



The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association



April 2023

One new species added to our State List

Learning how to document rare species

A longspur offers an identification challenge

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ON THE COVER

Green-tailed Towhee

A Green-tailed Towhee, featured in this issue's report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut, was captured beautifully by Aidan Kiley during its extended stay early this year in Fairfield.

The Mabel Osgood Wright Award 2023: Frank Mantlik

By Denise Jernigan

Denise Jernigan prepared the following for the 39th annual meeting of the Connecticut Ornithological Association, held on March 25, 2023 via Zoom conferencing.

The Connecticut Ornithological Association annually presents the Mabel Osgood Wright Award to a person or persons in Connecticut who has made a significant contribution to the knowledge, study, and conservation of birds. The 2023 recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award is Frank Mantlik of Stratford, who is recognized by many as Connecticut's premier ambassador for birds and birding.

Frank Mantlik's contributions to Connecticut birding are long-standing, wide-ranging, and essential to defining the state of Connecticut birding. Frank has been an outstanding advocate for birds and birding for decades, generously sharing his impressive knowledge and understanding of birds and bird life. His fine



A Fiery-throated Hummingbird in Costa Rica

photography, and his love of discovering uncommon and previously unreported species are shared generously with our statewide community of birders and nature lovers.

From his earliest days as a high school birdwatcher in Norwalk, through college at the University of Connecticut, as a Biology Technician with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and during his long career as a letter carrier for the United States Postal Service, Frank has developed an awareness of birds that few others obtain. He has watched birds, studied birds, written about birds, and shared his enthusiasm for birds with friends, acquaintances, field trip participants, other birders and scholars, and random strangers wanting to know what he was looking at with such delight. COA President Chris Wood recalls meeting Frank “probably in 1975 at Norwalk’s Veteran’s Park. We had both pretty much just started birding and shared a lot of early birding experiences. He soon leapfrogged me (and many others) in energy, skill, and persistence. But he was and continues to be a birding inspiration to me and many others, a model to which any birder can look for guidance on how to become a better birder, and enjoy it even more.”

A committed lister, Frank has recorded over 400 species for his Connecticut state list, and saw over 300 species in 2022 alone. He and his wife Linda even hosted a Western Tanager in their yard in April of 2020! All his time in the field has



An Eastern Screech-Owl in Connecticut



A Cedar Waxwing in Connecticut

sharpened his impressive identification skills and resulted in the discovery and documentation of the first state occurrences of Anhinga, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Bell’s Vireo, and Pacific Golden-Plover.

Frank has contributed to the literature of Connecticut birding by authoring or co-authoring more than 30 articles in *The Connecticut Warbler*, including many Connecticut Field Notes, ARCC reports, and Site Guides. His superb photographs have appeared in *Audubon*, *Natural History*, *The New York Times*, *American Birds*, *Birding*, *Bird Watcher’s Digest*, and *Field & Stream*, and of course in *The Connecticut Warbler* and the *COA Bulletin*.

He is an excellent and sought-after speaker for bird clubs, garden centers, and other organizations whose audiences have enjoyed his photos and stories of the trips he has led for COA, the Connecticut Audubon Society, the New Haven Bird Club, Sunrise Birding Tours, and Grace Farms. He is the Master Birder of Grace Farms in New Canaan, leading multiple bird walks there and sharing the joys of birding with everyone he meets.

In the 1990s he ran COA’s weekly recorded Rare Bird Alert for about 10 years, and he has led many of COA’s workshops for gulls, shorebirds, winter waterfowl and sparrows.



Frank Mantlik with his wife Linda

Frank has served as President of COA from 1991-1993 and Vice-President from 1989-1991 and again in 2017-2018. A long-time and hard-working member of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut, he now serves as Chair of ARCC.

As a Regional Coordinator for the Connecticut Bird Atlas, Frank has contributed to the understanding of bird habitat and distribution along the Fairfield County shoreline, particularly through his seabirding during wild storms at the Lordship seawall. He currently serves as Vice President of the Friends of Stewart B. McKinney NWR, and is on the Advisory Board for the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point, where he has been monitoring Piping Plovers and other shorebirds as a Coastal Waterbird volunteer for 15 years. He also heads up the Purple Martin Nest Monitoring Project at the Center. Frank has been an important and enthusiastic member of many Big Sit events at the Milford Point platform, raising money for the Center and bringing awareness of this Important Bird Area to a large and diverse audience.

As Chris Wood states, "His contributions to the Connecticut birding community are literally immeasurable and more than deserving of the MOW award." COA is proud to honor its good friend Frank Mantlik with the 2023 Mabel Osgood Wright Award.

Photos by Frank Mantlik

The 28th Report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut

By Phil Rusch, Julian Hough, and Frank Mantlik



This is the 28th report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (hereafter ARCC or "the committee"). The committee met in person on 5 March 2023 to complete a review of rare bird reports for the years 2022 and early 2023. This year the committee voted on 77 records, involving 43 species and 4 subspecies. The committee accepted 60 records for an acceptance rate of 85%. Some records are still being deliberated. One new species, Violet-green Swallow, was added to the state list, which brings the total to 451 species. Other highlights include the state's second record of Black-chinned Hummingbird, third records of Short-billed Gull, Slaty-backed Gull, Gray Kingbird, and Green-tailed Towhee, and fourth records of Say's Phoebe and Smith's Longspur.

STATE LIST AND REVIEW LIST

The committee requests observers submit their reports of species on the Review List (marked with an asterisk on the Connecticut Ornithological Association (COA) checklist), plus any species new to the state. The most recent Review List may be viewed on the COA website at: <https://www.ctbirding.org/arcc/arcc-review-list/>

For those wishing to submit a report, updated information on how to develop a report is located in the ARCC section of the COA website: <https://www.ctbirding.org/arcc/reporting-rare-sightings/>

Submit reports along with documentary material to the ARCC co-secretaries, Frank Gallo and Phil Rusch.

Each year, the committee evaluates the Review List to quantify the criteria used to determine what constitutes a review species. Based on a decline in occurrences over the past 20 years, the committee has determined that both Red-necked Phalarope

and Barn Owl should be added back to the Review List, the latter species having undergone a steep decline in both nesting reports and sightings. The committee voted to remove Black-legged Kittiwake from the review list with the exception of inland records, of which there is a total of only three since 1895.

The committee decided to track several species for possible return to, or removal from, the Review List including: Wilson's Phalarope, American White Pelican, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Western Kingbird.

FORMAT

The format of the report has changed ever so slightly. The species are listed in order according to the American Ornithological Society (AOS) Checklist.

Common Name *Latin Name* [Total number of accepted records]

Year: with multiple records of the species listed chronologically.

Number of individuals greater than one

Age, if known

Location, Town, *County*.

