The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association

July 2023

Well-documented rarities enhance autumn field notes
Watch sites bring an uptick in Broad-winged Hawks
Getting deep into White-crowned Sparrows

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Volume 43, Number 3 July 2023

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ON THE COVER

American Oystercatcher

This family of American Oystercatchers, photographed at Milford Point by Frank Mantlik, illustrate a Connecticut Bird Atlas category for breeding confirmation - recently fledged young. More categories are shown on Pages 79, 85, 87 and 88.

A Connecticut Bird Atlas Status Update

By Chris S Elphick

Atlas team: Chris S Elphick[1], Min Huang[2], Samuel A Merker[1], Craig Repasz[3], Valerie A Steen[4], Morgan W Tingley[5]

The end of February 2022 marked the end of data collection for the Connecticut Bird Atlas. This milestone was the end of the work for most people involved: No more trudging through snowy January woods in the hopes of a creeper, kinglet, or Winter Wren. No more trips to the mall to track down the Rock Pigeons that just have to be nesting somewhere in the block. No more frustrating visits to that small patch of habitat right down the road where (insert species as appropriate) was reliably seen right up until the day before the atlas began in 2018!

For the team involved with turning the data into a completed atlas, however, last February was just the beginning of the most complex part of the project. With almost 45,000 checklists submitted by hundreds of birders, and almost 350 species reported, but only one fulltime employee (postdoctoral researcher, Sam Merker), wrangling the data, developing the statistical analyses to understand it all, and writing the computer code to implement those analyses has taken up much of the last year. We are currently homing in on a final set of results for the breeding data and have made substantial progress for the winter atlas as well. With a goal of wrapping up the project by the end of the year, we are currently planning out the endgame and in this article we aim to provide a few preliminary results and a sense of what is to come.

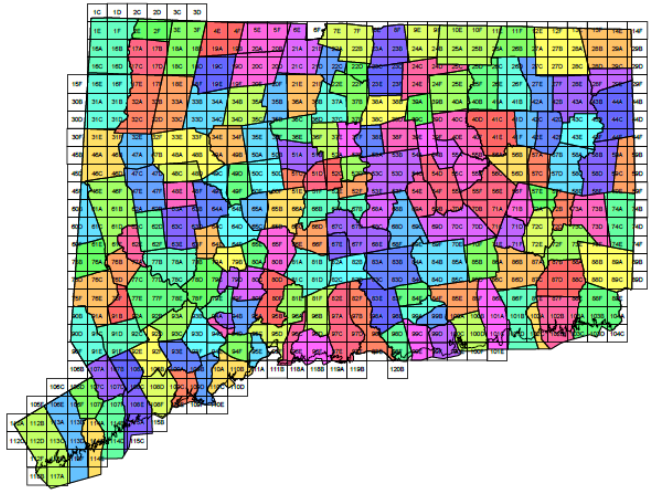
To achieve those goals, we describe each of the major data sets and how we are using them; we summarize the type of information people can expect to see in the final atlas; and finally, we close with some discussion of possible extensions of the project and ways in which we think the data could be used. We do include some example maps, similar to those that have been posted on the atlas blog throughout the project, but we provide them with the warning that we still consider all results to be preliminary and subject to change as we work through the final stages of data review and analysis. In particular, if readers think that we may be missing important data, please contact us immediately so we can ensure that the final analyses are as complete as possible.

Breeding season block data

Block data are the bread-and-butter of bird atlases, and since most atlases focus on the breeding season, the well-known “possible”, “probable”, and “confirmed” breeding codes are the data that most people think of. For those unfamiliar with atlas projects, most divide a region into a set of blocks that form a grid over the study area. The size of the blocks varies depending on the region being studied – smaller for some county

atlases, much bigger for country or continent-wide projects. Within each block, the goal is to generate a complete list of species that occur within the block's boundary, and to assess how confident we are that each species is breeding there. Birders make multiple visits to each block, visiting a diversity of habitats and locations to increase the odds of finding all the species present. On each trip they report not only the species they see, but breeding codes that provide an objective assessment of how certain we can be that nesting occurred.

Figure 1. Map showing blocks used for the Connecticut bird atlas, overlaid on a map of the state's towns denoted by different colors.

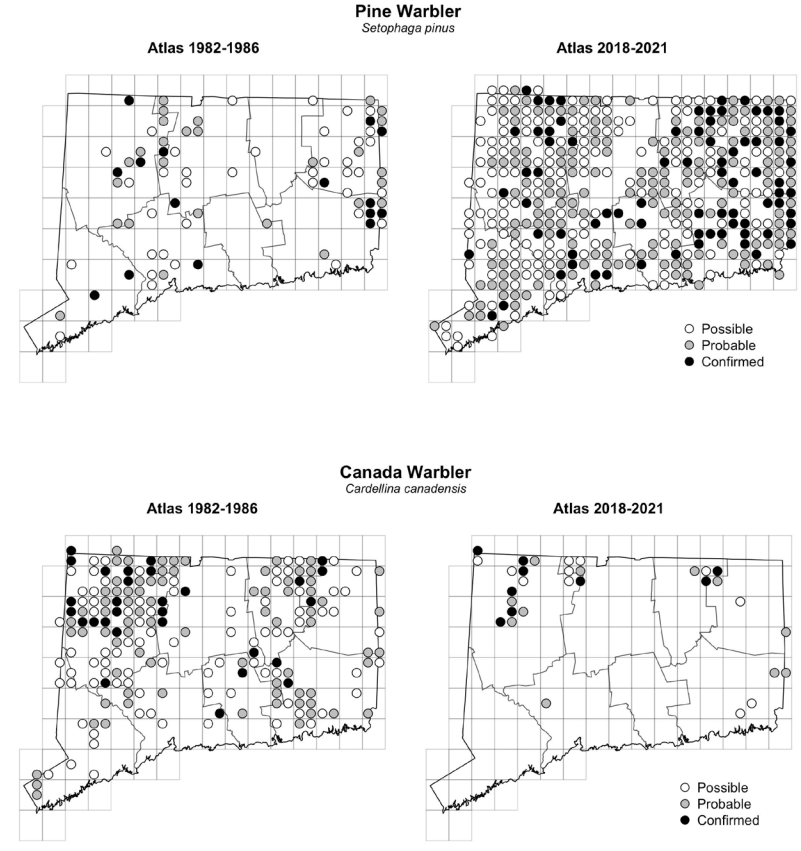


Codes that indicate that a species was present or was singing in suitable breeding habitat, point to possible breeding, but – because birds sometimes occur in places where they do not breed – these records are not taken to suggest that the species was definitely breeding. (Observations of birds seen in habitat that is not used for nesting – e.g. an egret in a salt marsh, or a swallow flying over the ocean, would not be included at all, as these birds clearly are not breeding where the observation occurred.) Other codes, including the presence of individuals that can be identified to sex and are seen to be directly interacting as a pair, or that are engaged in territorial behaviors such as counter-singing or courtship behavior, provide stronger evidence and are considered signs of probable breeding.

