



The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association



July 2021

New to Connecticut:

Pacific Golden Plover, Stratford

Common Ringed Plover, Madison

Townsend's Warbler, Wethersfield

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ON THE COVER

Ross's Gull

Although Connecticut added three new species to the state list in 2020, the bird that caused the most excitement was the Ross's Gull that paid a one-day visit to Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. The state's second, and first since 1984, was captured in flight by Ed Haesche, whose photo graces our cover.

New to Connecticut: Pacific Golden-Plover

By Frank Mantlik



The first Pacific Golden-Plover at Sikorsky Airport in Stratford. (Bruce Finnan)

On October 29, 2020, I discovered Connecticut's first Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) at Sikorsky Memorial Airport in Stratford. The weather was miserably stormy, with windswept heavy rain and northeast winds at 15-25 mph. I had been searching the area by car for possible rare birds brought in by the storm. This rarity was among a scattered mixed flock of shorebirds that were present on the grassy areas and runways: 51 Black-bellied Plovers, 27 Killdeer, 5 Dunlin, and a Hudsonian Godwit (also quite rare in CT). This was an adult plover, noted by its retained (but molting) breeding plumage of black on the breast and belly, and the golden spangles on the upper parts.

Initially I was uncertain as to the species of Golden-Plover, but assumed it was a very late American Golden-Plover. Knowing photos could help in the identification, I managed to obtain a few images, despite the deplorable conditions. (I attempted to shelter myself, camera, and scope with an umbrella). I texted the best image to colleagues, and almost instantly NY birder Doug Gochfeld responded "Pacific"? Julian Hough and Nick Bonomo also thought it looked good for Pacific, and they were soon en route to the airport. I had to run an errand for an hour, and returned around 5 pm to find a small, excited mob of rain-soaked birders scoping and studying the plover, which was mostly distant. I showed Julian my photos obtained earlier. He was convinced on the ID. Additional birders arrived. It flew once or twice, but was visible until dark about 6 pm.

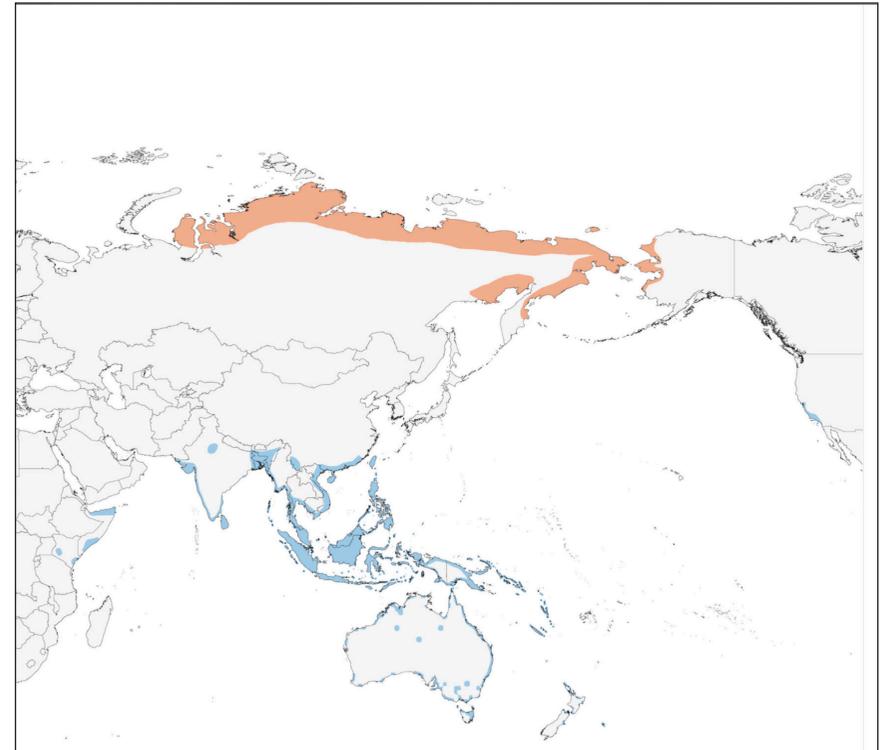
It was a large chunky plover, though noticeably (15%) smaller than the many adjacent immature Black-bellied Plovers. It was much darker with retained black splotches on breast and belly, indicating an adult bird. Many of the features that indicated this was a Pacific Golden-Plover were structural. Compared to American Golden-Plover, it had a slightly larger and longer bill, a shorter neck, shorter wings that barely extended beyond the tail (at rest), and longer legs. Photos showed relatively long tertials that almost reached the tail tip. Plumage-wise, this molting adult had obvious mottled black (and white) splotches on its neck, breast and belly, and apparently extending to the under tail. It had a dark crown and a dark line extending behind the eye and downward, both contrasted by a thin whitish supercilium that continued to the nape and then posteriorly down along the flanks. The cheek below its black eyes had a small whitish patch. The back and mantle were quite dark brownish with much spotting and spangling of white, gold, and black spots. The upper tail had fairly evenly spaced white and black barring. It differed from European Golden-Plover by having longer legs, and grayish under wings instead of white.

The bird mostly stood still or walked slowly around the grassy areas next to an airport runway, foraging along with the adjacent other shorebirds. Given the bad weather, there were virtually no airplanes taking off or landing. The plover flew a couple of times, usually short distances, and was always relocated. Patrick Comins obtained a poor photo of the under wing, showing the gray color. Once it landed briefly on the paved runway, allowing its long legs to be seen. I never heard the bird vocalize.

At first light the next morning (10/30), still with cold rain and snow and wind (hypothermia conditions), a large crowd and I relocated both the Plover and the Godwit. Many of us took additional photos. The bird remained all day to the delight of many.



The state's first Pacific Golden-Plover (right) with a Black-bellied Plover. (Frank Mantlik)



Pacific Golden-Plover breeding range (red) and wintering range (blue).

With improving weather on 10/31, only a few of many searchers reported seeing it in the morning.

Pacific Golden-Plover is a species that breeds on the arctic tundra of western Alaska and northern Siberia, Russia. It is highly migratory, typically involving extensive non-stop transoceanic flights. The species has an immense wintering range that includes coastal California, much of the insular Pacific to Australia, southeast Asia, India, and northeast Africa.

