

# YARD BIRDS

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Prior to our move to Worcester in 1999, we lived in Bolton for nine years. We started birding in 1994 and maintained a yard list from that time. By the time we moved, we had tallied 109 yard species. That bounty was attributable both to the variety of habitat within our five-acre yard (including stream, wetlands, woods, and open meadow) and to our proximity to other varied habitats. Our yard on one side was bordered by a farm field and an old orchard, and we were no more than a mile (as the duck flies) from the Delaney Wildlife Management Area (Bolton Flats was on the other side of town).

The proximity to Delaney accounted for Green Heron in the yard, and many flyovers of ducks and geese. The neighboring farm field and orchard accounted for Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and Common Snipe, among other species. We also recorded a wide variety of hawks, thrushes, vireos, warblers, and sparrows. Owls included Great Horned, Eastern Screech, and Barred. And among our winter visitors were Evening Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls, and Pine Siskins.

But two things really stand out as highlights of our Bolton yard – one an annual event, the second a one-day wonder.

The annual event was the return in spring of American Woodcocks that used our back meadow and neighboring field as launch pads for their display flights. We could stand out back unobtrusively and have woodcocks come in to land within ten feet, clearly seeing them *peent* and strut around. Sometimes doing yard work during the day, we would come across them hiding in the dense thickets against one of the boundary walls.

The one-day wonder happened in late December 1995. We were about to leave on a road trip but were delayed at home by a blizzard. Waiting for the snow to stop, we heard Blue Jay alarm calls and looked outside. There, perched in a tree, was a Northern Goshawk. After a while it made several passes through the yard. Its powerful flight and maneuverability were awe inspiring. Within an hour of the Goshawk's visit, the Blue Jay alarm sounded again. This time we looked out to find a Northern Shrike sitting on our bird table. That was quite a day!

As a postscript, we saw the Goshawk several more times, and the following spring/summer it was confirmed to be breeding at Delaney. The shrike's visit was not the first or the last either.

Now in Worcester, we have started a new yard list. With a smaller yard we don't expect the same variety as in Bolton, but we already have two species that never made the Bolton list. Wild Turkeys (adult and young) frequent our new yard. And quite unexpectedly, on three nights this July we had a Whip-poor-will calling from the woods behind us.

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