



The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association



April 2024

A Connecticut birder is honored with a top notch award.
ARCC assembles the latest compilation of rarities.
A look back at a summer filled with memorable birding.

The Connecticut Warbler

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ON THE COVER

Hermit Warbler

Rarity and beauty are a can't miss formula for any cover of The Connecticut Warbler. David Mathieu, an active young birder from Coventry, captured the allure of the state's third Hermit Warbler, which drew crowds to Avalonia-Knox Preserve in Stonington.

The Mabel Osgood Wright Award 2024

By Denise Jernigan

Mabel Osgood Wright contributed immeasurably to the advancement of our knowledge of, and the general public's knowledge of ornithology in Connecticut during the early 20th century. Her accomplishments included a keen understanding of bird biology and behavior, a unique talent for writing about the natural world, significant contributions to the early years of the Audubon movement, a founding member of the National Association of Audubon Societies, editorial responsibilities for the Audubon journal Bird-Lore, election to the American Ornithologists Union, founding membership of and first president of the Connecticut Audubon Society, creation of Birdcraft Sanctuary in Fairfield, Connecticut, active participation in conservation programs, support of legislation for the protection of birds, and authorship of 27 books on birds and nature, including a highly popular field guide to the birds.

The Connecticut Ornithological Association annually bestows its highest honor, the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, on an individual who has made significant contributions



Tina Green's discovery of this striking juvenile Sabine's Gull at Sherwood Island drew dozens of birders to one of Connecticut's stellar birding destinations. (Julian Hough)



This is the second of two Western Meadowlarks found by Tina Green at her red hot local patch, Sherwood Island State Park in Westport. (Frank Mantlik)

to the study and conservation of birds in Connecticut. This year's recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award is Tina Green of Westport, Connecticut.

Tina is known to many Connecticut birders (as well as to our neighbors in Massachusetts) as an excellent field birder, a leader of bird trips, a hard-working volunteer for several birding organizations, and a friendly and instructive teacher and friend to birders at all levels of experience. The Connecticut Ornithological Association is proud to recognize her skills, her talents, and her many contributions to the study and conservation of birds in the state.

Many birders first met Tina in April of 2009 when she discovered and correctly identified a Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) at Sherwood Island State Park, her home patch in Westport. She had not been birding seriously for very long at that time, but her bird study preparation and keen artistic eye immediately led her to notice a bird she had not previously seen at the park, and to get the word out via phone calls that rapidly spread around the state and region. Since then, she has seen 290 species of birds at SISP, a place that arguably offers the greatest biodiversity in the state of Connecticut, and she has submitted more than 2,500 lists to eBird. In the process, she has discovered several other rare species, including many on the

ARCC Review List. Remarkably, Tina discovered another Western Meadowlark at Sherwood Island 10 years later, in October of 2019. She has also added Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Common Murre, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Sabine's Gull, Franklin's Gull, and Gull-billed Tern to her list of species reported to and accepted by the Avian Records Committee.

In addition to her monitoring of Sherwood Island, Tina regularly visits the Sherwood Mill Pond, Compo Beach, Longshore Country Club, Nyala Farm, Smith Richardson Tree Farm, and Norwalk Islands, recording her sightings on eBird and guaranteeing their status as eBird hotspots for Fairfield County.



Tina Green, ready for finding good birds near or far. (Peter Green)

Tina's love of birds and her concern for their welfare and their future prompted her to join COA and other bird conservation organizations. She has served as COA Board member, Vice President (2011-2013), and President (2013-2015). The Avian Records Committee of Connecticut asked her to join the group in 2013, and still serves on that board.

Tina has chaired the COA Annual Meeting Committee for the past 10 years, coordinating all aspects of the meeting, signing up distinguished speakers, arranging for caterers, and coordinating meeting details with staff at Connecticut State Community College, Middlesex. Her tireless efforts have contributed to making the annual meeting the highlight of the year for COA and an eagerly anticipated social event for Connecticut birders. She also served on the Merchandise Committee (never without a few checklists and hats in the car!), the Executive Committee, the Research Committee, and the Nominating Committee.

Tina was one of the very first leaders for the New Haven Bird Club First Wednesday walks, and she continues to contribute her time to this very popular series. Despite the challenges of navigating Connecticut Interstate 95 during commuter time, Tina's walks at SISP routinely draw a sizable crowd of weekday birders happy to share a morning seeing and learning about birds with her.

Her conservation activities include obtaining colonial Purple Martin nest boxes and managing the martin colony at Sherwood Island, coordinating banding of the martins by CT DEEP staff, monitoring Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebird nest boxes, working with SISP staff on recommendations for park habitat, participating in Eagle Surveys, and monitoring the nesting Common Loons in Norfolk (CT).

Tina has served as mentor and birding guide for young birders in the state, and she generously shares her expertise and passion for birding with anyone fortunate enough to meet up with her in the field or on one of her field trips for the New Haven Bird Club. She is a strong advocate for using and submitting reports to eBird, and she encourages all of her many birding friends to do the same. Her enthusiasm and delight in every bird is shared with every birder she meets. Her impressive knowledge of bird identification, habitat, and behavior are all put to service in her efforts to support bird conservation for generations to follow.

