

# New England

ported was the appearance of Black-tailed Gull at two different Bay State localities. If accepted by the state records committee, these sightings will represent only the second and third time that this species has appeared in the Region.

**Abbreviations:** H.B.S.P. (Hammonasset Beach S.P., Madison, New Haven, CT), M.A.R.C. (Massachusetts A.R.C.), M.D.F.W. (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife), N. & S. Monomoy I. (Monomoy N.W.R., Chatham, Barnstable, MA), Noman's Land (Dukes, MA), Plum I. (Parker River N.W.R., Newbury/Rowley, Essex, MA), South Beach (Chatham, Barnstable, MA), S.S.B.C. (South Shore Bird Club), Stratton I. (York, ME), U.S.F.W.S. (United States Fish & Wildlife Service).

## LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

A lingering Red-throated Loon in a beaver pond at Durham, Rockingham, NH 15 Jun (SM) apparently ultimately succumbed to entanglement in a fishing line. Concurrent with increasing numbers of reports of Pacific Loons in recent years is an increasing number of out-of-season observations. This year an individual in breeding plumage was noted at Petit Manan Pt., Washington, ME 11 Jun (D. Larson, S. Wheelock), and another in basic plumage was definitively "digiscoped" at Rye, Rockingham, NH 9–10 Jul (SM). The only complete Common Loon breeding data for the Region this year came from Vermont, where 34 successful nests produced 54 chicks, a slight increase from last season's 49 survivors (*vide* Eric Hanson). Connecticut hosted the only reported nesting Pied-billed Grebes in s. New England at Woodbury, Litchfield and Stratford, Fairfield (*vide* GH). In the lingering department were single Horned Grebes at New Hartford, Litchfield, CT 12 Jun (S. Schrader), Rockport, Essex, MA 1–19 Jul (RH), and Easton, Aroostook, ME 7–27 Jul (BS), as well as Red-necked Grebes at Cobscook Bay S.P., Washington, ME 24 Jun (F. Hartman), Rye, Rockingham, NH 1–12 Jul (SM et al.), and Gloucester (2), Essex, MA 17 Jul (H. Pearce).

Tubenoses were in generally short supply this season, probably because the inshore abundance of bait, especially sand-lance (*Ammodytes* sp.), was apparently significantly lower than usual. Bay State whale-watching boats reported far fewer inshore whales than in recent past summers as well. Greater Shearwater, normally the most abundant shearwater in Gulf of Maine waters in summer, was practically absent on Stellwagen Bank off Massachusetts, and it was not until late Jul that up to 3000 were seen in the vicinity of Mt. Desert Rock, Hancock, ME (WT). Sooty Shearwater, usually the next most common species in Regional waters, reached a paltry inshore zenith of 210 at



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Unlike the previous two early-summer seasons, June 2004 was relatively cool and dry, with clear skies slightly above average. June temperatures in Boston averaged only 1.5° F below normal, while rainfall was 3.2 cm below average. July continued cool (2.9° F below normal), but in contrast to June was both cloudy and wet, with slightly more than usual amounts of precipitation; areas north and west of Boston actually received as much as 7–10 cm of rain on 25 July.

Given the reasonably temperate weather

this season, it appeared that nesting raptors (except the beleaguered American Kestrel), terns, swallows, Eastern Bluebirds, and probably most cavity-nesting species enjoyed reasonably good nesting success this summer. Piping Plovers on the other hand did not fare as well as in recent past seasons, and overall their numbers were down, though the extent to which weather was a factor is difficult to determine. Otherwise, the only seasonal generality that can be noted unequivocally was the scarcity of marine baitfish, which resulted in notably depressed numbers of seabirds in most inshore marine waters.

