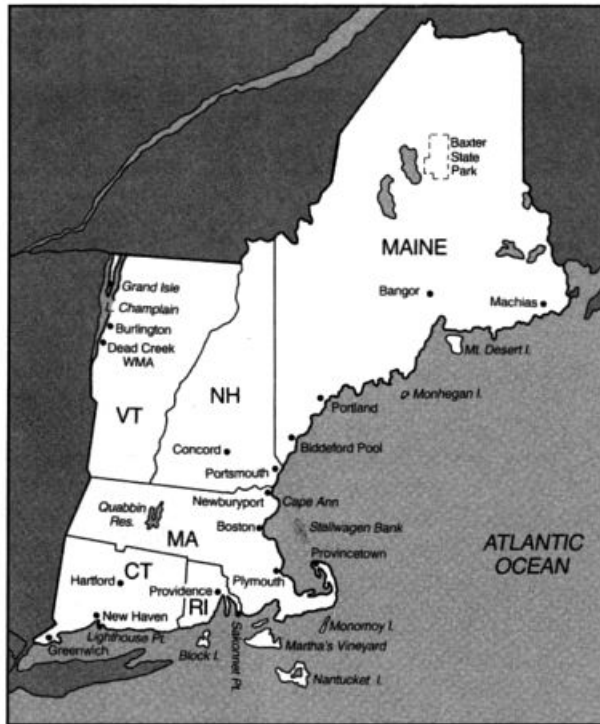


# New England



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**T** rue to its reputation, the New England weather this spring was punctuated by several big mood swings. Following a cold and very snowy March and early April, the mercury in Greater Boston reached 85 degrees F on 22 April. This brief hot spell was followed by a very early but meteorologically official (at least three consecutive days of 90+ degrees) heat wave on 2-4 May. As a result, the foliage swung from being roughly two to three weeks behind to at least a week ahead of schedule. The final radical swing came on 7 May, when temperatures throughout most of Massachusetts bottomed out in the mid-20s. By then, virtually all species of spring migrants had returned but were apparently unscathed by the late freeze. However many trees, including oaks, maples, and ashes were badly "nipped," and the potential long-term effects of this sudden freeze on birds remain to be seen.

While snowfall in the Boston area in March was nearly a foot over the monthly average, precipitation thereafter was far below normal, with total rainfall in April totaling a mere eight-tenths of an inch, and May totals being only slightly higher. The big March snows produced a wide-

spread and very deep snow pack across much of the Region. Through the first week of April, nearly three feet of snow remained on the ground in the towns of northwestern Massachusetts. In central New Hampshire at about the same time, the snow pack was still six feet deep. Through the third week of April, even though the snow was finally beginning to melt, most of New England still looked utterly wintery. The exception was the area encompassing southeastern Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and southern and eastern Connecticut, which, by virtue of the ameliorating effects of the ocean, received mostly rain and was essentially snow-free for most of the season.

Do northbound migrants respond to the presence of a pronounced snow line? Large numbers of jaegers have been observed in spring stacking up along the pack ice off Alaska, and it seems reasonable to assume that other spring migrants, especially insectivores like phoebes, and ground-feeders like woodcocks, would avoid proceeding too far beyond the southern limit of the snow pack. Whether such stacking has ever been documented in our Region, or for that matter, whether it *could* be documented, is unknown, but the question seemed especially appropriate this year.

Species recorded in never-before-seen numbers included White-faced Ibis, Mississippi

Kite, and Northern Wheatear (spring total), and among numerous other rarities, potential first state records, pending review by the respective records committees, included Anhinga in New Hampshire, Black-tailed Godwit in Connecticut, and probable Long-toed Stint in Massachusetts

**Abbreviations:** B. O. (*The Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts*); First Encounter (First Encounter Beach, Eastham, MA); H.B.S.P. (Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison, CT), M.A.R.C. (Massachusetts Avian Records Committee); Martha's Vineyard (Martha's Vineyard I., *Dukes*, MA); Monhegan (Monhegan I., *Lincoln*, ME); Nantucket (Nantucket I., *Nantucket*, MA); Plum I. (Plum I., including the Parker R. N.W.R., and the towns of Newburyport/Newbury/Ipswich/Rowley, *Essex*, MA); Tuckernuck (Tuckernuck I., *Nantucket*, MA); V.I.N.S. (Vermont Institute of Natural Sciences).

## LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

Pacific Loons in the Region this spring included a basic-plumaged bird off Cape Elizabeth, *Cumberland*, ME 10 Apr (PDV), and a bird in transitional plumage off Plymouth, MA 15 Apr (SP, TM). An above-average total of 4 Eared Grebes was present in four different states. These included the annual overwinterer (6th year!) in Gloucester, MA through at least 21 Mar (J. Soucy et al.), one off Napatree Pt., RI 20-21 Mar (CR), another in Waltham, *Hancock*, ME 14 May (K. Emerson), and one on a reservoir at West Hartford, CT 9 Apr (A. Shapiro). The latter 2 were especially unusual in being at inland sites.

Noteworthy tubenose reports included a single, early Leach's Storm-Petrel at First Encounter 7 Mar (BN), a count of 50 Northern Fulmar off Mt. Desert Rock in the Gulf of Maine 18 May (WT), and two land-based counts of fulmars from that perennially productive promontory, Andrew's Pt., Rockport, MA: 126 during a storm 5 Mar and another 273 under similar conditions 15 days later (RSH).

Two sightings of **Anhinga**, one in West Newbury, MA 13 May (L. Pivacek, E. Salmela) and the other in Stratham, NH 14 May (D. Abbott), probably involved the same individual. The latter represented a first state record. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons reached as far n. (and e) as Portland and Newagen, ME on 18-19 May (LB) and 18-25 May (N. Bither), respectively. An unprecedented total of 3 **White-faced Ibis** appeared in the Region this spring. A White-faced in Middletown, RI 21-26 Apr (R. Larsen et al., ph.) represented the first fully documented record for the Ocean State, one in Scarborough, ME 5-10 May (LB) represented the 2nd in that state, and another appeared at H.B.S.P. 21-26 Apr

(J Hough) for a 4th state record.

Black Vultures were a bit less pioneering this spring, with none seen n. of Massachusetts. Nonetheless, in Rhode Island, individuals were reported in each of the three months within the reporting period, and among a new seasonal high total of 12 in Massachusetts, 5 were seen in the Berkshire town of Pittsfield 5 Apr (S. Cook). Meanwhile, Black Vultures continue to be so common in w. Connecticut each spring that local compilers no longer enumerate the totals there.

## WATERFOWL

The 5 Greater White-fronted Geese that were reported from four localities in Massachusetts (B O) represented what has become a fairly routine seasonal total, but the single Greater White-fronted in Vergennes, VT 13 Apr (V.I.N.S.) was much less expected in that state. Although Vermont invariably yields by far the greatest counts of geese within the Region, most of these are Snow Geese, e.g. about 15,000 at Grand Isle 24 Mar and another 14,500 at Pantou 4 Apr (V.I.N.S.). The next-highest counts for this species in the Region usually come from w. Massachusetts, where there were three counts of 300 each, in Ashfield, Northfield, and Hadley, all in the first week of Apr (B.O.).

Brant detected inland this spring included three different flocks in early May on Lake Champlain, VT, the largest containing 75 birds (V.I.N.S.), and a single in West Bridgewater, MA 1 Apr (N. Samson et al.). A dark-bellied Brant in Newburyport, MA 4-5 May (RSH, JT et al.) was thought to belong to the Old World subspecies, *Branta b. bernicla* (Dark-bellied Brent), a form not previously recorded in New England. A Tundra Swan was present in West Bridgewater, MA 4-22 Apr (WRP).

Eurasian Wigeon away from more traditional coastal sites included one or 2 on Lake Champlain, VT and one in Boylston, Worcester, MA. Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal were especially well represented this spring, with five sightings coming from Massachusetts, one from Connecticut, and another from Maine. Additionally, two Green-winged x Common Teal intergrades were noted, one in Eliot, York, ME 6 Apr (SM) and another in West Bridgewater, MA 29 Mar (J. Johnstone). Tufted Ducks continued to be a feature this spring. A Regional total of 4 included one in Providence, RI 16 Apr (D. Harrison), 2 Massachusetts birds, in Westport 18 Mar (ML) and Clinton 8-10 Apr (E. McMenemy et al.), and a 4th, seen in two different towns on Lake Champlain, VT, in Colchester and South Hero, on the same day, 14 Apr. (V.I.N.S.). The Vermont record was the state's 2nd, following last year's first. Where might a pair of Tufted Ducks nest if they chose to do so in the