How did this Pacific Golden-Plover get to CT? We know that the species is a strong flier, with a developing pattern of vagrancy in the eastern U.S. I assume it got associated with a migrating flock of Black-bellied Plovers (and one Hudsonian Godwit) and flew east with them. The flock then got grounded along the CT coast by the stormy weather. As soon as the weather conditions improved on 10/31, the flock resumed their migration southward. But not before this first state record was enjoyed by dozens of shivering birders.

ebird Pacific Golden-Plover records in the Eastern USA

Maine (1): collected Scarborough Sept 11, 1911.

Massachusetts (4): Plum Is. 4/21/2002-5/5/2020; Plymouth Beach 7/20/2013; Monomoy 7/25/2019; Esther Is. 8/26/2020.

New York (1): Mecox Bay, L.I. 9/1/2003.

New Jersey (1): Cumberland County 9/4/2001-9/16/2001. Plus one Tuckerton (Ocean County) 5/15/2021-5/28/2021.

Pennsylvania (1): Dauphin 7/16/2020.

Delaware (1): Bombay Hook 7/25/1989.

North Carolina (1-2): Hatteras 7/30/2019; 7/6/2020-7/20/2020 (same bird returned?).

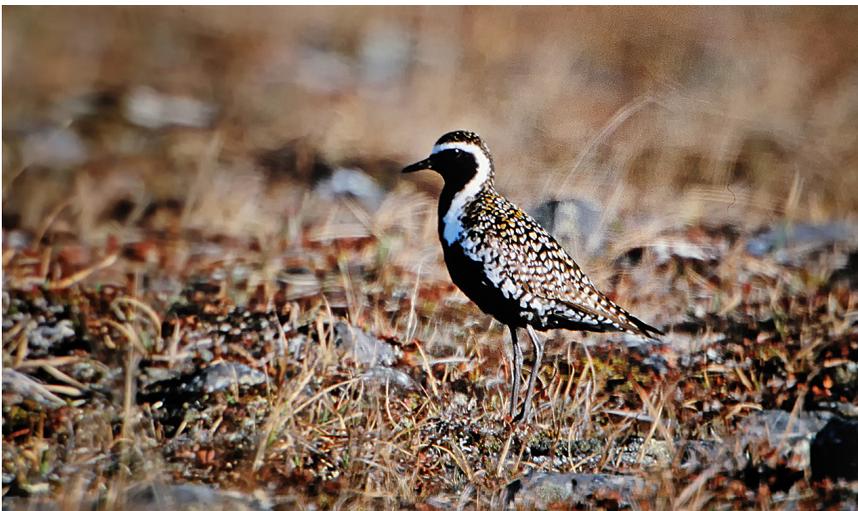
Florida (2-3): Palm Beach County 4/9/2016-4/18/2016; Sem-Chi 1/17/2020-1/30/2020; possibly same bird farther east Palm Beach County 2/19/2020-3/23/2020.

Citations

Birds of the World (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology): Pacific Golden-Plover (O.W. Johnson, P.G. Connors, P. Pyle), Version 1.1, 4/15/2021.

Frank W. Mantlik, Stratford, mantlik@sbcglobal.net

Editor's Note: *Although the Stratford bird occurred later than expected, it still retained a decent amount of tell-tale worn alternate plumage. With an increase in East Coast records in the last decade, there is a pattern of occurrences emerging for Pacific Golden-Plover that spans an earlier window from July-August. Observers of any Golden-Plover, particularly in early summer, should seriously consider Pacific rather than the expected American Golden-Plover, a species perhaps equally unusual at this time of year*



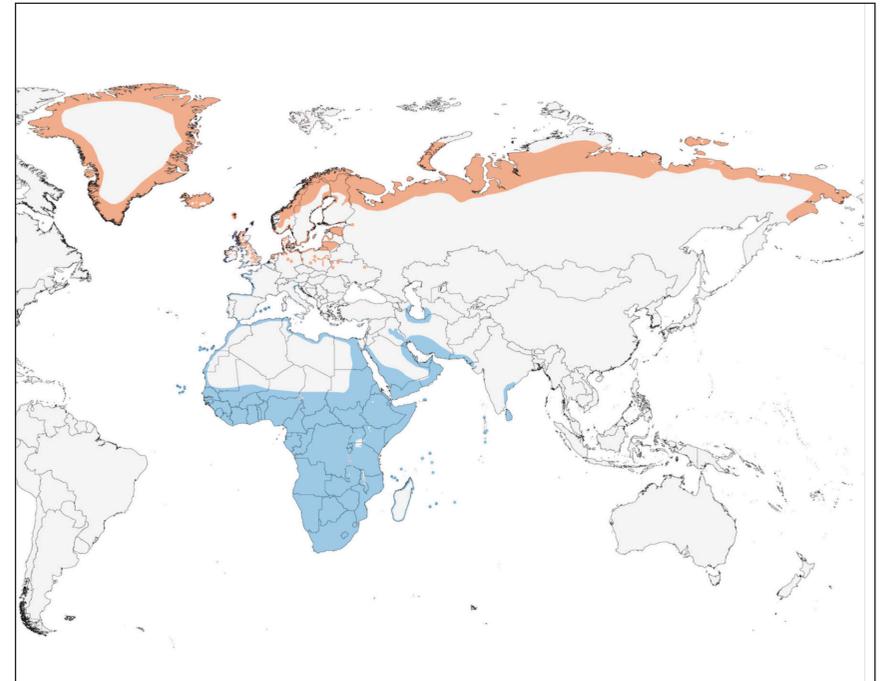
Pacific Golden Plover, Alaska June 2002. A white stripe snaking along the flanks on a summer bird should set alarm bells ringing. (Paul Fusco)

New to Connecticut: Common Ringed Plover

By Nick Bonomo

Dusk was approaching as I stood atop the observation deck on Cedar Island at Hammonasset Beach State Park, the site of so many first state records over the years. I had spent the entire day inside the park to that point. Early October is a time of great bird diversity in southern New England, as peak warbler and thrush migration overlaps with the first solid push of sparrows and waterfowl into the region. Marsh birds had not yet been frozen out, and shorebirds were still passing through in decent numbers. I had tallied a surprising 122 species since my 5:00 a.m. arrival that was punctuated by the most overwhelming thrush descent I have ever heard. Despite the staggering numbers of nocturnal migrants that were calling in the dark that morning, there was no fallout on the ground that day. Still, with modest numbers of birds present, the varied habitats at Hammonasset combined with the friendly date of Oct. 2 to produced an impressive list of birds.