Among the breeding bird highlights of the season was the confirmation of Great Egret and the attempted nesting (again!) of Caspian Tern in Vermont, the established nesting of King Rails at Parker River N.W.R., record-high pair counts of American Oystercatchers and Common Terns in Massachusetts, and the nesting of Long-eared Owl in Connecticut. Most noteworthy among the rarities re-

South Beach 12 Jul (RH), although a single in Long I. Sound, 2 km s. of H.B.S.P. 8 Jul (P. Comins) potentially represented a first state record for Connecticut. The highest single-day count of Manx Shearwaters was 13 at Rockport, Essex, MA 14 Jul (RH). Wilson's Storm-Petrel, with a dietary preference for plankton rather than fish, was distributed in somewhat more normal numbers, although a count along the New Hampshire coast of 1585 along with 14 Leach's Storm-Petrels during a storm 18 Jul (SM) was unusually high for that littoral location. While no specific Leach's Storm-Petrel nest count information was available this season, the presence of 10+ birds at Noman's Land off Martha's Vineyard 22 Jul (AK) certainly suggested the continued presence of nesting at this recently discovered site, the southernmost colony in the w. Atlantic. A solo American White Pelican appeared at Duxbury, Plymouth, MA 14 Jun (F. Bygate), and 2 birds later showed up at Westbrook, Middlesex, CT 8 Jul (P. Comins). Considering the disruption of pelican breeding in North Dakota this summer, it almost seemed surprising that New England did not receive more pelican fallout. In keeping with a projection that a total of 2175 pairs of Double-crested Cormorants in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay two years ago might have been nearing capacity, it may be significant that this year's summer census only produced 1735 pairs (CR, RF). A dedicated effort to establish the number of cormorant pairs breeding just in Essex, MA yielded a figure of 1250 pairs (JB).

It is encouraging to report confirmed breeding of Least Bittern this year at Plum I., after an apparent absence for a number of years (B.O.). As noted by Simon Perkins in the Spring Report, ecological conditions in the North Pool at Parker River N.W.R. on Plum I. offered optimal breeding habitat that was exploited by a number of uncommon or state-listed Bay State bird species, including also King Rail and Sora. Evidence of the continued increase in Great Blue Herons nesting in Massachusetts, some 60+ nests were noted at Middleboro (KA, WP) and 64+ nests at one in East Bridgewater (KA, WP), both in Plymouth, a region where nesting has been historically scarce. Two pairs of Great Egrets that nested successfully in a Great Blue Heron colony at Shad I., Missisquoi N.W.R., Swanton, Franklin, VT (Zoe Richards et al.) were possibly the first breeding records for the Green Mountain State, although the species nests on the New York side of L. Champlain. In Rhode Island, the annual colonial wading bird census in Narragansett Bay produced pair counts of 218 Great Egrets, 76 Snowy Egrets, 9 Little Blue Herons, 291 Black-crowned Night-Herons, and 173 Glossy Ibis (CR, RF)—numbers comparable to those of 2003. Perhaps most

encouraging was the modest increase in the number of night-herons, a species that elsewhere in the Region appears to be declining. Three Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, including a juv., at Ipswich, Essex, MA 29 Jul (JB) was intriguing, since Ipswich is one of the very few localities where this peripheral species has nested in Massachusetts. Two Black Vultures at Dublin, Cheshire, NH 4 Jul (T. Warren) were a further indication of the continuing northward spread of this species into New England.

## WATERFOWL

In addition to the usual reports of single early-summer Brant at scattered coastal sites, there was an unseasonal appearance of the ever-controversial Barnacle Goose at Machias, Washington, ME 27–31 Jul (N. Famous, *fide* Kay Gammons); there are just two other summer reports of this species in North America, to our knowledge, making this bird's provenance most likely from captivity. Noteworthy among breeding waterfowl was the confirmed nesting of Blue-winged Teal at Plum I. (RH) and Northern Shoveler at Stratton I. (LB) and Easton, Aroostook, ME in late Jul (BS). The presence of six pairs of Ruddy Ducks at S. Monomoy N.W.R. in early Jul (M. Brady) led to the confirmation of breeding the following month with the sighting of 2 juvs. 27 Aug (WP). Al-



Rare at any season in New Hampshire and particularly unexpected in the middle of summer, this Pacific Loon was at "Pulpit Rocks" in Rye 9 July 2004 (here) through the next day. Most of the many photographs of this bird show its distinct white flank patches—a character typically associated with Arctic Loon. Digiscoped photograph by Steve Mirick.