Americas? It's hard to imagine that the increasing numbers of Tufted Ducks in North America all return to the Old World to breed, so this question is now beginning to loom large. L. Champlain also produced a spate of Barrow's Goldeneye reports, though the exact numbers involved were impossible to ascertain. The maximum seen at any time was 4 at Colchester/South Hero 1 Apr (V.I.N.S.). The only other inland Barrow's were 2 seen roughly 30 mi from the coast in Waterville, *Kennebec*, ME 11 Apr (WS).

## KITES THROUGH CRANES

As it did last year, the kite season started a bit early with the appearance of a Swallow-tailed at Nantucket on Easter Sunday, 15 Apr (E. Ray et al.). Then, in May, Massachusetts birders blew the doors off all previous Regional high counts for Mississippi Kites. All but two of an astonishing 13 reports of the species came from Cape Cod, though the actual numbers of birds accounting for this total will remain a matter of conjecture. Equally surprising was the fact that they were seen nowhere else in New England, a point that brilliantly illustrates just how effective the Cape is as a spring kite trap.

During a relatively tame raptor migration, big days were all but lacking. Season-high counts for selected species, all in Massachusetts, included 333 Broad-winged in Barre 23 Apr (EMHW), 441 American Kestrels at Plum I. 22 Apr (TC), and 49 Merlins, also at Plum I. 22-24 Apr (TC). An ad. Swainson's Hawk was reported from N. Truro, MA 18 May (D. Manchester, *fide* B.O.). Though no details regarding this sighting reached this writer, in recent years, the outermost Cape towns of Truro and Provincetown have hosted well-documented, late spring and summer records of Swainson's Hawks. Two Golden Eagles in Vermont included birds in Bridport 24 Mar, and Brandon 27 Apr (V.I.N.S.), and another Golden, a bird that probably spent the winter there, was still at Quabbin Reservoir, Worcester, MA 10 Mar (JH). Gyrfalcon reports numbered two each from Vermont and Maine. However, only one, from Gouldsboro, *Hancock*, ME 24 May (WT), included details. Merlins have been breeding regularly in the Region near the Canadian border for about the last five years. A pair of Merlins discovered nesting in Hanover, NH 22 Apr (*fide* W. Scott), was roughly 100 mi farther s. than any pair had been known to breed in the Granite State.

A report of a Yellow Rail in Pittsford, VT 4 May did not include details (*fide* V.I.N.S.). Sandhill Cranes put in another very solid showing in the Region, continuing their recent trend, though the precise number of individuals accounting for the numerous sightings was unknown. Four reports of single birds from four

different towns in Maine probably involved no more than 2 individuals seen 9 Apr–31 May. These reports came from the adjacent towns of Durham and Brunswick, and Sidney and Belgrade, the two pairs of towns being roughly 30 mi apart (*fide* JD). In Massachusetts, single Sandhills were seen in Fairhaven, Chatham, and Groton 1 Mar–20 Apr (B.O.). One Sandhill was present again on an island in the Connecticut R., viewed from Barnet/Monroe, VT 19 May (V.I.N.S.), and other individuals were in South Kingston, RI 2 May (B. Gervels) and Southbury, CT 25-26 Apr (J. Longstreth)

## SHOREBIRDS

American Golden-Plovers are typically very scarce spring migrants in New England, so six reports of single birds, all in Massachusetts (B.O.), were noteworthy. One of them was very early in Duxbury 16 Mar (D. Furbish). Northernmost and easternmost American Oystercatchers in the Region included one or 2 in Biddeford and Scarborough, ME 21 Apr+ Oystercatchers have been nesting at Stratton I., Saco, ME for several years, and the above reports probably pertained to those breeders (*fide* JD). Another oystercatcher in Maine was a bit farther afield on Monhegan in mid-May (B. Boynton). A Willet in Turner's Falls, MA, on the Connecticut R. 8 May (M. Fairbrother) furnished a very rare inland record for this species in New England. It is mildly surprising that we do not see more Western Willets stopping over at inland sites during mid-summer when most *C. s. inornatus* are arriving on our coast from the prairies. Connecticut's first **Black-tailed Godwit**, seen initially at Milford Pt. 19 Apr (K. Hubbard et al.), and then Waterford 26-29 Apr (B. DeWire, et al., vt.), was no doubt the same individual that was present on Long Island, NY earlier in the season. All these reports apparently pertained to the race *islandica*, which is an endemic nester on Iceland that winters in Britain.