COA is proud to honor Tina Green with the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, recognizing her service to avian science and her support of the joy to be found in birding.

The 29th Report of The Avian Records Committee of Connecticut

By Frank Mantlik, Phil Rusch, and Julian Hough



This is the 29th report of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (hereafter ARCC or "the committee"). The committee met in person 10 March 2024 to complete a review of rare bird reports for the years 2023 and early 2024. This year the committee voted on 63 records involving 40 species and 5 subspecies with an acceptance rate of 80%. No new species were added to the state list; the total remains at 451 species. Highlights include acceptance of the state's second record of Trumpeter Swan, third records of Western Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler, Hermit Warbler, and fourth records of Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Roseate Spoonbill, Bell's Vireo, and Short-billed Gull. In addition, the committee accepted its first record of Barn Owl and its first three records of Bicknell's Thrush since adding these species to the Review List.

STATE LIST AND REVIEW LIST

The committee depends on observers to submit their reports of species on the Review List (marked with an asterisk on the COA checklist), plus any species new to the state. The most recent Review List may be viewed on the COA-ARCC 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 Connecticut Ornithological Association website. The link is:

<https://www.ctbirding.org/arcc/reporting-rare-sightings/>

Submit written 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 it uses to determine what constitutes a review species. Based on occurrences over the past 20 years, the committee has removed Painted Bunting and added Swallow-tailed Kite back onto the Review List. Lastly, the committee decided to track several species for possible return to, or removal from, the Review List including Wilson's Phalarope, American White Pelican, American Goshawk, and Western Kingbird.

FORMAT:

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

Record number is the year followed by the record number. ie. 2023-00

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The committee members who voted on records in this Report were 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. At the conclusion of this meeting, due to relocation to Wisconsin, Jeremy Nance resigned as a member. His contributions to the committee and to the Connecticut birding community will be sorely missed.

For more info on each ARCC member visit:

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

ACCEPTED RECORDS

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis* [4]

2023: Eleven, Point Folly, Bantam Lake, Litchfield, *Litchfield*, 3 May (*Bette Shaw** 2023-35).

A chance encounter by a dog-walker resulted in photo and cell phone video of the flock. Thanks to Buzz Devine for forwarding the information.



This Tufted Duck, shown here on 5 Jan 2024, drew many observers to Grannis Pond in East Haven starting on 15 Dec 2023. As typical of the species, it often associated with Ring-necked Ducks. (Linda Olsen)

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* [14]

2023: Adult, Seaside Park, Bridgeport, *Fairfield*, 25 Feb-4 Mar. (*Russ Smiley**, Stuart Winquist 2023-14).

This individual spent time foraging on ball fields with one adult Snow Goose and 100-200 Canada geese.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* [24]

2023: Adult, Broad Brook Mill Pond, East Windsor, *Hartford*, 2-3 Nov (*Jeff Fengler** 2023-39).

This vocalizing individual was found and well-photographed among large flocks of Canada Geese roosting on the pond. This Eurasian rarity is now annual in the

northeastern U.S.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* [9]

2023: Adult, Sydney Fuller Preserve, Suffield, *Hartford*, 28 Oct-1 Nov (*Abigail Wolcott**, Russ Smiley* 2023-38).

During its stay, this individual toured several local spots including Broad Brook Millpond, East Windsor, and along Crane Road, Ellington, *Tolland*.

Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator* [2]

2023: Sub-Adult, Aicher Preserve, Pomfret, *Windham*, 28 Mar-13 Apr, (*Andy Rzeznikiewicz*, Phil Rusch*, Jeff Fengler* 2023-18).

First discovered by a local birder 11 April, it had apparently been present since 28 March. This increasingly lethargic bird was captured and transported to a rehabilitator on 13 April. It unfortunately succumbed overnight to severe lead poisoning. The specimen is now at the UConn Biological Research Collection in Storrs, CT.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* [15]

2023-2024: Adult Female, Grannis Pond, East Haven, *New Haven*, 15 Dec-15 Jan; presumed same Konold's Pond, Woodbridge, *New Haven* 4-12 Feb (*Paul Smith**, John Oshlick 2023-46).

While scouting for the New Haven CBC, Paul Smith discovered this adult female, which was subsequently seen by 100+ birders daily through 15 Jan before the pond iced-over, no doubt forcing the bird to relocate.

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* [24]

2024: Adult, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 26 Jan-9 Apr (*Russ Smiley** 2024-12). Sandy Point, West Haven, *New Haven*, 3 Feb (*Alex Lin-Moore**, Cody Limber 2024-14).

The Stonington individual has wintered in Stonington Harbor since 2017. The New Haven harbor bird was well described and sketched by an experienced observer. It had been discovered earlier in the day by other birders (Christine Howe, DeWitt Allen) from Nathan Hale Park, New Haven (eBird).

