

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association



# July 2022

Taking an in depth look at summer birds The long and short of adult dowitchers Arctic Terns as we've never seen them

# **The Connecticut Warbler**

The Journal of the Connecticut Ornithological Association

# The 2021 Summer Bird Count

By Patrick Comins, Tom Robben and Chris Wood

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### **ON THE COVER**

#### Common Nighthhawk

Julian Hough captured the aerial mastery of the Common Nighthawk in his dynamic color photo, but less compelling was the species' dismal breeding outlook documented in the Summer Bird Count analysis.



Chestnut-sided Warblers were among a number of wood warbler species producing substandard statewide numbers. (Chris Wood)

#### Introduction

The Summer Bird Count (SBC) is our oldest and largest inventory of breeding birds in Connecticut. This effort is now in its 30th 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 three 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.

#### Results

This year 179 count-day species were recorded. This is just about average (97%) (Note: averages in this article refer to the average of the previous ten years' data, respectively) and three more than the last year's count. You can find the 2021 data

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table showing all SBC species and numbers at the website of the COA Connecticut Ornithological Association: https://www.ctbirding.org/birds-birding/ct-bird-countdata/ Go to that web page and click on the link called "2021 Summer Bird Count".

Litchfield Hills had the most species with 133 and Hartford the fewest with 105. There were 242 observers, in 131 parties which were the lowest totals since 2017. Volunteers tallied 1262.2 party hours, with 1224.2 being daylight hours and 38 night hours; about 94% of average for party hours and 85% of average for day party hours.

There were 101,806 individual birds recorded, which is 3,370 below last year's total and just about average (97%). The ten most abundant species were, in descending order: American Robin (1), Gray Catbird (5), European Starling (4), Red-winged Blackbird (3), Common Grackle (2), House Sparrow (6), Red-eyed Vireo (10), Canada Goose (8), Song Sparrow (7), and American Goldfinch (9).

Last year's ranking is given in parenthesis. These are the same species as last year in slightly different order.

Twelve species were represented by a single individual: Long-tailed Duck, Blackbellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Nighthawk (E), Olive-sided Flycatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Kentucky Warbler, Palm Warbler, and Evening Grosbeak.

#### **Non-nesting Species**

There were 16 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, Longtailed Duck, Northern Harrier (E), Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Ruddy



Although many warblers were recorded in record low numbers, the sparsely distributed Northern Parula somewhat surprisingly came in at 13, up from recent highs of ten. (Bruce Finnan)



Purple Finches always appear in limited numbers, mostly in the north, but counts in 2021 were the lowest since 2003. (Chris Wood)

Turnstone, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Bonaparte's Gull, Laughing Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Common Nighthawk (E), Olive-sided Flycatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blackpoll Warbler, Palm Warbler and Evening Grosbeak.

Noteworthy among these: New Haven's two Northern Harriers (E) could also represent a nesting attempt, but non-breeders are often noted on the counts. New Haven also scored with two Bonaparte's Gulls, the first SBC record for this species since 2013. Litchfield Hills' Common Nighthawk (E) may be a nesting attempt or more likely a late/early migrant. Woodbury Roxbury had an Olive-sided Flycatcher, the first for SBC since 2015; also quite noteworthy was their Evening Grosbeak, the first since 2010. New Milford/Pawling contributed two super rare non-nesting birds with a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, only the second SBC record ever and the first since 2005 and a Palm Warbler, the first ever recorded on an SBC! Just outside of the count window but certainly noteworthy were six Black-bellied Whistling Ducks seen the week of the Woodbury Roxbury count, but not during count period, which is considered 3 days before and 3 days after the count days.

#### **Notable Nesting Species**

Storrs had six Blue-winged Teal. This is a species that only occasionally nests in Connecticut and this report was of a hen and five chicks, confirmation of breeding for one of our least common nesting species. Common Gallinule (E), although one of the most widespread nesting species in the world, is exceedingly rare as a nester in Connecticut and rare here in general. To have two recorded on the Litchfield Hills Count is quite noteworthy, the third SBC records since 2013. Litchfield Hills also recorded the only Ruffed Grouse of the count with two. Both Barkhamstead and Litchfield Hills recorded Common Loons (SC), which are now nesting in the

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Great Blue Herons countered the downward trend for coastal nesting herons with a record statewide total of 389. (Bruce Finnan)

northwest reaches of the state, but Greenwich/Stamford and New Haven's loons are surely non-nesting visitors. Litchfield Hills also picked up American Bittern (E) and Least Bittern (T) and Hartford added two of the latter. Four Little Blue Herons (SC) would have been noteworthy along the coast, but for New Milford/Pawling they are especially good birds and just the fourth record in the last 10 years statewide. They almost certainly represent non-nesting visitors inland, but this species regularly nests along the coast. New Haven recorded 10 Black Skimmers, a species that has only recently started to nest in the state with regularity. Barkhamsted recorded two Eastern Whip-poor-Wills (SC), a species that is easy to miss and only recorded on six of the past 10 counts. Litchfield Hills came through with the count's only Goldencrowned Kinglets (2), a species that is both rare and difficult to detect in the nesting season. New Milford Pawling recorded Kentucky Warbler for the third year in a row, just across the state line in New York State. Storrs had 11 (!) Grasshopper Sparrows (E) and Greenwich/Stamford added another individual, though the latter may have been a non-nesting visitor. New Haven recorded two Seaside Sparrows (T) and five Saltmarsh Sparrows (SC).

### Species Recorded in Above Average Numbers

Sixteen species recorded at least ten-year high counts in 2021. Of these, six are considered rarities or had no previous report in the prior ten years (Blue-winged Teal (T), Little Blue Heron (SC) Bonaparte's Gull, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Palm Warbler, and Evening Grosbeak) and were already discussed under notable species. Red-breasted Merganser is also in a similar category considering the new high count was three (333% of average).