Breeding confirmation, however, requires observations that remove any doubt that nesting occurred nearby – for instance discovery of a nest, parental behaviors that only occur close to nests, or birds that are sufficiently young that they would have hatched nearby. The use of such codes is standardized across breeding bird atlases, and close adherence to the definitions requires careful data review – one of the

reasons why it takes time to convert all of the submitted data into finalized maps. For instance, not all birds carrying food warrant use of the CF breeding code – an Osprey carrying a fish, or a crow with a leftover piece of pizza, could simply be searching for a perch where it can sit and eat. Similarly, a tern carrying a mackerel could be travelling to a nest that is far enough away that it's in a different block … or perhaps even a different state.

Figure 2. Preliminary atlas maps showing contrasting patterns of distribution change for two warbler species. Pine Warblers have greatly expanded their range between the 1980s and the current atlas and are now commonly found statewide, whereas Canada Warbler has contracted its range into relatively few blocks, mostly along the state's northern border.



Pine Warbler (Bruce Finnan)

Canada Warabler (Mark Szantyr)

One of the main goals of the current project is to assess how bird populations have changed since the first Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas, conducted in the 1980s (Bevier 1994). To make these comparisons, we used the same atlas blocks and the same basic field methods. Comparisons are still hard to make because we do not know how much time observers spent looking for birds in the first atlas, nor do we have any information on how thoroughly each block was searched. Without this information, interpreting the data can be tricky because apparent changes might result from differences in search effort between the time periods. For many species,

however, the differences are sufficiently dramatic that there is little doubt they are real.

Breeding season point counts

Standard block data are a mainstay of atlas projects because they have been collected using essentially the same methods since the first systematic bird atlases in the 1960s. Simple lists of species for areas the size of an atlas block (approximately 9 square miles for the Connecticut project) provide only a very basic description of a species' occurrence patterns in a region, however. Since the early atlases, ornithological survey methods have developed considerably, and approaches to analyzing the resulting data have gone through several revolutions' worth of change. For instance, one of the challenges analysts face is that surveyors only detect a subset of the birds that are present in the places they visit. This is a problem because the proportion detected almost always varies among sites, time and date of survey, species, and many other factors. When multiple observers are collecting data, they become another source of variation that has nothing to do with how many birds are actually present. Fortunately, a wide variety of methods have been developed to address these problems. Unfortunately, the methods are complicated, often require considerable coding experience and high-powered computers, and can take years to learn. It is not an exaggeration to say that entire textbooks now exist on the topic. Nonetheless, ornithologists are now much better equipped to describe bird populations than when block survey methods were first developed.

Taking advantage of these research developments, we used a second type of breeding season survey to complement the data obtained from volunteer birders. This work involved trained research technicians to conduct point count surveys – a method that will be familiar to birders who have participated in the annual Breeding Bird Surveys run by the US Geological Survey. Point counts require an observer to travel to a pre-determined location where they record every bird seen or heard during a fixed time interval. Observers also collect a variety of other data (e.g., weather, background noise, time of day) that can be used to correct the counts for things that affect the observers' ability to detect all of the birds present. Although point counts usually last only a few minutes (8 min for our project, separated into four 2-min periods), when the data are collected for a large number of points the resulting analyses can allow one to estimate not only how many birds were seen, but also how many were missed. For the breeding atlas, technicians conducted surveys at 2,302 locations, scattered across the entire state, during the summers of 2018, 2019, and 2021.

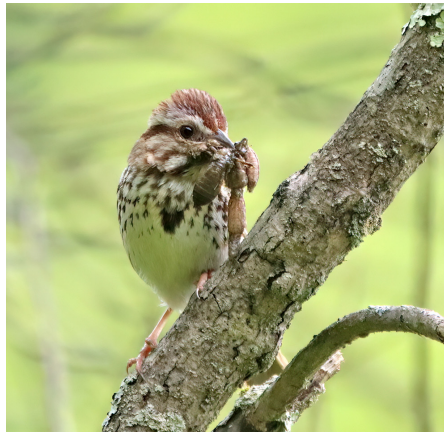
Another feature of our point count surveys is that the locations of each point were not chosen by the people who did the surveys, but randomly. Random selection has two benefits: it ensures that we do not just collect data at the sites that appear to be best for birds, which might give an overly rosy view of how well birds are doing, and it makes it possible to extrapolate from the sites that we survey to estimate how many

Illustrations of Connecticut Bird Atlas breeding codes

Copulation (right): a pair of Killdeer consummate breeding. (Mark Szantyr)

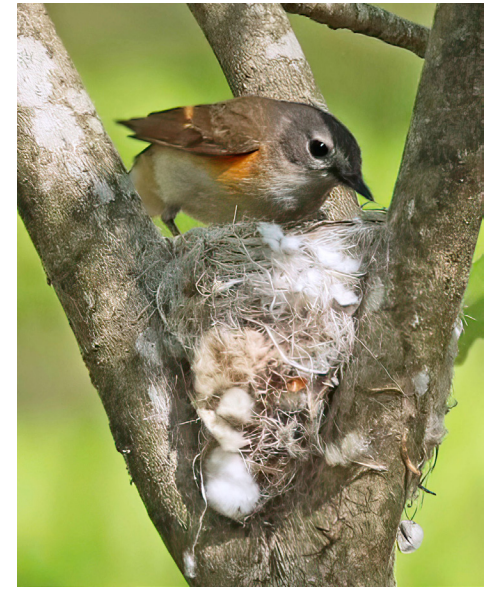
Carrying food (below left): a Song Sparrow loads up on juicy edibles. (Bruce Finnan)

Recently fledged young (below right): a juvenile Green Heron with a downy top knot. (Greg Hanisek)



Distraction display: a Piping Plover attempts to lure an intruder away from its offspring. (Frank Mantlik)

Occupied nest: a Yellow Warbler incubates eggs or nestlings. (Mark Szantyr)



Nest building: an American Redstart adds material to its nearly completed nest. (Bruce Finnan)

birds occur elsewhere in the state. By designing our site selection methods to ensure that a certain number of points fall in each major habitat, we were also able to ensure that our survey is representative of environmental conditions across Connecticut. Overall, this study design will allow us to map the relative abundance of birds in different parts of the state, determine how abundance varies in relation to different habitat features, and produce initial estimates of how big the populations of certain species are. These estimates of abundance will be the first for the State for many non-harvested species, and will be instrumental for investigating the causes of different patterns across species.

