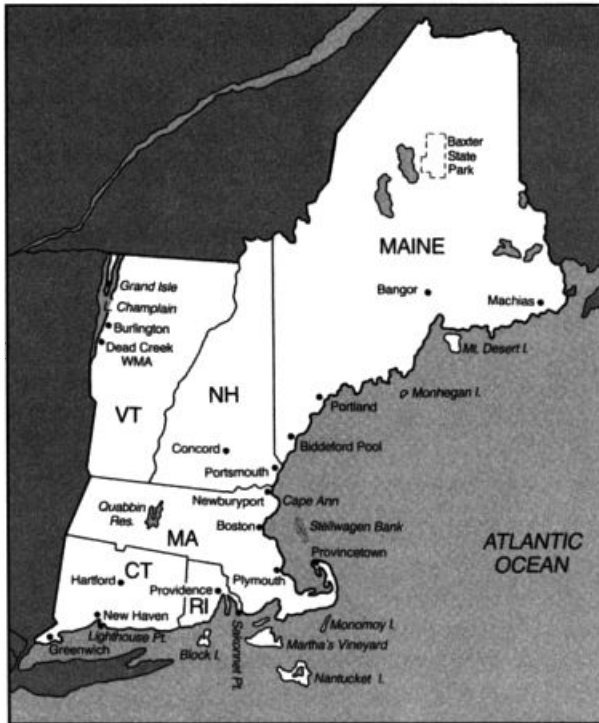


New England



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It had to happen eventually. After four consecutive winters with above-average temperatures, New Englanders finally got a taste of the real thing. December 2000, in fact, was the coldest December since 1989, falling into the bottom third in n. New England and the bottom fifth in the southern states. By January, temperatures were roughly normal, and even ended up in the top quarter by February. December was wetter than average, and many Christmas Bird Counters throughout the Region will not soon forget the thunderstorms of the 17th. In contrast, January and February were fairly dry, and we had to wait until March for the really serious snowfalls (but that's another season).

There were a number of clear patterns to New England's avifauna this winter, although none were particularly dramatic. Among them was a modest invasion of northern raptors, including Rough-legged Hawks, Gyrfalcons,

Snowy Owls, Northern Hawk Owls, and Northern Shrikes. In contrast, northern finches were almost absent, although they were replaced at feeders by a profusion of sparrows, especially Dark-eyed Juncos. Despite the cold temperatures, some half-hardies, including Hermit Thrush and a few warblers, lingered into the northern parts of the Region. On the other hand, the December freeze seems to have driven many waterfowl south early, and lingerers in this group were generally reported in lower numbers. Offshore, December was good for jaegers and Dovekies, and alcids in general were relatively common throughout the season. And finally, there were the rarities, including Brown Pelican in Rhode Island, possible Yellow-legged Gull on Nantucket, Veery in New Hampshire, and the usual collection of vagrant passerines from the south or west.

Abbreviations: Block I. (Block I., Washington, RI), M.V. (Martha's Vineyard, MA), Nantucket (Nantucket I., MA), Ogunquit (York, ME), P.I. (Plum I., Essex, MA), Provincetown (Barnstable, MA), Quabbin (Quabbin Reservoir, w. MA), Rockport (Essex, MA).

Loons Through Vultures

Pacific Loons are becoming regular in the Gulf of Maine. This season, one was in Gloucester, Essex, MA 18 Jan, and another was sporadically reported from Ogunquit 10 Dec–13 Feb (v.ob.). Away from the Gulf of Maine, Connecticut hosted one in Mystic, *New London* 30 Dec (C. Taylor). While Pied-billed Grebes regularly spend part of the winter in coastal areas, they are not expected over most of the Region's interior. This winter 2 individuals made it into Feb: one in Burlington, *Chittenden*, VT 2 Feb, and another one along the Connecticut R. in Chicopee, *Hampden*, MA 22 Feb. Back in the south, a Red-necked Grebe in Fairfield, *Fairfield*, CT 4 Feb was noteworthy for the Nutmeg State (*vide* GH). Wayward Eared Grebes included Gloucester's bird back for its 6th consecutive winter, and another in E. Lyme, *New London*, CT 29 Dec–13 Jan (ph., m.ob.). A Western Grebe made a one-day showing at Salisbury, Essex, MA 14 Jan.