Great Blue Herons (117%) continue to be recorded in good numbers, with an alltime high of 389. Clapper Rails (208%) also had a new all-time high of 20, though not much could be read into this for such a widespread species for which only limited habitat is covered by SBC territory. Peregrine Falcon (T) (200%) also had a new all-time high of 20. Fish Crow (164%) and Common Raven (144%) both shattered all-time high counts with 273 and 204, the previous high counts were 218 in 2018 and 182 last year.

Much effort has been put into the conservation of Purple Martins (SC) (179%) in recent years and an all-time high count of 122 is perhaps evidence of fruits of those labors. House Wrens (131%) were counted in all-time record numbers with 1476 eclipsing the previous high of 1288 in 2015. Brown Thrasher (SC) (147%) were a ten-year high, with 43, just shy of the 46 recorded in 2011. Northern Parula (176%) had an all-time high of 13 compared to ten in several of the past ten counts.

### Species Recorded in Below Average Numbers

Many species turned in poor performances, with 20 species coming in at or below recent lows, some of which we haven't seen since the earliest statewide counts. This year we will focus in our graphs to see if these low counts are anomalies or could represent trends of significance.

Only two Brant (7%) were recorded on the count, but this is a non-nesting species, numbers of which can vary widely from year to year. American Black Duck (41%) and Mallard (78%) were both recorded at all-time lows of 17 and 1003 eclipsing the previous lows of 2018 and 2019. Broad-winged Hawk (SC) (69%) came in at a ten-year low of 49, the lowest count since 2008. Spotted Sandpiper (74%) came in at a ten-year low of 36, the lowest total since 2005. American Woodcock (57%) had



Concerted efforts to manage and protect nesting colonies of Purple Martins helped produce an all-time high of 122. (Mark Szantyr)

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a ten-year low of 11, tying the totals from 2009 and 2010. Ring-billed Gull (29%) had an all-time low of 56. Though this is a non-nesting species numbers of which are expected to vary. Rock Pigeon (67%) had an all-time low of 545, eclipsing the previous low of 578 in 2014.

Red-breasted Nuthatch (37%) came in at a ten-year low with ten, the lowest since 2008. This species tends to fluctuate based on migratory patterns. Hermit Thrush (60%) with ten was the lowest count since 1997. Blue-winged Warbler (64%) turned in an all-time low of 193, 100 fewer than last year. Something to keep an eye on for sure. Blackburnian Warbler (76%) came in at a ten-year low of 164, the lowest since 2007. Chestnut-sided Warbler (81%) with 485 was the lowest total since 1993. Pine Warbler (86%) had the lowest total since 2003 with 382. Yellow-rumped Warbler (49%) had the lowest total since 1992 with 41, continuing a recent trend in this and other "northern" warblers. Black-throated Green Warbler (65%) had the lowest count since 2004. Scarlet Tanager (83%) has had several lower than average counts in recent years and this year's total of 611 was the lowest since 2003. Eastern Meadowlark (SC) (54%) tied the all-time low of eight in 2003 and 2005 and Purple Finch (65%) turned in the lowest total since 2003 with 74.

#### 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!

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 (NDDB) Project. This will ensure that the best available information can be taken into 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.

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You can find the 2021 data table showing all SBC species and numbers at the website of the COA:

https://www.ctbirding.org/birdsbirding/ct-bird-count-data/



# Problems & Pitfalls: Long- and Short-billed Dowitchers in alternate plumage

By Julian Hough



**Short-billed Dowitchers (griseus), Connecticut, July (Paul Fusco)** A group of classic griseus Some bright griseus can show color to some feathers on the flanks and vent, but it is never contiguous and solid as in hendersoni or Long-billed.

No matter what time of year, dowitchers pose a consistent identification headache for both expert and beginner observers. We covered juveniles/basic-plumaged birds in October 2021's *The Connecticut Warbler*, but the brightly plumaged adults in spring, summer and early fall can be equally difficult. The separation of Long-billed is made problematic by the central race of Short-billed Dowitcher (*hendersoni*) that passes through Connecticut in small numbers and can be very similar in many respects to Long-billed Dowitcher. They pose the main identification hurdles for birders. As a general note, Long-billed Dowitchers are a very scarce migrant here due to their generally western distribution. They are essentially non-existent in spring with singledigit numbers being found/identified in late summer. In this piece, I'll concentrate on the best way to separate these species in late summer and early fall.

#### Long-billed Dowitcher

Long-billeds are monotypic (lacking subspecies) and nest in western and northern Alaska, northwest Canada and northeast Siberia (Pitelka 1950). Although they have a more westerly bias to their distribution, Long-billeds migrate eastward to winter along the southern Atlantic coast from Florida south to Mexico and Guatemala.



#### Long-billed Dowitcher, England, July (Alan Curry)

A tricky bird from the UK. A short-billed (presumably male) Long-billed Dowitcher. Note the rotund appearance typical of Long-billed. The upper parts are quite dark, but the tell-tale white scapular and wing-covert tips have been worn off and are not evident here. The key features here are the brick red ground color to the under parts with the classic chevron-shaped bars at the carpal area that coalesce to form a semi-collar.



Long-billed Dowitcher, New York, August (Paul Fusco)

Similar to the bird above. Difficult to separate from many hendersoni since all of the telltale white wing covert tips are worn off and the marks at the carpal area seem to be more spot-like. The main clues are that the upperparts are still rather dark and the color of the underparts is solid and extensive, reaching all the way to the vent. Most importantly, the barring on the lateral tail coverts still show a nice chevron bar with a neat white terminal fringe.



Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers, Connecticut, August (Frank Gallo) A good comparison shot with a Short-billed Dowitcher (left), probably of the race hendersoni. The Long-billed looks a bit more long-legged in comparison and is beginning to show the typical gray-faced look. The relatively uniform brick-red underparts extend back to the vent, but again note the shape of the barring in the carpal area of both species. In particular note the more spot-like markings that extend onto the central belly in the Short-billed compared to the 'semi-collar' effect in the Long-billed.