At 6:38 p.m., while counting nighthawks bounding through the sky to the west, I heard a mournful “pooo-YIP” not far behind me, which immediately recalled



Common Ringed Plover breeding range (red) and wintering range (blue).

Common Ringed Plover, the Eurasian counterpart to Semipalmated Plover that has recently been documented several times in our region, though not yet in Connecticut. I turned around to see a lone Semipalmated-like plover flying low over the marsh. The bird called a second time, once again giving the classic flight call of Common Ringed Plover. Common Ringed and our Semipalmated Plover are very difficult to separate visually from one another, though experienced shorebirders will be able to do so with excellent views and/or photos. Its call note is perhaps the easiest way to quickly identify the species, and my prior field experience of hearing them in Europe and Africa solidified my confidence in making the identification, especially having reinforced that familiarity with audio study in preparation for a local encounter.

I watched the bird continue its flight path to where the marsh meets the muddy flats at their interface with Long Island Sound, and it dropped behind a large mat of Spartina grass, now out of view. It landed far enough away that visual confirmation of identification would likely not have been possible. Light was beginning to fall, the park was closing, and I was running out of time to document the record. I started my phone's voice recorder while I waited for the bird to reappear, but it neither called again nor walked back into view.

Equal parts thrilled at the encounter and frustrated by the lack of documentation, I was resigned to head home, share the sighting with the community, and hope that it would be relocated among the many Semipalmated Plovers the following day. Several birders descended on the park the next morning, but there was no sign of the bird despite having located a flock of 24 juvenile Semipalmated Plovers that should have held the bird if it was still around. The intervening night's excellent migration conditions probably did not help to keep it around.

I submitted the report to the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut, which accepted the record to the State List with the notation that it is a Heard Record Only. Here's hoping the next one will cooperate for many to enjoy!

ebird Common Ringed Plover records in New England and New York.

Maine (1): Seal Island Sept 15-19, 2020.

Massachusetts (7): Plum Is. May 20-23 2013, Sept 13-15 2019; Bristol County Sept. 11-12 2017; Monomoy Sept. 5 1990, Sept. 11 2010, Aug. 19 2018 and Sept. 2 2018.

New York (1): Aug. 24 2014.

Nick Bonomo, Wallingford, nbonomo@gmail.com

New to Connecticut: Townsend's Warbler

By Paul Desjardins and John Oshlick



The first Townsend's Warbler at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Wethersfield. (Bruce Finnan)

On Friday April 17, 2020 I decided to visit Hammonasset State Park but on the way there I thought I should visit Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hartford/Wethersfield in hopes of beating my early date for Black And White Warbler which had stood since April 19, 1964. I struck out on the Black And White but instead found a Townsend's Warbler which was a first for Connecticut!

I had always hoped to find a first state record for Connecticut, and after 61 years of birding it finally happened! I was frustrated that the species had never been seen in our state despite records for all of the surrounding states. I myself had seen it in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The only problem was I saw my Connecticut bird for all of 20 seconds or so and then it was gone in a flash. I tried to relocate it to no avail. I then got the word out, and within the hour birders started showing up to search for it. Finally it was relocated.

Nice, except no one had a camera for verification. Then Russ Smiley showed up with his camera and took photos of it. What a relief that the record now stood on solid ground. The next day, Saturday, offered dismal weather, but Sunday was a bright, beautiful day and scores of birders were able to see and photograph it. I am so thankful it was not a “one day wonder.”

Paul Desjardins, Windsor Locks, paul.desjardins@gmail.com

And Then There Were Two

Paul Desjardins’ amazing spring find proved that a Townsend’s Warbler can be found in Connecticut, and of course the fall is the best time to look.

Monday, Oct. 26th seemed like a good day to look for migrants, and social media posts earlier in the morning hinted that birds were moving. I finished an all night shift at work and started birding at around 10:30 a.m. I figured that I would try to make the most of what morning I had left. I found a few migrants at East Shore Park in New Haven. I then headed to nearby Nathan Hale Park, an excellent birding spot. It sits on New Haven Harbor with East Shore to the north and Lighthouse Point to the south. Given the excellent birds found at those surrounding sites I have always felt that this spot could produce good birds if it was birded enough.

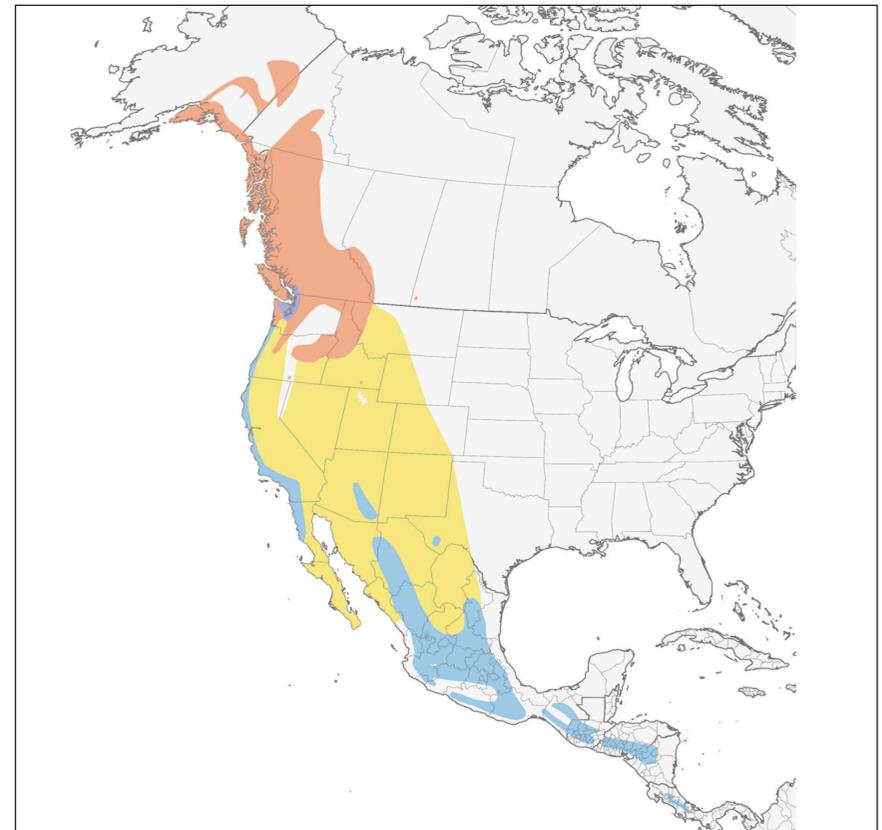
I was standing in the parking lot counting the gulls on the shore for my E-bird list when I thought I heard a chip behind me. I turned around and spotted a bright



The state's second Townsend's Warbler was found in New Haven. (John Oshlick)

yellow bird low in one of the Black Pines that separate the parking lot from the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve building. I was stunned to find that the bird was a Townsend’s Warbler! I snapped a few photos before the bird flew across Woodward Avenue and disappeared. I was able to get the word out and was soon joined by a group of birders, and we were able to relocate the bird in the tall spruces around the nearby picnic pavilion. Fortunately the bird remained there for the rest of the day and part of the next, allowing many more people to enjoy the bird. With two in a matter of six months, let us hope that Townsend’s Warblers continue to visit Connecticut a bit more often in the future.