Greater Shearwaters lingered in Massachusetts' waters into mid-Dec, with 9 seen from shore at Rockport 12 Dec and 25 on George's Bank 2 Dec. One off Block I. 10 Dec was among the latest reports on record for Rhode Island (*vide* DE). For the 2nd year in a row, New England hosted a **Brown Pelican** in Dec. This year's individual was no doubt quite a surprise to observers on the Block I. C.B.C., as it perched on a breakwater through sunset 21 Dec (C. Raithel et al.). The wader of the season was an imm. Little Blue Heron that just made it into the winter at Scarborough Marsh, *Cumberland*, ME 1 Dec.

Black Vultures continue to spread slowly from their w. Connecticut stronghold, although I suspect the cold winter curtailed their movements somewhat this year. Eastward wanderers made it to Niantic, *New London*, CT 10 Feb; Marion, *Plymouth*, MA 3 Jan; and Bourne, *Barnstable*, MA 6 Jan, while one at Sheffield, *Berkshire* 11 Feb was the first mid-winter record for w. Massachusetts (*vide* SK). It is not unusual for migrant Turkey Vultures to catch either end of the winter in early Dec and late Feb, but mid-winter reports away from s. New England are rare. This year's standouts were in Kensington, *Rockingham*, NH 31 Dec and Montville, *Waldo*, ME 6 Feb.

Waterfowl

For the first time in several years, inland waters froze before the end of Dec, resulting in fewer reports of waterfowl away from s. and coastal areas. Numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese were down this season, with only 2 in Massachusetts and 3 in Connecticut. Snow

Geese, on the other hand, were more numerous than usual in Connecticut. A Snow Goose flock in Newburyport, *Essex*, MA began at 114 in early Dec and declined to 69 by late Feb, making it the largest group ever to winter in the state (*vide* RH). Flocks of 100-300 Snow Geese were noted in several Vermont locations during Dec, but the high count was 4200 over Charlotte, *Addison* 12 Dec. Following the lead set by white-fronted geese, Tundra Swans were poorly represented, likely because colder temperatures resulted in less open water. Two were in Connecticut and 3 in Rhode Island, but none were reported from the traditional site of Naples, *Cumberland*, ME (*vide* JD).

Numbers of Eurasian Wigeon were roughly normal, with 8 in Massachusetts, and 4 each in Rhode Island and Connecticut. In contrast to last year, Blue-winged Teal and Northern Shovelers were less widespread, as well as less likely to linger beyond Dec. But just when it was becoming clear that waterfowl numbers were down in 2000-2001, there comes a flock of up to 250 Northern Pintail in Westport, *Bristol*, MA during Feb that may be the highest winter count on record for the Bay State. The male Tufted Duck returned to Wachusett Res., *Worcester*, MA for a 6th winter but was last reported on 16 Dec. There were no other Tufted Ducks reported for the Region.

Harlequin Ducks occurred in usual locations in normal numbers. The following are seasonal maxima for the traditional hot spots: 30 at Ogunquit; 91 at Rockport; 12 at Orleans, *Barnstable*, MA; 43 at Nantucket; 80 at Sachuest Pt., *Newport*, RI; and 25 at Jamestown, *Newport*, RI. The latter location appears to be something of an overflow area for the increasing population at Sachuest Point. The count of 30,000 Surf Scoters seen from a ferry in Nantucket Sound 6 Jan, along 9000 Black Scoters and 650 White-winged Scoters, made for a staggering count (RH). A sampling of state high counts for Common Goldeneye is likewise impressive: 271 on Lake Winnisquam, *Belknap*, NH 10 Dec, 547 in Quincy, *Norfolk*, MA 28 Jan, and 800 in Charlotte, *Chittenden*, VT 7 Feb. Each species of waterfowl appears to have a favorite wintering location, and for Hooded Merganser it appears to be the Lakes Region of cen. New Hampshire. The maximum mid-winter count for all of New England was a flock of 56 in Tilton, *Belknap* 3 Feb. The best s. New England could do was 35 in Plymouth, *Plymouth*, MA 11 Feb Red-breasted Merganser, in contrast, is a species of the ocean, with a high of 2000 at Provincetown 4 Feb. Inland individuals of this species are quite rare after Dec, thus making one at Quabbin 12 Jan and 2 at Shelburne,

Chittenden, VT 17 Jan especially noteworthy given the temperatures that preceded their discovery. Although less common than last winter, Ruddy Ducks were still found in above-average numbers. The maximum was a flock of 228 at Nahant, *Essex*, MA 17 Jan (RH).