**Short-billed Dowitchers, Connecticut, July (Nick Bonomo)** This is a nice comparison shot of a group of classic hendersoni with one griseus (front right). Note the bright and extensive peachy-buff underparts of the hendersoni with more clean, lightly spotted breast sides, compared to the griseus which has a messier and barred breast and a contrasting white belly.



Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitcher (hendersoni), New Jersey, August (Julian Hough)

This shot shows the subtle differences in shape often discernible between both species. The Long-billed (left) is more rotund and shorter-winged. The brighter upper parts of the hendersoni Short-billed, especially the tertial barring, should be apparent in the field. Again, note the shape of the spots/bars at the carpal area in both species and the retained diagnostic white-tipped scapular feather on the Long-billed.



**Short-billed Dowitcher, (griseus) Connecticut, July (Julian Hough)** A classic griseus in mid-July showing little color below. The flanks are heavily marked with spotting extending onto the central belly. The upperparts are worn and show the more worn, pointed tips to the scapular feathers.



Short-billed Dowitcher, Connecticut, May (Julian Hough)

An average individual in brightness and color and showing worn wing coverts. Many shorebirds in Spring have not replaced these winter feathers by the time they are migrating north. The dull orange-peach color to the foreneck and upper breast is muddied by dark brown streaking/barring, and it lacks the deep brick-red tones and prominent white and black barring shown by fresh Long-billeds.



Short-billed Dowitchers, griseus (left) and hendersoni (right), Connecticut, July (Julian Hough)

This nice comparison of the two sub-species shows the darker, "messier" griseus with its heavy flank barring and paler underparts with a noticeable white belly. The hendersoni stands out due to its clean, peachy underparts and limited, spot-like carpal markings. The upperparts show the bright broad golden feather edgings typical of hendersoni. 68 Hough

#### Short-billed Dowitcher

Three races of Short-billed Dowitcher 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.

#### Identification Problems and Pitfalls

As in many waders, both size and bill length overlap 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 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.

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.

#### Focus points

In the unlikely event you come across a putative Long-billed Dowitcher in spring in Connecticut, the following should help. A fresh spring dowitcher in April (and sometimes in May) that is: grayish-necked with reddish confined to the belly and upper flanks; has chevron-shaped barring on the upper flanks (with a white terminal fringe); and shows clear-cut, white oval tips to the rear scapulars and greater coverts is a Long-billed. Short-billeds are often more uniformly reddish-orange on the neck and upper breast and show more extensive "v"-shaped fringes to the wing-coverts. They show more rounded markings/spots that extend on to the lower belly, importantly lacking the distinctive white, terminal fringe of Long-billed.

In late summer (mid-July-August) things become tricky, and the old chestnut of identifying a worn "orange-bellied" dowitcher can cause issues. The 'inland' *hendersoni* race of Short-billed Dowitcher passes through in late summer, but are less abundant than *griseus*, and can be confusingly similar to Long-billed. *Hendersoni* averages larger than *griseus* and exhibits:

- brighter uniformly colored underparts that extend to the vent;
- flanks that are typically less heavily marked;
- more spot-like markings in the carpal area and central belly.

The upper parts of *hendersoni* are often brighter than *griseus* due to their broad buffy feather edges. In my experience, when most of the *griseus* are dowdy and messy, the brighter *hendersoni* birds often stand out by the features noted above, and these

hes separated from Long-billed with care. The following may be helpful in

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need to bes separated from Long-billed with care. The following may be helpful in separating these Long-billed and *hendersoni* Short-billed Dowitchers:

**Jizz**: Long-billeds often look "rangy", with long legs and bills and a rather plump, rotund shape, compared to the sleeker outlines of Short-billed. Short-billeds often show a slight primary projection compared to Long-billed, but this may have limited use in very worn birds.

**Underpart color**: The background color is a saturated brick-red on Long-billed, but a paler, more orange on *hendersoni* Short-billed. Long-billeds often hold their underpart coloration longer and will often stand out in a flock of Short-billeds, especially when mixed with duller *griseus* individuals.

**Underpart markings**: Long-billeds have obvious dark flank barring which extends towards the belly and up onto the neck sides. When fresh these bars are edged with white, but are quickly affected by wear. They often show a fine spur of spots/streaks forming a kind of semi-necklace typically lacking in *hendersoni*. The shape of the markings in the carpal area are often helpful. In *hendersoni* Short-billed they are spot-like and in Long-billed, if not worn away, they are more chevron-shaped.

**Upperpart pattern**: Long-billed averages darker above due to narrower pale barring and if retained, they show white-tips to the scapular feathers (shaped like the tertial pattern of a White-winged Crossbill).



**Primary molt:** Since Long-billed is not a long distance migrant compared to Shortbilled, it molts earlier and often shows a gap in the inner primaries where those feathers have been dropped. However, note that I've seen Long-billed in late summer that have not started molting their inner primaries, so use with caution. An adult dowitcher in active primary molt in late summer is unlikely to be a Short-billed.

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So, to summarize. Worn Long-billeds can look uniformly colored below with little obvious barring, and many have begun head molt. Any dowitcher in August that has a combination of uniform, brick-red underparts and a grayish face is likely a Long-billed. In comparison, typical *griseus* are more "dowdy," being duller, more peachy-orange on the upper breast and with messy flank barring. The underparts are noticeably white on the rear flanks and vent, and some may have white intruding into the lower breast. It is the brighter-colored *hendersoni* race that passes through in late summer that pose the most difficult identification problems, but concentrating on the features above may help you identify these tricky birds!

