

# Atlantic Provinces & St. Pierre et Miquelon



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The recent record-cold winter gave way reluctantly to a very cool, wet spring with few significant movements of migrants, but also to a spring without notable storms or bird mortality. There were—not unexpectedly given the Region's favorable geographic position—numerous rarities to excite the weather-weary birders, including four potential provincial firsts.

The Nova Scotia Bird Society has, for nearly 50 years, done a commendable job of

compiling and communicating the changes in the province's birdlife through its quarterly magazine *Nova Scotia Birds*. A number of volunteer editors divide the task among themselves, and their reports are indispensable to the preparation of this Region's report. Such a journal would be most welcome in New Brunswick, which has a large cadre of active and competent observers, as the listserve postings on "NatureNB" indicate. Alas, an active Internet discussion group cannot substitute for the systematic collection and analysis of bird sightings. One could argue that Prince Edward Island is too small to achieve this goal, but Roger Etcheverry of Saint-Pierre has done a superb job on the French islands for many years, and so we hope to see standardized data collection soon from all corners of the Region. Thanks to Roger for his thorough reporting and to

David Christie for pulling together data from New Brunswick. Lance Laviolette, who collects and distributes Nova Scotia's sightings to the *Nova Scotia Birds* editors for analysis, also helped enormously.

Abbreviations: A.B.O. (Atlantic Bird Observatory); B.I. (Brier I., NS); B.P.I. (Bon Portage I., NS); C.S.I. (Cape Sable I., NS); G. M. (Grand Manan archipelago, NB); H.R.M. (Halifax Regional Municipality, NS); N.A.M.C. (North American Migration Count, 10 May); N.S.B.S. (Nova Scotia Bird Society).

## LOONS THROUGH HERONS

About 20 Red-throated Loons were noted in Nova Scotia in mid-May, and an impressive 1500 were recorded flying n. past Lamèque I., NB 14 May (Hilaire Chiasson). Pied-billed Grebes popped up in unexpected locations, including one at Flemming Park, H.R.M. 21–22 Apr (Patricia Chalmers) and St. John's, NF 7 May (TB). Etcheverry of Saint-Pierre reports on Red-necked Grebes: "This was a 'medium-low' year for the species, with a maximum for the whole island of about 250 birds. Would the birds missing around here be those reported as a 'memorable influx' in the mid-Atlantic states [in late February through March]?" Although Red-necked Grebes are common off St. Pierre, they remain quite scarce off adjacent Newfoundland. An early Double-crested Cormorant 17 Apr at Saint-Pierre was thought to have overwintered (Pascal Asselin), although migrants had certainly arrived farther s. in the Region before then.

A lone American Bittern reached Saint-Pierre 30 Apr (LJ, m. ob.), remaining through 19 May, and an encouraging 21 were found on the N.A.M.C. in Nova Scotia. A Least Bittern, a species reported less than annually in the Region, was on C.S.I. 31 May (MN). It was a paltry spring for "southern" herons and egrets, one of the poorest in years (Newfoundland and Labrador had none), with only 6 Snowy Egrets and 5 Little Blue Herons in the Region. The 4th Tricolored Heron for the French islands turned up at St. Pierre (m. ob., ph.); another was in New Brunswick. The Prince Edward I. Great Egrets were at Stratford 28 Apr–8 May (DS et al.), at East Point 20 May (DS), and at Tignish 26 May (B. McOrmand, J. Blanchard). No Green Herons were seen away from New Brunswick, where they nest. One of the 2 Cattle Egrets noted in Nova Scotia this season was a cooperative individual along the shoreline at Halifax's busy Point Pleasant Park 14–20 Apr. The only Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was a molting ad. on C.S.I. 25 May (MN). Of 4 Glossy Ibis reported, 3 were in New Brunswick, one in Nova Scotia.

