

Atlantic Provinces



Blake Maybank

144 Bayview Drive
White's Lake, Nova Scotia B3T 1Z1
(maybank@ns.sympatico.ca)

Spring 2002 broke a climatological hitting streak of more than 16 seasons of above-average temperatures—it was, instead, cool and damp, delaying migration a bit, and unquestionably pushing back flowering and departure dates by more than two weeks. It was Nova Scotia's coolest spring since the weather office began keeping local records in 1948.

From New Brunswick, David Christie reports that “periods of cold weather accompanied by substantial snow storms in the last week of April and second week of May must have been difficult for early returning swallows, hummingbirds, and some other insectivorous birds. These species were inconspicuous during those periods, but no reports of mortality were submitted.” By contrast, Newfoundland (though not Labrador) had an average spring, as it lay north of most of the mess. There were few significant migrant movements, but enough rarities appeared to enliven the dank, reluctant season. And there was a “first” for Canada.

Abbreviations: B. I. (Brier I., Nova Scotia); C. S. I. (Cape Sable I., Nova Scotia); G. M. (Grand Manan archipelago, New Brunswick); Saint Pierre (Saint Pierre et Miquelon, France); N.A.M.C. (North American Migration Count; Nova Scotia only: 11 May); PEI (Prince Edward I.).

LOONS THROUGH HERONS

The cool weather delayed Red-throated Loon migration, with tardy birds in Nova Scotia until 20 May. The French islands continue to host an impressive spring concentration of Red-necked Grebes, with the high count 187 on 30 Mar (RE). A probable albatross, not identified to species, was observed among gannets well off the n. end of Miscou I. 3 May (Gérard Benoit). A glance at Table 1 reveals that 2002 was a poor show for southern herons, the worst since I began writing this account in 1989. As expected, the sightings stretched from early Apr until mid-May, but the complete absence of Little Blue Heron and Cattle Egret was remarkable. A Little Egret was in Glace Bay 10-11 May, perhaps the same individual seen in Cape Breton intermittently in recent years. The Green Heron in Saint Pierre was present 23-27 May (*vide* RE).

WATERFOWL

A (Greenland) Greater White-fronted Goose in Kings, NS from mid-Apr+ was thought the same bird as one that had lingered into early Dec, but

it was joined by a 2nd individual 28 Apr (m ob.). As the population of Greater Snow Geese continues to swell, more are “spilling over” into the Restigouche estuary of New Brunswick, with a peak count of 2000+ between 24 Apr and 4 May (v. o.). By contrast, there were but 2 single Snow Geese in Nova Scotia and 8 on Prince Edward I., though CD counted 150 in a flock at Wabush City, Labrador 15 May, which is closer to the species's migration route. This year there were no Common Teal noted, and the distribution of the other two European ducks was unusual, with Nova Scotia having the majority of Eurasian Wigeon (10; only one in Newfoundland), while Newfoundland (with 11) retained its dominance in the Tufted Duck department; 2 others were in Nova Scotia Gadwall continue their Regional population increase: an eagle flushed 45 birds from Cape Brûlé marsh, near Shediac 12 May (ST). The North Sydney, NS Canvasback was last reported 2 Mar. Redhead breed sparingly in New Brunswick, but even so a group of 7 at Caraquet 24 May+ was noteworthy (Marcel David). New Brunswick cornered the King Eider market, with 5 widely scattered males early Mar—early May Migrant Common Eiders are closely monitored off Saint Pierre, and a maximum of 6000 birds was counted off the Isthmus in late Mar (Bruno Letournel). Harlequin Ducks are increasing Regionally, as indicated by late Mar counts of 92 from G. M. and 14 off Saint Pierre, as well as four pairs at East Pt., PEI 20 Apr (Ray Cooke)

The poor weather may have concentrated scoters in the Bay of Fundy prior to their night-flight overland to the Northumberland Strait Up to 40,000 birds, roughly 60% Surf and 40% Black, were in the lower Peticodiac River and Shebody Bay 15-17 Apr. But they did move on, and the Black Scoter flock that traditionally stages in the Restigouche estuary numbered 60,000+ on 29 Apr (Mike Lushington) Elsewhere scoter numbers were more modest, but a flock of 4000+ on Green Bay 21 Apr, with a 60/40 Surf/Black split, was locally noteworthy, as was a flock of 1500 White-winged Scoters off Saint Pierre 12 Mar. A female Hooded Merganser reached Saint Pierre 12 May, where locally rare (*vide* RE), and 2 males reached Wabush, Labrador 24 May (CD).