ways a sporadic and local breeder in the Region, this species has not been conclusively confirmed nesting in the Bay State since the 1980s. Most notable of a cadre of out-of-season ducks were 2 Ring-necked Ducks at Easton, Fairfield, CT 15 Jul (D. Varza); single imm. male King Eiders at the Isles of Shoals, NH 17 Jun (Elizabeth Ring), Stratton I. 10 Jul (LB), Egg Rock, Hancock, ME 1–27 Jun (WT), and H.B.S.P., New Haven, CT 1–20 Jun (m.ob.); single Harlequin Ducks at Rockport, Essex, MA 18 Jun (B. Cagnina) and Chilmark, Martha's Vineyard in Jul (AK); a Bufflehead at Gay Head, Martha's Vineyard

27 Jul (AK); and Common Goldeneyes at Manomet, Plymouth, MA 12 Jun (WP) and Rockport, Essex, MA 18 Jun (B. Cagnina).

## RAPTORS THROUGH CRANES

Ospreys continue their magnificent recovery from the dark days of DDT contamination. In Vermont this year, 31 nests were located just in Swanton, Franklin, and a total of 108 fledged young state-wide smashed last year's record high count of 82 (*fide* John Gobeille). At Westport, Bristol, the Bay State's largest colony, Ospreys successfully fledged 95 young from 73 active nests, the best productivity in three years (DC). A Swallow-tailed Kite at Block I., RI 18–20 Jul (M. Wagner) represented the 7th state record, while Mississippi Kites at Chickatawbut Hill, Norfolk, MA 8–10 Jun (NS) and North Truro, Barnstable, MA 22 Jun (D. Manchester) were slightly later than the more usual flush of kites in May. Also in Massachusetts, 12 active Bald Eagle nests, up from nine in 2003, produced a robust tally of 16 young this season (*fide* TF, M.D.F.W.). At Connecticut's only breeding location, Northern Harriers nested again this year at Stratford Great Meadows, Fairfield (C. Barnard). Evidence of the continuing Regional increase in Cooper's Hawks, two nests, the first-ever, were found at Block I., RI (*fide* RF), and 13 nests were located in the 7000-acre Blue Hills Reservation, Nor-

folk, MA (NS). The continued and precipitous decline in American Kestrel was equally apparent: this season witnessed no nesting in 21 kestrel boxes monitored for many years in the periphery of the Blue Hills Reservation (NS), while in 63 boxes located in cranberry bogs in Plymouth, MA, 32 active nests fledged only 92 young, the lowest figures since 1990 in this long-term study (JM). This small falcon could be declining at a rate unequalled by practically any other bird species in New England. Merlins continue to show signs of increasing in the Region; four early

migrant appearances in e. Massachusetts in late Jul (B.O.) were part of an increasing trend toward earlier appearances near the coast in late summer. Seventeen successful Peregrine Falcon nests in Vermont fledged 39+ young, which matched exactly last year's productivity (*fide* SF). In Massachusetts, eight successful nests, two of them new sites, produced 25 chicks for a new state high total (TF, M.D.F.W.).

King Rails successfully nested at Plum I. this season, with two broods of young observed 2–3 Aug (WP, RH, m.ob.). Long known to be a rare breeder in the Region,

confirmation of this species as a nesting bird in Massachusetts has happened on only 15 occasions. Less unusual but nonetheless noteworthy was the breeding of Sora at Plum I. (B.O.). The positive nesting of these two rail species, as well as Least Bittern, at the North Pool at Parker River N.W.R. is most encouraging in view of the degradation of this wetland in recent years; we hope that restoration efforts of this important site will be aggressively pursued. Common Moorhen was also noted at Plum I.; however, the only confirmed breeders in the Region were at Addison, VT at Dead Creek W.M.A. (*fide* JN) and Shoreham (A. Strong), and also at Stratton I. (S. Walsh). At least one of two pairs of Sandhill Cranes raised one young in the Belgrade Lakes region, Kennebec, ME (*fide* SM) for the 5th year in a row. With this breeding location now well established, an increasing number of summer reports of cranes elsewhere in the Region should be carefully monitored, such as the one at Monroe, Grafton, NH, where a single bird spent its 5th summer on the upper Connecticut R. (*fide* WT). Other scattered sightings included singles at Rochester, *Strafford*, NH 8 Jun (SM) and Barn I., Stonington, *New London*, CT 9–12 Jun (R. Dewire).