A Turkey Vulture was seen at Wood Islands, PEI 4 May (H. Van Duiven), and while the species is rare on the island, vulture sightings might be expected to increase as the species continues its spread northeastward

from its s. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia range. There were 20+ reports of singles and groups in New Brunswick, along with many Nova Scotia mainland sightings, mostly from the southwest, especially in *Digby*.

## WATERFOWL

Snow Geese were few and far between this year away from their Regional stronghold on the Restigouche Estuary in n. New Brunswick, where a maximum of 2000 was counted 13 May. Elsewhere in the Region, 2 were at Locke Shore Road, PEI 25 Mar (Les Homans), one at Meadowbank, PEI 8 Apr (P. Chan), and one in Kings, NS 18 Apr (Judy Tufts). The large Brant flock at C.S.I. peaked at 8500 on 10 Mar (JN).

All European waterfowl reports came from New Brunswick and Newfoundland, with one notable sighting of a pair of Eurasian Wigeons at Labrador City 23 May (*vide* TB). Tufted Ducks numbered 12 (2 in New Brunswick, the rest in Newfoundland) and Eurasian Wigeon 7, with 6 Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal reported Regionally. King Eiders were present in single digits daily in Mar among Common Eiders off the Avalon Peninsula, NF, and from Apr through early May, New Brunswickers reported an impressive 6 birds, all males; Nova Scotians found but one. The striking male hybrid King x Common Eider noted last winter and spring returned to St. Andrews, NB 28 Feb–25 Mar (Jim & Jean Wilson, Tracey Dean). An impressive 30,000 sea ducks passed Pt. Lepreau, NB 25 Apr, mostly scoters and eiders. Heavy ice conditions may have delayed the scoter migration through the Restigouche Estuary, as 10,000 birds were noted in mid-Apr resting on open water in the Northumberland Strait e. of the Confederation Bridge (Kathy Popma); they shifted n. by month's end. There were encouraging numbers of Harlequin Ducks reported from each province as well as from St. Pierre et Miquelon, with many double-digit totals, which suggests that the species is recovering in the Region.

## DIURNAL RAPTORS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

There was a suggestive report of a Swallow-tailed Kite by a non-birder 26 May at Cloverdale, NB (Winston Johnston), but the bird could not be relocated. There were 5 or so sightings of Cooper's Hawk from New Brunswick (where the species has bred), while in Nova Scotia, Terry Paquet provided a good description of one over B.I. 22 May. This province still lacks firm documentation for this species, which is reported annually. A pair of Red-shouldered Hawks at Kouchibouguac N.P. 9 May was beyond the limited New Brunswick breeding range (Mike LeBlanc). Prince Edward Island hosted 2 provincially rare raptors: a dark-morph Broad-winged Hawk was well studied at New

Harmony 31 May (D. McAskill et al.), while a Golden Eagle was at East Point 20 May (DS et al.). Another Golden Eagle was noted at New Horton Ridge, NB 28 Mar (Connie Colpitts, Ron Steeves). Gyrfalcons were reported only from New Brunswick (3 in Mar) and Newfoundland (5 on the Avalon Pen. through mid-Apr). Two Sandhill Cranes were enjoyed in Nova Scotia, one in Canso, *Guysborough* 5–28 May (Steve Bushell), the other at Schooner Pond, *Cape Breton* 25 May (Junior Metcalf). The overwintering bird at The Goulds, near St. John's, NF was last reported in early May. How long before Sandhill Cranes start breeding in the Region?

In Nova Scotia, approximately 500 shorebirds survived the winter, almost exclusively at C.S.I., with the flock including 50+ Black-bellied Plovers, 10 Ruddy Turnstones, 250 Dunlin, 10 Red Knots, the remainder being Sanderlings. Three Dunlin apparently survived the harsh winter at St. Pierre et Miquelon. Mactavish reports from Newfoundland that "there was a small influx of European Golden-Plovers: one 28 Apr at Bonavista (John Joy), 7 on 3 May at St. John's, with at least 2 remaining to 12 May (Paul Linegar et al.), and a single 17 May at Cape Spear (Ken Knowles)." North America's southernmost breeding Semipalmated Plovers (one pair) returned to C.S.I. 18 May. C.S.I. is also the summer home to the continent's northernmost breeding pair of American Oystercatchers, which returned 14 Apr for a 4th breeding season (the last two being successful).