Table 1. Summary of southern heron sightings for Atlantic Canada, spring 2002.

	NS	NB	NF	SPM	PEI
Great Egret	1	5	2	0	1
Snowy Egret	4	0	0	0	0
Tricolored Heron	2	0	0	0	0
Green Heron	1	*	1	1	0
Glossy Ibis	2	1	0	0	0

*breeds regularly in s. New Brunswick in small numbers.

RAPTORS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

The Petitcodiac, NB watershed now hosts at least 10 Bald Eagle nests, where only one was known 25 years ago, and the Annapolis Valley, NS has shown a similar increase. From Western Labrador, Davis reports “tremendous” raptor activity: “During a drive from Cook’s Harbour to Goose Cove on 9 May, John Gibbons counted 38 Rough-legged Hawks, the biggest concentration he has ever seen. On 11 May at Wabush—Labrador City, there were a lot of raptors at the mine tailings, including 5 Ospreys, 3 Bald Eagles, 3 Northern Harriers, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, 7 Red-tailed Hawks, 6 Rough-legged Hawks, 2 American Kestrels, a Merlin, and a Peregrine Falcon.”

A **Purple Gallinule** was found exhausted in a back yard on C. S. I. 18 May (JN); it was later released but was not subsequently seen. A pair of **Sandhill Cranes** returned to Havelock, NB 8 Apr for the 6th year (*vide* Jim Brown); confirmation of breeding is eagerly awaited. A Sandhill Crane was released after rehabilitation 3 Apr near St. John’s, NF, and the individual may account for two separate sightings on the Avalon Peninsula in May.

A flock of 48 Black-bellied Plover on Cherry Hill Beach, NS 18 May was an exceptional spring count for that locality, while a single bird on Saint Pierre 19-30 Apr was the earliest ever for the islands (RE). Short bursts of northeasterly winds brought a few **European Golden-Plovers** to Newfoundland: 3 to Eastport 22-28 Apr (Kim Stroud et al.) and singles to Cape Bonavista 6 May (JJ), St. Alban’s 10 May 10 (*vide* PL), and Cappahayden 15-20 May (John Pratt, PL, Anne Hughes). American Golden-Plovers are less than annual in spring, but there were single birds at C.S.I. 28 Apr—11 May and at Wabush, NF 30 May. Two pairs of Semipalmated Plover returned to C.S.I., the most southerly breeding site for this species and the only breeding site in Nova Scotia. Three ad. American Oystercatchers, a pair and an unmatched bird, returned to C.S.I., the only Canadian breeding site, and the pair was nesting by period’s end.

An **American Avocet** was reported at St. Andrews, NB 12 May (Janice Hashey). Laurent Jackman videotaped a **Common Greenshank** on Saint Pierre 11-15 May, the first for the French islands and only the 4th or 5th documented Regional record. The overwintering Western Willet on C.S.I. was last noted 11 May. There were three May Nova Scotia sightings of both Solitary Sandpiper and Upland Sandpipers; the former is rare in spring, while the latter is always a lucky find. A **Eurasian Whimbrel** was found at Morien Bar, *Cape Breton*, NS 28 Apr—12 May (DM, Richard Knapton), and another was at Bonavista, NF 7 May (JJ). A count of 408

Sanderlings 1 May on C.S.I. was a Regional spring record (MN), as was a total of 300+ Dunlin at the same site 6 May. A flock of 150 Purple Sandpipers on Saint Pierre 27 Apr was significant (*vide* RE). Wilson’s Phalaropes, never numerous in the Region, seem to be disappearing. The only report was of 2 at Caraque, NB 24-27 May.