John Oshlick, Bethany, john.oshlic@gmail.com



Townsend's Warbler breeding range (red), on migration (yellow) and wintering range (blue).

The 2020 Summer Bird Count

By Patrick Comins, Tom Robben and Chris Wood



Despite a long-term decline in most scrub land species, Field Sparrows shattered an all-time high dating to 1992. (Bruce Finnan)

Note: Any evidence of nesting by state-endangered (E), threatened (T) or special concern (SC) species should be reported to the COA Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) Project. This will ensure that the best available information can be taken into account in land-use decisions. The taxonomic order will be updated next year, so that the 2021 SBC will be consistent with the latest AOS checklist.

Introduction

The Summer Bird Count (SBC) is our oldest and largest inventory of breeding birds in Connecticut. This effort is now in its 29th year and helps us to sample the changing status of breeding birds in the state and provide insight into the dynamic nature of the distribution and status of our breeding birds. As was true in the last two years, this year's effort was especially important as it coincided with the Connecticut Bird

Atlas project. Many observers collected data for the atlas project alongside their SBC data. As the results emerge from the atlas effort it will be interesting to see how well our SBC data captured the range expansions and contractions that the new atlas will undoubtedly show. The preliminary results indicate that our SBC data has detected a lot of the trends that are becoming apparent in comparing the results of the current atlas with historical results. This year was particularly challenging because of the social distancing requirements of COVID. Thank you for all of your efforts to track the breeding birds of Connecticut, especially in this difficult year!

Results

This year 176 count-day species were recorded. This is a little below average (96%) [Note: averages in this article refer to the average of the previous ten years' data, respectively] and eight fewer than the last year's count.

Greenwich/Stamford had the most species with 133 and Hartford the fewest with 110. There were 267 observers, which was the second highest total since 2015 in 172 parties. The number of parties was at the highest ever, likely because of the social distancing protocols of COVID and 47 more than last year. Volunteers tallied 1506.05 party hours, with 1440.05 being daylight hours and 60 night hours; about 110% average for party hours and day party hours; well above average night hours but down by 17 hours over last year's all-time high for that category.

There were 105,176 individual birds recorded, which is 10,110 above last year's total and just about average. The ten most abundant species were, in descending order: **American Robin** (1), **Common Grackle** (5), **Red-winged Blackbird** (3), **European Starling** (4), **Gray Catbird** (2), **House Sparrow** (7), **Song Sparrow** (10), **Canada Goose** (9), **American Goldfinch** (12), and **Red-eyed Vireo** (6). Last year's ranking is given in parenthesis. This is a very similar list to last year with **American Goldfinch** replacing **Cedar Waxwing** (14th this year). For the last two years **Cedar Waxwing**

You can find the 2020 data table showing all SBC species and numbers at the website of the COA:

SBC 2020 data can be viewed at;
<https://www.ctbirding.org/birds-birding/ct-bird-count-data/>

or

Scan the QR code with an app-enabled smartphone





Canada Warblers appear to be retreating from their breeding areas in the northern bogs, falling to 51% of their 10-year average. (Julian Hough)

and **American Goldfinch** have been replacing each other on the otherwise similar list.

Twelve species were represented by a single individual: **Greater Scaup**, **Bufflehead**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Common Loon** (SC), **Pied-billed Grebe** (E), **Horned Grebe**, **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (SC), **Swainson's Thrush**, **Prothonotary Warbler**, **Kentucky Warbler**, and **White-throated Sparrow**.

Non-nesting Species

There were 18 species recorded on the count days that do not regularly breed in Connecticut and can be considered either late migrants or non-nesting visitors. Underlined species could potentially nest in Connecticut, but are assumed to be non-breeders unless specific evidence of breeding was submitted: **Brant**, **Greater Scaup**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Bufflehead**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Horned Grebe**, **Black-bellied Plover**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Laughing Gull**, **Ring-billed Gull**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Prothonotary Warbler**, **Blackpoll Warbler**, and **White-throated Sparrow**.

Noteworthy among these: Greenwich/Stamford's **Common Goldeneye** hasn't been recorded statewide since 2015 and is only the third occurrence since 2011. New Haven had two (!) **Horned Grebes**, the first since 2014 and also the third occurrence since 2011. Their two **Sanderlings** were the fourth occurrence since 2011 and the **White-rumped Sandpiper** was the sixth record since 2010 and the first since 2017.

Greenwich/Stamford had a **Prothonotary Warbler**, only the second SBC record ever, with the only other having been in 2003. This species could potentially nest, but it is being treated as a non-nesting vagrant in the absence of further information.

Notable Nesting Species

Woodbury/Roxbury and Storrs had **Northern Bobwhites**, though they likely represent stocked individuals, not a naturally breeding population. A similar situation exists with Hartford's count period **Ring-necked Pheasant**. Three **Ruffed Grouse** were recorded in Barkhamsted, a species that is getting to be very difficult to find. Litchfield Hills had a **Common Loon** (SC), which could have been a late migrant or could be nesting in this northern count area. Litchfield Hills also had the only **Pied-billed Grebe** (E), one of our rarest and most endangered nesting species. Hartford, New Milford/Pawling and Litchfield Hills all recorded **Least Bitterns** (T), a rare and threatened nesting species. **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** (SC) are fairly common in some parts of the state, but can be difficult to record within the SBC territories and were recorded in Greenwich/Stamford and New Haven. A similar situation exists with **Glossy Ibis** (SC), of which 15 were recorded by New Haven. The state endangered **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (E) was recorded by Litchfield Hills (6!), Hartford, New Milford/Pawling and especially of note in Greenwich/Stamford as they have become quite uncommon nesters in the southern part of the state.