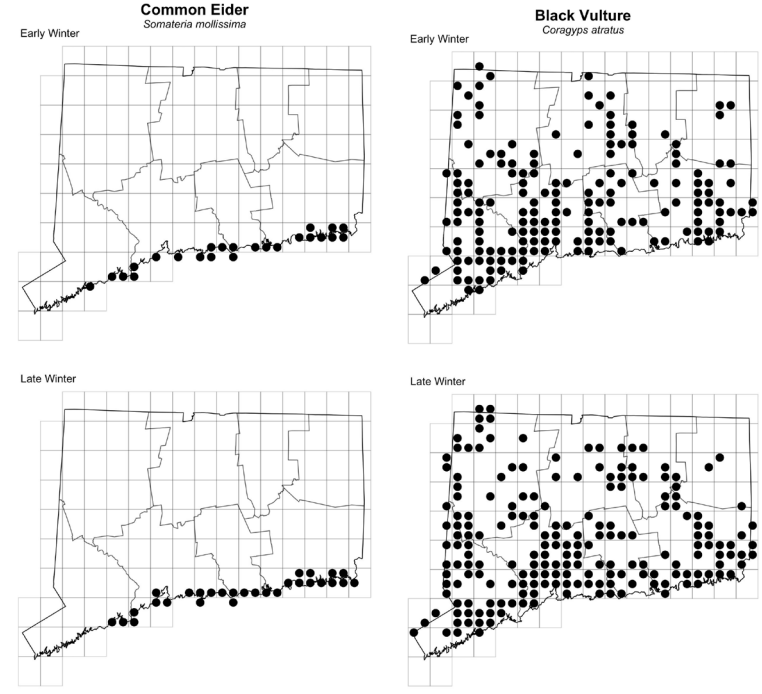
Winter block data

The original Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas was, as the name suggests, focused only on breeding birds. As bird atlasing has become more common, many regions have also conducted winter atlases to improve our understanding of where species spend time outside the breeding season. Methods for winter atlases are less standardized than for breeding projects, but generally follow similar principles – volunteer birders make repeated visits to blocks, visiting a range of habitats in an attempt to compile a complete list of species present.

For the Connecticut Bird Atlas, we broke the winter into early (November-December) and late (January-February) periods, to roughly coincide with the portions of the winter before and after heavy snow and freezing conditions become likely. We also designed several different types of surveys to encourage people to make special visits to lakes and coastal shorelines, where certain waterbirds are likely to concentrate, and to sites where species gather to roost communally. An overarching goal of the winter atlas protocols, though, was simply to encourage people to spread out and visit places that do not usually receive much attention from birders. Perhaps especially in winter, birding effort tends to become focused on a limited number of well-known sites, especially along the coast. A major goal of atlases though is to ensure that our knowledge is not biased by the disproportionate attention that these hotspots receive, and that we have a comprehensive understanding of how birds use habitats across an entire region.

Unlike the breeding survey, we do not have historical atlas data to compare the current atlas results to. Nonetheless, there are some species for which the data show clear distributional changes. Common Eider, for example, were recorded in blocks along much of the state's coast, while Black Vulture is not only a widespread breeder, but is commonly seen in many areas in winter; just a couple of decades ago, both of these species were rare enough that birders would often go out of their way to see them. This pair of species is especially interesting as the eider has expanded into the state from the north, while the vulture has encroached from the south; as such, they illustrate different types of distributional change, and presumably point to different underlying causes.

Figure 3. Preliminary atlas maps showing the Connecticut distributions of Common Eider and Black Vulture in early winter (top; November-December) and later winter (bottom maps; January-February).



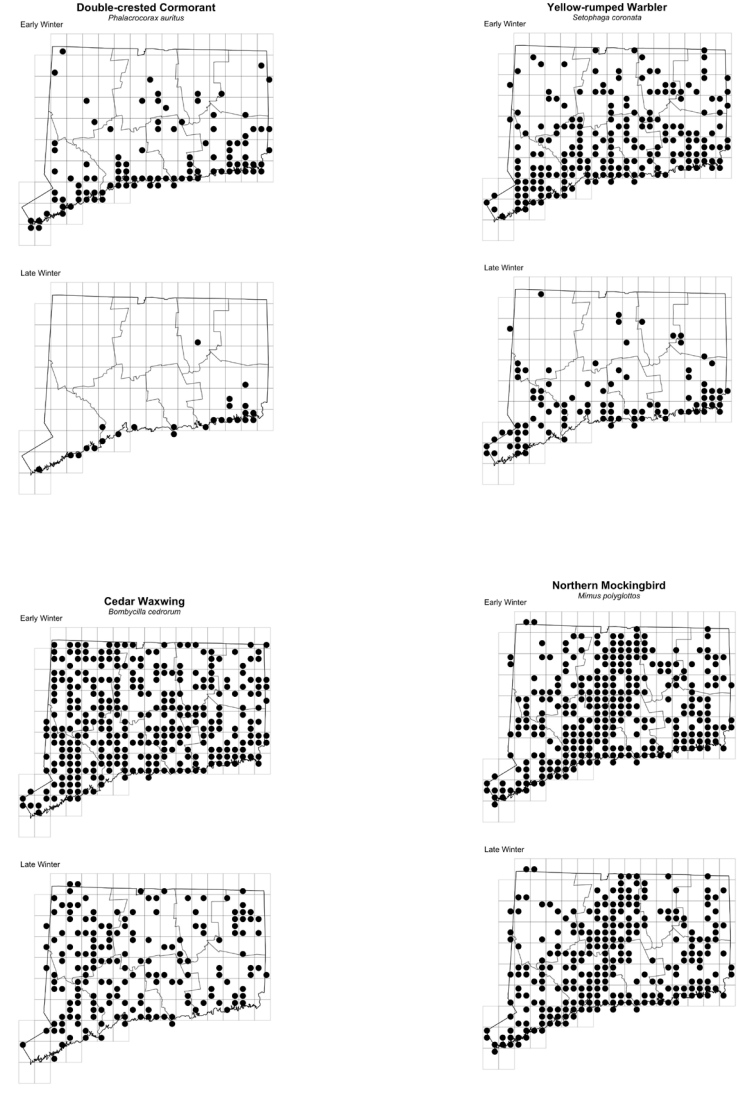
Interpreting winter data is also complicated because birds are much freer to move around when they are not tied to a nesting location, and much more prone to do so when inclement weather and variable food supplies make places that provide ideal winter habitat one year totally unsuitable in another. The Barred Owl irruption of 2018, and the massive finch incursions of 2020, for example, present very different patterns of occurrence than were seen in other years.