Byproducts of the Patagonia Rest Stop Effect at the Plum I. Salt Pannes included a Western Sandpiper 15 May (RSH), a Curlew Sandpiper 10-16 May (SP, RSH, ph.), and up to 2 Ruffs 11-23 May (C. Ralph, D. Sandee, ph.). Western Sandpipers are very rare in New England in spring, a somewhat surprising fact given their relative abundance on the s. Atlantic seaboard in winter and very early spring. The Plum I Western Sandpiper was, from a seasonal standpoint, more significant than the Ruffs, which are annual in spring. The "Pannes," a single relatively small (250 x 150 m) pool, have produced an extraordinary collection of rare shorebirds over the years. In addition to this year's highlights, others records there have

included Spotted Redshank, Long-billed Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Terek Sandpiper (still the only North American record away from the Pacific coast and Bermuda), and Little Stint. The only Ruff outside Massachusetts was a black-and-white male at Barn I., Stonington, CT 7-10 May (GH). Aside from the usual records offshore, phalaropes in the Region included an early Red-

**SA** One of the most exciting (though somewhat enigmatic and frustrating) events of the season was the appearance of a small *Calidris* sandpiper at Plum I. 4 May (†SP, RSH, JT et al.) that possessed many characteristics consistent with an alternate-plumaged **Long-toed Stint**. Seen among Least Sandpipers at the famous Salt Pannes at the Parker River N.W.R., the bird possessed scapulars, coverts, and tertials with jet-black centers and broad, bright, rusty-red margins, as well as yellow legs. Though the dorsal plumage rendered it much more vivid than any of the Least Sandpipers, behaviorally and structurally, it appeared nearly identical. At no time did the bird assume the more erect stance often adopted by Long-toed Stint. Following the initial sighting, the bird was observed twice again: 9 May (†N. Soulette, B. Stevens et al.) and 13 May (†M. Sylvia et al.). Unfortunately, all of the sightings were frustratingly brief and/or distant. Though the pattern of the forehead was never discernible during the 4 May sighting, this feature was clearly seen 9 May. If accepted as a Long-toed Stint, this record would constitute the first in e. North America and only the 4th or 5th outside Alaska.

necked during the 7 Mar storm at First Encounter (BN) and single inland Red-neckeds in Grafton, MA 24 May (B. Kamp) and Great Meadows N.W.R., Concord, MA on the same day (JH).

### SKUAS THROUGH ALCIDS

A Great Skua was noted along the Continental Shelf break near the 1000-fathom curve s. of Nantucket 17 May (K. Hartel). The same storm that produced the early Red-necked Phalarope on Cape Cod 7 Mar was also responsible for the season's largest single count of Black-legged Kittiwakes, 2450 at First Encounter. In addition to the usual reports of Black-headed and Little Gulls at various coastal localities came reports of a Black-headed Gull inland at L. Memphremagog, Newport, VT 29 Apr (V.I.N.S.) and an Iceland Gull on L. Champlain in Grand

Isle, VT on the late date of 22 May (DH). On the heels of the enormous incursion of Lesser Black-backed Gulls into coastal Massachusetts last summer, numbers of Lessers, not surprisingly, were up elsewhere as well. Among a total of 9 in New Hampshire, a collection of 5 in Rochester 20 Apr (SM) represented a new single-site maximum for the state. From 29 Apr onward, a pair of Forster's Terns was seen sporadically in the Plum I. marshes (B.O.), suggesting that they were again nesting at New England's only breeding outpost.