Raptors Through Rails

While Osprey regularly linger into Dec in s. New England, they are more unusual in the n. three states. This season there was one at Gerrish I., *York*, ME 3 Dec. Bald Eagles in New Hampshire made national news when a pair began building a nest along the Merrimack River in Bedford, *Hillsborough* in early Feb. If successful, this nest would be the first case of eagles breeding in an urban area in the Region, a sure sign that the species's recovery is well under way. Although the data are not clear on this point, it is this editor's impression that Northern Goshawks were more abundant over much of the Region this winter, based on reports to state rare bird alerts. If this large *Accipiter* did stage something of an irruption, it would fit nicely with a general influx of other n. raptors. One of these was Rough-legged Hawk, which was more common than usual in Connecticut, Rhode Island, w. Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. This marks the 2nd consecutive winter that this species has made it to Connecticut in relatively high numbers, with this year's birds arriving after an early Jan cold snap. Golden Eagles were at the usual locations in Connecticut and w. Massachusetts, including 2 each in Canaan, *Litchfield*, CT and the lower Connecticut River Valley, *Middlesex* and *New London*, CT; and a single bird at Quabbin. Another Golden Eagle was at Shaftsbury, *Bennington*, VT and was likely the same individual that frequented this location last winter.

Merlins may be increasing as a wintering species in New England, perhaps paralleling their increase as breeders in n. parts of the Region. This winter there were 3 in Maine, 2 in New Hampshire, one in Vermont, 11 in Rhode Island, and at least 20 in Massachusetts. Among the n. raptors moving south were Gyrfalcons. The gray individual at P.I. continued from Nov, where it was last seen 10 Dec. The Champlain Valley of Vermont hosted 2-3 birds and another 2 were reported from coastal Maine. The region's final Gyrfalcon frequented the Jefferson and Lancaster areas, *Coos*, NH from early Dec into Jan, providing the Granite State with its first accepted record since March 1993.

For the 2nd year, a Virginia Rail lingered into Dec in w. Massachusetts, where it was found in Northampton, *Hampshire* 17 Dec. More unusual was a Common Moorhen at

Trustom Pond, *Washington*, RI 2 Dec, and most unexpected was a **Purple Gallinule** on M.V. 1 Jan (*vide* A. Keith). This season's Sandhill Cranes were a returning individual in Fairhaven, *Bristol*, MA 27 Jan-23 Feb and one in Bloomfield, *Hartford*, CT 16-23 Dec. This or a different individual flew over nearby West Hartford 24 Feb.

Shorebirds Through Alcids

Lingering Semipalmated Plovers were seen at two locations 23 Dec: Naragansett, *Washington*, RI and Winthrop, *Suffolk*, MA. American Oystercatchers may be increasing as winter visitors in Connecticut, where up to 9 were at Westbrook, *Middlesex* 14-18 Jan. Considering the fact that they are one of the earliest fall shorebirds, the presence of 3 **Lesser Yellowlegs** on P.I. 5 Dec is unprecedented for the Bay State. One of these birds was still present 26 Dec. Surprise shorebirds at South Beach, Chatham, *Barnstable*, MA included a Western Willet 17 Dec and a Marbled Godwit 1-17 Dec. Despite the colder winter in most of the region, American Woodcock were ready for the breeding season on Cape Cod as early as 6 Feb, when one was heard calling in Truro, *Barnstable*, MA.

Following the fall's flight, Massachusetts hosted several jaegers into mid-Dec. Most were the expected Pomarines, including high counts of 12 at South Monomoy, *Barnstable* 1 Dec and 4 at Rockport 12 Dec. More noteworthy was one over Nantucket Sound 6 Jan (RH et al.), furnishing the Bay State with possibly a record late date. Among the Pomarines were some Parasitics, including 2 at Nantucket 2 Dec and one at Block I. 2 Dec. Topping the list was an adult **Long-tailed Jaeger** seen from land at Point Judith, *Washington*, RI 15 Jan (D. Finizia, C. Nunes). Although the primary Atlantic wintering grounds of this species are poorly known (thought to be in the Falkland Current off South America), they are certainly far from New England, and there are no recent winter reports from anywhere on the Atlantic Coast of North America. The individual in question was seen at close range, both in flight and on the water, by experienced observers, and awaits evaluation by the Rhode Island Records Committee.