There was a record tally of 577 Greater Yellowlegs on the N.A.M.C., which may suggest that breeding in Nova Scotia is more widespread than previously thought. A total of 4 Willets at St. Pierre 4 May was a local high count, as was the N.A.M.C. total of 646 in Nova Scotia. The only Upland Sandpipers reported were from New Brunswick, where there remains a tiny breeding population. Spring Whimbrels are Regionally rare, but there were 20+ in Nova Scotia's s. counties in late May as well as an early May individual on G.M. There have been but four previous spring records of Stilt Sandpiper in Nova Scotia, so 3 breeding-plumaged ads. on C.S.I. on 1 May were especially noteworthy (MN, JN). A female Ruff was at Bertrand, NB 10–11 May (Rodrigue Landry et al.). Wilson's Phalaropes continue their Regional decline, with but a single New Brunswick sighting.

## GULLS THROUGH ALCIDS

Single Laughing Gulls reached both New Brunswick 6–8 May (v.o.; adjacent locales in Lower Jemseg area) and St. Pierre 15 May (ph. LJ). An ad. Mew Gull 9–10 May at McGowan's Corner, NB (Jim Edsall et al.) was thought by some observers to be of the w. subspecies *brachyrhynchus*; the photograph is apparently inconclusive. A *canus* Mew Gull (Common Gull) was at St. John's, NF 30 Mar and 5 Apr

(Bmt). Lesser Black-backed Gulls are so routine in e. Newfoundland as to elicit no comment, but they were also widespread elsewhere, with 10 or so reported from New Brunswick and nearly that many from Nova Scotia.

In Nova Scotia, John Kearney spotted 2 Caspian Terns in Antigonish Harbour 25 Apr, and there were subsequent sightings of these birds in the area. Caspian Terns are expected annually along Nova Scotia's Northumberland Shore, but elsewhere in the province they are quite rare indeed, so Raymond D'entremont considered himself most fortunate to find a group of 3 in Lower West Pubnico 2 May. The species is equally unexpected along the Atlantic coast: James Hirtle had one at LaHave, *Lunenburg* 10 May, while Robert Lewis found one on L. Micmac, H.R.M. 8 May. There were four reports from New Brunswick, where the species is more routine, and one from St. Pierre et Miquelon. Elizabeth Doull and Fulton Lavender enjoyed a White-winged Tern at Westhaver Beach, *Lunenburg*, NS 29 May, and the written report is studiously thorough. This is the first report of the species from Nova Scotia and the 2nd Regionally, with the other record coming from New Brunswick.

## DOVES THROUGH STARLING

A rare spring Yellow-billed Cuckoo was on C.S.I. 28 May (JN, Mn). Jean-Sébastien Guénette heard an Eastern Screech-Owl 28 Apr during an owl survey at Parkindale, NB. This Regionally enigmatic species is an unproven breeder, despite a few reports in New Brunswick during the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project. The overwintering Long-eared Owl on C.S.I.'s Cape Sable was found dead 1 Mar, and the same fate likely befell the 15 Short-eared Owls at the same location (at least one corpse was found), where locally uncharacteristic heavy snows made prey inaccessible. On Prince Edward Island, a Long-eared Owl was found at L. Verde 31 May (Dan McAskill, Ray Cooke). A female Whip-poor-will was seen flying at dusk at C.S.I. 12 May (JN); the species is rarely seen on migration in the Region. Another at Springfield, NS was said to have arrived in late Apr, record early in the province, with singing heard nightly afterwards through at least 10 May, and yet another was calling 20 May near New Ross, NS (both Kim Huskins). A very early Ruby-throated Hummingbird in *Lunenburg*, NS 25 Apr was found dead a few days later. The only Red-bellied Woodpecker was a female 20 May at a feeder in *Shelburne*, NS (Donna Ensor). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 23 Mar at Doctors Cove, NS was record early (Terry Crowell et al.), but might it have wintered locally? A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a local rarity in St. John's in late May (A. Hughes et al.). A female American Three-toed Woodpecker was noted at Lamèque, NB