Date(s) occurrence, In the case of Accepted Records, (the finder or collector is listed first with those submitting reports next. *Denotes a report submitted.)

2023-00. This is the record number which is the year followed by the report number.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Jay Kaplan has decided to step down as chair of the committee. We wish to thank Jay for his long tenure as chair (Since 2003) of ARCC. Jay will continue to be an active member of the committee. Frank Mantlik has assumed the chairmanship. The committee welcomes Jeremy Nance as a new member of the ARCC. Jeremy is an active birder in the southwestern part of the state and has proven himself as a reliable field observer with a number of good finds to his name. The committee welcomes the experience he can bring to our assessment process. The current committee members are: *Nick Bonomo, Frank Gallo, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, Julian Hough, Jay Kaplan, Alex Lin-Moore, Frank Mantlik, Jeremy Nance, Phil Rusch, Dave Tripp and Glenn Williams.*

For more info on each ARCC member visit the COA website:

<https://www.ctbirding.org/arcc/committee-members/>

ACCEPTED RECORDS

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* [13]

2016: Adult, Southport, Fairfield, *Fairfield*, 16 Dec (*Christopher W Samorajczyk*). 2016-37.

2023: Adult, Day Hill Road, Bloomfield/Windsor, *Hartford*, 18-19 Jan (*Owen Cannon, Jeff Fengler**). 2023-04.

The Southport record was unearthed while researching specimens at the Yale Peabody Museum Collections. During December of 2016 and January of 2017, there were two Ross's Geese present in the Fairfield-Westport area. Neither of these two individuals coincided with the YPM specimen.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* [23]

2023: Two, Adult, Hockanum River Linear Park, Vernon, *Tolland*, 5-12 Feb (*David Mathieu**). 2023-12.

(Black) Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans* [8]

2022: Adult, Bradley Point Beach, West Haven, *New Haven*, 12 Nov (*Julian Hough**). 2022-53.

Despite the many throngs of Brant wintering along the Connecticut coastline, this is only the 8th record of this distinctive Pacific race. While it is truly a scarce migrant, it probably occurs more than the few records suggest, perhaps due to a lack of observers' efforts in targeting flocks specifically looking for this race.

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* [22]

2023: Adult, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 18 Jan-20 Feb (*Russ Smiley**). 2023-03.

This individual has wintered in Stonington harbor since 2017.

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* [17]

2022: Adult, Branford, *New Haven*, 7-19 Dec (*Dan Barvir, Steve Mayo**) 2022-63.

The bird was visiting feeders at a private residence and was only visible from the inside of the homeowner's living room.

Black-chinned Hummingbird *Archilochus alexandri* [2]

2022: HY, probably female, South Windsor, *Hartford*, 15 Oct-23 Dec (*Anonymous, Matt Bell**). 2022-61.

Only the second state record, it frequented a private feeder and was not available to the general masses. Permission was briefly granted to a local birder who was able to document the occurrence with photographs that enabled a confident identification of this tricky Western species. Unfortunately, the bird probably succumbed to the extreme cold of 23 Dec as it was not seen after that afternoon.



Compared to Ruby-throated, this female shows the longer, slightly decurved bill and broad, rounded tips to the outer primaries of Black-chinned Hummingbird. (Matt Bell)

Black Rail *Laterallus jamaicensis* [8]

2022: Adult, Torrington, *Litchfield*, 5-8 Jun (*Dave Rosgen*; *Mark Danforth**). 2022-27.

One was heard calling, and seen briefly, by veteran birder Dave Rosgen. It intermittently vocalized nightly from a cattail marsh on the Still River Greenway. Heavy rain on 9 June flooded the pool, likely causing the rail to abandon the marsh. Unfortunately, news of the find was slow to be released, in part because initially it was unclear if the site was on private property, as well as concern for the bird - a sensitive species - being agitated by recorded playback. Even so, many others were able to hear the bird's calls on subsequent nights. The committee always urges rarity finders who wish to share their good fortune with others, to weigh releasing news of rare birds and the effects it may, or may not, have on the birds' welfare.

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* [11]

2022: Adult, Meadow Pond Park, Simsbury, *Hartford*, 21 May (*Tom Yanik**). 2022-23; Adult, presumed same as the Simsbury bird, Four Mile River Boat Launch, Old Lyme, New London, 21 May (*Andrew Dasinger**, *Glenn Williams**). 2022-24A; Adult, presumed same as the Old Lyme bird, Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme, New London, 21-27 May (Ebird reports). 2022-24B.

The Simsbury bird is the first inland record for CT. One theory is that the bird was disoriented by the dense fog, and followed the CT River north to Simsbury. Possibly the same bird was found in the afternoon in Old Lyme, and later at nearby Rocky Neck State Park.



Ruff *Calidris pugnax* [12]

2022: Juvenile, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 14-16 Sep (*Matthew Male*, *Karen Gallo**, *Bill Rankin**). 2022-38.

This confiding shorebird was discovered frequenting the West End puddles at Hammonasset State Park and was seen and photographed by many observers during its stay.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* [8]

2022: Adult, Short Beach, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 18-30 Jul (*Frank Mantlik**). 2022-28.

A worn breeding-plumaged individual was found in a small pond on the Short Beach Golf Course by veteran rarity finder and hard-working local birder Frank Mantlik. Its protracted stay - at nearby Stratford Point or Milford Point - allowed new generations of observers to add it to their state and life lists. This was the first chaseable individual since a juvenile, 8-13 Oct 1998 in Old Lyme.

An Ebird search showed this was the only Curlew Sandpiper in North America at the time and it was subsequently voted as COA's "Bird of the Year" for 2022.

Dovekie *Alle alle* [11]

2023: Age uncertain, Thames River mouth, New London, *New London*, 21 Jan (*Phil Rusch**). 2023-07.

This distant individual was only seen twice in two hours but seen by an observer familiar with this diminutive alcid.

Common Murre *Uria aalge* [17]

2023: Adult, Thames River, New London, *New London*, 19 Jan-2 Feb (*John Oshlick**). 2023-06.

This species was unrecorded in the state prior to 2011. This lone bird was found during a large incursion of Razorbills into the eastern Long Island Sound during Jan and Feb 2023. Only three of the state's 17 records have been seen from shore.

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia* [31]

2022: Age uncertain, Shippan Point, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 17 Jan (*Patrick Dugan*, *Frank Gallo**). 2022-04.

Adequately described and photographed, Patrick Dugan's report was transcribed and submitted by non-observer Frank Gallo. Similar to Dovekies, Thick-billed Murres have a propensity of being "wrecked" during inclement weather and are typically found moribund inland, or along the coast. Any birders with grand plans to add



This stunning juvenile Ruff showed off for multiple observers at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison on 14-16 Sep 2022. (Chris S. Wood)



This beautiful adult Curlew Sandpiper provided excitement when it was found on 18 July 2022 at Short Beach Park in Stratford and when it then moved to Milford Point through 30 July. (Frank Mantlik)

this bird to their state list should therefore be quick off the mark and armed with defibrillators when future birds are reported!

Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle* [7]

2022: Adult, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 19 Apr (Phil Rusch*). 2022-15.

2023: Juvenile, Thames River, New London, *New London*, 19 Jan-19 Feb (John Oshlick*). 2023-05.

The Stonington bird was a fly-by, breeding-plumaged individual. The New London bird remained in the river mouth for a month, seen from shore by a number of lucky birders. It, and the above Common Murre, were both found by keen birder John Oshlick. This species, historically, has been difficult to find in the state.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* [30]

2022: Adult, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 19 Dec (Russ Smiley*). 2022-59; Two, first-cycle, Shippan Point, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 23 Dec (Al Collins*). 2022-65.

The Stonington bird was a well-photographed fly-by. The Stamford birds were singles both flying east offshore during strong southwest winds.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* [8]

2022: First alternate, Short Beach, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 27 May (Frank Mantlik*). 2022-25.

This one-day wonder was discovered and well-photographed roosting with other gulls and Common Terns on tidal sand-flats off of Short Beach. This species has become much less common in CT in recent years, probably tied to a shift in spring migration routes by flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls, resulting in its return back to the Review List.

Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* [16]

2022: Adult, Mansfield Hollow Reservoir dyke, Windham, *Windham*, 28 Jul (Phil Rusch*). 2022-29; First-cycle, Southport, Westport/Fairfield, *Fairfield*, 12 Nov (Tina Green*). 2022-52.

The Windham bird, very rare inland, was a lucky find by an experienced observer. Strong, fast moving southwesterly storms tracking northeast in early November are prime systems for scooping up south-western migrants such as Cave Swallows and Franklin Gulls which are staging in large numbers in Texas. Almost to the day, a similar system looked to be developing that might replicate the incursion of Franklin's Gulls in November 2015. Alas, it proved not to be except for the fall record. The Southport bird was among a large flock of late-season Laughing Gulls which lingered along the shore due to plentiful baitfish (Menhaden).



Left to right: Common Gull (race *kamschatschensis*), Stamford, January, 2023 (Josh Bernstein) and Short-billed Gull, Stamford, January, 2023 (Josh Bernstein). A nice opportunity to see these species together and compare size and structure. Note the slighter bill, amber eye, and characteristic crescentic head and breast markings of the Short-billed compared with the darker grey upper parts and heavy bill of the distinctive Asian race, colloquially referred to as Kamchatka Gull.



Common Gull (nominate race *canus*), Windham, March 2023 (David Mathieu). An obliging bird that allowed for close study exhibiting the typical gestalt of the slighter smaller Eurasian race, referred to as Common Gull. Strangely easier to separate from its Asian cousin than the similar, west coast Short-billed.

Common Gull *Larus canus* [11-kam, 9-canus]

2023: Adult, race *kamschatschensis*, Cove Island Park, Holly Pond, Cumming's Park, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 25 Jan-6 Mar (*Patrick Dugan, Frank Mantlik**). 2023-09A; Adult, *kamschatschensis*, presumed same as Stamford bird, Seaside Park, Bridgeport, *Fairfield*, 4 Feb (*Jeremy Nance**). 2023-09B; Adult, nominate race *canus*, Coventry Lake, Coventry, Tolland; Eastbrook Mall, Mansfield Hollow Reservoir, Tolland; Northridge Drive, Airport Trail, Windham, Windham, 17 Jan-21 Mar (*David Mathieu**). 2023-08.

The Stamford individual of the Asian race, colloquially referred to as Kamchatka Gull, has apparently returned for its 5th year. It's interesting that it flew from Stamford to Bridgeport, then back again, but based on wing pattern and appearance, it was presumed to relate to the same individual.

The nominate Eurasian race *canus*, colloquially referred to as Common Gull, was a rewarding find for Dave Mathieu, whose hard-working inland gulling paid off to the delight of many observers who travelled to see this individual. After its brief appearance and identification at an evening gull roost on Coventry Lake, it was sighted in three towns over two counties. To the astonishment of birders in the Northeast Corner, it decided to make the rooftop at the rear of Kohl's at the Eastbrook Mall in Mansfield, and the parking lot at the Walmart in North Windham its primary foraging locations with Friskies fish-flavored dry cat food as its meal of choice. It was seen by over 200 birders from 17 states as far away as Florida, California, and West Virginia.

Even more amazing, Phil Rusch discovered a second Common Gull that joined the original individual at the Walmart lot on the morning of 19 Mar 2023. It will be reviewed in due course.

Short-billed Gull *Larus brachyrhynchus* [3]

2022: Adult, Long Beach, Lordship Seawall, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 20 Mar (*Aidan Kiley**). 2022-64.

2023: Adult, Holly Pond, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 30 Jan (*Patrick Dugan, Aidan Kiley**). 2023-10.

The above records presumably relate to a returning individual and it is also presumed that this is the same individual that was seen at Randall's Island, New York City 3 Dec 2022 - 19 Jan 2023, and perhaps is also the same bird that had been seen in various parts of Brooklyn in previous years. Since its split from the "Mew Gull" complex by the AOS in 2021, it has required observers to separate them to species level, which can be quite tricky and primarily involves a precise description of the wing tip pattern. Key field marks of putative Short-billed Gulls should involve noting the color of the eye, size of the bill, wing pattern and the pattern of the head and breast

markings. Short-billed Gulls typically show a distinctive “nicotine-stained” shawl of fine markings that is often a clue when seen at a distance. These two sightings constitute only the second and third records. The first record was found by “Mew Gull whisperer” Nick Bonomo at Hammonasset on 20 Mar 2016. Keen gullers would be well advised to read his identification article and status in the state on this complex in *Connecticut Warbler* Volume 37: Number 2; pp 32-47.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus* [3]

2022: Third-cycle, Long Beach, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 18 Mar (*Jeremy Nance**). 2022-13.

Only the third record, and the first recorded away from a landfill, of this hard to identify Asian species. Discovered among a large flock of plankton-feeding gulls by a sharp-eyed observer, at least 20-30 birders managed to connect with this mega-rarity before dense fog developed. It is presumed to be the same individual as the one that frequented Central Park in New York City during February 2022.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* [14]

2022: First basic, Sandy Point, West Haven, *New Haven*, 18-19 Oct (*Julian Hough**). 2022-42.

In true Patagonia Picnic Table Effect, it was found while the observer was watching the Smith's Longspur. Despite breeding on Long Island, this remains a rare species in the state with individuals not lingering long. All previous records are of breeding adults in late spring and summer, so this individual, molting from juvenile to formative plumage, represents the first non-adult in the state.



