

# Atlantic Provinces & St. Pierre et Miquelon



## Bruce Mactavish

37 Waterford Bridge Road

St. John's, Newfoundland A1E 1C5

(bruce.mactavish1@nf.sympatico.ca)

It was a wet and cloudy summer in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Newfoundland experienced the clouds but not enough rain to maintain adequate water levels in salmon rivers and city reservoirs. The cool weather delayed harvest of farm crops, but it was unknown what, if any, effect there was on reproduction in birds.

Summer is clearly the time for some of the most remarkable rarities of the year in the Region. This summer, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and a Painted Bunting visited New Brunswick; White Ibis, Black-necked Stilt, White-winged Dove, and Shiny Cowbird were recorded in Nova Scotia; and both Black-tailed and Bar-

tailed Godwits were in Newfoundland. In recent years, a pattern of truly extraordinary bird occurrences in midsummer has emerged, a pattern of species occurring outside established patterns of vagrancy. Two species found in early July fit the bill this summer: a Lewis's Woodpecker in Nova Scotia and a Rock Wren in Newfoundland, both extraordinary western vagrants detected in the middle of the breeding season. These unrelated species are part of an emerging pattern of western species found in the Region at the height of summer, when birders have not expected western vagrants. In 2003, there was a mid-summer Golden-crowned Sparrow and a Western Tanager. In recent years, Sage Thrasher and Cassin's Kingbird have fallen into this category. What will be next?

**Abbreviations:** C.S.I. (Cape Sable I., NS); G.M.I. (Grand Manan I., NB).

### LOONS THROUGH CRANES

Red-throated Loon continues to maintain its southernmost breeding location in North

America at Miquelon, SPM where four broods were present in Jul (RE et al.). Manx Shearwaters were heard at night on Colombier I., SPM, where nesting has been suspected for more than a decade but as yet is unproven (BL et al.). Besides the usual Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, and Little Blue Herons in the Region, mostly in Nova Scotia, a Tricolored Heron photographed 22 Jun at Saint Rests Marsh, Saint John, NB (MC) and a fresh juvenal-plumaged Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 19 Jul on a ship 240 km se. of Cape Spear, NF (*vide* BMT) were the most noteworthy of the "southern" herons reported. There was a report of a Little Egret with a Snowy Egret 8 Jul at C.S.I., but no details have been seen. An ad. White Ibis frequented backyard lawns at Westport, Brier I., NS 26–28 Jul (C. Haycock). A Black Vulture was observed in flight at Miscou I. in ne. New Brunswick 17 Jul (MD). A Turkey Vulture nest was discovered in the same cave near Hammond River, NB where the first Regional breeding record was recently confirmed (JW).

Wood Ducks just e. of the breeding range were males 12 Jun at Loch Lomond, NF (AH et al.) and 11 Jul at St. Pierre, SPM (*vide* RE). A pair of Gadwall was present at Miquelon, SPM on the intriguing dates of 4 & 6 Jun (RE). Single drake Eurasian Wigeons were present Campbellton, NB 29 Jun (Gilles Rioux) and Grand Codroy R. estuary, NF 12 Jun (AH et al.). The annual Jun sightings of male Eurasian Wigeon suggest post-breeding birds, but as yet there is no confirmed breeding record, and Eurasian Wigeon x American Wigeon hybrids are almost unrecorded in the Region. A Ruddy Duck was at Cap Brûlé, NB sewage ponds 25 Jul (Jean-Sébastien Guénette).

A Red-shouldered Hawk near Fredericton, NB 27 Jun was the only sighting of this very scarce breeder (Diane Allain, Hal Dalzell). A few pairs of Rough-legged Hawks summered in the St. Shotts area on the s. tip of the Avalon Peninsula, NF, where they are sporadic nesters (*vide* BMT). Typical in recent years were mid-summer sightings of Sandhill Cranes: one in Sackville, NB 12 Jun; one in Rogersville, NB 20–24 Jun (*vide* BD); one in Round Hill, Annapolis, NS 3 Jun (Joe Nocera); and one in Aspen, Guysborough, NS 11 Jun (*vide* RL).