Yellow Rail *Coturnicops noveboracensis* [18]

2023: Adult, 345 Gold Star Highway, Groton, *New London*, 16 Sep (*Nicole Neigel** 2023-31). Sub-adult, 170 Flanders Road, Niantic, East Lyme, New London, 13 Oct (*Nicole Neigel** 2023-37).

Both of these individuals were no doubt disoriented migrants and were found in parking lots far from appropriate habitat. Both were rehabilitated, and subsequently successfully released at area salt marshes. Thanks to rehabilitator Nicole Neigel, both instances ended with positive outcomes.

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* [12]

2023: Adult, Plum Bank Marsh, Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, 13-14 May (*Nick Bonomo**, Dan Rottino* 2023-22).

A birder scouting for a CT Big Day discovered this rarity in an area of salt marsh that has hosted this species in the past. Black-necked Stilt is becoming an expected spring overshoot species.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* [10]

2023: Adult, female, Sandy Point, West Haven, *New Haven*, 21 May (*John Oshlick** 2023-25); Three, juvenile, Rocky Hill Meadows, Rocky Hill, *Hartford*, 15 Aug (*Sara Zagorski** 2023-27); Juvenile, Glastonbury Meadows, Glastonbury, *Hartford*, 15 Aug (*Bill Asteriades** 2023-28).

The West Haven bird was likely “knocked down” as a result of heavy rain the previous day. It seems rainy weather, during spring and fall migration windows can be a factor in the appearance of both phalarope species.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* [17]

2023: Juvenile, Shepaug Reservoir, Warren, *Litchfield*, 12 Oct (*Jill MacKenzie** 2023-34).

This individual was found dead, and was photographed by the observer. Initially submitted as a Red-necked Phalarope, careful review of the photographs determined it to be a Red Phalarope based on bill size and state of the preformative molt.

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus* [8]

2023: 2nd/3rd-cycle, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 26 Aug (*Monica Nichols** 2023-30).

A bird photographer was practicing shooting Laughing Gulls when an unfamiliar bird appeared in her viewfinder. This rarity was positively identified after the fact by her excellent photos. Intriguingly, this individual showed a head pattern and tail length more consistent with a 3rd cycle individual but also had quite heavily barred underwings, a feature more consistent with a younger bird.



The photographer was zeroing in on other species when this spectacular Long-tailed Jaeger flew into view on 26 Aug 2023 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. Of interest is the date of the last previous record, 25 Aug 2020 in Stratford. (Monica Nichols)

Dovekie *Alle alle* [18]

2020: Adult female, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 11 Jan (Kristof Zyskowski* 2020-61).

2024: Age Uncertain, Avery Point, Groton, *New London*, 10 Jan (Nick Bonomo* 2024-06); Age Uncertain, Harkness State Park, Waterford, *New London*, 12 Jan (Bill Eisele* 2024-08); Age Uncertain, Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, Stonington, *New London*, 13 Jan (Bob Dewire* 2024-10).

The 2020 record is of a specimen in the Yale Peabody collection. The 2024 records were of sightings during a span of inclement weather with strong southeast onshore winds. The Barn Island bird was found on the 3rd/4th impoundment, but then took off inland over the forest! All of the above Dovekie records reinforce the best way to find them in the state is to search both during and after a strong SE gale.

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia* [33]

2023: Adult, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 15 Dec (Russ Smiley* 2023-44).

2024: Adult, Stonington Town Dock, Stonington, *New London*, 2 Jan (Niall Doherty* 2024-02).

The December bird, a flyby, was well-photographed by an observer who is ever-ready with his camera, while the January bird was also photographed as it swam by the Stonington dock.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* [32]

2022: First cycle, Hampton, *Windham*, 22-23 Dec (Anonymous, James Taylor* 2022-68).

2023: 4-8, Adults, Saville Dam, Barkhamsted, *Litchfield*, 5-7 May (Dorrie Holmes*, Mark Danforth* 2023-21).

The Hampton bird was a weak or sick bird captured in a private field, apparently after a storm. The Barkhamsted birds were initially discovered by an experienced observer during inclement, damp weather. During the ensuing days, the flock (maximum count of 8) was seen by many birders (eBird). Both records represent very rare inland occurrences of this species in CT.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* [8]

2024: Adult, Stonington Point, Stonington, *New London*, 13 Jan (David Provencher* 2024-11).

This adult was seen as it flew past the point among an estimated 1400 Bonaparte's Gulls streaming east, during strong E/SE winds and periods of rain and fog. This was likely the same flock that had been present along the Rhode Island coast in the previous few days.

Common Gull *Larus canus* [12-*kamtschatschensis*, 10-*canus*]

2023: Adult, nominate race *canus*, Long Beach, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 6-11 Mar (Greg Hanisek* 2023-15). Adult, race *kamtschatschenis*, Cove Island Park, Holly Pond, and Cummings Park, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 23 Dec-1 Mar (Patrick Dugan, Aidan Kiley* 2023-48).

2024: Adult, nominate race *canus*, Coventry Lake, Coventry, *Tolland*; Eastbrook Mall and Mansfield Hollow Reservoir, Tolland; Northridge Drive, Airport Trail, Windham, *Windham*, 1 Jan-8 Mar (David Mathieu* 2024-01).