GULLS THROUGH STARLING

McKenna found a second-summer **Little Gull** off the Pictou Causeway, NS 6-11 May, one of very few spring Regional sightings. The wintering Common Gull at Saint Pierre was last seen 10 Mar, and the only other Regional reports were of an ad. and a second-year bird on the Avalon Peninsula in Apr. An ad. four-year gull at Glace Bay, NS through much of Mar, initially identified it as a Slaty-backed Gull, was instead apparently a hybrid of some sort. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were not reported from Newfoundland, where routine, but there were three reports from Nova Scotia, six from New Brunswick, two from Prince Edward I., and one from Saint Pierre et Miquelon. The rarest gull this season was a first-spring **Sabine’s Gull** from the Grand Manan ferry 17 May (Jim Wilson et al.)

During the past 15 years, Mourning Doves have exploded across the Maritimes, helped by feeders and mild winters, and the population expansion is now reaching farther northward and eastward. Fifteen overwintered on the French islands, a fledged young was found at St. Lawrence, NF 31 May, and a flock of 37 came to a feeder near St. John’s in Apr (PL). A Black-billed Cuckoo on Saint Pierre 29-30 May (LJ, m. ob.) was a notable event, while a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, very unusual in spring, was at G.M. 20-21 May (BD et al.). A **Northern Hawk Owl** was discovered at Sand L., Cape Breton 6 Apr. From Newfoundland, Linegar reports: “It was a great season for owls, a result of years of increasing rodent populations and extraordinary numbers of Snowshoe Hares. In Apr and early May, along a five-km stretch of road in the lower Salmonier Valley, 4 Boreal Owls, 4 Saw-whet Owls, and a Great Horned Owl were heard calling (PL, Anne Hughes, BMt).” Elsewhere, a Boreal Owl called near Sackville, NB, 16 Apr 16 (m. ob.), and one was found near Alberton, PEI, in mid-Mar (R. Bernard).

A Chimney Swift at Wabush, NF 30 May was very rare locally (CD). A Red-headed Woodpecker on Saint Pierre May 20 was the fifth local record since 1976 (*vide* RE). Two Red-bellied Woodpeckers in Nova Scotia and 3 in New Brunswick in Apr and May were thought to be overshooting spring migrants, not undiscovered overwinterers, while the overwintering bird outside St. John’s, NF was last reported 2 May, and

one successfully overwintered on Prince Edward I., last reported 26 Apr.

An Eastern Phoebe on Saint Pierre 12 Apr was most welcome but not unprecedented (Pascal Asselin). A very twitchable **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** entertained many birders at Green Bay, *Lunenburg*, NS 26-31 May (SF, m. ob.) A **Gray Kingbird** s. of Bathurst, NM 25 May was convincingly described by a lone observer (Marco Scichilone), but the species remains hypothetical for the provincial list. **Loggerhead Shrikes** were once rare breeders in New Brunswick, but there have been few convincing records in the past quarter century, so one on G.M. 20 May (Ron Steeves et al.) was particularly noteworthy. A Northern Rough-winged Swallow was beyond its known breeding range at Hillsborough, NB 6-8 May (ST). **Tufted Titmice** have been recorded in the Region only in New Brunswick; this spring one visited a feeder near Bocabec for two days during the 2nd week of May (*vide* Ron Wilson). On Saint Pierre, a Black-capped Chickadee sighting is an event, as none were reported in all of 2001. A lone bird 26 May was thus well received (Bruno Stark) The N.A.M.C. total of 76 White-breasted Nuthatches was double that of 2001, suggesting a population expansion in Nova Scotia. Brown Creepers are even more rare on Saint Pierre than Black-capped Chickadees, so 4 together on Langlade 20 May was a remarkable concentration and just the 11th report for the islands (Frédéric & Patricia Allen-Mahé).