Preliminary results also illustrate the well-known tendency of many species to become less common in the interior and more coastally-distributed as the winter progress – especially those species that are tied to aquatic habitats that freeze, or that depend on insect prey and fruits that become less available as the winter progresses. Other patterns that emerge from perusing the maps include species that we think of as being regular throughout the winter, but that still show substantial declines in occurrence after the new year, such as Cedar Waxwings. Yet others, show more complex patterns that require more detailed study – for instance, Northern Mockingbirds were not only

Common Eider (Mark Szantyr)

Black Vultures (Greg Hanisek)

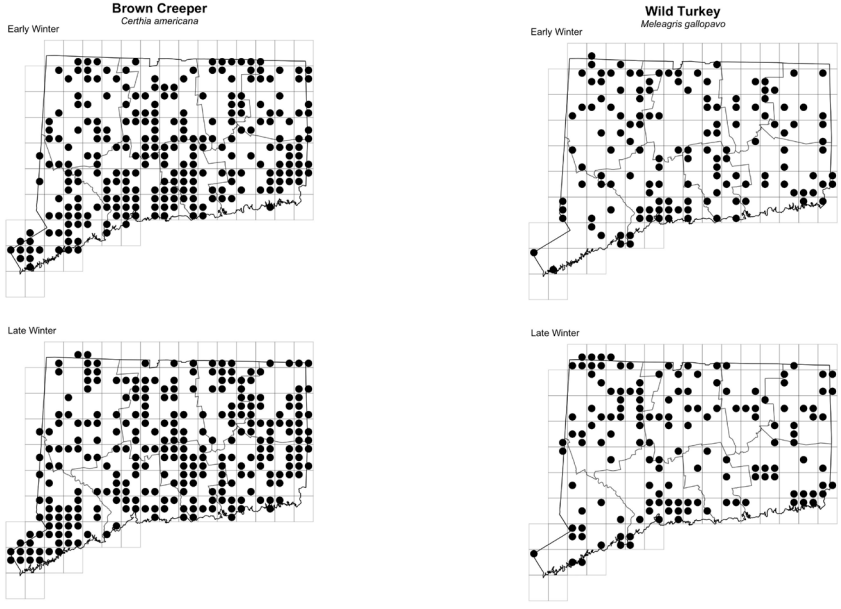
Figure 4. Preliminary atlas maps showing how species become more coastally distributed later in the winter when interior waterways are more likely to be frozen (Double-crested Cormorant), or when cold weather makes food more difficult to find for terrestrial species (Yellow-rumped Warbler). Some species that are widespread in winter, also become less common during January and February (Cedar Waxwing), while others are more likely to occur in more developed parts of the state (Northern Mockingbird).



more likely to be found in coastal blocks, but were also seen more often through the central north-south third of the state along the I-91 corridor, and in other portions of the state where land is both more developed and where elevations are lower.

Winter block data also revealed that species that we may not see very often and can consequently think of as rare – such as those creepers, kinglets, and Winter Wrens that many of us struggled to find in our forested blocks – are in fact widespread. At the same time, species that the breeding data tells us have to be out there – such as Wild Turkey, which is not migratory, so where could they go? – are seen surprisingly rarely in winter.

Figure 5. Preliminary atlas maps showing that Brown Creeper, though often hard to find, are widespread in the state. In contrast, Wild Turkeys breed across much of the state but proved relatively hard to find in winter.



Winter transect data

Just as the use of point count surveys allow us to do more than just map species occurrence, similarly standardized methods can be used to describe and understand variation in patterns of winter bird abundance across the state. Given the sparsity of birds in many areas in winter – and the need at times to keep moving to stay warm – we decided not to use point counts. Instead, technicians walked 500-meter long paths counting all of the birds they saw or heard along the way. As with the point counts, observers collected a variety of other information about each survey to help us determine the likelihood of detecting each species – and, by extension, estimate what proportion of the birds present were missed. These transect data will allow us to develop maps that describe variation in winter abundance across the state for many species, which we expect will reveal insights additional to those that can be gleaned from just the block maps.

What will the final atlas look like?

Historically, bird atlases have typically been published in book form, and many of us have devoted large sections of shelf space to our collections. Increasingly, though, atlas data have moved online and that is the current plan for the Connecticut Bird Atlas. Although we are still working out the details, the goal is to create a stable web site where the atlas data, and explanations of what they show, are presented for each species and available to anyone who seeks the information. Our initial goal is to focus on the maps – both block maps, and predictive maps based on statistical analyses of the point count and transect data. We aim to complete this goal by next winter.

Over time, though, we intend to expand the content in order to provide a much more complete "one-stop shopping" resource for information about the distribution and status of Connecticut's birds. We anticipate that each species will have its own page with illustrative photographs (all taken by Connecticut birders) and explanatory text, as well as maps. We are also developing a variety of other data summaries. For example, better information on when breeding happens, to improve on the "safe dates" – periods of the year when it is reasonable to assume that the occurrence of a bird in nesting habitat indicates that it may be breeding – that were used to guide atlasers during the current project. These safe dates were drawn from information compiled by other New England atlas projects, but relied to some extent on best guesses – our hope is to provide a stronger, data-based, basis for such dates in the future.

Our goal is for the atlas website also to draw on a variety of data sources to describe patterns of species migration through the state, to use information from the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut to describe occurrence patterns of rare species, and to provide enhanced descriptions of how species population sizes have changed over time. We see the underlying data set as a resource that will fuel much additional research on the state's birds, and some of this is already starting to happen. Two

scientific papers focused on analytical methods for using data collected by birders have already been published by members of the atlas team (Steen et al. 2019, 2020), and more peer-reviewed research articles are in development. Graduate student research projects are also being designed to use, and build on, Connecticut Bird Atlas data. Perhaps most importantly, atlas data have started to be used for land protection efforts, and we foresee the project's results being increasingly influential in conservation planning across the state. Once we have the atlas web site up and running, we anticipate that these efforts will become a lasting legacy of the past few years' work.

Acknowledgements

None of the work described here would be possible without the voluntary help of the many members of the Connecticut birding community, hundreds of whom contributed data to the project. We also thank the many field technicians who have worked on the project over the past few years, and the various people who have helped with data entry and management. The Connecticut Bird Atlas is a joint project of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Wildlife Division and the University of Connecticut, with additional funding from the Connecticut Ornithological Association, Connecticut Audubon Society, Audubon Connecticut, Great Hollow Nature Preserve and Ecological Research Center, the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, Hartford Audubon Society, Litchfield Hills Audubon, Menunkatuck Audubon Chapter, New Haven Bird Club, Potopaug Bird Club, and the Western Connecticut Bird Club.

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2022 Fall Hawk Watch

By Steve Mayo

An adult Peregrine Falcon and an immature Cooper's Hawk meet above Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven on Oct. 21, 2022. (Abby Sesselberg)

The 2022 season was notable for an increase of migrating Broad-winged Hawks compared to the previous year, and the smashing of several monthly and seasonal site records. Hundreds of observers and visitors stopped by and were able to enjoy this annual migration event.

Inland Sites

Connecticut has many historical inland watch sites. The question is, where exactly will the Broad-winged Hawks pass by? Early September weather featured warm temperatures, calm winds, rain, fog and even some forest fire haze. Variable winds on 9/14 shifted northerly, and each of four sites reported more than 100 Broad-winged Hawks. On 9/15, Chestnut Hill (Litchfield) had 1,559 Broad-winged Hawks, while the flight at other sites was much less significant. The next day, only 155 were seen at Chestnut Hill. Botsford Hill (Bridgewater) and Johnnycake Mountain (Burlington) did better, picking up 498 and 472, respectively. On 9/17, winds were light and variable, but Botsford Hill still tallied 753 and Chestnut Hill had another 1,037. Botsford Hill had 13 Sharp-shinned Hawks that day, contributing to a season total of 44. Favorable local weather resulted in Broad-winged Hawk counts of 148 at Botsford Hill 9/20, 187 at Botsford Hill 9/23, 157 at Chestnut Hill 9/23, and 123 at Johnnycake Mountain 9/23.