The Stamford individual of the Asian subspecies, *kamtschatschensis*, colloquially referred to as Kamchatka Gull, has returned for its 6th year. The Windham bird of the nominate European race *canus*, known colloquially as Common Gull, returned for its second year to the North Windham Walmart. The Stratford bird was a nice find among a large mixed flock of gulls gathered to feed on plankton on the inshore waters of Long Island Sound.

Short-billed Gull *Larus brachyrhynchus* [4]

2024: Adult, Holly Pond, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 4 Jan and 1 Feb (*Patrick Dugan*, Frank Gallo*, Aidan Kiley 2024-03).

This is presumed to be the same returning individual from 2023 based on an examination of the primary pattern. On the Feb date, it was in the company of the Kamchatka Gull.

Leach's Storm Petrel *Hydrobates leucorhous* [8]

2011: Age Uncertain, moribund, 4 Matthew Street, Prospect, *New Haven*, 29 Aug (*Peter Thiel*, Kristof Zyskowski 2011-46).

This bird was found emaciated in a residential area after the passage of Hurricane/Tropical Storm Irene. It succumbed and is now a specimen at Yale Peabody Museum (YPM 142395).

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* [8]

2023: Adult, Clark Hill Road, East Haddam, *Middlesex*, 26 Apr (*Dan Rottino** 2023-20); Falls River, Essex, *Middlesex*, 8 May, (*Christie Gilluly** 2023-49).

The East Haddam bird was a sighting by an experienced birder while looking for hawks migrating over his yard. The Essex bird was seen swimming and in flight in a portion of North Cove along the Connecticut River. These sightings coincide with a flurry of sightings of Anhingas in New York and New Jersey that April and May.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* [11]

2023: Adult, Housatonic River breakwater, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 5 Jul. (*Nick Bonomo**, Frank Mantlik* 2023-24).

A boating birder discovered this adult pelican roosting on the rock breakwater at the mouth of the Housatonic River. By promptly getting word out, a number of other birders were able to also scope it from land. This sighting was particularly noteworthy, as the vast majority of CT records are of immatures.



This immature Roseate Spoonbill, Connecticut's fourth since the first record in 2018, is shown here on 8 Sep 2023 in Milford as part of long stay. (Steve Broker)

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* [4]

2023: Juvenile, Milford Point, Milford, *New Haven* and Short Beach, Stratford, *Fairfield*, 24 Aug-8 Oct (*Roger Mann*, *Roger Mann, Jr.*, Frank Mantlik* 2023-29).

A man and his son photographed this immature in flight over the salt marshes of the Charles Wheeler WMA. They showed the photo to Coastal Center staff, who promptly got word out and it was relocated across the Housatonic River in Stratford. It remained in the area through the late date of 8 Oct, when it was seen by a Big Sit team at Milford Point. This species has exhibited a widespread pattern of vagrancy north of its usual range in recent years. This represents the fourth record for CT, with the first in 2018, and two more records in 2021.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* [16]

2023: Juvenile, Lighthouse Point Park, New Haven, *New Haven*, 12 Nov (*Abby Sesselberg** 2023-40).

This avid hawk-counter and photographer only discovered photos of this bird upon returning home after a productive day of birding!

Barn Owl *Tyto alba* [1]

2023: Age unknown, Willard's Island, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 19 Nov (*Jerry Connolly** 2023-42).



Connecticut's third Western Flycatcher proved cooperative for observers who sought it during its brief stay on 6-7 Dec 2023 at Connecticut College in New London. (Bob MacDonnell).

This is the first adjudicated record since Barn Owl was recently added to the Review List.

Western Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis* [3]

2023: Lyman Allyn Museum, Connecticut College, New London, *New London*, 6-7 Dec (Skyler Kardell, Phil Rusch*, Cody Limber* 2023-43).

A terrific find by a birding college student, this third CT record was well studied and photographed. It remained on campus two days, enabling many to see this rare *Empidonax* from the west.

Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii* [4]

2023: Cove Island Wildlife Sanctuary, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 21-25 Oct (Patrick Dugan, Frank Mantlik*, 2023-36).

An experienced observer found this fourth CT record at his local patch. Though it was often elusive, many patient/lucky birders saw this skulking rarity during its stay. Habitat restoration has paid off, as this vireo joins quite a list of CT rarities discovered at this productive sanctuary.

Bicknell's Thrush, *Catharus bicknelli* [3]

2018: First-basic female, Evan's Hall, Yale Univ., New Haven, *New Haven*, 13 Oct, (Jill McSorley 2018-36).

2022: Anthony's Ocean View, Lighthouse Road, New Haven, *New Haven*, 30 Sep (Frogard Ryan 2022-66).



This Bell's Vireo, shown here on the last day of its stay from 21-25 Oct 2023, was skulky as usual, but patience produced this nice portrait. (Frank Mantlik)

2023: Adult, Greenwich Audubon Sanctuary, Greenwich, *Fairfield*, 19 May (*Richard Chmielecki** 2023-23).

