

SUMMARY OF 1995 NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATION COUNT IN NEW ENGLAND

by Michael Resch

The North American Migration Count (NAMC) is a nationwide census held annually the second Saturday in May, with results compiled by county and state. The NAMC is the brainchild of Jim Stasz of North Beach, Maryland, who has combined facets of the Christmas Bird Count with Maryland's "May Count." The objectives of the NAMC include the following:

- obtain a snapshot of the progress of spring migration
- obtain information on the abundance and distribution of each species
- create challenges and goals among birders while collecting useful information
- establish the second Saturday in May as "National Birding Day"
- have fun.

To quote Mr. Stasz, "The North American Migration Count is a grassroots project instituted by independent birders to gather information about the distribution and abundance of all birds." No fees or donations are used to organize the program, compile the results, and report the data. The count has grown since its inception in 1992 to more than six thousand participants nationwide for the fourth annual NAMC on May 13, 1995, with reports from each of the lower forty-eight states, Alaska, and several Canadian provinces.

New England Summary

May 13, 1995, was a difficult day weather-wise throughout much of New England. Precipitation was reported from the vast majority of the region, ranging from a "miserable gale" along portions of the Massachusetts coast and the islands to "incessant drizzle" throughout much of the inland area. In conjunction with a reasonably cold spring and a somewhat later-than-normal arrival of spring migrants, it would be easy to predict a limited response for the count with few birds observed. On the contrary, more than four hundred birders participated in the NAMC in New England with 234 species and 115,000 individuals reported across the region. Table 1 shows a breakdown by state of key New England statistics.

Rarities and Notable Birds. One of the most exciting features of any birding event is the possibility of finding a rarity or other notable sighting. With nearly two thousand party-hours logged across New England, the 1995 NAMC was no exception. Rarities and other notable sightings on the count included one Red-necked Grebe in Nantucket County, Massachusetts; one Eurasian Wigeon (drake) in Essex County, Massachusetts; three Cattle Egrets in York County, Maine; one Black-headed Gull in Waldo County, Maine; one Harris' Sparrow in

Table 1. Key Statistics
1995 North American Migration Count in New England

	CT	RI	MA	VT	NH	ME	Total
Parties	15	5	76	10	35	30	171
Observers	34	9	190	39	96	44	412
Counties Reporting	4	3	12	5	9	10	43
Number of Species	141	137	209	135	143	165	234
Number of Individuals	8,563	4,464	70,768	6,930	11,586	12,546	115,989

Nantucket County, Massachusetts; and White-winged Crossbills in Hampden County, Maine, three New Hampshire counties, and Essex County, Vermont.

Analysis of the Progress of Migration. One of the principal purposes of the NAMC is to track the progress of migration. In other words, the NAMC data, when normalized on a party-hour basis, can be used to determine how far spring migrants have progressed into the country from their wintering grounds and to what extent wintering species have exited the country for their breeding areas. Table 2 shows the relative degree of arrival and departure of several key groups of species for each of the six New England states.

The values in Table 2 were calculated by dividing the NAMC totals for each state by the total number of party-hours on foot for that state. Foot-hours were used rather than total party-hours in normalizing the totals because few of the small passerines analyzed in Table 2 are observed while driving.

The results for all warblers and vireos would suggest that by May 13, 1995, these migrants had rather uniformly arrived throughout all of New England except for New Hampshire and Maine. However, the calculated values for all warblers and vireos may be skewed by the warblers and vireos that arrive rather early in spring or that may have overwintered during warmer winters (particularly in southern portions of New England). The "early arrivers" addressed in Table 2 are Solitary Vireo, and Yellow-rumped, Pine, Palm, and Black-and-White warblers. As shown in the second row of Table 2, the numbers of early arrivers per foot party-hour indicate the abundance of these species was similar in all New England states. In comparison, the "late arrivers," defined as Blackburnian, Prairie, Blackpoll, Mourning, Wilson's, and Canada warblers, were most common in Connecticut, with smaller numbers in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and even smaller numbers in the three northern New England states. Despite the unique results for the early and later arrivers, the pattern for "all other warblers/vireos" (i.e., all warblers/vireos except the early and late arrivers) is similar to the pattern for all warblers/vireos.

A similar analysis was performed for the migrant thrushes (Veery and Gray-cheeked, Swainson's, and Wood thrushes). Hermit Thrush was not included to eliminate any effects overwintering Hermits may have on the data. The values in the next to last row in Table 2 indicate the thrushes had arrived in the greatest numbers in Connecticut, with smaller numbers in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Vermont, and even smaller numbers in New Hampshire and Maine.