Maltby Lakes (Orange) continued coverage with a single, auspicious, morning on 9/24. Kettles formed and passed in every direction on cool northwest winds. A total of 3,965 Broad-winged Hawks were tallied in about three hours. This exceeded the Chestnut Hill season total of 3,168. Johnnycake Mountain had a good end-of-season day of 143 Broad-winged Hawks on 9/28. Booth Hill (West Hartland) contributed a season total of 238 Broad-wings (364 total raptors) over 33 coverage hours. For the first time in many years, there were no 2022 reports from Middle School (Torrington) or Poquonack (Windsor).

Quaker Ridge

Quaker Ridge (Greenwich) was the only Connecticut site with August coverage. The last week of August produced 64 hawks. On 9/14, 1,258 Broad-winged Hawks were counted and there were an additional 1,108 on 9/15. On 9/16, light northwest winds brought many more kettles to Greenwich. Close kettles in the morning were followed by multiple kettles (as large as 1,000 individuals) moving far over the southeast. Still more Broad-winged Hawks peeled directly over the site towards the day's end. An amazing 14,823 Broad-winged Hawks were tallied. Additional significant flights occurred on 9/23 (1,568), 9/24 (3,183), and again on 9/28 (1,309). By season's end, the site reported 25,112 Broad-winged Hawks.

September brought a nice rebound of migrating Sharp-shinned Hawks (1,762). Another 1,552 were counted in October, contributing to a season total of 3,408. All of these totals were the highest in over a decade for this small, beleaguered Accipiter. American Kestrel (341) and Merlin (59) had good counts for the month, and season totals for the small falcons were within 10-year averages. October brought 754 Cooper's Hawks and a record push of Turkey Vultures (1,750) including 391 on 10/28. The October and season totals (2,247) are new site records for Turkey Vulture.

Migration quieted down in November, with some exceptions. There was a massive Red-shouldered Hawk flight. Small kettles of Red-shouldered Hawks appeared over the Greenwich site on 11/9, and again on 11/15. Daily totals were 267 and 140 respectively, contributing to a season-record of 1,871. November Red-tailed Hawk numbers (83) were not as noteworthy, but another record was broken for Cooper's Hawk. The 915 total for the 2022 season was significantly higher than the previous record of 657, set in 2007. Golden Eagle is a Quaker Ridge specialty. There were 11 in October and November, and many of these were migrating on light southerly winds.

Lighthouse Park

Mid-September brought northwest winds and good cloud cover to Lighthouse Park (New Haven). The site had more than its share of Broad-winged Hawks for the second year in a row. Totals on 9/15 (249), 9/23 (1,395), 9/24 (1,469) and 9/28 (522) comprised the majority of September's count of 3,657. There was also a good

The subtle beauty of an immature Northern Harrier is on display during a low pass over Lighthouse Point Park on Oct. 5, 2022. (Abby Sesselberg)

uptick in Accipiter numbers from previous years. September totals for Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks were 1,033 and 512, respectively.

October weather was a real mix of favorable (northerly) and southerly winds. Poor migration weather eliminated the traditional peak flight at mid-month. Numbers picked up later in the month. The Accipiter number recovery continued in October, but 2022 will be remembered for a huge buteo flight on 10/28. The 78 Red-shouldered Hawks that day supported a new October record for this species. It was a real challenge trying to count the 'Shoulders as they moved timidly back to the NE end of the Park. In the afternoon, Red-tailed Hawks streamed east to west, directly overhead. An amazing 171 Red-tailed Hawks were tallied that day. The rarities also started to show. On 10/27 the crowd was entertained with both a Swainson's Hawk and a Northern Goshawk. A second Goshawk flew by two days later.

November had several quick frontal passage events with favorable northerly winds. Most were of short duration and weren't preceded by "blocking weather." Turkey Vultures (166) helped bring the 11/8 daily hawk total to 381. For the most part hawk numbers and coverage hours were down in November. Lighthouse Park ended up with 756 diurnal raptors for the month, the lowest November total since 2015. There were many other highlights throughout the month, including three juvenile Golden Eagles.

Site hawk watch summaries are available on the COA website at www.ctbirding.org. Additional data including daily, monthly, and seasonal summary reports may be obtained from the Hawk Migration of North America website, hawkcount.org.

2022 migration summaries of Connecticut and other Northeastern United States sites can also be obtained from Northeast Hawkwatch, www.nbataly.com/nehw/.

Watchers

Mark Aronson, Renee Baade, John Askildsen, Blake Auchinclos, David Babington, Bill Banks, Dan Barvir, Steve Beal, Brian Bennett, Gail Benson, John Berman, Kathy Blair, Nick Bonomo, Polly Brody, Christina Buccieri, Silvio Buccieri, Tom Burke, Dana Campbell, Richard Chmielecki, Jim Cortina, Rita Dempsey, Ayreslea Denny, Paul Desjardins, Angela Dimmitt, Cynthia Ehlinger, Adam Fasciolo, Jo Fasciolo, Chris Finlay, Bobbie Fisher, Nancy Glynn, Olivia Giuntini, Frank Guida, Ed Haesche, Greg Hanisek, John Hannan, Carrol Harrington, Richard Harrington, Roy Harvey, Craig Heberton, Judy Herkimer, Kim Herkimer, Julian Hough, Kimberly Jannarone, Lynn Jones, Maria Kaprielian, Paul Kennedy, Carlos Kim, Fred Koeter, Steve Kovari, Cody Limber, Joan Lupercchino, Ryan MacLean, Frank Mantlik, Mike Marsano, John Marshall, Jeff Martin, Shaun Martin, Stefan Martin, Steve Mayo, Kevin McGrath, Ken Merrifield, Ken Mirman, Judy Moore, Jim Muchmore, Tom Murray, Richard Nieman, Leslie Petrick, Matt Popp, Von Potter, Rick Roach, Paul Roberts, Sol Satin, Chris Segal, Abby Sesselberg, Jim Sherwonit, Nadir Shir-Zelniker, Scott Slora, Howie Sternberg, Severin Uebbing, Eric Vitols, Harry Wales, Mike Warner, Christine Weintraub, Steve Wolter, Chris Wood, Sara Zagorski

The distinctive underwing pattern of an immature Golden Eagle, here on Nov. 20, 2022, always stirs the crowd at Lighthouse Point. (Abby Sesselberg)

You can find the 2022 Fall Hawk Watch data table showing all Hawk Migration species and numbers at the website of the COA:

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

Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik

This long-staying Rufous Humminbird was seen by many observers (here on Aug. 15, 2022) at a feeder in the Plantsville section of Southington. (Frank Mantlik)

Fall Season, Aug. 1 to Nov. 30, 2022

The first **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Depot Ponds in Mansfield on Oct. 9 (DM, MB). Two Cackling Geese were unusually early on Sept. 27 at Three Rivers Park in Woodbury (RN). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was a good inland find on Oct. 13 at Saugatuck Reservoir in Weston (JN); two were there on Oct. 23 and remained into November (AK et al.). Two Northern Shovelers were present as early as Aug. 3 at Saugatuck Reservoir (AK, NM). The first Redhead was unexpected at Mondo Ponds in Milford on Oct. 14 (SSp, NJ); four were at Nepaug Reservoir in Canton on Nov. 27 (JMe et al.). Ring-necked Ducks are often found in triple-digit flocks, but 1200 on Nov. 26 at Lake Wononpakook in Salisbury were extraordinary (GW).