The 7 Mar storm was somewhat odd insofar as it apparently distributed different types of birds to different places on the Massachusetts coast. For example, despite the fact that it dumped thousands of kittiwakes into Cape Cod Bay, it produced virtually no alcids there. Yet on the same day on Cape Ann, a storm-chaser tallied a very high total of 485 Thick-billed Murres from Andrew's Pt. (RSH). From the same vantage point, during the 22 Mar storm, the same observer counted 1210 Razorbills. These sorts of Razorbill numbers are fairly typical in winter and early spring in the waters around Cape Cod. For example, 4200 unidentified large alcids, the vast majority of which were probably Razorbills, were off N. Truro 24 Mar (BN). But away from Cape Cod, such numbers are exceptional. The only Atlantic Puffin not reported from the Gulf of Maine was in Gloucester, MA (arguably in the Gulf of Maine) 3-4 Mar (S. Hedman).

### CUCKOOS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A remarkably early, well-described Yellow-billed Cuckoo was studied carefully as it sang repeatedly in Ashfield, MA 6 Apr (SS). Numbers of Short-eared Owls at Nantucket and Tuckernuck, the only remaining nesting localities known in New England, numbered one and 4 (two pairs), respectively. The Tuckernuck total was down from 11 pairs only two years ago. This could have been due to the local rodent populations simply being in a down cycle, or it could have been the direct result of the loss, on both islands, of the globally endangered Coastal Heathland habitat that is critical to the owls' local existence. The owls have been losing ground to both natural ecological succession and to development. Let's hope this year's dip is just part of the latest cycle and not something more permanent. A **Northern Hawk Owl** remained in Sidney, *Kennebec*, ME 4 Mar-2 Apr (D. Ladd).

Reported from at least eight different sites in Massachusetts (though, curiously, nowhere else in New England), Chuck-will's widows have never been so prevalent in the Region as they were this spring. They almost certainly now nest each year on Martha's Vineyard, though positive proof is still lacking. Away from the Vineyard, reports came from Wellfleet (where a bird has

been heard singing for several successive summers and was present again through this reporting period), Mattapoisett, Bourne, Nantucket, Tuckernuck, Gloucester, and Royalston. The latter site is the only inland locality. The amazing female Rufous Hummingbird that just spent her 5th winter in a greenhouse in Northampton, MA was released as usual this spring (3 May) And, as usual, she flew off, not to be seen again What makes Black-backed Woodpeckers prone to wild wandering as often as they are? "Exhibit A" this spring was a bird that materialized on Martha's Vineyard 16 May (S. Whiting).

### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WAXWINGS

If accepted by the M.A.R.C., a report of a Say's Phoebe in Concord, MA 24 Apr (B. Windmiller) would represent the first state (and possibly Regional) record in spring. Two Loggerhead Shrikes reached New England this spring. One was in Brattleboro, VT 29 Mar (V.I.N.S.) and the other appeared at Monhegan 16 May (T. Martin et al.). Fish Crows continue to consolidate their positions in both the Massachusetts section of the Connecticut R. Valley and in the Champlain Valley of Vermont: 6 were reported from four sites in the former, and a pair was in Burlington, VT 1 May (V.I.N.S.). A single Fish Crow at the higher elevations of Woodstock, VT 22 Apr (V.I.N.S.) provided further evidence of this species's increasing comfort with more boreal surroundings. No reports were received this year of the Fish Crows that presumably still occupy the northeasternmost outposts near Portland, ME.

A Barn Swallow in Chilmark, Martha's Vineyard 23 Mar (M. Pelikan) returned from the s. a bit early. Four Sedge Wrens in Massachusetts included singles in Barnstable 19-26 May (J. Liller et al.) and at Plum I. 3-5 May (RSH), and a pair in Athol 17 May (J. Johnstone). Two additional singletons were in South Windsor, CT 12-16 May (P. Cianfaglion et al.) and Addison, VT 6 May (V.I.N.S.).

The Veery that survived the winter in Bristol, Grafton, NH disappeared 3 Mar (*vide* PH). A male Varied Thrush made a brief showing in Worthington, MA 22 Mar (D. McLain) and 2nd report of a Varied Thrush from Alton, *Belknap*, NH also 22 Mar (B. Baed et al.) is pending evaluation by the state records committee. A Northern Mockingbird observed from a boat more than 10 mi off the coast of New Hampshire 3 May (SM, DJA) was clearly vying for top honors in this year's Darwin Awards. In a year unlike most recent years, in which Bohemian Waxwing made virtually no forays into Massachusetts, the species was, nonetheless, still relatively numerous into the spring season in its usual winter haunts. In Maine, 200 were

tallied in Houlton, *Aroostook* 27 Mar (L. Little), and 2 were still in Augusta 2 May (N. Famous). Roughly 100 Bohemians were noted in Morrystown Corners, VT 9 Apr (V.I.N.S.).