Gull-billed Terns seldom make the crossing from Long Island, but this young bird was seen by observers simultaneously enjoying the Smith's Longspur at Sandy Point in West Haven. (Julian Hough)

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* [10]

2022: Adult, Lower Bolton Pond, Bolton, *Tolland*, 13 May (*David Mathieu**). 2022-17; Twenty-seven, Adults, Bantam Lake, Litchfield, *Litchfield*, 13 May (*Dave Tripp**). 2022-18; Fourteen, Adults, Candlewood Lake, Brookfield, *Litchfield*, 13 May (*Brendan Murtha**). 2022-19; Sixteen, Adults, Lake Pocotopaug, East Hampton, *Middlesex*, 13 May (*Russ Smiley**). 2022-20; Seven, Adults, Saugatuck Reservoir, Easton, *Fairfield*, 13 May (*Jeremy Nance**). 2022-21; Adult, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 13 May (*Aaron Bourque**). 2022-22.

On the morning of 13 May 2022, Connecticut awoke to dense fog covering the majority of the state. The weather conditions aligned to produce a fall-out, with at least 69 Arctic Terns on scattered inland lakes. For a more in-depth look at this incredible Arctic Tern incursion, see Jeremy Nance's article in *The Connecticut Warbler*, Volume 42, No. 3, pp 71-78, 2022.

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica* [8]

2022: Nepaug Reservoir, Canton, *Hartford*, 10 Nov (*Jay Kaplan**). 2022-51.

This species, well known to be prone to misidentification due to the problems of light and identification pitfalls with other loons, still presents adjudication difficulties for the committee. Often distant, through no fault of the observer, there are often no photographs to aid in submissions, and like many other species, descriptions are often lacking in the requisite areas to help the committee decide if a Pacific Loon was seen. Observers would be advised to refer to the article by Julian Hough on the identification of Pacific Loon in *The Connecticut Warbler*, Volume 28: Number 1; pp 25-31 that points observers towards the subtle features that need to be documented in the field.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* [15]

2022: Long Island Sound (from ferry), Waterford, *New London*, 3 Sep (*Chris Loscalzo**, *Marianne Vahey*). 2022-37.

This shearwater was seen at close range and was well described by experienced observers.

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* [21]

2022: Four, Long Island Sound (from ferry), Waterford, *New London*, 28 Jul -11 Aug (*Russ Smiley**, *Steve Mayo**, *Dan Rottino**). 2022-30A-E.

These individuals were seen in Connecticut waters from the ferry between New London and Orient Point (NY) which offers birders the best chance of seeing tubenoses in CT.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* [10]

2022: Sub-adult, Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, 9-10 Sep (*Tim White**), 2022-36A; Sub-adult, presumed same as above, Old Lyme, *New London*, 10 Sep (*Steve Mayo**). 2022-36B; Sub-adult, presumed same as above, Niantic Bay, East Lyme/Waterford, *New London*, 12-22 Sep (*Dave Provencher*). 2022-36C; Sub-adult, Stonington Harbor, Stonington, *New London*, 7 Nov (*Phil Rusch**). 2022-50; Sub-adult, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 29 Nov-3 Dec (*Patrick Dugan*, *Frank Mantlik**). 2022-57.

The Stonington individual was seen at dawn the prior two days in Watch Hill, RI, flying from the direction of Stonington Harbor. The Stamford individual was seen by U.S.Coast Guard contractors on 29 Nov 2022 and the information was relayed to local birders by Brian Hess and Miley Bull and many birders saw it subsequently around Shippan Point/Westcott Cove.

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* [15]

2022: Three, Juveniles, Plum Bank Marsh, Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, 21-28 Aug (*John Michael Arnett**, *Severin Eubbing**, *Jim Sherwonit**). 2022-32; Juvenile, Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme, *New London*, 2-14 Sep (*Deb Lalonde**, *Bill Rankin**). 2022-33A; Juvenile, presumed same as East Lyme, Hammonasset State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 14 Sep (*Steve Mayo**). 2022-33B; Juvenile, presumed same as above, Lighthouse Point, New Haven, *New Haven*, 15 Sep (*Tom Murray**). 2022-33C; Juvenile presumed same as above, Sandy Point, West Haven, *New Haven*, 16 Sep (*Paul Smith**). 2022-33D; Juvenile, Stewart McKinney NWR, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 7-16 Sep (*Mary Walsh**, *Vin Gallogly**, *Chris Wood**, *Aidan Kiley**). 2022-34; Two, Juveniles, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 23 Oct-13 Dec (*Frank Mantlik**). 2022-46.

These seven individuals were part of a large post-breeding dispersal into the northeast and New England that included a flock of up to 30 juveniles in Wells, ME in August. The species is now nesting in southern NJ, with an amazing tally of 1075 (490 juveniles) in the evening roost in Ocean City on 21 Aug 2022! The initial flock in Old Saybrook may have numbered up to six birds, and was found by a Diamondback Terrapin researcher who posted his photos on iNaturalist.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* [15]

2022: Juvenile, intermediate morph, Lighthouse Point, New Haven, *New Haven*, 27 Oct (*Tom Murray**, *Paul Roberts**, *Bobbi Fisher**). 2022-47.

A pleasant surprise, this rarity was seen well and photographed by experienced hawk-watchers. Almost annual in recent years, it remains a highly-prized find at hawk-watches. Despite its expected occurrence, without the presence of photographs, based on recent submissions, describing this distinctive species' differentiating fieldmarks on paper seems to be tricky.

Gray Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis* [3]

2022: HY, Bauer Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 12 Oct (*Chuck Imbergamo**, *Anthony Woodall*). 2022-40.

A great find by our local hardworking list-serve moderator, Chuck Imbergamo. He alerted one other birder; they both obtained excellent photos. Only the 3rd record, it disappointed many birders by quickly departing southwest never to be seen again.

Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya* [4]

2022: Sikorsky Airport, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 19 Mar-2 Apr (*Tom Murray**). 2022-14.

A purple patch for rarities in Stratford, this bird put on a show at Sikorsky Airport for 100+ observers. It was another feather in Tom's rarity cap after his recent discovery of the Milford Point Northern Lapwing on 16 Dec 2021.

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina* [1]

2022: Female, Farmington River, Avon, *Hartford*, 8 May (*David Lawton**). 2022-16.



Connecticut's third Gray Kingbird made a brief appearance at Bauer Farm in Madison on 12 Oct 2022. (*Chuck Imbergamo*)



One of the most-watched birds in state history, this Townsend's Solitaire was present and often perched in the open from 21 Nov 2022 to at least 1 Mar 2023 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. (Steve Broker)

This long-awaited first state record was found in a mixed swallow flock feeding over the Farmington River in Avon. The swallow was seen and carefully studied by an experienced observer over a 90 minute period. Detailed field notes and sketches accompanied his report, though no photos were obtained. His description included proper size (smaller than Tree Swallow), a grass-green back, and distinctive rump pattern. Despite the efforts of several hopeful birders the entire next day, it was never seen again.

Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi* [8]

2022: Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 21 Nov 2022-1 Mar 2023 (Scott Roxbrough, Steve Mayo*, Phil Rusch*). 2022-54.

First discovered, and reported on eBird, by Scott Roxbrough, this rare thrush spent the entire winter in the park's campground area, and was seen by dozens of birders. It fed typically on fruit of Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and other plants.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* [2]

2022: Adult, Seacrest Road, Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, 20-28 May (Anne McNulty*, Steve Mayo*). 2021-44 Addendum.

The bird that constituted the first state record in the fall/early winter of 2021-2022 returned for eight days in 2022 to the same feeding station in Old Saybrook to the delight of the homeowners. It is likely the bird had wintered locally among one of the large flocks of House Sparrows.

Smith's Longspur *Calcarius pictus* [4]

2022: Sandy Point, West Haven, *New Haven*, 18 Oct (Bill Rankin*, Cody Limber*). 2022-41.

This was a great find by local patch birder, Bill Rankin. Its identity was quickly determined via circulated photos, and the news was disseminated promptly. Although it was seen and photographed by many, as is usual with this species in Connecticut, it was a one-day wonder.

LeConte's Sparrow *Ammospiza leconteii* [16]

2022: Cassidy Road, Southbury, *New Haven*, 20 Oct (Jeff Campbell). 2022-43; Woodbridge, *New Haven*, 23 Oct (Chris Loscalzo*). 2022-45.

Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco *Junco hyemalis oregonus* [7]

2022: Adult male, Bethany, *New Haven*, 4 Nov 2022 - 1 Mar 2023 (Ann Fiske). 2022-67.

This distinctive junco returned to a Bethany yard for the third consecutive winter.

Green-tailed Towhee *Pipilo chlorurus* [3]

2023: Veterans Park, Fairfield, *Fairfield*, 13 Jan-19 Mar, (James Purcell*, Frank Mantlik*, Aidan Kiley*). 2023-02.

James Purcell discovered this rarity, the state's third, among a mixed flock of sparrows a short way from his home. The bird found a private feeding station adjacent to the park and settled in for the winter. The homeowner allowed many to view this special bird.

Yellow-rumped "Audubon's" Warbler *Setophaga coronata auduboni* [6]

2022: Long Beach, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 23 Oct (John Oshlick*). 2022-44.

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* [22]

2022: HY probably male, Silver Sands State Park, Milford, *New Haven*, 24 Nov (Julian Hough*). 2022-56; HY, Coulter Street, Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, 9 Dec (Nick Jacome, Joe Attwater*). 2022-58; Adult male, Lord's Point, Stonington, *New London*, 21 Dec 2022-24 Jan 2023 (Steven Dodd, Phil Rusch*). 2022-60.

Both HY birds were short stayers and didn't hang around long to be seen by the

masses. The Stonington adult is likely the same male that was at the same location during Feb-Mar 2022.

BREEDING RECORDS

Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis*

2022: Location withheld, *Norfolk*, July 2022. 2022-01

Several Ebird reports with photos 24-31 July 2022 documented two different families with small flightless juveniles in Norfolk. After several years of suspected breeding in the state, this constitutes the first confirmed breeding by Sandhill Cranes.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*

2023: Groton, *New London*, 8 Jan. 2023-01.

One was reported near dusk from the Mystic River in Groton. The photos were of a lone adult white goose, facing directly into the camera, and therefore indeterminate as to whether it was a Ross's or Snow Goose.

Ruff *Calidris pugnax*

2022: Madison, *New Haven*, 29 Sep. 2022-39.

Two individuals were reported as photographed at Hammonasset Beach State Park on 29 Sep. (One juvenile had been present there 14-16 Sep). Careful examination of the metadata on the photographs revealed that the photos were taken 15 Sep 2022, and of one individual. The committee believes that this was an innocent clerical mistake.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

2022: Waterford, *New London*, 24 Dec. 2022-62.

Two individuals were observed from shore off Harkness State Park. Though the observer reported some field marks for the species in question, a majority of the committee felt the description didn't clinch the identification, nor did it eliminate other small gull species.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

2022: Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, 23 Aug. 2022-35.

While the observer noted an impression of a bulky white tern, at great distance, the photos submitted were inconclusive and two-thirds of the committee voted to not

accept.

Great Blue Heron "Great White Heron" *Ardea herodias occidentalis*

2022: Waterford, *New London*, 30 Apr. 2022-26.

The observer admitted having a moderate level of uncertainty regarding the identification. The photos submitted were distant and overexposed, but one showed a bird with black legs. Also some on the committee felt the size and structure of the bill was not correct for a Great Blue Heron, and better fit Great Egret.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*

2022: Greenwich, *Fairfield*, 29 Sep. 2022-48; Greenwich, *Fairfield*, 30 Oct. 2022-49.

In both reports, descriptions of the birds in question were lacking adequate details. In cases like these, where photos were not obtained, detailed field notes and sketches are recommended.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

2021: Stamford, *Fairfield*, 26 May. 2021-63.

Three observers saw a medium-sized falcon briefly in flight that one of them felt fitted this species. Though some descriptive details were noted, the committee unanimously felt a bird of such extreme rarity, submitted a year after the observation, warranted more documentation.

Hoary Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni*

2021: Canaan, *Litchfield*, 21 Jan. 2021-04.

One bird was photographed among some Common Redpolls on the ground. The written description was fairly good, but in some ways contradicted what the photos showed, including a moderate amount of streaking on the rump. The committee deliberated for the full three rounds of voting, but still could not muster enough positive votes for acceptance. The committee also felt that many of these HY females pose a challenge based on current acceptable criteria and may not be identifiable with certainty in the field due to overlap with HY female Common Redpoll.

Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco *Junco hyemalis oregonus*

2023: Simsbury, *Hartford*, 9 Jan. 2023-13.

An individual of this subspecies was reported from Rosedale Farms in Simsbury. The description and one photo was circulated to several experts with experience in the many subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco. All of them thought this bird was not a pure

“Oregon” Junco, but rather likely an intergrade, based in part on having too much gray on the flanks.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED (ORIGIN)

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris*

2021-25. Facebook.

One was reported from Union Park in Manchester 11 May 2021, via Facebook. Though the photo was indeed of a HY/female Painted Bunting, the committee, in two rounds of voting, felt that without any written details nor confirmation from the photographer as to where the photo was taken, the record should not be accepted.

Yellow Rail, *Coturnicops noveboracensis*

2021-53, Facebook.