A **Harlequin Duck** was at Hatchett's Point, Old Lyme, on Nov. 6 (BS). A flock of 22 Black Scoters dropped onto Nepaug Reservoir in Canton for a typically brief stay

on Oct. 17 (JMe). A widespread flight on Oct. 28 included a high count of 85 at Columbia Lake (DM, KJ et al.); also noteworthy were 35 each on Shenipsit Lake in Tolland (JFe et al.) and Mansfield Hollow Lake (NR). A **Barrow's Goldeneye** was at a regular spot on the Connecticut River in Enfield starting on Nov 24 (WG). A high count of 500 Ruddy Ducks was at Andover Lake on Nov. 5 (JFe et al.). Up to 350 were on Broad Brook Reservoir in Cheshire on Oct. 22 (SBr). Two Red-necked Grebes at Bantam Lake in Litchfield on Sept. 30 were early (BD, JMa).

A widespread movement of Common Nighthawks on Aug. 27 included 1140 at Weatogue (JTr). A flock of 300 Chimney Swifts entered a chimney at Winsted Post Office on Aug. 30 (JPr). A late one was at Windsor Locks on Oct. 22 (PDe). The state's second confirmed **Black-chinned Hummingbird** visited a private South Windsor yard Oct 15, until it succumbed in Dec. (MB). In a great season for **Rufous Hummingbirds** the following were reported: an adult male Aug. 13-25 at a residence in Southington (CK, m.ob.); Aug 28-29 at Pistol Creek Park in Middletown (JSp et al.); Oct. 15-28 at a residence in Tolland (DF, m.ob.); and an adult female Nov. 6 through the end of the season in Trumbull (SV et al.). A Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird on Nov. 7 in Tolland was a second bird at that location (DF). Another was at a Portland feeder on Oct. 29 (BA).

A vocal **King Rail** was a surprise find on Aug. 13 at Sperry Pond in Middlebury (GH). A paddle through the Wheeler salt marsh at Milford Point on Sept. 11 tallied 15 Clapper Rails and 5 Soras (FM, et al). **Common Gallinules** exceeded expectations with singles Sept. 2-6 at Saugatuck Falls Natural Area in Redding (SD et al.); in the Dayville section of Killingly on Oct. 18 (PRu); and at Janie Pierce Pond in Woodbury on Oct. 20 (RN). A huge push by **Sandhill Cranes** included a record 26 over New Canaan Nature Center on Nov. 8 (FG) and 15 on Nov. 23 at Konold's Pond in Woodbridge, with 13 still there the next day (TK et al.).

The first American Golden-Plover was at Milford Point on Aug. 26 (SSp, SMa); an amazing flyover flock of 16 was photographed on Sept. 22 at Stratford Point (SBu). Four Hudsonian Godwits were early on Aug. 8 at Compo Beach in Westport (TG). Eight Hudsonians were at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) on Oct. 3 (RS); seven were at Milford Point on Oct. 5 (TM); one was at Stratford Marina Oct. 6 - Nov. 13, with two present Oct. 23 (SSp, FM, LB et al.). A Marbled Godwit was a nice find on Aug. 6-12 at Anderson Ave. marsh, Milford (DB, AS, m.ob.), and two were at Sherwood Island on Sept. 1 (TG). Singles were at Sandy Point in West Haven on Aug. 25-29 (JO et al.); at Milford Point Aug. 31-Sept. 5 (CU et al.); and at the Stratford Marsh restoration area Sept. 9 (IR). The season's best shorebird was a cooperative juvenile **Ruff** at HBSP on Sept. 14-16 (KG, m.ob.).

A Sanderling was a good inland find on Sept. 8 at Rocky Hill Meadows (PDe), as was a Dunlin at the same location on Sept. 4 (PDe). Two Purple Sandpipers were

In a stellar season for White Ibis, a species undergoing a population boom, this immature was at McKinney National Wildlife Refuge in Stratford on Sept. 24, 2022. (Frank Mantlik)

first noted on Oct. 26 in Old Saybrook (TW). The first Baird's Sandpiper was found on Aug. 20 at Mansfield Lake (PRu, et al.). A high count of 18 White-rumped Sandpipers was at HBSP on Oct. 6 (MK). The first Buff-breasted Sandpiper was at HBSP on Aug. 9 (RS, KL et al.) with a final one Sept. 21 at Sandy Point (JO). A good count of nine Pectoral Sandpipers was at Station 43 in South Windsor on Oct. 2 (PDe). An adult Long-billed Dowitcher was at Sandy Point in West Haven Aug. 7 (JH); another was at Stratford Marina on Oct. 10 (FM); four were at Barn Island WMA in Stonington on Oct. 16 (JTe, PL); and one in flight was heard calling on Oct. 22 at Rocky Neck State Park in East Lyme (MM). A Solitary Sandpiper was late Oct. 23 at Mondo Ponds in Milford (PG, MZ). Of special note was a Solitary of the western subspecies *cinnamomea* on Aug. 31-Sept. 3 at Saugatuck Reservoir in Weston (JN, AK et al.). A maximum of 154 Greater Yellowlegs were at Stratford Marina on

Oct. 23 (FM).

Exceptional for the Northeast Corner was a large group of shorebirds on Aug. 22-24 at West Thompson Lake in Thompson: up to 55 Killdeer; up to 40 Semipalmated Plovers, a Baird's Sandpiper, up to 45 Semipalmated Sandpipers, up to nine Pectoral Sandpipers, six Spotted Sandpipers, two Solitary Sandpipers, up to 12 Lesser Yellowlegs and one Greater Yellowlegs (DM, JFe et al.).