Unusual inland in mid-winter, especially after a cold Dec, was a Black-headed Gull at Quabbin 12 Jan (S. Perkins et al.). A Mew Gull was at Lynn, *Essex*, MA 8-15 Feb. Thayer's Gulls were reported from Southbury, *Fairfield*, CT 29 Dec (GH); Nantucket; and Portland, *Cumberland*, ME 18 Feb (P. Comins). Perhaps as a result of increasing winter populations (see S.A.), Lesser Black-backed Gulls are increasingly

SA Interesting population changes may be afoot with the Region's populations of "winter" gulls. At least one observer (RH) has noted a consistent, even dramatic, decline in Iceland Gulls in northeastern Massachusetts over the last few decades. Counts over 50 were reported from Cape Ann in the late 1970s and early 1980s, whereas there have not been more than 5 at that location in the last five seasons. Numbers at other locations in the Bay State have shown similar trends. Perusal of the last four years of data show drops of roughly 50% at P.I. and Provincetown, and even the traditional hotspot of Nantucket had a maximum only 45 this winter, compared to 85 in 1999–2000 and 60 in 1998–1999. Christmas Bird Count data from Maine also show a decline, at least away from the far "down east" (*vide* WT). At the same time, Lesser Black-backed Gulls are on the increase. Massachusetts and Connecticut each averaged 4 statewide in the early 1990s, totals that increased dramatically—to 15 and 10 respectively—by decade's end. Glaucous Gulls seem to be holding their own, although they are now less common than the previous species in s. New England. The factors behind these changes are open to speculation, and a complete analysis would require a much more extensive perusal of C.B.C. and other data. Nonetheless, this is a good example of the sorts of population trends that can only emerge when we step back and look at sightings in large blocks. Only time will tell if the patterns continue (they show every sign of doing so, at least for Lesser Black-backs), but in the meantime we need to keep making and submitting our observations.

common inland in cen. New England. This season there were at least 2 in w. Massachusetts and a well-described individual in Brattleboro, *Windham*, VT 31 Jan (M. Taylor) provided a rare record for the Green Mountain State. And then there was Nantucket. This regional larid hotspot has long been known as a good location to find large concentrations of Lesser Black-backed and Iceland Gulls. In the midst of such mundane fare, observers discovered a bird showing all the field marks of **Yellow-legged Gull** 28 Dec (†P. Buckley, R. Veit, F. Buckley). The bird in question appears to have been of the subspecies *Larus cachinnans michahellis*, the population breeding in the Mediterranean, which may be a separate

species from the nominate Yellow-legged Gulls of the Black and Caspian Seas.

After a lackluster showing last winter, alcids were reasonably common. Dovekies staged one of their largest incursions in many years, with most large counts in Dec. At Rockport, 22 were observed 5 Dec, but the motherlode came 17 Dec, when the miserable weather presumably forced 62 close to shore (RH). Other good totals included 9 at Ogunquit 12 Dec and 14 at Jamestown, RI 10 Feb. Common Murres were also slightly more common than usual, with peak counts of 6 and 7 from Rockport and offshore Rhode Island, respectively. Their Thick-billed relatives were back up to numbers comparable to the winter of 1998–1999. In Long Island Sound, 6 Razorbills made it all the way to New London, *New London*, CT through Jan and Feb, and the species was also more common than usual in Rhode Island. High counts farther north included 20 in Rye, *Rockingham*, NH 22 Dec; 7000 from Nantucket 4 Jan; and 8000 from Provincetown 4 Feb. There was the usual scatter of Atlantic Puffins, all from Massachusetts except a single offshore sighting from Rhode Island 4 Feb.

Doves Through Woodpeckers

A Eurasian Collared-Dove was reported in Newbury, *Orange*, VT 1 Dec (C. Bretton), but no details were submitted. To date, this expanding species has not been recorded in New England, but observers should remain alert for that possibility. Rough-legged Hawks and Gyrfalcons weren't the only n. raptors moving south this winter, since Snowy Owls increased for the 2nd year in a row. Totals Regionwide included 4 in Vermont, 2 in New Hampshire, 3 in Maine, 19 in Massachusetts, 4 in Connecticut, and 2 in Rhode Island. Snowies weren't the only n. owls in New England, however, as **Northern Hawk Owls** appeared for the first time since 1998. New Hampshire hosted 2 individuals, including one at the Whitefield Airport, *Coos* 1 Dec–18 Feb that was seen by birders from all over the



Overwintering American Pipits are quite rare in northern New England, so this individual at Hampton Beach, Rockingham, New Hampshire (here 28 January) was especially noteworthy, considering the cold temperatures it endured. Photograph from video by Steve Mirick.