#### Acknowledgments

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# Arctic Tern: An unprecedented fallout in inland Connecticut and the Northeast

By Jeremy Nance



An adult Arctic Tern over Bantam Lake in Litchfield on May 13, 2022. (Larry Master)

May 13 – a date with much birding promise – was off to a slow start. A storm system stalled off the east coast had for days given us unfavorable winds, hindering movements of northbound migrants. To make matters worse, a thick fog enveloped much of the state. But birds are on the move in May, and this year, May 13 produced an unprecedented event – at least 66 Arctic Terns, an offshore migrant that has been encountered only a handful of times in Connecticut, appeared at a total of six inland bodies of water in the state. For birders in pelagically challenged Connecticut, nearly all of whom had never seen this species in the state, the sight of flocks of Arctic Terns gracefully coursing over inland lakes and ponds resulted in both shock and elation. This article details the Arctic Tern fallout in Connecticut and the surrounding region, and examines the weather events and migratory behaviors that might have precipitated it.

#### Arctic Terns - Premiere Pelagic Migrants

Arctic Terns are circumpolar arctic nesters, and in North America breed south to the northern New England coast (Hatch et al., 2020; Veit and Peterson, 1993). After the brief nesting season, Arctic Terns head offshore and begin a remarkable pelagic migration - the longest known migration of any bird - to spend the austral summer feeding in Antarctic waters. Nesting birds fitted with geolocator tracking devices in Greenland and Iceland traveled as many as 48,000 miles annually in migration, and during the more compressed spring migration, were able to cover over 300 miles per day (Egevang et al., 2010). The remarkable routes of these tagged birds included passage along both sides and through the center of the Atlantic Ocean, and in many cases featured a trans-Atlantic crossing within the Intertropical Convergence Zone. Tracked Arctic Terns nesting in coastal Maine made similarly impressive migratory journeys (Audubon Puffin Project). Arctic Terns are infrequently encountered on the North American coast far from their nesting grounds, and are seen only rarely inland (eBird data). As described below, at least some populations may regularly pass over land. Visual observations and radar studies of Arctic Terns migrating inland have shown that they can do so at high altitude and at night (Alerstam, 1985; Kramer, 1995), suggesting that nearly all birds migrating over inland regions go undetected.

### The May 13 Arctic Tern Fallout

The first hint of something remarkable developing on the morning of May 13 came when David Mathieu, during a morning check of his local patch Lower Bolton Lake, encountered a "glowing white bird flying back and forth over the lake – a tern!" As any inland tern is unusual, David wisely snapped some photos of the distant tern, which revealed it to be quite a rarity – an Arctic Tern! Initially unaware of the Lower Bolton Lake Arctic Tern, Mike Doyle found a lone Arctic Tern at Little Pond (Litchfield County) and Dave Tripp and others encountered a jaw-dropping 27 Arctic Terns at Bantam Lake (Litchfield County). Word of the Lower Bolton and Bantam Lake birds, and of Arctic Terns turning up inland in nearby states, prompted other birders to check their local lakes and reservoirs. New reports came in from Saugatuck Reservoir (7) and Candlewood Lake (14) in Fairfield County and Pocotopaug Lake (16) in Middlesex County. All told, 66 Arctic Terns were documented in Connecticut on May 13 (Figure 1). The vast majority were one-day wonders, although single terns lingered an additional day at Pocotopaug and Candlewood lakes (eBird data).

To put this event in perspective, the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC) has to date accepted only four Arctic Tern records - this year's sightings, and several older historical reports from 1865 to 1977 (Phil Rusch, personal communication) have not yet been reviewed. Three of the four accepted Connecticut records are summer sightings in coastal New Haven County (Aug. 20, 1991, three at Milford Point; Aug. 27, 1994, one at Sandy Point; July 1, 2000, one at Falkner Island). Only a May 16, 2014 record from Batterson Pond in Hartford County presages, in date and inland location but certainly not in scope, the May 13 Arctic Tern fallout.



Figure 1. Arctic Tern sightings in Connecticut on May 13, 2022. Data compiled from reports confirmed in eBird by June 13, 2022

As impressive as it was, the Connecticut Arctic Tern fallout was but part of a larger regional event whose epicenter was roughly centered on our state (Figure 2). May 13-15 eBird reports of inland Arctic Terns came from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, with the overwhelming majority initially observed on May 13. Observers at Worden Pond in Washington County, RI, noted a high count of 35, with other notable totals of 20 at Bashakill State WMA in Sullivan County, NY, 18 at Quabbin Reservoir in Hampton County, MA, and 17 at Lake Tappan in Bergen County, NJ. In addition to these reports from inland bodies of water, where it is possible to determine accurate counts at a single location, single terns or groups of terns were observed flying up or down the Delaware (PA and NJ), Hudson (NJ and NY), and Connecticut (MA) rivers (Figure 2). A small subset of terns lingered a day or two at some inland sites, but nearly all disappeared by May 15 (eBird data). A few coastal reports emerged during this period as well (eBird data, not shown in Figure 2), although most of the records were inland. This disparity might be explained because coastal birds could quickly return to sea and thus remained largely unnoticed. Another factor could be bias: since terns were initially reported at inland lakes, this is where many birders focused their subsequent efforts to find them.

eBird data shows that Arctic Terns occur inland in the northeast during May and June quite rarely, typically as individual birds; no fallouts even approaching the magnitude of May 13, 2022 have been noted previously. Historical reports of multiple inland spring migrants are also very limited. Two records that stand out are of 16 Arctic Terns reported by R. Forster at Heard Pond, Wayland, MA, on May 20, 1979 (Veit and Peterson, 1993); and 30 reported by T. Richards at Spofford Lake, Chesterfield, NH, on May 9, 1960 after a strong easterly storm (Keith and Fox, 2013). Although

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these reports were not accompanied by a detected wider fallout, one can only wonder if this was the result of the difficulty in quickly alerting the birding community to rarities during this era (the concept of the rare bird land line 'phone tree', often initiated from a pay phone, is likely unfathomable to many birders today!).