## SHOREBIRDS

Coastal nesting shorebird numbers were mixed this season. In their Bay State Regional stronghold, 490 nesting pairs of Piping Plovers was the lowest total since 1997 (*fide* SM, M.D.F.W.), even though tiny Rhode Island hosted 50 pairs (RF; U.S.F.W.S.). A combination of predation pressure, wet spring weather, and indeterminate effects of last April's oil spill in Buzzards Bay may have been collectively responsible for the decrease in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts total of 191 pairs of American Oystercatchers was the highest state tally in the several years that this population has been intensively surveyed (*fide* SM, M.D.F.W.); 22 pairs were counted in the Ocean State (RF, CR). The most noteworthy counts of Upland Sandpipers were 43 at Centerville, *Washington*, ME 29 Jun (N. Famous); 16 at Hanscom Air Base, Bedford, *Middlesex*, MA 20 Jul (MR); and 11 at Chicopee, *Hampden*, MA 12 Jun (T. Gagnon).

Foremost among the rarer shorebirds reported this season was an American Avocet at Sachuest Point N.W.R., *Newport*, RI 25–31 Jul (S. Reinert et al.); a Bar-tailed Godwit (nominate race) at South Beach 5 Jun (BN); single Curlew Sandpipers at South Beach 23 Jun (BN) and Charlestown Breachway, *Washington*, RI 15–16 Jul (J. St. Jean et al.); and a Ruff at Charlestown Breachway 30 Jun (J. Murphy). Unusual by date, location, or count size was a Marbled Godwit at Reid S.P., *Sagadahoc*, ME 10 Jun (J. Adams et al.); 10

Western Sandpipers at South Beach 25 Jul (BN); a Stilt Sandpiper at Great Meadows N.W.R., *Middlesex*, MA 31 Jul (WP); Wilson's Phalarope at Popham Beach S.P., *Sagadahoc*, ME 1 Jul (P. Vickery); and 6 Red Phalaropes at Egg Rock, Gulf of Maine 24 Jun (WT).

The most notable tallies of other shorebirds were 360 summering Black-bellied Plovers at South Beach 28 Jun (BN); 500 Lesser Yellowlegs at Plum I. 25 Jul (P. Roberts); 260 Willets (including a very early *inornatus* 5 Jun) at South Beach 26 Jul (BN); 65 Hudsonian Godwits at South Beach 25 Jul (BN); 2 Marbled Godwits at N. Monomoy I. 20–26 Jul (BN) and one at Little Compton, *Newport*, RI 20 Jul (RF, G. Dennis); 800 Red Knots, 2600 Sanderlings, and 3800 Semi-



This Curlew Sandpiper at the Charlestown Breachway, *Washington County* 15 (here) through 16 July 2004 provided only the tenth record for Rhode Island; the species is recorded annually in Massachusetts. Photograph by Peter Capobianco.

palmed Sandpipers at South Beach 25 Jul (BN); 900 Least Sandpipers at N. Monomoy I. 20 Jul (BN); and 2300 Short-billed Dowitchers at Eastham, *Barnstable*, MA 24 Jul (P. Flood). A point of increasing concern to longtime Bay State birders in recent years is the seeming decline in the numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpipers, and Short-billed Dowitchers regularly using Newburyport Harbor, *Essex* as a major southward migration stopover site. Whether this is a function of a cleaner Merrimack River estuary, increased disturbance by fly fisherman trekking over the mudflats to the river's edge, a diminution of key prey species, or a reflection of a general shift in usage areas to other sites is not clear. It is certain, however, that summer shorebird numbers at this historically important estuary are not what they were 25–35 years ago.

## JAEGERS THROUGH ALCIDS

Despite the relative paucity of tubenoses throughout most of the period, the great numbers of foraging terns from the large colony at S. Monomoy I. still managed to capture the attention of 13+ Parasitic Jaegers at South Beach as early as 12 Jul (RH). The "Wonderful World of Gulls" this summer