Northeast. The 2nd bird, only a few miles away in Jefferson, was seen infrequently during the first half of Dec. To the east, 3 hawk owls visited Maine: one-day sightings at Bancroft, *Aroostook* 30 Dec and Orono, *Penobscot* 28 Jan, and the 3rd at Sydney, *Kennebec* from 21 Jan into March. A roost of 10–12 Long-eared Owls in Essex, *Essex*, MA 28 Jan was one of the largest recorded in the county (JB). Short-eared Owls were widespread along the Connecticut coast, but not quite as common in Rhode Island as the previous winter.

The only Red-headed Woodpeckers in the Region were 2 overwintering individuals in Connecticut, and an additional single-day sighting from Hudson, *Hillsborough*, NH 6 Jan (J. Bedard). Red-bellied Woodpeckers made inroads to the north, with birds in Brandon, *Rutland*, VT 8 Feb, and Orono, *Penobscot*, ME in early Jan. While Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are pretty regular in s. New England, one visiting a feeder in Moultonborough, *Carroll*, NH throughout Jan and Feb was unusual for the n half of the Region (J. Currier). Even farther north, but where it was supposed to be, was a Three-toed Woodpecker in Houlton, *Aroostook*, ME 5 Jan, providing a rare winter record of this hard-to-find boreal species.

Flycatchers Through Waxwings

Despite the cold Dec, this winter there were 2 Eastern Phoebe in Massachusetts into mid-winter, one at Sudbury, *Middlesex* 21 Jan and another on Nantucket 31 Jan. The **Tropical**

Kingbird that graced Hingham in Nov left as the season turned but was replaced by a Western Kingbird on M.V. 5 Dec, providing the Bay State with a rare winter record. It was the 2nd banner year in a row for Northern Shrikes. Totals of 40, 22, and 41 in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine compare favorably with last winter's 60, 24, and 55, respectively. Like the hawks and owls discussed above, this smallest raptor seemed to move south as the winter progressed, with increases noted in Connecticut in late Jan. The season's only vireo was a Blue-headed at Mansfield Hollow S.P., Tolland, CT 3 Dec (C. Elphick). Winter Fish Crows are to be expected from Massachusetts south in variable numbers, but the small corvids are rare after Sep from New Hampshire north. It is thus noteworthy for there to have been two reports from Maine: one in Freeport, Cumberland, at the end of Dec, and another at Brunswick, *Sagadahoc* 5 Feb (*fide* WT).

Carolina Wrens increased for the 5th straight year at the edge of their range in w. Massachusetts and s. New Hampshire. Among the Region's six records of House Wren this season, one was singing in Augusta, *Kennebec*, ME 4 Dec, and 2 made it into Feb in e. Massachusetts. A Sedge Wren was again on Nantucket 2–3 Dec, while at the opposite corner of New England, a Marsh Wren was noteworthy at Colchester, *Chittenden*, VT 17 Dec (A. Strong).

Despite the Dec freeze, Ruby-crowned Kinglets were well reported from areas where they are usually absent in winter. New Hampshire hosted 3 in Dec, w. Massachusetts had 5 in Jan (including 2 at a feeder through Feb), and one lingered to 23 Jan on Monhegan I, *Lincoln*, ME. Almost unprecedented in the Region was a **Veery** that appeared at a feeder in Bristol, *Grafton*, NH in late Oct and was still present in mid-Feb (ph. P. Moulton). The only other winter record for the Region is of a bird in Greenwich, Connecticut in Jan 1980. Our regular winter thrushes—Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, and American Robin—continue to increase in the north and west and to consolidate their gains in the south. There were 3 Varied Thrushes this winter, all in the north: Buxton, *York*, ME 31 Dec to 7 Jan; Etna, *Penobscot*, ME 1–2 Jan; and Rye, NH 16–25 Feb. A Gray Catbird was north and late in Bennington, VT 18 Feb. There are usually a few American Pipits in e. Massachusetts each winter, although numbers vary. This year the peak count was 25 at Middleboro, *Plymouth* 10 Dec. More noteworthy were the birds in *Rockingham*, coastal New Hampshire. Five were in North Hampton 13 Jan, and one spent almost the entire winter just to the south in Hampton. As one would expect, there were

only a few Bohemian Waxwings after last year's invasion. Most were in n. New Hampshire and Maine, with smaller numbers in n. Vermont. They appeared to increase somewhat in late Jan, followed by southward-wandering individuals in Feb. Of the latter, the farthest afield were birds at Monterey, *Berkshire*, MA 20 Feb, and Scarborough, ME in early Feb.