### SHOREBIRDS THROUGH TERNS

Two pairs of American Oystercatchers produced young at the Region's only breeding site on The Hawk, C.S.I. (MN et al.). Once again, a single ad. American Oystercatcher frequented isolated islets off the e. side of G.M.I. during much of the summer (BD et al.). A Black-necked Stilt was present at Cherry Hill Beach, NS 6–8 Jun (SF et al.); sightings of this species are on the increase in Atlantic Canada, but it is still considered a major rarity. A Solitary Sandpiper in peatland near Minto, NB 21 Jun was probably a local breeder (Dwayne Sabine). A Black-tailed Godwit was photographed near Bareneed, Conception Bay, NF 8 Jun, representing the 11th for the province (Andrew Badcock, *vide* BMT). A Hudsonian Godwit pho-

tographed at Portugal Cove South, NF 14–15 Jun furnished only the 2nd Jun record for the province and one of the very few mid-Jun sightings in the Region (KK, BMt). Newfoundland's 2nd Bar-tailed Godwit was an ad. female found at Stephenville Crossing 22 Jul by Kim Eckert leading a VENT tour. It remained long enough to be viewed by local birders over the next few days. A Marbled Godwit was most unusual at Glace Bay, C.B.I., NS 14 Jul (Junior Metcalf).

A few Great and South Polar Skuas were reported from ferries and whale-watching cruises from various locations in the Region. Typically, sightings were not accompanied by details, and even the few that were are difficult to judge. The status of the two species of skua known to occur in the Region remains as muddled as it was 20 years ago. While Laughing Gull is a regular summer rarity in e. parts of the Region, e.g., in Newfoundland, there appears to be a genuine increase in records from the s. portion, especially the Bay of Fundy. Brian Dalzell estimated up to 25 Laughing Gulls "floating around" the Bay of Fundy. Return of Laughing Gulls as a breeding species in the Region may be close at hand. Common Terns fared poorly in New Brunswick. A census of the massive colonies at Kouchibouguac N.P. revealed 4335 pairs in 2004, down from 7971 pairs in 2003 (ML); no reason for the decrease was suggested. The mixed Common Tern and Arctic Tern colony of 3200 pairs on Machias Seal I. had almost total nest failure due largely to a lack of small herring (*vide* BD). A pair of Black Terns nested in a large colony of Common Terns at Kouchibouguac N.P., NB after five years of prospecting there (ML). Two pairs of Black Terns nested for the 2nd year at Machias Seal I., NB, but both nests were unsuccessful (*vide* BD). On a positive note, breeding Common Murre numbers doubled on Machias Seal I., at least 200 nests were found (Arney Black), with an additional 125 pairs present on nearby Yellow Murre Ledge (John Drury).

### DOVES THROUGH WAXWINGS

A White-winged Dove at Liscombe, Guysborough, NS was seen by two bird tour groups 6–11 Jul (Chris Benesh et al.). Incredibly, this is about the 29th individual observed in Nova Scotia and the 4th in 2004 (*vide* IM). Rare summer Yellow-billed Cuckoos were singles at Daniels Head, C.S.I. 13 Jun (MN) and Barrington, NS 20 Jun (MN). The first Barred Owl for Newfoundland & Labrador was a fresh road kill near North West R., Labrador on 16 Jul (John Thomas). This specimen adds credence to a report of a calling Barred Owl in the same area of rich deciduous forest in Aug 2001 (Isabel Schmelzer). Breeding Mourning Doves were again confirmed at St. Pierre, SPM (*vide* RE) and at nearby St. Lawrence, Burin Pen., NL (*vide*

BMt). Mourning Doves colonized New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in the 1970s and 1980s and are now pushing into the eastern-most areas of the Region as breeders.