hardly failed to delight! Hooded gulls kicked off the parade with 1021 pairs of nesting Laughing Gulls in Massachusetts (*fide* SM, M.D.F.W.); at least 7–8 Little Gulls and 5 Black-headed Gulls present along the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island (*fide* JD, SM, B.O., RF); and single early Sabine's Gulls at Eastham, *Barnstable*, MA 9 Jul (C. Goodrich) and South Beach 30–31 Jul (G. Gove et al.). Far more noteworthy, if not unexpected, were two single-day sightings of ad. Black-tailed Gulls in Massachusetts at Lynn Beach, *Essex* 11 Jun (J. Quigley) and South Beach 7 Jul (V. Laux). Because this species would be a first for the state, acceptance of these reports is pending review by the M.A.R.C. The species has been detected in the Region in Rhode Island in 1995, as well as on multiple occasions in Maryland, Virginia, California, New Jersey, New York, and Texas, single occasions in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and North Carolina. There are Canadian records spanning from Sable Island, NS to British Columbia; Belize and Sonora, Mexico also have single records. At the close of the reporting period there was little indication of a major build-up of Lesser Black-backed Gulls at South Beach this summer, the highest count being 6 on 26 Jul (BN). Notably late were imm. Glaucous Gulls at Chapquiddick I., *Martha's Vineyard* 3 Jun (AK) and Seabrook, *Rockingham*, NH 11 Jun–16 Jul (SM).

Despite repeated attempts by Caspian Terns since 2000 to nest at Young I., *L. Champlain*, VT, no success came this season (D. Capen, *fide* DH), and the ultimate success of one or 2 pairs that tried to nest at Popasquash I. (*fide* M. LaBarr) was uncertain. Given that there is a small, established population of Caspian Terns present on the New York side of *L. Champlain*, it is clearly only a matter of time before successful nesting occurs in Vermont. There were no fewer than six coastal Caspian Tern reports, northernmost of which was one at Greater Chebeague I., *Cumberland*, ME 30 Jun (M. Rogers). Sandwich Terns made unusual Regional appearances this year at Edgartown, *Martha's Vineyard* 3 Jun (AK), *Nantucket* I. 23–26 Jul (E. Ray), and *Charlestown Breachway*, *Washington*, RI 31 Jul (S. Tsagarakis et al.). Bay State tern colonies contained pair totals of 1523 Roseate Terns, 16,343 Common Terns, 6 Arctic Terns, 2551 Least Terns, and 6 Black Skimmers (SM, M.D.F.W.). The total of Common Terns eclipsed last season's previous modern-day maximum of 16,087 pairs, undoubtedly the result of continued predator removal and gull exclusion at the state's largest colony at

S. Monomoy I. What this increase in pairs fails to reflect is the fact that there was a mysterious die-off of juvenile terns at several Massachusetts colonies this season, with at least 1200 dead terns accounted for as of mid-August (*fide* Rebecca Smith).

Most remarkable was a report of 2 Dovekies without details from the waters e. of Mt. Desert Rock, Gulf of Maine 25 Jul (*fide* WT). While possibly correct, any Dovekie s. of Canadian Waters in mid-summer is highly noteworthy. Reports of Common Murres in the Gulf of Maine seem to be slowly, if not steadily, increasing in summer, with reports this season including singles at Isles of Shoals, NH 19 Jun (*fide* BT) and Eastern Egg Rock 28 Jun (M. Rogers), as well as 50 at Petit Manan I., Washington, ME in late Jun (*fide* WT). Two Atlantic Puffins at Isles of Shoals, NH 17 Jun (*fide* BT) were also somewhat s. of expected summer range.

## PIGEONS THROUGH THRUSHES

Practically annual in the Region in recent years, White-winged Doves appeared this season at Chatham, Barnstable, MA 8–9 Jun (P. Bailey) and Block I., RI 18 Jun (M. Wagner). In the Nutmeg State, Monk Parakeets appear to be expanding from their longstanding stronghold in coastal Fairfield, with first-time nesting occurring in Old Saybrook, Middlesex and New Britain, Hartford (*fide* GH). Contributors in both Vermont and New Hampshire commented on better-than-average numbers of both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos this season (*fide* JN, BT), which is not unexpected given the proliferation of early-season caterpillars in many areas this summer.

The nesting of Long-eared Owl at Southbury, New Haven, CT (R. Naylor, *fide* GH) was most unusual, given the fact that there was but one state breeding confirmation during the 1982–1986 Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas period. An out-of-place Chuck-will's-widow was heard at Chesterfield, Hampshire, MA 4 Jun (G. LeBaron), and as usual the highest Regional Whip-poor-will counts were attained in Massachusetts, where 32 were tallied at Myles Standish S.E., Plymouth 23 Jun (G. d'Entremont) and 22 at Montague, Franklin 21 Jun (R. Packard). For the 2nd season in a row, a carefully monitored Chimney Swift roost in Hanover, Plymouth, MA supported 500+ swifts throughout the period, suggesting that most birds were probably non-breeding individuals (WP).