**SA** Eurasian Jackdaw was one of the season's highlights. First reported as a "large grackle" from a feeder at Lower Chezzetcook, NS, it was definitively identified and photographed 19 Apr (IM, FL) and determined to be of the "western" race. It may have been around for some time, as there was an unconfirmed (and undocumented) report two years earlier from the same area.

16 Mar; the species is perhaps the Region's rarest resident bird. A pair of nesting Black-backed Woodpeckers on B.I. represented the first local nest record for this well-watched island. One Northern Flicker apparently overwintered on St. Pierre (*vide* LJ).

An Olive-sided Flycatcher 27 May on St. Pierre was record early by one day (RE), and a Great Crested Flycatcher on the same day at Lamèque I. was an unusual species for ne. New Brunswick (Roger Dumaresq). New Brunswick had its first spring Say's Phoebe 17–19 Apr at Saint John (Ian Cameron), for a 5th confirmed provincial record and the 2nd this year. An Eastern Kingbird on St. Pierre 10 May was nine days earlier than average (RE). Two spring Yellow-throated Vireos made a good haul, one on B.P.I. 1–4 May (A.B.O.), the other on B.I. 18 May (N.S.B.S.). There were four May reports of Warbling Vireos in Nova Scotia where the species is seasonally scarce, unlike in neighbouring New Brunswick. Blue Jays now seem to be resident on St. Pierre, as several birds overwintered and remained to breed (RE).

Two provincially rare Northern Rough-winged Swallows were over B.I. 17 May (N.S.B.S.). A single Black-capped Chickadee 19 May on St. Pierre was considered a notable local record. Many observers have described a decline in the Boreal Chickadee population in Nova Scotia, but the N.A.M.C. results showed numbers near the long-term average. By contrast Golden-crowned Kinglet numbers are down 50% from long-term Regional totals, notwithstanding a good movement noted on G.M. in Apr. The species remains scarce on St. Pierre et Miquelon as well, and the recent harsh winter is likely to blame for the Regional decline. A male Northern Wheatear was found 18 May on White Head I., G.M. (ST et al.). A dozen or more pairs of Eastern Bluebirds were reported from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, with another seen at Nail Pond, PEI 28 May (DS et al.). On St. Pierre, Gray-cheeked Thrushes continue their decline (only 2 this spring), while Hermit Thrush is now the French islands' most common thrush (RE). Frank Branch succeeded in confirming an addition to New Brunswick's list, a Redwing that perched briefly in his yard at Trudel 29 Mar (*vide* DC). The bird was relocated at nearby Paquetville 1–7 Apr.

It was a banner year for Brown Thrashers, with the following Apr–May provincial totals: New Brunswick 14 (including 7 at Pennfield); Nova Scotia 10 (including a single at

the only provincial breeding site on C.S.I.); and Prince Edward Island one, at Emyvale 21 May. Bohemian Waxwings were reported only from New Brunswick, with at least one flock in Apr totaling more than 100 birds.

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Nova Scotia enjoyed a fine spring for rarer warblers. These included a female Blue-winged Warbler on B.I. 18 May (FL, Bill & Eileen Billington), a Pine Warbler banded on B.P.I. in early May (A.B.O.), a Prothonotary Warbler at Dartmouth 14 Apr (Elaine Black), a male Kentucky Warbler at the Port J'Hebert Pocket Wilderness, *Queens* 19 May (TP, perhaps the 5th spring record for Nova Scotia), and 3 Hooded Warblers—a long-staying and most cooperative male on C.S.I. 18 Apr–4 May (MN et al.) and 2 on B.P.I. in the first week of May, one of which was banded (A.B.O.). New Brunswick had its own warblers about which to boast: a Yellow-throated Warbler 18 May at Salisbury (Jackie & Lloyd DeCoste) and the province's first confirmed Louisiana Waterthrush 17–20 Apr at Chance Harbour (Normand Belliveau, m. ob., ph.); there are about four previous sight records of the species for the province. A Magnolia Warbler 12 May at St. Pierre was record early by three days (*vide* RE), and an Ovenbird there 27 May was also considered noteworthy (RE).