A live individual of this species was reported on Facebook as being brought to a veterinary clinic in Wilton on 20 Sep 2021. Photos of the bird in hand were of a Yellow Rail. Despite committee efforts to obtain details about this event, it could not be ascertained where - CT, NY, or elsewhere - the bird had been captured. In its second round of voting, the committee voted unanimously to not accept.

In the future, the committee has decided that Facebook records will be considered for review only if the Facebook poster fills out a written report. Those without such will be added to the large number of un-reviewed reports that the committee has on file.

Frank Mantlik, mantlik@sbcglobal.net
Phil Rusch, philiprusch@charter.net
Julian R. Hough, jrhough1@snet.net

Documenting a Rare Bird

By Louis R. Bevier and Julian R. Hough



Birders assemble in good numbers to find, and hopefully document, the extremely rare Green-tailed Towhee in Fairfield in early 2023. (Julian Hough)

(Originally published in part in *The Connecticut Warbler*, Vol. 16, No. 1, January 1996)

One of the pleasures of watching birds is sharing observations with others. Whether it is a first for the year or a first for the state, we naturally enjoy telling other people of our finds. If your sightings are used for a detailed study of birds in your region, then you have made a lasting contribution both to other people and to bird conservation. To ensure your observations are not ignored, you must practice keeping notes. A part of this is learning to document rare birds.

The allure of listing is undeniable and the prospect of finding unusual birds has probably led to better coverage of our state than at any other time. Improved optics and identification techniques have increased the skills of birders. While this issue is devoted to statewide rarities, don't forget that some "mundane" birds can be rare on the local level. A Western Sandpiper on a small, inland pond might seem unworthy of a description at the time, but when you learn it is the only local record, you better have a description.

Photographs greatly enhance the substantiation of any record and should be sought if at all possible. Obtaining digital recordings of vocalizations is also valuable and becoming more prevalent, especially in the age of social media and online Facebook and WhatsApp that allow for a quick dissemination of news and photos. For most

“old-school” birders, the basic form of documentation is still the written description based on notes taken while studying a bird. However, note-taking is fastly becoming a lost art in the face of digital photography, whereby everyone seems to have the ability, via a cellphone or digital DSLR, to capture an image. However, while a picture is often worth a thousand words, such images posted on a Facebook Group, while informing many quickly of the presence of a potential rarity, needs more for historical archiving perspectives, and as such committees require a modicum of information to accompany “photo-only” reports.

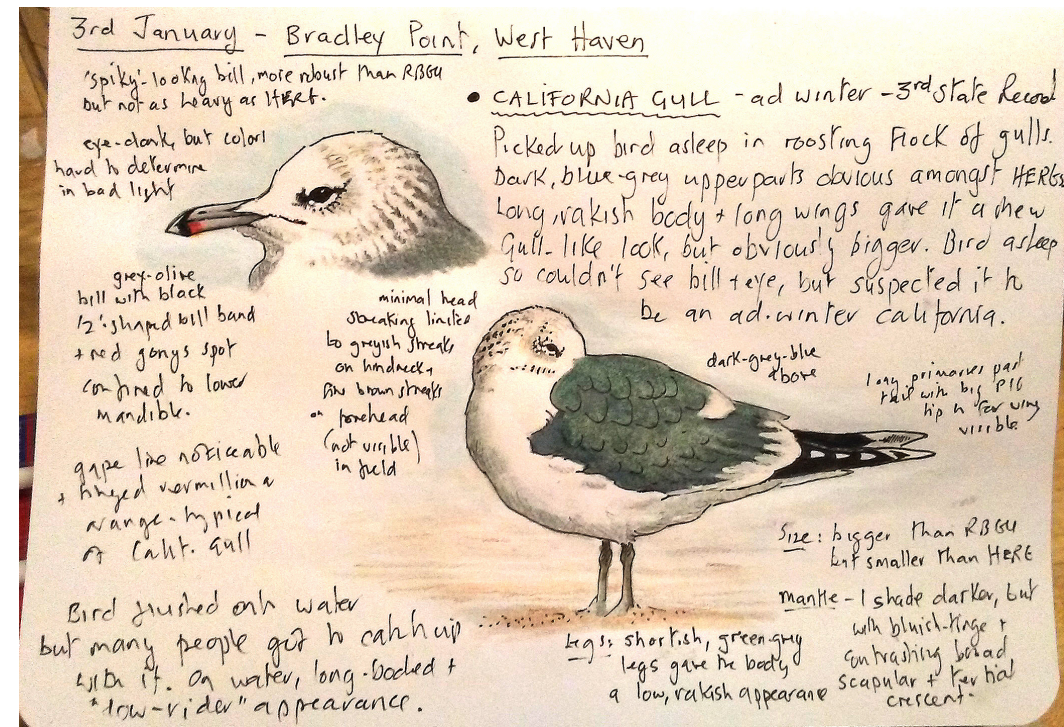
Learning to write a description takes practice, and the best way to start is to describe common birds or photographs of birds. Learn the names for feathers and patterns on birds (use bird topography outlines in field guides), and then develop an orderly and consistent approach to description: size and structure, head, upperparts, underparts, etc. Follow the same order each time. Communication with others is most effective if these terms are used. Two older publications that will help you are: *The New Approach to Identification* by Peter Grant and Killian Mullarney (1989) and *Advanced Birding* by Kenn Kaufman (1990). The first, a pamphlet, is a brilliant, concise distillation of techniques for describing the field marks on birds, understanding molt and plumages, and judging size and structure. Have you ever wondered why tail spots on warblers look different from above and below? This booklet will help you understand what you see on a bird. Kaufman's book is not just for advanced birders, it is for anyone wishing to learn more about the birds they see and has an excellent beginning chapter on birding techniques.

Take notes while watching the bird! This is often difficult, particularly when you want to chat and enjoy a rarity with your friends. Get them to help out, though. One can write as another dictates, then reverse roles. This is a great learning exercise. Sketches of the bird can be quite helpful. It is relatively easy to draw a diagram of the bird with notes pointing to observed patterns. Remember, the goal is not to make an artistic masterpiece, it is a tool to train you to “look” at a bird rather than just “see it”. Avoid the temptation to use a field guide when making these drawings, and remember that one's aim is to describe the individual bird under study and not a generalized image of the species.

