Aaron Bourque, Patrick Comins, John Correia, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Buzz Devine, Mike Doyle, Laurie Doss, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Chris Elphick, Frank Gallo, Kat Gillis, Susan Gowen, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek (GHa), Shelley Harms, Gary Hodge (GHo), Julian Hough, Jay Kaplan, Denise LaPerriere, Chris Loscalzo, Nic Main, Gregory Mandel, Frank Mantlik, James Muller, Tom Murray, Jeremy Nance, John Oshlick, Chris Petherick, Bev Propen, Valerie Richardson, Jason Rieger, Dan Rottino, Phil Rusch, Kris Scully, Steve Spector, John Triana, Lou Truex, Mary Truex, Marianne Vahey, Jonathan Wright-Goodison, Sara Zagorski

Photo Challenge

By Aidan Kiley



Last issue's challenge photo brings us to one of the most challenging genera of North American birds: the Empidonax flycatchers.

There are five species of Empidonax that regularly occur in the state: Willow, Alder, Least, Yellow-bellied and Acadian.

The two most distinctive of the five can be ruled out quite easily. The most colorful empid, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, shows a dark green throat that does not contrast with the face, and a very deep green back as well as a quite compact shape. The quiz bird shows a contrasting white throat, light olive green and dark brownish back and a very slightly elongated shape, ruling out Yellow-bellied.

Forest-breeding Acadian Flycatcher is best known for its extremely long primary projection. This bird shows short to medium primary projection, much shorter than Acadian, so we do not need to consider that species in any more depth.

Now, by process of elimination, we are left with Willow, Alder and Least. Willow and Alder are best separated by voice but also have valuable visual characteristics that are often overlooked. Willow Flycatchers tend to be rather brown, a bit elongated, and drab. Other Willow traits are a peak or "crest" of the head, presence of cold gray tones, and incomplete to minimal eyering. The quiz photo shows a rounded head, no dull brown or gray tones on the back, moderately strong wingbars, a complete

eyering, and a generally compact shape. All taken into consideration together, rule out Willow Flycatcher.

As this bird does not suggest western rarity in any way, the remaining options are Least and Alder.

Alder vs Willow is a very challenging visual identification, but Alder vs Least is not to be overlooked. Sometimes Willow can be eliminated, but greenish empids with an eyering present a challenge between Least and Alder.

Least Flycatcher is the smallest of the empids, and notably shows a complete, wide eyering, small, round head, short primary projection, brownish white to pure white wingbars, long, narrow tail and an elongated shape.

Some of these characteristics are met by our bird, but this bird's larger head, fairly narrow eyering, very wide and short tail, wingbars and tertial edging that are contrasting but not very bold or pure white, heavy bill, and compact shape indicate that this is an Alder Flycatcher. The tail width and shape and heavy bill are the two most useful features to separate this bird from Least. The primary projection appears quite short in this photo, but more accurately in the other photo provided, which gives a better angle. Using all of these field marks, we have successfully eliminated all other contenders and confirmed Alder.

This Alder Flycatcher was photographed on Sept. 25, 2021 at Greenwich Point Park by Richard Chmielecki.

Aidan Kiley of Fairfield is an avid birder, eBirder and Fairfield University student.



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 42, No 1, 2021

- 1** **Flying Kites: The Mississippi Kite in Connecticut**
Chris Loscalzo
- 12** **Scavengers in Connecticut**
Joseph Belanger
- 18** **Connecticut Field Notes**
Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik
- 23** **Photo Challenge**
Aidan Kiley