Single Red-headed Woodpeckers were noteworthy at N. Sandwich, Carroll, NH 5 Jun (J. Howe), Holden, Penobscot, ME 24 Jun (J. Markowski), and Stratford, Fairfield, CT 16–22 Jul (P. Solum). Though permanent residents in n. New England, reports of the elusive American Three-toed Woodpecker are always of interest. This season, sightings

were made in Maine at Whiting, Washington (one bird; *fide* WT), Baxter S.P., Piscataquis 8 Jun (2; M. Rolerson), and New Sweden, Aroostook Jun–Jul (2; BS). Subtle indications of modest range expansion by Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers was suggested by multiple territorial pairs at Woodbury, Litchfield and Southbury, New Haven, CT (*fide* GH) and Pepperell, Middlesex, MA (E. Stromsted).

Data sets such as the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey, as well as anecdotal impressions, point to the fact that American Crow has been severely declining in New England for several years. Another indication of this decline is suggested by this year's record low cumulative total of 2300 crows tallied on eight Connecticut Summer Bird Counts, a data set incorporating 10 years of survey data using eight C.B.C. circles. The average number of crows counted for the ten-year period is 3880, and the previous low count is 3154. Although the causes for the decline are undoubtedly complex, West Nile virus has been clearly identified as a causative agent in many areas. For the 2nd year in a row, a statewide survey of Purple Martins was undertaken in Massachusetts, with a total of 234 pairs tallied (D. Clapp). Although up somewhat from last year's estimated maximum of 180 pairs, indications are that this species is certainly deserving of continued surveillance and nest-box management in the Bay State. Sedge Wrens, always scarce in the Region, are most regular in northern sectors, as indicated by the presence of 7 in Vermont's Champlain Valley throughout Jul (A. Strong) and singles at Ft. Fairfield, Aroostook, ME 12 Jun (BS) and Fryeburg, Cumberland, ME 8 Jul (D. Mairs). Two Sedge Wrens attempting to nest at Ledyard, New London, CT 19–23 Jun (S. Gordon) disappeared when their nest field was mowed (*fide* GH). In s. New England, Golden-crowned Kinglets regularly maintain outlying breeding locations where planted Norway Spruces simulate their preferred Canadian Zone habitat, but a pair with young at Falmouth, MA 27 Jun (RF) represented the only known nesting site in Barnstable. Swainson's Thrush is a species seemingly declining in w. Massachusetts in recent years, so reports of 5 singing at Mt. Greylock, Berkshire 19 Jun (J. Hutchison) and 5 at Hawley, Franklin 3 Jul (ML) were encouraging. Although American Pipits have probably been regular breeders at Mt. Washington, Coos, NH since first confirmed there in 1991, reports are infrequent, so 4 displaying pipits there 24 Jun (*fide* BT) and 8 observed 11 Jul (*fide* BT) were appreciated.

## WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Summer season reports of warblers are particularly difficult to summarize and quantify effectively, so what follows are only the most

notable from a voluminous number of reports received. In the continuing saga of declining Golden-winged Warbler throughout New England, a report of one to 3 birds in the vicinity of Monkton, Addison, VT throughout Jun (TM) came from one of the few areas where the species seems to be holding on in the Region. Although the presence of up to 2 Magnolia Warblers at Burlingame W.M.A., Washington, RI 20–25 Jun (J. Magill et al.) was intriguing, no evidence of extralimital nesting was established. Errant and lonely probably best describes a solo male Blackpoll Warbler at Marblehead, Essex, MA 18 Jul (K. Haley), a Kentucky Warbler at Sudbury, Middlesex, MA (T. Spahr), and a Hooded Warbler at Wompatuck S.P., Hingham, Plymouth, MA 1 Jun–3 Jul (SM). Cerulean Warblers definitely nested at Pawtuckaway S.P., Nottingham, NH again this year (JB), but less conclusive were the activities of a male and a female Prothonotary Warbler at Lyme, New London, CT 13 Jun–1 Jul (T. Antanaitis, D. Provencher, *fide* GH); the only known nesting of the species in Connecticut occurred in 1946. Two male Yellow-breasted Chats at Prudence I., Narragansett Bay, RI 21–22 Jun (R. Enser) more likely represented breeding individuals.