A Lewis's Woodpecker at a feeder on Elgin Rd., Pictou, NS 1–3 Jul was a shocker (KM et al.). It was photographed and observed by a handful of fortunate birders before vanishing. The only previous record for the Region was at Cow Head, NF 14 Aug–11 Sep 1986. A rare bird in Jun, an ad. Red-headed Woodpecker was at L. George, Yarmouth, NS 11 Jun (Grant Milroy). A female Red-bellied Woodpecker lingered until 4 Jun at Buctouche, NB (Jean-Paul LaBlanc). Less than annual in Newfoundland, an Eastern Phoebe at Cape Race 23 Jun was unexpected in



This male Shiny Cowbird spent two days at a feeder in Canso, Nova Scotia 13 June 2004 (here) through the next day. As was true of the Region's other record, from New Brunswick in 1993, this bird was reported first as a Brewer's Blackbird. Aside from single records in Maine and Virginia, there are no other records of the species north of North Carolina. Photograph by Tom Kavanaugh.

summer (DM). A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in ne. New Brunswick at Miscou I. 21 & 22 Jun falls within the pattern of occurrence established by the 30+ previous records for the province (*vide* DC). A White-eyed Vireo banded 8 Jun on Kent I., NB was the first Jun record for the province and possibly the Region (*vide* BD). A breeding pair of Northern Rough-winged Swallows, rare in the Region, returned to Riviere Verte, Gloucester, NB after a 2003 nesting (Roger Guitard).

A contender for the award for the most absurd avian occurrences in the Region was the Rock Wren singing at Port-aux-Basques, NL. Found on 3 Jul by visiting New Brunswick birder Michel Chaisson, it remained for more than a week, during which time it sang feverishly from the rock foundation of a bridge for all to see and to photograph. There is one previous record for the Region 4–8 Oct 1980. Most of the few East Coast records are from mid-autumn and winter. Singing House Wrens were at Fredericton, NB 20 Jul (BMy); Hammond River, NB 11 Jun–10 Jul (Allen Gorham, JW); Scoudouc, NB through Jun (Norm & Gisèle Belliveau); Tusket Falls, Yarmouth, NS 3–8 Jun (MN et al.); and Cole Harbour, NS 3 Jul (FL et al.). Twenty-five Marsh Wrens singing at the Germantown, NB marsh is probably the highest concentration

in the Region (MC). A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 2 Jun was a late spring migrant on Kent I., NB (Corey Freeman). A Gray Catbird strayed n. to Plum Pt., Great Northern Pen., NF 20 Jun (Ivy Gibbons). As expected in recent years, Bohemian Waxwings were seen throughout the summer around Wabush in w. Labrador (Gordon Parsons).

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

A Chestnut-sided Warbler singing 20 Jun in cen. Newfoundland near Grand Falls was intriguing, as the species has yet to be proven breeding in the province (Mike Parmenter). A spring Summer Tanager lingered at a Canso, NS feeder until 5 Jun (TK). A Scarlet Tanager was quite out range and habitat at St. Brides, NL 24 Jun (DM). Likewise, a male Eastern Towhee visiting a feeder at Ferryland, NL for the first two weeks of Jun was outside the late fall/early winter window of usual occurrence (*vide* BMt). A Clay-colored Sparrow singing on Kent I., NB in mid-Jun had little hope of finding a mate at that isolated location (Nat Wheelwright). A Field Sparrow was at Oromocto, NB 25 Jul (Beverley Schneider). A late spring Blue Grosbeak was at St. Pierre SPM 7 & 12 Jun (FA). A male Painted Bunting was present at a feeder near Baie Ste Anne, Northumberland, NB 5–10 Jul (Bill Rushworthy), about the 15th occurrence for New Brunswick, most of which have been in May and Jun.

A male Shiny Cowbird was photographed at the already famous feeder of Tom Kavanaugh in Canso, NS 13–14 Jun (TK et al.). This extraordinary occurrence would seem part of the northward expansion of this species, but that expansion had slowed in the past eight years or so, with only occasional singles n. to the Carolinas. There is one previous record from the Region: a male photographed at Lamèque, NB 5 Aug 1993. In both cases, the feeder operators first identified the birds as a Brewer's Blackbird. Any reports of Brewer's Blackbirds at feeders in summer should be checked. White-winged Crossbills responded to an exceptionally heavy cone crop in Newfoundland by arriving en masse in Jun and Jul, with much singing by the end of the period. A male Eurasian Siskin photographed at feeder in Lorneville, Saint John, NB 1–3 Jun was most likely an escapee from somewhere on this side of the Atlantic Ocean (JW et al.).