Bird banders who trap a rare bird should take careful notes, measurements, and photographs from a number of angles. The practice of rehabilitating injured birds has become important to bird conservation, and people working in places where birds are taken, such as veterinary hospitals, should obtain the exact date and place where the bird was found. Sometimes injured birds are transported great distances, and this can confuse the place of origin

Guidelines for submission of a rare bird

For the majority of birders, there is nothing more rewarding or exciting than discovering and identifying a rare or unusual bird. The Avian Records Committee



Sketches of rarities are a refined practice by British birders. This rarities submission by Julian Hough reveals hours of practice describing birds. While most might not be able to draw this well, the diagramming of patterns and colors is within our capabilities. Even stick figures with notes can be very useful. You will improve with practice. Through careful observation you will avoid these problems and acquire a deeper and more lasting appreciation for birds.

of Connecticut (ARCC) was formed to assess and adjudicate on the occurrences of any such extralimital species within the state. It is responsible for maintaining the state list as well as concurrent awareness of the bird species recorded within state boundaries. In order to evaluate and document sightings of rare or scarce species, the committee asks that written descriptions be submitted for assessment. Descriptions should include all relevant details of the bird, including any sketches (however crude) and, most importantly, any available photographs.

There is an art to writing a convincing description and this article will suggest some helpful guidelines for those making future submissions. For some rarity-finders, it is both a privilege and an honor to write such reports. For many others, filling out such a formal report is regarded as a chore. As a dedicated birder, it is more aptly termed a duty. It is accepted that some birders, even the most experienced and reliable field people, are not adept at writing descriptions. To commit a live bird to paper and to

convey all the salient points to someone else can sometimes prove problematical. Herein lies the primary problem of assessing rare records. Committee members might not have had the benefit of seeing the bird you describe; each member must vote on a record based on the written material. A member will make a composite from all the supplied details; therefore descriptions should include as much detail as possible. One persistent problem is that submissions often contain precise descriptions of the bird's location, habitat, or movements but fail to describe the bird itself. This information is vital to the acceptance of a submission.

If a submitted description is rejected, it is for one of two reasons: (1) The written information did not conform to the currently accepted criteria used to identify that particular species, or (2) The submission lacked sufficient detail. Many of the submitted descriptions fall into the second category. When a record is rejected, it is not necessarily that the committee feels a mistake has been made regarding the identification, but that either similar or confusion species were not sufficiently ruled out, or important plumage details were not noted due to the brevity of views. As a result, from an assessor's point of view, the identification is not proven beyond reasonable doubt. In some cases where important detail is lacking, the committee will try to solicit the information from the observers. If the documentation is not forthcoming, or cannot be provided, the record is rejected.

A cautionary note should be added at this point. The committee is aware that most birds do not sit out and allow a feather by feather dissection. While some genuine rarities are reliably identified, they do not always give the observer time to note details that would be sufficient to make a formal acceptance possible. Do not be afraid to state that you did not note leg color, wing-pattern, etc.; sometimes a negative comment imparts more information to the assessor than an ambiguous description.

If you are lucky enough to find a rarity, we urge you to take a detailed description at the time of discovery and, if possible, to obtain a photographic record. Even a poor quality photograph can be of great help in the acceptance process. The committee would prefer descriptions to be based on original field notes rather than on notes written after the current literature has been referenced. Observers are therefore urged to submit copies of their original field notes with their formal written description. If you find a good bird, always try to inform other birders in the vicinity, as well as one of the members of the committee, as quickly as possible. The more people that see a rarity, the easier it is to document the occurrence.

Submitting a description for adjudication

Information to include when submitting a description can be found on the COA website here: <https://www.ctbirding.org/arcc/reporting-rare-sightings/>

On a final note, the committee would like to thank all the finders of rarities for their compliance with the requirements of the committee. Above all, we thank you for unselfishly sharing your discoveries with other birders. Happy hunting!

Louis R. Bevier, Maine and Julian R. Hough, New Haven, CT

Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

Summer Season, June 1 through July 31, 2022

A shortest reporting season is also the most complex. Accordingly it is broken down into four segments: the end of northbound migration in early June; the beginning of southbound migration in July; the breeding season throughout the period; and the array of interesting occurrences that fit under the umbrella of lingerers, wanderers and strays.

Northbound migration

Two Black Scoters were still at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford on June 7 (RS). Seven Red Knots, a species in alarming decline, were at Sandy Point in West Haven on June 8 along with 10 White-rumped Sandpipers (BR). The high count of White-rumped there was 16 on June 11 (BR). A bird identified as a **White-rumped Sandpiper x Dunlin hybrid** was convincingly identified at Sandy Point on June 12 (SU). See article and photos in the October Connecticut Warbler (Vol. 42 No 4). Late Bonaparte's Gulls were at Goshen Cove in Waterford on June 2 (KG) and at Silver Sands State Park in Milford on June 6 (JO).

The latest Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was at Great Mountain Forest in Canaan on June 8 (WS, OP). Single Swainson's Thrushes were present on June 1 at Little Pond in Litchfield (AM), at Larson Sanctuary in Fairfield (BMu) and at Great Hollow Preserve in Sherman (JG). A Blackpoll Warbler was still present on June 15 in Woodbury (RN).

Southbound migration

Day after day, first reports for returning migrant shorebirds piled up as usual in early July: a Short-billed Dowitcher of the *hendersoni* subspecies on July 11 at Sandy Point (SU); a Stilt Sandpiper at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) on July 12 (GHO); and a Western Sandpiper on July 13 at HBSP (SMa). A strong candidate for bird of the season was an molting adult **Curlew Sandpiper** found July 18 in a small pond on the golf course at Short Beach Park in Stratford (FM, m.ob.). A high count of 10 Whimbrel was made at Circle Beach in Guilford on July 25 (RS). A good count of 12 Solitary Sandpipers at Saugatuck Reservoir in Easton on July 30 (JN) included one of the western subspecies *cinnamomea* the next day (JN, AK). Black Terns appeared on July 15 at HBSP (FM) and on July 16 in Westport (TG).

The first Olive-sided Flycatcher was reported on July 31 in Litchfield (NM). A Red-breasted Nuthatch was on the move June 30 at HBSP (SH), and one was in a



This adult Common Gallinule was a surprise find at Buddington Pond in Copp Family Park in Groton, where it was present through much of July. (Russ Smiley)

Woodbury yard June 29-July 1 (RN). A Blackpoll Warbler was very early July 26 at Milford Point (PDe).

Lingers, wanderers and strays

A Ring-necked Duck summered at Saugatuck Reservoir in Easton (JN). A **Common Gallinule** was at Buddington Pond in Groton June 30 (SMc et al.). It was seen



Red Crossbills, including this one on July 31 at Benedict Pond in Norfolk, were widespread in northern Litchfield County during summer 2022. (Jannie Shapiro)

through July 21. Stunning and unexpected was a **Black Rail** heard and at times seen from June 5-8 in marsh habitat in Torrington (DR et al.). An **American Avocet** was a spectacular inland find on July 11 at Nod Brook in Avon (WG et al.). Another was more expected on July 24 at Milford Point (KH fide TM). A **Franklin's Gull** was an excellent find July 28 in North Windham (PR). A sub-adult Common Loon was on Lake Lillinonah in Newtown July 4-13 (RN). A **Great Shearwater** was seen from the New London-Orient, NY, ferry on July 28 (BFo).