Clay-colored Sparrows are apparently maintaining a toehold population in Vermont, where this year 3 were noted at S. Burlington, Chittendon 16 Jun (TM) and two pairs were at Grand Isle (DH). Farther s. in Massachusetts, singles appeared at Bedford, Middlesex 6–11 Jun (E. Morrier) and Mt. Greylock, Berkshire 21 Jun (I. Lynch). Equally worthy of mention are 25 Vesper Sparrows and 10 Grasshopper Sparrows at the Kennebunk Plains, York, ME 19 Jun (DL), along with Grasshopper Sparrow totals of 15 at Ft. Devens, Worcester, MA 19 Jun (R. Lockwood) and 15 at Chicopee, Hampden, MA 12 Jun (T. Gagnon). A confirmed nesting of Indigo Bunting at Martha's Vineyard 28 Jun (AK) represented a very rare nesting record for the island. Slightly less unusual but still noteworthy were nesting reports of Pine Siskins in Connecticut at Winsted, Litchfield (D. Rosgen) and Harwinton, Litchfield (P. Carrier).

Subregional editors (boldface), contributors (italics), and cited observers: Kathleen Anderson, *Jim Berry*, *Bird Observer* journal (B.O.), Lysle Brinker, *David Cole*, Jody Despres, Steve Faccio, Rachel Farrell, Tom French, Greg Hanisek, Rick Heil, David Hoag, Allan Keith, Derek Lovitch, Mark Lynch, Joey Mason, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Mike Maurer, Scott Melvin, Steve Mirick, Ted Murin, Julie Nicholson, Blair Nikula, Chris Raithel, Marj Rines, Bill Sheehan, Norman Smith, Bill Taffe, William Townsend. ☛

# State of the Region

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New England is a region comprising some of the most densely populated areas in the eastern United States, juxtaposed with some of the most extensive wilderness north of the southern Appalachians. The tensions that result from having one foot in megalopolis to the south and the other in the huge industrial forests to the north drive much of the conservation activity in this six-state Region, which is neatly divided by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service (2002) between Bird Conservation Region (BCR) 14—the Atlantic Northern Forests of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and westernmost Massachusetts—and the more densely populated New England coastal areas (BCR 30). The division between these BCRs is so distinct that it is visible from high altitudes and from space.

Inevitably, in areas where dense human populations meet relative wilderness there will be conservation concerns arising from population growth, development, and sprawl. New Hampshire is currently one of the fastest-growing states in the country and is losing an estimated 15,000 acres to development per year. Similarly, a Massachusetts study undertaken by MassAudubon for the period 1985–1999 determined that over 202,000 acres, or 40 acres per day, were visibly converted to new development statewide. Specifically, 31 acres of forest, seven acres of agricultural land, and two acres of open space were developed each day during that period. For many New Englanders, these numbers virtually translate to the average size of many townships (i.e., 15–20 mi<sup>2</sup>). Needless to say, much of this development is concentrated along the sea-coast or in major river valleys—areas that contain some of the richest biodiversity in the Region. At the fringe of the megalopolis in southern New England, much of the remaining habitat is already heavily fragmented and no longer supports viable populations of many forest birds, largely due to the high density of exotic species (e.g., European Starling, House Sparrow), domestic pets, human-associated mammalian predators (e.g., skunks, raccoons, coyotes), and brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

In spite of tremendous growth and development, many forest areas in this Region are relatively secure, due in part to the regulated industrial forests and large land tracts already preserved in the north and active land conservation efforts at the state and local level in many areas. Although efforts to save Regional forests continue, early-successional habitats such as grasslands and shrublands are rapidly diminishing. These habitats host some of the Region's rarest species and species showing steep population declines. As long as agriculture continues to decline across the Region—and as long as grasslands, shrublands, and farmlands remain targets for rapid development—bird species characteristic of these habitats face eventual extirpation in New England. It is no coincidence that Northern Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, Short-eared Owl, Vesper Sparrow, and Grasshopper Sparrow are state-listed species in a number of New England states. In addition to development, the practice of fire suppression on natural succession in many areas (e.g., pine barren habitats) negatively impacts species like Whip-poor-will, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow, along with most grassland species.