**Contributors** (subregional editors in boldface): Frédéric Allen-Mahé, David Christie, Merv Cormier, Brian Dalzell, Marcel David, Roger Etcheberry, Sylvia Fullerton, Anne Hughes, Tom Kavanaugh, Ken Knowles, Randy Lauff, Fulton Lavender, Mike LeBlanc, Bruno Letournel, Bruce Mactavish (BMt), Blake Maybank (BMy), Ken McKenna, Ian McLaren, David Milson, Murray Newell, Jim Wilson. ☉

# State of the Region

Ian McLaren • Biology Department • Dalhousie University • Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H4J1  
(iamclan@dal.ca)

Despite the Region's low human density (2.4 million people, 52% urban, in 540,000 km<sup>2</sup>), there have been great impacts on terrestrial and marine environments in Canada's Atlantic Provinces. Some 60% of the land is forested and substantially owned or leased by forestry companies. Agriculture is largely localized along river valleys and coastal areas. Accordingly, forestry has had wide impacts, but agriculture has especially affected rich forests and wetlands. The sea, with some 40,000 km of coastline, has dominated patterns of human settlement and resource exploitation. Damming of rivers flowing into the Bay of Fundy has led to huge losses of salt marshes, and many elsewhere have been diked and drained. The establishment of Canada's 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone in 1977 has not been accompanied by adequate stewardship. Species of particular concern are listed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and by various provincial agencies. The Species At Risk Act (SARA), passed in June 2003, now gives formal protection to many species listed by COSEWIC (see <[http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/CDN\\_SAR-May2004\\_e.pdf](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/CDN_SAR-May2004_e.pdf)>). These, along with less-threatened species, are considered here in three groups: Seabirds, Shorebirds, and Landbirds.

## Seabirds

Some 50 million seabirds live in or pass through the Region each year, including most of the alcids wintering in the western North Atlantic. Newfoundland hosts the world's largest colony of Leach's Storm-Petrel, on Baccalieu Island, one of the world's largest colonies of Common



**Bicknell's Thrush** is a little-known species that nests in dense, stunted spruce/fir forests in the Atlantic Northern Forest BCR, including large areas of New Brunswick and part of Nova Scotia. As few as 25,000 pairs may exist. Only recently (1995) split from Gray-cheeked Thrush, which winters in South America, Bicknell's wintering grounds are thought to lie only in the Greater Antilles. Deforestation and fragmentation are threats in both breeding and wintering ranges. Photograph by Tim Laman/VIREO.

Murre, on Funk Island, and the largest North American concentrations of Atlantic Puffin, in Witless Bay. Catastrophic declines of commercial groundfishes off Atlantic Canada have not directly affected seabirds but may have severely reduced the abundance of forage fishes. Reduced gillnetting has lessened by-catches of birds in recent years. Off Newfoundland, collapse of cod and the increase of Harp Seals have been accompanied by reduced availability of Capelin for many surface-feeding gulls, and increased abundance of Arctic Cod as food for other seabirds. The role of oceanographic changes in this switch is uncertain. Recent analyses implicate over-fishing in a shift to a pelagic food web on the Scotian Shelf ecosystem, but effects on seabirds, which use mostly pelagic prey, are unclear. Fishery collapse and better management of garbage has locally reduced productivity in Herring Gulls but may have increased predation by large gulls on other seabirds in their colonies.

The greatest hazard to marine birdlife to continue to be the illegal flushing of oily bilge water at sea, which is estimated to kill some 300,000 birds annually, 80% murre and Dovekie. Canada's record on preventing this practice is deplorable. Aerial pollution surveillance has been some 400 hours per year, compared with about 2000 hours off California. In the United States and Europe, bilge-dumping fines of a million dollars or more have been

imposed, whereas by contrast a \$125,000 fine by a Nova Scotia court in February 2002 was unprecedented.

Seabird hunting continues to be of concern. Newfoundland entered Canada belatedly (in 1949), and its traditional murre (mostly Thick-billed) hunt remained intact, with some 200,000 killed annually. Wide publicity and local sympathy for closure of Harlequin Duck hunting seems to have worked; rated by COSEWIC as endangered in 1990, it was downlisted to "special concern" in 2001. The Canadian Wildlife Service is addressing concern about other species, such as scoters and Common Eiders, which may be subject to unsustainable harvests.