New Milford/Pawling and Litchfield Hills contributed a combined four **Soras**. Greenwich/Stamford had a count period **Black Skimmer**, and New Haven had four which may have been attempting to nest in the area. Sharp observers in Litchfield Hills nabbed a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (SC), one of Connecticut's most elusive and secretive nesting species (which could nest in any of the territories in the state). A total of eight **White-eyed Vireos** were recorded in various count areas. Litchfield Hills and New Milford/Pawling found **Golden-crowned Kinglets**. Check your local spruce stands for their high pitched, quiet, chickadee-call-like song. Woodbury/Roxbury scored with a **Kentucky Warbler**, the second year in a row we found one. Last year's was in the New Haven area. Nine **Northern Parulas** (SC) were recorded across most of the northern count areas. Any June record should be carefully examined for evidence of nesting by this previously extirpated species. Storrs hit the **Grasshopper Sparrow** (E) jackpot with 14! Grasshopper Sparrows were missed entirely in 2019. Two each of **Seaside** (T) and **Saltmarsh Sparrows** (SC) were recorded in New Haven. Though both of these species are more abundant nesters than these results would indicate, they are difficult to find within any of our count areas.

Species Recorded in Above Average Numbers

A whopping 18 species recorded at least ten-year high counts in 2020. Perhaps this was a result of smaller groups of participants being able to cover more territory than our usual method of larger and fewer groups. The species are discussed in descending

order of their deviation from the ten-year average. **Carolina Wrens** (306%) shattered their all-time high, more than doubling the previous record of 502 from 2010 with 1070 recorded, approximately 1/3 of this total came from Greenwich/Stamford with 313. **Hooded Merganser** (208%) totaled a 10-year high of 64, but well off the all-time high count of 72 in 2004. Waterfowl numbers can fluctuate wildly from year to year depending on the numbers of ducklings observed. **Clapper Rails** (202%) were at a 10-year high with 19, just short of their all-time high of 21 in 2002. **Peregrine Falcons** (T) (185%) continue to put in a good showing with a new all-time high count of 17, eclipsing last year's record of 12. **Field Sparrow** (179%) shattered the all-time high of 212 from 1992 with 238. A great showing for a species that had been chronically in the declining species column and well above the modern low count of 77 in 2011. As has been the case for several years, **Bald Eagles** (T) (176%) put in a new all-time high of 76, eclipsing last year's record of 60. **Red-shouldered Hawk** (156%) is another species that appears to be on an upswing, with a new all-time high of 177, compared to last year's record total of 154. **Wood Duck** (149%) also came in at a new all-time high of 735, beating the previous high of 671 in 2016. As with the Hooded Mergansers the number of Wood Ducks can also vary widely from year to year based on how many chicks are found. **Osprey** (138%) also continue their upswing with a new all-time high count of 229, beating the former record of 194 in 2018.

Barred Owls (136%) seem to be doing well, eclipsing the former all-time high of 139 in 2017 with 152. A new all-time high of 182, is little surprise for **Common Raven** (135%), beating the count of 180 in 2018. **Red-tailed Hawks** (127%) put in a new all-time high of 375, well above the old high count of 360 in 2012. **House Finch** (126%) had a good showing with a new 10-year high of 1248, well above the 1128 from 2018, but well below the pre eye disease record of 3510 in 1993. **Song Sparrow** (118%) came in at a new all-time high of 3461, well above the previous high from 2016 of 3213. The 381 **Great Blue Herons** (117%) beat the previous all-time high of 374 in 2017.



American Goldfinch joined the list of 10 most abundant species for the 2020 Summer Bird Count, bumping Cedar Waxwing down to 14th. (Mark Szantyr)

For non-nesting species, the four **Northern Bobwhites** (4000%) recorded by Storrs and Woodbury Roxbury were the first ones recorded since 2014, although they were found on count period in 2018. This is a 10-year high count, but still well off of the all-time high of 19 in 1992. They are considered extirpated from the state as nesters and only are recorded as stocked birds or escapees. The three **Dunlin** (300%) tied their 10-year high from 2017, although well off their high count of 11 in 2007. Six **Long-tailed Ducks** (273%) tied their all-time high count from 2012 and seven **Blackpoll Warblers** (219%) tied 2014 for a 10-year high, but were well under their all-time high of 11 in 1996 and 2002.

Species Recorded in Below Average Numbers

Many species turned in poor performances, with 22 species coming in at or below recent lows, some of which we haven't seen since the earliest statewide counts. Many of these are northern species that are near the southern limit of their breeding range in Connecticut. We will continue to watch these species to see if this is indicative of a trend. **Gadwall** (0%) was missed for only the third time since 2011, with a count period sighting in 2018. **Northern Goshawk** (T) (0%) was missed this year, having been recorded in about half of the previous 10 counts. **Upland Sandpipers** (E) (0%) were also missed, for the third year in a row. **Common Nighthawk** (E) (0%) was missed for the first time since a count period record for 1991 and altogether since 1990 and **Eastern Whip-poor-Will** (SC) (0%) was missed for the fourth time since the 1990's. Only one **Common Loon** (SC) (19%) was found, tying the 10-year



Black-throated Blue Warblers joined other songbirds with northern affinity in showing a continuing decline. (Bruce Finnan)

low from 2012. There was also one recorded during count period in Greenwich/Stamford. Most Common Loons recorded on SBC are just lingering migrants, as was certainly the case for the Greenwich/Stamford bird. The 17 **Canada Warblers** (44%) represents a record low since the start of statewide SBCs in 1992, eclipsing the former low of 19 in 2018. This is a bird that appears to be withdrawing from Connecticut as a nesting species. Only 29 **Northern Waterthrushes** (48%) were recorded, a ten-year low, but well above the 22 recorded in 1994 and 2004 and 14 and 8 respectively in 1992/93. The ten **Cerulean Warblers** (SC) (51%) was a ten-year low and the lowest since the nine recorded in 2009. Gypsy moth infestations may have taken their toll on this species in recent years in Connecticut. The 48 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (54%) were the fewest since 1992 when there were only 31. Only 58 **Alder Flycatchers** (SC) (54%) were observed, the fewest since 1996 when the total was also 58. This may be an anomaly as in 2019, a total of 118 were recorded. **Dark-eyed Junco** (58%), came in at a new ten-year low of 34, the lowest since 2004 when there were 29. **Swamp Sparrows** (58%) at 189 were at the lowest number since 1993 when there were 140. The 129 **Black-throated Blue Warblers** (61%) was the lowest total since 1997 when there were 120. **Purple Finch** (61%) just beat out 2018 by one for the new ten-year low of 75, the lowest total since 1993's 66.