Besides concern over large-scale landscape changes in matrix habitats, some of the most critical Regional bird conservation issues center on the management of human activities within specialized habitats in densely populated areas. In coastal areas, barrier beaches provide nesting habitat for federally threatened Piping Plovers and support some of the largest tern colonies on the Atlantic Coast. Most notably in Massachusetts, certain estuaries and barrier beaches represent critical stopover habitat for throngs of migratory shorebirds, most of which

have been identified as seriously declining by the *United States Shorebird Conservation Plan* of 2001. Only by continued and aggressive management will these areas be able to withstand the realities of human impact by a burgeoning population. In offshore marine waters, concern is being increasingly registered over declining commercial fish stocks, by-catch issues, and the ever-present specter of major oil spills, all of which have potential implications for seabirds using New England waters.

Regional bird populations are also facing more insidious threats. Although DDT was banned in the early 1970s, Common Loons continue to succumb to poisoning caused by ingesting lead fishing sinkers and lead shot, while increasing quantities of mercury are being registered in the tissues of a number of aquatic bird species. At Lake Umbagog, one of New England's more pristine lakes, loons and Ospreys have been in decline for several years, yet no one knows why. Ongoing research at the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences is monitoring increasingly pernicious effects of toxins on long-legged wading birds—research that could someday help explain the Regional decline of Black-crowned Night-Heron, for instance. Likewise, the impacts of West Nile virus, an infection against which native bird species seemingly have little natural immunity, is seriously impacting Regional populations of American Crow, along with an undetermined number of other species.

In very recent years, "global climate change" has moved from a theoretical construct to a well-documented phenomenon, as evidence in support of a rapid warming trend continues to accrue. Among the landscape-level changes that could result if the current trend continues are 1) a significant rise in sea level and 2) a northward shift in the extent of existing life zones across wide latitudinal areas. Since the majority of the world's population of Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows live along the New England coast in a narrow band of salt marsh barely above the high tide line, what effect might a rise in ocean height of even a few inches have on this highly specialized species and its salt marsh habitat? Or at the other extreme: whither Bicknell's Thrush, a high-elevation treeline specialist living in a zone that is steadily moving upslope in response to global warming? Although these examples are speculative and possibly extreme, they nonetheless represent predicted, long-term effects of global climate change and should not be discounted as issues of Regional conservation concern. Every effort should be made to curb the accelerating effects of global climate change, especially those resulting from fossil fuel consumption and automobile emissions.

In response to concerns about the "greenhouse effect," the quest for alternative energy sources becomes increasingly essential. Unfortunately, developing alternative technology often generates its own suite of concerns. One of the most attractive alternatives to fossil fuel consumption is wind power. In Nantucket Sound south of Cape Cod, a proposal calling for the location of 130 wind turbines, each 425-feet high, would represent the largest offshore wind farm in the world if implemented. Yet this massive proposal currently represents one of the most controversial alternative energy projects in New England. While the issues are complex and the evidence is difficult to

gather, the wisdom of erecting so many giant turbines in waters used annually by many thousands of wintering sea ducks—and potentially in the path of hundreds of federally-listed Roseate Terns that annually make their way from major nesting colonies in Buzzards Bay to staging areas at Chatham—seems questionable from the perspective of bird conservation. Similarly, the jury is still out on the impacts on nocturnal migrants of ridgeline wind development projects, a situation paralleled by the uncertainties associated with the erection of an ever-growing proliferation of communication towers.

Although this enumeration of bird conservation challenges seems daunting, the good news for New England is that through the well-known continental bird plans, coordinated bird-conservation efforts are becoming more feasible. Regionally, some of the state-based Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans, geared toward non-game species, are helping direct resources. The future is hopeful, but we must remain vigilant.



**Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow** breeds along the Atlantic coast in a narrow band of salt marsh barely above the high tide line, from Scarborough Marsh, Maine (here) and vicinity south to Virginia. The Environmental Protection Agency predicts a 60 cm (2 ft) rise in sea level along the United States' Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico shores in the next 100 years; if sea levels continue to rise as predicted, this species and others restricted to this habitat would almost certainly be lost. Photograph by Derek Lovitch.