The Nova Scotian populations of the (COSEWIC, endangered) Roseate Tern, at the margin of its range, have been studied extensively. The two major colonies (76 pairs on the Brothers Island and 40 pairs on Country Island in 2004) have been sustained in recent years by wardening and predator control.

Finally, seabird populations may be affected by poorly understood oceanographic variation. A recent conference highlighted disappearance of masses of Red-necked Phalaropes from southwestern Bay of Fundy during the 1990s. This was mooted as a spillover effect of a wider, tenfold decrease in Atlantic Canada of their chief prey, the copepod *Calanus finmarchicus*. Although probably a natural, long-term fluctuation, such events can make species more vulnerable to human impacts.

## Shorebirds

Wider declines of some shorebirds, including Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Red Knots, and Black-bellied Plovers, are reflected by censuses in Atlantic Canada. The Region supplies vital stopover sites for these and other shorebirds. In autumn, 75–95% of the total population of Semipalmated Sandpipers fatten on a single species of small crustacean on the vast tidal mudflats of upper Bay of Fundy. Another site, Cape Sable Island, Nova Scotia, hosts Canada's only breeding American Oystercatchers (a species of concern globally) and the largest and most diverse assemblage of wintering shorebirds in eastern Canada. Fortunately, some important sites are National Wildlife Areas, Hemispheric Shorebird Reserves, and Important Bird Areas, and outright destruction of coastal beaches and wetlands is prevented by land-use regulations. Effects of such activities as increasing and almost unregulated exploitation for bait of mudflat "bloodworms" (*Glycera*) need study.

Among breeding shorebirds, the Piping Plover (COSEWIC, endangered) has only some 220 breeding pairs in the Region (including the Magdalen Islands, Québec). Most egg and chick mortality is from high tides and predation, but both are partly driven by human disturbance. People, with their ATVs and dogs, continue to ignore warning signs and patrols by citizen "Guardians," and the plover population remains at best stationary. Hopefully, ongoing education will help. The saltmarsh-nesting Willet is of less concern, although its Regional population of only 2500 pairs makes it potentially vulnerable.

## Landbirds

Breeding ranges of some COSEWIC-listed landbird (and wetland) species extend into Atlantic Canada (e.g. Least Bittern, Rusty Blackbird), but their welfares lie largely elsewhere. The Region does have substantial fractions of others, including the charismatic Bicknell's Thrush (special concern), and contains the entire breeding ranges of two listed subspecies. The Savanna (Ipswich) Sparrow (subspecies *princeps*, rated of special concern), nesting on Sable Island, Nova Scotia, along with other conservation concerns, could be impacted by federal plans—currently being strenuously opposed—to dispense with year-round wardening of the island. The (endangered) Newfoundland subspecies (or species?) *perna* of Red Crossbill has declined sharply in the last 50 years.

The fate of many species is linked to forestry. Although knowledge and legislation have somewhat mitigated the excesses of forestry, current pulpwood extraction exceeds sustainable, medium-term rates, and there is little old-growth left to either protect or manage wisely. The largely forested National Parks (two in each province except Prince Edward Island, in which the park is essentially seashore) help, as do some areas protected by Land Trusts or in provincially designated wilderness areas, but private land is extensive: in Prince Edward Island, over 90% of the land is privately owned; in Nova Scotia, 70% of the land is privately owned; and in New Brunswick, 50% of the land is privately owned, and most forested public land is leased to forestry. Although more remaining patches of older or unusual forest need to be set aside, and the importance of remnant snags and cavity trees is increasingly accepted, many ecologists believe that landscape-scale management is the only remaining strategy for sustaining forest bird diversity. This includes limiting the areas of intensively managed conifer plantations. Fine tuning of the scale and timing of cutting and pre-commercial thinning also holds some hope; for example, preliminary research indicates that Bicknell's Thrush in New Brunswick is most common in naturally regenerating softwood stands 5–12 years after clear-cutting, which corresponds to the period when pre-commercial thinning most often occurs in the industrial forest.

I thank Bill Freedman (forest ecology), Marty Leonard (COSEWIC), John Chardine (Canadian Wildlife Service), and Becky Whittam (Bird Studies Canada) for assistance with this summary.