Warblers Through Finches

As one might expect in a chilly Dec, the numbers of lingering warblers were relatively low. Reports in the early part of the season included a Nashville on the Newport, *Newport*, RI C.B.C. 16 Dec, a Northern Parula on M.V. 1–2 Dec, and a Yellow-throated in Derry, *Rockingham*, NH 18–22 Dec. The latter bird was at a feeder, a behavior that allowed a few other warblers to survive well into 2001. Among them were a Black-throated Blue in Brewster, *Barnstable*, MA throughout the winter, and 2 Ovenbirds: one all winter in Durham, *Middlesex*, CT and another at Kittery, *York*, ME 17–20 Jan (v.t. S. Mirick). Pine Warblers, which regularly spend all or part of the snow season in s. New England, may have been more common than usual in the north, where they were also aided by feeders. Farthest afield were birds in Hanover, *Grafton*, NH 7 Dec into Jan, and Buck's Harbor, *Washington*, ME 18 Jan to 6 Feb. Also away from their usual wintering areas in the Region were Yellow-rumped Warblers in Vermont: 2 at Ferrisburg, *Addison* 1 Jan, and one at Starksboro, *Addison* 18 Jan. Finally, another good find was an **Audubon's Warbler** at Ninigret N.W.R., *Washington*, RI 23 Dec (J. LeBaron), marking only the 2nd time this species has been recorded in the Ocean State. The season's only Western Tanager was found in Woodbury, *Litchfield*, CT 14 Dec (J. Frew). At first apparently a one-day-wonder, it reappeared 28 Feb and remained well into Mar. Two others were reported from e. Massachusetts without supporting documentation.

If one had to name the winter of 2000–2001 for a passerine phenomenon, it would be called "The Year of the Sparrow." Leading the wave were Dark-eyed Juncos, which occurred in numbers large enough to exceed C.B.C. records throughout the Region. Speculation on the cause of this junco invasion focuses on three theories: 1) they had a very productive breeding season in 2000, 2) large natural food crops caused them to stay farther north than usual, and 3) cold weather in Canada caused them to move farther south than usual. The latter two, conveniently, are testable hypotheses, using C.B.C. data and other regional



Not quite a standard feeder bird was this Ovenbird in Kittery, York County, Maine, on 17 January, one of two this winter in New England. Photograph from video by Steve Mirick.

reports, and perhaps by the time this season is summarized in its entirety we'll have a better idea of what was going on. Joining the juncos were larger than usual numbers of Eastern Towhees, and Savannah, White-throated and Fox Sparrows, especially in the north and inland west. Unusual sparrows included 3 Lark Sparrows (2 in New Hampshire, one in Massachusetts), 2 Grasshopper Sparrows (in Massachusetts and Connecticut), and a Lincoln's Sparrow on the S Kingston C.B.C., *Washington*, RI 23 Dec. The rarest species in this group however, was the **Harris's Sparrow**, 2 of which graced New England feeders this season. One was at Berlin, *Coos*, NH 22–24 Dec (K. Dube), while the other persisted in Putney, *Windham*, VT from Nov into Mar (S. Medved). A female **Painted Bunting** frequented Wellfleet, *Barnstable*, MA 1–12 Feb.

Winter blackbirds of note included 5 Yellow-headed in Connecticut and one in Massachusetts; a Boat-tailed Grackle in Stratford, *Fairfield*, CT 11 Dec; and at least 9 Baltimore Orioles, with one in Maine, 3 each in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and 2 in Rhode Island. This season's Bullock's Oriole was an imm. male at S Dartmouth, *Bristol*, MA 19–23 Jan (ph. R. Bullard). As is to be expected, winter finches were largely absent after last year's invasion. Purple Finches appear to be the only species that moved to any extent, but even they were generally in scattered smaller flocks. Pine Grosbeaks were largely restricted to n. New Hampshire and n. and c. Maine, although one was out of place near the s Maine coast at Old Orchard Beach, *York* 24 Feb. Red Crossbills showed a similar distribution, although a handful made it to the Berkshires in w Massachusetts. White-winged Crossbills were more common and widespread over the same general area, with additional sightings from