The 2018 and 2022 birds are specimens at Yale Peabody Museum, found as window strikes and confirmed by wing chord measurements. The 2023 bird was accepted unanimously based on song and call recordings by the alert observer.

Smith's Longspur *Calcarius pictus* [4]

1982: Willard's Island, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 2 May (*Paul Desjardins** 1982-01/H2-11).

This record languished in the archives for 40 years. This was a bird reportedly seen by many at the time. The recently found original negative and original photo allowed confirmation to species. This represented the second CT record, the first being a specimen collected from Stratford 24 Mar 1968.

Le Conte's Sparrow, *Ammospiza leconteii* [17]

2023: Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 13 Oct (*Jack Robbins** 2023-33).

2024: Sherwood Island State Park, Westport, *Fairfield*, 13-28 Jan (*Jo Fasciolo**, *Adam Fasciolo* 2024-07).

The Madison bird was photographed, and identified from photos that evening, by an observer searching for a previously-reported Clay-colored Sparrow. The Westport bird was a great find by a birding couple who were able to obtain photos. It was relocated by some on later dates, but proved to be very elusive.

Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta* [5]

2023: Adult, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, *New Haven*, 26-30 Mar (*Lisa Cushing*, *Steve Mayo** 2023-17).

Photos initially posted on social media caused some reviewers to suspect Western Meadowlark. Many came to see and study this bird and it was also heard vocalizing, including singing. Some calls were recorded by Andy McGann (eBird).

MacGillivray's Warbler *Geothlypis tolmiei* [3]

2023: Adult male, Pine Creek Open Space, Fairfield, *Fairfield*, 17-19 Nov, (*James Purcell**, *Frank Mantlik** 2023-41).

An experienced birder made this exceptional find at one of his local patches and managed to obtain a photo using his cellphone through his binoculars, and promptly alerted the birding community. It was not relocated that afternoon, but was heard



The always elusive LeConte's Sparrow took some effort to find from 13-28 Jan 2024 at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport. (Jo Fasciolo)

and seen briefly by a few early the next morning, and then seen and heard by many two days later. At times it was very vocal, giving distinctive chip notes, but remained hidden in the dense underbrush. This secretive bird occasionally appeared in the open, and only briefly; some obtained good photos. There was an influx of this species into the Northeast with additional individuals found in MA (25-27 Nov), NH (25-27 Nov), and PA (5-26 Nov) - eBird.

Black-throated Gray Warbler *Setophaga nigrescens* [12]

2024: Male, Mountain Spring Road, Tolland, *Tolland*, 5-7 Jan (*Eileen Redshaw*, *David Mathieu** 2024-05).

This stunning male visited a private feeder, and the homeowner allowed a couple visitors on 7 Jan (during a snowstorm) to confirm it with photos.

Hermit Warbler *Setophaga occidentalis* [3]

2024: First-winter female, Knox Preserve, Stonington, *New London*, 30 Jan-12 Feb (*Daniel Errichetti**, *Chris Wood** 2024-13).



This Black-throated Gray Warbler, the state's 12th, provided a first Tolland County record when it visited a yard in Tolland. It is shown here on 7 Jan 2024 during a snow storm. (David Mathieu)

This was an amazing find by an experienced observer among a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers. It could prove elusive, often foraging among Red Cedars, or on the ground (no snow cover), and was noted eating insects.

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* [24]

2023: Adult male, Rocky Road, E., Harwinton, *Litchfield*, 16-19 April (Denise LaPerriere* 2023-19); First-alternate male/Adult female, DEEP Marine Headquarters, Ferry Road, Old Lyme, *New London*, 23 Dec (Jeri Duefrene* 2024-09).

The Harwinton bird was a bright male in non-breeding plumage that visited a private yard and feeders. The Old Lyme bird was initially thought to be an American Goldfinch, but her photos posted on iNaturalist allowed a correct identification to species.

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* [22]

2023: Adult male, Farm Brook Reservoir, Hamden, *New Haven*, 9 Dec and 20-22 Feb (Peter Grund, John Oshlick* 2023-45).



A Western Tanager doesn't have to be an adult male to be stunning, as this bird shows on 23 Dec 2023 at the DEEP Marine Headquarters in Old Lyme. (Jeri Duefrene)

This adult male was found in brushy woods near an inlet stream of the reservoir. No doubt the same bird then appeared in February at a private feeding station in the neighborhood, and was posted on social media.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

2022: Three, Long Island Sound off Stamford, *Fairfield*, 30 Oct (2021-51).

The observer had prior experience identifying this species, but many on the committee felt the description was lacking and the photos were not of much help. In addition, the sighting was during very poor weather conditions. This record went the full three rounds of voting.

Cabot's Tern/Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis aculavidus* /

Thalasseus sandvicensis sandvicensis

2018: Sandy Point, West Haven, *New Haven*, 18 Aug (Greg Hanisek*, Frank Mantlik* 2018-25).