Most of the terns found on May 13 were present much of the day, providing an opportunity to examine their behavior in an atypical environment. Birders noted that terns at several of the locations in Connecticut were feeding by plucking unidentified prey at or near the water's surface (David Mathieu, Russ Smiley, Dave Tripp, Mike Doyle, personal communications). Arctic Terns at Saugatuck Reservoir were observed plunge-diving for fish, which was at least once documented by photograph as successful (Jeremy Nance, eBird S109898563). Why the terns utilized alternative feeding strategies at different inland locations is unclear. Possibilities include better water clarity or more abundant small fish populations where terns were plunge diving.

#### Weather

One of the most striking aspects of the Arctic Tern fallout is that birders were caught completely off guard. Our understanding of how weather impacts bird migration is an imperfect science built on correlative observations and common sense. The unprecedented magnitude of the fallout suggests that it resulted from a rare weather event, or coincidence of events, that occurred when large numbers of Arctic Terns were migrating north off the Atlantic coast. Two weather events occuring prior to and on May 13 stand out. First, a low-pressure system moved off the coast of Virginia



Figure 2. Inland Arctic Terns in the northeast May 13 – May 15, 2022. Birds present at individual inland bodies of water are indicated by circles; diameter scales linearly with the maximum number of birds reported and color indicates the date of the initial observation (see legend). Coastal sightings are not shown, and birds observed migrating along inland rivers are summarized by text. Data compiled from reports confirmed in eBird by June 13, 2022.



Figure 3. Offshore winds preceding the Arctic Tern fallout. Wind directions and speeds on May 11, 2022, influenced by a low pressure system stalled off of the Carolina coast. Strong northeast winds were present offshore of the northeast and mid-Atlantic coasts. Data from Ventusky.com

on the morning of May 7, producing strong northeast winds offshore of the mid-Atlantic and northeast states. The system remained stalled off the Carolina coast until it dissipated on May 12 (Figure 3). For the first time in a week, winds off the mid-Atlantic and northeast coasts were light and more favorable for migration. A second weather phenomenon on May 13 may have also played an important role in the fallout - low cloud cover and fog enveloped offshore waters and extended well inland into the mid-Atlantic and Northeast (Figure 4). Remarkably, the inland extent of fog and low cloud cover in the Northeast matches very well with the inland extent of Arctic Terns recorded on May 13. Based on these observations, it is reasonable to speculate that Arctic Terns offshore of the east coast struggled to migrate north during the week preceding May 13. When winds became more favorable for migration on the 12th, they moved north. Some continued to migrate over land, where they might have been challenged or disoriented by the fog and low clouds and forced to land on inland bodies of water. The second aspect of this formula - timing - is more straightforward to address. Years of excellent data from near-daily spring pelagic trips to the gulf stream waters of Cape Hatteras, NC, indicate that Arctic Tern numbers are at their highest (birds per party hour) during the second week in May (eBird, Hatteras Pelagic - Gulf Stream hotspot). Therefore, these weather events occurred near the peak of Arctic Tern migration off the east coast.

#### An inland migration route over the northeast?

A fascinating conclusion of this weather analysis is that Arctic Terns were not forced The Connecticut Warbler, Vol. 42 No 3, July 2022 into our region by high winds, akin to hurricanes pushing pelagic species inland. Quite the opposite occurred – winds died down on the 12th for the first time in nearly a week! In addition, other pelagic species that pass offshore in mid-May were not detected inland on May 13. These observations raise the intriguing possibility that Arctic Terns chose to migrate overland, perhaps trying to make up time with a more direct route to their Arctic breeding grounds after being slowed off the Atlantic Coast. Recent geolocator studies of Arctic Terns breeding on the North Sea coast of Britain show that terns typically cross Britain overland, rather than fly around the island, to reach their nesting grounds (Redfern and Bevan, 2020). While most of these birds pass over land undetected, an analysis of spring inland Arctic Tern sightings in Britain suggests that birds are observed most often when northerly winds occur offshore during the preceding days (Kramer, 1995). This weather pattern is analogous to that preceding the May 13 fallout in our region.

Sightings of Arctic Terns migrating along major rivers draining our region on May 13 and the days following shed some light on this question, although the observations are not consistent. Some birders, such as those along the lower Hudson River, reported Arctic Terns migrating south along the river back towards the coast (e.g. Patrick Shure, eBird checklist \$109941181). However, others reported northerly migration, such as a group of 17 flying north along the Connecticut River in Massachusetts May 15 (Jeremiah Trimble, eBird \$110478196). So, it seems likely that some of the Arctic Terns that moved inland on May 13 returned to the ocean, whereas others may have continued north over land.

An intriguing question raised by the May 13 fallout is whether a subset of Arctic Terns routinely migrates inland over the Northeast in spring, taking a shortcut to their breeding grounds. Geolocator studies of Arctic Terns nesting in Greenland, Iceland, and coastal Maine did not detect overland migration in our region (Egevang et al., 2010; Audubon Puffin Project, unpublished); however, such movements seem unlikely as they would lengthen the migration of these specific populations. It would be fascinating to track Arctic Terns that breed in the Hudson Bay or central Canadian Arctic, which could shorten their migration by flying inland over the Northeast, to see if they routinely pass undetected over Connecticut each spring.

#### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Louis Bevier, Marshall Iliff, Kent McFarland, Shai Mitra, Phil Rusch, and Jeremiah Trimble for graciously providing insights and information on historical Arctic Tern sightings in the Northeast; and Mike Doyle, Dave Tripp, David Mathieu, and Russ Smiley for sharing personal accounts of their encounters with inland Connecticut Arctic Terns on May 13.