Black-throated Green Warbler (63%) continues the trend of low numbers for our northern breeders with a new ten-year low of 185, the lowest since 1993 when we had only 103. Likewise for **Hermit Thrush** (63%), with a new ten-year low of 125, the lowest total since 1997's 109. **Magnolia Warbler** (76%) tied 2019's ten-year low of 72 the lowest number since the 67 of 1999. **Black-and-White Warbler** (76%) was significantly below the previous ten-year low of 488 of 2018 with 431, the lowest total since there were 417 in 2006.

Wild Turkey (80%), with 372 was the lowest total since the 335 in 1997. **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** (81%) were just under the ten-year low of 200 from 2011 with 198, which was the lowest number since the 157 in 2008. **American Redstarts** (81%) came in at 1170, the lowest amount since 2008 when there were 1131. At 1707, **Yellow Warblers** (81%) were at the lowest level since 1993, which saw 1593. With 396 **Pine Warblers** (85%) it was the lowest total since 2001 when there were 377. **Chestnut-sided Warblers** (85%) at 519 was the lowest level since 1994's count of 375.

As for non-nesting species, **Greater Yellowlegs** (0%) was missed on the count for the first time since 2009. Only 78 **Ring-billed Gulls** (35%) were recorded, the fewest recorded since statewide SBCs began.

We will be keeping an eye on future counts of these species to see if any of these results are indicative of a trend of concern. Worth special mention again are the wading birds which have been in apparent decline on the SBC for several years.



While wading birds in general remain an area of concern, Green Herons were a somewhat surprising success story for the count. (Julian Hough)

Though none of them had 10-year lows, we will continue to watch **Great Egret** (T) (61%), **Snowy Egret** (T) (85%), **Black-crowned Night Heron** (37%), and **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** (SC) (54%). **Green Herons** (106%) were a bright spot, as was the record high count of **Great Blue Heron** (117%). Species coming in at <50% of their ten-year average, but not at ten-year lows included: **Black-crowned Night-Heron** (37%) and **Northern Mockingbird** (48%).

Thank you

On behalf of the Connecticut Ornithological Association and the entire birding community, we would like to thank all of the volunteer observers, captains and compilers for all of your hard work. The data that you provide is critical for understanding our summer bird abundance and distribution! A special thank you goes out to Joe Zeranski, the father of Connecticut's Summer Bird Count for his leadership and all he has done over the years to coordinate, promote and report about the Count. This and future articles are dedicated to Joe's memory. Thank you for all you have done for the birds and birding in Connecticut!

Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik



This male Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco made a long stay at a feeder in Chaplin. (Mark Szantyr)

December 1, 2020 – February 29, 2021

A major flight of Snow Geese on Dec. 15 found up to 500 passing over Deer Pond Farm in Sherman (SMr), and 84 were over White Memorial Conservation Center in Litchfield (CHa). A **Black Brant** was a good find on Dec. 1 in West Haven (AL); this was the sixth state record of this western form. Two Tundra Swans were in Sterling on Jan. 10-11 (DP), and two were present on the Farmington River in Farmington from Feb. 6 through the end of the period (TM, m.ob.). Up to three Blue-winged Teal were at Konold's Pond in Woodbridge on Dec. 13-16 (FG et al.). A wintering male Eurasian Wigeon was at 14-acre Pond in Norwalk (m.ob.). Females were at Oak Lawn Cemetery in Fairfield Dec. 3-12 (FM), and at Law High School pond in Milford Dec. 4 (SS). The high counts for Redheads, always scarce and unpredictable, were nine at Coventry Lake on Dec. 28 (DM) and eight on Jan. 21 at Grass Island Natural Area in Greenwich (CEh). A female **Tufted Duck** was found on Dec. 22 at Captain's Cove, Bridgeport (AK et al.) and was seen in the area through season's end. A hybrid assessed to be a Lesser Scaup X Ring-necked Duck was in Bridgeport on Feb. 5 (AK).

A female King Eider was at Tuxis I., Madison, on Dec. 16 (FM et al.); a flyby male was seen on Jan. 3 in Stamford (FG), and a female found Feb. 5 at Russian Beach, Stratford, was present also at nearby Stratford Point through the end of the period (FM, m.ob.). A female **Harlequin Duck**, found at Linden Shore, Branford, on Jan. 15 (FG), was last reported Feb. 16 (FM). A Long-tailed Duck was an unusual mid-winter inland find on Jan. 18 at Saville Dam in Barkhamsted (FZ). Single Barrow's Goldeneyes were reported from Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) on Jan. 1 only (JF) and on multiple dates in Groton (DM et al.), at Seaside Park in Bridgeport Jan. 3-15 (JN, m.ob.), and in the Connecticut River at Windsor Locks/Enfield Jan. 2-Feb. 14 (PDe, JW et al.). A male and a female were at Noank Jan. 2-3 (JRe). A hybrid was photographed at Seaside Park in Bridgeport on Jan. 14 (JN). The state's two premier places for Common Merganser were productive as usual, with 3500 on Lake Waramaug in New Preston (RB) and 1500 on Bantam Lake in Litchfield (MD), both on Jan. 8.

An Eared Grebe was photographed at Barkhamsted Reservoir Jan. 2 (GB). A Ruby-throated Hummingbird, seldom confirmed in winter, was at a Guilford feeder on Dec. 13 (NB,SD). Sandhill Cranes, now expected at any season, included one on Dec 8 at HBSP (CLi) and a flock of five flying over a backyard in Stratford on Dec. 16 (FM). An American Oystercatcher lingered to Dec. 7 at Eastern Point, Groton (LF). Up to two Spotted Sandpipers remained to Dec.27 at Burying Hill Beach in Westport (TG et al.). Even more unexpected was one, possibly one of the Westport birds, at Ash Creek in Fairfield on Jan. 24 (TR et al.). A major flurry of Razorbills in late December peaked at 27 on Dec. 29 at Stonington Point (PR). A storm-blown **Dovekie** found in a North Branford yard Dec 26 was assessed by a rehabber and later released at HBSP (CCu). A **Thick-billed Murre** was a good find Jan. 9 at Avery Point in Groton (JT). However, it was eclipsed by a **Black Guillemot**, the state's fourth documented record, found on Jan. 3 at Bluff Point in Groton and present to at least Jan. 18 (SH et al.).