Atypically, New Brunswick out-scored Nova Scotia in the Summer Tanager sweepstakes, three sightings to one, all in the first half of May, although the Nova Scotia bird was at the least-likely locale, the village of Catalone on Cape Breton I.; that tanager eventually fell prey to a cat. Nova Scotia had the Region's only Eastern Towhees, 4 in total, including one that had successfully overwintered at Falmouth. Field Sparrows were in short supply, with but 3 in Nova Scotia and 2 in New Brunswick. New Brunswick's first report of a Brewer's Sparrow—seen on Kent I. 4 May—was accompanied by a good description, but no photographs were taken (Nathaniel Wheelwright and students). There is one previous Regional record, from Nova Scotia in Sep. A migrant nominate Savannah Sparrow was quite early 6 Apr at Taylor Village, NB (AC et al.). Spring Grasshopper Sparrows are exceptionally rare in the Region, but one 20 May at Castalia, NB was especially unusual (AC et al.). Song Sparrows, while still uncommon on St. Pierre et Miquelon, are continuing to increase in number, and several made it through the winter (RE). Two Lincoln's Sparrows successfully overwintered in Newfound-

land, as did single White-crowned Sparrows in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Forty White-crowned Sparrows were counted on the N.A.M.C. in Nova Scotia. Pascal Asselin found 30+ Lincoln's Sparrows on St. Pierre 18 May, a notable concentration for this elusive species; there were also hundreds of White-throated Sparrows there in the 3rd week of May.

Two male Northern Cardinals 20 Mar at Argyle Shore, PEI (Lorne Yeo) provided further evidence of the species' expansion in the Region. A major influx of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks was noted 16 May in s. New Brunswick; earlier extralimital individuals were noted at St. Lawrence, NF 28 Apr (G. & N. Wilson) and St. Pierre 4 May (Dominique Gouverne). Nova Scotia had all the Blue Grosbeaks this spring, 5 in total, including 3 at one feeder in Shag Harbour 5 May. Indigo Buntings were more equitably shared, with 20+ in Nova Scotia, 10+ in New Brunswick, one in Prince Edward Island, and 3 at St. Pierre et Miquelon. Two male Bobolinks at Milford, NS 29 Apr were unusually early (Don MacLaughlin). Rusty Blackbirds continue their decline in Nova Scotia, as the N.A.M.C. total of 27 is less than half that of recent years, and the lowest since 1995, when there were many fewer observers. By contrast a N.A.M.C. total of 6000+ Common Grackles suggests one reason for the decline of Rusty Blackbirds, as grackles are now being found in many of the bogs and wet areas formerly favored by the Rusties. Brown-headed Cowbirds are thankfully scarce on the mainland and rarer still in Newfoundland, where a single bird at Kippens 15 Apr was newsworthy (B. Winsor). Orchard Orioles made a very poor showing, with just 3 in Nova Scotia, all in May, at B.I., C.S.I., and Portuguese Cove, H.R.M. Away from Nova Scotia there were singles at Grand Harbour, NB 16 May, and Maximeville, PEI 19 May. Pine Grosbeaks were thin on the ground, and both Red and White-winged Crossbills were very scarce indeed, with the latter reported only from Nova Scotia. Pine Siskins reappeared in very modest numbers across the Region after being virtually absent all winter, and Evening Grosbeaks were widespread in rural areas, albeit in low numbers.

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