Jeremy Nance, Easton, nance.jeremy@charter.net



Figure 4. Surface clouds and fog present on the morning of May 13, 2022. Low clouds and fog blanketed inland areas, including the entire state of Connecticut, and extended far offshore. Data from Ventusky.com

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# 2nd Historic Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut

By Phil Rusch



This is the 2nd Historical Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC). The report presents the results of many hours of research reviewing specimens and documents, both in person and virtually, at The Biological Research Collections (BRC) at the University of Connecticut (UCONN) in Storrs, CT, The Peabody Museum of Natural History (YPM) at Yale University in New Haven, CT, The Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH) in Chicago, IL, and the Birdcraft Museum at the Connecticut Audubon Society (BCM) in Fairfield, CT

This report is the direct result of the committee's concerted attempt to document and review records of Review List species found in Connecticut prior to the formation of the committee in 1985. It was decided to treat all unreviewed records prior to January 1, 2000 as "Historic". This report documents eight first state records for Connecticut.

The Committee decided to review this small but significant batch of records as a special report that included:

Two from the BRC at UCONN, one from YPM at Yale, two from The Birdcraft Museum in Fairfield, one from the FMNH in Chicago IL, and five from the archives of ARCC.

Future historical reports are planned for specimen records from Yale's Peabody Museum (YPM), The National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Washington DC, The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, The Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH) in Chicago, and the University of Iowa Ornithological Collections (SUI) in Ames, Iowa.

### Committee Membership:

Members, in addition to the author, who voted on records in this report are Nick Bonomo, Tina Green, Frank Gallo, Greg Hanisek, Julian Hough, Jay Kaplan, Alex Lin-Moore, Frank Mantlik, Dave Tripp, and Glenn Williams.

### Format:

This report will vary slightly from prior ARCC reports since most of the records are of specimens. Each record has been designated a unique ARCC file number. As this report spans the years of 1869-1994, the ARCC file number will use the designations H2-01 to H2-10. H2 refers to Historical Report #2, and 01-10 refers to the individual record. The species are listed in order according to the latest American Ornithological Society (AOS) checklist. Multiple records of a particular species will be listed by the ARCC reference file number. Months of the year are shortened to the first three letters. In addition, the catalog number of the specimen and the collector, if known, will be listed.

#### Accepted Records :

#### Corn Crake (Crex crex)

H2-01. YPM 000950. (Photos): This bird was collected on 18 October 1943 by Donald Page, while pheasant hunting what was known as "Redbush Farm" in the town of Orange. It is currently located at the Peabody Natural History Museum of Yale University in New Haven.

There is an earlier record of a specimen from Old Saybrook, collected by JN Clark on 20 October 1887. This specimen, to date, has not been conclusively located. However, a Corn Crake of the right sex and age has been found in the collection at UCONN. Unfortunately, the data on the tag is incomplete, and an extensive search through ledgers and notebooks of both WE Treat (the former owner of the skin) and JN Clark (the collector) has failed to connect the skin with the two principles in this mystery.

Since we cannot connect the 1887 skin with Connecticut, the 1943 specimen becomes the first and only documented record of this vagrant from Connecticut.





# Long-tailed Jaeger (Stercorarius longicaudus)

H2-02. UCONN 10127. (Photos): This bird was found in deceased Glastonbury by Paula Knoeklein on 3 Sep 1994, brought to UCONN where it was identified by Louis Bevier. The first week of September is right in the time window for this species to appear in Connecticut. This specimen is the third record of Long-tailed Jaeger from Connecticut. In fact, seven of the eight sightings of this species have occurred between 28 August and 3 September. Five were sighted on the coast and three were inland. I know what I will be looking for during that time frame in the coming years.

#### Atlantic Puffin (Fratercula arctica)

H2-03. YPM 120339. (Photos): This bird was found alive on Weybosset Street in East Haven by a Mrs. J. Wilkerson on 3 Oct 1968. The bird was taken to the West Rock Nature Center where it died



Atlantic Puffin

on 7 Oct 1968. The bird was donated to the Peabody Museum, and was prepared as a mount for the famous "Birds of Connecticut" exhibit.

What was left was preserved as a fluid specimen, given another collection number, and wrongly became the 3rd Record of Atlantic Puffin from Connecticut.

It turns out there are only 2 records of this species from the state. The first is from Penfield Reef in Fairfield on 19 Nov 1947, where it was shot by a hunter. The specimen made its way to the Birdcraft Museum in Fairfield where it was preserved as a mount (BCM 1487). The Birdcraft collection is in storage at the moment. I am looking forward to documenting the birds in that collection soon. Until That time, Mrs. Wilkerson's juvenile Atlantic Puffin becomes the first documented record for Connecticut.

#### Black-legged Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla)

H2-04. (Photo): This bird was found by our own Paul Desjardins on Long Wharf in New Haven on 8 Sep 1983. Photos of the bird taken by Paul and Noble Proctor were discovered in the ARCC archives and were used to document this record.

#### Black-capped Petrel (Pterodroma hasitata)

H2-05. BCM 1244. (Photos): This bird was found dead on the beach after

the 1938 Hurricane in Fairfield on 7 Oct 1938, and was taken to the Birdcraft Museum, incorrectly identified as a Great Shearwater, and prepared as a mount by FJ Novak. Flash forward to 1952, and visiting ornithologist RC Murphy corrected the identification to Black-capped Petrel. This is Connecticut's first and only Documented State Record.

#### Cory's Shearwater (Calonectris diomedia)

H2-06. (Photos): This bird was found alive in Woodbury following Hurricane Belle on 10 Aug 1976 by Mrs. John Danaher. It was transported to Connecticut Audubon Society for rehabilitation and eventual release on Long Beach in Stratford by Dennis Varza and Dave Junkin. This becomes Connecticut's first State Record.

#### Brown Pelican (Pelecanus occidentalis)

H2-07. (Photo): Three Brown Pelicans were found at Stonington Point in Stonington on 20 Jul 1993 by Bob Dewire. These birds were part of a larger incursion into the waters north and south of Long Island NY. The pelicans stayed at Stonington until at least 22 Jul 1993. These birds become the first State Record pending review of two specimens at Yale dated 1905 and 1977.