A terrific season for gulls topped out on Jan. 16, when the state's second **Ross's Gull**, and first since 1984, was found at HBSP. The second-cycle bird remained throughout the day, allowing many birders to see this iconic North America rarity (MK, NB, m.ob.). A first-cycle **Mew Gull** of the nominate subspecies was at Green Harbor Beach in New London on Dec. 9 (NB). It was the state's first of that age-class for any subspecies. Added to this stellar array was an adult **California Gull** found on Jan. 3 at Bradley Point in West Haven (JHo et al.) and seen sporadically through the season. A nice mix in Hartford on Jan. 1 included an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull at Riverside Park and at the Murphy Road waste center an adult Glaucous X Herring Gull hybrid, two first-cycle Iceland Gulls and a first-cycle Lesser Black-backed Gull (NB). Glaucous Gulls were remarkably numerous with reports from more than a dozen locations.



First seen on the Hudson River in New York, this imperiled Brown Pelican was captured and taken into rehab on Jan. 27 at a Connecticut River harbor in Essex. (Frank Gallo)

A juvenile Red-throated Loon was a good inland find on Dec 1 at Saugatuck Reservoir in Weston (JN). An immature **Brown Pelican** seen Jan. 26 in Old Saybrook was found in distressed condition the next day on a dock on the Connecticut River in Essex, where state DEEP workers were able to capture it and take it into rehab (FG et al.). The latest Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was seen on Dec. 7 in Stratford (FM). The largest of multiple Black Vulture roosts included 95 on Dec. 9 in Watertown (GHa), 80 in Norwich on Dec. 27 (JBn, PT), and 76 in New Milford on Jan. 3 (ADi). Single Ospreys lingered well into December, with scattered single birds seen almost daily to Dec. 14, when one was reported in Stonington (CD). An anomalous mid-winter report came from New London on Jan. 2 (DC, LW). The formerly endangered Bald Eagle can now fairly be called common, but a careful count of 45 in the Groton Reservoir area on Jan. 2 was noteworthy (Jri, DWr, KT).

Single Snowy Owls were widely reported on the coast, with observations from Dec 8 at Groton-New London Airport (PR), on Dec. 28 at the Farmington waste water treatment plant (fide JSw); on Dec. 29 at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford (GW et al.); on Jan. 1 at Brazos Road in East Haven (CLO et al.); on Jan. 3-6 at Long Beach in Stratford (JN, TB et al.); on Jan. 15-20 around New Haven harbor (JO, FG et al.); on Feb. 15 at Ocean Beach in New London (DH); and on Feb. 20 at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks (KS). Red-headed Woodpeckers were widespread throughout the season, headlined by as many as five at Shingle Mill Pond in Salem (RS, m.ob.). There were up to three at Rose Hill Wildlife Management Area in Ledyard (BA, DP et al.) and singles were reported from at least seven additional locations.

A Northern Shrike found Dec. 21 in Morris remained to at least Feb. 4 (NM, RB m.ob.). One was found on Jan. 23 in Union (PR), and another on Feb. 14 in New Hartford (FZ). The first spring report of Tree Swallow came on Feb. 27 from

Danbury (MP). Up to three Northern Rough-winged Swallows were very late at a waste water treatment plant in New London on Dec. 15-16 (MF, PT et al.). A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was very late Dec. 15 at Silver Sands State Park in Milford (JO).

Purple Finches and Pine Siskins peaked during the fall migration, but the rest of the boreal finches were present in uneven numbers in what ranks as a noteworthy irruption. Evening Grosbeaks were widespread in small numbers, but one flock that at times exceeded 20 was in Union from Dec. 18 through the end of the season (PR m.ob.). As usual, Pine Grosbeaks were sparse and limited to northern areas such as Canaan Mountain in small numbers. A moderate flight of Common Redpolls was of special interest because it carried with it an unusual number of **Hoary Redpolls**. These included long-staying birds at Nod Brook WMA in Avon Jan. 13-31 (GS m.ob.) and Sherwood Island State Park in Westport Feb. 25 to early March (GHo, TG, m.ob.). Red Crossbills were most easily seen at HBSP, where flocks of up to 20+ lingered in Japanese Black Pines during January. White-winged Crossbills were scattered but less easily pinned down.

Six Vesper Sparrows were a significant find on Dec. 19 in North Haven (AL et al.). A Seaside Sparrow was late on Dec. 13 at HBSP (KZ). An adult male **Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco** appeared at a Chaplin feeder on Feb. 3 and remained well into March (PR). Another was present through February at a residence in Bethany (AF). Yellow-breasted Chats were in New London Dec. 10-18 (PR et al.); in a Westport yard Dec. 17 (JT, PL); at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford Dec. 18-19



Evening Grosbeaks, such as this one visiting Woodbury, were part of an irruption of a broad spectrum of northern finches during winter 2020-2021. (Chris S. Wood)

(JA) and again on Jan. 13 (NN); on Spithead Road, Waterford, on Jan. 2 (ADa); and at Bluff Point State Park in Groton on Jan. 2-23 (DM, DP). In addition to many single Baltimore Orioles, mostly at feeders, four wintered at a feeder in Mystic (CBa). An adult male **Bullock's Oriole** found in late November in Hebron was present through the season and well in to March (JM, PR et al.). The winter roost of Boat-tailed Grackles in Stratford/Bridgeport held 28 on Jan. 8 (FG); four were in Clinton on Jan. 19 (RM).

An Ovenbird appeared in snow-covered Jackson Square in New Haven on Dec. 18 (JSm). About 10 Orange-crowned Warblers for the season included two in New London on Dec. 10 (PR). One long-stayer at Mac's Harbor in Stratford was identified as the bright interior West subspecies *orestera* (AK et al.). A Northern Parula was present Dec 1 at the Branford sewer plant (JO et al.); reports through Jan. 17 included two on Dec. 14 (JO). A high count of three Blackpoll Warblers were at Fort Trumbull in New London on Dec. 7 (JA). A dead Cape May Warbler was found on Dec. 20 in Wethersfield (PDe). The winter warbler hot spot was the Norwalk Esplanade, where a Tennessee Warbler, a Cape May Warbler and a Prairie Warbler made it through the season (FM, PL et al.). Also present there were up to three Yellow-rumped Warblers, two Palm Warblers and a Pine Warbler.