The overwintering **Carolina Wrens** in Halifax and Dartmouth were seen into Apr, the former in full song, while the G.M. Carolina Wren also survived the winter and sang well into May. Can the first Regional breeding be far off? New Brunswick snapped up all the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher sightings, 7 in total, all in May. In sharp contrast to last spring’s amazing flight, there were but 2 Northern Wheatears this spring, in far-flung Wabush, Labrador 22 May (CD) and Louisbourg, NS 23 May (Philip Burke). For the 2nd year in a row, Eastern Bluebirds attempted to nest in northernmost Nova Scotia, at Cape North. News of a **Townsend’s Solitaire** in Halifax Regional Municipality, NS 25 Dec+ came to light in early Mar, just after the bird had disappeared. Wood Thrush remains Regionally rare; this season, a singing bird on B.I. 20 May (EM) and an undocumented bird on Bon Portage I. in mid-May were the only reports. The Sullivan’s Pond, NS, Gray Catbird successfully overwintered, as did the bird on Saint Pierre, the latter a more remarkable achievement given the more northerly locale. A Northern Mockingbird was far afield on Saint Pierre 29 May (RE). The Halifax Brown Thrasher overwintered, as did one in Pictou, NS, and a pair of Brown Thrashers

reappeared in the same C.S.I. yard where they gave Nova Scotia its first successful breeding last year and were thought to be nesting again by the end of May (*fide* MN). A dozen thrasher sightings across New Brunswick suggest a range expansion there as well.

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Two rare spring warblers that are more typically wintering birds were Orange-crowned Warblers on B.I. 26-28 Apr (Laura Titus et al.), G.M. 14 May (BD), and Inkerman, NB 20 May (Marcel David), and a Pine Warbler at an Apple River, NS feeder 7-10 Apr (Kathleen Spicer). On 6 May, Bethsheila Kent carefully observed a male **Audubon's Warbler** at South Haven, Victoria, NS. A Blackburnian Warbler 18 May on Saint Pierre was record-early by three days. Cape Sable I hosted a **Worm-eating Warbler** 18 Apr, but the rarest warbler of the season was Nova Scotia's 2nd (and the region's 3rd) **Swainson's Warbler**, banded 22 May on Bon Portage I. (ph. Mike Peckford). A **Connecticut Warbler** on C.S.I. 20 May (JN et al.) was just the 5th spring provincial record. There were two **Hooded Warblers**, one on Cape Sable 20 Apr (*fide* MN) and a female on Saint Pierre May 29 (Jacky and Christine Hébert), the 2nd local record. Suzanne Borkowski's determination (and up to 50 mealworms a day) helped "Willy," the media-savvy Wilson's Warbler, make it through the winter in Halifax, the first time this species has overwintered in the Region. The bird departed for parts unknown 16 Apr. A Yellow-breasted Chat also overwintered in Halifax, not apparently assisted by any feeder. A Yellow-breasted Chat banded at St. Andrew's, NB 20 May was a spring rarity.

There were 3 Summer Tanagers in Nova Scotia in May, but the media star was a bird in East Bay, Cape Breton 4-24 Apr that had the presence of mind to be discovered (and subsequently featured) by the host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Maritime Noon radio show (Steve Sutherland). Single Scarlet Tanagers reached n. to Saint Pierre 31 May (Dominique Gouverne) and Cupids, NF 29-31 May+ (*fide* PL). The Sackville, NS **Western Tanager** successfully overwintered (a provincial first) and was last reported 31 Mar. New Brunswick's first **Green-tailed Towhee** overwintered at Saint John West and was last reported 19 Mar (Merv J. Cormier). An Eastern Towhee overwintered on G.M., and there were two other spring sightings, one each in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. A Chipping Sparrow overwintered on Saint Pierre. Spring Clay-colored Sparrows are noteworthy; there were three reports from Nova Scotia and four from New Brunswick. In addition, one bird overwintered

in Lunenburg, NS, and more remarkably, so did 2 in Newfoundland. Spring Lark Sparrows are always a regional treat—one successfully overwintered at Burnt Cove, NF, while birds at Cape North, NS, 11-18 May (Fritz McIvoy) and Rivière-Verte, NB 4 or 5 May (*fide* J.D. Bourque) were not knowingly winter birds, although that is possible given the number recorded across the Region this past winter.