An unidentified jaeger (likely Parasitic or Long-tailed) was at Stratford Point on Sept. 7 (FM). A juvenile Bonaparte's Gull was unexpected on Aug. 1 at a residential property in Middlebury (ML). A significant fallout, at a lake noted for a variety of such events, involved 84 Bonaparte's Gull on Nov. 7 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (MD). Milford Point hosted 2500 Laughing Gulls on Sept. 25 (GA, FM), and 700 was a late high count on Nov. 7 at Russian Beach in Stratford (FM). A **Franklin's Gull** was a stellar find on Nov. 13 at Southport Beach (TG). A notable double-header on Oct. 18 at Sandy Point in West Haven was discovery of both a **Black-headed Gull** (JMe et al.) and a **Gull-billed Tern** (JH et al.). Two Caspian Terns made one of their infrequent inland appearances on Aug. 9 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (NM, JMa). The latest report of Black Tern was of two on Sept. 7 at Bantam Lake and adjacent Little Pond in Litchfield (BD, MD).

Single **Wilson's Storm-Petrels** were seen from the New London-Orient, NY, ferry on Aug. 3 (AF, JFa) and Aug. 5 (PRu). An unusual sighting from land far west in the Sound was of one on Aug. 4 at Burying Hill Beach in Westport (TG). A Cory's Shearwater was reported from the ferry on Sept. 3 (CLo, MV). From land one was off Cornfield Point in Old Saybrook on Aug. 4 (MB, DRo). **Great Shearwaters** were seen from the ferry Aug. 5-19, with a high of four on Aug. 7 (DRo et al.). A **Brown Pelican** first seen in Old Saybrook on Sept. 9 was then found eastward from Old Lyme to Niantic through Sept. 15 (TW, AS, SMa, m.ob.). One was at Stonington Point on Nov. 7 (PRu) and one was in Stamford on Nov. 30 (PDu).

A good inland count of seven Great Egrets was at Great Pond in Simsbury on Aug. 16 (PDe). A Cattle Egret was in Durham on Oct. 24 (MG). Up to four **White Ibis** were in Old Saybrook on Aug. 21-26 (JA, CLi, SU et al.), and that was just a start for a rapidly expanding species. Three were at the Branford Trolley Trail on Aug. 28 (LM); one was at Rocky Neck State Park in East Lyme on Sept. 2-5 (DL et al.); and one to two were at the Long Beach Blvd. Pond and Access Road ponds in Stratford from Sept. 7 into the winter season (MW, FM m.ob.) The latest Glossy Ibis was found on Oct. 23 at the Access Road ponds (FM, AL).

Among the handful of migrating Golden Eagles seen, mainly at hawk-watches, a lucky observer saw three over his New Haven yard on Nov. 8 (JH). Single migrant Northern Goshawks passed Lighthouse Point, New Haven Oct. 27 (SSa, FM,

A highlight of the Lighthouse Point hawk watch was this juvenile Swainson's Hawk on Oct. 27, 2022. (Paul Roberts)

PRo) and Oct. 29 (MA). A good count of 1560 Broad-winged Hawks was made at Chestnut Hill in Litchfield on Sept. 15 (DB), followed by a monumental flight of 14,800 the next day at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich (HW et al.). A later flurry brought 1395 to Lighthouse Point on Sept. 23 (DC et al.), while on Sept. 24 there were 3183 at Quaker Ridge (HW et al.), 1469 at Lighthouse Point (NB et al.) and c. 1700 at two locations in Fairfield (AK,CM). A migrant immature **Swainson's Hawk** was a highlight of the Lighthouse Point count on Oct. 27 (PRo, TM, SSa). The first Red-headed Woodpecker was found at Trout Brook Valley on Aug. 25 (LH), and scattered singles were reported through the end of the period.

A **Western Kingbird** flew by the Lighthouse Point hawk watch in New Haven on Oct. 8 (SMa, AS et al.), and one was in Stonington on Oct. 11 (PRu). A "yellow-bellied" kingbird on Sept. 24 at Bluff Point State Park in Groton could not be identified to species (AL). Arguably the bird of the season was the state's third **Gray Kingbird** on Oct. 12 at Bauer Farm in Madison (CI, AW). The last record was 30 years ago. The first southbound Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was reported on Aug. 13 in Winchester (PDe). A Red-eyed Vireo was late Nov. 8 at Lighthouse Point (CLi, AS et al.). A juvenile Horned Lark, a species that normally nests very early, was a surprise find on Sept. 3 at HBSP (PS).

A late Northern Rough-winged Swallow was at Lighthouse Point on Nov. 8 (CLi). Lighthouse also had the only **Cave Swallow** on the same day (JSh). Late Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were at Silver Sands State Park in Milford on Nov. 25 (JO) and at Walnut Beach in Milford on Nov. 29 (TM). In a great season for **Sedge Wrens**, singles

were good finds on Oct. 11 at Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton (LH); at Milford Point on Oct. 18 (PDe); at HBSP on Nov. 2 (CU); at Sherwood Island on Nov. 4 (JPe); and at Trout Brook Valley on Nov. 22 (LH).

The most-watched bird of the season, and probably the year, was a **Townsend's Solitaire** found Nov. 21 at HBSP (SR). It was seen regularly through the end of the year and into 2023 (et mult. al.). In a season with no significant northern finch flights, there were widely scattered reports of mostly single Evening Grosbeaks, but on Nov. 9 there were five at Hoydens Hill Open Space in Fairfield (JPu) and three at the Quaker Ridge hawk watch (HW). There were only two double-figure counts of Pine Siskins - 10 on Oct. 26 in Winchester (DRs) and 13 on Nov. 7 at Quaker Ridge (HW). A Lapland Longspur was early on Sept. 19 at Sandy Point in West Haven (JO); Milford Point hosted a high count of five on Oct. 9 (SSp et al.). Another contender for bird of the season was a juvenile **Smith's Longspur,** the state's fourth, on Oct. 18 only at Sandy Point in West Haven (BR, m.ob.).

Grasshopper Sparrows, always scarce in migration, were found at six sites in late fall, including singles on Nov. 23 in Mansfield (DM) and at Long Wharf in New Haven (JO). A **Lark Sparrow** was in Derby on Oct. 3 (RGu fide FM). Two were at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby on Oct. 12 (BB). The first of c. 15 reports of **Clay-colored Sparrow** came from Silver Sands State Park in Milford on Sept. 17 (FM et al.). The first American Tree Sparrow was on Oct. 28 at Tulmeadow Farm in West Simsbury (BM). The first White-crowned Sparrow was found on Sept. 17 at West Simsbury (BT). **LeConte's Sparrows** were exciting finds on Oct. 20 at Southbury Training School Farm (JC et al.) and on Oct. 23 in Woodbridge (CLo, MV). A

This female Blue Grosbeak showed well on Oct. 17, 2022 at Silver Sands State Park in Milford. (Frank Mantlik)

remarkable count of 35 Lincoln's Sparrows were at Glastonbury Meadows on Sept. 17 (AD).