Finally, the NAMC results can also be used to investigate how wintering species are migrating away from the region. The "winterers" in Table 2 were Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, junco, Purple Finch, both crossbills, Pine Siskin, and Evening Grosbeak. Of course the sightings of some of these species may have represented individuals already on breeding territory rather than true migrants. The numbers per foot party-hour indicate that these

**Table 2. Progress of Migration
1995 North American Migration Count in New England**

	Birds Per Foot Party-Hour						
	CT	RI	MA	VT	NH	ME	
All Warblers & Vireos	19	18	20	23	13	11	
Early Arrivers	4.7	3.7	5.2	4.7	5.5	4.6	
Late Arrivers	0.75	0.48	0.58	0.09	0.15	0.11	
All Other Warblers/Vireos	14	14	14	18	7.5	6.6	
Thrushes	3.5	2.2	2.2	2.2	0.78	0.40	
Winterers	0.04	0.57	0.33	5.68	3.55	2.82	

species had all but left Connecticut, were present in very low numbers in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and were present in considerable numbers in the northern tier states. Is the value from Vermont skewed by a disproportionate number of party-hours from the northern portion of the state, or were Vermonters better at finding these species?

Counts of Expanding Species and Species in Trouble. A regionwide count such as the NAMC also provides an opportunity to track the expansion of the ranges of applicable species and to track species whose numbers and ranges may be on the decline. Brief analyses of NAMC data for expanding and declining species are provided below.

Three examples of expanding species are Black Vulture, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Fish Crow. One Black Vulture was reported in Litchfield County, Connecticut, where this species is now almost considered a regular bird along the Housatonic River Valley. Is an unexpected sighting of one from Worcester County, Massachusetts, suggestive of a sole wanderer or the beginning of a new outpost? The Red-bellied Woodpecker appears to be expanding northeasterly from strongholds in central and western Connecticut, potentially along major river valleys. The NAMC reported 0.41 birds per party-hour in Connecticut, 0.19 birds per party-hour in Hampden, Massachusetts (along the Connecticut border including the Connecticut River Valley), 0.13 birds per party-hour in Rhode Island, 0.003 per party-hour in Worcester County, Massachusetts, and single birds from Nantucket and Norfolk counties, Massachusetts.

The range expansion of the Fish Crow is generally following the coastlines and river valleys and is enhanced near inland landfills. Coastal sightings included three birds in Fairfield County, Connecticut, two in Washington County, Rhode Island, three in Suffolk County, Massachusetts, and one in Cumberland County, Maine. Inland sightings included one each in Hampden and Hampshire counties, Massachusetts (along the Connecticut River Valley), three in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, and one in Worcester County, Massachusetts.

Data from four declining species (i.e., American Bittern, Common Moorhen, Upland Sandpiper, and Eastern Meadowlark) were also examined. The American Bittern was not reported from Connecticut or Rhode Island and was only reported from one county (Worcester) in Massachusetts. Reports of only seven or eight birds were received from each of the three northern states. For the Common Moorhen, only one bird was reported (Rockingham County, New Hampshire) for the entire region. Was this species overlooked, or is it in more trouble than we may think?

Only six Upland Sandpipers were reported throughout the region: four in Hartford County, Connecticut, and one each in Plymouth and Essex counties, Massachusetts. Finally, the Eastern Meadowlark was reported from each state,

but only eighty-six individuals were found across the region. This equates to 0.046 birds per party-hour, or one bird for every twenty-three hours in the field.

Future of the NAMC in New England

Coverage in the 1995 NAMC in New England was significantly improved over the previous two years. While a total of seventy-nine parties covered only nine of sixty-five New England counties in 1993, these totals increased to 171 parties covering forty-three counties in 1995. Hopefully this trend will continue for the 1996 NAMC on May 11. However, still roughly one-third of the counties were unrepresented, and coverage in some other counties was spotty at best. Coverage was best in states and counties with compilers who organized their portion of the count and who applied just the right amount of torque to the arms of those who counted. The future of the NAMC in New England will be brightest if many state and county coordinators are added to the existing list provided in the next paragraph. Please contact me if you would like to volunteer to be a coordinator. As coverage improves, some of the above analyses could be performed by county or region (for instance up the Connecticut River valley) rather than on a state-by-state basis. Population trends over time will also be completed in future NAMC summaries. Perhaps five years from now, the NAMC article will summarize the colonization of Red-bellied Woodpeckers throughout the entire region and may even discuss the expansion of Little Egrets in New England.

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