This previously accepted record of Sandwich Tern was reopened to review the possibility of it being of the European subspecies, *sandvicensis*, at the request of member Julian Hough. This was based on a recent identification article in *North American Birds* (vol 74, No.1, pp 16-25; 2023) by David Sibley. The committee deliberated on this at length at its Mar 2024 meeting. While distant photos by Mantlik and others seem to show several features - pale under-primaries, brighter white inner edges of primary tips, largely dark cap, thinner bill - highly suggestive of the European race, the quality of the photos were inadequate to satisfy the majority of the committee).

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

2022: Age and sex uncertain, Long Island Sound off Waterford, *New London*, 5 Aug (2022-31).

This was a bird identified only from photos, after the fact, taken from the New London ferry. Many on the committee thought the distance, lighting, and waves made the identification to species impossible.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

2023: Unknown age, Holly Pond, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 1 Aug (2023-26).

While the identification was possibly correct, the written details provided were inadequate for a majority of the members to vote in the affirmative.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

2020: First-summer, Grace Richardson Conservation Area, Fairfield, *Fairfield* 10 Jun (2021-11).

This was an intriguing record based on an eBird list that contained photographs of an apparent first-summer Eurasian Hobby, a continental mega-rarity. The committee went through three agonizing rounds with this record but felt that, due to further information not forthcoming from the observers, and given the extreme rarity of the species, a conservative approach was warranted.

Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii*

2023: Cove Island Sanctuary, Stamford, *Fairfield*, 4 Nov (2023-36A).

While the well-documented individual was present 21-25 Oct, this report from 10 days later lacked convincing details.

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus swainsoni*,

2024: Branford Sewage Treatment Plant, Block Island Road, Branford, *New Haven*, 6 Jan (2024-04).

Several observers found a Warbling Vireo on the exceptional date of 6 Jan and one observer suggested it may have been the western subspecies. After much research (including input from Peter Pyle) and deliberation, the committee unanimously decided that it was impossible to make that determination from the photos. Of additional interest, a CBC birder also photographed a very late Philadelphia Vireo at this site on 16 Dec 2023.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

2021: Trescott Hill Road, Canaan, *Litchfield*, 14 Nov (2021-55).

This was a sight-only record of a bird seen feeding on a fruiting shrub in her back yard. The observer, a sculptor artist, gave an honest, adequate description, complete with sketch, of what she saw. In the end, after much deliberation and three rounds of voting, the committee felt the report didn't meet the criteria for acceptance of a continent-wide rarity.

Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*

2023: Al Harvey Road, Stonington, *New London*, 20 Dec (2023-47).

This was a fine report, with photos, by an experienced observer, of a male Euphagus blackbird. It was a tough record to assess, based on similarity of Rusty and Brewer's Blackbirds. The images provided seemed to show a bird more consistent with Rusty Blackbird than Brewer's.

Townsend's Warbler *Setophaga townsendi*

2023: Lake Drive, Harwinton, *Litchfield*, 16 Sep (2023-32).

This report included photos of a Setophaga warbler that superficially looked like a Townsend's Warbler. But careful scrutiny of the photos, which were in tricky lighting, led many on the committee to assess that it was actually a Black-throated Green Warbler.

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Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek and Frank Mantlik



This adult Caspian Tern showed off its impressive size and appearance on July 30, 2023 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. (Steve Mayo)

Summer Season, June 1 to July 31, 2023

Our shortest but most complex season encompasses two ends of migration, the bulk of the breeding season and an overall presence of lingering and wandering species.

Northbound Migration

A Whimbrel was still on the move June 1 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, hereafter HBSP (SHu, ES). The latest Short-billed Dowitcher was on June 19 in Old Saybrook (AA). A Solitary Sandpiper was at Three Rivers Park in Woodbury on June 2 (CW). The high count for the steeply declining Red Knot was 16 on June 7 at Milford Point (MJ), which also held four White-rumped Sandpipers on June 18 (SHe). The Stamford Summer Bird Count turned up a total of three Black Terns at two locations (FG, AC).

The latest Common Nighthawks were moving June 10 at four locations, including three at Little Pond in Litchfield (CF et al.). The latest Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was at

Milford Point on June 10 (JFe). Northern Parulas on June 5 at Greenwich Point and in New Haven were probably late migrants (CEh, BR). A **Prothonotary Warbler**, a species usually found early in the migration season, was still around on June 6-8 at East Rock Park in New Haven, the most consistent location for this southern overshoot (ES, m.ob.). The species could potentially nest in the state. Mourning Warblers, noted late migrants, were at four locations in June, the last on June 13 at Flanders Nature Center in Woodbury (JCo). Blackpoll Warblers, among the last of boreal breeders to pass through, were reported daily to June 11, with the latest still present on June 20 at Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton (MP, JPr). A Wilson's Warbler was still on the move on June 5 at Wimisink Marsh in Sherman (ZA).