An adult male Scarlet Tanager was quite a surprise at a feeder in Wallingford on Dec. 23 (JC). A female Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a feeder in Portland on Dec 16 (ADn). An Indigo Bunting in Westport was one of several interesting finds on Dec. 18 after a snow storm the day before (TG). A Dickcissel visited a feeder in Stamford on Feb. 3 (DWi).

Exotics - A male Mandarin Duck spent late December at a millpond in Norwalk (FM et al).

Observers – Dave Alpeter, Bob Askins, Joe Attwater, Christie Baird (CBa), Glenn Barger, John Bean (JBn), Joe Bear (JBr), Ray Belding, Nick Bonomo, Chris Bosak (CBo), Thera Bowen, Jeffrey Cameron, Dana Campbell, Carolyn Cimino (CCi), Christine Cummings (CCu), Curt Danforth, Anita d'Annunzio (ADn); Andrew Dasinger (ADa), Paul Desjardins (PDe), Angela Dimmitt (ADi), Mike Doyle, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Sara Dzielski, Cynthia Ehlinger (CEh), Chris Elphick (CEL), Mario Farr, Jeff Fengler, Ann Fiske, Larry Flynn, Frank Gallo, Tina Green, Cathy Hagadorn (CHa), Greg Hanisek (GHa), Jim Harris (JHa), Denise Hickey, Susan Hochgraf, Gary Hodge (GHo), Julian Hough (JHo), Chris Howe (CHo), Aidan Kiley, Micky Komara, Cody Limber (CLi), Alex Lin-Moore, Chris Loscalzo (CLO), Preston Lust, Ryan Maclean, Joyce Managerr, Nic Main, Frank Mantlik, Tom Marsan-Ryan, Stefan Martin (SMr), Dave Mathieu, Sean Murtha (SMu), Jeremy Nance, Nicole Niegel, Linda Olsen, John Oshlick, Maureen Patten, Dave Provencher, Tom Raskaukas, James Restivo (JRe), Jason (Rieger (JRi), Phil Rusch, Kris Scully, Russ Smiley, Jackson Smith (JSm), Paul Smith, Gillian Smits, Steve Spector, Jack Swatt (JSw), Pat Tamborra, Jory Teltser, Kevin Thompson, Anthony Vicciarelli, Dorothy Wadlow (DWa), Lisa Wahle, Doug Warner (DWr), John Weeks, Glenn Williams, Dave Winston (DWi), Sara Zagorski, Fran Zygmunt, Kristof Zyskowski.

Photo Challenge

By Jory Teltser



When looking at the pictured bird, the first things that jump out are its posture, structure, and overall coloration. There are no other birds in the picture to compare it to, so size is somewhat difficult to perceive, but we can reasonably conclude that this is likely a smaller-sized bird. Its overall brown coloration, short triangular bill, and horizontal posture while foraging on the ground make this bird a sparrow.

Fall plumaged Indigo Buntings or female Red-winged Blackbirds can sometimes be mistaken for sparrows, but the face patterning, plain breast, and finely streaked back rule out these species. There are several species of sparrow regularly found in Connecticut, but we can start to look at a few regular Connecticut species that look like this individual - small, brown, and nondescript. Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Field Sparrow, House Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and White-crowned Sparrow. That's a lot of sparrows, and those are only the ones that regularly occur in the state!

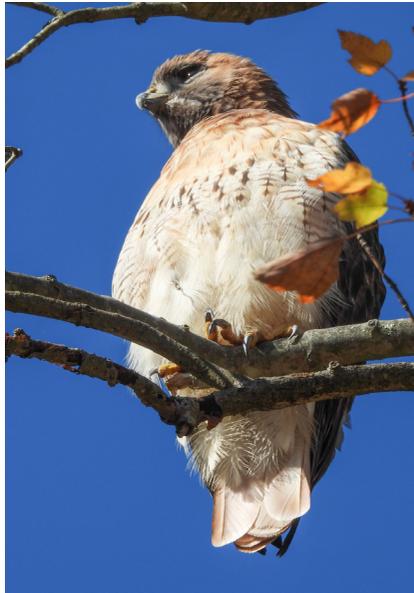
Let's try to get this list down a bit. We can rule out a few of these right off the bat just by a lack of key field marks. This bird appears to have a very plain breast and flanks, ruling out species that have streaking in these areas such as Lincoln's Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and Savannah Sparrow. This bird also lacks a bright white throat (eliminating White-throated Sparrow) and bright rufous wings (ruling out Swamp Sparrow). A young female Junco would lack any wingbars and have more gray tones in the crown and back. Grasshopper Sparrow also lacks any wingbars, and also has a distinct purple nape and yellow lores. House Sparrow

is significantly larger with a grayish bill and more heavily marked wings. A young White-crowned Sparrow would have a plainer face and, like American Tree Sparrow, have a bold rufous crown.

What we are left with are the sparrows found in the genus *Spizella*. There are six species on earth that are in this genus, but of those only three regularly occur in Connecticut: Clay-colored, Field, and Chipping. The bird appears relatively nondescript overall, with little contrast in the face markings and no obvious bright tones to any feather groups or bare parts. The crown is finely marked, and the malar stripe is present but quite dull. Field Sparrow is usually quite beige and warm in coloration, with a distinct eye ring, long tail, and rufous crown, and Chipping Sparrow in the fall typically is very gray overall with dark lores and a gray nape and rump that contrast with the back, tail, and crown.

So is this bird a Clay-colored? Well, something seems a little off. If by now we have ruled out Chipping Sparrow, it's time to take a look at two species that closely resemble it. Both Clay-colored and Brewer's Sparrow superficially resemble fall plumaged Chipping Sparrow, with a few key differences. Clay-colored is much more likely than Brewer's in New England, but we need to consider key field marks that one should look for in Clay-colored - a very prominent white malar stripe, with very neat markings on wings and back. Brewer's Sparrow superficially resembles an extremely dull version of a Clay-colored. And that's what we find. The small pale eye-ring, dull pink bill, finley streaked crown and nape lead to the conclusion that this is, in fact, a Brewer's Sparrow! This individual, Connecticut's first and only Brewer's Sparrow, was photographed by Frank Mantlik on 23 Nov 2019, at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

Jory Teltser of Westport, a student at Oberlin College and Conservatory, was the first to correctly identify it after seeing a photo posted in an eBird checklist.



Next Challenge Photo

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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