**WARBLERS THROUGH CROSSBILLS**

Warbler migration was fairly routine. The most notable exception came in the form of the Region's second-ever **Swainson's Warbler**. Immediately following its "discovery" at Naushon I., Gosnold, MA 19 May (ph. TM, A. Jones et al.), a summer resident there realized that the unfamiliar song that she had been hearing since 11 May belonged to this species. The bird continued to sing from the same thicket until at least 2 Jun (SSt).

All the regular passerine "overshooters," including Blue Grosbeak, Summer Tanager, and Yellow-throated, Hooded, Kentucky, and

**SA** Northern Wheatear is a very rare spring visitor to New England. The appearance of 3 in the Region, an event unprecedented in a single spring season, was directly related to the massive influx of wheatears into the Canadian Maritimes in late May, which included a confirmed nesting record on the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland later in the nesting season. In Massachusetts, a male wheatear adorned the dunes in Provincetown 19 May (S. Highley et al.), and a female, found 60 mi from the coast in Petersham 16-17 May (J. Baird et al.), represented the first spring record in w. Massachusetts. Amazingly, this individual was discovered less than one mi from where the same observer found another wheatear in Sep 1995. In Connecticut, where the species had been recorded in spring only twice previously, a wheatear was seen at H.B.S.P. 26 May (L. Kendall et al.).

Prothonotary Warblers, made their usual spring (mostly coastal) cameos. Those found farthest n. included a Yellow-throated Warbler in Biddeford, ME, and another Yellow-throated and 2 Summer Tanagers at Monhegan. Instead of reorienting and withdrawing southward as spring overshooters usually do, a singing male Kentucky Warbler chose instead to establish a territory and remain in Southwick, MA 20-31 May (SK). As far as anyone knows, a mate never took the bait.

The numbers of spring Clay-colored Sparrows in the Region have increased significantly within the last 10 years, and during this same time frame, Clay-colored have been known to nest at least twice. The upward trend was reflected this

year in the total of seven reports from three states: Vermont (2), Maine (3), and Massachusetts (2). Conversely, the number of Regional records of Western Meadowlarks has decreased in the last 20 years. A singing male *S. neglecta* (so called because ornithologists overlooked them during the earliest w. collecting expeditions) was studied meticulously during its stay in Norridgewock, *Somerset*, ME 25-31 May (WS, L. Bevier et al.).

A Harris's Sparrow visited a feeder on Naushon, Gosnold, MA 29 Mar-1 Apr (SSt), and another was reported from Putney, VT 1 Apr (V.I.N.S.). The prolonged visit by a male **Painted Bunting** to a feeder in Malden, MA 7-25 Mar (R. & J. Wootton) made news in several local newspapers. The only Lark Sparrow of the season appeared at Plum I. 10 May (RSH), and this spring's Regional Dickcissel total was 4: one in Maine and 3 in Massachusetts.

Three Boat-tailed Grackles were first noted back at Stratford, CT 20 Apr (D. Varza). This remains the only known breeding locale for the species in New England. A Yellow-headed Blackbird added an additional splash of color to Southport, *Lincoln*, ME 1-4 May (M. Dauphin), and a Bullock's Oriole that spent the winter at a feeder in S. Dartmouth, MA, remained at least until 15 Apr (J. Bullard, ph.).

Following a "bumper crop" winter season, in which the species nested for the first time in Massachusetts, White-winged Crossbills remained in the Bay State through the spring season. A flock of 30 was found in Ashfield 23 Mar (SS), and smaller numbers were reported from at least eight different towns in Mar and Apr (B.O.). On 18 May, single males were seen in Windsor and Savoy (ML), and 2 males and 4 "young" were noted at Mt. Greylock, *Berkshire* 20 May (T. Gagnon). The latter 8 were apparently the first ever recorded in w. Massachusetts in the month of May. A European Goldfinch, presumably an escapee, visited a feeder in Milford, CT 16 May (T. Zawislinski).

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