Southbound Migration

Whimbrels were on the move with a high of five on July 19 at Milford Point (SS). A White-rumped Sandpiper on July 23 at Milford Point seemed clearly southbound (JFe, KS); a few around July 1 should probably be called "tweeners." The earliest Pectoral Sandpiper was found July 17 at HBSP (JCa). A few Bonaparte's Gulls began to appear in late July along the coast (KJo et al.). Two Western Sandpipers kicked off their eagerly awaited appearance on July 23 at Stratford Point (AK). Semipalmated Sandpiper numbers build fast, with 2200 at Milford Point on July 29 (MJ). A Tennessee Warbler was a nice find during morning flight on July 30, after a strong cold front, at Willard's Island at HBSP (NB).

Lingers, Wanderers and Strays

Common Eiders, far west of expected locations, included one on June 1 at Compo Beach in Westport (TG); two on June 11-18 at the Norwalk Islands (JL et al.); and three on June 12 at Merwin Point in Milford (BR, KJa). A Surf Scoter was off Stratford Point from July 5-22 (CHe et al.). Others were at HBSP on June 1 (JFe) and at Quiambog Cove in Stonington on July 20 (DW). In typical distribution in Long Island Sound, White-winged Scoters were at four locations from Bridgeport to New Haven and Black Scoters were at four locations in New London County. The high count of lingering Long-tailed Ducks was up to four through June 29 at Compo Beach (TG). A Common Goldeneye remained off Branford on July 7 (RM). The only Ruddy Duck was at West Lake Reservoir in Danbury on June 21 (MP).

A Horned Grebe was late June 2 at Nepaug Reservoir in Canton (JK, JMe). A **Wilson's Phalarope** was a good find on June 6 at Goshen Cove in Waterford (SWi), as was another on June 30 at Barn Island in Stonington (FC). A Caspian Tern was at Sandy Point in West Haven throughout June (WB et al.). The first of a handful of Royal Terns appeared on June 19 at Cockenoe Island, Westport (BM). In addition to the usual handful off Common Loons summering in



This adult male Blue Grosbeak was present throughout June 2023 at Suffield Wildlife Management Area in northern Hartford County. A female was also present. (Jeff Joffray)

Long Island Sound, a Red-throated Loon was at Penfield Reef in Fairfield on July 8 (AK).

A trip on the New London-Orient, NY, ferry on June 6 produced eight Wilson's Storm-Petrels in CT waters (SMi). An adult **Brown Pelican** was a seasonal highlight on July 5 at the mouth of the Housatonic River in Stratford and Milford (NB et al.). The state's few breeding American Bitterns occupy inland marshes, so one at Toll Gate Pond in Greenwich on June 10 (SMA) was unexpected, as was one at Sherwood Island SP in Westport on July 31 (TG). A Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was far from the species' breeding stronghold in coastal Fairfield County when it was found on June 13 in Coventry (SMe). Single adult Little Blue Herons were unexpected inland at Burnt Swamp in Woodbridge on June 11 (CL) and at Portland Fairgrounds on July 27-28, with a juvenile also present on the latter date (TA, JG).

Clay-colored Sparrows were out of season on June 1-4 at Machimoodus State Park in East Haddam (SWn et al.) and on June 27 at Allen's Meadows in Wilton (JBe). This species has extended its range eastward and is a potential addition to the state's breeding list. Single **Dickcissels** were present June 18-19

at Northwest Park in Windsor (DB, SG et al.) and on June 23 at Flirt Hill (JN) and July 1 in nearby Trout Brook Valley (LH), both in Easton.

The Breeding Season

Gadwall, once a regular coastal breeder, was reported from only four locations, none with broods present (FM et al.). Single Blue-winged Teal, always potential breeders, were near the Quinnipiac River in North Haven on July 2 (TT) and at Anderson Pond in North Stonington on July 22 (MG). Two Northern Shovelers - both males - on June 24 at Milford Point were potential nesters (GA). Pied-billed Grebes at possible breeding locations included one on July 24 at Bantam River marshes in Litchfield (JS) and two on July 25 at McLean Game Refuge in Granby (CHo). An adult Common Gallinule found in May at a marsh in Cornwall remained in proper breeding habitat to at least July 4 (JCo, JMo, LMa et al.).

Sandhill Crane was confirmed breeding in northern Litchfield County, with at least one fledged young seen (var. obs.). A Black Skimmer, a species that breeds sporadically, was at Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk on June 23 (AF); others were at Sandy Point, West Haven on June 7-30 (WG, BR) and at Milford Point on June 15-July 2 (MJ et al.). **Mississippi Kite** breeding sites are kept confidential, but any other sightings could suggest breeding as well: Putnam Memorial State Park (JBa), Stamford Museum and Nature Center (BO, LMo) and Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area (BM), all in Fairfield County. A pair of **Merlins** attended at least two noisy fledglings during the season in downtown Litchfield (KD), an apparent first confirmed nesting for the state.

A Golden-crowned Kinglet was a good find on June 9 in North Stonington (DP). Five Red Crossbills, three adults and three juveniles, were in Winchester on June 23, suggestive of breeding (DRs). The only report of a Yellow-breasted Chat was from Brookfield June 10-11 (JMa, JBa). Nashville Warblers have become hard to find during breeding season. The only reports were single birds June 17 (DH) and July 6 (SHa) in different parts of Norfolk. Northern Parula is a scarce but widespread breeder as indicated by many June-July reports spread over all eight counties, with the most locations (about a dozen) in Litchfield County. A pair of **Blue Grosbeaks** was on territory and apparently breeding in June at Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton (JN, AK et al.). A male and a female were present in the same time period at Suffield WMA (AS, m.ob.).