A significant fallout of Eastern Meadowlarks on Oct. 18 produced a count of 25 at Lighthouse Point (JSh). Four Rusty Blackbirds on Sept. 24 at Lighthouse Point were the season's first (AL). A **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was photographed at Milford Point on Sept. 9 (CU). A now rare **Golden-winged Warbler** was at Bluff Point on Sept. 23 (PRu, AM et al.). A Lawrence's Warbler was at Northwest Park in Windsor on Aug. 12 (PDe). A late Black-and-White Warbler was seen on Nov. 21 at New Canaan Nature Center (FG). Unusually late were an American Redstart on Nov. 29 at the Connecticut Audubon Christmas tree farm in Westport (JPe) and a Magnolia Warbler on Nov. 26 at Long Beach in Stratford (ZA). A **Yellow-throated Warbler** was found in New Haven on Sept. 23 (JH). A Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler, the western subspecies, was at Long Beach in Stratford on Oct. 23 (JO).

Single **Summer Tanagers** were at Bluff Point on Sept. 17 (DP) and at Waveny Park in New Canaan on Sept, 22 (SBu). The first **Blue Grosbeak** report was on Sept. 15 at Bluff Point (CE et al.). Others were reported from at least five locations. A **Painted Bunting** was at Silver Sands State Park in Milford on Nov. 24 (JH). The first Dickcissel was reported on Aug. 25 in Old Saybrook (PDe); the high counts were four each on Sept. 20 and Sept. 27 at Lighthouse Point (JSh et al.).

Observers – Zachary Adams, George Amato, John Arnett, Mark Aronson, Bill Asteriades, Dave Babington, Bill Banks, Larry Bausher, Matt Bell, Nick Bonomo, Steve Broker (SBr) Sam Buttrick (SBu), Dana Campbell, Jeff Campbell, Andrew Dasinger, Saverio DeGiorgio, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Buzz Devine, Mike Doyle, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Chris Elphick, Adam Fasciolo, Jo Fasciolo (JFa), Jeff Fengler (JFe), David Funke, Frank Gallo, Karen Gallo, Rick Gedney (RGe), William Generous, Michael Good, Tina Green, Peter Grund, Ron Guerrucci (RGu), Greg Hanisek, Larry Havey, Krista Hayward, Julian Hough, Chuck Imbergamo, Kim Jones, Lynn Jones, Nalini Jones, Candace Kalmick, Tom Kenefick, Aidan Kiley, Micky Komara, Deb Lalonde, Kris Lasocki, Cody Limber (CLi), Mia Limson, Alex Lin-Moore, Chris Loscalzo (CLo), Preston Lust, Andrew MacDonald, Nic Main, Dave Mathieu, Barry Marsh, Stefan Martin (SMr), John Marshall (JMa), Steve Mayo (SMa), Chase McCabe, Michael McBrien, Linda Meyer, Jamie Meyers (JMe), Tom Murray, Jeremy Nance, Russ Naylor, John Oshlick, Jennifer Perga (JPr), Joe Pescatore (JPe), Dave Provencher, James Purcell (JPu), Bill Rankin, Noah Reid, Paul Roberts (PRo); Imani Rodriguez, Dave Rosgen (DRs), Dan Rottino (DRo), Scott Roxbrough, Phil Rusch (PRu), Sol Satin (SSa), Brian Schick, Abby Sesselberg, Jannie Shapiro (JSp), James Sherwonit (JSh), Russ Smiley, Paul Smith, Steve Spector (SSp), Jory Teltser (JTe), Brian Toal, Jonathan Trouern-Trend (JTr), Severin Uebbing, Chris Unsworth, Marianne Vahey, Scott Vincent, Harry Wales, George Wallace, Mary Walsh, Timothy White, Julie Wilson, Anthony Woodall, Sara Zagorski, Molly Zahn

Photo Challenge

By Aidan Kiley

A White-crowned Crowned Sparrow, subspecies gambelii (Bruce Finnan)

Last issue's quiz photo brings us one of the least popular families for many birders: the New World Sparrows. Called "little brown jobs" by some, sparrows can present significant challenges. Fortunately, we have more than we need here to arrive at the correct identification.

The sparrows that occur in Connecticut come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and structures. One of the trickiest genera is the Spizella sparrows, which are known for their slender bodies and long tails. These include Brewer's, Chipping, Clay-colored and Field. Brewer's and Clay-colored can be ruled out by the large bill, lack of white in the face, head pattern, and shorter tail in proportion to the body. Field could be considered due to the bright pink bill, but Field Sparrows show a smaller bill, a strong eyering, a longer tail proportionally to the body, lack of a defined eyeline, and rufous tones to the body. Song and Lincoln's can easily be ruled out by the lack of both streaking and reddish tones. The pink bill and facial pattern nix Swamp.

A White-crowned Crowned Sparrow, subspecies leucophrys (Bruce Finnan)

Having eliminated these, let's investigate another genus, Zonotrichia, which contains species with more similar shapes to our quiz bird. The Zonotrichia sparrows are Harris's, White-crowned, White-throated, and Golden-crowned. Harris's can easily be eliminated by the lack of black in the face. White-throated, one of our best-known sparrows, would show yellow in the lores, a dark bill, a contrasting white throat, and wide supercilium (white or brown depending on color morph and age). Golden-crowned, a significant rarity, shows a dark bill, dull gray underparts, and, on adults, significant black on the head and yellow and white in the crown.

This bird doesn't have a white crown, so can we eliminate White-crowned too? One of the trickiest aspects of sparrow identification is that adults can look very different from immatures. Our quiz bird is fairly nondescript with brownish gray underparts, slight buffiness on the flanks, a large pink bill, faint eyeline, strong white wingbars, and brown crown stripes. Additionally, the medium-length tail in proportion to the body and relatively chunky shape overall fits with the Zonotrichia sparrows. All of these field marks fit an immature White-crowned Sparrow. This photo was taken in October, and it likely hatched in northeastern Canada in June or July of the same year.

White-crowned Sparrow has five different subspecies, which are challenging but fascinating to explore. Immatures can be trickier than adults, but this bird shows a large, pinkish bill that is typical for leucophrys, the expected subspecies in Connecticut. The lores are paler than many leucophrys, so it is possible this bird came from an overlap zone with gambelii, the next subspecies we'll discuss, or represents normal variation within "pure" leucophrys. Subspecies are tricky! For comparison, let's look at a different White-crowned. This bird was first found on Dec.10, 2022, at the Long Beach Blvd. Pond in Stratford. When I stumbled across it, multiple features immediately struck me as being very different from the White-crowns I had previously seen in the East. The bill was bright carrot orange, smaller than normal for eastern birds; its lores were completely pale without a touch of darker brown; and the underparts were sandier brown than typical of leucophrys. This photograph taken by Bruce Finnan on March 6, 2023, shows these field marks well. This bird is of the subspecies gambelii, commonly called Gambel's. This is one of the western breeding forms that is rare but regular in the East, especially in later fall/winter months. This identification requires a lot of care, and some birds are not safely assignable, but this Stratford bird is about as classic as you can get. White-crowned Sparrows are fascinating with their extensive variation due to both age and geography.

Next Challenge Photo

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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

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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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Volume 43, No 3, 2023

Printed at Yale University