A Lincoln's Sparrow can be added to the unexpected assemblage of species that overwintered on Saint Pierre. It was a good spring for White-crowned Sparrows, with more than 100 sighted in Nova Scotia, as well as 15+ in Saint Pierre, and many in New Brunswick. An Oregon Junco was reported at Rang St. Georges, NB 18 May (Audard Godin). A male **Chestnut-collared Longspur** graced a lawn at Tiverton, Long Island, NS, 10-19 May (Dianne Outhouse, Carol Welch et al.), but the identification was not made until 16 May. This is the 8th provincial record, the 7th for spring. There was an impressive late May flight of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks across the Region, with hundreds across Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, with some going farther north, including 9+ on Saint Pierre and 7 on Newfoundland. One New Brunswick bird at Summerfield 17 May was a striking **bilateral gynandromorph**—its right side had the "distinctive red and black male colours and the left

SA A recently discovered "Winter Sparrow Oasis" at Daniel's Head, Cape Sable Island, increased its new-found reputation and allure with confirmation of a **Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow** among a wintering group of sparrows that included many Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows (roughly equal numbers of "Nelson's" and "Acadian" races) and Savannah Sparrows, as well as a **Seaside Sparrow** (last observed 6 Apr). IM had been particularly uneasy regarding the identification of one of the elusive band of sparrows lurking in the salt marsh and adjacent grasses and bushes, and he managed to secure two identifiable photos 6 Apr, which, upon analysis, confirmed his (and others') suspicions. This is the first record of this species for Canada, although its occurrence was long anticipated since the split of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow complex some years ago, as the species breeds as far north as s. Maine. The bird was still present as of 25 May, and a future breeding attempt would not be out of the question. Several of the overwintering **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows** were present near the end of May, including two birds thought to be of the James Bay race. Full details will be published in *Birders Journal*.

side brown and buff female colours" (Loretta Mikitzel, Robert Gareau). Among the Rose-breasted flight was a single male **Black-headed Grosbeak** at Amherst, NS 13-14 May (Con Desplanques). There were but 2 Blue Grosbeaks at Blanche, NS 22 Apr (*fide* MN) and Gander, NF (Kevin Butler), the latter especially rare locally, but Indigo Buntings were in reasonable numbers, with 20+ in Nova Scotia (2 in Apr, 15+ in late May), the "usual influx" in New Brunswick (DC), and 7 in Newfoundland. Notably, one Indigo Bunting overwintered in Lamèque, NB, departing in mid-May. A spring highlight was a female **Painted Bunting** at a Sackville, NB feeder 13-23 Apr (Andrew Macfarlane et al., ph) Three Dickcissels overwintered in Nova Scotia, 2 in Canso and one in Louisbourg; both are coastal communities, and all the birds lingered into mid-May. The cool weather in late May might have resulted in the influx of orioles to feeders. Baltimore Orioles were too numerous to count on the mainland, although farther n there were 5 on Brier and Cape Sable Is., 5+ on Saint Pierre, and 2 in Newfoundland. Orchard Orioles always attract notice, and observers noted 8 in Nova Scotia, 2 in New Brunswick, and one on Saint Pierre, this last bird an imm. male, and only the 2nd record for the islands. With respect to finch highlights, the redpoll flight dispersed by mid-Apr (a few Hoarries were accurately picked out in New Brunswick), and other species were modestly represented across the Region. Etcheberry reports that American Goldfinches now appear to be resident on Saint Pierre, with 40+ birds visiting feeders year-round. Christie notes there was a **European Goldfinch** at Campbellton 19 May (John McRae), "most likely an escapee, but of course Maritime birders are always tantalized by the possibility of vagrants arriving from Europe."

Corrigendum

There is a 3rd confirmed regional record of **Common Ringed Plover**, a bird photographed on Seal Island, NS 7 Oct 1989 (IM, EM, BMy, Fulton Lavender).

Contributors (subregional editors in boldface) **David Christie** (New Brunswick), Brian Dalzell, Cheryl Davis, **Fred Dobson**, **Roger Etcheberry** (Saint Pierre), **Sylvia Fullerton**, **Andy Horn**, John Joy, **Paul Linegar** (Newfoundland), Bruce Mactavish (BMt), Blake Maybank (BMy), **Dave McCorquodale**, **Ken McKenna**, **Ian McLaren**, Eric Mills, Murray Newell, Johnny Nickerson, **Richard Stern**, Stuart Tingley.