#### Northern Hawk Owl (Surnia ulula)

H2-08. FMNH 138001: (Photos): This long-lost specimen was discovered in the collection of the Field Museum (FMNH) in Chicago IL by following up a single note in the archived records of George Clark, retired professor of Ornithology at UCONN. A quick search of the on-line service Vert-Net and an Email to Collection Manager Ben Marks resulted in the photos below. This bird was collected in Killingworth CT



Northern Hawk Owl The Connecticut Warbler, Vol. 42 No 3, July 2022



Varied Thrush

during the winter of 1869 by Dr. F.W. Hall, prepared by the Rev. C.M. Jones, and made its way into the collection of LB Bishop before ending up at the FMNH. A long-awaited first Documented State Record.

#### Northern Wheatear (Oenanthe oenanthe)

H2-09. (Photo): This first Documented State Record was found and photographed in the Lord's Point section of Stonington in the early morning of 10 Sep 1976 by Oliver Denison III. He quickly telephoned Bob Dewire who confirmed the identification about an hour later. Several local birders, including the author, got to see the bird before it left the area the following morning. There are two earlier undocumented sight records from 1965 and 1968. The 1965 record, interestingly, is from Latimer Point which is the next rocky coastal outcrop to the west of Lord's Point. This is the first Documented State Record.

#### Varied Thrush (Ixoreus naevius)

H2-10. UCONN 7517: (Photos): This adult male bird hit a window at the home of Mrs. Richards on 17 Dec 1977 in the Riverside section of Greenwich CT. The specimen made its way to UCONN where it became the first Documented Record of the species from Connecticut.

Phil Rusch, Chaplin, philiprusch@charter.net

# **Connecticut Field Notes**

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

#### Winter Season, Dec. 1, 2021 to Feb. 28, 2022

Greater White-fronted Geese, in keeping with their upward trend, were reported from at least 20 locations. In a great year for the species, a total of at least eight Pink-footed Geese included a record four from Dec 19 to Jan. 8 in South Windsor (DL et al.). Far removed from those birds were three at the Fairfield County Hunt Club in Westport from Jan. 15 to Feb. 4 (JG et al.). A "Black" Brant was found on Feb. 5 in West Haven (NB).

Bantam Lake in Litchfield held an excellent inland total of 16 Gadwall on Dec. 12 (MD). The season's first Redhead was at Greenwich Harbor on Dec. 10 (SM), with a high of seven on Jan. 4 (CL, GL), and a female was at Maltby Lakes in West Haven on Feb. 7 (JT). A massive flock of 740 Ring-necked Ducks was at Lake Zoar in Southbury on Feb. 27 (RN). A female Tufted Duck found Jan. 4 at Captain's Cove, Bridgeport, was present through the season (GH, m.ob.), no doubt the same bird that has wintered there since at least Jan. 2017. Male Harlequin Ducks were at Greenwich Point on Dec. 19 (NH), in Waterford on Jan. 1 (JA), in Branford on Jan. 23-Feb. 3 (BR et al.) and at Stonington Jan. 25 through season's end (PR, m.ob.). Barrow's Goldeneyes were reported from at least six locations. Bantam Lake held a total 1100 Common Mergansers on Dec. 13 (MD) and 1300 were at Lake Zoar in Southbury on Feb. 9 (RN). Two Tundra Swans, always scarce in the state, were at



This Thick-billed Murre, shown here on Feb. 11, was one of a series of exciting species that drew birders to Stonington Point, a long trek for many of them. (Paul Smith)



This is one of two Tundra Swans that wintered in Windham County. (Russ Smiley)

Pine Acres Lake in Hampton on Dec. 8 and remained throughout the season (JF, m.ob.).

An Eared Grebe found on Jan. 25 at Stonington Harbor remained into March (PR, m.ob.). High on the list of significant finds was the state's second record for Northern Lapwing on Dec. 16 at Milford Point (TM, m.ob.). A Semipalmated Plover was late Dec. 15 at HBSP (CI). Before their precipitous population decline Red Knots were regular in winter in small numbers, but based on their current status, one on Dec. 6 at Stonington Point was a significant rarity (RS). A Long-billed Dowitcher at Johnson Creek on the Stratford-Bridgeport line, an area with previous records, was present Dec. 13-26 (FM et al.).

A Thick-billed Murre was seen on Jan. 17 at Cove Island Park in Stamford (PD), and one was present Jan. 31-Feb. 11 at Stonington Point (RS, PR, m.ob.). A Black-headed Gull was seen Feb. 11-17 at Barn Island in Stonington, the most reliable spot for this species in recent years (GW et al.). A rare Common (Kamchatka) Gull was at Cummings Park and vicinity, Stamford, Feb. 10 through early March (PD, m.ob.). It was a good winter for Glaucous Gulls with reports from at least 12 locations including three inland (m.ob.). A nice mid-winter flight of 27 Northern Gannets were counted on Jan. 19 at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford (JF). A Green Heron was remarkably late Dec. 16 in Branford (LR). Snowy Owls made a big incursion in southwest CT, with at least five present in the Stratford/Milford area

through the season (FM, m.ob.). A Red-headed Woodpecker was found Jan. 26 in Salem and was seen through the season (BM et al.).