Observers: Zachary Adams, Anthony Albrecht, George Amato, Tim Antanaitis, Judith Bachman (JBa), William Batsford, Joe Bear (JBe), Debbie Bishop, Nick Bonomo, Jim Carr (JCa), Al Collins, Fernando Corrada, John Correia



This adult Sandhill Crane and its one fledgling were part of a pair's confirmed breeding in July 2023 in northern Litchfield County. (Buzz Devine)

(JCo), Kristi Dranginis, Cynthia Ehlinger (CEh), Chris Elphick (CEl), Adam Fasciolo, Jo Fasciolo (JFa), Jeff Fengler (JFe), Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe, Frank Gallo, William Generous, Susan Gowen, John Graham, Matthew Graul, Tina Green, Greg Hanisek, Shelley Harms (SHa), Larry Havey, Craig Heberton (CHe), Sophie Herron (SHe), Conor Hogan (CHo), Dorrie Holmes, Steven Hubbard (SHu), Kimberly Jannarone (KJa), Kim Jones (KJo), Matt Joyce, Jay Kaplan, Aidan Kiley, James Leone, Chris Loscalzo, Richard Madonna, Frank Mantlik, Larry Master (LMa), Stefan Martin (SMa), James Masullo (JMa), Sam Merker (SMe), Jamie Meyers (JMe), Shai Mitra (SMi), Lisa Monachelli (LMo), Joanne Morrissey (JMo), Tom Murray, Brendan Murtha, Jeremy Nance, Brian O'Toole, Maureen Patten, Joe Pescatore (JPe), Jeffrey Price (JPr), Mark Price, Dave Provencher, Bill Rankin, Dave Rosgen (DRs), Dan Rottino (DRo), Ed Sadowski, Alex Sauerbrunn, James Singletary, Steve Spector, Katrina Stewart, Tommy Thornhill, Dorothy Wadlow, Sean Williams (SWi), Stuart Winquist (SWn), Chris S. Wood

Photo Challenge

By James Purcell



It's mid-November and you're out at one of your local patches, scouring through thicket after thicket, hoping to stumble across something rare like you do every year, always coming up short. You then hear a sharp "chup" call coming from a dense tangle of vines down low, and something seems off. It doesn't sound like the usual sparrows and cardinals you'd expect at this time of year, but more like a warbler - but it doesn't sound quite right for Yellow-rumped or Palm, the only ones you'd really expect to find at this point in the fall.

All of a sudden, this bird pops out of the brush just a couple feet off the ground, offering a full view. After a few brief seconds, it dives back into a clump of phragmites and continues to only provide quick looks between the tangles of twigs and leaves. At first glance, it's clear we are dealing with a warbler of some kind. The bright yellow belly and undertail eliminate any sparrow, finch, or thrush, and the thin, pointed bill indicates that it's not a vireo or tanager. There are over 30 species of warbler that occur regularly in Connecticut, so at first it may seem like a bewildering task to narrow them down.

Luckily, this bird gives us several distinctive clues. The pale gray hood that wraps around the entire head, contrasting with the bright yellow of the underparts and the green of the upperparts, is only shown by four warblers: Nashville, Connecticut, Mourning, and MacGillivray's. Nashville would have

a paler whitish belly compared to the solid yellow that this bird shows, and the tail would be much shorter, giving an impression of a petite warbler all around. A Connecticut Warbler, particularly in the fall, would show more of a brownish hood compared to the pale gray that this bird has, and the tail would once again be shorter, creating a streamlined and sturdy look that almost looks like a miniature thrush compared to a warbler. Connecticut would also show a solid white eye ring, which leaves us with Mourning or MacGillivray's.

That brings us to the defining field mark on this bird - the bright white markings both above and below the eye, otherwise known as "eye-arcs". This is different from a complete eye ring because it's broken on the sides, and it's the first thing that stood out to you when you first laid eyes on the bird. This marking is distinctive for MacGillivray's Warbler. Mourning Warbler can appear quite similar in overall coloration, but always shows an eye ring that is only slightly broken at best. More importantly, that eyering is much narrower, less obvious, and uniform in width around the eye, rather than emphasized in these bold "arcs". This feature, combined with the whiter throat and longer tail, all point clearly to MacGillivray's over Mourning. If we combine that with this bird's skulking behavior as it provides fleeting glimpses in and out of the thicket, it's a slam dunk. All those years of checking thickets have finally paid off!

This photo was taken by Frank Mantlik on November 19, 2023 at Pine Creek Open Space in Fairfield.

James Purcell is an avid birder from Fairfield who has been birding in CT since 2008, although he mostly sticks to local patches in his hometown so he can try to find rarities like this special occurrence last year.



Next Challenge Photo

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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

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