Single **Mississippi Kites** were reported in Greenwich June 8 (RM, CE), in Litchfield on June 11 (RN), in Derby on June 14 (BB), in Hamden on June 22 (JZ) and in New Milford on June 24 (AD). A female Northern Harrier was unexpected on June 10 in Woodbury (RN). Red-headed Woodpeckers were reported on June 9 in Cheshire (AB) and on June 20 in Fairfield (KW). A Cattle Egret in Simsbury on June 3 was the only one reported (CV, JK, JMe). A **White-faced Ibis**, in keeping with recent trends, was at HBSP to at least June 24 (MK). A single Evening Grosbeak visited a feeder on Whirlwind Hill in Wallingford on July 11 (JL).

The breeding season

A pair of Blue-winged Teal on June 14 in the Boulder Pond at HBSP could have bred

in the extensive nearby marshland (GHo). At two locations in Woodbury, one female Hooded Merganser was escorting 16 young and another had nine young (RN). At Wimisink Preserve in Sherman, females had a five and eight young respectively, and yet another had two young on the Shepaug River in Roxbury. All of these were in the first two weeks of June (RN). Two large juvenile Pied-billed Grebes were feeding near good breeding habitat on July 29 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (GHa).

A Common Nighthawk on June 28 in New Haven may represent the last breeding location in the state (VR). Three Black-crowned Night-Herons, present through the season at Lake Zoar in Southbury, remained unproven as successful breeders (RN). A Least Bittern was at Hessekey Meadows Pond in Woodbury on June 15 (RN). The nesting pair of Mississippi Kites in northwest Fairfield County had one chick but were unable to fledge it. An observer who has monitored the nest for several years suspected it was taken by a hawk or crow. The parent birds disappeared shortly after the check was gone and were no longer in the area after Aug. 2 (JH).

Red Crossbills were present in northern Litchfield County through most of the period, suggesting breeding. Six were reported on June 27 in Winsted (DR), and at least nine were seen there in the next few days. Reports ranged from Norfolk to Barkhamsted (m.ob.). A **Clay-colored Sparrow** found June 5 at Holcome Hill in Newtown sang as if on territory for several weeks, but no evidence of nesting, or of a mate, was found (EB, PDu et al.). A Vesper Sparrow was in suitable habitat June 7 at Topsmead State Park in Torrington (MK). Two Savannah Sparrows were feeding two fledglings on June 15 at Lake Zoar in Southbury (RN).

Observers:

Ed Bailey, Bill Banks, Paul Desjardin (PDe), Angela Dimmitt, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Cynthia Ehlinger, Bruce Finnan (BFa), Brendan Fogarty (BFo), Frank Gallo, Karen Gallo, William Generous, Julia Gneckow, Tina Green, Kathy Hall, Greg Hanisek (GHa), Shelley Harms, Gary Hodge (GHo), Janet Holt, Jay Kaplan, Aidan Kiley, Mark Kirley (MKi), Micky Komana (MKo), Joseph Landesberg, Ryan MacLean, Nic Main, Frank Mantlik, John Marshall (JMa), Steve Mayo (SMa), Scott McConnell (SMc), Andy McGann, Jamie Meyers (JMe), Tom Murray, Brendan Murtha, Jeremy Nance, Russ Naylor, John Oshlick, Oliver Patrick, Bill Rankin, Valerie Richardson, Dave Rosgen, Phil Rusch, Will Schenck, Russ Smiley, Severin Uedding, Christopher Veale, Glenn Williams, Kate Wong, Sara Zagorski, Jim Zipp

Photo Challenge

By Julian R. Hough



Kicking through some grass on the coast in late October, you flush a bunch of Horned Larks, and amidst the flock, a rippling call of a longspur stands out as different. The flock alights and as you approach, careful scanning reveals a rather non-descript bird, sparrow-like, creeping mouse-like through the dead stems.

Lapland is the only longspur likely to be encountered in Connecticut, and it typically conforms to a standard appearance with rather rich plumage tones and well-marked head pattern. However, experienced birders know to rule out Smith's Longspur and Chestnut-collared Longspur, vagrants from the Midwest that have occurred on a couple of occasions in the state.

Looking carefully again, you see that the horizontal shuffling gait fits with a longspur and not a sparrow, but the bolder plumage patterns of Lapland seem to be absent and there appears to be a definite pale eyering. You panic a bit and realize this may be a Vesper Sparrow! You breathe a sigh of relief as you realize the bill is less robust and there is an obvious primary projection. We are back in the game. It is a longspur after all. Excitement begins to build.

How do the other species differ from Lapland Longspur? What features should you look for? It is at that moment when being prepared for this conundrum is firmly

out of your grasp, and you realize you will have to actually look at the bird and take notes if you have any hope of getting it past those sticklers on the rarities committee!

The bird is quite monotone, being a warm brownish-buff, especially below, in contrast to the whitish underparts of a Lapland. The head pattern is more bland, lacking a broad supercilium, with a darker brown frame to the ear coverts, rather than solidly blackish as in Lapland, and there is that noticeable white eye ring. Honing in on the greater coverts and tertial edges, you now see that the characteristic rufous edgings of Lapland are absent, contributing to the rather buffy appearance of this bird. You start to become more confident that this actually is a Smith's Longspur.

Supporting this thought, the bird is quite streaked above, with darker lateral crown stripes and a brownish lower border to the ear coverts. The underparts are uniformly warm-buff, contributing to the monotone appearance. There is a thin malar that extends into neat, but wispy streaks on the underparts that are typical of Smith's Longspur. Excellent! However, we need to eliminate Chestnut-collared Longspur, a species that has only occurred twice before, but in late spring in the state. In fall and early winter, Chestnut-collared Longspurs are similarly lacking in strong rufous tones; look quite grayish above and below; have a heavy, thicker-looking bill and an even blander head pattern than Smith's Longspur. Experience and comparison would inform us this species has a shorter primary projection than either Lapland or Smith's. In flight Chestnut-collared has a striking black and white tail pattern, different from the pale outer tail feathers often apparent on the other longspur species.

I photographed this confiding Smith's Longspur, found by Bill Rankin, at Sandy Point, New Haven County, on 18 October 2022.

Julian R. Hough, jrrough1@snet.net



Next Challenge Photo

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

Editor

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

Departments

Field Notes

Greg Hanisek
Frank Mantlik

Bird Counts

Steve Broker
Steve Mayo
Patrick Comins

Site Guides

Arnold Devine
Dwight Smith

Layout/Production

Manny Merisotis

Editorial Advisory Board

Louis Bevier
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Wayne Petersen

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

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

CONNECTICUT ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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**Connecticut
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314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06824
www.ctbirding.org

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