A Western Kingbird found on Nov. 9 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) made it until Jan. 12, when it was found dead (GN, m.ob.). An unidentified (Blue-headed/Cassin's) vireo was in Darien on Dec. 31 (JL). In addition to a long-staying Northern Shrike that wintered at Major Donnelly Park in South Windsor (KS, m.ob.), others were at Bafflin Sanctuary in Pomfret on Dec. 2 (AR), at Rosedale Farm in Simsbury on Jan. 10 (JW) and in Moodus on Feb. 6 (DC). Four Red Crossbills were in Salisbury on Dec. 31 (BD, DJ). A Lark Sparrow was a nice winter find Jan. 21 at Nicholdale Farm in Shelton (DB). There's been a slight uptick in winter Lincoln's Sparrows, with reports from three locations this winter. A wintering flock of White-crowned Sparrows at Short Beach, Stratford, maxed out at 16 on Feb. 14 (FM). The season's only Yellow-headed Blackbird was found in Moosup on Jan. 10 (PR). An astonishing flock of 26 Eastern Meadowlarks was found Dec. 19 in Preston during the Norwich CBC (SK). Baltimore Orioles were reported from at least eight locations, with up to two wintering at HBSP (TM et al.) and two visiting feeders in Old Saybrook (JS.).

An unusual flurry of Nashville Warblers consisted of singles on Dec. 15 at the mouth of the Quinnipiac River in New Haven (JO), at three locations on the New Haven CBC on Dec. 18 (SU, FG, JO); on Dec. 20 in Portland (CH); on Dec. 26 at Caswell Cove in Milford (TM et al.); and Jan.15-16 at Captain's Cove, Bridgeport (EK, SS et al.). A Common Yellowthroat, a species known to winter, was present in mid-January



This adult male Black-throated Blue Warbler, show here on Dec. 17, made it deep into the winter at a feeder in New Preston. (Dave Tripp) The Connecticut Warbler, Vol. 42 No 3, July 2022



This stunning adult male Wilson's Warbler, shown here on Jan. 19, fit a growing trend of winter rarities settling in at the Branford sewage treatment plant. (Paul Smith)

at Southbury Training School farm (AL). Unexpected in winter were an American Redstart on Jan. 1 in Clinton (MK); a Northern Parula on Dec. 8-26 in a Westport yard (TG); and a Blackpoll Warbler on Dec. 1 at the Branford sewage plant (JO). An adult male Black-throated Blue Warbler lingered to at least Feb. 22 at a feeder in New Preston, making an appearance on the Litchfield Hills CBC (OS et al.). A female Black-throated Blue was in Moosup on Dec. 30 (DE). Up to two Pine Warblers wintered at the Norwalk River esplanade (FM et al.), and Palm Warblers were found at about a dozen locations. A Wilson's Warbler made a surprise appearance Jan. 19 at the productive Branford treatment plant, where it stayed through Jan. 28 (SZ, m.ob.).

A Western Tanager found Jan 1 at HBSP remained until at least Jan. 24 (NM, m.ob.). A male Painted Bunting visited a feeder Feb. 6 in Stonington (CC). A Dickcissel was in Greenwich on Jan. 15 (SE).

Observers – Joe Attwater, Nick Bonomo, Derik Bowen, Dan Cimbaro, Catherine Cindrich, Buzz Devine, Mike Doyle, Patrick Dugan, Deb Eccleston, Stacey Essaid, Jeff Fengler, Frank Gallo, Jonathan Green, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, Nathaniel Howard, Chris Howe, Chuck Imbergamo, Denise Jernigan, Skyler Kardell, Emily Keating, Micky Komara, Dave Lawton, Carol Lemmon, Gary Lemmon, James Leone, Adrian Lewis, Bob MacDonnell, Nic Main, Frank Mantlik, Dave Mathieu, Jamie Meyers, Tom Murray, Sean Murtha, Gina Nichol, John Oshlick, Bill Rankin, Laurie Reynolds, Andy Rzeznikiewicz, Phil Rusch, Kris Scully, James Sherwonit, Russ Smiley, Olaf Soltau, Stephanie Stewart, Dave Tripp, John Triana, Severin Uebbing, John Weeks, Glenn Williams, Sara Zagorski, Fran Zygmont.

## Photo Challenge

By Frank Gallo



#### (Frank Gallo)

When identifying a bird, it is good practice to first determine its family. In the photo, we have what appears to be a small bird, perched in flowers, showing a rather thin straight bill. This suggests a warbler, rather than one of the vireos, which have hook-tipped bills. But the bird is rather dull, more like a vireo, not a bright beautiful spring warbler. Perhaps it is fall, when many warblers become less colorful (and more confusing). Perhaps it is a female. Or both.

Aside from the bird, what else does the photo show us? The flower is a goldenrod -a late-season bloomer, and the leaves of the flower are beginning to turn red. It is fall. Identifying fall warblers can be tricky, especially when dealing with youngsters, which can be extremely dull in some species.

#### 88 Gallo

What can we see? The bird has a two-toned bill, paler below than above, and a large dark eye surrounded by an obvious buffy eye ring that stands out against the uniformcolored face. The bird is olive-brown above, washed yellow below, with a whiter chest, and slightly brighter yellow belly and undertail coverts. The legs seem dark and very thin. The wing is darker than the body and shows yellow-green edgings to the flight feathers and two thin, pale wing bars, which are barely noticeable in the photo. We can't see the length or shape of the tail, but the tail is yellow with darker edges on the outer feathers. No tail spots are visible. Otherwise, there's not much body patterning and the bird is rather dull-plumaged overall.

What warblers show a bold eye ring? Could this be a Nashville or a Common Yellowthroat? No, neither has a yellow tail. Before we dive down the rabbit hole with visions of Orange-crowned, or, ooh, maybe a young dull Connecticut, or.... There is only one warbler species with the combination of a big dark eye surrounded by an obvious pale eye-ring set against a plain face, that has yellow-green edging to the wing feathers, and, uniquely, among North American warblers, a yellow tail and yellow under-tail coverts. This is a Yellow Warbler, probably a young female.

#### Frank Gallo, New Canaan, peeplo@aol.com



Next Challenge Photo

#### THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Illustrations and photographs are needed and welcome. Line art of Connecticut and regional birds should be submitted as good quality prints or in original form. All submitted materials will be returned. We can use good quality photographs of birds unaccompanied by an article but with caption including species, date, locality, and other pertinent information.

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